

# Analysis of Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment and Livelihood of Elderly Persons in Uganda



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## **List of Acronyms**

HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MGLSD:	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
SAGE:	Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment
SHS:	Shillings
UBOS:	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UG:	Uganda
WHO:	World Health Organization

## 1.0 Introduction

The World Health Organization (2021)<sup>1</sup>, predicted that the population of elderly aged 60 years and over will increase from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion by 2030. It is further projected to double by 2050 even in the wake of covid-19. However, world-over, older people are the most vulnerable because old age is the most challenging phase of life. Most rural elderly age 80 or over cannot effectively engage in productive work coupled with deteriorating health conditions renders them extremely vulnerable. Notwithstanding their challenges, older persons play a critical role within their societies. According to Schatz & Ogunmefun (2007)<sup>2</sup>, most elderly persons are very supportive of their less successful and vulnerable family members including care giving to orphans and supporting persons living with HIV.

Similarly, in Uganda, the population of elderly persons rose from 840,000 in 1991 to 1.4m in 2014<sup>3</sup> and it is predicted to reach 5.5 million by 2050 (UBOS, 2012)<sup>4</sup>. It is devastating that this age group constitutes the poorest group in communities. They lack access to regular income and inadequate social security protection from the government<sup>5</sup>. The majority are poorly housed with poor nutrition, making them highly susceptible to various chronic disease conditions.

## 2.0 Social Protection

Social protection is globally recognized as critical to national development strategies, especially, in sub-Sahara Africa. Scholars and social protection protagonists have defined it in several aspects. For instance, the World Bank which is the leading global policy actor, defines it as a set of public actions which address income poverty, economic shocks, and social vulnerability. Its definition parameter shelters the inter-relationship between

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<sup>1</sup> WHO (2021). Ageing and Health.

<sup>2</sup> Schatz, E., & Ogunmefun, C. (2007). Caring and Contributing: The Role of Older Women in Rural South African Multi-Generational Households in the HIV/AIDS Era. *World Development*, 35(8).

<sup>3</sup>UBOS (2019). The National Population and Housing Census 2014 – Status of older persons, Thematic Report Series, Kampala, Uganda

<sup>4</sup> UBOS (2021). Living Alone among Older Persons in Uganda: Prevalence and Associated Factors

<sup>5</sup> Kowal, P., Kahn, K., & Ng, N. et al. (2010). Ageing and adult health status in eight lower-income countries: the in depth who-sage collaboration. *Global Health Action*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 11–22, 2010.

exclusion and poverty<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, the African Union (2008), definition encompasses public actions carried out by the state and other stakeholders that address risks, vulnerabilities, discrimination, and chronic poverty. Although, social protection might take a broader definition depending on location. In rural Africa, according to the African Development Bank, social protection includes aspects of labor markets, social insurance, social assistance, micro and area-based schemes to protect communities and child protection<sup>7</sup>.

According to Uganda National Social Protection Policy (2017), government is implementing various social protection interventions including; (i) The Public Service Pension Scheme (ii) The National Social Security Fund, Workers Compensation (iii) The Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (iv) Public Works

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<sup>6</sup> World Bank Report (2015). Overview of social protection. [https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Event/socialprotection/Rawlings\\_Overview%20of%20Social%20Protection%20\(poll\)\\_PCC15.pdf](https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Event/socialprotection/Rawlings_Overview%20of%20Social%20Protection%20(poll)_PCC15.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Africa Development Bank (2011). Social Protection. <https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Section%203%20MDG2011.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Uganda National Social Protection Policy (2017). Social Protection <https://socialprotection.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/National-Social-Protection-Policy-uganda.pdf>

Programmes and (v) Social Care and Support Services<sup>8</sup>.

In recognition of social protection as a human right<sup>9</sup>, this paper explores SAGE as a social protection intervention undertaken by the government to ameliorate the elders' plight in Uganda.

## **2.1 Review of Sage Programme**

In Uganda, elderly persons constitute only 4.3% of Uganda's population, 98 % of elderly persons live in the rural and 54 % are women<sup>10</sup>. Although they are a minority group, they contribute immensely to economic development. They nurture young people, care for their grandchildren, guide society and preserve cultural values. These roles are central to the economic productivity of a society. Thus, the need for livelihood support towards them.

Since 2012, the government of Uganda has been implementing SAGE across the

<sup>9</sup> International Federation of Social Workers (2016). The role of social work in social protection systems: the universal right to social protection. (June), 1–11. Retrieved from

<sup>10</sup> MGLSD (2020). Ministry Of Gender, Labour and Social Development: State of Older Person in Uganda. <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ESP-OP-Study-Final-12-Oct.pdf>

country. The programme was designed to provide a monthly cash stipend of \$7 to those above 60 years. However, it was revised to support only those above 80 years in 2018. The four-year pilot phase was designed to cover 560,000 elderly persons in 124,547 households<sup>11</sup>. However, according to the Social Development Sector Review report (2021), the program had only benefited 178,984 people by the end of the last financial year. The deficit stemmed from an unavailable database of persons who were over 80years<sup>12</sup>. This has significantly affected the progress of the project and over 54,559 have missed out.

