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Buying out the political support of the poor with Ghana's leap programme: An empirical fact or fiction?

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Abstract

There is a consensus around the view that pro-poor programmes constitute an effective response to extreme poverty. However, available evidence indicates that the political class in many nascent democracies use such programmes to extract electoral returns from the poor beneficiaries. The Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) programme attempts to support the poor to leap out of poverty. Using concurrent mixed methods approach, this article examined the extent to which LEAP benefits get to the poor, and also to ascertain if the recipients feel compelled to reciprocate government's generosity by supporting the incumbent electorally. The results suggest that the selection of LEAP communities and beneficiaries are motivated by partisan consideration. Thus, politicians use LEAP to reward party supporters. It concludes that LEAP benefits constitute insufficient motivation to swing the political support of beneficiaries toward the incumbent since most of them were affiliated to either NPP or NDC prior to their selection.

Keywords: LEAP, clientelism, political support, poverty reduction, partisan, implementation

Introduction

The mobilization of political support through clientelistic exchanges has become a prominent electoral strategy in many developing democracies and Ghana is not an exception. Although few studies such as the works of Lehoucq (2007)^[22] and Stokes et al. (2013)^[38] have highlighted the ineffectiveness and difficulty associated with the enforcement of this electoral strategy, the opaque nature of the practice has restricted an extensive assessment of the efficacy of such practice. Political clientelism in the words of Berenschot refers to "the practice of exchanging a targeted, non-policy-based provision of money, gifts or other state resources for political support" (Berenschot, 2018)^[10]. It also involves the replacement of officially mandated criteria of choosing beneficiaries of government programmes with a politically orchestrated criterion purposely for the mobilization of political support (Stokes, 2007)^[37]. In many emerging democracies, poverty reduction programmes and political clientelism have become two arenas of party politics that appear closely related. In most instances, well-designed poverty reduction programmes have often been used as disguised baits for the buying out of the political support of the poor beneficiaries (Borges, 2011)^[11]. Generally, the basic logic behind clientelistic practices is that voters after benefiting from such selective treatment would plausibly feel indebted to the giving politician and would want to support him electorally (Young, 2009; Lindberg and Morrison, 2008: 101)^[44, 23]. It is therefore not surprising that Stokes (2005)^[36], has described most poverty reduction programmes in developing democracies as "instruments of electoral investment" for the incumbent party. In Ghana, successive governments under the fourth republic have implemented several practical measures to tackle poverty which has become endemic. The growing concern however, has been that most of these programmes implemented over the years failed terribly to produce the expected outcomes. The failure has been attributed to the incessant inordinate desire of the political elites to manipulate the targeting mechanisms for political gains (Abdulai and Hicky, 2016)^[2]. Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) which has been added to this list of several poverty reduction programmes in Ghana is the focus of this study.

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From the inception of the programme, critics have not only tagged it as a tool for the mobilization of political support but have also accused the incumbents for repeatedly citing increasing number of LEAP beneficiaries as the key measure of its success (Martei, 2015) ^[24]. Till date, substantial studies with a range of methods have been done to assess the impact of LEAP on the beneficiaries (Park, *et al.* 2012; Handa *et al.*, 2013; Davis *et al.*, 2014; Sulemana *et al.* 2019) ^[30, 19, 12, 39]. All these major studies have unanimously reported that LEAP has improved the living conditions of the beneficiaries. Nonetheless, the aspects of the programme which have prominently been missed from the accumulated studies have been the degree to which the benefits get to the extremely poor, and whether the provision of the benefits can serve as sufficient motivation for the beneficiaries to switch political support in favour of the implementing government. This study, by using mixed methods design sought to fill this important gap in the literature. The study was imperative because the problem of widespread political clientelism and its negative effects on the effectiveness of poverty reduction programmes remained one of the most pressing dilemmas of Ghana. It is believed that an improvement in our knowledge would not only contribute to effective implementation of LEAP but could also serve as a basis for better policy measures and advocacy. The rest of the paper is organised into five sections namely; the background and description of LEAP, theoretical framework, review of some relevant works on political clientelism and the LEAP programme, the methodology, presentation of key findings, discussion of findings and the conclusion.

