

Child Support Grants and Poverty Reduction in Hill Crest Community, Eastern Cape Province of South Africa

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ABSTRACT The South African Social Security System was discriminatory during the pre-apartheid era, however this was readdressed post-1994 to be non-discriminatory in nature. This paper sought to explore the effectiveness of child support grants in poverty alleviation. A qualitative research design underpinned this study. The data collection methods used were interviews with social workers and focus group discussions with recipients and beneficiaries of the grant. An interview guide was used in gathering data. The data collected was analyzed into themes that were responding to the research questions of the study. The findings revealed that child support grants are contributing a lot in providing basic needs such as food and clothing to the wellbeing of children. The paper concluded that child support grants are an effective mechanism in alleviating poverty. A number of recommendations were made from the conclusions for the Department of Social Development.

INTRODUCTION

Pre-1994, poverty was prevailing and the colonial regime implemented social welfare services and they were being provided to the vulnerable in a discriminatory tendency. Phlaahla (2015) notes that the amount given on cash grants to people were different depending on one's race. This perpetuated poverty for the disadvantaged individuals and their families. This changed in 1994 when South Africa gained its independence under the African National Congress party. In 1996, the Constitution of South Africa was formulated and its Chapter 2 stated that the government was responsible for providing welfare services to all citizens in non-discriminatory and no racial tendency (Constitution of South Africa 1996).

This led to the adoption of White Paper for Social Welfare in 1997. The Social Security System was amended to offer welfare assistance to all vulnerable South African citizens. This broad social welfare service was a strategy to alleviate people, inequalities, unemployment and exclusion (Patel 2005 as cited in Van Breda 2015: 7). The White Paper for Social Welfare was a strategy to alleviate poverty through offering cash grants as relief to vulnerable individuals. It stat-

ed that, every South African should have a minimum income that is sufficient to meet basic needs and they should not live below minimum acceptable standards (Department of Social Welfare 1997).

This led to provision of social grants such as child support grants, disability, war veteran grant, old aged, foster care, care dependency, grant in aid, social relief in distress and disability (Government of South Africa 2016). This was a relief program to assist vulnerable individuals in meeting minimum basic needs. A research carried out by Kelly and GroundUp Staff (2016) noted that social grants uses most of the budget for social welfare services as 16 million South Africans are recipients of these cash transfer grants.

According to Kelly and GroundUp Staff (2016), and the Government of South Africa (2016) social grants cash transfer were increased during the beginning of this year and the new figures are the following, that is, child support grant is now R350 per month, foster care grant (R890) and care dependency grants (R1500) per month. However, in the Eastern Cape Province child poverty is still rampant in spite of government efforts in providing these grants as relief strategies in halving poverty. This is supported in a study conducted by Hall and Sambu (2014: 94), which observed that child poverty in Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces has increased

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to seventy percent, in Gauteng its thirty-four percent and in Western Cape its twenty-seven percent. Therefore, this paper was aimed at assessing child support grants in alleviating poverty in the Hillcrest community in Alice Town, Nkonkobe Municipality, Eastern Cape Province.

Statement of Problem

The government of South Africa through the Department of Social Development (DSD) has implemented child support grants such as child support grant, foster care grant and care dependency grant as a poverty alleviation strategy to enhance the wellbeing of vulnerable children. However, child poverty is still persistent in Hillcrest community, Eastern Cape. Department of Economics Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism (2013: 11) states that there are a lot of predicaments being faced in Eastern Cape Province and amongst them are high levels of poverty, income disparities, lack of food and high unemployment rates. The author observes further that food insecurity accounts to seventy-eight percent in many households. The government strategies of poverty alleviation through the provision of social grants have been effective in other provinces such as Gauteng and Western Cape. However, in the Eastern Cape Province poverty levels are still rampant. Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate child support grants as a poverty alleviating strategy in Hillcrest community.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer two research questions, which include:

- How effective are children's grants in poverty alleviation?
- What challenges are being faced by recipients of the grants?

