

# Influence of Political Will on Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Cash Transfer Programme in Mandera North Sub-County, Kenya

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**Abstract-** Kenya has been conducting orphan and vulnerable children cash transfer to support the needy. Like any other program, the cash transfer program has policies that guide its operations for effectiveness. Political processes shape policymaking and with Kenya having transitioned to a new political dispensation since 2010, the political influences on the cash transfer policy uptake are worth examining. The study was guided by the following objectives: To examine the effect of political will on OVC cash transfer programme in Mandera North sub-county. The study adopted a mixed-method approach where both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analyzed and adopt a descriptive survey design. The study sample size was 287 study participants. The sample included 2 staff from the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2 staff from the Department of Children Services, and 2 staff in local administration. Stratified random sampling was used based on the participants categories. The primary data was obtained through administering a questionnaire to Household heads of CT-OVC beneficiary. This was complemented by the qualitative data collected through key informant interviews with the staff from the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, the Department of Children Services, and the local administration. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Qualitative data was analyzed and presented through thematic analysis. The study found that on average, respondents perceive a moderate political will for the program. This indicates that while political support exists, it may not be strong. Political mobilization can indeed be a powerful tool in raising effectiveness of CT programs. Many respondents were unsatisfied with including beneficiaries in the program. The respondents perceive political settlements has a moderate effect on the program's effectiveness. The study recommends that the State department of social services implement robust anti-corruption policies and transparency mechanisms to ensure that funds are used as intended.

**Index Terms-** Cash Transfer Programme, Mandera, Political Will, Orphans, OVC, Vulnerable Children

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social protection is a vital instrument as a means to address challenges relating to poverty and vulnerability in addition to managing risks and fostering change in the levels of high inequality. Many states have embraced social protection policies and/or strategies through formulation and implementation of initiatives such as social transfer programmes, which have not only contributed towards key global development goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in relation to education and health, but also enabled governments to provide much needed safety nets for citizens living in poverty with little to no capabilities or opportunities to improve their quality of life (Fiszbein et al, 2019).

Social protection programmes have expanded rapidly in low-income countries over the past two decades (World Bank, 2015b). In particular, the number of cash transfer programmes targeted at poor citizens has grown substantially, with studies indicating that almost all the countries in sub-Saharan Africa have a scheme under implementation. The current wave of cash transfers originated from Latin America in the late 1990s, where they were domestically driven as a response to poverty and the social and political threats presented by rising inequality. The subsequent success witnessed in a decrease in poverty and inequality levels drew international attention and the same programmes have been transported to Africa (Costa Leite, Suyama and Pomeroy, 2013).

Social protection policies constitute part of the global social policy agenda. Social policy plays a wide range of roles in development, ranging from poverty reduction and redistribution to enhancement of national cohesion and building solidarity (Aina, 2004; Mkandawire, 2005; Adésinà, 2007). Divergent views emerge on the rise of cash transfers as the social policy option in Africa. Some scholars decry the narrowing of social policy to cash transfers and as inadequate transformational instruments to meet the multiple functions of social policy.

Due to the globalised nature of the world, international policy initiatives like social protection cannot be ignored by nation-states. Global agendas easily permeate national plans through transfer, diffusion and policy learning. With most action on the transfer of cash transfer happening in the last 15 years,

Kenya is viewed as an early adopter, starting the first programme, the Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC), in 2004. The policy adoption process was however complex. Policy transfer processes are complicated due to an array of variables arising out of multiple actors, multisitedness and multiple interests in the policy space. The complexity of the process is evident from the initial phase of defining the policy problem, setting the agenda for the policy solution through to decision-making and implementation. Political processes, divergent interests and knowledge, and intricate power relations with the policy space further complicate the transfer and adoption mechanisms.