Background and Description of LEAP

Poverty reduction has not only occupied the centre stage of the development strategies of successive Ghanaian governments since independence, but has also featured prominently in all the medium term national development policy frameworks under Ghana's fourth republic (Asante and Aye, 2008) ^[7]. One of the strategies developed under Kufour's regime to promote poverty reduction was Ghana's Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II (GPRS II). Under the GPRS II, the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) was developed as well to help reduce poverty and also to promote the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015 (MoGCSP, 2015; Debrah, 2013:41) ^[25, 13]. The NSPS also sought to provide an all-inclusive society through the provision of sustainable mechanisms. With the support of World Bank, Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and other Civil Society Organizations such as Help Age Ghana, the government of Ghana in fulfillment of the objective of the NSPS instituted the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) in March 2008 as a flagship social protection programme. LEAP provides bi-monthly cash transfer to households that are considered extremely poor and vulnerable (Sackey, 2019; Ottie-Boakye, 2020) ^[34, 28]. In addition, the said poor households must also have any of the following vulnerable groups: persons without any productive capacity due to severe disability, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC); older persons within the age bracket of 65 years or more; (Handa *et al.* 2013; UNICEF, 2020) ^[19, 41]. LEAP does not only provide cash grant for the beneficiaries but also assists them to get access to other

related government social interventions like National Health Insurance Scheme. The programme which began on a pilot basis in 21 districts with 1,654 beneficiary households in March 2008 has just over a decade of its implementation expanded exponentially to cover over 213, 000 beneficiary households spread across the 260 Metropolitan, Municipal and District assemblies in Ghana (Ottie-Boakye, 2020) ^[28].

Theoretical Framework for the study

The paper employed Rational Choice Theory (RCT) as its theoretical framework. Though the theory has been attributed to many scholars, James Buchanan has been credited to be the most notable proponent (Anderson, 2011: 25) ^[6]. The theory in this context was used to explain the actions of both the political class and LEAP beneficiaries. Conventional literature on the nature of politics in developing democracies suggests that due to high level of poverty, the politicians largely commit to actions that are ex-post rational and that the poor voters provide political support for politicians who offer sufficient selective incentives (Robinson and Vendier, 2013; Hicken, 2011) ^[32, 20]. This situation pertaining in new democracies as captured by the above-mentioned scholars appeared to reflect the underlying presumptions of the rational choice theory. Generally, the main task of the rational choice theorists was to provide an explanation as to what motivates political actors to do what they do. On the basis of this the RCT was premised on the presumption that human beings are naturally rational, self-interested and utility maximizers. Consequent to this assumption, the theorists see political actors as rational actors whose actions have always based on cost-benefit analysis. Besides, the theory contends that because politicians are opportunistic, they are always looking for opportunity to manipulate laid down rules for the realisation of their preferred outcome (Anderson, 2011: 26) ^[6]. In addition, RCT assumes that "the decisions of the rational politicians are calculated on the basis of how such actions will help or hurt their chances for re-elections" (Roskin, 2016) ^[33]. The theorists therefore concluded that once the political class ceases not to provide the clientelistic goods in exchange for political support, the recipients on the other hand will continue to reciprocate the gesture; because both of them are rational actors (Anderson, 2011: 25) ^[6]. Flowing from the assumptions of the RCT, Schaffer has intimated that the acceptance of material benefits creates patron-client relationship which compels the recipients to feel obligated to reciprocate the gesture (Schaffer, 2007) ^[35]. Using LEAP implementation in Ghana as a case, the study deploys the key assumptions of the RCT to analyse the data collected from the field to verify whether the assumptions reflect the reality.

