

Full Length Research Paper

Socio-cultural support systems for the elderly and its implications for formal social protection programmes in rural Western Kenya

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The rising populations of the elderly and the various socio-cultural and economic changes that have taken place in the Luo community have had an impact on support systems for the elderly. However, there is little knowledge that shows this impact in relation to the functionality of the available support systems for the elderly. This study sought to examine socio-cultural support systems for the elderly in Malunga-West sub-location. Specifically, the study sought to examine the existing family-based support systems, non-family sources of support and the implications these support systems pose for formal social protection programmes for the elderly. The study was guided by the concept of relatedness as conceptualized by Carsten, and which is an approach to studying relationships in people's daily life practices. The study used qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Data were presented using descriptive statistics, reports and verbatim quotations. The study findings show that the extended family is continually becoming overburdened by care and support for its elderly population. Despite this, the elderly still rely on the extended family and other kin for their care and support. However, the elderly were slowly struggling to move away from the notions of depending on intergenerational reciprocity for their survival. The study concluded that despite changes in the community the extended family is still the core of support systems for the elderly. The study recommended that policy formulations with respect to the elderly should recognize the central role of the family and other non-family sources in care and support for the elderly.

Key words: Elderly, Family-based support, Non-family support, Social Protection, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Ageing is an aspect of human beings characterized by progressive and irreversible changes in both structure and function of the body with time. Ageing is viewed as a social and biological process common to all age groups as they pass through life in particular social contexts, which are also changing. The living arrangements of the

older population can and do have an influence on the demand for formal and informal support systems. In Africa, the Southern African region has the continent's highest percentage of older inhabitants (HAI, 2004). Only South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Mauritius provide non-contributory universal pensions for their elderly

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persons (Kilbride and Kilbride, 1993). However, decisions about the extensions of public benefits for the care and support of the older population clearly have to be seen in the context of resource constraints determined in part by the development path on which the country is set (Brodsky, 2003). Concrete knowledge of the particular circumstances and changes affecting the lives of older people and their families in individual countries is necessary.

According to the 2009 census report, Kenya had 1,198,638 elderly people (606,065 elderly men and 592,573 elderly women (GOK, 2010). The distribution of older persons varies across the eight provinces with Nyanza and Rift Valley exhibiting the highest concentration of older persons. Ageing in Nyanza Province is occurring against a background of social and economic hardships, widespread poverty, the HIV and AIDS pandemic and the rapid transformation of the traditional extended family structure (Kiemo and Gachuhi, 2005; Nyambedha et al., 2003b). The elderly have for a long time relied on their extended family networks for support and as Cattell (1997) reports; children here represented a source of care and support in old age. The Luo traditionally resided in homesteads where the younger members of the extended family would assist the elderly members in performing domestic chores. Furthermore, this also provided the elderly with company and thus prevented loneliness and the onset of 'social death'. However, this is no longer the case due to the breakdown of the extended family structure and the biting poverty which makes it impossible to cope.

Social change processes and support systems for the elderly

In the Luo community, extended family networks or relations generally cared for the elderly (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo, 1989). There were also institutions in the community that ensured the protection and provision for the needs of elderly people who had no living relations to take care of them. Specifically, there was the institution of the *pim* (an elderly woman responsible for rearing young children and adolescents). The *pim* and those under her care lived together in the *siwindhe* (the girls' house or a dormitory) located within the enclosure or *dala* (homestead). In finding a role as a *pim*, the elderly Luo woman also protected herself from a 'social death'; meaning being left to starve amidst a famine or being otherwise without companionship or protection (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo, 1989). Before the 1930s, there may have been thousands of *siwindhe* in western Kenya, but thereafter, there were few. Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo (1989) attribute this change to the introduction of formal education in both rural and urban areas which promised greater opportunities for the nurturing of the young.

The advent of HIV and AIDS has aggravated the poverty experienced by older people and led to the 'skipped generation' households (Muga and Onyango-Ouma, 2009). However, according to Cattell (1997), it is worth noting that this household type- elderly with children- existed even prior to the AIDS pandemic with working age adults migrating to cities leaving children behind with their elderly grandparents in the rural areas. The disintegration of family members in pursuit of employment and better opportunities in urban areas has resulted in many older people living alone in rural areas and a weakened support network (Geissler et al., 2004).

