

Cash Transfers and Social Protection



Interview with Mr Lawrence Ofori Addo, Coordinator of LEAP, the cash transfer programme in Ghana.

IPC: Mr. Ofori Addo, could you please tell us how the idea of LEAP came to Ghana?

L.A.: Well, let me say that Ghana is in the second phase of the poverty reduction strategy. In the first poverty reduction strategy document and its implementation it was realised that the needs of the vulnerable, extreme poor and excluded sections of the population were not adequately represented, even though there had been some interventions to address issues of poverty. But then we realised that the issues relating to the needs of the vulnerable, excluded and extremely poor people have not been well clarified. So based on those analyses, the GPRS II, that is the Poverty Reduction Strategy Document Two, recognised the need for introducing a good second social protection strategy to include cash transfers to address the needs of the extreme poor and the sections of the population that are vulnerable and excluded. Now, a lot of issues were going on. We were trying to design the type of programme and a whole lot of things. But they were at the desk level, where people were writing, expressing their concerns and things like that, until the first meeting that was organised by DFID and Brazil between Brazil and some African countries. So it was during that meeting that we were awakened to the type of social protection strategies that Brazil had developed over the years, in particular the Bolsa Familia. So on our return it gave us a lot of impetus to take a second look at the documents we had prepared so that at least we could factor some of the things we learned from Brazil into the document. Indeed let me say the experiences we got from Brazil actually influenced the finalisation of the document to include the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, which is a cash grant programme. Indeed it became the flagship programme for the social protection strategy document in Ghana. When we assembled a team of international and local experts to assist us in shaping the cash transfer programme, Brazil was invited on three occasions to support the process, and therefore I would say that is the origin of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty and also gives recognition to the support we have had from Brazil.

IPC: What would you say are the main challenges for the programme now that it has been launched?

L.A.: There are three main challenges that we can easily identify. First of all is the capacity: we need to build the capacity of the various institutions that are very much involved in the roll-out of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, particularly the Department of Social Welfare or the Social Development Department. They are at the centre of the implementation. We also have to build the capacities of the various districts, what you would call municipalities in Brazil, and then also local communities, to be able to be part of the implementation process. That is one challenge. Another challenge is that the poverty situation in Ghana is not very much like the poverty situation in Brazil. If you want to put it on a scale or a graph, you realise that the poverty situation in Ghana is very flat. In other words the poverty is very much dispersed in the population. So if you are looking at targeting, it becomes a little bit problematic, because it appears almost everybody is poor. That is the situation in Ghana, so that is one big challenge that we have. The last but not the least that I can also think of is the sustainability issue. Even though government has clearly indicated its political commitment, we are in a democratic era, and voting and change of government can easily come. Therefore the need for legislation to protect the programme is very much a consequence.

IPC: Would you like to add anything about the design of LEAP, any issue that you consider especially important?

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L.A.: One particular thing that I consider very important is the central registry system that Brazil has. In fact, we have also included it in our LEAP programme. When we returned from Brazil we already had some kind of a programme for all this, but we copied the single register and introduced it in Ghana. That actually facilitated the recognition that the Ministry of Finance and the other stakeholders have for the programme. They realised that we do not have adequate information on the sections of the population that we were referring to. But then we were able to demonstrate to them [the stakeholders] that if we are able to develop a single registry in line with that of Brazil, we can at least develop a lot of data and information on the situation of vulnerability and exclusion in Ghana.

IPC: Thank you very much Mr. Ofori Addo.

L.A.: Thank you too for having me.

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