Theoretical Framework

This paper was underpinned by the Theory of Change (TOC). Vogel (2012) asserts that the idea of TOC emerged from the publications of Carol Weiss in 1990. The purpose of TOC is to improve the evaluation theory and practice in the field of community initiatives and programs. Valters (2012) affirms that TOC is embodied with two broad components, which are conceptualiz-

ing and operationalizing and three core frames, which are population, strategies and outcomes. Furthermore, this framework is based on two streams of development and social program practice, which are evaluation and informed social practice (Vogel 2012). Brest (2010: 173) further alludes that TOC is not just about generating knowledge about whether a situation is effective, but also on explaining how and which methods used can be more effective. Therefore, it is seen as a roadmap, a blueprint and an engine for change (Weiss 1995 as cited in Stein and Valters 2012).

TOC related to this study because it advocates for a gradual change in the wellbeing of children who are receiving grants as a poverty alleviation strategy. This theory explained changes in their wellbeing. This allowed the researchers to deduce the effectiveness of children's grants in reducing poverty.

Literature Review

The accelerating rate of child poverty worldwide has led many governments to take initiatives towards addressing plights of children. This has led to the implementing of various policies, programs and modification of social security systems to make them responsive to the needs of vulnerable children. In the sub-Saharan region, Botswana, Zambia, Namibia, Lesotho and Zimbabwe are providing grants as relief measures in alleviating poverty (Garcia and Moore 2012). In Zimbabwe cash transfers are being offered to vulnerable individuals to assist them in meeting their basic needs.

Garcia and Moore (2012) assert that children in difficult circumstances and families in distress are being given cash transfers as a poverty alleviating strategy. The Namibian government has developed a broad social protection system, which includes funded programs, cash transfer grants and pension contribution as a strategy of alleviating poverty (Odhiambo 2015). There are four types of children's grants being provided as measures of alleviating child poverty. These are the child maintenance grant, foster care grant, special maintenance grant and safety allowance grant (Constitution of Namibia 1990).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 26 supports this notion by denoting that "every child has the right to benefit from social security." Article 27 states that every child has the right "to a standard of

living adequate for his or her development” and obliges the state “in case of need” to “provide material assistance.” This means governments should support child welfare programs, as they play a pivotal role in poverty alleviation. Barnes and Wright (2012: 35) concur that from the birth of democracy in 1994, “the South African Government committed itself to protecting children’s rights and reducing child poverty.” This was achieved through the social assistance programs, which are regarded as the main arm of government’s poverty alleviation strategy to vulnerable individuals, families and communities.

The provision of children’s grants such as child support grant, foster care grant and care dependency grant are considered to be central mechanism in alleviating child poverty (Government of South Africa 2016).

Tanga and Gutura (2013: 128) assert, “South Africa suffers from high and rising poverty levels and extreme inequality.” Section 28 in the Constitution of South Africa Act No. 108 of 1996, grants every platform for a rights-based approach to be advocated and enforced in-order to address accelerating child poverty in South Africa. Drawing from these assertions thereof, social grants are initiatives implemented by the government to increase investment in health, nutrition and education of vulnerable people. This poverty reduction strategy seeks to restore social functioning through enhancing their well-being of the people.

The South African government has in the past formulated and implemented various policies and legal frameworks that seek to address the needs of its citizens including children. According to Section 27 of the Bill of Rights, in the Constitution of South Africa Act No 108 of 1996 “everyone has the right to have access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance.” The provision of social grants has made a positive transformation in the lives of the disadvantaged citizens. The following grants (child support, care dependency and foster care) were specifically made available to vulnerable children.