The focus of the proposed study is therefore on the dynamics of the policy processes leading to the adoption of cash transfer policies in Kenya, with a focus on the mechanisms of transfer and the dynamics around adoption of the CT-OVC.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The cash transfer program for orphans and vulnerable children in Mandera North Subcounty faces challenges influenced by geopolitical dynamics. These dynamics impact the program's effectiveness, targeting, and sustainability. Understanding these influences is crucial for designing context-specific interventions that address the unique needs of beneficiaries.

Mandera North sub-county is located in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) of Kenya. These regions often experience political instability, cross-border tensions, and security threats. Geopolitical dynamics can affect the OVC cash transfer program implementation, targeting, and monitoring. Despite Kenya's devolution process that has decentralized governance to county governments, variations in capacity, political will, and resource allocation across counties can influence the success of cash transfer programs. Mandera's unique context requires tailored approaches especially around geopolitical dynamics considering sparse population as well the political oriented development. These geopolitical factors influence community perceptions and acceptance of cash transfers. Effective cash transfer programs require coordination among various stakeholders, including national and county governments, NGOs, and community-based organizations. Thus, the need to explore the political-will challenges facing orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) cash transfer programme in Mandera North subcounty.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Politics wield a profound influence over the effectiveness of cash transfer programs in Canada, permeating every aspect of their implementation and impact. The design of these programs, from eligibility criteria to benefit levels and distribution methods, reflects the prevailing political ideologies and priorities (Jones & Marinescu, 2022). Left-leaning governments often advocate for broader eligibility and more substantial benefits as part of their agenda to address income inequality, while right-leaning administrations may prioritize cost-effectiveness and targeted assistance. Funding allocation is inherently political, as government budgets are shaped by the priorities of the ruling

party or coalition. Cash transfer programs must compete with other social initiatives, tax policies, and infrastructure projects for funding, making their financial sustainability contingent on political decisions (Baird, McKenzie & Özler, 2018). Changes to cash transfer programs, whether expansions or cuts, are frequently driven by political considerations. Governments may expand programs in response to public pressure or economic conditions, or conversely, reduce funding due to fiscal constraints or ideological beliefs. The administrative efficiency of cash transfer programs can be influenced by political factors as well. Changes in government leadership or policy direction may lead to restructuring within overseeing agencies, potentially affecting program implementation and effectiveness (Boardman, Siemiatycki & Vining, 2016). Public perception and support for cash transfer programs are shaped by political messaging and rhetoric. Governments may use communication strategies to garner public support for their policy agenda or justify changes to existing programs, influencing their overall effectiveness (Ducas & Wilner, 2017). Moreover, political instability or frequent changes in government leadership can create uncertainty for cash transfer programs, hindering their effectiveness. Lack of policy stability may disrupt implementation, create administrative challenges, and undermine public trust in these programs. In addition, the effectiveness of cash transfer programs in Canada is intricately linked to political dynamics, encompassing policy design, funding allocation, program changes, administrative efficiency, public perception, and policy stability.

In South Africa, the intersection of politics and social welfare initiatives, particularly cash transfer programs, is a complex tapestry that significantly influences their effectiveness (Whitley, Collison-Randall, Wright, Darnell, Schulenkorf, Knee & Richards, 2022). These programs, aimed at alleviating poverty and addressing socio-economic disparities, often find themselves entangled within the broader political landscape, impacting their implementation, reach, and impact.

Political factors wield a substantial influence on the design and execution of cash transfer programs. The ideologies and priorities of ruling parties shape the objectives and focus of these initiatives (Hochfeld, 2015). In South Africa, where political history is deeply intertwined with issues of race, inequality, and social justice, political agendas can either bolster or hinder the efficacy of such programs.

At times, political willpower becomes a critical determinant of the success of cash transfer programs. Strong commitment from governmental authorities can lead to robust funding, efficient administration, and targeted outreach efforts, ensuring that the intended beneficiaries receive adequate support (Peck & Theodore, 2015). Conversely, political instability, wavering commitments, or competing interests may impede the smooth functioning of these initiatives, resulting in delays, inefficiencies, or even outright neglect.

