The Rural–Urban Dichotomy Effects of Social Grants on Sustainable Poverty Alleviation in Polokwane Local Municipality, South Africa

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Abstract
The scope of this contribution was to interrogate the alleged rural–urban dichotomy effects of social grants on sustainable poverty alleviation. One major problem that has marked previous comparative studies in this area is that there is no universally agreed definition of ‘urban’ or ‘rural’. Their inherent contrasts are critical to the applicability and effects of concerted interventions due to the diversity of actors, agendas, underlying intentions and so on. This contribution was anchored in the belief that socio-economic narratives were intrinsically distributed among rural and urban households as well as societies and so, too, were the effects of intervention strategies. The study, by focusing on Polokwane Local Municipality has argued that social grants have dichotomous and differential effects as a strategy for poverty amelioration in rural and urban settings. The paper has engaged on a scholarship synthesis of characteristics and contexts of the rural–urban dichotomy, types of social grants and dimensions of poverty in rural and urban areas. In our conclusion, we consolidated recommendations revolving around the enhancement of the rural–urban effects of social grants so as to optimise sustainable poverty alleviation across space.

Keywords
Social grants, rural, urban, sustainable poverty alleviation, South Africa

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Introduction

A high incidence of poverty in South Africa has aggravated the entrenched complexities in the measurement of the efficacy of public and private intervention action, besides juxtaposing the embedded rural–urban narratives (Maile, 2013; Todaro, 2012). Armstrong, Lekweza and Siebrits (2008), employing the Income and Expenditure Survey of Households 2013/14 (IES, 2014) and the General Household Survey 2014 (GHS, 2014), recorded the common problems experienced by most South African households—inaccessibility to infrastructure services, the burden of high transport costs, limited levels of education and exposure to hunger. Notwithstanding its beleaguered history, the South African social security system was a major post-apartheid initiative committed to adopting a level of state welfarism that alleviated these stark socio-economic ills. The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA, 2016) has accounted for over 16 million individuals receiving one or more non-contributory social grants; this figure reflected a level of poverty in a society that was inherently consumeristic with over a third of its labour force structurally and chronically unemployed (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2015).

However, literature continually documented spatially spread household welfare status quos, income levels and a socio-economic infrastructure and behaviours between rural and urban areas as the legacy of a social policy built on ‘separate development’ (Devereux & Gallarza, 2016). Though these contextual variances underlined the rural–urban contextual and characteristic dichotomies, the evaluation of effects of social grants on sustainable poverty alleviation in South Africa were seemingly superficial and largely aggregated rather than differentiated between rural or urban narratives. While modern ‘rural’ areas across the globe are now experiencing factors traditionally associated with the urban environment and the result is an ‘increased blurring of urban–rural distinctions’, a multidimensional characterisation of a settlement type, based on style and density of housing, predominant commercial and agricultural activities and access to services South Africa, has still vividly demonstrated a rural–urban dichotomy (Matz, Stieb & Brion, 2015). Hence, this study maintains that all social grants have a rural– urban dichotomy effect as a strategy for sustainable poverty alleviation due to the diametric divergence between South African rural and urban contexts and characteristics. The study has argued that by virtue of contrasting contexts and divergent characteristics between rural and urban areas, social grants have a dichotomous effect, and are important to understand as a strategy for poverty amelioration.

The significance of this study was twofold. Theoretically, the study was targeted at substantially contributing to the social grant-sustainable poverty alleviation discourse and literature base. Empirically, the contribution revealed the rural–urban effects of social grants so as to investigate the alleged myth or reality of dichotomous effects on sustainable poverty alleviation. Conceptual and pragmatic narratives and findings revolving around characteristics and contexts of the rural–urban dichotomy, roles and types of the South African social grants, dimensions and dynamics of poverty in rural and urban South Africa, the rural–urban effects of social grants on sustainable poverty amelioration in contemporary
South Africa would be critically engaged. To accomplish this, it was imperative to discuss the research methodology employed for the study.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

