



Oxford Policy Management

# Support to the design of a regional exchange and training framework on safety nets in West Africa

Report of mission to Ghana, 22-26 Novembre 2015

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## Introduction

Experience of social safety nets as a mechanism for poverty reduction and strengthening of resilience to shocks is still quite limited in West Africa. By “safety nets” is meant here the types of programmes that transfer resources directly to households in a predictable manner. In other words, these are regular social transfers (in cash, in near-cash or in kind), including transfers that are linked to participation in labour intensive public works (PWPs). In most West African countries, these kinds of programmes have been set up in the recent past and, up until now, have been small-scale, with only small numbers of beneficiaries. There is also not yet a critical mass of expertise for the design and implementation of such programmes.

Because of these constraints, the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which is particularly interested in the linkages between safety nets, food security and nutrition, has taken the initiative to study the prospects for setting up a regional mechanism for training and exchange of knowledge, information and experience on safety nets in West Africa, as a way of strengthening competencies in this field. For this purpose, RAAF contracted Oxford Policy Management (OPM) to undertake a regional study, which includes missions to gather information in eight member states of ECOWAS, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

The mission to Ghana took place from 22 to 26 November 2015, coordinated by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. During the mission, discussions were held with the main actors involved in the design, management, coordination and financing of safety nets, with the aim of collecting information and ideas (through a questionnaire and open discussions) to inform the possible creation of a regional capacity building mechanism. These consultations involved the following organizations:

- The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, including senior management, the Directorate of Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, the Directorate of Social Protection, the Directorate of Social Development, the Ghana School Feeding programme and the National Targeting Unit (National Household Registry);
- The Ministry of Food and Agriculture, including the Directorate of Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation and the Women in Agriculture Directorate;
- The Ministry of Health;
- The National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS);
- The Ghana Social Opportunities Project, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development;
- The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF);
- The Centre for Social Policy Studies and the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, University of Ghana, Legon.

The list of people met is in an annex at the end of the report. In total, 24 individuals took part in the discussions, of whom 15 completed the questionnaires<sup>1</sup>. Although these consultations did not involve all the potentially relevant actors, due to constraints of time and the absence of some actors who were away from Accra at the time of the mission, it would be reasonable to suppose that those who were interviewed do constitute a fairly representative sample of the actors involved in safety net programmes in Ghana.

As in the other countries visited, the mission included a quick mapping of the main safety net programmes in the country, the collection of information on needs for capacity building and discussions about the possible strategies that could be employed by a regional capacity building mechanism. OPM would like to thank the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and, in particular, the Chief Director, Mr Kwesi Armo-Himbson, and the Director of Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Mr Mawutor Ablo, for organizing the programme of meetings during the mission, as well as all those who gave up time to participate in the discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> Only government actors were asked to complete the questionnaire, thereby excluding development partners (UNICEF) and academics (ISSER and CSPS).

# 1 Mapping of social safety nets

Ghana has advanced further than most West African countries in setting up a portfolio of non-contributory social protection programmes that address the main types of vulnerability and risks. However, in some cases these are still quite small programmes, in terms of beneficiary coverage, and the overall level of public expenditure on non-contributory social protection is low by international standards. The Government of Ghana is expected soon to adopt officially a new National Social Protection Policy, drafted this year, to guide the development of social protection over the next 15 years, from 2016 to 2031 (GoG 2015).

## The main programmes

Ghana's flagship social transfer programme is the **Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)** programme, which was inspired by Brazil's Bolsa Família and launched in 2008. The programme makes bimonthly cash transfers to very poor households (defined as the "bottom 20%") with unsupported elderly (65+), disabled unable to work or orphans and vulnerable children (OVC).<sup>2</sup> It has gradually expanded to reach almost 300,000 'eligible' beneficiaries in 145,000 households, as of November 2015. This is equivalent to about a third of households below the extreme poverty line.

This year the categorical eligibility criteria have also been widened to include pregnant women and children under 1, who will then remain in the programme until the age of 3, in an attempt to address the risks of child under-nutrition. This began as a pilot in the North and Upper East regions called LEAP 1,000 (an allusion to the 1,000 day "window" for preventing chronic under-nutrition) but has now been integrated into LEAP nationally. With several donors complementing internal Government budget allocations for the programme (see below on financing), LEAP is now entering a period of more rapid scale-up, with coverage to reach 350,000 households by 2017.

