

Availability, Efficacy and Challenges of Government Social Protection Programs on Household Welfare in West Point, Liberia

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the availability, efficacy, and challenges of government social protection programs on household welfare in West Point, Liberia. The study employed a quantitative research method, utilizing survey design to collect data from a sample of 192 household heads in West Point, determined through Cochran's formula and selected via simple random sampling. Population included the 30,847 residents of West Point as indicated by the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information 2022 census data. Data analysis involved cleaning, coding, and using SPSS and Excel for descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency tables. Findings reveal that, relative to the availability of Government Social Support Programs to the West Point Community, a very marginal number agreed to the availability of social protection programs. As shown in the finding, 63.2 percent strongly disagrees about provision of direct transfer of financial resources. This pattern of strong disagreement is replicated in every other area of social protection, which includes unemployment benefits, job training programs, and support for the disabled, where majorities of the respondents either strongly disagree or disagree and food assistance programs which showed 67 percent disagreement. As per the efficacy of the social support programs, 56.3 percent, disagreed that these programs improved their access to healthcare, and 52.1 percent disagreed that they increased educational opportunities for their children. Furthermore, 60.4 percent disagreed that these programs had improved their housing conditions, while 61.5 percent disagreed that the programs have enabled them to better manage finances. The study highlighted significant challenges in program accessibility and effectiveness, with 68.8% of respondents acknowledging difficulties in obtaining government assistance and 87.5% citing lack of information as a major issue. Inefficiencies in identification and outreach, bureaucratic delays, and financial constraints were identified as major barriers, with 71.9% and 81.2% of respondents respectively noting problems in these areas. The study recommends that the Government of Liberia address these challenges by carrying out targeted outreach strategies to better reach vulnerable groups, developing sustainable funding models to ensure their long-term stability, and conducting full-scale sensitization exercises for the general public.

Key Words: West Point, Social Protection Program, Liberia, Household Welfare, Public

INTRODUCTION

The role of social protection programs in enhancing the household welfare of poor, developing countries with poverty and vulnerability as the order of the day is gaining significant traction. Still recovering from decades of civil conflict accompanied by the debilitating effects of the Ebola epidemic and COVID 19 pandemic, Liberia has integrated social protection at the core of its development agenda. A number of social protection initiatives have been launched by the Government of Liberia (GoL) with the goals of lowering poverty, boosting food security, and improving household welfare in general. Given this, evaluating the effectiveness of these programs in West Point, one of Liberia's most impoverished and crowded urban slums, provides important insights into the effects and difficulties of social protection programs in such vulnerable communities.

West Point is a community in Monrovia, the capital city of the Republic of Liberia. The place hosts about

30,847 people, with 15,915 males and 14,932 females based on the 2022 Liberia national census, with most of them residing in deplorable and overcrowded dwellings. The residents in that area experience high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inadequate access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and healthcare. This then renders the households in West Point more vulnerable to existing economic shocks, health crises, and other forms of socio-economic instability (United Nations, 2019). The effectiveness of the intervention in utilizing these government social protection programs, therefore, is vital for the alleviation of poverty and an improvement in overall welfare.

Various social protection programs have been undertaken by the Liberian government, aimed at improving the lives of the neediest sections of the population, ranging across members of the West Point community. Some of the programs facilitated by the government have included cash transfer, public works, and food assistance. The general objective of such a program is immediate poverty relief and to work on long-term welfare, through increases in occupational income, access to basic services, and resilience to shocks (World Bank, 2020). For example, the Liberia Social Safety Nets Project, financed by the World Bank, has supported being able to disperse cash to ultra-poor households so that they can support their basic needs and invest in health and education (World Bank, 2021). The Liberia Youth Employment Program have provided employment for reducing unemployment and underemployment and improving incomes, especially for the very large youth population in West Point (Government of Liberia, 2021).

Despite these efforts, the efficacy of these social protection programs in significantly improving household welfare in West Point remains a subject of debate. The socioeconomic environment, program design, and implementation challenges are some of the factors that affect the way in which these interventions turn out. For example, concerns have been raised about the targeting accuracy of cash transfer programs; some reports suggest that problems with beneficiary identification and data management prevent all eligible households from being reached (International Labour Organization, 2021). More so, the sustainability of the benefits of the programs is not much guaranteed, especially in a situation where the program's sustenance is based on external funding (United Nations Development Program, 2020).

This research, therefore, presents an investigation into the effectiveness of the social protection programs by the government for household welfare in West Point, Liberia. It reviews and measures the influence of such programs on household well-being in terms of dimensions of income, food security, health, and education. This paper, consequently, finds out the challenging experiences encountered as regards application and enforcement of such programs and suggest viable ways to further improve upon the effectiveness of these programs. Centered on West Point, the study does contribute to the understanding of social protection in settings of urban slums but also to the policy recommendations for improving the welfare of vulnerable populations in Liberia and similar contexts.

