

Special Themes Report: Chiefs' Role in HSNP

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HUNGER SAFETY NET PROGRAMME: PHASE 2 EVALUATIONS

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The Special Themes series allows HSNP to explore topics of interest in a systematic way. The Programme Implementation and Learning Unit (PILU) determines the topic from questions or concerns raised through other monitoring tools, field observations or current policy issues. The findings are based on multiple open-ended interviews with recipients, implementing agencies, pay agents, and county and national staff. This allows observers to triangulate data and provide colourful insights. Reports are led by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), an independent consultancy firm.

Introduction

HSNP requires two distinct tasks to be done routinely on the ground: **communicating programme information** (a process governed by its 'field communication model'), and **dealing with complaints, queries and updates** (governed by its 'case management system'). In addition there is a third group of activities consisting of support to irregular processes such as initial mobilisation, retargeting etc.

In the past HSNP used rights committees for both the communication and the case management tasks. In mid-2015 the HSNP began to use local chiefs for the communication component, instead of rights committees. Now HSNP intends to begin to use chiefs also for the case management component. Programme staff at county level will receive training in April 2016 about the chiefs' new duties in case management, and will then return to the counties to cascade this training to the chiefs themselves. Chiefs have it as part of their remit to support the delivery of social programmes; thus this role under HSNP should be part of their mandate.

The special themed study for this cycle is to better understand the chiefs' role in HSNP, how they perceive this role, any likely challenges in absorbing a new role and their general feedback about the programme. The goal is to clearly identify whether the chiefs know about and understand their roles and responsibility in HSNP, the feasibility of using them for case management and what their supervisors think about the chiefs' duties under HSNP.

A note on the administrative structure

Chiefs are the representatives of the national government at local level. One is appointed in each location. They are assisted by **assistant chiefs**, of whom there is one per sublocation, and several village elders who support implementation of programmes and policies in communities. Even a sublocation can cover a very large geographical area, so assistant chiefs are often working fairly autonomously in a role similar to that of a chief. Chiefs report upwards to a hierarchy leading from an **assistant county commissioner** (ACC) (one per ward) to a **deputy county commissioner** (DCC) (one per subcounty) to the overall **county commissioner**. As these postholders implement national policy locally they are independent from, though necessarily work closely with, the decentralised county governments which have their own structures, policies and budgets.

Methods

OPM field teams and RGA team supervisors conducted interviews between 4 and 8 March 2016. Interviews were held with chiefs, assistant chiefs, DCCs and ACCs in one subcounty in each of the HSNP operational counties. A small number of additional interviews were conducted with respondents in related posts where they were present (Table 1).

Table 1 Summary of fieldwork, March 2016

| Stakeholder | Wajir | Mandera | Turkana | Marsabit | TOTAL |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| County Commissioner | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Deputy County Commissioner | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Assistant County Commissioner | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 7 |
| Chief | 6 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 18 |
| Assistant chief | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Ward administrator ¹ | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Rights committee member | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total interviews | 9 | 7 | 10 | 12 | 38 |

Source: OPM / RGA. Notes: (1) Ward administrators are part of the apparatus of the decentralised county government. (2) Subcounties visited were Tarbaj in Wajir, Banisa in Mandera, Turkana West in Turkana, and North Horr in Marsabit. A small number of interviews were also held in Wajir East and Wajir South.

Chiefs' roles and responsibilities on HSNP¹

KEY FINDINGS ON THE CHIEFS' ROLE IN RELATION TO HSNP

All the chiefs we interviewed were aware of the HSNP and mentioned being involved in one way or another in its implementation.

Lack of awareness of the additional HSNP roles of the chiefs. The chiefs were generally not aware of their new role in communications. They viewed this and the additional case management role, however, as part of their general roles and responsibilities.

Chiefs are able to absorb the HSNP tasks and also handle complaints and updates if needed. There was a general consensus both by the chiefs and their supervisors that the chiefs could not only handle their current commitments in HSNP, but also take on the additional tasks of case management. In a few instances there was a suggestion to keep on the rights committees for handling the paperwork of documenting complaints and updates, particularly in Turkana.

Any programme delivered through chiefs will need to work within the resource constraints of the government administration. The challenges of transport and the need for allowances—especially for fuel—were mentioned by a majority of the respondents as the current limitation in reaching their entire sublocations. Chiefs cover a wide geographical area.