Literature Review

Political Clientelism and Ghanaian politics

Chapter 6 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana titled "The Directive Principles of State Policy" under Articles 34 and 35 frowns on discrimination and selective distribution of state resources. In pursuance of a just society, Article 35 (5) (i) for example clearly states that "the state shall actively promote the integration of the people of Ghana and prohibit discrimination and prejudice on the ground of place of origin, circumstances of birth, ethnic origin, gender or religion, creed or other beliefs" (Republic of Ghana, 1992) ^[31]. On the contrary, there is demonstrable literature on

Ghana which have established that the country's politics is characterised by selective distribution of state resources (Abdulai and Hicky, 2016) ^[2]. Within this scope, pervasive poverty has been identified as one of the major causes of clientelistic politics in Ghana. Debrah (2013:40) ^[13] for instance, has argued that the political process in the country since independence has been driven by bread and butter concerns. He revealed that issues relating to personal ambitions of politicians, regionalism and ethnicity which have characterised the politics of many developing countries have not been considered as priorities in Ghanaian politics. Whitfield, (2011) ^[42] and Oduro *et al.* (2014) ^[27] have described the Ghanaian political environment as highly competitive. Whitfield has attributed the competitiveness of the country's politics to the existence of a vibrant opposition party which compels the ruling government to pursue policy choices that are driven by political survival calculations. Similarly, a study by Ninsin (2016) ^[26] has extensively highlighted the clientelistic political space within which LEAP is being implemented. He intimated that electoral mobilization has become an endless practice between the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) which are the two major political parties in Ghana. Ninsin attributed the phenomenon to the fact that victory in Ghanaian election provides the winning political party and her supporters the opportunity to become "privileged beneficiaries of financially rewarding patronage as well as the power to monopolise public resources" (Ninsin, 2016:159) ^[26]. He further explained that strong desire to enjoy these benefits on a regular basis motivates members to work assiduously toward "an endless electoral mobilization which is hardly driven by alternative policies and ideas" (Ninsin, 2016:159) ^[26]. The above studies have unanimously revealed that the political class in Ghana appears to cherish the introduction of pro-poor programmes for reasons other than supporting the real poor and vulnerable. The studies have also provided useful information about the nature, purpose, causes and the pervasiveness of political clientelism in Ghana. This study therefore sought to contribute to the existing knowledge on the implementation of Social Protection programmes in general and Ghana in particular.

Studies on LEAP implementation

The LEAP programme from the inception of its implementation has attracted a considerable amount of studies. The literature on it can broadly be cast into two categories. While the first category has focused on how the programme has impacted on its beneficiaries, the second category on the other hand has principally concentrated on the implementation challenges over the years. For instance, scholars such as Sackey (2019) ^[34] and Abbey *et al.* (2014) ^[1], have all highlighted on a number of key challenges facing the programme. These challenges enumerated included erratic payment system, absence of proper linkage of LEAP to other pro-poor interventions, poor targeting mechanisms and scanty staff with limited operational capacity. The issue about the implementation challenges have been reinforced by Fuseini *et al.* (2019), Bawelle (2016) and Debrah (2013) ^[15, 9, 13]. Their studies identified insufficient cash benefits provided to the beneficiaries and difficulty in accessing the complementary services as some of the irregularities that have watered down the impact of the programme. In addition, Martei (2015) ^[24] and

Agyemang *et al.* (2014) ^[5] highlighted the government's failure to ensure prompt payment of the cash grant to the beneficiaries as a major bane to the successful realization of LEAP's stated goals. Notwithstanding the above identified challenges confronting the programme, significant studies have also extensively established tremendous impact the programme has had on the beneficiary households. The studies done by Korboe (2011); Park *et al.* (2012); Handa *et al.* (2013); Thome *et al.* (2013); and Davis *et al.* (2014) ^[21, 30, 19, 40, 12], have all agreed that the programme has made positive contribution towards the living conditions of beneficiary households. Groot *et al.* (2015) ^[18] in their study for instance, observed significant improvement in girls' school attendance among the beneficiary communities. They attributed the reason for this achievement to the ability of beneficiaries to use the cash grant to purchase schooling items like stationery, uniforms and sanitary pads which hitherto were difficult for them to get for their children. Park *et al.* (2012) ^[30] have also intimated the unique nature of the programme by highlighting on the existing arrangement which makes it possible for all beneficiaries to benefit from free health insurance scheme simultaneously. In addition, a recent study by Abdul-Gafaru (2021) ^[4] reported that apart from the fact that the LEAP programme has been influenced by donor interest and ideas in terms of its design and implementation, the electoral calculus by the domestic political elites substantially drives its institutionalization and expansion. The assessment by the World Bank (2011) ^[43] revealed that LEAP and other related social assistance programmes in Ghana have always been characterised by lack of proper targeting and has called for pragmatic measures from the government to enhance the targeting process. For a person to benefit from the programme, there are a number of conditions which the government has to ensure that they are strictly complied with. These conditions include registration of births, enrolment and retention of children in schools, elimination of child trafficking and child labour. Contrarily, Park *et al.* (2012) ^[30] assessed the level of the beneficiaries' adherence to these pre-conditions and established that majority of the beneficiary households never complied with any of these conditions, yet they were provided with the cash benefits. They concluded that this lack of enforcement is a reflection of the government's unwillingness to ensure that the LEAP's eligibility criteria were strictly followed to prevent the participation of unqualified persons.