According to Makoni and Stroeken (2005), many younger migrants send remittances back to their parents although some choose not to do so, or most commonly could be unable to do so due to their own unstable financial situations. The high levels of unemployment and low wages in urban areas have made it difficult for adults who migrate to these urban centers to remit resources back home to support their ageing parents. The situation for the elderly is worsened further by the fact that these migrant adults in most cases have left their families in the care of their elderly parents. The introduction of migrant labour was, therefore, the primary social change process that sparked the long chain of social processes that have seriously influenced the support systems for the elderly in the Luo community.

In communities affected by HIV and AIDS, elderly people are the primary care takers of the sick and the large numbers of orphaned children (Nyambedha, 2006; Whyte et al., 2004; Geissler et al., 2004). AIDS has disrupted the survival strategies of families and communities. Grandparents undertaking care roles are incapacitated from many fronts – lack of food and income, grief, shock and trauma suffered after the death of their children and poor health, among others (Geissler et al., 2004). Despite these hardships, they receive little or no support from the traditional structures that took care of orphans in the past. These factors have prompted the elderly to engage in alternative sources of livelihood that do not hinge on the traditional reciprocity structures.

Statement of the problem

Although the elderly population is increasing in every community, it is widely assumed that the elderly are well taken care of and supported by the extended family. However, there is little information to support this assumption with respect to the functionality of the available support systems for the elderly. In addition, social change and the HIV and AIDS pandemic have led to the breakdown of the traditional support systems for the elderly and necessitated a myriad of challenges which the elderly have to cope with. Little knowledge exists to explain how the elderly people survive in the circumstances where family support is minimal and

unreliable and formal support systems are limited or non-existent. The societal fabric that sustained attitudes towards responsibilities for elderly people has also weakened considerably.

The purpose of this study was, therefore, to examine the everyday lives of the elderly persons in the circumstances where family support is minimal and unreliable and social protection programmes are limited or non-existent. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions concerning the elderly in the study area: what are the existing family-based support systems and the existing non-family sources of support? What are the implications of these informal support systems for formal social protection programmes?

Justification of the study

In African traditional communities, there were no formal rules for elderly care and support. However, the extended family was widespread and efficient, ensuring that the elderly were adequately cared for. In the recent past, social change has adversely affected the extended family in sub-Saharan Africa reducing its capacity to perform collective social responsibilities. Furthermore, the HIV and AIDS pandemic has led to a rising number of orphans left in the care of their elderly grandparents thus escalating old age vulnerability. A study on the support systems for the elderly was thought appropriate in order to provide insights into the nature of existing social support systems in contemporary times and how the elderly cope amidst socio-cultural and economic changes. Similarly, it has also elucidated the impact of increased retirement age and the cash transfer scheme on the wellbeing of the elderly population. The Older Persons' Cash Transfer (OPCT) program has not yet attracted significant academic and policy researches except for a few institutions such as Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis. Thus, this study has contributed to the limited available feedback on the first phase of this programme. The study has also provided information useful to the development and implementation of ageing policies in Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

This study employed the concept of relatedness as postulated by Carsten. A central aspect of relatedness that Carsten discusses is the sharing of substance, including both food and blood (Carsten, 2000). Carsten (2000) defines relatedness as those social connections between persons that are collectively recognized and regarded as enduring, as extending beyond individual interpersonal relationships, and as carrying rights and responsibilities associated with being related. The concept is thus suitable for studying fluid and dynamic relations in people's daily life practices. Hutchinson

(2000), in his study of the Nuer practices of relatedness, argues that this emphasis on everyday life practices in local connections in a struggle to meet the demands of a livelihood provides a new framework through which practices can be analyzed and understood without necessarily making references to cultural rules in creating kinship relations.

According to Luo culture, children are expected to take care of their old parents and to match their words of respect with deeds to the elderly in society. However, children find it almost impossible to provide their parents with the constant support they feel they should. The concept of relatedness was, therefore, used to explore family-based support systems.