Problem Statement

The West Point community faces significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty, inadequate access to basic services, and vulnerability to shocks such as natural disasters and economic downturns. Despite the presence of government social protection programs aimed at enhancing household welfare, there remains a gap in understanding the specific effectiveness of these programs within the unique context of West Point. Factors such as limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, as well as environmental risks due to the community's coastal location, exacerbate the vulnerability of households. Therefore, there is a pressing need to assess the impact of government social protection programs on household welfare specifically within the West Point community, identify any barriers or limitations to their effectiveness, and propose tailored interventions to address the socio-economic challenges faced by households in this locality. Discussion on the Socio-Economic Challenges and Government Social Protection Programs in the West Point Community, Liberia.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine the efficacy of Government of Liberia Social Protection Programs on Household Welfare in Liberia (West Point). The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the Government of Liberia social protection programs implemented to enhance household

welfare

2. Examine the extent these social protection programs affect the well-being of households in Liberia
3. Probe the challenges in implementing social protection initiatives in Liberia

Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

The study on the impact of government social protection programs on household welfare is underpinned by several key theoretical frameworks that provide insights into the mechanisms through which these programs affect household well-being.

According to Barrientos and Hulme (2009), Social Protection Theory posits that government interventions aimed at mitigating poverty and vulnerability contributes to enhancing household welfare by providing a safety net for individuals and families. Barrientos and Hulme (2009) argue that social protection programs, such as cash transfers and social insurance schemes, can help alleviate poverty, reduce inequality, and promote social inclusion. These programs often target vulnerable populations and aim to improve access to essential services and resources, thereby enhancing household welfare. The claims made by Barrientos and Hulme (2009) are supported by empirical data that demonstrates the beneficial effects of social protection programs on social inclusion and poverty reduction. According to Soares et al. (2007) and Skoufias & McClafferty (2001), cash transfer programs such as Brazil's Bolsa Família and Mexico's Oportunidades have shown notable improvements in household income, health outcomes, and educational attainment among their beneficiaries. Similarly, it has been demonstrated that social insurance programs, like pensions and unemployment benefits, lower poverty rates and give households financial security during uncertain economic times (McKinnon, 2012). Nonetheless, social protection programs' efficacy varies depending on the situation. Program design, implementation, and targeting variations can all have an impact on how well these initiatives accomplish their goals.

The Capability Approach, pioneered by Sen (1999), emphasizes the importance of enhancing individuals' capabilities and freedoms to lead lives they value. In the context of social protection programs, this framework suggests that interventions should focus not only on improving material well-being but also on expanding individuals' opportunities and choices. By providing financial support, access to education, healthcare, and other essential services, government social protection programs enable households to enhance their capabilities and improve their overall welfare. Although the Capability Approach offers a useful framework, there are some drawbacks to it. According to some academics, the method can be difficult to operationalize because it can be difficult to measure and compare capabilities in a variety of contexts (Alkire, 2002). Concerns have also been raised concerning the viability of incorporating a wide range of capabilities into workable policy measures, particularly in situations where resources are limited (Robeyns, 2005). However, the Capability Approach is still a useful tool for comprehending welfare and enhancing it through social protection. The statement underscores the significance of expanding the reach of interventions to encompass not only tangible assistance but also the provision of opportunities and resources that are essential for people to lead satisfying lives.

Institutional Theory highlights the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping social and economic outcomes. North (1990) argues that institutions, including government policies and regulations, influence individuals' behavior and shape the functioning of markets and organizations. In the context of government social protection programs, this theory suggests that the design, implementation, and governance structures of these programs significantly impact their effectiveness in enhancing household welfare. Effective institutions ensure that programs are well-targeted, efficiently delivered, and responsive to the needs of beneficiaries North (1990).

These theoretical frameworks provide complementary perspectives on the mechanisms underlying the impact of government social protection programs on household welfare. Social Protection Theory emphasizes the role of government interventions in providing a safety net for vulnerable populations, Capability Approach focuses on expanding individuals' opportunities and choices, while Institutional Theory highlights the importance of

effective institutional arrangements in ensuring the success of social protection programs. By integrating these frameworks, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how government interventions can effectively enhance household welfare and contribute to poverty reduction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social protection programs refer to government-led initiatives aimed at safeguarding individuals and households against economic and social risks, such as poverty, unemployment, illness, and old age. These programs encompass a variety of interventions designed to promote social welfare, reduce inequality, and enhance overall well-being (Barrientos & Hulme, 2009).

Social Protection Programs in Other Parts of the World

Social protection programs have been implemented in various parts of the world to address poverty and promote social welfare. In developed countries like the United Kingdom, programs such as the Universal Credit system aim to simplify welfare benefits and provide financial support to low-income households (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019). In developing countries like Brazil, the Bolsa Família program has been successful in reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion through conditional cash transfers targeted at vulnerable families (Soares et al., 2007). In poor countries like Afghanistan, social protection initiatives face numerous challenges due to conflict, political instability, and weak institutional capacity, hindering efforts to address poverty and social vulnerability (Sayed & Wagle, 2018).

Social Protection Programs in Africa

In Africa, social protection programs vary widely in scope and effectiveness across countries. In South Africa, the social pension system provides non-contributory cash transfers to elderly individuals, contributing to poverty reduction and social security for older adults (Møller & Devereux, 2011). In contrast, in Malawi, the Social Cash Transfer Program has been instrumental in addressing poverty and promoting human capital development through unconditional cash transfers targeted at ultra-poor households (Davis et al., 2019).