Methodology

The nature of questions to be answered in the study necessitated the adoption of Concurrent Mixed Methods design for the study. This approach involves the gathering of qualitative and quantitative data at the same time. The good thing about this approach is that it allows the researcher to compare the data collected to determine contradictions or corroboration in the findings. The study was conducted in eight (8) districts in Greater Accra and Northern regions which were purposively selected. The selection of four districts from each region was based on incidence of poverty (GSS, 2014, GSS, 2015) ^[16, 17], and the district's (constituency's) strong attachment to either NPP or NDC (EC, 2017) ^[14] as criteria. The survey sampled three hundred and sixty (360) LEAP cash recipients who were randomly selected from the eight districts using simple random technique. The data used for the quantitative study

were collected through interviewer-administered questionnaires because majority of the respondents could not read and write. Regarding the qualitative study, twelve (12) key informants were identified and purposively selected from the LEAP implementing institutions. While the participants from the government institutions were selected because of their direct involvement in the implementation of LEAP, those selected from the three Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were those who have extensively researched and followed the implementation of the programme for a number of year The CSOs were also identified and targeted for the study on the basis of their proven participation in poverty reduction programmes in Ghana. The key informants included the Social Welfare Officers in-charge of the eight selected districts, LEAP Programme Manager at the LEAP National Secretariat, an official each from IMANI Center for Policy and Education-Ghana, Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), and Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG). The study employed IBM SPSS version 20 to analysed and presented the quantitative data in a form of descriptive and inferential statistics. Besides, Nvivo 12 (Pro Version) was used to analyse the qualitative data thematically.

Presentation and Discussion of key findings

This part of the study presents the results of the analysis of the data gathered from the field of study. The questions this

paper sought to answer included: the extent to which the LEAP cash grants get to the extreme poor who are the target population of the programme and to establish whether the recipients of LEAP benefits feel compelled to reciprocate the government’s kind gesture by providing their political support to the incumbent during elections? The findings therefore represent the views expressed by the 12 key informants and the 360 LEAP beneficiaries who participated in the survey.

The demographic characteristics of participants in the survey

Majority of the respondents were females representing 201 (55.8%) and the rest 159 (44.2%) were males. This was a representative of the entire national LEAP beneficiaries’ population where females are more than the males. The number of respondents in each district constitutes 5% of the total LEAP beneficiaries in the district. Out of 360 respondents, 68 were LEAP beneficiaries selected from known NPP strongholds whereas 71 were chosen from NDC strongholds and the remaining 221 being recipients from districts (constituencies) considered to be neutral politically. In all, the number of LEAP beneficiaries selected from Greater Accra region was 141 and those selected from the Northern region constituted 219 for the qualitative study. See Table 1.2. for details:

Table 1.2: Key demographic characteristics of survey participants

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	159	44.2
Female	201	55.8
Total	360	100
District		
Shai- Osu Doku	66	18.3
La Dade Kotopon Municipal	15	4.2
Ga West Municipal	45	12.5
Ga East Municipal	15	4.2
East Gonja	93	25.8
Tamale Metropolitan	47	13.1
Kumbungu	26	7.2
Yendi Municipal	53	14.7
Total	360	100
Beneficiaries’ Constituency		
NPP Stronghold	68	18.9
NDC Stronghold	71	19.7
Neutral Constituency	221	61.4
Region		
Greater Accra	141	39.2
Northern	219	60.8
Total	360	100.00

