Social Cash Transfer, Generational Relations and Rural Youth Trajectories in Lesotho and Malawi

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Funding: ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research ES/M009076/1

Globally, the youth population is larger than ever with 20% in the least developed countries aged 15-24 (United Nations, 2013). Numbers of African youth are also set to rise in the next decade and constitute 42% of all youth by 2030 (UNDESA, 2015). This 'youth bulge' (UN DESA 2015), and associated issues such as poverty, preoccupy policy makers concerned about the implications for future generations. Yet youth are also significant social actors in the present, contributing to and shaping their communities and societies. However, despite growing investment in education, economic growth does not match levels of school graduates with many remaining jobless, as employment opportunities for youth are sparse (Gough et al 2013). This results in frustration and disillusionment among young people, and concerns about their social exclusion and failure to attain 'social adulthood' (Jeffrey 2010; Langevang 2008). Yet there is a paucity of knowledge as to how young people find or create livelihoods.

This paper focuses on rural youth poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, which is particularly under-researched. 'Rural youth', however, are not a contained social category. Many young people live multi-spatial lives, moving repeatedly between diverse urban and rural environments. However, while poverty provokes many youth to migrate to urban areas (White 2012), those left behind include some of the poorest: young people without the resources needed to move or who found they were unable to sustain themselves in an urban environment. Girls in particular become trapped in villages, especially if they marry early and are expected to maintain a rural homestead (Ansell 2002). For such young people, pathways out of poverty must begin from, even if they do not remain within, rural locations and are intimately connected to the families, households and communities in which they live.

Over the past decade, policy responses to poverty in sub-Saharan Africa have begun to coalesce around unconditional cash transfer schemes. In recent years, a plethora of cash transfer schemes have been adopted across many African countries as a means for addressing poverty and inequality. Some of these schemes target individuals on the basis of their extreme poverty; others target individuals as part of groups that are deemed vulnerable because, for instance, they are elderly (and unable to work) or young (and need investment in their futures) (Ferguson, 2007). Lesotho has two well-defined and established government funded cash transfer programmes: the old age pension and the child grants programme. Since 2004 the old age pension has been targeted at those over the age of 70 and provides cash assistance on a monthly basis. The Child Grants Programme, introduced in 2009, was funded by the EU initially and the Government and targeted towards poor households with a child/children on a quarterly basis. In Malawi's Social Cash Transfer Programme (mtukula pakhomo), unconditional cash transfers are provided to ultra-poor labour constrained households usually with a dependency ratio greater than 3. This began in 2006 but has been rolled out across the country with varying levels of success and is mainly donor funded.

Rural families/households and communities in southern Africa operate in highly interconnected ways despite the targeting of cash transfers mainly towards individuals or through households. Households are often spatially dispersed, functioning over long distances, as some members work elsewhere and contribute through remittances. They are also interconnected through kinship, as multiple generations can live in the same compound and /or eat from the same pot. Further the nature of close remote communities means that interactions between households can be familiar and ever present. These social, spatial and relational processes are commonplace in rural communities. The research this paper is based on takes a relational approach to poverty for understanding and analysing the impacts of cash transfers on youth, families/households and communities beyond the recipients themselves. As Davis et al (2012) highlights this has received minimal attention in impact evaluations, while Ballard (2013) suggests cash transfers have potential through their redistributive (relational) role beyond the individual recipient.

To understand young people's lives 'entails balancing our analysis between the ways young people see and interpret the world and the ways they are positioned in it as part of families and societies' (Christiansen et al 2006:16). Therefore this paper draws on qualitative and participatory research with community and household members including young people, living in rural villages in Lesotho and Malawi, as exemplar to explore the wider significance of cash transfer schemes beyond the targeted recipients. Understanding the role of social relations in understanding poverty and the impacts of cash flows requires detailed case studies using qualitative research (Harriss 2007). Individual interviews with household members totalling 80 interviews across the two communities were complemented by a series of participatory focus groups where youth explored the various interconnected and relational ways in which cash transfers flow through communities.

Utilising the diversity of the cash transfer approaches employed in Malawi and Lesotho, this paper explores how cash, given to the elderly or caregivers of children, has benefits and disbenefits beyond the target groups infiltrating families and communities in a complex and multifaced way. The paper highlights how cash flows between and within households, over space and for a variety of social, generational and personal reasons. In Lesotho, child grants are a key source of income for young parents, allowing them to buy much needed resources such as food and clothes, despite the amount being deemed insufficient. However, at the same time youthful parents are stigmatized as they are deemed able to work and therefore undeserving of unearned income. In this instance cash transfer have both positive economic relations for youth but result in negative social relations within their communities. The pension scheme, however, is a universal benefit that goes to all elderly people. Moreover, it is a larger sum and youth benefit indirectly from it as their grandparents and other elderly community members pay them to undertake tasks or offer them gifts. This facilitates livelihood opportunities for youth through piece work and paid work beyond the community.

In Malawi, similar distribution of cash transfers occurred within and between households. Often this was through the purchase and sharing of food between family members or through grandparents purchasing livestock to generate family income. This was the experience of Yamikani who stated that his grandmother had purchased goats and chickens which would generate income to pay for casual labor in the fields and reduce the burden on the family. Such decisions impacts more widely on communities as

other youth can access more casual employment in fields at the same time as freeing up the time and resources of immediate family members.

The relational flow of cash through transfers is therefore deemed to have wider unintended benefits, such as creating employment, but at the same time elucidates the anxieties and negative flows of cash and related activities that also impact on recipients. Issues of jealously and stigma appear to infuse community relations in both contexts, which can also result in some recipients hiding their cash, getting into debt and individualizing their spending. The paper ends by reflecting on the findings from a policy perspective and considers the implications of individual recipient targeting for addressing wider relational youth poverty trajectories.

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