Children’s Grants in South Africa

Hall and Sambu (2014: 96) state that, child support grants programs were initiated in 1998. Tanga and Gutura (2013: 128) define the child

support grant (CSG) as “a grant paid to a primary caregiver of child who satisfies the criteria in terms of Section 6 of the Social Assistance Act (No. 13 of 2004).” The caregivers receive this grant on the premise that they have an income, which is below R3500 per month, if the caregiver is a single parent, and if the caregivers are a married couple their income combined should be less R7000 per month (Government of South Africa 2016). The CSG provides an income to households to enable them to care adequately for the child, and to provide for his/her basic needs.

Foster care grant is given to a child who’s staying with a foster parent because he/she was removed from the care of the primary caregiver because of living abuse, neglect, abandonment or the environment was not conducive for the child (Hall and Sambu 2014). The children court is responsible for a child in foster care under such circumstances. This grant provides financial support to children who are not in the custody of their biological parents. There is no mean test for the foster parent (Kelly and GroundUp Staff 2016).

Care dependency grant (CDG) is provided to caregivers of children with severe disabilities who have special needs. Grobbelaar-du Plessis and Van Reenen (2011: 187) state that the purpose of the CDG is to assist parents or guardians to care for children with disabilities. In support, Hall and Sambu (2014) elaborate that the care dependency grant is meant for parents or caregivers with children who have severe chronic illnesses and disabilities to assist them in covering the additional costs they will incur. The provision of these grants to vulnerable children has contributed significantly to their growth and development.

The Department of Social Development (DSD) plays a pivotal role in assessing individuals who need welfare assistance. The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) is responsible for distribution of cash grants to the recipients. The major role of the Department of Social Development is to provide social security services and enforce policies that focus on income support to poor and vulnerable citizens. In all its work the DSD provides a comprehensive social services system that protects the poor and vulnerable. Tanga (2014: 277) supports this notion by stating, “A component of the mission of the Department of Social Development in

South Africa is to provide an efficient and compassionate social welfare system, which is aimed at eradication of social welfare problems through the implementation of social welfare intervention that will bring maximum benefit to social welfare objective.”

SASSA was established under the South African Social Security Agency Act, 2004. It is a public entity whose obligation is to manage, administer and make payment of social assistance grants to their intended beneficiaries (South African Social Security Act No. 9 of 2004). It is accountable for implementing policies, programs and procedures for successful and resourceful social assistance grants administration system. Tanga (2014: 280) argues further that social grants support development, reduces poverty and at the same time they help improve the levels of nutrition, health and education for recipients and the beneficiaries. In South Africa, grants are playing a pivotal role in improving the wellbeing of vulnerable people.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focused on assessing child support grants in alleviating poverty. This project was carried out in Hillcrest Community, Nkonkobe Municipality, Eastern Cape. Creswell (2009) maintains that a researcher chooses a specific research approach to use in a study for a number of reasons such as, the nature of research problem, the readers of the study or her practical experience with that approach. The continuous persistence of poverty in Eastern Cape calls for a qualitative approach to unveil the factors contributing to the vulnerability of children. Hunter and Bailey (2011: 8-9) describe qualitative approach as a method used by researchers to examine people’s experiences in detail, by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observation.

Population is the aggregation of elements from which the sample is actually selected (Rubin and Babbie 2013: 160). The population that constitutes this study includes all the recipient and beneficiaries of child support grants in Hillcrest community. The sampling technique that underpins this study is purposive and it falls under the non-probability framework. Purposive sampling is a procedure in which the researcher chooses participants who in her judgment are

likely to yield useful results (Whittaker 2012: 39). The researchers of this paper only selected the participants who were beneficiaries and recipients of child support grants in Hillcrest Community. De Vos et al. (2011) define a sample as a small portion of the total set of object, events or persons who together comprise the focus of the study. In this paper, the sample comprised 24 participants. This included four key informants from DSD and SASSA in Alice Town and 20 recipients and beneficiaries of the child support grants.

The data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews were conducted with four social workers from DSD and SASSA. Two separate focus group discussions were done with children and their guardians. The instruments used in collecting data were in-depth interview guides. Boyce and Neale (2006: 3) assert that in-depth interviews are useful when you want detailed information about a person’s thoughts and behaviors or want to explore new issues. Therefore in this paper, the researchers wanted to obtain detailed information on the effectiveness of child support grants in alleviating poverty from the perspectives of social workers, recipients and beneficiaries.

