

Pension Watch

Briefings on social protection in older age



Briefing no. 18

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Voice and accountability in the Senior Citizens Grant

Evidence from older citizen monitors in Uganda

Voice and accountability are central principles of a rights-based approach to social protection. This brief summarises data from surveys and focus groups carried out by older citizen monitors with recipients of the Senior Citizens Grant in four districts of Uganda. Questions focused on implementation and accountability issues in the scheme. The responses highlighted areas for improvement, both in local-level programme implementation and in social protection policy design.

Key messages

- Awareness among older people about how much money they should receive was high. Nearly all respondents had said they received the correct amount of money in the most recent payment.
- The proportion of older people who knew why they had been selected for the Senior Citizens Grant was 15 per cent lower in districts that the scheme has been extended to than in districts that were part of the pilot phase. This highlights a number of challenges with the system of targeting the 100 oldest persons, used in the new districts.
- Almost 40 per cent of respondents in the new districts reported travelling between 4-6 kilometres to reach the paypoint. This is a significantly higher proportion than in the pilot phase districts.
- Steps have been taken to improve the system for nominated representatives to collect payment on behalf of older people who cannot reach the paypoint. However, this system has yet to be fully implemented in the two new districts.

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International

Social protection: key to sustainable development

Social protection is now widely recognised as playing a critical role in addressing poverty and inequality and supporting sustainable development. This is acknowledged in a number of international and regional frameworks including the Sustainable Development Goals.¹ It is also evidenced by the dramatic increase in the number of countries working to expand their social protection schemes over the last decade.²

Voice and accountability are central principles of a rights-based approach to social protection.³ Voice is about participating in decisions that affect our lives, expressing an opinion and having that opinion heard, accessing information, and meeting and debating with others. Accountability refers to the process of holding ‘individuals, agencies and organisations responsible for executing their powers according to a certain standard’.⁴ Accountability relates not only to monitoring of standards, but also access to justice and remedies.

Why voice and accountability are important for social protection

There are at least three main reasons why voice and accountability are important for social protection. At a programme level, strengthening accountability helps to ensure that programmes function effectively. This includes reducing error, fraud and corruption, ensuring that social protection recipients receive the right amount of cash regularly, reliably and accessibly, and improving policy design.

Strengthening accountability can also contribute to broader efforts to build trust in the state and strengthen state-society relations, for example, by providing channels for recipients and broader society to voice their concerns and participate in policy and programme development.

Accountability also has an intrinsic value: having a voice on issues that affect our lives is central to our dignity and self-worth and is fundamental to rights-based social protection.⁵

Citizen-generated data

HelpAge International supports older citizen monitors (trained volunteers, usually members of older people’s associations) to collect data about the social protection schemes available to older people in their countries. This evidence is used by older people to advocate with local officials for improvements in implementation of social protection schemes at local level. It is also used at national level to advocate for long-term change in social protection policy design and operations.

This brief summarises quantitative data from surveys which older citizen monitors carried out with 366 recipients of the Senior Citizens Grant in Uganda, and qualitative data from group discussions with older people. The surveys and group discussions were completed at pension paypoints located in Amuru, Gulu, Moroto and Napak districts during September – November 2017. Respondents answered questions about targeting and registration, delivery and payments, and participation and accountability in the Senior Citizens Grant.

The data is not intended to be representative of recipients of the Senior Citizens Grant as a whole. However, it provides a snapshot of challenges that are relevant for future policy design and operations of social protection in Uganda. More information on older citizen monitoring and how it is conducted in Uganda can be found on the last page of this brief.

1. United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere, Goal 1 targets, www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty (5 Feb 2018)

2. International Labour Organization, *World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, Geneva, International Labour Office, 2017

3. International Labour Organization, R202 – Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R202 (5 Feb 2018)

4. McGee R and Gaventa J, *Synthesis report: Review of Impact and Effectiveness of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives*, Institute of Development Studies, 2010

5. Sepulveda M and Nyst C, *The Human Rights Approach to Social Protection*, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2012

Social pensions in Uganda

In October 2011, the Government of Uganda launched a pilot Senior Citizens Grant in 15 districts under the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) Scheme supported by the UK Department for International Development, Irish Aid and UNICEF. In August 2015, the Government of Uganda announced a plan to gradually take over funding of the pilot areas from development partners, and to expand the programme to an additional 40 districts by 2020, towards a longer-term goal of national coverage.