Moreover, the politicization of social welfare can introduce biases and inequalities into the distribution of benefits. Patronage networks, favoritism, or electoral calculations may influence the selection of beneficiaries, diverting resources away from those who need them most. Such practices not only undermine the effectiveness of cash transfer programs but also exacerbate existing socio-economic disparities, perpetuating cycles of

poverty and marginalization (Plagerson, Hochfeld & Stuart, 2017).

Additionally, political rhetoric and discourse can shape public perceptions and attitudes towards cash transfer programs. Debates surrounding their efficacy, necessity, and sustainability can sway public opinion and impact support for these initiatives (Devereux, Masset, Sabates-Wheeler, Samson, the Lintelo & Rivas, 2015). Politicians may exploit these discussions for partisan gains, framing cash transfers as either essential tools for social justice or wasteful expenditures, depending on their political agendas.

Furthermore, the broader policy environment, including fiscal constraints and economic priorities, can constrain or enable the implementation of cash transfer programs (Owusu-Addo, Renzaho & Smith, 2018). Political decisions regarding taxation, budget allocations, and economic reforms directly affect the availability of resources for social welfare initiatives, influencing their scope and reach.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of cash transfer programs in South Africa is deeply intertwined with political dynamics. While political commitment and leadership can enhance their impact, political interests and ideologies can also undermine their efficacy and fairness. Addressing these political influences is essential for ensuring that cash transfer programs fulfill their intended goals of alleviating poverty and promoting social justice.

In Kenya, the effectiveness of cash transfer programs is profoundly shaped by the intricate interplay of political dynamics, governance structures, and socio-economic realities (Juma, 2023). These initiatives, designed to mitigate poverty and address inequality, are significantly influenced by political decisions, interests, and power dynamics within the country (Ouma & Adésínà, 2019).

Political will power plays a pivotal role in determining the success of cash transfer programs in Kenya. The commitment of governmental authorities to prioritize social welfare agendas, allocate sufficient resources, and ensure efficient implementation is crucial for the effective functioning of these initiatives (Mohamed, 2018). Strong leadership and institutional support can lead to streamlined processes, targeted interventions, and improved outcomes for beneficiaries.

However, the politicization of social welfare can also pose challenges to the effectiveness of cash transfer programs. Political considerations, such as electoral cycles, party agendas, and patronage networks, may influence the design, administration, and distribution of benefits (Rohregger, Bender, Kinuthia, Schüring, Ikuu & Pouw, 2018). In some cases, cash transfers may be used as tools for political mobilization or clientelism, leading to biases, favoritism, and exclusionary practices that undermine their intended impact.

Moreover, the broader policy environment, including fiscal constraints and economic priorities, shapes the feasibility and sustainability of cash transfer programs in Kenya. Political decisions regarding budget allocations, taxation policies, and economic reforms directly affect the availability of resources for social welfare initiatives (McCord & Winder, 2016). Changes in government priorities or shifts in political power can lead to fluctuations in funding levels or changes in program design,

impacting the continuity and effectiveness of cash transfer programs.

Furthermore, political rhetoric and public discourse can influence perceptions of cash transfer programs among Kenyan citizens. Debates surrounding their efficacy, fairness, and necessity can shape public attitudes and support for these initiatives. Politicians may leverage these discussions to advance their agendas, either championing cash transfers as essential tools for poverty reduction or criticizing them as wasteful or ineffective, depending on their political interests.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of cash transfer programs in Kenya is intricately linked to political dynamics and governance structures. While political commitment and leadership can enhance their impact, political interests and power struggles can also pose challenges to their effectiveness and fairness. Addressing these political influences is essential for ensuring that cash transfer programs fulfill their objectives of reducing poverty and promoting inclusive development in Kenya.