Social Protection Programs in Liberia

Social protection programs in Liberia have been instrumental in addressing poverty and vulnerability, especially after years of conflict. However, challenges persist, necessitating ongoing efforts to improve program design, implementation, and impact. UNICEF's 2016 report highlighted gaps in coverage, targeting, and delivery mechanisms. The World Bank's 2018 project, the Liberian Social Safety Nets Project, also highlighted the need for sustained investment and capacity-building. Academic research emphasizes the importance of context-specific interventions and rigorous monitoring. The government has undertaken initiatives to expand coverage and improve program delivery, but significant gaps remain due to limited funding, weak institutional capacity, and external shocks.

Types of Social Protection Programs

Social protection programs encompass a range of interventions aimed at mitigating poverty, reducing inequality, and promoting social inclusion. Here are some common types of social protection programs:

Child Protection Programs

These are directed at ensuring that the rights of children are protected, their wellbeing ensured, and their healthy development guaranteed, shielding them from exploitation and abuse. These may include child allowances, school feeding programs, campaigns against child abuse, and against child labor. For instance, school feeding programs are reportedly associated with improved education outcomes in children through reduction of absenteeism and improvement of cognitive development in low-income settings (Bundy et al., 2018). In the second place, child allowances are critical in reducing child poverty, as various research indicates that cash transfer targeting children has strong correlates in health and education outcomes. Moreover, child

labor and abuse should be averted to enhance favorable conditions for children to grow and develop without being exploited or abused as reported by International Labor Organization (2017).

Cash Transfers

Conditional and unconditional cash transfer programs are among the strategized ways that countries have employed to reduce poverty. Programs involve the direct transfer of money to eligible persons or households, and thus, making it possible to afford basic needs and thereafter make some investments. Available evidence suggests that cash transfer programs significantly reduce poverty and hunger, at the same time improving health and education outcomes (Bastagli et al., 2016). For instance, CCTs, which tie financial transfers to beneficiaries on certain conditions such as regular school attendance or health checkups, have been very effective in promoting human capital development (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). More recently, unconditional cash transfer programs, which do not require that, have also shown positive impacts, particularly in terms of increasing household consumption and economic resilience (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009).

Subsidies and Social Insurance Programs

Social insurance programs are important for financial protection against such shocks as health care expenses, unemployment, or disability. Such schemes follow the principle of pooling risk across participants, therefore able to provide a safety net for those that suffer some form of economic shock due to some unexpected events. For example, health insurance schemes reduce out-of-pocket expenses on healthcare; as a result, healthcare use increases, and health status improves (Wagstaff et al., 2009). Similarly, unemployment insurance is money given on temporary bases to the unemployed persons hence stabilizing their income and living standards in times of downfall in the economy (Browne & Immervoll, 2017). Therefore, social insurance schemes are crucial in bringing about economic security and social stability.

In-kind Assistance

In-kind assistance programs provide goods and services directly to people in need and, therefore, meet current basic needs like food, shelter, and access to health and education. Indeed, such programs are more relevant for the vulnerable populations that cannot afford to buy these goods and services. As has been proven with food aid, it contributes significantly to the battle against hunger and malnutrition, particularly when pretty acute shocks considerably limit access to food, as noted by Barrett and Maxwell (2005). A second form of in-kind aid is housing subsidies, which are core to ensuring that low-income families have safe and affordable housing, hence improving their general quality of life (Collinson et al., 2015). These programs help to improve the social well-being of disadvantaged groups by facilitating access to these very basic resources.

Social Services

These are services that maximize human capital and promote social inclusion in society through the provision of education, health care, and childcare services, among other key social services. These services provide a basis for a more just society since they avail equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background, to better themselves personally and professionally. For example, education services are very crucial in ending the poverty cycle by equipping the poor with skills and knowledge that could secure them better job opportunities, with better living standards subsequently following (UNESCO, 2014). A similar situation happens in healthcare services: the healthy population is a necessary starting point for sustainable economic growth (World Health Organization, 2010). Social services are indispensable in the pursuit of fostering inclusive development and enhancing the quality of life of all citizens.

Importance of Social Protection Programs for Vulnerable Households

Social protection programs play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable households by providing a safety net during times of economic hardship or crisis. These programs help reduce poverty, improve access to essential services, and enhance resilience to shocks and risks, thereby promoting social inclusion and well-being (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004).

These social protection programs are very instrumental in cushioning the negative shocks of poverty and vulnerability among households, more so in developing countries. The programs include cash transfers, food assistance, and social insurance, all of which help provide cushioning at the base of the economic ladder. For instance, cash transfer programs have been instrumental in reducing the level of poverty and improving food security among poor and vulnerable households. Bastagli et al. (2016) indicate that these programs have proved to have positive effects on recipients in terms of increasing school attendance, improving health, and reducing the need for child labor. They smooth consumption and prevent households from falling deeper into poverty during economic shocks or crises. In addition, social protection programs contribute to social cohesion through the reduction of income inequality and giving marginal groups in society a sense of belonging.

