

## CONTRIBUTION OF OLDER PERSONS CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME ON FOOD SECURITY OF THE ELDERLY IN WAJIR COUNTY, KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

*The Fraction of Kenyan population accounted for the elderly (people of 65 years and above), is steadily on rise as per recent statistics. This fraction of the people vulnerable as their ability to contribute economically and socially to the community has been underpinned by their age. The situation is worse in marginalized areas of Kenya, where even productive population is vulnerable. There thus exists a need to come up with mechanisms that can cater for the needs of elderly and vulnerable. One such mechanism is the Older People Cash Transfer Program (OPCT), initiated and active in Kenya. Regrettably, given the challenge of catering for the elderly and vulnerable, there is very little research done on contribution of the OPCT program on the socio-economic empowerment. This thus necessitated need for this study, whose aim was to establish the contribution of the Older Persons Cash Transfer Program (OPCT) on food security among the elderly in Wajir County. The study used a cross-section survey design that targeted persons aged 65 and above in Wajir County. The sample size was determined to be 363 participants from the constituencies of Wajir County. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and results were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The results indicated that OPCT contributed to the food security of the elderly in Wajir County. However, the study also found that the amount disbursed was too little and thus unable to be used for some essential food security activities like subsistence farming and acquiring food storage facilities. The study recommended that the government should address this by increasing the amount disbursed to the elderly.*

**Key Words:** *Elderly People Support, Vulnerable Population, Food Security, Cash Transfer Program*

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## BACKGROUND

According to research conducted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division Report (UNDESA) (2013), the population of adults aged 60 and older is increasing globally. The report additionally states that by 2050, the number of people within this age bracket will shoot to over a Billion. Citing the fact that women tend to live longer than men, the report stated that the majority of this aging population will predominantly be composed of women. Albeit the fact that longer life span is a triumph for humanity, the old in the human population are slowly becoming a vulnerable group (UNDESA, 2013). Developed countries like the United States, Germany, and Japan as the UNDESA report ads, have recorded that the elderly are increasingly being committed to adult care homes. Thus, the report states, because of the physical limitations that come with old age and the fact that they need more care and attention at that age. The productive generations in the mentioned nations are engaged in multiple economic activities as the cost of living in the countries is high. A good majority of the elderly cannot be committed to the homes as related expenses are high. Thus, they become marginalized and unattended, unable to manage their day-to-day activities (Harvey, Holmes, Slater & Martin, 2017).

Factoring the physical limitations that come with old age, the elderly (65 years and above) thus, unable to productively contribute to national economic development, especially in developed nations where one needs multiple sources of income to live comfortably (UNDESA, 2013). This necessitates their dependence on the working generation, which more often denies them the dignity of self-management. The chronic illnesses and old-age bodily limitations further compound this issue, rendering most of the elderly around the world unproductive and dependent (UNDESA, 2013).

The Second World Assembly on Ageing adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action (MIPA) (2006), whose key objective was to encourage both developed and developing nations to empower their elderly with means to manage themselves, especially with regard to finances. MIPA has however not gained enough political mileage to push its agenda through. This action plan's beneficial approaches are thus overlooked in many forums where the welfare of the elderly in the world's population is being discussed. In Mexico for instance, the program "*Oportunidades*" transfers cash to elderly women who have been left with grandchildren, following the demise of their parents. In addition, the named program is coupled with a nutritional aspect, which provides fortified foods for the children and the elderly women taking care of them, as well as nutritional education.

In a global setting again, Bangladesh and India have also created social protection schemes that are compatible with OPTC. However, the initiatives by the two countries have managed short-term cash transfer (or cash and food) with limited coverage, since the initiatives were pilot programs (started in 2017), to aid the governments of the two nations to assess the feasibility of the programs. The success of the pilots would thus be followed by the actual implementation of the programs that would then cover greater areas and periods of time (Harvey, Holmes, Slater & Martin, 2017). Though the pilot initiatives are still in progress, evidence-based inferences have been made and thus far, the programs have been seen to have a positive outcome.

