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**EXPANDING  
SOCIAL  
PROTECTION**

# **Evaluation of the Uganda Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) Programme**

**Impact after two years of programme  
operations 2012-2014**

**Final report – Executive Summary**

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# Abbreviations

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>CDOs</b>   | Community Development Officers                         |
| <b>DFID</b>   | UK Department for International Development            |
| <b>DID</b>    | Difference-in-differences                              |
| <b>ESPP</b>   | Expanding Social Protection Programme                  |
| <b>FCS</b>    | Food Consumption Score                                 |
| <b>FGD</b>    | Focus group discussion                                 |
| <b>HHS</b>    | Household Hunger Scale                                 |
| <b>KII</b>    | Key informant interview                                |
| <b>LC1</b>    | Village chairperson                                    |
| <b>MIS</b>    | Management information system                          |
| <b>MoFPED</b> | Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development |
| <b>MoGLSD</b> | Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development      |
| <b>NAADS</b>  | National Agricultural Advisory Services                |
| <b>NGO</b>    | Non-governmental organisation                          |
| <b>ODI</b>    | Overseas Development Institute                         |
| <b>OPM</b>    | Oxford Policy Management                               |
| <b>PSM</b>    | Propensity score matching                              |
| <b>RDD</b>    | Regression discontinuity design                        |
| <b>ROSCA</b>  | Rotating Savings and Credit Association                |
| <b>SACCO</b>  | Savings and Credit Cooperative                         |
| <b>SAGE</b>   | Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment               |
| <b>SCG</b>    | Senior Citizens Grant                                  |
| <b>UGX</b>    | Ugandan shilling                                       |
| <b>UBOS</b>   | Uganda Bureau of Statistics                            |
| <b>UNICEF</b> | UN Children's Fund                                     |
| <b>VFSG</b>   | Vulnerable Family Support Grant                        |



# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report presents the impact evaluation of the Uganda Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) programme. Its purpose is to provide an evaluation of the impact of the SAGE programme in the 24 months since the baseline study. A separate report provides an assessment of the operational performance of the SAGE programme.<sup>1</sup>

## The SAGE programme

In light of its recognition of the importance of social protection for the achievement of the country's development objectives the Government of Uganda is implementing the Expanding Social Protection programme (ESPP), with the goal of reducing chronic poverty and improving the life chances of poor men, women and children. One key element of the ESPP is the pilot SAGE programme. The aim of the SAGE pilot is to test a range of implementation modalities for an efficient, cost-effective and scalable social transfer, to generate evidence for national policy-making, and to provide a reference point for relevant stakeholders regarding the government's acceptance of, and commitment to, social protection.

The expectation was that the SAGE pilot reached around 560,000<sup>2</sup> people in 124,547 households over a period of four years (April 2011-February 2015), covering approximately 15% of households in 14 pilot districts (see Figure 1 below).

SAGE applies two targeting methodologies for its social transfers: the Vulnerable Family Support Grant (VFSG) (which employs a composite index based on demographic indicators of vulnerability to determine eligibility) and the Senior Citizens Grant (SCG) (which uses age to determine eligibility).<sup>3</sup> Under the VFSG, adult women (if they are present in a beneficiary household) are selected by the programme to be the physical recipient of transfers (men are selected if women are not present). Under the SCG, the transfer is given to the specific older person enrolled.

In both cases (VFSG and SCG) the transfer is currently worth 25,000 Ugandan shillings (UGX) per month and is paid every two months. The amount is reviewed and updated once a year.<sup>4</sup>

Responsibility for implementation of SAGE rests with the SAGE Implementation Unit, based within the Social Protection Secretariat in the MoGLSD. An ESPP Steering Committee oversees the work of the Social Protection Secretariat, including implementation of the SAGE programme. The ESPP Steering Committee reports to the MoGLSD, which in turn reports to Cabinet and Parliament.

Within the pilot districts SAGE is administered by local government officials, including district chairpersons, Community Development Officers (CDOs), sub-county chairpersons, parish chairpersons and village chairpersons (LC1s). Payments are administered by agents supplied by the payments (MTN) provider and are overseen by relevant local government staff (sub-county and parish chairpersons) at the paypoint.