As one of the poorest provinces in South Africa, Limpopo’s poverty profile was marked by the following facts: only 24 per cent of its population had a Grade 12 (equivalent to Standard 10) qualification or more; 5.7 per cent had a basic qualification; it had the highest population growth rate (3.9 per cent per annum) in the country and its general socio-economic development was the slowest and weakest as compared to elsewhere (Marais, Nel & Donaldson, 2016; Stats SA, 2013). It was, therefore, not surprising that 60 per cent of the population of the Polokwane Municipality (2,315,499) depended on various types of social grants as the main source of household income: 1,699,494 on Child Support Grant (CSG), 430,368 on the State Old Age Grant (SOAG) and 93,428 on the Disability Grant (DG) (SASSA, 2014). On its part, the Socio-economic Impact Assessment Study of the Integrated Development Planning in the Capricorn District Municipality (2010) and the Household Welfare Survey (2011) documented spatially spread household welfare status quos, income levels and socio-economic behaviours between rural and urban clusters in the Municipality. While these contextual variances underlined the rural–urban dichotomy, evaluations of the effects of social grants on sustainable poverty alleviation in the Polokwane Local Municipality were seemingly superficial and largely aggregated rather than dissected into rural or urban contexts. The study, thus, argued that by virtue of contrasting contexts and divergent characteristics between rural and urban areas, as a strategy for poverty amelioration social grants had dichotomous effects. A comparative appraisal of the effects of the social grant strategy on sustainable poverty alleviation through normative cross-sectional surveys in Seshego township (urban) and Ga-Maja village (rural), both under the Polokwane Local Municipality, would be attempted.

The aim of the study was to investigate the rural–urban dichotomy effects of the social grant strategy on poverty alleviation. Objectives formulated from the aim were as follows:

- To expose the characteristics and contexts of rural–urban dichotomy.
- To establish the roles of the social grant strategy in rural and urban areas.
- To investigate dimensions and dynamics of poverty in rural and urban areas.
- To evaluate the rural–urban dichotomy effects of the social grant strategy on poverty alleviation.
- To recommend measures that could enhance and synchronise rural–urban effects of the social grant strategy on poverty alleviation.

**Research Design and Methodology**

Based on a normative design, the comparative study evaluated: first, several characteristics and contexts of the rural–urban dichotomy; second, the roles of social grants in rural and urban areas; third, the multi-dimensional nature of poverty; and
finally, the rural and urban effects of social grants as a strategy for poverty alleviation. The need to access unfiltered perceptions and appraisals from stakeholders of the social grant programme on the ground prompted a cross-sectional field survey to be undertaken. While both quantitative and qualitative approaches were utilised in the collection and analysis of data, the study was more biased towards the latter so as to cater to a spectre of confounding variables which were at work simultaneously with social grants in society. This approach focused on the challenges around explicitly pin-pointing correlational and causal relationships between cash transfers and poverty alleviation. Ultimately, elicited and appraised data on the effects of social grants on poverty alleviation in Seshego township and Ga-Maja village were juxtaposed so as to affirm or deny the alleged rural–urban dichotomy effects.

A synthesis of conceptual and contextual background of the discourse revolving around the rural–urban dichotomy effects of social grants on sustainable poverty alleviation was supplemented by a comparative empirical qualitative and quantitative analyses of primary data solicited from a rural (Ga-Maja village) and an urban (Seshego township) cluster of the Polokwane Local Municipality. With the study areas purposively sampled (based on rural–urban categorisation by the Polokwane Local Municipality) and the targeted population (Child Support, Disability and Old Age grantees) simple-randomly sampled, the sample neither had a precise representation of the national diversity of rural–urban dichotomies nor an equal representation of social grant types and characteristics. So one limitation of the study was that the findings might not be representative of the entire country, more so because the sample constituted of a total of only 100 grantees between Ga-Maja village and Seshego township combined. Moreover, since the targeted population comprised individuals who were eligible to receive various types of social grants in the Polokwane Local Municipality, the unity of analysis would have been ideally these individuals. However, taking into account that most recipients on the ground were either too young, old or disabled to participate in the study themselves, the study used households to comparatively investigate the effects of social grants on sustainable poverty alleviation. Besides, literature has documented that household structures and income patterns dilute the ideal measurement of per capita effects of social grants on individual grantees’ welfare within households.