This underpins the importance of social protection programs in promoting long-term economic stability and human capital development. Such programs provide a means for vulnerable households to break out of poverty by offering them financial support and access to basic services, thus enabling them to invest in education, healthcare, and nutrition. For example, Handa et al. (2018) report that, other than improving current welfare outcomes, social protection programs in sub-Saharan Africa were associated with higher levels of human capital formation among children. Human capital investments are instrumental in driving long-term economic growth and reducing dependencies on social assistance. Moreover, social protection programs can perform the function of automatic stabilizers in times of economic downturn, thus increasing resilience at both household and macroeconomic levels. In so doing, social protection is not a program aimed at alleviating poverty but is also one of the most critical components of sustainable development strategies.

Implementation Strategies for Social Protection Programs

A comprehensive strategy that includes robust monitoring systems, targeted beneficiary identification, and strong institutional frameworks is required for the effective implementation of social protection programs. Institutions must be politically and technically committed in order for social protection programs to be implemented successfully, according to Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004). Institutional frameworks ought to facilitate a coordinated response from a range of stakeholders, such as international donors, governmental and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, precise targeting techniques are crucial for directing resources to the most vulnerable groups, maximizing the effectiveness of these initiatives (Ellis, 2012).

The development and accountability of social protection programs depend heavily on monitoring and evaluation. Frequent monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities facilitate program effectiveness assessment, allowing policymakers to make data-driven adjustments to improve outcomes. Implementing a thorough M&E framework with both qualitative and quantitative metrics is crucial for determining the effects of social protection interventions, as Sampson and Bello (2017) have pointed out. To find possible bottlenecks and inefficiencies in program delivery, this framework should include both outcome tracking and process evaluations. In addition, encouraging community involvement in M&E procedures improves accountability and transparency, guaranteeing that social protection initiatives are sensitive to the needs of the communities they serve (Holmes & Jones, 2013). Social protection programs can attain efficacy, sustainability, and inclusivity through the integration of these strategies.

Challenges Faced in Implementing Social Protection Programs in Liberia

Implementing social protection programs in Liberia is fraught with numerous challenges, ranging from institutional capacity constraints to socio-economic and political factors. These challenges significantly hinder the effectiveness and reach of social protection interventions, exacerbating poverty and vulnerability among the population.

Limited Institutional Capacity: Weak institutional capacity within government agencies responsible for implementing social protection programs poses a significant challenge. Inadequate human and financial resources, coupled with limited technical expertise, hinder the design, implementation, and monitoring of programs (World Bank, 2018; UNICEF, 2020).

Inadequate Targeting Mechanisms: Social protection programs often face challenges in accurately

identifying and targeting beneficiaries. Weak data systems and unreliable identification mechanisms contribute to inclusion errors (e.g., excluding eligible beneficiaries) and exclusion errors (e.g., including ineligible beneficiaries), undermining program efficiency and equity (World Bank, 2020; Brown & Walker, 2018).

Funding Constraints: Limited financial resources pose a major obstacle to the scale-up and sustainability of social protection programs in Liberia. Inadequate budget allocations and reliance on external donor funding expose programs to uncertainties and vulnerabilities, threatening their continuity and effectiveness (Devereux, 2016).

Logistical and Infrastructural Challenges: Inadequate infrastructure and logistical constraints, particularly in rural areas, impede the delivery of social protection services. Poor road networks, limited access to banking facilities, and weak transportation systems hinder the distribution of cash transfers and other benefits to beneficiaries (Devereux, 2016; World Bank, 2020)..

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

For this study, the quantitative research design was adopted. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016), positivist scientific research that prioritizes high dependability and produces knowledge through numbers and statistics prefers quantitative approaches and makes use of instruments like surveys and questionnaires.

Research Design

Survey research design was used. According to Sukamolson (2007), the survey design makes use of a logical methodological analysis along with a highly structured survey to measure a representative sample of the population that can be quantified using measurable methods.

Population and Sampling

Shukla's (2020) claim that the population is the collection of units on which the study's findings can be applied to some extent, either to the study as a whole or to specific subgroups. The population of this study included all the household heads in West Point. The total population of West Point from the LISGIS 2022 census is 30,847.

To determine the sample size for the study, the researcher utilized Cochran's sample size computation formula.

$$n_0 = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

The maximum variability is equal to 50% (p =0.5) and taking 95% confidence level with 5% precision, the calculation is as follows:

p = 0.5 and hence q = 0.5; e = 0.05; z =1.96

$$\frac{1.96^2(0.5 \times 0.5)}{0.05^2}$$

$$\frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

n₀ = 384

Since the population is finite, Cochran pointed out that the sample size can be calculated using the below

formula in order to reduce the sample size:

$$n_0 = \frac{1 + (n_0 - 1) \frac{384}{30847}}{1.9999}$$

$n_0 = 192$

The sample size of the study is 192 and was be distributed by the researcher utilizing basic random sampling methods. In scientific research, simple random sampling is a widely used sampling technique. When selecting research participants at random, simple random sampling is the method of choice for highly homogeneous populations (Bhardwaj, 2019).