Decentralisation of government has not affected the workload or the roles of the chief. Only 3 out of the 25 chiefs and assistant chiefs interviewed felt that the decentralisation of government, especially the newly appointed ward administrators, had reduced their workload.

¹ In this subsection, 'chiefs' covers both chiefs and assistant chiefs.

Overall there is a general consistency among the chiefs' responses as to their perceived roles and responsibilities on HSNP. All knew of the programme. This familiarity may be aided by the generally low turnover of postholders: many have seen the HSNP develop from Phase 1. One in every three chiefs whom we interviewed had held positions as assistant chief or chief for about 20 years. Table 2 indicates chiefs' responses to the question, 'What is your current role on HSNP?' The question was open-ended so the field is highlighted if at least one member mentioned the responsibility.

Table 2: Chiefs' perceptions of their roles in HSNP

| Chiefs' responses on HSNP roles | Wajir | Mandera | Turkana | Marsabit |
|--|-------|---------|---------|----------|
| HSNP information—dissemination of payment dates, emergency payments etc. | | | | |
| Targeting—Mobilisation | | | | |
| Targeting—Handling the issue of unsolvable and untraceable cases | | | | |
| Handling complaints and queries i.e. deceased cases, loss of smart cards etc. ¹ | | | | |
| Overseeing payments | | | | |
| Handling cases of agent malpractice | | | | |

Source: OPM / RGA. Responses drawn from interviews with 25 chiefs or assistant chiefs. Note: (1) 'Handling complaints and queries' means dealing with recipients who approach the chief, eg. by referring them onto the appropriate person. The chiefs are not yet formally keeping records of complaints nor able to resolve them themselves.

As shown above the chiefs are fairly well informed about their roles and responsibilities in HSNP. It was clear that most were taking the roles as part of their general work as chief. They note that their day-to-day role is to represent the government, maintaining peace and security and relaying information both to communities and to the county or to Nairobi. Many cited aspects of their usual role as including mobilising public barazas, approving ID card requests, registering births and deaths and solving family disputes, besides supporting the implementation of health and education policy. The chiefs' supervisors, the ACCs, mostly endorsed this position.

HSNP is a government programme, and as government officer I am duty bound to coordinate activities ... so this is well within my area of jurisdiction (Assistant chief, Turkana West, Turkana).

Most of the time we feel that chiefs are the most knowledgeable people to contact in a sublocation and giving them such a role will make the flow of information faster on both sides, either from beneficiary to the donor and NDMA or back to beneficiaries. The chiefs are able to carry out the tasks given, even updating, passing on information and solving problems which may arise in the programme. (ACC, Wajir East).

It was therefore not surprising that very few chiefs indicated that there was a change in their role in HSNP as they were conducting dissemination and helping with complaints from the onset:

I haven't noticed any change. We haven't been communicated any change, we're just doing what we used to do, that is, passing information to the community members and receiving any issue a beneficiary might have (Chief, Tarbaj subcounty, Wajir).

Only three respondents, in different subcounties, were aware of a specific change in their role:

The work of HSNP has increased in recent months because we are now doing the rights committees' work, like complaints on fingerprints and also key messaging (Assistant chief, North Horr, Marsabit).

The responses on whether the chiefs had enough understanding varied across the counties. Most knew the value and frequency of the routine payments; many were familiar with the ad-hoc payments to Group 2 households in the event of a drought. Most were aware of the programme implementers, including the NDMA, Equity Bank, HelpAge and its partners and the rights committees. Some were able to describe the different roles of these partners in some detail. In a small number of cases in Turkana West, Turkana, and North Horr, Marsabit, respondents mistook the programme as having been initiated by Oxfam or Care, since these were the organisations that conducted the registration. In Tarbaj, Wajir, the chiefs we interviewed felt that they had enough understanding of the programme to carry out their role well, though two respondents observed that it was difficult to understand the rationale for the selection of Group 2 households and their variable payment dates and values. In the other three counties there was an expressed suggestion to have more training on case management, HSNP overview, the targeting process and their specific roles as chiefs in HSNP.

As for the time spent by chiefs on HSNP issues, about half of our respondents reported that some query might come up daily.