Whittaker (2012: 93) asserts that data analysis is the process of making sense of the information collected and searching for what lies below the surface content. The field notes were read thoroughly to avoid bias and to avoid misinterpretation of the participants. Thematic analysis was used in presenting data. Carey (2012: 222) denotes that thematic analysis focuses on identifying themes and patterns regarding individual, group attitudes, behavior or values. The data was categorized into themes, which were responding to research questions of the study. The direct words of participants were presented in the findings. In upholding confidentiality, pseudo names were used and codes (alphabetical letters) were used to represent the participants.

This paper observed ethical principles that govern the social sciences research. The researchers obtained an ethical clearance from University of Fort Hare Govan Mbeki Research Committee before commencing to collect data. The following ethical principles were observed including informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation (Leedy and Ormrod 2013). The participants were informed that pseu-

do names would be used when reporting the findings. Furthermore, they should voluntarily agree to take part in this paper on their free will. Lastly, they should fill in the informed consent form to show they have understood the paper.

RESULTS

The findings of this paper are presented according to the demographics of the participants and followed by four themes that emerged during the interviews and discussions. Table 1 shows the demographics of the participants.

The paper consisted of 24 participants with the majority (20) who were beneficiaries and recipients of child support grants whilst the remaining were the social workers. The total number of females was 14 with the age ranging from 13 years to 60 years. The sum of male participants was six with their age ranging from 13 years to 60 years as well. The total number of children still receiving the CSG was seven. The next section includes the themes that emerged from the discussions.

Theme 1: Child Support Grants Contribute to Basic Needs

The recipients of these grants alluded that grants have made a positive transformation in providing for the needs crucial for the well-be-

ing of their children. They mentioned that in the past they had limited income in securing food, stationary and clothing for the children. However, with the provision of this cash transfer, they are now able to increase food security in their households. The following are excerpts from some of the participants.

Participant **M** revealed that:

I was struggling to provide food for my grandchildren, when their parents passed away. The youngest one was always crying whenever I told her that I don't have money to buy her some snacks. The crying made her health deteriorate. Since I started receiving grants for them our lives have changed. From the money that I receive, I buy them what they want and she has boosted her health.

Participant **L** elaborated that:

My child used to eat 2 meals per day—porridge in the morning and supper at night. I could not afford to provide 3 meals and snacks to carry to school. However, nowadays my son is no longer relying on the soup kitchens at school for I am now able to prepare him a lunch box.

Participant **C** mentioned that:

I always eat bread with peanut butter/honey every day at breakfast and lunch and at supper we always eat pap and chicken. Granny always says we don't have money for luxuries but other children on the street eat a lot of sweets and chips.

Table 1: Characteristics of the study participants and their pseudo names

<i>Codes</i>	<i>Names (Pseudo)</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Household members</i>
A	Mr Smith	Male	31-40 years	5
C	Ntombikhayise	Female	13-18 years	4
F	Mr Khosana	Male	30-40 years	5
L	Catherine	Female	20-30 years	1
S	Gogo Phakathi	Female	51-60 years	6
K	Mr Mbutu	Male	41-50 years	4
W	Ms Peterson	Female	20-30 years	4
E	Johnson	Male	13-18 years	5
X	Gogo Floo	Female	51-60 years	6
I	Karabo	Female	13-18years	5
F	Ms Phondwana	Female	41-50 years	3
Z	Zibuko	Male	13-18 years	6
M	Gogo Lukhatwe	Female	51-60 years	5
Y	Ms Ndlovu	Female	31-40 years	7
T	Akhona	Female	13-18 years	4
O	Ms Ndondwe	Female	31-40 years	3
G	Thandeka	Female	13-18 years	4
Q	Jabulani	Male	13-18 years	5
R	Ms Bumi	Female	31-40 years	4
B	Mis Moroka	Female	41-50 years	3

Source: Authors

Participant Y elaborated that:

I have 7 members in my family, 4 of them are not working and I am only receiving 2 grants for my nieces. The money I get from my part time job, if combined with the cash grants cannot sustain us to buy food for the whole month. The government should increase these grants if they are serious about helping us reduce poverty.