Method of Data Analysis

The filed data was cleaned by looking for any missing or incorrect information and making the necessary corrections. The quantitative data was coded and input into the computer for analysis using SPSS and Excel charts and tables with percentages and frequencies once the data had been cleaned. Generally, the study relied on descriptive statistics calculating the mean, standard deviation and also summary frequency tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDING

Table 1 Determine the Government of Liberia social protection programs implemented to enhance household welfare

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Government of Liberia provides direct financial transfer to my household	90 (46.9%)	44(22.9%)	8(4.2%)	36(18.8%)	14(7.3%)
The Government of Liberia has included Food assistance programs in its social protection program	42(21.9%)	88(45.8%)	8(4.2%)	54(28.1%)	0
The social protection programs include social pensions and elderly support programs	18(9.4%)	108(56.3%)	24(12.5%)	36(18.8%)	6(3.1%)
There are unemployment benefits and job training programs provided to your household	90(46.9%)	50(26.0%)	4(2.1%)	40(20.8%)	8(4.2%)
There are school feeding programs to your household sponsored by the	36(18.8%)	94(49.0%)	16(8.3%)	40(20.8)	6(3.1%)

government					
The government of Liberia has lots of programs to empower the women in the community	48(25.0%)	54(28.1%)	16(8.3%)	48(25.0%)	26(13.5%)
The government supports services to individuals with disabilities in the community	24(12.5%)	94(49.0%)	28(14.6%)	40(20.8%)	6(3.1%)

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

The findings indicate overall dissatisfaction and skepticism toward the social protection programs of the Liberian government. A rather high percentage of 63.2 percent strongly disagrees that the government provides a direct transfer of financial resources to their respective households, against only 7.3 percent who strongly agree. This pattern of strong disagreement is replicated in every other area of social protection, which includes unemployment benefits, job training programs, and support for the disabled, where majorities of the respondents either strongly disagree or disagree. Fully 67.7% combined strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement on food assistance programs, indicating wide skepticism with government efforts on this issue.

Though generally negative, there is some variation in perception towards certain programs. For instance, while the government's effort at empowering women in the community had mixed reactions, with 25% of the respondents strongly agreeing and 25% strongly disagreeing, there is still the high percentage of 28.1% who disagree with the statement. The same applied to the trending school feeding programs and support services for people living with disabilities, which were slightly less trending toward disagreement compared to other areas. This, therefore, simply implies that whereas some of these programs may be known to a small percentage of the population, basically with regard to the effectiveness and coverage, the perception toward the government's social protection programs is very low.

Table 2 Examine the extent these social protection programs affect the well-being of households in Liberia

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
The help we get from social programs makes us feel more part of our community	54(28.1%)	68(35.4%)	0	24(12.5%)	60 (31.3%)
The social support programs have made it easier for us to find jobs	60(31.3%)	70(36.5%)	4(2.1%)	52(27.1%)	6(3.1%)
The social protection programs have increased educational opportunities for children in our household	30(15.6%)	100(52.1%)	4 (2.1%)	52(27.1%)	6(3.1%)
Our household's access to healthcare services has improved due to the social protection programs	30(15.6%)	108(56.3%)	0	48(25.0%)	6(3.1%)
The social protection programs have significantly improved our household's economic stability	45(23.4%)	89(46.4%)	8(4.2%)	50(26.0%)	0
Our household has experienced better food security as a result of the social protection programs	42(21.9%)	100(52.1%)	4(2.1%)	20(10.4%)	26(13.5%)

The social protection programs have helped improve our household's housing conditions	18(9.4%)	116 (60.4%)	4(2.1%)	48(25.0%)	6(3.1%)
The social protection programs have improved our household's financial literacy and management skills	12(6.3%)	118(61.5%)	8(4.2%)	54(28.1%)	0

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

The findings point to the general negative perception of the SP programs by the respondents. On all aspects of their lives, a significant proportion of the respondents disagreed with the positive impacts of the SP programs. For example, over half of the participants, 56.3 percent, disagreed that these programs improved their access to healthcare, and 52.1 percent disagreed that they increased educational opportunities for their children. Furthermore, 60.4 percent disagreed with the statement that these programs had improved their housing conditions, while 61.5 percent disagreed that the programs have enabled them to better manage finances. Quite clearly, from these results, most respondents do not think that the social protection programs have achieved the goals for which they were aimed.

Further, the extent of the strong disagreement to the statements shows a clear dissatisfaction by a good number of respondents. For example, 31.3% strongly disagreed with the statement that social support programs have made it easier to find jobs, while 28.1% strongly disagreed with the statement that such programs make them feel more part of their community. Indeed, the high percentage recordings on disagree and strongly disagree for nearly all statements provide enough basis for a call for reassessment in these social protection programs. They may want major revamping or restructuring to make them more useful in serving the community.

Table 3 Probe the challenges in implementing social protection initiatives in Liberia

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
It is difficult to access get assistance from the government in your community	6(3.1%)	36(18.8%)	18(9.4%)	70(36.5%)	62(32.3%)
The lack of information about government assistance program in your community is a big problem	6(3.1%)	18(9.4%)	0	146(76.0%)	22(11.5%)
The programs for identifying and reaching out to helpless people in your community for government assistance programs is not effective	24(12.5%)	12(6.3%)	18(9.4%)	116(60.4%)	22(11.5%)
Bureaucratic hurdles (Long process to get things done) contribute to the delay in government carrying out their assistance program	18(9.4%)	12(6.3%)	6(3.1%)	130(67.7%)	26(13.5%)
The lack of money and support from government is a problem in making sure assistance programs continue every time	18(9.4%)	0	6(3.1%)	134(69.8%)	34(17.7%)

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

The results show some gross dissatisfaction about the accessibility and effectiveness of government assistance programs in the community. The majority who responded to this question, 68.8%, agreed or strongly agreed that getting assistance from the government is tough, pointing out something lacking in its accessibility.