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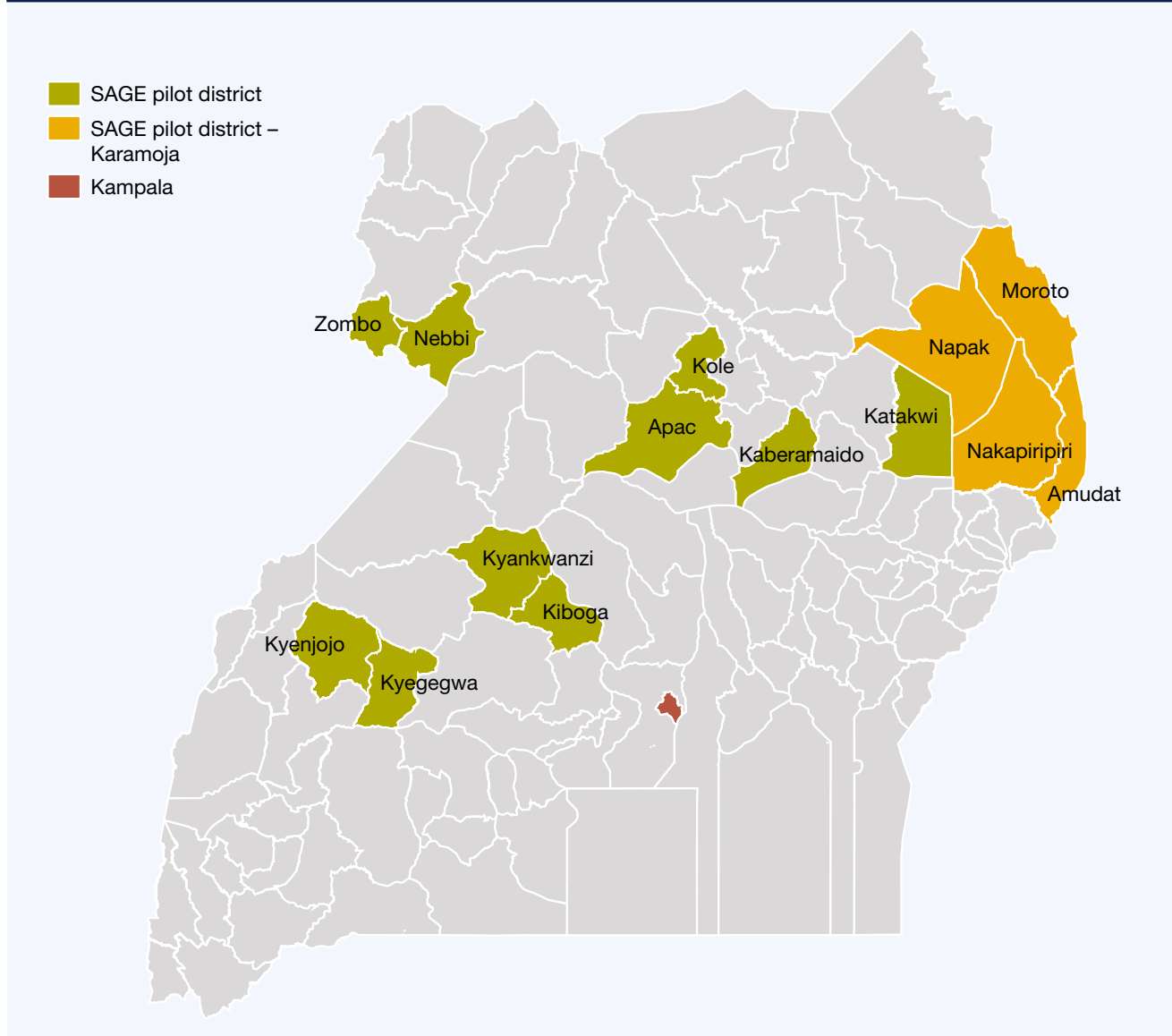
1 Mertens, F., Sindou, E., Attah, R. and Hearle, C. 2016. Evaluation of the Uganda Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) Programme: Programme operations performance report. Endline final report.

2 Based on average of 4.5 people per household; data provided by SAGE MIS.

3 Over 65 years; over 60 years in Karamoja region.

4 The transfer was increased to UGX 24,000 in July 2012 and to UGX 25,000 in July 2013.

**Figure 1: SAGE programme pilot districts**



## The impact evaluation

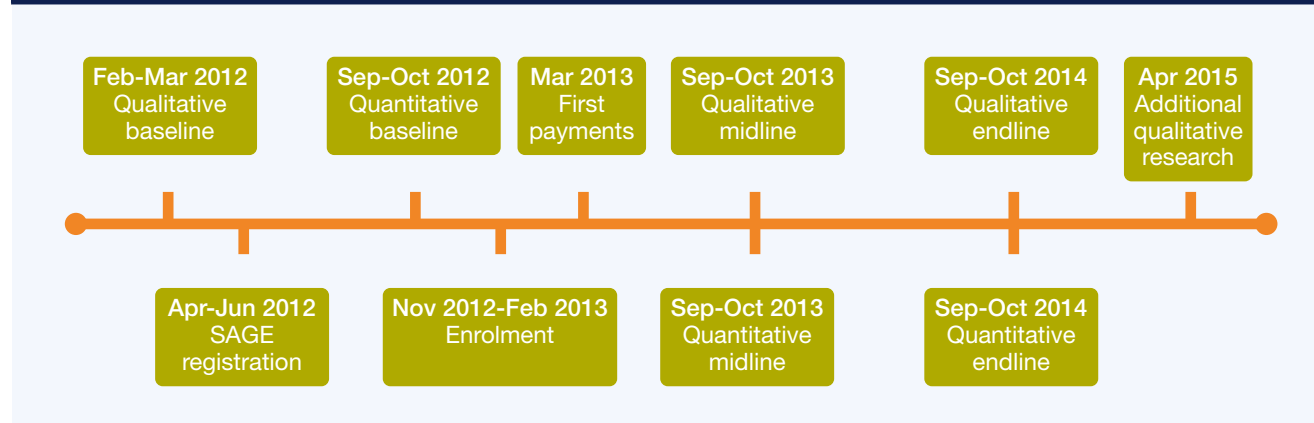
The SAGE pilot includes an independent evaluation component. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the impact of the SAGE pilot programme, to compare the relative performance of the two targeting methodologies used by the pilot (VFSG and SCG), and to ensure that evaluation findings are disseminated nationally.

