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Gender Responsive Budgeting in Ghana: An Analysis of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)

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POLICY BRIEF

Gender Responsive Budgeting in Ghana: An Analysis of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality remains a significant obstacle to socio-economic development, with women disproportionately affected by poverty. According to the 2017 Ghana Living Standards Survey, the poorest households spend considerably less on essential goods compared to wealthier households, perpetuating cycles of inequality. Development partners have long highlighted the nexus between poverty and gender inequality, urging policymakers to adopt strategies that address these disparities.

The Government of Ghana has demonstrated commitment to gender equality through various international and national frameworks. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Domestically, the National Gender Policy (2015) seeks to improve social, economic, and legal conditions, with a focus on equitable resource access for women. The 2024 Affirmative Action and Gender Equity Act aims for a 30% representation of women in public and private sectors by 2026. Under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), several social interventions, including the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) program, have been instituted to empower vulnerable groups, reduce poverty, and close gender gaps.

LEAP, established in 2008 under the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS), serves as Ghana's flagship social protection initiative. It provides cash grants to vulnerable households, such as orphans, the elderly, and persons with severe disabilities. The program has expanded significantly over time, improving beneficiaries' access to education, healthcare, and income-generating opportunities. LEAP also facilitates access to complementary interventions, including the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and the School Feeding Program, aligning with Article 35 (3) of Ghana's Constitution, which promotes equitable access to public services.

The overarching goal of LEAP is to reduce poverty by enhancing access to services and opportunities for extremely poor and vulnerable groups. Specific objectives include:

- Improving household consumption and nutrition for vulnerable populations, including children under two, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
- Increasing healthcare access for children under five, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
- Boosting school enrollment, attendance, and retention among children aged 5–15.
- Facilitating access to complementary services to enhance household productive capacity.

Since its inception, LEAP has received support from organizations such as UNICEF, DFID, and the World Bank, expanding from 1,654 households in 2008 to 360,000 households as of May 2024. The program transitioned to electronic payments in 2016, enhancing efficiency and transparency. This analysis evaluates the 2024 Programme-Based Budget (PBB) and Mid-Year Budget Review to assess the gender responsiveness of LEAP and its alignment with Ghana's gender equality goals.

Limitation: The reviewer was unable to access the LEAP Secretariat report to determine whether it included sex disaggregated data necessary for a comprehensive GRB analysis. Additionally, a review of the Special Audit Report on LEAP revealed that it also lacked such data, further limiting the ability to assess the program's gender specific impacts.

2.0 GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE 2024 BUDGET STATEMENT, MID-YEAR BUDGET AND PROGRAMME-BASED BUDGET FOR LEAP

The 2024 budget expenditure allocation of GH¢720 million for LEAP reflects the government's commitment to expanding the programme to 450,000 households. This marks a significant increase of 1,369% in monetary terms from the GH¢49 million allocated in 2016 and a 112% increase in household coverage from 212,000 households. While this growth demonstrates progress in addressing poverty, the analysis reveals critical gaps that hinder the programme's potential to address gender-specific vulnerabilities effectively.

One key limitation is the absence of sex-disaggregated data in the 2024 budget documents. Although LEAP Secretariat indicates that 56% of beneficiaries are women and 44% are men, this information is not incorporated into the Programme-Based Budget (PBB) or the Mid-Year Review. This omission limits the ability to assess how effectively LEAP addresses gender disparities and whether its interventions are adequately targeted. Without comprehensive data, it becomes challenging to measure the programme's success in reducing gender inequality or to identify areas where additional support may be needed.

Evidence from the UNICEF brief on LEAP 1000 impacts 2010-2022 highlights LEAP's transformative impact on women, noting improvements in decision-making power, social support, and community participation among female beneficiaries. Additionally, the programme has been linked to reductions in intimate partner violence and enhanced household harmony. However, systemic barriers persist, including limited access to financial resources, insufficient infrastructure, and a lack of representation in decision-making processes, which undermine the long-term benefits of the programme for women.

The mid-year budget review noted that LEAP benefits have doubled since 2023 and are indexed to inflation to preserve their real value. While this is a positive development, the allocation does not explicitly account for the unique challenges faced by women, such as the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work and limited access to alternative income sources during economic crises. These oversights may reduce the programme's effectiveness in addressing the root causes of gender inequality. Another significant issue is the coordination of LEAP with other social protection initiatives. Although the budget emphasizes a multi-sectoral approach to social protection, inefficiencies in coordination between implementing agencies often lead to delays in disbursements. Such delays disproportionately affect women, who rely on timely cash transfers to stabilize household consumption and manage caregiving responsibilities. Strengthening inter-agency coordination is crucial to ensuring the programme's effectiveness in supporting vulnerable households.

The budget also highlights significant progress in expanding LEAP's reach, with plans to support 450,000 households by the end of 2024. However, the programme's current scope remains insufficient to address the scale of poverty and inequality in Ghana. The lack of gender-specific interventions within the budget further limits its impact. For example, while LEAP has been instrumental in improving access to education and healthcare, there is little evidence of targeted support for women's economic empowerment, such as access to credit or entrepreneurial training.