However, locally recognized forms of relatedness are not confined to connections of shared bodily substance based on birth or ancestry, but extend beyond these to ties based on shared locality, adoption and nurturance including feeding. This aspect of relatedness guided the examination of care and support for the elderly not just from the extended family but also from the community and other forms of relations which broadly also include the government and other social networks that pervade the everyday life of the elderly. The study used the concept of relatedness to reveal the importance of non-family sources of support for the elderly. The concept of relatedness, therefore, provided a broad basis on which care and support for the elderly in the community was studied.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a cross-sectional research design, with a descriptive approach conducted in two phases. The study was carried out in Malunga-west sub location of Siaya County which hosts *Kodhiche* (a shelter) albeit uncommon in the Luo culture that esteems intergenerational reciprocity. The elderly population was 987 persons (Government of Kenya, 2002). The majority of the inhabitants are Luo with the main economic activity being subsistence farming. Residents get additional income from small scale trade in the village and the local market. There are limited local employment opportunities available in the surrounding schools and shops within the trading centre. Migration of young adults to look for employment in the nearby towns is common. The study targeted both male and female older persons aged 60 years and above. The unit of analysis was the household headed by the elderly. The study applied simple random and purposive sampling methods to arrive at a sample size of 106 respondents (37 men, 69 women) and key informants. Due to the fact that the study was mainly qualitative, an error of 9% and a confidence interval of 95% were maintained (Israel, 1997). The study used semi-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, key informant and in-depth interviews to collect data. Data interpretation took note of the emerging themes and analysis was descriptive and interpretive.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

The findings of the study show that elderly women were

Table 1. Sex of elderly respondents.

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Female	69	65.1
Male	37	34.9
Total	106	100.0

Source: Field data.

Table 2. Marital status of the respondents.

Marital status	F	Percentage
Married men	35	33.8
Married women	22	20.0
Single/never married women	3	2.8
Widows	44	41.5
Widowers	2	1.9
Total	106	100.0

Source: Field data.

Table 3. Age of elderly respondents.

Age	F	Percent
60-65	33	31.1
66-70	23	27.7
71-75	18	17.0
76-80	10	9.4
81-85	13	12.3
86-90	5	4.7
90 and over	4	3.8
Total	106	100.0

Source: Field data.

more than elderly men (Table 1). Marital status of the elderly respondents was also obtained as it is core to issues of care and support (Table 2). The study also captured the age categories of the elderly respondents because the aging process in itself influences care and support of the elderly (Table 3).

Family-based support systems for the elderly

The elderly categorized their sources of support as consisting of help from children (78%) and help from extended family and other kin (86%). Those who were childless (14%) claimed that they relied more on themselves for their daily needs as compared to reliance on a family which they did not have. As a result, it was

necessary to examine the household compositions and subsequent relationships of household members with the elderly respondents (Table 4).

Among the study respondents, elderly women who lived alone comprised 18%. This was due to various reasons which included the death of all their children and childlessness. In the study sample, no male respondent was living alone.

A greater percentage of the respondents (61%) were living with their sons and their son's family (wife and children). It has to be noted, however, that the sons and their families operated from their own houses with regular visit and help to their elderly parents. This was in the form of sending their children to perform various chores for their grandparents. Once in a while, the daughters-in-law would cook food and give to their elderly parents' in-law; they also assisted when the elderly people had guests from *Nyoluoro* (Church) or *chama* (self-help groups) or *buchanyuola* (kin groups). Only 4% of the elderly respondents reported living with their daughters-in-law as part of their households. Only 15.9% of the elderly in the study sample mentioned spousal support. Married men were the major dependants of spousal support in the study. On the other hand, 28% of the elderly respondents reported having their grandchildren in their custody.

It is evident, from the study findings, that only 1% of the elderly respondents had no religious affiliation of any kind.

Religious affiliations of respondents were as follows (Table 5).

Among the study sample, elderly people who fellowshiped with the Anglican (14%), Catholic (20%) and Legio Maria (6%) Churches reported some kind of assistance in the form of: - being given second hand clothes, pastoral visits for members of the church in their particular groups, also referred to as *duol*, which left behind *sadaka* (offerings) and specifically for Catholic and Legio Maria, being given a house to live in.

As with all other age-groups in the community, the elderly also engaged in various economic activities, as shown in table below, in order to earn a living (Table 6).

About 46.2% of the respondents relied on farming as a source of their livelihood. On the other hand, 14% of the elderly respondents did not engage in any economic activity in order to earn a living. There were various reasons put forth by the respondents, mostly being poor health. The elderly respondents especially in the older age category (76 years and above) had various ailments that made them incapable of walking and hence participating in any meaningful activity to earn a living. For instance, during an in-depth interview, an elderly widow aged 82 years, who had a swollen leg and had not been able to walk for the past two years narrated that:-

I have not walked for two years now. I just sit and wait for anyone who comes around like you to help me. My house can stay even for three days without being swept (laughing). Chicken come into the house but finding

Table 4. Relationship of respondents with household members.