**Table 1 Main social protection programmes and their coverage, 2014**

Programmes	Type of targeting	Number of beneficiaries	Coverage rate (%)	Denominator
Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)	Geographical/categorical/CBT/PMT	90,754	25	Extreme poor HH
Labour Intensive Public Works (LIPW)	Geographical/self-selection/CBT	30,042	10	Extreme poor rural HH
Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP)	Geographical	1.7 million	39	Primary & pre-primary pupils
Take-home rations for girls	Geographical/categorical	30,000	25	Girl pupils in targeted districts
Free exercise books	Universal	4.8 million books	90	Primary pupils
Free school uniforms	Geographical	400,000	57	Enrolled extreme poor children
National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)	Universal	10.2 million	38	Total population
Exemptions: children	Categorical	4.6 million	38	Children <18
Exemptions: pregnant women	Categorical	268,650	28	Pregnant women
Exemptions: elderly 70+	Categorical	362,464	40	Elderly (70+)
Exemptions: indigents	Economic	1.5 million	...	...

Source: Derived from World Bank 2015.

The LEAP transfer amount, which is on a sliding scale linked to the number of 'eligible' beneficiaries in the recipient household (but not the *total* number of household members), was tripled in 2012 (to 24-45 Ghana cedi for households with 1 to 4 eligible beneficiaries) from a level that had been widely regarded as too low to have much impact on the well-being of LEAP

<sup>2</sup>The concept of OVC is not very clear and seems in practice to have been interpreted mainly to refer to orphans.

beneficiaries (see below regarding the results of the LEAP impact evaluation). In early 2014, the average transfer amount of 36 Ghana cedi per household was estimated to be equivalent to about 21% of the average consumption of recipient households, but in real terms this amount was being steadily eroded by inflation in the absence of a mechanism for indexation (Handa et al 2014). The effectiveness of the programme was also being undermined by long and frequent delays in making transfer payments to the beneficiaries, although this problem has been effectively resolved since 2013.

Another key intervention is the **Labour Intensive Public Works (LIPW)** programme, which was set up through the World Bank-supported Ghana Social Opportunities Project (GSOP), under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. LIPW creates short-term employment opportunities (of about 6 months) for the rural poor through community asset projects in fields where labour-intensive methods are economically efficient: mainly rural feeder roads, small earth dams and dug-outs (water reservoirs) and tree planting for soil and land conservation.<sup>3</sup> Most projects are scheduled during the agricultural off-season in the poorer northern regions, from November to March/April. In the first 9 months of 2015, LIPW provided 3.4 million person-days of employment in 60 districts, mainly in the north, although there has been a recent expansion to some districts in the forest and coastal regions. Since LIPW began in 2011, there have been 133,668 beneficiaries. Labour intensity (the share of wages in total expenditure) averages 60%, varying from 50% for feeder roads to 60% for earth dams and dugouts and 73% for tree planting (MLGRD 2015). WFP has also supported some public works projects, using food for work and more recently cash for work, for the rehabilitation of broken down irrigation systems.

The LIPW wage (7 Ghana cedi for a 6-hour day) is slightly more generous than the minimum wage (7 Ghana cedi for an 8-hour day), due to the fact that the minimum wage in Ghana is low compared to market rates for unskilled labour. There has generally been high demand for the temporary jobs available through LIPW, making it necessary to use community-targeting methods to supplement wage-based self-selection.

It is also worthy of note that GSOP is about to introduce a Complementary Income Generating Skills pilot to upgrade the skills of beneficiaries of both LIPW and LEAP, in an effort to promote their income generating capacity and so reduce their dependence on social assistance or short-term public works – although it is recognised, in the case of LEAP, that it is unrealistic to expect some beneficiaries (especially the elderly and disabled) to achieve ‘graduation’. The lack of linkages to complementary programmes and services, with the notable exception of the linkage of LEAP beneficiaries to health insurance (see below) has been seen as one of the main weaknesses of both programmes.