**Characteristics and Contexts of the Rural–Urban Dichotomy**

One major problem that has marked rural–urban comparative studies was that there was no universally used definition of ‘urban’ or ‘rural’ (Yusuf, Wood, Ralston & Reddy, 2016). It had since been noted that among 228 countries for which the United Nations had data, about half use administrative definitions of urban (for example, living in the capital city), 51 have used population, size and density, 39 use functional characteristics (economic activity), 22 had no definition of urban and 8 define all (Singapore) or none (Polynesian countries) of their population as ‘urban’ (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015;
In the past, urban and rural environments were clearly different, but modern ‘rural’ areas are now experiencing factors traditionally associated with the urban environment and the result is an ‘increased blurring of urban–rural distinctions’ (Champion & Hugo, 2004). Additionally, patterns of urbanisation vary between regions (Kasarda & Crenshaw, 1991; Matz et al., 2015), resulting in equally varied settlement types and a great deal of heterogeneity among urban areas across the globe and even within countries (Champion & Hugo, 2004). Some alternative measurements are worth noting here: the use of remote sensing to measure urbanicity (Tatem & Hay, 2004); a survey instrument to measure the built environment (Weich et al., 2001); an assessment tool for collecting information on urban neighbourhood characteristics (Caughy, O’Campo & Patterson, 2001); and a multi-dimensional characterisation of settlement type based on style and density of housing, predominant commercial and agricultural activities, and access to services (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2015).

While there was ‘an increased blurring of urban–rural distinctions’ in developed countries (Champion & Hugo, 2004), in most developing countries the characteristics of rural and urban areas are diametrically divergent by virtue of their contrasting contexts (Hall, 2015). These inherent contrasts are critical to the applicability of interventions due to the diversity of actors, agendas, underlying intentions and so on (Ellis & Freeman, 2005). While people in South African rural societies are characterised by socio-economic homogeneity and thus they enjoy communitarianism, people in urban areas belong to different castes, creeds, religions and cultures, thus they do not consistently share the same social status, norms and values. Socio-economic narratives are thereby intrinsically distributed among rural and urban households as well as societies and so are the effects of intervention strategies such as social grants in South African societies (Chowdhury & Mukhopadhaya, 2014; Mitra, 2009).

Inherent capitalism in free market South African urban economies is implicitly manifest in the urban poor being left out of the formal economic activities and/or receiving poverty wages of which a bigger fraction is spent on food, and essential non-food commodities such as education, health and socialising, which often go unfulfilled (Botha & Booysen, 2013). Conversely, with agricultural livelihoods such as crop farming, gardening, gathering and livestock rearing representing the main sources of food within rural households, income often has played a complementary role in rural food security (Alem, 2015). Furthermore, assets possessed by an individual urban household determines its aptitude to enhance economic productivity and the transformation of these assets into income or other basic needs with the street vending and other small entrepreneurial ventures. In rural contexts, big household sizes seem to be regarded as an asset with which wealth can be accumulated either through labour in agricultural activities or lobola (bride price) payments or headcount safety nets (Todaro, 2012). While urban female-headed households are more vulnerable to antagonistic attitudes towards female employment, they have a better chance of accessing and controlling income than their culturally grounded rural counterparts. There also has occurred classical separate migration, where, usually, the male household member of a rural household has migrated to cities in pursuit of employment leaving the female-headed households behind. This eventuality in South Africa has resulted in females making
the decision on expenditures from the remittances received (Todaro, 1969, 2012; Yusuf et al., 2016).