Relationship	F	Percentage
Spouse	17	15.9
Children	35	33.8
Grandchildren	30	28.0
Childless	15	14.0
All dead	4	3.7
Daughter's in- law	4	3.7
Workers	1	0.9
Total	106	100.0

Source: Field data.

Table 5. Religious affiliations of respondents.

Church	F	Percentage
Nazareen	3	2.8
Anglican	15	13.8
Apostolic	4	3.7
Catholic	21	19.3
Coptic	11	10.0
Hera	37	33.9
<i>Legio maria</i>	6	5.5
<i>Ngw'ono</i>	4	3.7
<i>Roho</i>	7	6.4
None	1	0.9
Total	106	100.0

Source: Field data.

Table 6. Economic activities of respondents.

Economic activities	F	Percent
Farming	49	46.2
Herding	2	1.8
None	15	14.1
Remittances	6	5.6
Selling of alcohol	6	5.6
Selling of bananas	2	1.8
Selling of charcoal	2	1.8
Selling of fish	3	2.8
Selling of grains	3	2.8
Selling of baskets	6	5.6
Selling of cows	1	0.9
Selling of sisal ropes	4	3.8
Selling of paraffin	4	3.8
Total	106	100.0

Source: Field data

nothing to eat they go out on their own without being chased away. My farm has remained without any work

(laughing); someone who used to do her own things now just sits and waits even for two days without food (laughing again). This shows that poor health made it impossible, and even traumatizing for the elderly people to engage in simple daily chores such as sweeping and chasing away chickens from the house during the day. . It also stresses the fact that reliance on farming as a source of livelihood in old age is very tricky because of reduced physical strength and ailments that disable the elderly. Similarly, an elderly married man aged 76 years had been operated on and could not engage in any heavy work and had to rely on an only son whom he claimed had so many dependents to support.

A small proportion of the elderly respondents engaged in various forms of trade either in the village or in the local market that was some distance away from the village. However, most of these forms of trade depended on farm produce that the elderly people did not productively and actively engage in. For instance, the elderly respondents reported selling sugarcane, bananas and grains such as maize and beans from their farms. This also points to the size of businesses and the level of income that accrued to them and whether it was enough to take care of their needs and those of the their households.

Information from key informants showed that poverty was widespread in the area and as a result there was an annual hunger season (*kech*) experienced by the people of this community. The elderly who were poor received assistance and as one of the key informants, a 63 year old married man said, '*the situation was not as bad as it is today where an elderly person can go without food even for two days while the neighbours are eating*'. Among the elderly who rely on their children (78%), help comes in form of remittances of money especially from children who are away in towns, or those who have migrated to live in the local market centers, clothing and food. Among the elderly persons who participated in the semi-structured interviews, those who reported food as a source of help meant already cooked food from their sons' houses and dried foods such as *omena* (small fish) and other types of dried fish from their sons and daughters who had migrated to places near the lake such as Usenge and Imbo. However, every elderly person complained of various shortcomings as a result of relying on one's children for help. For instance, the following is an excerpt from an in-depth interview with an elderly widow aged 87:-

My children used to help me but one was retrenched and the other son has a lot of school fees to pay. I cannot complain that I don't get enough; I have to persevere with the little that I receive.

Similarly, there was also an emergent gender dimension in relation to reliance on support from children. The elderly male respondents who participated in one of the focus group discussions claimed that support from sons

was more appropriate than support from daughters, especially married daughters. Great discomfort was experienced, especially by men in situations where support had to be accepted from a married daughter. This discomfort was not an issue with the women as they were quite happy to receive support from their married daughters. Consequently, during the FGD discussion, it was evident that when a son did not support his parents it was very painful for them and they considered this as a form of neglect.