I don't have any specific day or time for this programme, anytime attend to beneficiaries, some even come to seek information from my house and I attend to them, you know most of the beneficiaries are community members and we consider each other as a family, I don't turn them down. (Chief, Tarbaj subcounty, Wajir)

On a typical day I deal with ID issues and date of payment or any other inquiries regarding HSNP. (Chief, Turkana West, Turkana)

While, cumulatively, the routine tasks of communication and referring queries may only take a small proportion of chiefs' time, the workload spikes when specific one-off HSNP tasks are implemented. In North Horr, Marsabit, four of the seven chiefs we interviewed said that the programme was currently absorbing 10 days per month or more of their time owing to the ongoing process of tracing or replacing unreached families (the 'mop-up'). Even though the workload of chiefs consists of HSNP-related work on many days of the month, they responded positively to being able to tackle the routine component as part of their work. A small number were not very keen on the idea of taking on what they perceived as a secretarial role of writing and reporting on complaints and updates, preferring to leave this to the rights committees.

The only major challenge mentioned was the insufficient logistical arrangement currently in place limiting their movement. Most respondents reported that they either had no transport at all or had no fuel allowance for their motorbike. As the HSNP becomes increasingly embedded in regular government structures it will necessarily be reliant on the public resources available:

With the resources we have we may not achieve much because as a government officer I am required to work within my limit, which means I don't have a lot of transport allocated to me and meeting these people requires a lot of movement. (Chief, Tarbaj subcounty, Wajir).

Only three of the 25 chiefs and assistant chiefs interviewed had not attended any training by NDMA. The rest mention having received training on a few of the following; the overall design, case management, resolving ID issues, information dissemination, role of chiefs, issues of unsolvables and untraceables and the account opening and activation.

Understanding of the programme among ACCs / DCCs

KEY FINDINGS ABOUT THE ACCs' / DCCs' INVOLVEMENT IN HSNP

The major reshuffle of national administration units in recent months makes it unsurprising that DCCs and ACCs, many newly in post, are little informed about the HSNP.

Some awareness of the programme. Although the ACCs and DCCs were aware of a cash transfer programme and its challenges such as lack of ID cards and sufficient pay agents, it remained clear that some of them did not recognise it as the HSNP and confused it with other government transfer programmes.

Oversight by the ACCs and DCCs of the chiefs' HSNP tasks is limited. Some ACCs asked for their inclusion in the planning meetings with NDMA as this would help them provide oversight.

Most ACCs and DCCs we spoke to have not received any HSNP training. A few ACCs and DCCs requested to be included in training as well.

From January 2016 there has been a major reshuffle in national administration units i.e. of DCCs and ACCs. Seven out of the 10 we interviewed were not more than 6 months old in office. It was therefore not surprising to find them little informed about the HSNP. Among these stakeholders and others peripherally connected, such as county commissioners and ward administrators, the HSNP is still often confused with the other cash transfers of the National Safety Nets Programme in the county. Those that knew of it were broadly aware that it was intended to support the less well off in the community by providing periodic cash. A few knew that it was run by the NDMA; four recalled some challenges they had heard of, mainly relating to targeting and to the lack of ID cards. The chiefs' roles and responsibilities is also not well understood among this group but they are aware that they are involved in one way or another in the programme.

There is a general consensus among all the respondents that information dissemination and case management should be part of the chief's roles and responsibilities. The respondents felt that the HSNP role fits very well with their current duties. Chiming with the view of the chiefs themselves, most mentioned it as being part and parcel of the chiefs' duties; they are not seen as a separate role, rather complementary to all the other tasks that they do.

They are better placed to do the communications and case management. Chiefs are required to have constant meetings with the community members, they can use the forum to do their household update and also communicate to the beneficiaries and also record any kind of complaint they may have (County commissioner, Wajir).

Oversight by the ACCs and DCCs of the chiefs' HSNP tasks is limited because they have no set role on the programme and the chain of reporting goes through the NDMA to the County Steering Committee. Some considered that their lack of involvement meant the chiefs' role must be working smoothly. In North Horr, Marsabit, and in Banisa, Mandera, two ACCs mentioned having got involved to assist the programme, offering advice in the case of deceased recipients and resolving difficulties with obtaining ID cards. Mostly, though, they are so new in their posts that they are not in a position to provide oversight even if needed, as very few have attended any training or instruction about the HSNP. The programme may have run such orientation sessions in the past. We advise that a new round be conducted to cover the newly appointed administrators, and that the programme considers a way of providing ad-hoc inductions on its objective and operations as and when senior government officials are appointed in HSNP areas.