Source: Field Data (2019)

The selection of LEAP beneficiaries

Since proper targeting is critical to the success of LEAP, it was important for the study to examine the extent to which the extremely poor and vulnerable benefit from the programme. When asked whether the eligibility criteria were strictly followed during the selection of the LEAP beneficiaries, seven out of the eight Social Welfare Officers from the selected districts emphatically answered no. They conceded that interference from the political class at the local level has been a regular feature in the selection of both the beneficiary communities and the individual beneficiaries

of LEAP. In explaining this assertion, they intimated that the eligibility criteria of LEAP have never been followed. This revelation was instructive because these officers are the principal implementers of LEAP at the districts. In an attempt to throw more light on the prevailing situation, a district Social Welfare Officer (D2) from the Northern region stated that:

‘I said that because previously the LEAP communities were selected on the basis of districts poverty profile generated by Ghana Statistical Service but now they are chosen because of political support. Again, LEAP on paper is for: the

poorest families but in practice the District Chief Executive who is a politician and his party executives largely determine who benefits” (Field interview, 2019)

Another District Social Welfare Officer (D3) in responding to a question on how the political party officials interfere with the selection process provided his own personal experience to support the claim. He explained that:

“Political interferences and manipulations are common in the selection process” He added that “a classical example was in 2016 when we were working on LEAP 1000 enrolment and a party chairman and the women organizer insisted that we have to finish registering their prepared list before we can register outsiders which I did not have an option than to comply with their demand in order to protect my job” (Field interview, 2019)

Apparently, the manipulation of the LEAP selection process by politicians in an attempt to get their supporters enrolled into the programme have been a major concern for the Civil Society Organisations who have monitored its implementation over the years. Consistent with the claims by the District Social Welfare Officers, a statement by an officer (C3) from one of the Civil Society Organisations summed-up the sentiments of all the officers representing the selected CSO’s when she stated:

“I do have a serious reservation when it comes to the selection of the communities and individuals to benefit from

the programme. Available evidence to our outfit indicates that the selection is discriminatory and politically motivated”. (Field interview, 2019).

In order to further establish this finding, similar questions were asked in the quantitative study to corroborate or contradict this assertion.

For example when the beneficiaries in the survey were asked to indicate whether they think political party executives influence the selection process. The outcome is presented as follows:

Influence of political party executives on LEAP selection

In responding to the question of interference from the political party officials in the selection process, 59.1% of the beneficiaries in the survey agreed that yes they do. Again, while about 22% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion, the rest which constituted 18,9% had no idea about the claim. From the data it was evident that while large majority of respondents from NDC strongholds, NPP strongholds and politically neutral constituencies unanimously agreed that political party executives influence the selection process, the percentage of respondents with that perception in NDC strongholds (76.1%) was significantly higher than those in NPP strongholds (50%) as well as constituencies considered to be politically neutral (56.4%). See Table 1.3 for details.

Table 1.3: Do political party officials influence selection of LEAP beneficiaries?

Party officials influence	Beneficiaries’ District/Constituency				χ^2	p
	NPP	NDC	Neutral	All		
Yes	50.0%	76.1%	56.4%	59.1%	23.02	0.00**
No	38.2%	7.0%	21.8%	22.0%		
Don't know	11.8%	16.9%	21.8%	18.9%		
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

Source: Field Data (2019)

Knowledge of other poor people who were more qualified applicants than respondents

In an attempt to establish the veracity of the assertion that the poor who were not connected to the two major political parties hardly got selected to benefit from LEAP, the beneficiaries were asked whether in their opinion they knew

other poor people who were more qualified than themselves but failed to be enrolled, two in five (42.2%) respondents in the survey answered in affirmative whereas the rest disagreed. This trend is true for NPP stronghold, NDC stronghold as well as politically neutral constituencies. See Table 1.4 for details:

Table 1.4: Knowledge of other poor people more qualified applicant than respondent

Knowledge of more qualified applicants	Beneficiaries constituency				χ^2	p
	NPP	NDC	Neutral	All		
Yes	50.0%	45.1%	38.9%	42.2%	10.58	0.090
No	27.9%	18.3%	35.3%	30.6%		
Don't know	22.1%	36.6%	25.3%	26.9%		
Refused	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.3%		
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%		