Loneliness in old age can be very painful and disturbing as was the case among 14% of the elderly respondents in the study sample who lived alone either because their children were all dead or due to the fact that they had no children during their reproductive years. There were seven elderly widows who resided at *kodhieche* (a place for the poor) owned by the Catholic Church in Nyagondo, a local market centre. These elderly widows had no existing maternal relatives and the three who had children had lost them to death. Relatives from their husbands' side had neglected them after the death of their husbands. When the situation worsened, they found various routes that led them to this place where they stay expecting nothing from everyone apart from, as they said '*those who God touches their hearts to assist them*'. One of the key informants, a 72 year old married man, explained that in traditional Luo community, when one's husband died, after burial rights had been completed, a widow, depending on her age underwent widow inheritance rights (the levirate). One of the elderly women who lived in this 'place for the poor' was an 86 year old widow who, during an in-depth interview, declared to have undergone such widow inheritance rights when her husband died. She did not have children of her own with either her late husband or the one who inherited her. Unfortunately, this second 'husband' died and she was left alone. None of her husband's kin relations took her over and she was left to fend for herself. She states that after some time, her hut crumbled and she had nowhere to live and this is when she left (after consultations with the then *Padri* (Priest) of the Catholic Church) for *kodhieche* where she was allocated a room to live in. She stated that since she came to this place, no relatives have come to visit or offer any form of assistance. She has resigned herself to fate and it is her wish to be buried here when she eventually dies. This narrative shows that the levels of loneliness experienced by the elderly widows transcended issues of companionship to include also the lack of provision for basic needs such as food and water.

Non- Family Sources of Support for the Elderly (as New Forms of relatedness)

The elderly adopted various coping mechanisms which included non-family sources such as membership of

various religious organizations, neighbourhood/kin (popularly known as welfare groups) and self- help groups. There were also formal support systems (Older Persons' Cash Transfer (OPCT) and retirement pensions) that were evident in the study area.

The elderly also relied on other forms of friendships that had been maintained over time. There was no NGO working in the study area with the aim of supporting the elderly.

The Catholic Church owns the one-roomed semi-permanent houses used by elderly widows at *kodhieche* while the *Legio Maria* builds mud-walled and grass-thatched houses in Church compounds specifically for single elderly women, referred to as sisters, who have devoted themselves to God. A greater percentage of the elderly were affiliated to the *Hera* Church. Unfortunately, a key informant that is an elder in *Hera* Church said categorically that the Church had no financial resources and, therefore, no proper mechanisms were in place to care and support the elderly members. There were also certain religious groups that had gained some level of popularity in the study area as a result of promises of monetary assistance and help in other forms such as clothes to their members. The religious groups that fell in this category included the *Nazareen*, Coptic, *Ngw'ono* and the Apostolic Churches. When combined, 20.3% of the elderly in the study sample were members of these religious groups. However, the elderly members of these Churches claimed that this assertion was true in the beginning but after these religious groups had gained popularity in the area, they stopped distributing any gifts to members of their congregations.

Furthermore, there were instances where the leadership of these religious groups, who were mostly elderly people, complained of being over-burdened by the need to contribute money and other resources to assist when the Church had guests. One of the elderly key informant who was 79 years old, a married man and an elder of the Catholic Church observed that:-

We are the ones given the Church budget to contribute especially when there are guests. When they come to pray, they take away the *sadaka*(offering), they only leave for you prayers no matter what problems you have.

This laid an additional burden on the already strained resources of the elderly in the community. However, members of mainstream Churches such as the Catholic and Anglican Churches reported receiving some assistance in the form of second- hand clothes, pastoral visits and even some money.

Similarly, some elderly respondents of the semi-structured interviews complained of differential treatment from their churches whenever they had problems that required the involvement of their church leadership. For instance, a 68 year old married woman from the Anglican Church reported that if a member contributed 2.4 US\$

per year, the Church would give 30 US\$ when that member had a problem, but if one did not contribute, the Church would be under no obligation to offer any financial assistance. However, some focus group discussants claimed that the Church only assisted with prayers when they visited (*nyoluoro*) and during funerals. Furthermore, 59% of the respondents felt that the Church was not helping them in any way as far as care and support was concerned. Most of the respondents who shared this view were members of various African religious organizations that were specific to certain regions or ethnic communities. The study included three religious leaders, from the Catholic Church, *Hera* and Legio Maria as key informants. The key informant from *Hera* Church, locally called *jayalo* (a preacher) however, reported that the Church was not doing anything, apart from visits and prayers, to support its elderly members because it did not have external networks, sentiments shared by the leader of Legio Maria church.

Another source of non-family support for the elderly was from kin/neighbourhood groups and self-help groups. These welfare groups included Ahono, Magari, Nyapiedho and Msembe. Apart from a few exceptions, almost all the elderly respondents were members of these welfare groups. Most (90%) respondents to the semi-structured interviews were members of various self-help groups. Examples of self-help groups included those whose membership was open to both men and women, such as *Mondo Tek*, *Osiepe Ber*, Nyapiedho Elder Self-help Group, and those whose membership was restricted to women only which included *Ochwinjo* women group, *Kinda* women group, *Bi Mos* women group, Malunga-West Widow Support Group, *JiwPachi* women group, and *Umoja* women group. Among these self-help groups, only *Kinda* women group and Malunga-West widow support group were registered with the department of social services in the County. The remaining groups were operating on the basis of mutual trust and most of the groups had been in operation since the year 2003. Membership to kin/neighbourhood groups was based on lineages with almost every village having their own group.