Third, there are some **programmes in the agriculture sector** that have a safety net character in so far as they transfer resources to small farmers, notably in the form of subsidised inputs (fertilizer and seeds). Fertilizer subsidies were introduced in 2008, in response to the sharp rise in fertilizer prices during the global food, energy and financial crisis. Seeds were added in 2010. Some other projects, such as an IFAD cassava project and the World Bank’s West Africa Agriculture Project (WAAP), target small farmers with free planting materials and agricultural extension services. The ‘block farm programme’ has targeted rural youth, providing packages of fertilizers and seeds. There appears to have been no real attempt yet to promote linkages between these programmes and projects within the agriculture sector and safety net programmes such as LEAP and LPIW.

A fourth key intervention is the **Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP)**, which is one of the largest social assistance programmes, providing a free school lunch to 1.7 million primary school children in 4,881 pre-primary and primary schools (39% of all pre-primary and primary pupils in the country), as of 2014. This programme, which began as a pilot in 2005 and was

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<sup>3</sup>The District Assemblies implement the projects in partnership with agencies such as the Ghana Irrigation Development Authority, the Department of Feeder Roads, the Forestry Department and the Ministry of Agriculture.

rolled out nationally from 2006 onwards, has a triple objective: to improve school enrolment and attendance, reduce hunger and improve the nutrition of school children, and stimulate growth in food production. It is based on the 'home-grown school-feeding concept', under which the Government contracts and pays directly local caterers who source their food in local markets, thereby stimulating demand and promoting agro-food production. Management of the programme, which is fully funded by the Government of Ghana, moved from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in August 2015. The programme's geographical targeting was improved in 2011 to concentrate government resources on the poorest communities.

In addition, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been providing **take-home rations for girls** to incentivize school attendance by girls and promote gender parity. This programme, which began in 1999, provides a ration of maize, oil and iodized salt to girls to take home to their families at the end of each month if they attend school for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of school days. In 2014, it provided rations to about 32,000 girls in 508 schools in 12 districts (10 in the Northern Region and 2 in the Volta Region).

Other major programmes in the education sector with a social protection dimension include the **education capitation grant**, which makes payments to schools in lieu of registration fees, which were abolished in 2005, and the provision of **free school uniforms and exercise books**. Beginning in 2009, the Government has been distributing about 400,000 school uniforms a year to pupils in geographically targeted poor communities. Distribution of exercise books (4.8 million a year) is quasi universal. This was to be expanded to 500,000 school uniforms and 15 million exercise books in 2015. There are also several overlapping scholarship programmes (World Bank 2015).

Finally, in the health sector, the Government's main social protection initiative, since 2003, has been the establishment and consolidation of the **National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)**. Although contributory social insurance programmes are not normally categorised as 'safety nets' or social transfers, NHIS is in fact a hybrid scheme with a very strong social assistance component, as it is mainly tax funded (through the National Health Insurance Levy added to VAT) and only about a third of NHIS members are required to pay premiums (34%). In 2014, NHIS had 10.1 million active members (about 38% of the population), of which 6.7 million were in categories exempted from premium payments: children under 18 (4.6 million), pregnant women (268,650), elderly aged 70 and above (362,464) and indigents (1.5 million) (World Bank 2015).

While the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) manages the NHIS, the responsibility for identifying those who qualify for the **NHIS indigent exemption** lies with the Department of Social Welfare in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. Since the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the Ministry of Health in 2013, all beneficiaries of LEAP, school feeding and various other social welfare programmes (along with the other members of their families) are now eligible for automatic free enrolment in the NHIS under the indigent provision, resulting in the expansion of indigent coverage from 393,453 in 2012 to 1.23 million in 2013 (NHIA 2013).

## **Programme impacts**

Most of the programmes have not been rigorously evaluated. The main exceptions are LEAP and LIPW. In the case of LEAP, the impact evaluation baseline and follow-up surveys took place in 2010 and 2012 respectively, during a period characterized by lengthy arrears in cash transfer payments and before the increase in transfer amounts, which were still very low. Under these circumstances, impacts might have been expected to be modest. Beneficiaries appear to have regarded their transfer receipts, which were paid in lumpy amounts in arrears, as an irregular (and unpredictable) windfall and so used them mainly to reduce household debt (a 23 percentage point reduction compared to the control group) and increase savings, rather than increase their consumption. There was also a significant increase in their purchases of seeds, which suggests that productive capacity may have improved. There were also significant

impacts on education: an improvement in school enrolment for older children aged 13-17 (+7 percentage points) and, for all children, improvements in school attendance and retention (Handa et al 2014). A third round of the LEAP impact evaluation is due in 2016.