The evaluation assesses SAGE against its main objective of empowering recipient households through having an impact across the following four areas:

- reducing material deprivation;
- increasing economic security;
- reducing social exclusion; and
- increasing access to services.

In order to assess these impacts, the evaluation adopts a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative and qualitative information were collected over three years on a range of key indicators and supporting data. Figure 2 presents the timeline of the evaluation, alongside key dates for the SAGE programme itself.

**Figure 2: Timeline for the evaluation**

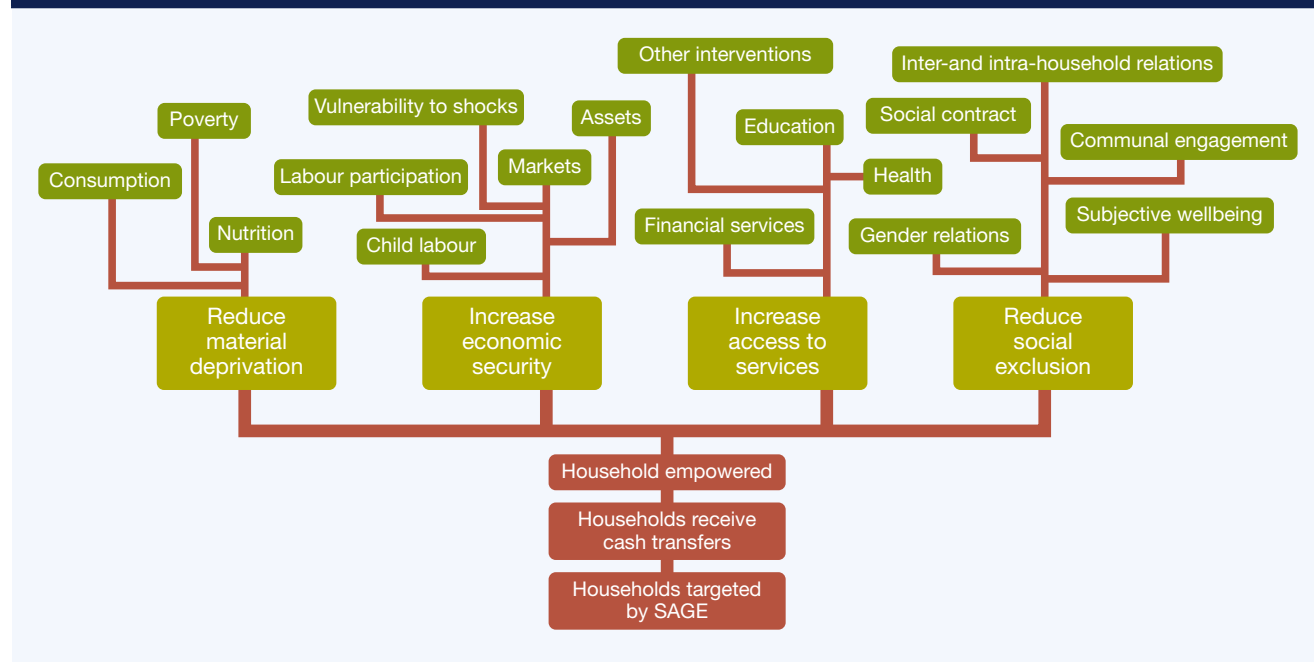


## Evaluation methodology

### Evaluation theory of change

The evaluation assesses SAGE's impact via the framework of an evaluation theory of change. Using this theory of change, the evaluation identifies and tracks specific indicators and research questions for each of SAGE's main objectives. The SAGE evaluation theory of change is summarised in the following figure:

**Figure 3: SAGE cash transfer evaluation theory of change impact tree**



As demonstrated by the figure, the theory of change hypothesises that SAGE's social cash transfers will be effective in tackling poverty and vulnerability, while promoting broader developmental impacts.

## Quantitative impact evaluation

In order to assess SAGE's impact, the quantitative component of the evaluation compares information gathered from households receiving the SAGE cash transfer (*treatment households*) with information gathered from households that do not receive the transfer (*comparison households*) to measure a range of quantitative indicators across the four broad impact areas related to the theory of change (material deprivation; economic security; access to services; and community cohesion and social exclusion). The difference in the indicators between the treatment and comparison households represents the quantitative measure of the impact of the programme.

The quantitative impact information was collected from treatment and comparison households using a three-round longitudinal household panel survey, implemented in 398 clusters across 48 sub-counties in eight of the programme districts. A sample of 100 control communities was also surveyed in order to measure impact on a selection of community-level outcomes.

### Approach taken to compare treatment with comparison households

The main challenge in the identification of a suitable counterfactual for the evaluation (i.e. the comparison households) is selection bias. A regression discontinuity design (RDD) was originally chosen by the evaluation Steering Committee to overcome this challenge. However, since it became apparent that the RDD was not viable in the context SAGE, the evaluation team proposed a back-up methodology based on propensity score matching (PSM), combined with difference-in-differences (DID). PSM works by matching treatment households with comparison households such that their observable characteristics are as similar as possible at baseline prior to the programme. DID works by comparing the difference over time in a given indicator for the treatment group, to the difference over time in that same indicator for the control group. DID allows one to control for differences in unobservable, time-invariant characteristics between treatment and comparison groups (such as 'motivation' or social connections, which are not necessarily captured by conditioning on observables in a standard PSM). This PSM-DID approach was successful in establishing a valid counterfactual – the comparison households – in reference to which SAGE's impact on the treatment households can be estimated.