Social Worker 1 stated that:

Grants have made a significant transformation on the wellbeing of children and their families by substantiating the money they are receiving with the ones they are making for a living. At least they will be able to provide the needed necessities.

Theme 2: Many Shortcomings Encountered in Application for the Child Support Grant

There are several problems encountered in the application of grants. The following participants explained the challenges they faced at the SASSA. The following are narrations from the participants.

Participant S revealed that:

I applied for the CSG when my grandson was two years old but I did not get it early because the mother was nowhere to be found and the birth records was missing, so the application was put on pending for some weeks.

Participant F stated that:

The social worker that assisted me was very impatient. I could not read properly because of eye problems. She referred me to a young lady who was also in the queue and after waiting for a month I received a call from their department that I did not completely fill in the form.

Participant N stated that:

The process took a very long time. I continuously go to the offices to ask whether they have not forgotten about my application. It took three months for them to do the assessment.

Social Worker 3 reported that:

When the guardians come to apply for grants they expect it to be done as quick as possible of which we inform them that, there are processes and procedures that have to be adhered to before they became eligible to receive the grant.

Theme 3: Childs Grant as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction

The main purpose of child grants is to reduce poverty. The responses of participants

varied from one person to another. It depended on the composition of their household, the number of economically active people in that household and how they define basic needs.

Participant O maintained that:

I started receiving grants in 1999 and I can certainly say the provision of my household needs has significantly improved. My children no longer sleep hungry, they are all attending school and the public hospitals offer them free medication. When it comes to hunger poverty, this I have escaped.

Participant A noted that:

My household is still in absolute poverty because our source of income is the care dependency grant of my granddaughter and my old aged pension. This is not enough to buy food that sustains us for a month.

Social Worker 4 reported that:

Great work has been done in poverty reduction in Hillcrest community. People's needs are infinite and they cannot reach satisfaction but absolute poverty has been alleviated in this community. This is supported by the household survey they conducted in 2013, which showed that all households have access to clean water, electricity, food, clothing and their children's education and health needs have been met by the government through subsidising. The only poverty that is still persisting is asset poverty because many households do not have investments.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Deducing from the findings, it has been observed that females outnumber males as beneficiaries of child grants. This shows that there are many female-headed families in Hillcrest Community. At the height of unemployment and increasing inflation it is very challenging to provide all the needs of children as a single parent. It therefore calls for the government of South Africa and other stakeholders to continuously revise the social security framework so that it comprehensively caters for all basic needs. The above finding concurs with a study done by Kang'ethe et al. (2015), which also revealed that most households in Alice Town, Nkonkobe Municipality are headed by females.

In contrary, a study done in Ngqwushwa Local Municipality by Gutura and Tanga (2014: 666) showed that the majority of recipients of social grants were children. This means that child-headed and female-headed families are the

vulnerable to poverty. These findings reflect further that female and child-headed households are the most vulnerable to poverty in Hillcrest Community. Pheko (2011) contends further that female poverty is a crucial social phenomenon and policymakers should regard this matter with urgency because it shows elements of gender inequality and vulnerability. Kang'ethe et al. (2015: 68) reiterates that the government and other stakeholders need to play a vital role in implementing policies that empower women.

The findings revealed that child support grants are fundamental in meeting basic needs such as food and clothing. Various beneficiaries of social grants acknowledge that due to the provision of social grants their household food security has improved significantly, as they can afford at least two meals per day and luxury goodies for their children. These assertions entail that social grants as a poverty reduction strategies are essential in improving the standards of living for several vulnerable families. The above findings are also supported by Statistics South Africa (2015), which indicates that eighty percent of South African households are now food secured after the introduction of genetically modified food. This shows that hunger and poverty have decreased in South Africa.