The Senior Citizens Grant is designed to respond to the constitutional obligations of the state with regard to the welfare and maintenance of older people and policy commitments in the National Social Protection Policy (2015) and other related policies. The scheme aims to alleviate the insecurity and vulnerability faced by many older people as traditional support systems weaken. Many families are struggling to care for children as well as older relatives, in the context of widespread poverty.

Targeting and registration

The Senior Citizens Grant currently uses two different methods for targeting older people. Programmes that started during the pilot phase are targeted at all persons aged 65 years and above (except in the Karamoja region where the eligibility age is set at 60 years due to lower life expectancy). In the new districts, grants are targeted at the 100 oldest persons per sub-county.⁶ Older citizen monitors carried out exit surveys at paypoints in Napak and Moroto (pilot districts in Karamoja region) and Gulu and Amuru (new districts).

Social protection schemes have the potential to strengthen social cohesion, state-society relations and visibility of the government. An important question is whether recipients and broader society are aware of the purpose of the scheme including the intended target groups, and how the scheme is funded. The proportion of survey respondents in Moroto district who knew why they had been selected to receive the Senior Citizens Grant was high at 99 per cent (Figure 1). In Amuru, Gulu and Napak districts, the responses were notably lower at 85, 82 and 83 per cent respectively.

Figure 1: Proportion of respondents who know why they are selected to receive the Senior Citizens Grant, by district



6. The Government has signed memorandums of understanding with the new districts to keep adding 100 recipients per sub-county every year.

The proportion of respondents who knew that the Senior Citizens Grant was a government-funded scheme was again high in Moroto district at 99 per cent (Figure 2) and notably lower in Gulu and Napak districts at 81 and 84 per cent respectively. In Amuru district, only 63 per cent of respondents knew that the grant was a government-funded scheme.

Figure 2: Proportion of respondents who know that the Senior Citizens Grant is a government-funded scheme, by district



The high level of awareness among older people in Moroto district has a number of possible reasons: the simple eligibility criteria makes it easy for people to understand why they receive the grant, and the relatively long duration of the scheme and the large proportion of people who receive the grant helps to spread information about it. Moreover, since the scheme is important to the Government's development partners, it has been supported by a comprehensive communications strategy. Civil society organisations, such as Karamoja Agro Pastoral Development Programme, have also been informing older people about the programme through older people's associations and radio programmes.

However, although the grant has also been running in Napak district since 2011, awareness of the targeting criteria and funding source was at least 15 per cent lower than in Moroto district. The difference could be because Moroto is more developed than Napak and has a better communications infrastructure, including housing all the radio stations in Karamoja.

In contrast, the lower level of awareness shown in Amuru and Gulu districts could stem from several issues. The eligibility criteria targeting the 100 oldest persons in each sub-county seems to have contributed to misunderstanding among older people and SAGE officials about who should be included in the programme. Many eligible older people have been missed out due to not having a national identity card. In some sub-counties, there have not been enough older people with requisite identity documents to fill the 100 available places on the scheme.⁷ Programme communications have been weaker than in the pilot districts with little mobilization of older people. Many housebound and frail older people had been unable to register.

Furthermore, the delayed expansion of the programme in Amuru and Gulu, due to budget shortages on the part of the Government of Uganda, led many older people to doubt the existence of the scheme and lose faith in the information they received from local officials.

Delivery and payment

The SAGE programme uses a number of methods to deliver the Senior Citizens Grant. Payroll information is stored electronically in a programme management information system. Older people receive cash at a paypoint which may be a mobile banking van, temporary payment hall or payment desk. During the pilot phase, the payment service was delivered by a telecommunications company, MTN, Uganda. When the programme was expanded, the payment service provider changed to Post Bank Uganda. Recipients of the Senior Citizens Grant receive UGX 25,000 (US\$6.84) per month, which is paid on a bi-monthly basis (UGX 50,000 (US\$13.68) per payment cycle).