#### IV. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study was guided by the two theories; Human capital theory and Vulnerability/risk reduction theory. The study adopted a mixed-method approach where both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analyzed and adopt a descriptive survey design. The study was conducted in Mandera North subcounty with a target population of 1022 consisting of the cash transfer for OVC beneficiaries of CT-OVC in Mandera North subcounty. The study sample size was determined using Slovin's formula which gives 287 study participants. The sample included 2 staff from the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2 staff from the Department of Children Services, and 2 staff in local administration. The rest of the 281 was the household heads of each selected household. Stratified random sampling was used based on the participants categories. The study used both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained through administering a questionnaire to Household heads of CT-OVC beneficiary. This was complemented by the qualitative data collected through key informant interviews with the staff from the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, the Department of Children Services, and the local administration. The study assessed the construct and content validity through expert judgment while internal consistency for reliability was assessed using Cronbach Alpha coefficient with a threshold of 0.70. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 26.0 through descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and regression analysis. Qualitative data was analyzed and presented through thematic analysis.

#### V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of political will on OVC cash transfer programme in Mandera North sub-county. The questionnaire respondents were asked , "How likely are the following political aspects relating to the effectiveness of the orphans and vulnerable children cash transfer

program in Mandera North sub-county?" The responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale between 1- strongly disagree and 5-strongly agree. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Political Will Influence on OVC Cash transfer programme in Mandera North subcounty**

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Bureaucracy	225	1.00	5.00	2.29331	1.00588
Nepotism	225	1.00	5.00	3.76001	1.15928
Corruption	225	1.00	5.00	3.28891	1.18815
Mobilization	225	1.00	5.00	3.03561	1.26723
Political will	225	1.00	5.00	3.07111	1.22995
Inclusion	225	1.00	5.00	2.60891	1.32217
Participation	225	1.00	5.00	2.46671	1.11803
Political settlements	225	1.00	5.00	2.48891	1.25396
Incentives	225	1.00	5.00	2.78671	1.32247

Table 1 shows that 225 responses were made for bureaucracy. The minimum rating is 1, and the maximum is 5. The mean score is 2.29. This shows that, on average, bureaucracy was not perceived as a significant issue, but there is still some presence. A standard deviation of 1.01 indicates that there is a moderate spread of responses.

In nepotism, a minimum entry of 1 and a maximum entry of 5 were made. The mean score is 3.76. Generally, the respondents rated nepotism moderately high. A standard deviation of shows that responses spread out across different points on the scale, though not extremely wide.

In corruption, a mean score of 3.29 suggests that, on average, the respondents perceived corruption to be prevalent in the administration of the cash transfer program for OVCs. A standard variation of 1.19 suggests a moderate spread in the responses.

Related to the two themes, one key informant posted; We try our level best to avoid the issues of nepotism and corruption int the OVC program. When nepotism is present, funds may be distributed to ineligible recipients, diverting resources away from those who truly need them. Favoritism can erode trust in the program among beneficiaries and the broader community, leading to reduced participation and support (KI 03). The findings imply that the issues surrounding corruption may affect cash transfer programmes hence affecting effectiveness. In related to this, cash transfer programs must compete with other social initiatives, tax policies, and infrastructure projects for funding, making their financial sustainability contingent on political decisions (Baird, McKenzie & Özler, 2018).

Still, in Table 1, a minimum of 1(strongly disagree) and a maximum of 5 (strongly agree) were made under mobilization. The mean score for this entry, 3.04, suggests that mobilization efforts were perceived on average as moderate. A standard deviation of 1.27 shows that there is some variability in responses. This is in tandem with existing literature that points to effectiveness of the OVC CT program in Mandera North

subcounty. In South Africa, the intersection of politics and social welfare initiatives, particularly cash transfer programs, is a complex tapestry that significantly influences their effectiveness (Whitley, Collison-Randall, Wright, Darnell, Schultenkorf, Knee & Richards, 2022).