The main aim of these welfare groups, as was explained by two key informants for the study, was to assist members in times of problems, especially during funerals as respondents to the semi-structured interviews asserted, '*bura(group) helps in times of death*'. One of the in-depth interviewees, a 72 year old married woman who was not a member of any welfare group claimed that *anywola dondore* (members of the same kin/neighbourhood had a lot of issues that did not please her). She was, however, a member of a self-help group.

The groups practiced what is commonly known as 'merry-go-rounds' (rotating credit schemes) where members pay a particular amount of money at specified intervals to one another. Furthermore, members encouraged themselves to save with the group and would access the savings at the end of the year. Interviews with key informants, two of whom were leaders of women

groups and another two were leaders of kin/neighbourhood groups, revealed gender disparity in the membership of these groups. Respondents enumerated various forms of benefits such as:

We take small loans from the groups where my wife is a member and send to our son who is in college. When it is our turn, we use what we get to pay the debts that we incurred for our son's fees. Later on we intend to start a small business when we finish paying debts (77 year old married man).

Some of the elderly respondents, however, were not able to cope with the demands of the self-help groups, especially in relation to group contributions. During an in-depth interview, an 87 year old widow had this to say with respect to group membership and contributions:-

I used to be in many groups but now I only belong to one, for our kin group. I no longer have what to take to the groups because I used to milk my cows and sell milk but now all the calves are dead. I am also not able to walk to the meetings and hear what is going on.

When asked during a focus group discussion with elderly married men why they were not as active as the elderly women in such groups, some elderly men claimed that their wives were already members so there was no need for them to be members as well. Others claimed that they were too busy and did not have the time to attend the meetings.

However, contrary to the mostly shared opinion as mentioned above, a 65 year old married man in a semi-structured interview claimed that:-

I am not a member of these groups because they are meant for women. You know women like gossiping a lot about their husbands in such groups; in fact I have forbidden my wives from attending these meetings because it will spoil them and make them hot-headed.

The study showed that only 5.6% of the respondents (all men) received a monthly pension from the government. The pension received ranged from 2.5 to 4.8 US\$ per month. The elderly who received this pension complained that it was not adequate to cater for their needs and those of their households. An elderly married man aged 71 years claimed during an in-depth interview that:-

I get pension monthly, but it is very small. It has never been increased. My son who is a mason gets money but he drinks it all saying that pension is taking care of me and his mother. May be if I was not getting pension, he would assist me and I would be more comfortable because he is here with me every day while the pension is only once a month.

A negligible proportion of the elderly respondents in the study sample (3.7%) were beneficiaries of the OPCT programme. The OPCT beneficiaries had received 60

US\$ at once by the time of conducting this study. Even though the proposed frequency of delivery was every two months, as the key informant from the social welfare office had explained, the elderly were concerned that this was not very easy to handle.

One of the respondents, a 76 year old widow and a beneficiary, complained during an in-depth interview that her son took all the money the government gave her and only bought for her a blanket and ten kilograms of maize. When she asked him where the other cash was, he said that it was finished and that she should not worry as the government would give her more money. This respondent was, therefore, of the opinion that the government should give her the money on a monthly basis so that '*even when my son steals from me, I don't wait for long before I get something.*' However, her neighbours claimed during the semi-structured interviews that she drunk part of the money and the rest was snatched from her by her son.

During the semi-structured interviews, it was evident that no community sensitization was done for all the respondents complained about the small number (only four) of those who had been given the money. They were not aware of the fact that this was only the first phase of the programme and a universal scheme was yet to be rolled out. In addition, there was no community committee that had identified and validated the beneficiaries. As a consequence, some of the elderly married male respondents complained during the semi-structured interviews that the assistant-chief only selected elderly widows so that he could manipulate them for his own benefits. For example, one of the participants, a 71 year old married man, claimed that he no longer has access to the homestead of one of the beneficiaries where he used to graze his cattle. He alleged that his herd's boy was chased away and told that only the assistant-chief's cattle were allowed to graze there. He consequently views this as a form of reward the chief was getting for including the owner of the compound in the programme. The assistant-chief, who was also a key informant for the study, however refuted these claims during an interview with him. Furthermore, an assessment of the four beneficiaries during the study by use of observation checklists concurred that they were indeed poor and needy elderly people. There was also a complaint during an FGD conducted with elderly widows that one of the widows chosen had a son that was an employee at the district's social welfare office and hence had influenced the selection of his mother into the cash transfer programme.