## Qualitative impact evaluation

The qualitative component of the evaluation aims to complement the quantitative research by capturing impacts and exploring contextual factors that are less easy to quantify. This research explores the following potential impacts of SAGE:

- reduced poverty within recipient households;
- reduced poverty within the wider community;
- reduced vulnerability to the effects of seasonal stresses, longer term trends and shocks;
- improved livelihood choices and options;
- increased informal employment opportunities; and
- reduced social exclusion of marginalised individuals, groups or households.

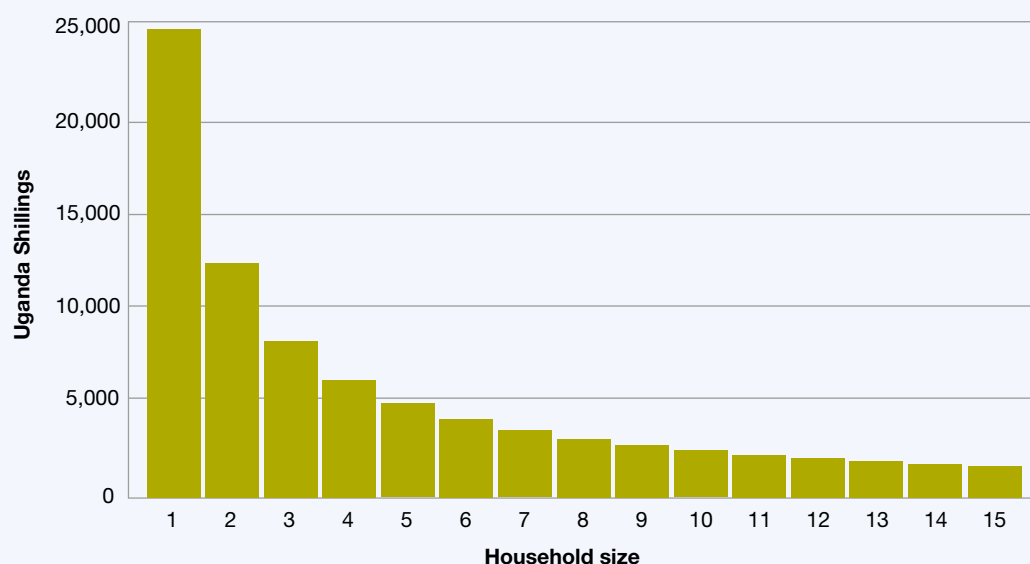
The qualitative research was conducted through focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIs) and household case studies with SAGE beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. 101 FGDs and 123 KIs, as well as 81 household case studies, were facilitated. To broaden the range of the qualitative data, FGDs were carried out with alternative identity groups to provide different perspectives (such as businesswomen or fishermen, or youth in SCG areas), while KIs were undertaken with local opinion leaders who have everyday contact with their communities (teachers, health workers, religious leaders, women's leaders, local officials, businesswomen, and youth leaders.). We also facilitated KIs with district and sub-county level officials, programme implementers and pay agents. This breadth in regard to respondents allows for an in-depth understanding of the impact of SAGE on entire households and communities, rather than just the named recipients.

## Findings regarding receipt and use of the SAGE transfers

According to the SAGE programme management information system (MIS), beneficiary households across the eight evaluation districts received on average a total of UGX 521,303 in cash transfers during the evaluation period: very close to their full entitlement.

The mean monthly value of the transfers for beneficiary households per adult equivalent is UGX 11,000 (\$4.20), which is close to around 18% of the average poverty line in evaluation areas, and around 12% of total household consumption on average for both beneficiary groups. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that this may be too low to have a transformative effect. However, it should be noted that the per-person value of the transfers depends on the size of the household concerned, with large differences in per-person value between small and large households (as demonstrated in the figure below).

**Figure 4: Nominal per capita monthly transfer value by household size**



Source: SAGE Impact Evaluation Survey Sep 2012-Oct 2014.



The SAGE cash transfers are paid directly to elderly individuals in the case of the SCG, while women are the named recipients of the transfers in VFSG households, if they are present. The proportion of beneficiaries who are female is high overall, at 65% over the two targeting mechanisms. The figure is much higher for VFSG households than SCG households (81% vs. 56% respectively). SCG recipients are older on average than VFSG recipients (72, compared to 56).

In regard to costs for beneficiaries of receiving the transfers, on average beneficiaries spend approximately 3% of the bi-monthly transfer value (UGX 1,500) on costs associated with collecting the transfer.

In the vast majority of cases (98%) the main person who decides how the cash transfer is spent is the named beneficiary, but these decisions are often made in discussion with other family members.

The main use of the SAGE transfer as reported by beneficiaries is expenditure on food and basic needs (reported by 75% and 54% of SCG and VFSG beneficiaries, respectively). This is followed by productive investments and expenditure in health and education. VFSG beneficiaries were significantly more likely to report using the transfer for investment in productive assets and education than SCG beneficiaries.

7% of beneficiary households reported sharing some of their most recent transfer in the form of a gift or loan to other households (6% sharing; less than 1% loaning).

In regard to the time-scale of expenditure, beneficiaries reported that by the end of the second week after payday the transfer is invariably completely spent, after which time households resort to credit from shops or neighbours, and/or living off the proceeds of their own enterprises until the next payment day.