Narrowing down the scenario to Africa, Global Action on Aging (2006), reports that African countries face increased difficulties in their efforts to support their older population. The survey also notes that most African countries' elderly populations are disproportionately made up of women and reside at the lowest socioeconomic levels. The case of elderly women is even direr as they are frequently left to nurture orphans whose parents have either been deceased from diseases, civil wars, and ethnic clashes. There is a thus, a shift in focus, especially by developing countries on the importance of social protection/social safety net programs towards the protection of the old and vulnerable.

In comparison to Uganda and Tanzania, Kenya is at the forefront with regard to managing its elderly population. Uganda and Tanzania are still reliant on social security programs initiated at independence

(Haider & Mohamud, 2017). There are a number of policies and initiatives already in effect, with regard to care for the elderly in Kenya. These include The National Social Protection Policy (Republic of Kenya 2011), whose general objective with regard to social protection, is to make certain that all Kenyans live in dignity and are free to achieve their own economic and social development. Second is the National Policy and Older Persons and Ageing that was put in place in 2009.

This policy was prepared as a mechanism to aid elderly people in Kenya with their challenges at the time (2009). The challenges included; poor health due to unavailability of affordable healthcare, overlook of their human rights, poverty and inability to attain sustainable livelihoods, gender issues, harmful cultural practices, nutrition and food security, housing and physical amenities, access to information and training, lack of employment (Haider & Mohamud, 2017). The Kenyan Constitution (2010) also allocates an act towards the protection of the elderly including the right to pursue their personal development; actively engage in societal activities; have their family and the state provide them with enough care and help (Republic of Kenya 2010) and to be free from abuse and live with respect and dignity.

One of the initiatives by the Kenya government to help the elderly is the Older Persons Cash Transfer Program (OPCT). The OPCT Program is a social protection program in Kenya, which is an initiative of the Kenyan government that facilitates direct transfer of funds from the national government treasury to the poor and elderly in Kenya. As the social development program under study, the key contribution of OPCT is to address economic vulnerability amongst the elderly. Through the program's primarily 'economic' function, it's expected to aid the elderly in Wajir and other counties, through monthly contributions of Kshs. 2,000. This amount, as per the program's documentation, will be increased, tentatively to the government budgeting. This being the case, the elderly in Wajir and other counties are expected to have increased enablement, with regard to dealing with hunger, poverty and economic deprivation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the Kenya Bureau of Statistics Report (2017), roughly 36.1% of Kenyans live below the country's official poverty threshold, and 63% of Kenyans experience multidimensional poverty. Despite the significant decline in the levels of economic inequality over time, employment and economic opportunities for the elderly are almost none existent (Haider & Mohamud, 2017). The situation is even direr in arid regions like Wajir County, where challenges to the elderly range from environmental to social to economical. The elderly in Wajir County is thus at risk of starvation if initiatives like OPCT run aground.

Research on social protection programs like OPCT that cater to the elderly has received much attention. However, OPCT and other social protection programs have not been successful in aiding the elderly to manage themselves. Globally, social protection programs implemented in India, Brazil and Nigeria as before mentioned, have not completely managed to address the issue of managing the elderly in the population either (Mathiu & Mathiu, 2012). Researchers Mathiu and Mathiu (2012); Burns, Lavoie, and Rose, (2012); Kakwani, Subbarao (2000) and Holzmann, *et al* (2000) agree that social protection programs face numerous challenges in their implementation and this accounts for their narrow margins of success. Given that the programs, though similar are implemented in diverse environments, there is a need to explore more on the aspects that lead to the success or failure of a social protection program. It is the aim of this study, through a thorough investigation of OPCT as a social protection program, to gain knowledge that can be used in better implementation of the OPCT program. Future social protection initiatives in Kenya and elsewhere will be able to make use of this knowledge.

The objective of this study was to determine the contribution of the OPCT program on food security among the elderly.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO 2014), sub-Saharan Africa continues to have high rates of food insecurity compared to other developing countries and the rest of the globe, particularly in families with people who are not working, such as children and the elderly. This has led to severe levels of undernourishment in the region. Despite the fact that Latin America, India, The Middle East, The Caribbean, and North Africa have all shown some progress in the form of reduction of the numbers of people living in extreme poverty, the elderly in the Sub-Saharan region of Africa still lag far behind in terms of initiatives that are geared towards their protection from hunger and extensively, economic empowerment, as compared to the other named regions (FAO, 2014).