A mean score of 3.07 was made under Political will. This suggests that, on average, respondents perceive a moderate political will for the program. This indicates that while political support exists, it may not be strong. A standard deviation of 1.23 indicates moderate variability in the responses. A minimum entry of 1(strongly disagree) and a maximum of 5(strongly agree). This links to the interview findings where one key informant posited; Political mobilization can indeed be a powerful tool in raisin effectiveness of CT programs. It can lead to significant changes in policy, governance, and social structures. Mobilization efforts can bring attention to important issues that might otherwise be overlooked. By rallying public support, political movements can pressure policymakers to enact changes (KI 04).

The findings also corroborate with the existing literature that opines that the effectiveness of cash transfer programs is profoundly shaped by the intricate interplay of political dynamics, governance structures, and socio-economic realities (Juma, 2023).

The minimum entry on Inclusion is 1(strongly disagree), and a maximum of 5(strongly agree) was made. The mean score of 2.61 indicates that, on average, the respondents rated the inclusion aspect to be below average. It further suggests that many respondents were unsatisfied with including beneficiaries in the program. A standard deviation of 1.32 indicates a moderate spread of responses. This implies that despite effector in place to ensure inclusiveness, it may not be effective. For instance, governments may use communication strategies to garner public support for their policy agenda or justify changes to existing programs, influencing their overall effectiveness (Ducas & Wilner, 2017).

Under participation, a minimum value of 1.00 suggests that some respondents rated participation in the program at the lowest level. A maximum of 5.00 indicates that some individuals rated participation at the highest level. A mean score of 2.47 shows that, on average, the participants perceived participation below average. A standard deviation of 1.12 suggests moderate variability in responses, and most responses were concentrated around the mean.

In the statement Political the lowest rating given by any respondent 1.00. The highest rating is 5.00. A mean score of 2.49. This suggests that, on average, the respondents perceive political settlements has a moderate effect on the program's effectiveness. A standard deviation of 1.25 indicates that there is a moderate level of variability in how the respondents perceived political settlement.

The lowest and highest scores recorded for the incentive variable are 1.00(strongly disagree) and 5.00(strongly agree), respectively. The mean score is 2.79 indicates the average response for the incentives. This suggests that, on average, the respondents neither strongly disagreed nor strongly disagreed with the effectiveness of incentives in the program. A standard deviation of 1.32 suggests moderate variability among the respondents.

The collected data was used to conduct a correlation analysis between Average score in the effectiveness of OVC CT programs and Average score in political will. The results were presented using Table 2.

**Table 2 Correlation Analysis between Average score in the effectiveness of OVC CT programs and Average score in political will**

		Average score in the effectiveness of OVC programs	Average score in political will
Average score in the effectiveness of OVC programs	Pearson Correlation	1	.021
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.758
	N	225	225
Average score in political will	Pearson Correlation	.021	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.758	
	N	225	225

Table 2 shows Pearson correlation (r) of 0.021. This is a weak positive correlation between Average score in the effectiveness of OVC CT programs and Average score in political will. This implies that despite being positive, the association between the two variables is weak. Moreover, there is statistically insignificant correlation between the average score in political will and the average score in the effectiveness of OVC CT programs in the Mandera North sub-county.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that bureaucracy was not perceived as a significant issue, but there is still some presence. The respondents perceived corruption to be prevalent in the administration of the cash transfer program for OVCs. The study showed that the OCV CT managers try their level best to avoid the issues of nepotism and corruption in the OVC program. The issues surrounding corruption may affect cash transfer programmes, hence affecting effectiveness. The study found that on average, respondents perceive a moderate political will for the program. This indicates that while political support exists, it may not be strong. Political mobilization can indeed be a powerful tool in raising effectiveness of CT programs. Many respondents were unsatisfied with including beneficiaries in the program. The respondents perceive political settlements has a moderate effect on the program's effectiveness. There was a weak positive correlation between Average score in the effectiveness of OVC CT programs and Average score in political will.

The study recommends that the State department of social services implement robust anti-corruption policies and transparency mechanisms to ensure that funds are used as intended. For practices, the study recommends that the children's offices implement regular training sessions for administrators and staff on anti-corruption practices and ethical conduct. This can help minimize nepotism and corruption.

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