7. Livingstone A, Maina E, Mugisha J and Sam-de Mwaya J (forthcoming) *Voice and accountability in social protection: the case of social pensions in Africa*, London, HelpAge International

Data collected by older citizen monitors showed that respondents across all four districts had a very high level of knowledge about the amount of money they should receive from the Senior Citizens Grant (Figure 3). And nearly all respondents said they had received the correct amount of money in the most recent payment (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Proportion of respondents who know how much their payment should be, by district



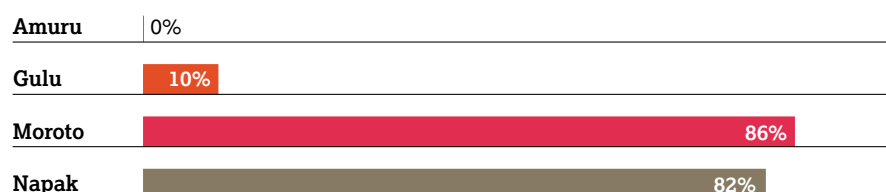
Figure 4: Proportion of respondents who said they received the correct amount in the most recent payment, by district



However, the timeliness of the payments is a significant issue, particularly in Amuru and Gulu districts which are part of the expansion phase. In Amuru, none of the respondents said that their most recent payment had been received on time (data collected between November-December 2017). In Gulu, the figure was 10 per cent (data collected in October 2017). Timeliness of payments in Moroto and Napak was high at 86 and 82 per cent respectively (Figure 5). The situation in Moroto and Napak is a vast improvement on 2016 when older people experienced delays in payments of up to five months. One focus group respondent in Napak said, “When SAGE is delayed, I don’t have enough money to buy essentials like soap, paraffin, salt or food”. In Karamoja, older people said they had eventually received arrears totalling UGX 125,000 (US\$34.21) in one payment.

The late release of government funds for the expansion phase had been a factor in the delay. This resulted from resource constraints and priorities competing with SAGE. During meetings between older citizen monitors and local government officials, SAGE representatives explained that the delay in payments had also been caused by the “transition process between the old payment service provider, MTN, to PostBank, coupled with expansion to more districts”. They also said that district SAGE teams lacked adequate staff and funds to deliver the scheme, with individual staff in Gulu responsible for paypoints covering a distance of up to 50 kilometres.⁸

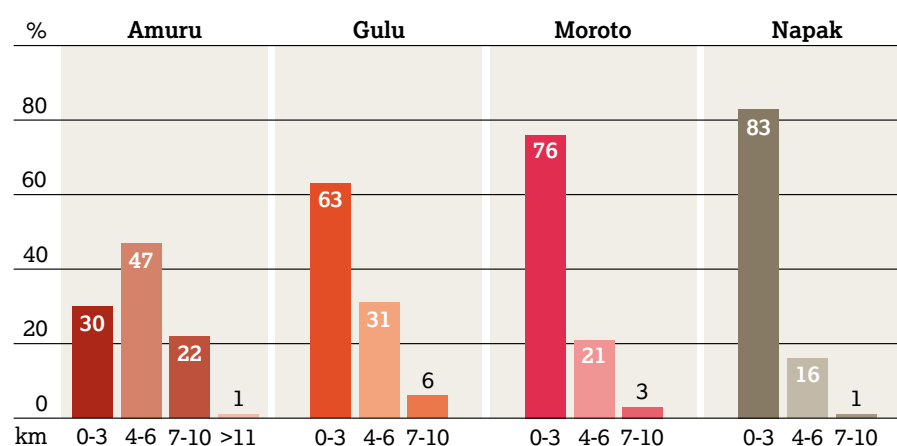
Figure 5: Proportion of respondents who said they received their most recent payment on time, by district



Accessibility of the paypoint is an important issue in social pension schemes, as they inherently have a high proportion of people who have mobility issues. The proportion of older people who have a disability tends to increase with age. Just over 20 per cent of Ugandans aged 66 to 75 years have a moderate to severe disability. This increases to almost 35 per cent between the ages of 76 and 85 years, and almost 50 per cent of Ugandans aged 86 years and above.⁹ For the new districts targeted at the 100 oldest persons per sub-county, ensuring the paypoint is accessible is particularly important. For example, in Paicho sub-county in Gulu, the grant is received by a total of 93 people aged between 78 and 108 years. In Atyak sub-county in Amuru, the grant is received by 82 people aged between 83 and 97 years.¹⁰

In Amuru and Gulu, the proportion of respondents who reported travelling long distances to the paypoint was considerably higher than in Moroto and Napak. In Amuru, 47 per cent of respondents reported travelling 4-6 kilometres to reach the paypoint, compared with 31 per cent of respondents in Gulu, 21 per cent in Moroto, and 16 per cent in Napak (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Distance respondents said they travelled to the paypoint, by district