According to the FAO study (2014), over the course of 24 years, the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa who make \$1.25 or less per day or less has decreased by 2.5%. An assessment of the aforementioned population reveals that 177 million more people are now surviving on an income of \$1.25 or less, and 264 million more people were counted in 2005 despite the percentage decreasing to still be surviving on less than \$2.00 per day. This being the situation in an urban region in Kenya like the capital-Nairobi, it is expected that the average working person in a marginalized region like Wajir County will have a far less daily income. As explained, the working population is expected to provide for the elderly and the children (if any). With a daily income lower than \$2.00, it is far-fetched that the average working person in Wajir County will be able to provide for both themselves and the elderly in their care.

Africa has a large subsistence agricultural population. Given the poor rural agricultural practices and the climatic changes that have been experienced in Kenya thus far (2019), it is a reality that subsistence farming can no longer provide for a household in Kenya's rural regions. Wajir County and other parts of Northern Kenya periodically experience recurrent natural disasters like floods and drought, diseases that kill the cattle, camels or other livestock that the nomadic and Cushitic communities in these regions heavily count on (PSGR, 2018). Along with pests and plant diseases that have a negative impact on Wajir's production output, expenditure on food as a necessity for households rises (PSGR, 2018). Given this is a low-income region of the country, there is a need to complement the efforts of the working population that have elderly persons under their care (PSGR, 2018).

The elderly in Wajir County also suffer from a lack of access to services and/or facilities like roads, water, electricity, and markets. Moreover, the presence of conflict and insecurity forces the population of Wajir County to flee from their homes and land, leaving the working population without a means to survive or support the elderly in their care. This has been the case in places like Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Sudan. Thousands of individuals have been internally displaced in both Kenya and Somalia, and many refugees have requested asylum in nearby nations. More than 500,000 people who are internally displaced, refugees, or stateless are currently living in Kenya's numerous camps, many of whom were impacted by the post-election violence in 2007–2008. (UNHCR, 2015). 20% of the refugees in Kenyan camps are elderly people (UNHCR, 2015).

The creation and implementation of social transfer programs and thorough poverty reduction strategy papers have proven to be suitable tools for addressing issues related to poverty and vulnerability in Wajir County and surrounding areas as a means of addressing the plethora of difficulties faced by these areas (Nino-Zarazua, 2012). This study thus aims to also add to the body of knowledge presented by previous studies.

The number of people who are impacted by direct funds transfer programs is estimated to range from 750 million to one (1) billion, and these programs have a discernible impact on poverty in middle- and low-income populations. Over time, these programs may have a significant impact on the reduction of global poverty as a whole (Barriontos, 2012).

## METHODS

**Design:** This study employed a cross-section survey design. This approach is deemed suitable because, according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), it permits the researcher a chance to examine many factors simultaneously all at one time.

**Population and sample size:** The study targets individuals aged 65 years and above in Wajir County who form the greatest majority of the Older People Cash Transfer Fund in the County (KNBS, 2007). The study also targeted key informants who are the Location OPCT Committee in Wajir County who interact directly with the elderly and coordinate with the National Level OPCT Unit in Nairobi. According to Wajir County Annual Development Plan (2007), the projected number of persons aged 65 and above in Wajir County was 6,594 people.

This sample size was calculated using the Fisher formula:

$$nf = n/1+(n)/(N)$$

$nf$ =desired sample size when study population <10,000

$n$  = desired sample size when the study population >10,000

$N$ =estimates of the population size

$$nf = \frac{n}{1+(n)/(N)}$$

$$nf = \frac{384}{1+(384\div 6594)} = 362.8$$

Thus the sample size was 363 respondents.

**Data collection and analysis:** A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. To make the respondents more compliant to the study, respondents were allowed to choose the time and venue for an interview to help them understand the questionnaire and what was expected of them. In addition to going through the questionnaires with the respondents, they were allowed to keep it but have it filled by a specific timeline. This allowed the respondents some flexibility given their age.

Descriptive data analysis was used from the responses. Both Excel and SPSS were used to generate the results. Tables and graphs were used to present the results.