## Findings regarding the impact of the SAGE cash transfers

### Economic and material welfare

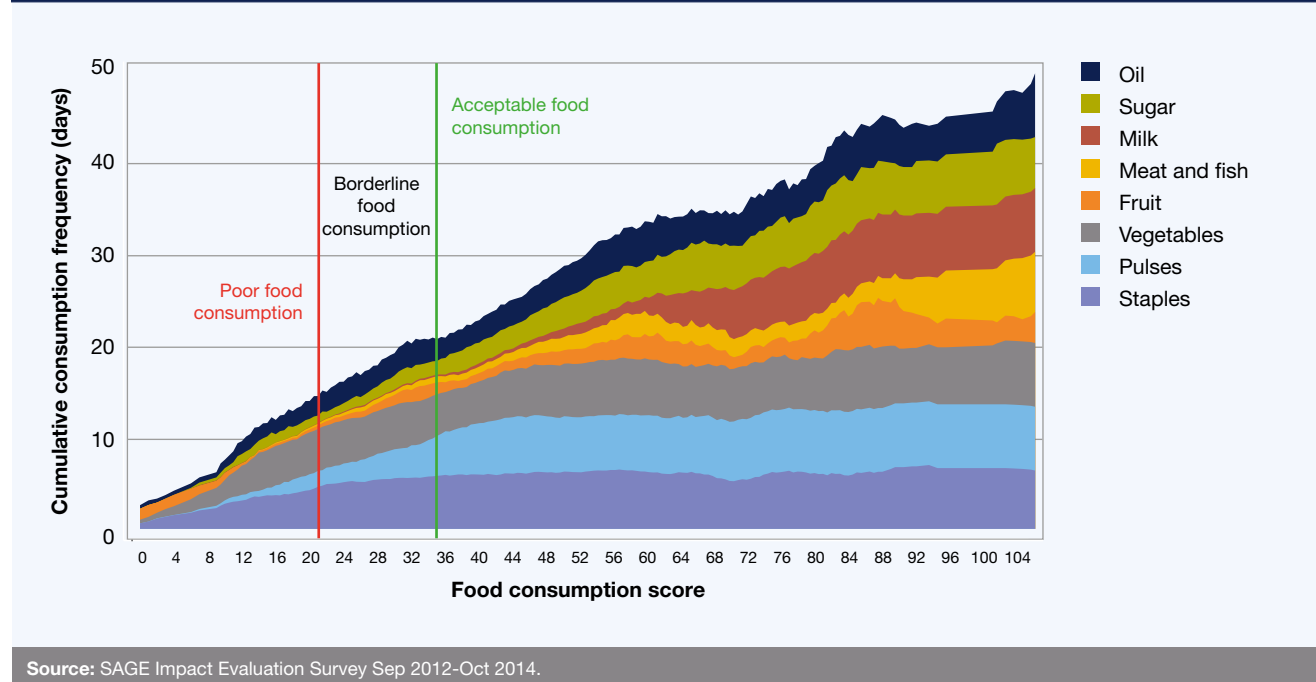
The consumption expenditure data obtained in the quantitative research suggests that SAGE has had an impact on welfare: an increase in welfare occurred over the programme period for both VFSG and SCG households. This trend was marginally pro-poor, meaning that poorer households increased their welfare proportionally more than wealthier households. The improvement in treatment households was found to be larger than that in comparison households.

SAGE has had a positive impact on poverty measures, using a monetary definition of welfare based on consumption expenditure. Poverty headcounts for both SCG and VFSG households declined during the programme period. For VFSG there was also a significant impact on other poverty measures (poverty gap and severity of poverty).

There has been a significant increase in consumption expenditure for SCG households and a significant increase in food consumption for both SCG and VFSG households. For the SCG treatment group, the impact on food consumption was driven by their increased expenditures. For the VFSG beneficiary group the impact was driven by falling food consumption amongst the comparison group, suggesting that SAGE has been acting like a safety net for VFSG recipients, protecting them from falling consumption.

The increases in food expenditure for the SCG group are matched by a reduction in the proportion of households suffering hunger. For the VFSG group we found an improvement in quality of diet, with fewer households with poor food consumption, as measured by the Food Consumption Score (FCS). Figure 5 presents a picture of the level of dietary diversity and the quality of diet as one moves from households with a low FCS to households with a high FCS.

**Figure 5: Food consumption score against frequency of consumption**



SAGE has not had an impact on child malnutrition.

SAGE has not had an overall effect on the levels of education expenditure for beneficiary households, in either SCG or VFSG households. However, SAGE has had a positive impact on health expenditure – but for SCG beneficiaries only.

SAGE transfers have had a positive impact on families' experiences of their welfare situation, and thus on their subjective wellbeing. This was especially reflected in the qualitative data for SCG households. The transfers are seen to help reduce elderly beneficiaries' dependence on others, which has resulted in a widely perceived improvement in dignity and respect for elderly beneficiaries.