An added challenge for older people with mobility issues was that the system for nominating a representative (such as a family member or friend) to collect the payment on their behalf was not being fully implemented. This applied to all districts but particularly the new districts. According to the SAGE operations manual, older people who are registered for the Senior Citizens Grant can nominate a representative to collect their payment if they cannot attend in person due to illness or injury, being infirm or living with a disability. However, this was not being implemented, due to low awareness of the system among both older people and SAGE officials. In some cases, this has led to family members using wheelbarrows to transport older people to the paypoints.¹¹

9. Expanding Social Protection Programme, Income security for all Ugandans in older age. Kampala, Government of Uganda, 2011

10. Data compiled by Caritas Gulu, a local NGO which supports older citizen monitoring to improve older people's access to SAGE

11. Livingstone et al

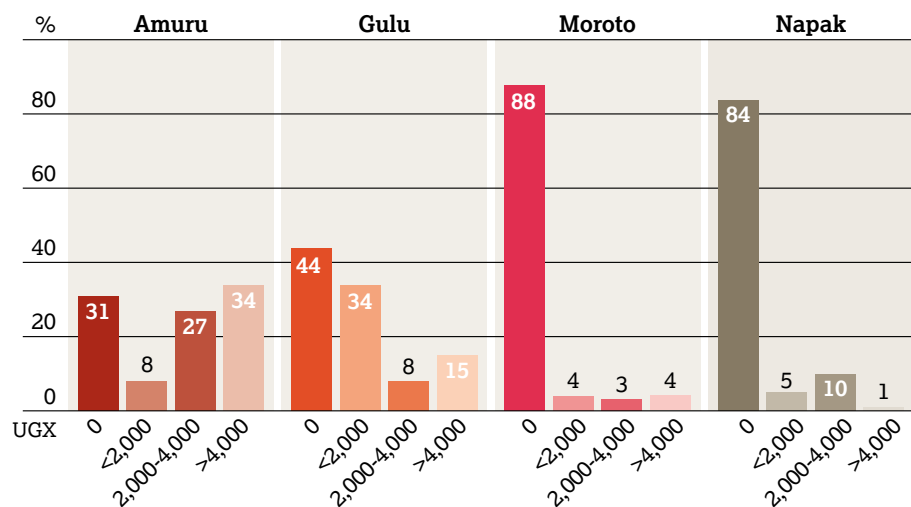


Caritas Gulu

However, it is not just physical accessibility which is a problem for older people collecting their pension. The long distances to paypoints mean that older people have to pay for transport (such as a motorcycle taxi or shared taxi). In the new districts, expenditure on transport was far higher – the proportion of respondents who spent more than UGX 4,000 (US\$1.09) to reach the paypoint was 34 per cent in Amuru and 15 per cent in Gulu, compared with just 4 per cent in Moroto and 1 per cent in Napak. In contrast, 88 per cent of respondents in Moroto and 84 per cent in Napak said they did not spend any money to reach the paypoint. Most of the paypoints in these districts were close enough to walk to.

The main issue with the cost of transport is that it reduces the total amount of money from the Senior Citizens Grant to spend on essential items. For example, just over one third of older people in Amuru said they spent almost 8 per cent of their bi-monthly US\$13.68 grant on travelling to collect the payment. In Gulu, cases had been reported of boda-boda drivers taking advantage of older people by increasing their fares on payment days.

Figure 7: Amount of money spent on transport to reach the paypoint, by district



Participation and accountability

The SAGE programme operational guidelines set out a comprehensive system for lodging complaints about service delivery and appeals against decisions about eligibility for enrolment. Older people can submit a complaint about payment-related issues to PostBank. They may submit complaints about other matters to the parish development committee, parish chief or village council. If these local-level structures are unresponsive, older people may submit complaints directly to the sub-county community development officer, who is responsible for channelling complaints to the district and national-level SAGE units for investigation.¹²

Despite the various complaints and appeals channels, the older-citizen generated data suggests that access to complaints mechanisms is often limited. While all respondents in Moroto said they knew where to get help if they had a problem with the grant, this figure drops to 72 per cent in Amuru and 73 per cent in Gulu (Figure 8). In Napak, 83 per cent of respondents said they knew where to get help if they had a problem with the grant.

Figure 8: Proportion of respondents who know where to get help if they have a problem with their pension, by district



The high level of awareness about the complaints and appeals procedures in Moroto district could be attributed to a number of reasons including the importance given to programme communications during the pilot period. However, awareness of the complaints and appeals procedure was 17 per cent lower in Napak. This may stem from the poorer communications infrastructure than in Moroto.

The lower level of awareness of complaints and appeals procedures among older people in Amuru and Gulu follows a similar pattern to their level of awareness about targeting and the source of funding. This could stem from the generally weaker programme communications in comparison with the pilot areas.