When asked whether the support they had received from the government was adequate, the elderly beneficiaries were of the opinion that it was better than nothing though the frequency of the delivery was not good. During an in-depth interview, an 80 year old widow who was also a beneficiary asserted that:-

The money *srikal* (government) gave me helped me a lot. I bought chicken which I now keep, I also bought a sheep

and gave (*moso*) to my daughter who is married in Alego to keep for me. I was given the money on Tuesday, and went straight to the market (Tuesday is the market day) and bought *nyamami* (a big tilapia fish) that I had stayed for long without eating. I have also drunk a lot of tea that I also like so much and as you can see am now very strong.

DISCUSSION

Traditionally, Luo communities practiced the custom of fostering out children. This practice gave the elderly, especially women, the opportunity to request a child from a younger relative to perform household tasks. However, a lot has changed with regard to the family-based support systems for the elderly. The death of adult children as a result of AIDS has left most orphans in the care of their elderly grandparents. The requirements of formal education have had a two-sided effect on the elderly people. First, there is the requirement of school fees and other levies which the elderly who lack a source of income are not able to afford. Consequently, orphans left in the care of their elderly grandparents are forced to drop out of school and look for wage employment in urban centers. However, lack of sources of income and resource accumulation in the rural areas has continued to promote labour migration of these adult grandchildren thus rendering this second generational source of support for the elderly unavailable. Secondly, formal education has rendered the Luo cultural practice of fostering out children redundant. The elderly are, therefore, deprived of the benefits of this practice.

The other social change process is the advent of the monetary economy. Social support has taken an economic dimension in the rural areas and no one desires to perform any tasks for free. Simple tasks become complicated as one grows older and becomes physically incapacitated. Using money to pay for such simple tasks becomes quite frustrating for the elderly because of meager financial resources. The findings of this study confirm those of studies done by Whisson (1964) and Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo (1989) which state that the community experienced social and economic changes during the colonial period with the introduction of migrant labour in urban areas and adoption of a monetary economy.

This study and many others (Geissler et al., 2004; Nyambedha et al., 2003b; Muga and Onyango-Ouma, 2009; Cattell, 1990) have shown the huge burden that care giving especially to orphaned grandchildren has on the elderly grandparents. Most resources of the elderly end up in taking care of their dependents as opposed to supporting themselves in the context of diminishing social support from extended family and other kin relations. The elderly who have reached the 'sit and eat' stage, as Cattell (1990) reports, experience a lot of hardships,

especially as a consequence of increased notions of individualization in the community

This study further concurs with a similar study by Williams (2003) on vulnerable livelihoods of the aged people in Kikole, Uganda. According to Williams (2003), the productivity of land is said to be decreasing and therefore, more is needed to subsist. On the other hand, the subdivision of one's land among one's children, most often sons, reduces the productivity of land. This means that as much as the elderly people may rely on land to get surplus produce for sale, it is not sustainable and there is need for other sources of income that are not dependent on land. Williams (2003) also discusses seasonal variation in income as another problem for elderly people with few resources; for example, while income is confined to at most two seasons per year, money is needed throughout the year. At the level of subsistence, therefore, it is agreeable that elderly people remained with minimal options to meet their required needs. This points to the impact of individualization and the nuclearization of the institution of the family such that it no longer performs its traditional function as a buffer for the poor in the society. Such changes have promoted reliance on one's own children as opposed to the Luo traditional community where children belonged to the community and the elderly could demand assistance from any child irrespective of their biological parentage. There is, therefore, the weakening of the extended family support for the elderly in the contemporary Luo community.

There are various social and economic demands that have emerged in modern times that families, especially those in the urban areas, must contend with. The impact of structural adjustment programmes has highly increased the rate of unemployment in urban areas. As a result, adult children are not able to meet the demands of the modern family, such as the expensive western culture in terms of dressing, type of food, housing and household items and the cost of formal education for their children and still be in a position to send adequate remittances back home to their elderly parents. Furthermore, western ideologies have replaced the traditional beliefs which anchored the responsibility of one's elderly parents on the adult children. Support from one's adult children has become a privilege as opposed to being viewed as a right as it was in the traditional Luo community.