Source: Field Data (2019)

Political parties in Ghana whose activities you follow most in the media

Again, when the study tried to ascertain the relationship between LEAP beneficiaries and the Ghanaian political parties, the beneficiaries were asked to indicate the political party they track their activities in the mass media. Almost three in five (58.7%) of the participants in the survey revealed that they regularly follow the activities of NDC the most in the media; about 34.6% of them indicated NPP as

the party they follow their activities in the media and the rest constituting 6.7% cited other lesser known political parties. The data clearly reveals strong relationship between the LEAP recipients and the two major parties in Ghana. Specially, while majority of beneficiaries selected from NDC strongholds (74.6%) track NDC activities the most in the media, another significant number of those in the NPP strongholds (58.8%) follow NPP activities the most. See Table 1.5 for details

Table 1.5: Political party in Ghana the beneficiaries follow its activities most in the media

Party they follow most in the media	Beneficiaries constituency				χ^2	p
	NPP	NDC	Neutral	All		
NDC	36.8%	74.6%	60.4%	58.7%	30.28	0.00**
NPP	58.8%	19.7%	31.8%	34.6%		
CPP	2.9%	2.8%	3.2%	3.1%		
PNC	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	1.7%		
PPP	1.5%	1.5%	0.9%	1.1%		
Other	0.0%	1.4%	0.9%	0.8%		
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%		

Source: Field Data (2019)

Evidences from both the qualitative and the survey studies sufficiently suggest that there have been massive breaches of the criteria for selecting the beneficiaries of LEAP. The breaches have been occasioned by political expediency. As observed from the data, the selection of the LEAP recipients has been contingent on the prior support for the ruling party. It is therefore safe to conclude that the programme has largely been used to reward party supporters at the expense of those who need the cash grant most.

Using LEAP to buy the political/electoral support of the beneficiaries

As indicated earlier, the study also attempted to establish empirically the degree to which the LEAP recipients feel compelled to reciprocate the government’s kind gesture by supporting the incumbent electorally. Thus, it was interested in determining whether the incumbent gains any electoral advantage for the implementation of LEAP. Addressing this question became imperative as earlier studies have observed that the establishment of most poverty reduction programmes in Ghana has often been influenced more by electoral calculus than any other consideration (Paller, 2014; Abdulai, 2017) [29, 3]. When the question was posed to elicit the views of the LEAP programme manager and the eight Social Welfare Officers, all but one conceded that since majority of the recipients were attached to the two major political parties prior to their selection, the cash grant can do extremely very little to tilt their electoral support in favour of the incumbent. A statement by a Social Welfare Officer from Greater Accra labelled D4 reflected the above view when she stated:

“I can say that it is possible for some to vote for the implementing government because for the poor and the vulnerable in general they can easily fall for anything that their very survival depends on, particularly the beneficiaries who were not aligned to either NDC or NPP. Apart from this group, LEAP can do little to change the minds of the people who benefit from it because majority of the beneficiaries had their political parties before they were

enrolled unto the programme” (Field interview, 2019)

Additionally, the participants from the Civil Society Organizations shared similar view during the interviews. For example, an official from Institute for Democratic Governance (C3) indicated:

“In terms of elections, the real function of LEAP is to maintain the party loyal members and it is for this reason that politicians engage in politically driven distribution. LEAP is only an effective political tool to reward their loyal supporters but for enticing the beneficiaries to vote for them only few can be persuaded. As I have stated earlier, the LEAP benefits are going to the supporters of the two dominant parties, thus NPP and NDC” (Field interview, 2019)