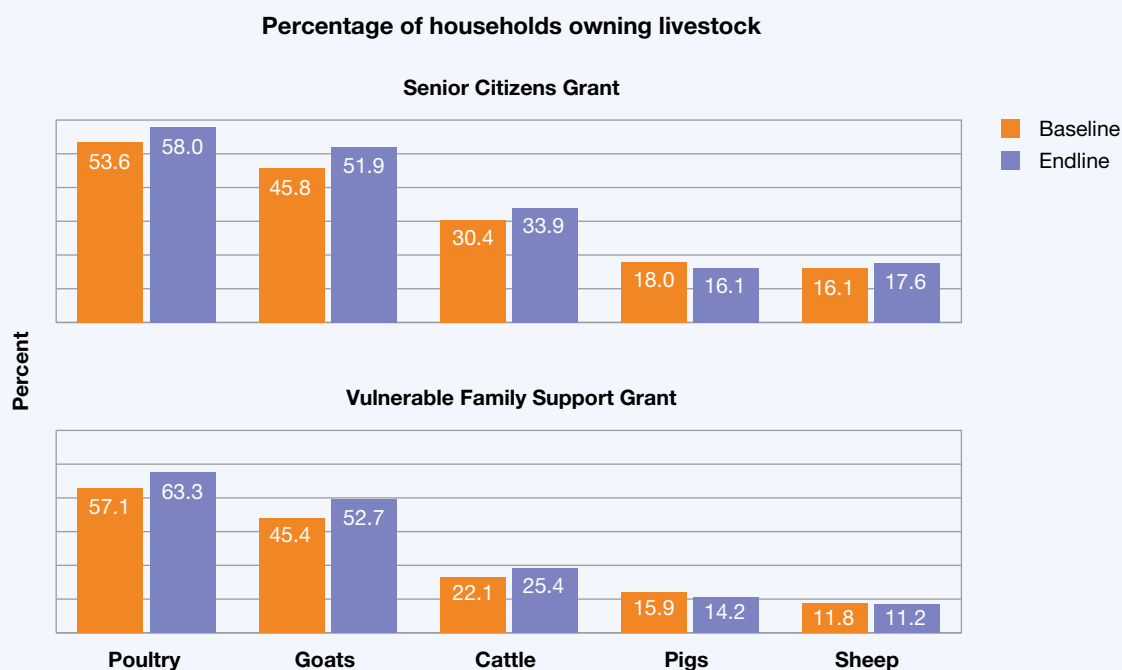
VFSG households also reported an improvement in their experience of poverty, with a significant decrease in the proportion of households reporting themselves as 'struggling' and a significant increase in the proportion reporting 'doing ok' or 'doing well'.

The evaluation established that SAGE has not had an effect on labour supply or livelihood activities in general, and it has not had an impact on rates of child labour.

There are indications that SAGE may have increased the amount of land owned or cultivated. However, the data here are not fully conclusive.

The SAGE programme has had a positive impact on the proportion of both VFSG and SCG households owning livestock (particularly cattle and goats; see Figure 6 below). For VFSG beneficiaries, it has also increased the proportion of households that have both purchased and sold livestock in the last 12 months, and increased the value of those purchases. SAGE has also helped VFSG households purchase other productive assets.

**Figure 6: Livestock ownership by targeting mechanism and livestock type**



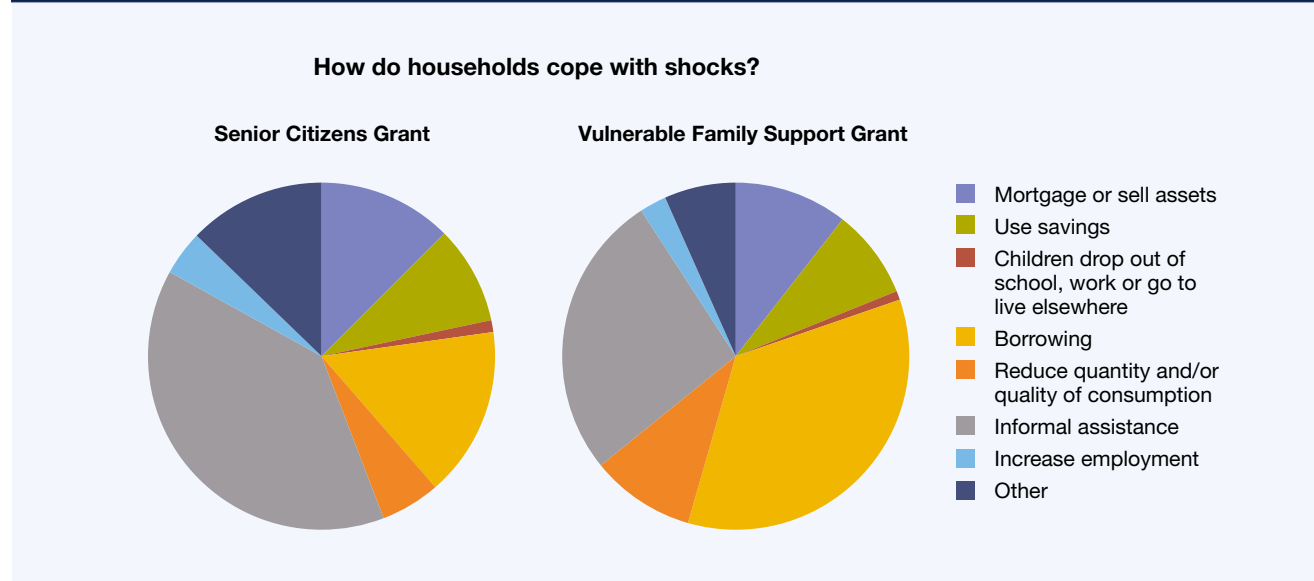
Source: SAGE Impact Evaluation Survey Sep 2012-Oct 2014.