**Ethical Considerations:** The researcher requested an authorization letter from Kenyatta University before the field investigation began. The National Commission of Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) was contacted using the letter to request a research permit. An introductory letter was created for all interviews and was linked to the questionnaires. Participants received the chance to withdraw, and strict secrecy was guaranteed.

## RESULTS

Of the 363 questionnaires that were prepared and distributed, 290 were correctly filled and returned. The response rate was thus 79.89%.

The study had more female respondents than male respondents. The female respondents made up 58% of the respondents while the male were 42%. The explanation given to explain higher number of female beneficiaries enrolled in the program than male beneficiaries was that most households are headed by women. Some of the reasons given as to why most households are headed by women was that some women had been widowed and in other scenarios men had left their homes and gone to search for new livelihood opportunities leaving their wives behind (Table 1).

**Table 1: Gender of respondents**

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Male</i>	122	42%
<i>Female</i>	168	58%
<i>Total</i>	290	100%

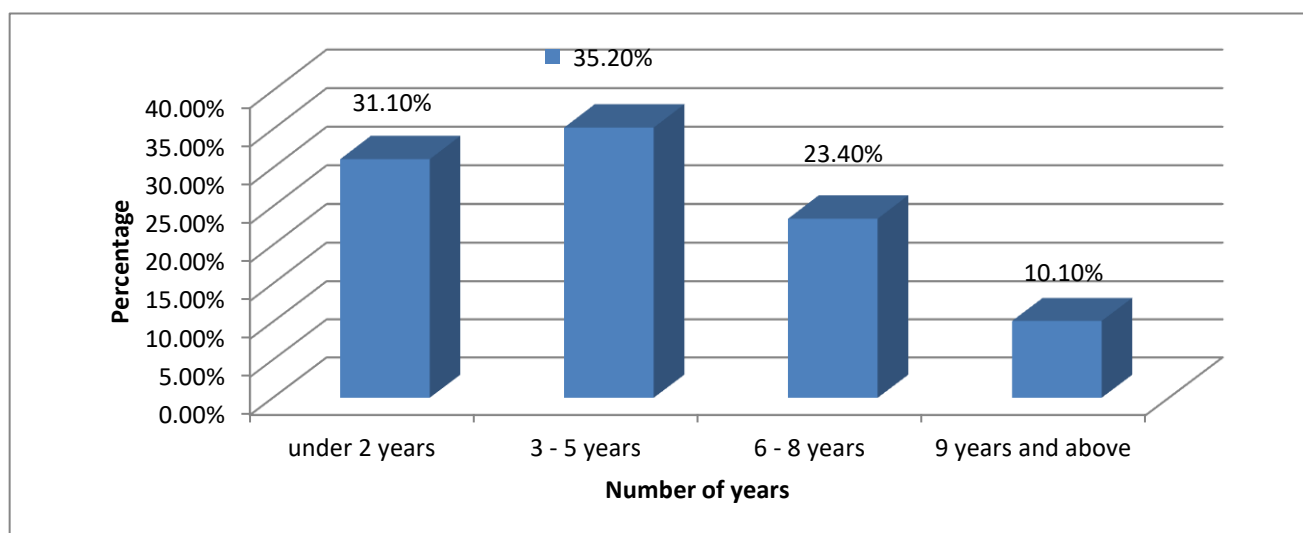
Majority of the respondents fell in the age bracket of 65 – 70 (38.6%). This shows that most of the OPCT program beneficiaries are those within the age category of 65 – 70 years compared to those who have attained 91 years and above who represent only 1.4% of the respondents (Table 2).

**Table 2: Age of the respondents**

<i>Age distribution in years</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>65 - 70</i>	102	35.2%
<i>71 – 75</i>	72	24.8%
<i>76 – 80</i>	55	19.0%
<i>81 – 85</i>	39	13.4%
<i>86 – 90</i>	18	6.2%
<i>91 and above</i>	4	1.4%
<i>Total</i>	290	100%

In the questionnaire, the respondents indicated the length of time they had benefited from the OPCT program. This was necessary as it would be crucial when assessing the longevity of the OPCT program in Wajir County and its effectiveness to its intended beneficiaries.