Besides, the results from the survey also supported the assertion that the provision of LEAP benefits does not have enough capacity to win the votes of new supporters to boost the chances of the incumbent to retain political power. For example, the beneficiaries were asked which political party would they have voted for assuming general elections were to be held at the time of the study? Interestingly, the data showed that 57% of the respondents would have voted for the largest opposition party NDC. Although this was at a time the LEAP implementing government came from the NPP. This result was not unexpected, given that the NDC’s combined administrations of Mills and Mahama had registered the majority of respondents in the LEAP program at the time of the survey. Particularly, while 60% of the beneficiaries in NPP strongholds indicated they would have voted for NPP, another large percentage of those in NDC strongholds (69%) and 59% of respondents in constituencies considered to be politically neutral would have voted for the NDC. The results from the Chi-Square test also showed that there was a strong relationship between beneficiaries’ location and the party they would have voted for. (20.13, $p<0.05$). The above data therefore suggest that incumbents in Ghana cannot bank their hopes on the LEAP initiative as a source of any significant additional votes during elections. See Table 1.6.for details.

Table 1.6: Which political parties will you vote for if elections were held today?

Beneficiary’s party to vote for	Beneficiaries’ Electoral Constituency				χ^2	p
	NPP	NDC	Neutral	All		
PPP	2%	2%	1%	1%	20.13	0.01*
CPP	1%	1%	2%	2%		
NDC	37%	69%	59%	57%		
NPP	60%	28%	36%	39.%		
Others	0.0%	0.0%	2%	1%		
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%		

Note: * is significant at $p< 0.05$

Source: Author’s Field Data (2019)

The loyalty of LEAP beneficiaries leans toward the political parties

After determining the beneficiaries' expected voting patterns in the event of a general election, another question was asked to ascertain whether their loyalty was to the implementing government or the political parties. This was done to shed more light on the extent to which the LEAP benefits can swing their loyalty. Consequent to this, respondents were asked if the provision of the cash grant provides enough motivation for them to reciprocate the gesture by voting for the party of the implementing government. The responds indicated that 63% of the LEAP beneficiaries rather would vote for the party whose government chose them to benefit from the program. On the contrary, 20% of the respondents disagreed, 10% said they were undecided, and 7% were indifferent. The beneficiaries' readiness to vote for a party whose government chose them

was universal across all the selected districts. The qualitative data, as well as the empirical statistics clearly showed that the beneficiaries' loyalty leaned towards the parties which chose them. The plausible conclusion was that the provision of LEAP benefits by the government does not have the capacity to win the beneficiaries loyalty but rather their loyalty leans towards the parties they were affiliated to prior to their selection.

As seen in table 1:7, the majority of beneficiaries in NPP strongholds benefited from LEAP during NPP administration headed by Kufour, whereas 100% of beneficiaries in NDC strongholds were chosen during the two NDC led administrations headed by Mills and Mahama respectively. This plainly indicates that the party officials from both the NPP and the NDC have been successful in getting their supporters enrolled into the program over the years. See Table 1.7 for details.

Table 1.7: Loyalty of LEAP beneficiaries is for the political parties

Willingness to vote for party that chose you	Beneficiaries' Electoral Constituency				χ^2	P
	NPP	NDC	Neutral	All		
Yes	63%	70%	61%	63%	5.56	0.47
No	22%	20%	20%	20%		
Don't know	7%	9%	10%	10%		
Indifferent	8%	1%	9%	7%		
Total	100	100	100	100		

Source: Author's Field Data (2019)

Discussion of key findings

The LEAP programme was instituted in 2008 with the ultimate goal of providing financial support to the extremely poor and vulnerable to leap out of poverty. After more than a decade of its implementation many studies have confirmed the positive economic impact the programme has had on the beneficiaries (Handa *et al.*, 2013; Fuseini *et al.*, 2019) ^[19, 15]. This study attempted to go beyond the economic benefits of LEAP and answer two lingering questions including who actually receives the benefits. With regards to the question of whether the benefits get to the extremely poor, it has been established empirically that the selection of the LEAP communities and individual beneficiaries were motivated by partisan considerations. Thus, the mandatory eligibility criteria designed to guide the selection were not strictly followed. Hence, the selection of the beneficiaries has been contingent upon a person's prior support for the ruling party. To put it bluntly politicians treat the programme as a tool to reward loyal party supporters. The finding corroborates with the earlier studies including Martei (2015); Abdulai and Hicky (2016); Ninsin (2016); Abdulai (2017) and Abdul-Gafaru (2021) ^[24, 2, 26, 4] who have all argued that the Ghanaian politicians cherish the implementation of poverty reduction programmes such as LEAP for reason other than supporting the poor. The finding is also not different from the outcome of the study by the World Bank (2011) ^[43] when it established that most pro-poor programmes implemented in Ghana have always been characterised by improper targeting. The finding further validates a popular supposition of RCT which contends that "the decisions of the rational politicians are calculated on the basis of how such actions would help their chances for re-elections" (Roskin, 2016) ^[33]. In addition, the finding confirms another RCT assumption which argues that rational politicians in their desperate quest to pursue their self-interest usually manipulate existing rules so as to