Relatedness is constructed through the participation in a set of social relationships that may as well include, but not exclusively, collections of relatives. Relatedness would therefore, include any kind of relation such as ties between neighbours and co-villagers which, according to the respondents were diminishing in the contemporary times when compared to the traditional period. It could be argued therefore, that the traditional extended family has disintegrated considerably that it now considers the elderly who are no longer socially and economically productive as a burden. Another issue here is the

importance of having one's own biological children. Although the concept of relatedness includes even neighbours and co-villagers as one's relations who should be concerned with the welfare of the elderly members of the community, this is not always the case. The study findings suggest that children are indeed a prime source of old age security and therefore the lack of children make old age precarious. The debate on the relationship between socio-cultural support systems and social protection programmes for the elderly should have a clear focus on the various contexts that the elderly find themselves.

The need to offer a comprehensive social protection programme for the elderly must be anchored on social support networks for the elderly available within the community with an aim of improving accessibility to the same. The elderly, to some extent, get economically empowered through credit facilities from groups. These groups also act as a social forum where the elderly can continue to maintain their social networks, to actively participate in the life of the community and to avoid instances of loneliness and lack of companionship. If social protection schemes would avail some financial assistance to the elderly, it would promote greater levels of self-reliance and even enable the elderly in these groups to save more. Larger amounts of savings would eventually cushion the elderly from various shocks such as those caused by emergencies and inadequate remittances from migrant adult children. Involvement in such self-help groups also provides a basis on which social protection programmes for the elderly could be anchored. Coupled with small and micro enterprises that most financial institutions in the country are initiating in rural areas, the elderly would eventually be in a position to support their households and lead a more meaningful life. However, this situation does not apply to all. As people age, they most often become physically incapacitated, for instance, they no longer are able to walk long distances to maintain their social networks including attending group meetings and going to the market to sell and earn an income crucial for sustained group membership. This has implications for any social protection programme for the elderly in that as much as it offers financial assistance; issues of accessibility and reliability (in terms of how often money is given) become very crucial as such elderly people are totally dependent. Furthermore, the question of whether it would be justified to give all elderly people the same amount of money comes into play as some are able to walk and do business while others are totally dependent.

Similarly, with the current high levels of food prices experienced in Kenya, it becomes very difficult to appreciate the amounts of pension the elderly receive bearing in mind that they too have households to support including orphans in their care. Furthermore, the question whether the retired elders are also entitled to pension increments as those still in active and productive

employments begs an answer. However, the community still considers pensioners better-off despite the inadequacy of the pensions received. The fact that they receive pensions has not watered down the elderly people's preference for family-based support. This strengthened the role of the extended family in the provision of care and support for the elderly in Luo community. Social protection programmes, therefore, need not be viewed as a replacement for extended family support for the elderly but as a complimentary effort made by the government towards the senior citizens. The continued implementation of the OPCT programme needs also to appreciate the aforementioned challenges in order to be promotive and transformative in the long run.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has shown that family-based support systems still remain the core of care and support in old age. The expectations, therefore, of intergenerational reciprocity between parents and children is a reality and failure to achieve this causes feelings of despair and neglect. The failure to achieve such expectations may not be in the domain of the elderly to ward off. Although many elderly people may say that they feel deprived now, and that nothing in old age is likely to equal the memory of earlier abundance, most old people do get a return of their investment in their children. Family-based support systems, though informal, needs to be adequately recognized by social policy actors in the formulation and implementation of formal social protection programmes for elderly people.

The study has also shown that non-family sources of support may be seen, to a certain extent, as a replacement or an alternative source of support for the elderly. However, this has implications for achieving the objective of transformative social protection. Furthermore, using cash transfer as a poverty reduction mechanism in old age may register only minimal success rates if it is not complimented by other efforts that target other age categories such as youth employment, subsidized costs of both healthcare and post-primary education.

The relationship therefore, between socio-cultural support systems whether family based or not and formal support systems for the elderly should be of a complementary nature with lessons learnt cutting across either side of the spectrum. This is envisioned to promote appropriate and sustainable social support mechanisms that are contextualized and avoid duplication, prejudice and wastage of resources. Coupled with intergenerational strategies that deal with the family as a unit, this would go a long way in reducing poverty, the core objective of transformative social protection.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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