In regard to households' abilities to cope with shocks, the SAGE programme has positively impacted one of the key risk-coping mechanisms: both SCG and VFSG households reported being better able to borrow a large amount of money in an emergency. As the following figure indicates, borrowing is a common way of coping with shocks.

SAGE transfers have had a positive impact on families' experiences of their welfare situation, and thus on their subjective wellbeing.



**Figure 7: Coping strategies by targeting mechanism**



Source: SAGE Impact Evaluation Survey Sep 2012-Oct 2014.

## Access to education, health and finance services

Despite that respondents often reported education as an area of use of cash transfer resources, the quantitative research found that SAGE has not increased overall education expenditure. Nor has it had any impact on education attendance or attainment for children in either SCG or VFSG households. In addition, no distinct results were noted in this regard, with respect to primary school aged children or secondary-school-aged children, or for boys and girls distinctly within those two age groups. These results were corroborated by the qualitative research.

The quantitative research suggested that SAGE has not had a strong impact on health and health outcomes (although for SCG recipients it has had an effect on the mean expenditure on health care per household member). The qualitative findings were more encouraging, suggesting that the SAGE transfer has tended to positively impact SCG households' health-seeking behaviour, by increasing the ability of beneficiaries to buy medication and even, in some cases, to access private health care.

It appears that the SAGE transfers enabled VFSG households to save more, but in the case of both SCG and VFSG households it did not have any impact on rates of borrowing or buying on credit. In regard to credit the findings at midline contradict this result, and, in addition, the qualitative data are inconclusive. Many respondents reported that, between SAGE payment dates, beneficiaries do obtain goods on credit in local shops and pharmacies, as well as loans from friends and family, which they pay back once they receive their transfer. The precise relationship between SAGE and access to credit has thus not been fully explained by either the quantitative or qualitative data.

The evaluation established that the SAGE transfer has not displaced other support from formal sources.

## **Local markets and infrastructure**

The quantitative data did not show any significant impact by SAGE on the development of local market infrastructure, although qualitative data suggested the stimulating effect of SAGE on local markets, particularly on payment days.

The evaluation found that SAGE has not had any impact on local food price inflation, or on agricultural or non-agricultural wages.

In regard to communities' financial infrastructure, the evaluation found that SAGE has not had a significant positive impact on the proportion of communities with an operating Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCA) or Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO).

## **Social relations and cohesion, including household relations**

The evaluation found that while SAGE has not significantly affected perceptions of social norms around gender or gender inequality, it has contributed to women's empowerment by marginally improving female beneficiaries' control of assets. However, SAGE has not significantly influenced female control over household decision-making, which remains dominated by men.

At the household level, the cash transfer has helped to reduce the dependence of the elderly, and in some cases promoted a new dependence on the elderly as a source of support. This latter development is welcomed by the elderly themselves, as it increases their status and dignity. The qualitative evidence suggests that SAGE has increased the autonomy of elderly household members.

In most communities, SAGE has played a significant role in improving relations between family members in beneficiary households, and in particular in SCG households. However, it has also exacerbated marital tensions in some VFSG households due to the named beneficiary being female. For SCG recipients the positive improvement in relations has often been characterised by beneficiaries being able to contribute to the wider family welfare, rather than being a dependent.

In regard to SCG communities, the qualitative research produced lots of testimony indicating that SAGE has contributed to existing systems of sharing and mutual support. However, these findings were not reflected in the quantitative data, where no impact was observed regarding the likelihood of SCG households either giving or receiving informal support. In VFSG areas, in contrast, the evaluation found that SAGE has had a positive impact on the likelihood of beneficiaries providing support to other households.

SAGE is broadly perceived to have contributed to general social cohesion, through its positive impacts on intra- and inter-household relations. This is particularly the case in SCG areas, with one reason given for this being the belief that everyone will one day benefit from SAGE when they reach the eligible age.

Both the quantitative and qualitative research found a notable increase in the social status and voice in community meetings of elderly SAGE beneficiaries, which is seen to be the result of SAGE's impact on beneficiaries' self-esteem.



## **SAGE and the social contract**

The evaluation found that SAGE has not produced a change in people's perceptions of the social contract, or their ideas about the duties of citizens and the responsibilities of the state. However, SAGE is seen by some to have influenced the social contract indirectly, by reinforcing or raising expectations of the state as the provider of long-term safety nets.

Generally speaking, the provision of poor quality services is considered to be a breach of the social contract. In this regard, the quality of services delivered by the state is not deemed to have been affected by SAGE.

The evaluation identified some isolated perceptions that receipt of SAGE had excluded some beneficiaries from benefiting from National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS). It is perceived that this exclusion reflects an attempt by district officials to level the playing field in the distribution of state benefits.

## **Conclusion: summary of findings, policy implications and next steps**

### **Summary of findings**

The SAGE programme has achieved its core objective of supporting beneficiary households' basic consumption and assuaging poverty. It has helped households to retain and build their productive assets, and it has reduced their vulnerability by supplementing their natural coping strategies in the face of shocks. In the case of the SCG it has increased health expenditure, and for some recipients even appears to have improved health outcomes for some households. It has not caused dependency and it has reduced the burden of labour on the elderly. Finally, the SAGE programme may have had positive spill-over effects in the local economy, in the form of increased demand for labour and stimulation of local commodity markets.