The LIPW evaluation, conducted during the pilot phase of the programme in 2012, reported increases in household expenditure on food and other consumption, a reduction in debt, increased likelihood of savings and improved school attendance (World Bank 2015).

## **Policy, institutional framework, capacity and financing**

Although national strategies for social protection were drafted in the past (in 2007 and 2012), these were not officially adopted by the Government of Ghana. Social protection programmes therefore developed in a piecemeal way, without an overarching vision and clear priorities, and there was no clear framework to guide public expenditure decisions regarding social protection. Capacity for implementing programmes has generally been weak and, as has already been mentioned, levels of financing have been low, notably when compared with other lower middle-income countries. However, a number of recent developments point to important steps forward in these areas: the development of an overarching policy framework, investments in capacity development and prospects for improved financing.

### ***Policy and legal framework***

The draft Ghana National Social Protection Policy for 2016-2031 and a new social protection law are due to go to the Cabinet for official adoption at the end of 2015. According to the draft (GoG 2015), the Policy's goal is to 'promote the well-being of Ghanaians through an integrated platform of effective social assistance, social and productive inclusion, social services and social insurance'. The Policy has a phased approach, starting in the short term with a focus on transforming the lives of Ghanaians living in extreme poverty, through scale-up and consolidation of a core basket of five on-going flagship programmes: LEAP; NHIS exemptions; LIPW; Education Capitation Grant; and the School Feeding Programme. These will constitute an 'integrated platform', to which other initiatives with a social protection character, including those with the potential for productive inclusion (such as the programmes of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture) will be linked. The Policy makes a strong commitment to the development of common systems, notably for targeting (see below), M&E systems and information sharing.

### ***Institutional framework and capacity***

The Policy indicates that the Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Decentralization, chaired by the President, will be the highest coordinating body for social protection, in order to ensure effective delivery of programmes through the decentralized local governance system. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection will be responsible for overall operational coordination, with support from two inter-ministerial bodies, the Social Protection Sector Advisory Committee (which includes Ministries and representatives of development partners and NGOs) and, at a more technical/operational level, the Social Protection Technical Working Committee. Regional Social Protection Monitoring Teams will be set up within the Regional Planning Coordination Units, and there will also be district and community level social protection committees.

Major investments are currently being made to strengthen operational capacity for programme implementation, particularly with respect to targeting, registration and payments mechanisms. Under a World Bank project, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection is building a National Household Registry, linked to a common targeting mechanism that could be used by a wide range of programmes in different sectors, such as LEAP, LPIW, NHIS indigent exemptions and the distribution of free school uniforms. Starting with the three northern regions in 2016, this will use population survey methods to register and collect data on all households in the country that wish to access social assistance programmes. A newly refined proxy means test (PMT) formula will then use this data to determine households' eligibility for the range of participating programmes.

This major initiative faces two major challenges, one logistical and the other technical. Setting up the National Household Registry, through survey methods, throughout the whole country is an enormous and costly undertaking and, to ensure that it remains up-to-date and valid, it will have to be repeated at frequent intervals (at least once every two years). Its success will also depend heavily on the targeting accuracy of the PMT, which may be difficult given the limited number of variables used in the formula (for practical reasons) and the shallow differentiation in households' assets, living conditions and consumption levels across the bottom deciles of the population. While a successful common targeting mechanism has obvious advantages, in terms of cost-efficiency, an inaccurate common PMT would risk replicating errors of inclusion and exclusion across a range of programmes.

Another important innovation is the rollout of a new automated payments system for LEAP, which is expected to start soon, following a successful pilot supported by UNICEF. This will replace the cumbersome (and insecure) manual payments system operated through the Post Office up to now. UNICEF has also provided technical assistance in other areas, including the development of the new Social Protection Policy and Law, design of an M&E system, a Management Information System (MIS), the LEAP impact evaluation and a mechanism for civil society monitoring of LEAP implementation

### ***Financing***

Despite the progress made in developing and rolling out a portfolio of programmes, the overall level of government financing of social safety nets, or non-contributory social protection programmes, is still quite low. Weaknesses in the budget classification system make it very difficult to identify and aggregate social protection expenditure. Estimates by the World Bank (2015) indicate that, in 2014, total social protection expenditure was equivalent to 1.4% of GDP. However, this includes spending on pensions, essentially the Government's contributions as an employer to the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT), equivalent to 0.9% of GDP. If the latter is excluded, the government's spending on social assistance was only 0.5% of GDP in 2014, or about half what was spent on energy subsidies. Moreover, almost half of this (46%) went to scholarships.