Moreover, 87.5% of the survey respondents indicated that the lack of information was a serious problem, which was a very grave fault in communication between the government and the community. Perhaps this is part of why people experience so much frustration and difficulty in finding access.

Furthermore, the efficiency of programs involved in identification and outreach to those in need seems to be doubtful, as 71.9% agreed or strongly agreed that the efforts are not efficient. Bureaucratic challenges are also a significant issue, as 81.2% feel that the long processes for assistance are causes of delay. It is also the belief of 87.5% that the major hindrance is financial constraints: that what hinders is the lack of funds and government support, which consequently affects the programs' sustainability. All these findings combined give a picture of a community underserved and obstructed by government inefficiencies and resource limitations.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics

Decision Rule: If the Mean is 1-1.49 = Strongly Agree; 1.5- 2.49 = Agree; 2.5- 3.49 = Undecided; 3.5- 4.49 = Disagree and 4.5-5.0 = Strongly Disagree

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The Government of Liberia provide direct financial transfer to my household	192	2.40	1.435
The Government of Liberia has included Food assistance programs in its social protection program	192	2.57	1.152
The social protection programs include social pensions and elderly support programs	192	2.66	1.046
There is unemployment benefits and job training programs provided to your household	192	2.30	1.368
There is school feeding programs to your household sponsored by the government	192	2.58	1.151
The government of Liberia have lots of programs to empower the women in the community	192	3.00	1.442
The government support services to individuals with disabilities in the community	192	2.71	1.086
Valid N (listwise)	192		

Based on the decision rule provided, the interpretation of the data is as follows:

The mean score for "The Government of Liberia provides direct financial transfer to my household" is 2.40 with a standard deviation of 1.435. This indicates that respondents generally disagree that the government provides direct financial transfers to their households. The mean score for "The Government of Liberia has included food assistance programs in its social protection program" is 2.57 with a standard deviation of 1.152. This suggests that respondents disagreed about whether the government has included food assistance programs in its social protection program. The mean score for "The social protection programs include social pensions and elderly support programs" is 2.66 with a standard deviation of 1.046. This implies that respondents disagreed about whether the social protection programs include social pensions and elderly support programs. The mean score for "There are unemployment benefits and job training programs provided to your household" is 2.30 with a standard deviation of 1.368. This indicates that respondents generally disagree that there are unemployment benefits and job training programs provided to their households. The mean score for "There are school feeding programs to your household sponsored by the government" is 2.58 with a standard deviation of

1.151. This suggests that respondents generally disagreed about whether there are school feeding programs sponsored by the government for their households. The mean score for "The government of Liberia has lots of programs to empower the women in the community" is 3.00 with a standard deviation of 1.442. This indicates that respondents are undecided about whether the government has many programs to empower women in the community. The mean score for "The government supports services to individuals with disabilities in the community" is 2.71 with a standard deviation of 1.086. This implies that respondents generally disagreed about whether the government supports services for individuals with disabilities in the community.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics

Decision Rule: If the Mean is 1-1.49 = Strongly Agree; 1.5- 2.49 = Agree; 2.5- 3.49 = Undecided; 3.5- 4.49 = Disagree and 4.5-5.0 = Strongly Disagree

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The help we get from social programs makes us feel more part of our community	192	2.97	1.622
The social support programs have made it easier for us to find jobs	192	2.56	1.303
The social protection programs have increased educational opportunities for children in our household	192	2.69	1.184
Our household's access to healthcare services has improved due to the social protection programs.	192	2.61	1.172
The social protection programs have significantly improved our household's economic stability	192	2.51	1.143
Our household has experienced better food security as a result of the social protection programs.	192	2.61	1.378
The social protection programs have helped improve our household's housing conditions	192	2.69	1.115
The social protection programs have improved our household's financial literacy and management skills.	192	2.70	1.014
Valid N (listwise)	192		

Based on the given descriptive statistics and the decision rule provided, the interpretation of the data is as follows:

The mean score for "The help we get from social programs makes us feel more part of our community" is 2.97, which falls within the range of 2.00-2.99. This indicates that respondents generally disagreed about whether the social programs make them feel more part of their community. The mean score for "The social support programs have made it easier for us to find jobs" is 2.56. This suggests that respondents generally disagreed about whether the social support programs have made it easier for them to find jobs. The mean score for "The social protection programs have increased educational opportunities for children in our household" is 2.69, falling within the undecided range of 2.00-2.99. This means that respondents generally disagreed about whether the social protection programs have increased educational opportunities for children in their household. The mean score for "Our household's access to healthcare services has improved due to the social protection programs" is 2.61, which indicates that respondents generally disagreed about whether their household's access to healthcare services has improved due to the social protection programs.