According to a study by Byaruhanga & Debesay (2021), the pilot cash advance to the elderly persons indicated a notable improvement on their standards of living in several districts<sup>13</sup>. The report further indicated that the SAGE programme has helped households improve nutrition and reduce their vulnerability in the face of

adverse economic shocks. However, the programme has suffered some limitations as it has not significantly impacted beyond basic consumption implying that it is unlikely to lead to sustainable improvement in the long term<sup>14</sup>.

In an attempt to improve performance among the elders, the government adopted a legal instrument that allows for the representation of elders in the parliament of Uganda. This representation has directly impacted the SAGE program. In the financial year 2021/22, elders through their representatives, advocated for an increment to UGX 120.7 Bn covering over 340,000 elders.

### **3.0 Africa Comparative Review**

In Kenya, the government has made significant strides regarding economic, social-cultural rights and development of its people<sup>15</sup>. This was particularly achieved through deliberate and intentional means. The government of Kenya, through its

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<sup>11</sup> Mertten, et al. (2016). Evaluation of The Uganda Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) Programme (2012-2014).

<sup>12</sup> New Vision (February, 2022). Uganda Lacks the Database of Persons Over 80years.

<sup>13</sup>Byaruhanga I, & Debesay J. (2021). The Impact of a Social Assistance Program on the Quality of Life of Older People in Uganda. *SAGE Open*.

<sup>14</sup> Oxford Policy Management (2015). Uganda Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) programme.

<https://www.opml.co.uk/projects/uganda-social-assistance-grants-empowerment-sage-programme>

<sup>15</sup> Muthoni, K., Supervisor, K., Ewald, J., & Fritz, H. (2015). Social Protection in Kenya: The Use of Cash Transfer Programmes in Progressively Addressing Poverty and Vulnerability. (June).



devolution conducted need assessment, analyzed data and generated appropriate care for the elderly. The Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) was comprehensively designed in a way that it covered all the basic needs as opposed to providing only cash. According to Munro (2013), for social assistance grants to be effective, the definition ought to be comprehensive and detailed to enhance the well-being of elderly persons<sup>16</sup>.

In South Africa, a survey by Noyoo (2017), indicated that questions of resource distribution must consider the perceived needs and interests of the different social groups and classes. The elder person needs ought to be prioritized when designing a social welfare policy to make sure they are fully protected<sup>17</sup>. Although there are differences in context between South Africa and the Kenyan case, the need aspects are integrated in their definition of the social protection policy for improving the well-

being of the elderly persons which Uganda lacks.

In Zimbabwe, on the other hand, research indicates that social protection is focused on elders' health and quality of life<sup>18</sup>. This has seen Zimbabwe witness an exponential increase in the population of the elderly and increased life expectancy in just 30 years. For instance, the population of the elderly grew from 4.7 percent in 1982 to 6 percent in 2017. However, the lack of strategic and economic planning in Zimbabwe, has made access to resources problematic due to increased numbers. Thus, snowballing their vulnerability and poverty by the end of 2021.

#### **4.0 Policy Recommendations**

- i. Government should consider not only extending monetary support to elders but also consider supplying food and other necessities of life to the beneficiaries in line with other global practices like in Kenya. In the United States, for example, provide a welfare program that

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<sup>16</sup> Munro, L. T. (2013). Social protection. Handbook on Development Policy and Management. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781950494.00029>

<sup>17</sup> Noyoo, N. (2017). Reflecting on the Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 2(4), 108–116. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-017-0039-y>

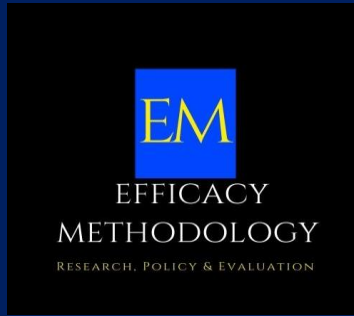
<sup>18</sup> Hungwe, C. (2021). Aging in Zimbabwe: Reflections 41 Years After Independence. *The Gerontologist*, 62(2), 152–158. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnab138>

caters for the absolute poor hosted at social housing.

- ii. The monthly \$7 (UGX 25,000) given to elderly persons is meagre considering that about 85% of active elderly persons are engaged in crop farming with no social security rendering them highly vulnerable. Besides, they look after grandchildren and orphans which has worsened their situation economically (MGLSD, 2020). Thus, the amount advanced under SAGE is just a drop in the ocean that needs to be increased.
  
- iii. The politics of patronage ought to be avoided. A vast majority of elders are segregated based on their tribes, political affiliation and their locality. This makes the majority not to benefit from the program. This vice ought to stop immediately and equal access granted to all elderly persons across the country.

## **5.0 About Efficacy Methodology**

Efficacy Methodology (EM) is Africa's leading independent nonprofit public policy think tank. Our focus is on Research, Policy and Evaluation. We are strategically working towards establishing collaborative administrative secretariats in Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, Ghana, Botswana and Angola.



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