Ardington, Case & Hosegood (2009) and Heller (2013) noted that despite the length of urban residence being a significant factor for urban adaptations, skills transfer and eventual employability, educational levels between the rural and urban poor were identical. The KwaZulu-Natal Income Dynamics Study (KIDS), a longitudinal survey, found that adult members of chronically poor households in rural areas are less educated and have a lower level of literacy than their urban counterparts. But despite that the common problem faced by both the rural and urban poor was their financial illiteracy and misuse of funds—wages, remittances and grants (Aliber, 2014; Ardington, Case & Hosegood 2009). A lot of studies have confirmed that the urban poor are unable to live on their limited earnings and are often forced to take loans from various sources (Reddy & Sokomani, 2008). A study by Bigsten and Shimeles (2011) found that the urban poor had very limited access to formal sources of credit due to their unstable and vulnerable socio-economic status. As a result they mostly relied on credit from informal ‘loan sharks’. The trend of routinely relying on informal loans sharks who charge exorbitant unregulated interest rates was also recorded in South Africa, especially in urban township households (Stats SA, 2015). The Bophelong Survey confirmed the dire socio-economic conditions prevailing for many urbanites in Bophelong township. Many respondents (51 per cent) had incurred debts for furniture, clothes and school fees. Some (14 per cent) had turned to local moneylenders (who charged 50 per cent interest per month) to provide food (10 per cent), services, such as, electricity (5 per cent), schooling (6 per cent) and other (11 per cent). This trend confirmed that while the depth, incidence and severity of poverty in low-income countries was identical between rural and urban areas, the risks, as well as risk-spreading tactics, which characterised the rural and urban poor were not only divergent and dichotomous but contextually parallel.

Roles and Types of the South African Social Grants System

The South African Social Security Agency Act 9 of 2004 declared that ‘everyone has the right to have access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance’ (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). Notwithstanding its beleaguered history, South Africa’s social security system was a significant post-apartheid initiative committed to the country’s constitutional mandate to tackle its very visible socio-economic ills. The first of its two main objectives was to immediately reduce poverty among groups who could not participate fully in the labour market, and therefore formed vulnerable to low-income groups—the elderly, those with disabilities and children. The second objective was to increase investment in health, education and nutrition so as to encourage economic growth and development (Republic of South Africa, 1996). These twin objectives were reflected in the government’s 1997 White Paper on Social Development, which stated that ‘a social security system was essential for healthy economic development, particularly in a
rapidly changing economy, and would contribute actively to the development process. It was important for immediate alleviation of poverty and is a mechanism for active redistribution’ (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Though unique and contextual, the South African Social Security Agency Act resembled many features of the Esping-Andersen Theory of Welfare State Regimes. The similarity with the western model of social protection manifested itself in firstly, in so much that the South African approach too was from a social democratic regime, with higher levels of de-commodification in accessing social resources and characterised by well-funded public welfare benefits and services that were national and financed by taxes (Esping-Andersen, 2013). Today, over 60 per cent of the South African national budget contributes to social security (R127.2 billion) (Nene, 2016). Secondly, the country’s liberal regime was characterised by a reliance on the market showing low levels of de-commodification. The modern South African social security system emerged from, and was still shaped by, the fragmented forms of social protection inherited from the pre-democracy era and by moderate economic transfers, and prioritised individuals with greater and means-tested needs (Arts & Gelissen, 2002; Devereux, 2016; SASSA, 2015a).

Today, the post-apartheid government, just like other welfare states across the world, is increasingly committed to a leading role in ameliorating poverty of its most indigent citizenry through Social Support Grants and Free Basic Services which are informed by the income status (means-test) of households. Literature has said that the post-apartheid discourse about social grants shifted away from the racial parity of the system towards whether the cash transfers were effective as a strategy for poverty alleviation and if they were, do they have constructive effects in rural and urban areas? (Todaro, 2012). Before engaging in any debate revolving around their progress (or lack thereof), it was crucial to explore varying rural–urban roles played by different means-tested grants in South Africa.