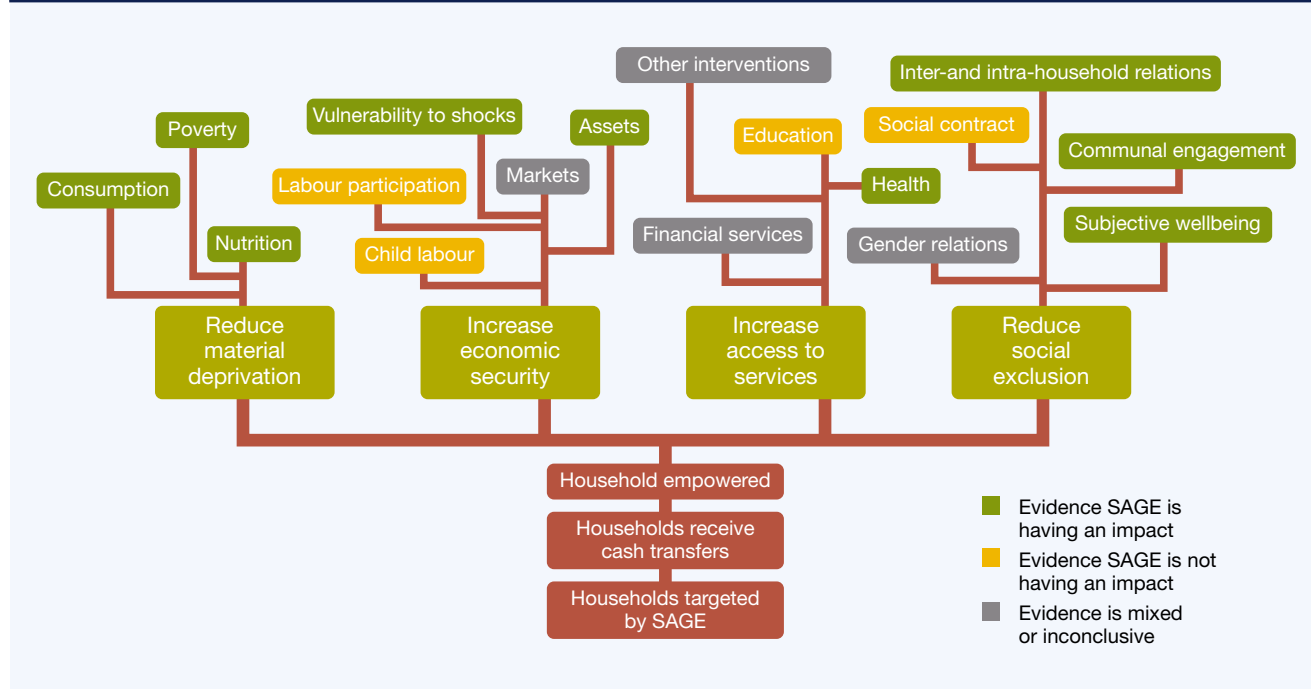
Looking beyond these core areas, SAGE does not seem to have had an impact on education, either positively or negatively, and it has had only very minimal impacts on access to financial services. It has not affected perceptions of the social contract. On the other hand, it does seem to have contributed positively to both intra- and inter-household relationships within communities.

The fact that the SAGE transfer has not significantly impacted areas beyond basic consumption implies that it is unlikely to prove transformative: it has made an often vital difference to beneficiaries' lives, but due to the relatively low value of the transfer its potential to alter the welfare trajectories of households over the longer term is somewhat curtailed.

### **Policy implications**

The findings of the impact evaluation of SAGE indicate that cash transfers should not be considered as a silver bullet, and that they do not necessarily impact every dimension of wellbeing.

The evaluation has also shown that SAGE has had slightly different impacts depending on the target group, whether SCG or VFSG. This implies that separate programme theories of change should be developed for each targeting mechanism. This would enable the ESPP to tweak the programme's objectives and design according to an explicit rationale, as well as focusing questions for future monitoring and evaluation purposes.

**Figure 8: Updated evaluation theory of change**

During the evaluation period the Government of Uganda made the decision to discontinue the VFSG and to scale-up the SCG nationally. It is welcome news that the SCG is making a qualitative difference and improving the lives of the elderly in their communities. However, the elderly are not the only vulnerable group in the population. Thus, to continue building momentum for social protection in Uganda, consideration should now be given to other initiatives to reach non-elderly vulnerable populations, such as children and the working poor.

Finally, and importantly, a major finding of the evaluation is that the relatively low value of the SAGE transfers (around 12% of total household consumption expenditure) reduced their potential to affect livelihoods and local markets, as well as potentially transformative investments in education. If it is sought to increase the value of the transfers the trade-off between costs and benefits of different transfer values and coverage scenarios might help in budget negotiations, as might linking such simulation work to further research on the impact of the transfers on the local economy.

## Next steps

The findings of this evaluation will be presented to a group of national stakeholders in May 2016, in an event organised by the Social Protection Secretariat in the MoGLSD. All the reports and other outputs from the evaluation will be made publically available via the ESPP and Oxford Policy Management (OPM) websites. In addition, the quantitative datasets will be made available to researchers and policy-makers internationally via the World Bank microdata library.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/home>



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