The World Bank (2015) has described Ghana's level of spending as being 'a fraction of its Sub-Saharan African lower-middle-income peers' (2.1%). This is despite the fact that some large social protection programmes, such as the School Feeding Programme, are 100% financed from internal government resources, while such programmes (generally much smaller) are heavily dependent on donors in most other West African countries. LEAP is co-financed by the Government and donors, namely the World Bank, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and, through UNICEF, the United States Agency for International Development. DFID assistance takes the form of earmarked resources in the UK's budget support to Ghana. LPIW is totally financed from outside, by the World Bank, through the Ghana Social Opportunities Project.

Although fiscal space is tight in Ghana, with efforts being made to reduce a large and persistent overall deficit, there may be scope for increasing social protection expenditure and improving the efficiency of this spending, in particular by rationalizing the portfolio of programmes and prioritizing those that have demonstrated the strongest impacts on the poor. Social protection expenditure has been given priority in Ghana's current Extended Credit Facility agreement with the International Monetary Fund for 2015-2018.

## **2 Thematic priorities**

During the mission, the actors engaged in social safety nets and related programmes were asked to indicate what they considered to be thematic priorities for the development of competencies. Respondents to the questionnaires ranked a set of 21 thematic options on a scale of 0 to 5, where 0 indicated no priority and 5 indicated maximum priority. The results are in Table 2, which shows the average score for each theme.

As can be seen in the table, the five highest priority themes were targeting, grievance mechanisms, M&E, design of social safety net programmes and beneficiary registers. In the open discussions, particular attention was drawn to the importance of: (i) the linkages of safety nets to productive activity and financial inclusion, and the related issue of ‘graduation’ of safety net beneficiaries; (ii) the financing of social protection programmes, given the low levels of domestic budgetary commitment, and (iii) the economic and social impacts of safety nets (to counter still prevalent ideas that these merely ‘encourage laziness’).

Some respondents added themes not listed on the questionnaire. One of these was school feeding, which, it was argued, needed to be included as part of a broad approach to social protection. In particular, Ghana’s experience with a large, nationally financed school feeding programme linking educational, nutritional and food production objectives, through the ‘home-grown school feeding’ approach is of potential interest to many countries in the region – and, indeed, has been influential in the reform of Côte d’Ivoire’s school feeding programme. Another missing theme was management information systems (MIS).

It was also pointed out that the list of themes included in the questionnaire did not explicitly include broader ‘systems’ issues, such as the linkages and complementarity of different types of programmes within the broad social protection system, the development of national social protection policies and strategies, and coordination among the different actors involved. However, it would be fair to argue that many of the specific themes, such as those on diagnostics of poverty and vulnerability, targeting, value for money, and monitoring and evaluation, are equally relevant to systems and individual programmes.

**Table 2**      **Priority themes for learning**  
(Scale of 0 to 5 where 0 indicates no priority and 5 indicates maximum priority)

Themes	Average score
Targeting methods	4.93
Grievance mechanisms	4.73
Monitoring and evaluation of safety net programmes	4.73
Design of social safety net programmes	4.67
Beneficiary registers	4.67
Value for money (cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency)	4.53
Case management and referral systems	4.47
General introduction to social protection and safety nets	4.40
Safety nets and food security	4.40
Safety nets and nutrition	4.40
Payment mechanisms (for cash transfers)	4.40
Promotion of resilience and graduation	4.33
Budgeting and financial analysis of safety nets	4.33
Undertaking diagnostic studies on social protection systems	4.20
Safety nets and emergencies	4.13
Safety nets and environmental risks	4.07
Setting the transfer amount	4.00
Social and economic impacts of safety nets	3.97
Labour intensive public works	3.93
Conditionality in safety net programmes	3.67
Rationales for transfers in cash or kind	3.60

### 3 Existing access to training and knowledge sharing

Through the questionnaires, the consultants also obtained information on actors' current or prior participation in training programmes and mechanisms for knowledge exchange in the field of social protection or safety nets, at the national, regional and international levels. The results are in Table 3.