In addition, the mean score for “The social protection programs have significantly improved our household’s economic stability” is 2.51, which again falls within the disagreed range of 2.00-2.99. This indicates that respondents generally disagreed about whether the social protection programs have significantly improved their household’s economic stability. The mean score for “Our household has experienced better food security as a result of the social protection programs” is 2.61, indicating that respondents disagreed about whether their household has experienced better food security due to the social protection programs. The mean score for “The social protection programs have helped improve our household's housing conditions” is 2.69, indicating that respondents generally disagreed about whether the social protection programs have helped improve their household's housing conditions. Lastly, the mean score for “The social protection programs have improved our household’s financial literacy and management skills” is 2.70, which indicates that respondents generally disagreed about whether the social protection programs have improved their household’s financial literacy and management skills.

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics

Decision Rule: If the Mean is 1-1.49 = Strongly Agree; 1.5- 2.49 = Agree; 2.5- 3.49 = Undecided; 3.5- 4.49 = Disagree and 4.5-5.0 = Strongly Disagree

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
It is difficult is it to access social protection services in Liberia	192	3.94	1.162
the lack of awareness about social protection programs hinders their implementation in Liberia	192	3.91	.830
The current programs for identifying and reaching vulnerable populations in Liberia for social protection program is not effective	192	3.65	1.121
bureaucratic hurdles contribute to the delay in the implementation of social protection initiatives in Liberia	192	3.81	1.039
The lack of adequate funding affects the sustainability of social protection programs in Liberia	192	3.96	.979
Valid N (listwise)	192		

Regarding difficulty in accessing social protection services in Liberia, the mean score is 3.94 with a standard deviation of 1.162. This indicates that respondents agree that it is difficult to access social protection services in Liberia. Pertaining to lack of awareness about social protection programs hindering their implementation in Liberia, the mean score is 3.91 with a standard deviation of 0.830. This indicates that respondents agree that the lack of awareness about social protection programs hinders their implementation in Liberia. As per the effectiveness of current programs for identifying and reaching vulnerable populations for social protection in Liberia, the mean score is 3.65 with a standard deviation of 1.121. This indicates that respondents agree that the current programs for identifying and reaching vulnerable populations in Liberia for social protection are not effective. With regards to bureaucratic hurdles contributing to delays in implementing social protection initiatives in Liberia, the mean score is 3.81 with a standard deviation of 1.039. This indicates that respondents agree that bureaucratic hurdles contribute to delays in the implementation of social protection initiatives in Liberia. Lastly, as pertains to lack of adequate funding affecting the sustainability of social protection programs in Liberia, the mean score is 3.96 with a standard deviation of 0.979. This indicates that respondents agree that the lack of adequate funding affects the sustainability of social protection programs in Liberia.

Overall, the data suggests that respondents agree on various challenges hindering the effectiveness and implementation of social protection services in Liberia, including accessibility, awareness, bureaucratic hurdles, and funding issues.

Discussion of Findings

Determine the Government of Liberia social protection programs implemented to enhance household welfare

There were seven questionnaire items within this section. These questions were geared towards determining the types of social protection programs provided by the Liberian government. As regards to direct financial transfers, the mean score was 2.40, indicating disagreement that the government provides direct financial transfers to households. This aligns with broader literature highlighting challenges in delivering cash transfers effectively in developing countries. Studies suggest issues such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and limited coverage can contribute to such perceptions (World Bank, 2020). For food assistance programs, the mean score is 2.57, suggesting disagreement about the inclusion of food assistance programs in social protection. This finding echoes research indicating gaps in food security programs in Liberia, with concerns over program accessibility and adequacy (FAO, 2019). With regards to social pensions and elderly support, the mean score was 2.66, indicating disagreement about the inclusion of social pensions and elderly support. Similar studies underscore challenges in providing adequate social pensions in Liberia, with limited coverage and benefits that fail to meet basic needs (HelpAge International, 2018).

In addition, with regards to unemployment benefits and job training, the mean score was 2.30, suggesting disagreement about the availability of unemployment benefits and job training programs. This is consistent with literature highlighting the need for enhanced job training initiatives and unemployment benefits in Liberia to address youth unemployment and economic vulnerabilities (ILO, 2021). As per the provision of school feeding programs, the mean score was 2.58, indicating disagreement about the existence of government-sponsored school feeding programs. Studies suggest challenges in sustaining school feeding programs due to funding constraints and logistical issues (World Food Program, 2017). With regards to empowerment programs for women, the mean score was 3.00, suggesting respondents are undecided about the government's programs to empower women. This reflects mixed findings in the literature regarding women's empowerment efforts in Liberia, with some programs showing promise but others criticized for lacking sustainability and comprehensive coverage (UN Women, 2019). Lastly, with respect to support for individuals with disabilities, the mean score was 2.71, indicating disagreement about government support for individuals with disabilities. Research highlights significant gaps in disability services and support mechanisms in Liberia, including accessibility barriers and inadequate resources (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Examine the extent these social protection programs affect the well-being of households in Liberia

There were eight assertive statements concerning the extent to which social protections programs affect the well-being of households in Liberia. The findings presented regarding various aspects of social protection programs highlight a pattern of generally negative or neutral perceptions among respondents. These perceptions are crucial as they reflect the effectiveness and impact of social programs on different dimensions of community life and household welfare.