The findings also revealed that programs and projects initiated by the Department of Social Development, Donors and Non-Government Organizations are assisting in poverty alleviation. These projects are providing a source of employment and income to guardians of the children. The provision of social grants has since enabled guardians of children to sustain on the cash grant therefore increasing household income for meeting basic needs. In contrary, to the study of Gutura and Tanga (2014: 665) some of the beneficiaries of child support grants are empowering themselves through self-initiating projects such as gardening and poultry to supplement their income.

Drawing comparison from the Zimbabwean context, the poverty alleviation projects are being orchestrated by the government through the newly adopted framework of Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio Economic Agenda (ZIMASSET). Its cluster number 4 (social services and poverty eradication) is playing a pivotal role in enhancing the wellbeing of the vulnerable population (woman, unemployed, children and the elderly). The government is providing social

protection measures and subsidizing fees and levies to the vulnerable population (Government of Zimbabwe 2013: 76). Based on the implementation of social protection in Zimbabwe, it can be argued that, the South African government and its stakeholders (donors) should adopt a developmental approach, which calls for the empowerment of people in an effort to holistically reduce poverty in communities.

The findings of the study have shown that using through using the theory of change child support grants can be used as mechanisms of poverty reduction. These sentiments are supported by Weiss (1995b) as cited in Stein and Valters (2012) who recognize that the TOC if well implemented can provide a roadmap, a blueprint and a social engine for community transformation. Based on the discussion of findings for this paper it can therefore be concluded that child support grants are alleviating poverty in Hillcrest Community, which has been evidenced by the overwhelming responses provided by the participants of the study. The findings have shown further that there is a positive relationship between social grants and reduced poverty in communities. In the wake of such an essential social empowerment development, the South African government needs to increase the provision of social grants as part of redressing the socioeconomic inequalities. This is also imperative in improving food security and household income in most vulnerable communities, and not only in Alice but the country as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The paper observes that child support grants are an effective social mechanism towards addressing poverty in communities. This was substantiated by participants who alluded that their lives have been transformed in a positive way since they started receiving the cash grant. They are now able to access basic necessities that are required for the attainment of full growth and development for a child. The paper observes that the provision of social grants was beneficial to participants, as they were able to access basic necessities such as food, clothing and other commodities wanted by children. These attempts provide an impression that child support grants are playing a pivotal role in the betterment of vulnerable children. The paper concludes that programs and projects initiated by DSD are as-

sisting in poverty alleviation although critics warn about the growing dependency syndrome due to provision of these relief grants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions drawn from this paper, the researchers came up with following recommendations to the Department of Social Development (DSD). The researchers recommended that, social workers should embark on community development projects since they are imperatives in poverty alleviation. Social workers need to educate guardians and raise awareness on the need to indulge in self-initiating projects to remain sustainable economically and improve household income. A shift in the mindset of guardians and other community members in required eradicating the dependency syndrome.

The paper recommends social workers to inform the guardians on the need to be innovative and entrepreneurial, which is fundamental in employment regeneration and self-sustainability as social grants are minimal to cater for all basic necessities of children. The registration and application processes need to be simplified to make it easier for the beneficiaries. The paper recommends social workers to continuously advocate for the increase in child support grants, so that they tally with inflation rates and changes, which may occur in the economy of the country.

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LIMITATIONS

The researchers faced challenges of time constraints and language barriers. The focus group discussions consumed a lot of time, for some participants came late for the meeting while others had arrived earlier. Language was a barrier that the researchers encountered. However, it was overcome by recruiting an interpreter.

APPENDIX

CDG	Care dependency grant
CSG	Child Support Grant
DSD	Department of Social Development
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
TOC	Theory of Change
ZIMASSET	Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio Economic Agenda

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