achieve their preferred outcome (Anderson, 2011) ^[6]. Furthermore, the study sought to establish whether the beneficiaries of LEAP cash grant feel compelled to reciprocate the government's gesture by supporting the incumbent electorally. Specifically, the study was interested in finding out whether the provision of LEAP benefits is strong enough to motivate the beneficiaries to switch political parties or their support. The study offers evidence which indicates that the provision of the LEAP grant does not serve as sufficient motivation to change the minds of the beneficiaries in favour of the incumbent or the implementing government. This finding contradicts the conventional logic behind clientelistic network which suggests that beneficiaries after receiving such clientelistic transfer would plausibly feel indebted to the giving politician and would want to support him in the hope of receiving future benefit (Young, 2009) ^[44]. A reasonable deduction from the finding was that majority of the beneficiaries were known and loyal supporters of the two major political parties thus, NPP or NDC before they got enrolled to the LEAP programme. Hence their loyalty and support tend to tilt towards their affiliated political parties that got them selected to benefit from LEAP than the incumbent. This evidence implies that LEAP to a large extent does not engender transfer of political support to the state but rather politicians use the programme to consolidate their existing political support. This finding again confirms the finding by Ninsin (2016) ^[26] which noted that supporters of the ruling party in Ghana always become the "privileged beneficiaries of financially rewarding patronage" when it comes to the distribution of state resources. The finding also agrees with a study by Auyero (2000) ^[8], when he studied the logic of clientelism from the clients' perspective in Argentina. He found that the slum-dwellers who were the clients in a clientelistic relationship failed to recognise the state as the provider of the material benefits. On the contrary

they rather gave credit to the Peronist political party which engineered the clientelistic network. Again, this evidence from the study is consistent with the rational choice theorists' principle of human rationality (Anderson, 2011)^[6]. Here, the Ghanaian rational politicians' motivation to implement LEAP would be based on cost-benefit calculations. Obviously, they would invest in a programme that in their opinion will provide them with the highest political dividends. This implies that the motivation for the incumbent to invest hugely in LEAP is derived from their desire to use it to consolidate their known support base.

Conclusion

So far the assertion that the implementation of LEAP in Ghana has improved on the living conditions of the recipients has sufficiently been established. The answers to the research questions have been found. First, it has been found that LEAP implementation in Ghana has been characterised by massive breaches of the criteria for selecting both LEAP communities and beneficiaries. Hence, the selection of the beneficiaries has been contingent on ones association with the governing party which can either be the NPP or NDC. The findings further support the perception held by a section of Ghanaians that the political class considers LEAP as a convenient tool for the consolidation of the ruling party's support base instead of using it to recruit neutral beneficiaries whose electoral support cannot be guaranteed. The paper has also found that the LEAP benefits do not serve as sufficient motivation to swing the political support of the beneficiaries in favour of the incumbent. This is so because a large majority of the beneficiaries were loyal supporters of the two major political parties prior to their selection. This explains why their support tends to tilt towards the political party that got them selected to the programme. It can therefore be concluded that LEAP has not been used to buy out the political support of the poor in Ghana. The paper recommends that to address the problem of improper targeting associated with the selection of LEAP beneficiaries, a compilation of a credible national database of the extremely poor and vulnerable Ghanaians is an urgent requirement. Besides, the paper argues that this database can only be relevant only if the ruling government demonstrates practical commitment to strictly select LEAP beneficiaries from it. For this to happen, stakeholders such as the media, Civil Society Organisations and the development partners ought to push this noble agenda since the politicians on their own will not have any motivation to do it.

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