Caritas Gulu

12. Expanding Social Protection Programme, *Implementation Guidelines for the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) Senior Citizens' Grant and Vulnerable Families Support Grant*, Uganda, February 2012

Conclusions and recommendations

The decision to gradually take on financing of the Senior Citizens Grant in the pilot districts and extend the scheme to 40 more districts by 2020 is a significant milestone in the Government of Uganda's commitment to strengthen social protection for older people. However, the data collected by older citizen monitors highlights a number of programme design and implementation challenges, particularly in the new districts.

Simplify the targeting criteria and allow alternative identification documents

The data presented in this briefing paper highlights how the system of targeting the 100 oldest persons per sub-county in the new districts is causing misunderstanding among older people. The issue seems to stem from weak programme communication about eligibility criteria, as well as the system for identifying eligible older people which uses the general national identity database which many older people are not included in.

As an interim measure, allowing an alternative method for identifying eligible older people would help to improve the situation. The SAGE operations manual suggests that an alternative method will be used in future. However, this has so far not been implemented and there are still high levels of exclusion.¹³

In the medium term, the evidence suggests that using a simple targeting method in the new districts – such as an age cut-off, which is currently used in the pilot areas – would help increase older people's understanding of the programme, and make registration easier. A previous study of the pilot phase found that almost all beneficiaries and community members understood the eligibility criteria and the targeting process.¹⁴ Keeping the administration simple is particularly important in low-resource settings where budgets for programme administration are limited.

To reduce the initial costs of expanding the scheme, it may be necessary to start with a higher age cut-off than in the pilot areas, such as 80 years. The eligibility age can gradually be reduced as financial resources grow. This is an approach used by other countries. For example, Nepal's Old Age Allowance started at 75 years and then was reduced to 70 years.¹⁵

A decision to change the targeting criteria to an age cut-off in the new districts would follow a recent trend of lower-income countries expanding such schemes. In 2016, the semi-autonomous region of Zanzibar, Tanzania, launched a universal social pension for people aged 70 years and above. Kenya is set to launch its Inua Jamii 70 and Above social pension in early 2018.

Reduce the distance to paypoints

The citizen-generated data highlighted several issues related to payment of the Senior Citizens Grant, particularly in the new districts. The main issue is the long distance to the paypoints. This reduces older people's ability to reach the paypoint independently, and makes it more likely that they will need to ask someone else to collect their cash. Payment mechanisms should be designed so that older people can collect their social pension themselves for as long as they are able to, or want to. Collecting one's own payment is not simply a matter of mechanics, but is also about social participation and having control over one's own finances.

The long distance to paypoints also means that older people have to pay for transport, which reduces the amount of money they have left to spend on essential items. A previous study of the pilot areas found that some older people were choosing to walk rather than pay for transport, and that this, combined with long queuing times, was having a detrimental effect on their health.¹⁶ Time taken to reach paypoints which are far away, along with long waiting times at the paypoints, also comes at a cost for older people who are working and may lose a whole day of income.

13. Livingstone et al

14. Bukuluki P and Watson C, *Transforming cash transfers: beneficiary and community perspectives on the Senior Citizens Grant*, Uganda, London, Overseas Development Institute, 2012

15. Knox-Vydmanov C, *Pension Watch briefing no. 2, The price of income security in older age*, London, HelpAge International, 2011

16. Merttens F, Sindou E, Attah R and Hearle C, *Evaluation of the Uganda Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE). Endline programme operations performance – final report*, Oxford, Oxford Policy Management, 2016

Providing more paypoints would reduce the distance which older people have to travel to collect their payment. This seems an obvious solution to address this challenge in a way which would maximise the participation of older people. During meetings with older citizen monitors in Gulu, SAGE officials committed to bring payment points closer to older people by increasing the number of mobile banking vans. However, due to the limited coverage of the programme in the new districts, it may be too expensive to provide more paypoints for the relatively small number of recipients. This highlights another administrative complication of a narrowly targeted, low-coverage scheme.

Fully implement the system for nominated representatives

Fully implementing the system for nominated representatives is important for supporting older people who are chronically infirm or housebound, or become suddenly ill or injured. The process for nominating a representative can take between two to six months, which is not fast enough to prevent an older person from missing out on a payment in the case of sudden illness.¹⁷ The social pension schemes in Kenya and Zanzibar require every recipient to nominate a representative on registration. This does not mean that the older person's representative will collect their pension every time, unless they want them to, but means that the system has been set up in case they need it.