**Table3 Participation in training or knowledge exchange mechanisms**

	% of responde nts
Education/training in social protection, safety nets or related fields	
Masters or higher	40.0
Bachelors	6.7
Professional/vocational training	6.7
Short-term courses	33.3
Participation in mechanisms for knowledge exchange on social protection or safety nets	20.0
Participation in study tours to other countries on social protection or safety nets	33.3

#### ***Degree/diploma programmes***

Regarding the 40% stating that they had a Masters degree in a field related to social protection, this was sometimes quite remote from social protection, but included 1 Masters in Public Policy with a social protection specialization and 1 PhD with a dissertation on social protection in health. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection has sent 3 students to take specialized Masters courses in social protection in 2015/2016: two to the University of Bonn and one to the University of Mauritius.

#### ***Short-term training***

Discussions during the mission indicated that the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection has been sending a significant number of its staff to take specialized short term courses in social protection. Last year two staff went to Washington D.C. for the Social Safety Nets core course at the World Bank's World Development Institute and, in 2013, eight staff attended a course on social transfers held in Thailand by the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) of Cape Town. The Ministry, along with other actors, has also sent staff to a short-term training course on social protection offered locally, since 2014, by the Centre for Social Policy Studies at the University of Ghana (see below).

#### ***Communities of practice***

About 5 staff of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, all at a senior managerial level, are active members of the the community of practice (COP) on cash transfers set up by the World Bank for Anglophone Africa, which has been active since about 2012 and holds a physical meeting once a year and virtual meetings (webinars) about once a quarter. One of the Ghanaian members is on the COP Steering Committee. Membership (or indeed knowledge of the existence of the COP) does not extend to the middle level of younger, professional staff of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, or to other actors outside that Ministry.

#### ***Study tours***

The Brazilian Embassy has played an influential role in the development of Ghana's social protection system. This began around 2007-2008, influencing the initial design of LEAP, and

has continued since then through a number of study tours. In 2014, UNICEF and the World Bank jointly sponsored a study tour to Brazil that involved a cross-section of actors, including the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Finance and parliamentarians. Another study tour to Brazil, the same year, was sponsored by WFP and focused on Brazil's experience in school feeding.

## 4 Options for a regional capacity building mechanism

There was universal support, among the different actors met during the mission, for the idea of setting up a mechanism in the ECOWAS region for developing the technical capacity of social protection or safety net actors.<sup>4</sup> There was felt to be a great need for this, since the programmes are recent, systems are still weak and there is not yet a critical mass of expertise. A regional mechanism could help actors in the different countries learn from the experience of their peers across the region, where the social, cultural and economic conditions are fairly similar – albeit with differences between Anglophone and Francophone countries and between the coastal and Sahelian countries. Language was not seen as an insuperable problem, but would require investments in interpreters and translators.

The questionnaire responses showed 100% support for **short-term training courses**, with a two-thirds preference for a flexible approach providing a menu of options of specialized modules. Most respondents wanted a combination of online and face-to-face training methods.

All but one respondent also backed the idea of setting up a **regional MA programme** in social protection, as a way to develop a higher-level cadre of expertise. However, a dissenting voice expressed concern that most of those benefiting would not return to government employment and suggested that this would be a wasted investment.

Regarding the establishment of a **community of practice**, all but one of the questionnaire respondents supported this proposal, with almost all respondents supporting a mix of virtual meetings, regional physical meetings and a forum for written exchanges. This was despite the fact that a COP managed by the World Bank already exists.

As has been noted above, only a small minority of the actors, at senior managerial level in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection participate in the World Bank COP. The latter is also seen as being too narrowly focused on cash transfers, rather than social protection interventions in a broader sense, although the COP does at times discuss broader system issues and national social protection policies and strategies.

Several of the respondents recommended developing a community of practice with a broader membership and focus, in order to strengthen the coherence of social protection systems and the complementarities and synergies between different types of programmes. Some also thought that a community of practice rooted in the ECOWAS region would be more attuned to the specific challenges of developing stronger social protection systems in West Africa. One actor, who is already participating in the World Bank COP, took a dissenting view, arguing that communities of practice actually did little to strengthen knowledge and expertise, compared to more formal training, and had a tendency to become a 'talk-shop'.