Such interventions could enhance the programme’s impact on reducing gender disparities and promoting sustainable development.

Finally, while the government’s investment of GH¢1.2 billion in LEAP since 2017 demonstrates its commitment to social protection, the absence of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework hinders the ability to measure the programme’s long-term impact on gender equality.

The analysis of the data from the reviewed documents highlights the absence of sex-disaggregated data, a critical limitation that restricts the ability to conduct a comprehensive gender analysis of LEAP. While this gap makes it difficult to evaluate the program’s specific impact on men and women, it is worth noting that LEAP has demonstrated a commitment to addressing the needs of vulnerable women. Notably, in 2015, the program was expanded to include eligible pregnant women and mothers with infants below one year a commendable initiative that shows LEAP’s adaptive approach to targeting at-risk groups.

This expansion reflects a recognition of the compounded vulnerabilities women face due to socio-economic and health-related challenges and highlights the program’s potential to reduce inequalities.

However, the absence of detailed, sex-disaggregated data limits the ability to measure how effectively this initiative has achieved its intended outcomes. Comprehensive data is essential to assess whether such targeted interventions have successfully addressed gender-specific vulnerabilities, improved maternal health, and contributed to the broader goals of gender equality and social inclusion.

A more comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis is needed to ensure that LEAP effectively addresses the needs of its beneficiaries and aligns with Ghana’s broader gender equality objectives.

3.0 CHALLENGES AND GAPS IN REVIEWED BUDGET DOCUMENTS

1. **Lack of gender-age disaggregation:** The budget does not disaggregate LEAP beneficiaries by sex, hindering the ability to assess gender-specific impacts and equity in program reach.



2. **Sustainability Concerns:** Although the LEAP benefits are indexed to inflation, long-term sustainability will depend on periodic reviews, monitoring, and ensuring timely budget disbursements.
3. **Limited Graduation Outcomes:** The pilot graduation exercise is still at the analysis stage, and its success depends on effective criteria and support mechanisms for exiting households.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of the LEAP program, the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection should consider implementing the following recommendations.

- **Data Improvement:** Consistently collect and report sex-disaggregated data in LEAP to enable a clearer understanding of the programmes impact on women and men and their sub-groups such women with disability, female headed household, single mothers and men from deeply vulnerable background. This will support evidence-based decision-making and the design of more inclusive interventions.
- **Consider Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRP):** Incorporate gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) into MDAs planning, budgeting planning and implementation to ensure equitable allocation of resources. GRB will help address the distinct needs of women and men, particularly in vulnerable households of LEAP's beneficiaries, fostering greater inclusivity and impact.
- **Address Gender Gaps:** Implement targeted strategies to support beneficiaries or target group particularly women, through the following:
 - Capacity-building initiatives to enhance women's economic participation.
 - Improved access to LEAP grants, especially for women in marginalized groups.
 - Policies to mitigate risks of gender-based violence linked to climate vulnerabilities or economic hardships.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Establish a gender-sensitive M&E framework to track and evaluate LEAP's outcomes for women and men and their intersections regularly. This will provide actionable insights to refine the programme, ensuring it effectively advances gender equality and social protection goals.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The reforms, including benefit indexation and expansion plans, demonstrate progress in social protection. However, the lack of sex-disaggregated data poses challenges in evaluating gender-specific impacts. Efforts to reassess and graduate beneficiaries are critical for targeting resources effectively, but the results of these pilots must inform broader implementation. With increased funding and systematic reforms, the LEAP programme has the potential to make a meaningful impact on reducing extreme poverty and enhancing socio-economic resilience in Ghana.

Text Box

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PBB, MID-YEAR BUDGET AND 2024 BUDGET STATEMENT

Mid-Year

- Increased spending on LEAP from GH¢49 million in 2016 to GH¢423 million today to support 350,000 households; compared with 212,000 households in 2016;
- Government has in the last two years increased the LEAP grant by 200% from GH¢64.00 in 2022 to GH¢256.00 in 2024; meaning that we have doubled the grant every year for the last two years. This measure ensures that the programme's outcomes are effectively achieved. Under the enhanced LEAP, the number of beneficiary households has increased from 212,917 in 2016 to 324,073 in 2024.

2024 Budget

- Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has paid five cycles of Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) cash grants to 350,551 extremely poor households amounting to GH¢298,580,972.35 with the final cycle will be paid by the end of December 2023. Recipients of the five cycles of payments included 1,438 alleged witches in the witches' camp and 278 cured persons in the Leprosariums at Ankaful, Jirapa and Weija.
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PBB

- Under the SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SUB-PROGRAMME for Social Protection, the output indicator only measures the number of beneficiary household receiving cash grant and the number of LEAP beneficiaries who graduated into productive inclusion.



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