Any payment system which allows recipients to nominate someone else to collect their cash must also have a system of post-payment monitoring to ensure that the intended recipients actually receive their money. It must be flexible enough to allow recipients to change their representative. This is particularly important for older people who never attend the paypoint in person. It is also relevant for those who may occasionally use a representative. Although older citizen monitors were unable to explore this topic in detail, a previous study found that a small proportion of older people claimed that someone else had taken their money.¹⁸ In general, financial abuse of older people is seldom acknowledged and is a particularly under-researched area. Therefore it is possible that the issue may be larger than the statistics suggest.

Improve awareness of accountability mechanisms among SAGE officials

The SAGE programme sets out a comprehensive system for complaints and appeals in its operational guidelines, including a number of different channels that older people can use to make a complaint. However, the level of awareness of these different mechanisms does not appear to be shared evenly across the four districts. In the new districts of Amuru and Gulu, more than one quarter of respondents said they did not know what to do in the case of a complaint.

Awareness of complaints and appeals mechanisms is higher in the pilot districts of Napak and Moroto. However, this has not always been the case. Initial low awareness about these mechanisms led SAGE officials to introduce a prepayment announcement to recipients on payment days. They explained the targeting criteria, value of the payment, and what to do if they wanted to complain. Older citizen monitors also started to inform older people about the complaints and appeals procedures.

In contrast, this prepayment announcement is not currently provided in Amuru and Gulu. In these districts, older citizen monitors have helped to fill the information gap by updating older people on the Senior Citizens Grant. They have mobilised older people to collect payments and informed them about complaints and appeals mechanisms.

17. Merttens et al

18. Merttens et al



SAGE Uganda

Despite the relatively low level of awareness of older people about the scheme in the new districts, it is notable that targeting the 100 oldest persons still compares favourably with poverty targeting in terms of transparency and accountability. Older citizens monitoring the means-tested Basic Social Subsidy Programme in Mozambique found that 65 per cent of respondents did not know why they had been selected for the programme, and 68 per cent did not know what to do in the case of a complaint.¹⁹

A final word

The purpose of this brief is to present the findings of data collected by older citizen monitors on implementation of the Senior Citizens Grant in Uganda. Overall, the data presents a fairly positive picture of implementation in Moroto, a slightly less positive picture in Napak, and a noticeably worse picture in Amuru and Gulu.

The Senior Citizens Grant is gaining political interest. It may have been a factor in some Members of Parliament losing their seats in recent elections because voters attributed the fact that it had not been introduced in their area to their parliamentary representatives.²⁰ But bringing the scheme to the new districts is not enough: the scheme must be implemented successfully, in both the original districts and the new ones.

Allowing the ineffective implementation of the scheme to continue is a political risk for MPs. Rather than strengthening the social contract and visibility of the Government to communities – a documented outcome of the pilot phase²¹ – currently the scheme appears to be undermining trust in the Government.

19. Livingstone A, Almeida F and Zimba A, *Pension Watch briefing no. 17 Voz e responsabilização no Programa Subsídio Social Básico*, London, HelpAge International, 2018

20. Development Pathways, How has national ownership of Uganda's Senior Citizens Grant developed? www.developmentpathways.co.uk/resources/national-ownership-ugandas-senior-citizens-grant-developed (5 February 2018)

21. Expanding Social Protection Programme, *All you need to know: Expanding Social Protection Programme Phase I*, Kampala, Government of Uganda, 2015


HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.

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Further information about older citizen monitoring

Older citizen monitoring has been a core feature of HelpAge's voice and accountability work since 2002. To date it has involved more than 3,000 older people's associations in 27 countries. Older citizen monitors regularly collect evidence and advocate on issues ranging from health services and social protection, to the inclusion of older people in local planning and budgeting. In Uganda, older citizen monitors have been monitoring access to health services and the Senior Citizens Grant in Gulu, Moroto and Napak since 2012, with financial support from Irish Aid. In 2016, older citizen monitors focused on implementation of the Senior Citizens Grant, and extended their reach to Amuru in the context of scale up of the programme to new districts.

For more information on HelpAge's work on voice and accountability in social protection, including older citizen monitoring data from other countries, visit www.pension-watch.net. For more information on HelpAge's voice and accountability work refer to our report, *Older citizen monitoring: Achievements and learning*, which can be downloaded from www.helpage.org.

Find out more:

www.pension-watch.net

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