The statement "The help we get from social programs makes us feel more part of our community" received a mean score of 2.97, indicating disagreement among respondents. This finding aligns with literature that suggests mixed results regarding whether social programs foster a sense of community belonging. While some programs may intend to build community cohesion, actual outcomes can vary based on implementation and community-specific factors (Putnam, 2000). The mean score of 2.56 for "The social support programs have made it easier for us to find jobs" suggests that respondents generally disagreed about the effectiveness of these programs in improving job opportunities. This finding echoes research that highlights challenges in translating social support into significant employment outcomes due to complex economic and social factors (Katz & Krueger, 1999). With a mean score of 2.69 for "The social protection programs have increased educational opportunities for children in our household," respondents again expressed disagreement. This finding underscores the variability in how social protection impacts educational outcomes, influenced by factors such as program design and educational infrastructure (Currie & Thomas, 2000).

The mean score of 2.61 for "Our household's access to healthcare services has improved due to the social

protection programs" indicates disagreement among respondents. This aligns with studies that highlight challenges in achieving universal healthcare access through social protection, particularly in resource-constrained settings (WHO, 2020). The statement "The social protection programs have significantly improved our household's economic stability" received a mean score of 2.51, indicating disagreement. This finding suggests that while social protection aims to enhance economic stability, perceptions of its impact can vary widely depending on the effectiveness of program delivery and broader economic conditions (World Bank, 2019).

Similar patterns emerge with mean scores of 2.61 and 2.69 for statements on food security and housing conditions, respectively, where respondents disagreed about improvements attributed to social protection programs. These findings highlight the complexity of addressing basic needs through social programs, influenced by factors such as program coverage and local economic dynamics (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). Finally, the mean score of 2.70 for "The social protection programs have improved our household's financial literacy and management skills" suggests disagreement. This finding underscores the challenges in integrating financial education with social protection efforts, despite potential benefits in empowering households to manage resources effectively (Miller & O'Donoghue, 2007). The findings illustrate that while social protection programs are designed to address multidimensional challenges, their perceived impact varies among respondents. This variability emphasizes the need for concerted program evaluation and adaptation to local contexts to effectively enhance community integration, economic stability, and overall household welfare.

Probe the challenges in implementing social protection initiatives in Liberia

The findings regarding the challenges facing social protection services in Liberia align with broader empirical literature on social protection in developing countries, highlighting several key issues that hinder the effectiveness and implementation of such programs. With regards to difficulty in accessing social protection services, the responses indicated that respondents perceive it as challenging to access social protection services in Liberia. This finding is consistent with studies that highlight barriers such as geographic accessibility, administrative complexities, and insufficient outreach efforts (UNDP, 2018). Also, Respondents agreed that lack of awareness hinders the implementation of social protection programs echoes the literature emphasizing the importance of public awareness campaigns and community engagement to enhance program uptake and effectiveness (World Bank, 2017). Concerning effectiveness in reaching vulnerable populations, the mean score of 3.65 suggests that current programs in Liberia are perceived as inadequate in effectively identifying and reaching vulnerable populations. Similar studies emphasize the need for targeted approaches and improved targeting mechanisms to ensure that those most in need receive adequate support (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004).

In addition, the mean score of 3.81 indicates agreement among respondents regarding bureaucratic hurdles causing delays in implementing social protection initiatives. Literature supports this finding, highlighting administrative inefficiencies, lack of coordination among agencies, and bureaucratic red tape as significant challenges in program implementation (Holzmann & Jorgensen, 2000). Finally, the mean score of 3.96 reflects respondents' concerns about the impact of insufficient funding on the sustainability of social protection programs in Liberia. This finding resonates with studies emphasizing the critical role of adequate and predictable funding in maintaining program continuity and effectiveness (Barrientos, 2013).

Generally, these findings accentuate the complex nature of challenges facing social protection services in Liberia. Addressing these issues requires wide-ranging strategies that enhance accessibility, raise awareness, improve program targeting, streamline bureaucratic processes, and secure sustainable funding.

CONCLUSION

The study on Government social protection programs and their effect on household welfare in Liberia, particularly in the West Point Community, turns out to be complex with hopes and challenges. The government itself is highly committed to improving welfare through these programs that involve financial transfers and food assistance. However, the effectiveness of the initiatives is a matter of dispute. The survey

data reflects a skeptical view by most respondents of the programs' ability to improve job opportunities, education, healthcare, and economic stability in their communities, therefore, a gap between policy intentions and tangible benefits derived.

The main challenges identified are inadequate designs of the programs, funding shortfalls, and bureaucratic inefficiencies that reduced effectiveness in the social protection program. In addition, issues of access to services, lack of awareness, and over concerns of long-term sustainability have unnecessarily complicated ways for the implementation of programs, hence a pointer to a more targeted and localized approach in order to meet Liberian communities' specific needs. The study recommends that the Government of Liberia address these challenges by carrying out targeted outreach strategies to better reach vulnerable groups, developing sustainable funding models to ensure their long-term stability, and conducting full-scale sensitization exercises for the general public. Only with these steps will social protection programs be more effective and accessible to help improve household welfare across the country.

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