The South African social grant programmes were commonly divided into three domains: firstly, the elevation of welfare, consumption and access to basic services (education, health); secondly, potential economic gains such as management of risks, insecurity and facilitating savings and investments; and lastly, empowerment of grantees in a social context. Thus, income redistribution through social grants was perceived as a sign of post-colonial equality and a renewed social compact between state and citizens. The quest to redistribute income was primarily targeted at the most vulnerable and indigent members of society, hence the prioritisation of children, the disabled and the elderly in South Africa (Narsey, 2012). Grants redistributed income between generations, amongst the insured, according to risk and vulnerability and across time—thus smoothing consumption.

**Dimensions and Dynamics of Poverty in Rural and Urban South Africa**

Reddy and Sokomani (2008) have acknowledged that understanding the context, dimensions and dynamics of poverty in rural and urban South Africa was essential
for conceptualising the setting within which state social grants were received and used. In the last decade, multi-dimensional conceptions of poverty had come to the fore, which increasingly viewed poverty as a series of interlinked deprivations. Sen’s work, for instance, posited poverty as the product of a lack of various capacities, both intrinsic and instrumental, which included income, education, health and human and civil rights (Reddy & Sokomani, 2008). Many of the poor were locked in poverty traps, with the cycle of low income, limited assets and opportunities constraining them from making investments (in their health, education and livelihoods) to lift themselves out of poverty. Poverty, however, was not only defined by low incomes, consumption and capabilities—the poor had a heightened susceptibility to risk and the probability of catastrophic decline or death. Poverty was therefore also characterised by insecurity and an acute vulnerability to income variability over time (Baulch & Hoddinott, 2000).

Without overlooking other dimensions of poverty, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA, 2015b, p. 6) ‘puts on the income lenses of poverty’. Be that as it may, poverty has continued to be conventionally, principally and widely defined by and associated with low incomes and consumption, its alleged rural orientation and equivocal methodologies in measuring its chronic or episodic nature. On the one hand, as a basis of measuring poverty in monetary terms, poverty lines have been used as indicators, regardless of arguments that poverty was multi-dimensional and could be non-material (Alkire, Roche & Seth, 2013). Indeed, poverty was not only defined by low incomes, consumption and capabilities—the poor have a heightened susceptibility to risk and the probability of catastrophic decline or death. On the other hand, post-apartheid interventionist efforts were inclined towards the rural poor in former Bantustans (black home-lands) despite recent a inquiry reporting that the incidence, depth and severity of poverty in low-income countries had gradually become identical between rural and urban contexts.

**Rural–Urban Background of the Polowane Local Municipality**

The Polokwane Local Municipality is located in the heart of Limpopo Province within the Capricorn District Municipality. It has hosted the fast-growing capital city of the Limpopo Province (Polokwane city), along the N1 which extends from Pretoria to Zimbabwe. In terms of its physical composition, Polokwane Municipality is 23 per cent urban and 71 per cent rural (SASSA, 2014). Since data about the Polokwane Local Municipality are aggregated in terms of wards, the comparative study juxtaposed precisely Ward 8 of Seshego township (urban) and Ward 3 of Ga-Maja village (rural). These areas are visibly marked by rural–urban dichotomous social, economic and environmental status quos as well as behaviours (Polokwane Municipality, 2010).
Seshego Township (Ward 8)

Seshego township lies 10 km directly northwest of Polokwane CBD although the development of the Seshego complex almost makes the township autonomous and self-sufficient in terms of the provision of most goods and services to the residents. The complex houses banks, retail shops and chemists among other business entities. From the estimated central point of Ward 8, the Seshego complex is at a walking distance of just over a kilometre away. According to the Polokwane Local Municipality, the basic level of services in the township is Category 2 which implies that there is piped water inside dwellings, flush toilets connected to sewage system or ventilated pit latrines, refuse removal at least once a week and houses are connected to the electricity grid. While up to 35 per cent of the Seshego Ward 8 population has completed Grade 12/Standard 10 and the official unemployment rate is in the region of 45 per cent, up to 52 per cent of the residents earn no remuneration income (Polokwane Municipality, 2015). The 2013/14 SASSA Annual Report recorded about 3,500 SOAG, 450 DG and 6,000 CSG recipients in the ward who travel an average of 3 km to pay points (SASSA, 2014).