One respondent suggested that, in addition to providing training and a community of practice, a regional mechanism could undertake **peer reviews** of social protection systems or programmes in the different countries within the region.

Finally, it was suggested that it was particularly important to involve Ministries of Finance in this initiative, due to their central role in the financing of social protection programmes. Their

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<sup>4</sup>It should be noted that one person interviewed questioned whether ECOWAS would have the technical and logistical capacity to manage a regional mechanism of this nature, particularly an online community of practice, which would require strong platform management, experienced facilitators and video-conference facilities for effective online access in all the participating countries.

knowledge of social protection and its potential economic and social impacts is weak in Ghana, as elsewhere in West Africa, and social protection is not yet really mainstreamed in the budget planning process, with specific budget codes and identifiable programmes.

**Table 4 Preferences regarding possible modalities for a regional capacity building mechanism**

	% of respondents
<b>Community of practice</b>	93.3
Modalities	
a. Virtual meetings (« webinars »)	66.7
b. Regional physical meetings	93.3
c. Forum for written exchanges	73.3
<b>Short term training courses</b>	100.0
Types of courses:	
a. A single integrated course	35.7
b. A menu of options of specialized modules	64.3
Modalities:	
a. Online training only	0.0
b. Face-to-face training only	13.3
c. Combination of the two	86.7
<b>Regional Masters programme in Social Protection</b>	93.3

## 5 Education/training institutions with capacity in social protection

Unlike almost all other West African countries, Ghana has some existing capacity and experience in the design and delivery of training programmes in social protection. The Centre for Social Policy Studies (CSPS) at the University of Ghana, Legon, which was set up in 1996, has been delivering an annual 3-week course since 2014, with modules on social protection and vulnerability, targeting for social protection and development, and qualitative methods for social protection and policy research. This is fee-paying (about USD 500 per participant), but demand is high, with 44 participants in the 2015 course, including some coming from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT), NGOs, trade unions and other organizations. Donors (DFID and UNICEF) have sponsored some of the participants. CSPS also has Masters and PhD programmes in Social Policy, which includes a social protection component, and is a member of the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR), based in Nairobi.

CSPS is able to draw on resource persons from other parts of the University of Ghana, including the Institute for Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), which is one of the leading social science research centres in West Africa, dating back to 1962. ISSER is particularly strong in quantitative research methods, impact evaluations and poverty analysis. It has been involved in the on-going LEAP impact evaluation in collaboration with the University of North Carolina. ISSER has been running Masters and PhD programmes in Development Studies since the 1990s and also delivers short-term courses in areas such as project cycle management and research methods.

## 6 Conclusion

Ghana has gone further than almost all other West African countries in establishing a range of complementary safety net programmes and is in the final stages of developing a National Social Protection Policy that sets out a clear vision for strengthening these programmes over the next 15 years. Some of these programmes, such as the Ghana School Feeding Programme, are large, with substantial coverage of their target populations. Others are still quite small, although

in some cases, such as LEAP and LIPW, are now rapidly expanding their coverage. Major investments are being made to build institutional capacity and to improve the efficiency of programmes, especially through the development of the common targeting mechanism and the National Household Registry, and a monitoring and evaluation system. LEAP is investing in a new e-payments system. Internal government financing for safety nets has historically been low, but this is a protected area under Ghana's current credit facility with the IMF and is expected to expand, despite tight fiscal space.

Although Ghana can be seen as a leader in this field in West Africa, the main programmes are all quite new, having been developed over the past decade, and expertise in the design and development of programmes is still scarce. There have been some limited opportunities to develop knowledge and skills through short-term courses and study tours, mainly on an ad hoc basis with donor support, as well as, for a few senior personnel in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, through the World Bank's Community of Practice.

The actors met during this mission unanimously supported the idea of ECOWAS developing a regional mechanism to build capacity in this field across the countries of the sub-region, including a community of practice, short-term training courses and a Masters programme. It emerged clearly from the discussions that Ghana has not only much to benefit from such a collaborative regional initiative, but also much to offer because it is slightly ahead of the other countries in terms of programme development. Its possibly unique experience (within the region) in the delivery of social protection training, through the courses at CSPS, is an additional benefit that Ghana could potentially bring to the ECOWAS initiative.

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