Most of the respondents 102 (35.2%) have been under the OPCT program for a period of 3 – 5 years compared to those that have been under the program for 9 years and above 30 (10.3%). Those who have been under the program for 2 years and below were 90 (31.1%) while those who had benefited for a period of 6 to 8 years were 68 (23.4%) (figure 1).



**Figure 1: Number of years under OPCT program**

## Descriptive statistics

The researcher sought to establish the contribution of the OPCT program on food security among the elderly in Wajir County. The results are shown in the Table 3.

**Table 3: Food Security**

Statement	Mean	Standard variation
The program has enabled the elderly to buy foodstuff for their consumption	3.46	0.222
The program has enhanced subsistence farming.	2.91	0.315
The program has enabled the elderly to access clean water sources.	3.23	0.273
The program has enabled the elderly to acquire better food storage facilities.	2.83	0.316
The program has enhanced livestock keeping by the elderly.	2.83	0.314

Majority of the respondents as shown by a mean of 3.46 and a standard deviation of 0.222 indicated that OPCT program has enabled the elderly to buy foodstuff for their consumption and the program has enabled the elderly to access clean water sources (mean of 3.23 and standard deviation of 0.273). The findings however indicated that the program has not enhanced subsistence farming (mean of 2.91 and standard deviation of 0.315), has not enabled the elderly to acquire better food storage facilities (mean of 2.83 and a standard deviation of 0.314), and the program has not enhanced livestock keeping by the elderly (mean of 2.83). Overall, the OPCT program has improved food security among the elderly in Wajir County as indicated by the aggregate mean of 3.05 with an aggregate standard deviation of 0.29.

## Discussion

From the results, it was evident that there was a lack of uptake of the program. Only a small percentage of people had been on the program for many years with the majority having been on it for two to three years despite the fact that it has been around for a long time. Lack of sensitization about the existence of the program and the processes involved in enrollment were some of the reasons given to justify why most beneficiaries have not been benefited longer from the program. A study done by Mbaru (2011) indicates that there are other requirements that the beneficiaries of the OPCT program in Kenya are required to meet apart from being 65 years of age and older. The other requirements, such as income status, geographic location, and being ineligible for another CT program must also be met. Identifying older people, men and women, requires assessing these factors to determine whether or not they are eligible to participate in the program. Some of the respondents said that the process of enrolling for the program is tedious and the benefits do not warrant such a process.

The findings indicated that the program helped the elderly achieve some form of food security. However, in some areas like livestock acquisition, better food storage facilities and subsistence farming were not impacted by the program. This could be explained by the fact that these things are all costly and the funds disbursed by the government through the program were not enough to acquire them.

The initial assessment of Kenya's Cash Transfers for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) program, an equivalent of OPCT program, according to DFID (2005), revealed that the funds given had been used for food, clothing, shoes, medical expenditures, and small household purchases and that the funds were inadequate to meet other needs. The findings from the DFID study are consistent with the results of this study which show that the money from the OPCT program is primarily used for basics and is insufficient to cater for other essential needs like enhancing subsistence farming. Respondents indicated that the money from the program cannot be used to improve subsistence farming since it is not enough to cater for the purchase of expensive farm inputs such as fertilizer and quality seeds required for subsistence farming. Samson et al. (2006) came to the conclusion that a substantial body of international research clearly shows that OPCT funds

help households manage the risks associated with their livelihoods and thereby encourage investments in microenterprises, labor market participation, and employment outcomes. Currently, the amount paid to each OPCT beneficiary in Kenya is KES 2,000 per month (GoK, 2016:3).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the responses from the respondents, the OPCT program has a positive contribution on the food security among the elderly in Wajir County. This was confirmed by the overall mean of 3.05. The results also indicated that the amount of money the beneficiaries get is not enough to enable them enhance subsistence farming that can lead to better food security since some of the farming equipment required for subsistence farming is very costly.

From the study findings, it was evident that the OPCT program has had a tremendous contribution in safeguarding the wellbeing of the elderly people in Wajir County by shielding them from the adverse effects of poverty and other vulnerabilities associated with the elderly people in society.

The national government should put adequate measures in place to ensure that the socio-economic status of the elderly is well taken care of. The government should through legislation consider increasing the amount disbursed to the elderly through the OPCT program to enable them meet all their needs without facing social stigma.

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