Ga-Maja Village (Ward 3)

Ga-Maja village is located in a remote area located around 60 km away from Polokwane city with fares for one trip ranging between R30 and R60 depending on whether it is public or private transport. With only 7 per cent residents of the village possessing post-high school qualifications and an expanded unemployment rate in the region of 86 per cent, it was not surprising that only 20 per cent of Ga-Maja Ward 3 lived above the upper-bound poverty line (Polokwane Local Municipality, 2016). The rural dimension of the village was reflected in the poor level of even the most basic services: its water source was either the river or communal taps which were located more than 200 m from most households; poor or no sanitation facilities, wood as the main energy source and long distances to service centres (30 km). Around 5,000, 700 and 11,000 people received the SOAG, DG and the CSG in the ward, respectively (SASSA, 2015b).

Research Findings

The findings of this study were based on primary and secondary data solicited from the rurally located, Ga-Maja village and the more urban, Seshego township, as well as literature, international and national, as well as local discourses and databases. While the study aimed at and adhered to research ethics and tried to ensure validity and reliability in the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, the research findings of this study, though deemed logical and acceptable, were not meant to represent the national canvas of social grants and poverty alleviation in rural and urban areas. Research findings would be presented as theoretical, empirical and synthesised accounts of the set research objectives.

Theoretically, the study sprung from the discourse around whether the rural–urban dichotomy was a gradually fading and blurring phenomenon or whether it
was a reality of permanently fixed and inherently contrasting characteristics and contexts. The thesis statement of the study was anchored on the latter argument. The scholarship synthesis then highlighted a number of positive and negative roles and effects of various cash transfers delivered to impoverished and vulnerable people in welfare states. As commonly outlined in welfare states, the following domains were found:

- Despite arguments about modern rural areas across the globe experiencing factors traditionally associated with the urban environment and the ensuing increased blurring of urban–rural distinctions, a multi-dimensional characterisation of settlement types, based on style and density of housing, predominant commercial and agricultural activities, behaviour and access to services in South Africa clearly demonstrated the rural–urban dichotomy.
- As their ideal common role was designed, grants supported consumption and improved the welfare of recipients and their broader households both in rural and urban areas. However, measuring welfare was obscured by the contextual dichotomies recorded in rural and urban South Africa and beyond. Apart from the hugely generalised and cross-sectional reports by the UNDP, available literature offered meagre data on disaggregated indicators of welfare and consumption such as access to social services like health and education. The paucity of such data in rural areas was compounded by poor infrastructural development and administrative overlaps between traditional leaders and local government while rampant rural–urban migrations exacerbated the plight in urban areas.
- The generation of potential economic benefits, such as improving a recipients’ ability to manage risk and insecurity, facilitate savings and investments and support the development of local markets was documented, equally abstract and unsynchronised between rural and urban areas. Social grants indeed provided an important material basis for recipients and their households to engage in livelihood-supporting activities, such as vending and stokvels (a saving or investment society to which members contribute a fixed amount) as explorations of options of making a living in capitalistic urban areas. With frequent climate change-driven droughts virtually eliminating agrarian livelihoods in rural households, social grants also provided flexibility to mitigate shocks such as unemployment, water and food insecurity.
- Reports indicate welfare dependency with a lower grantees for the SASSA pay roll. This calls for an increase in the monetary value.
- At an aggregate macro-social level, cash transfers had an important political effect in high-inequality and post-repression situations such as those seen in South Africa. The fact that they were an effective redistributive mechanism which moderated social unrest was also documented in most welfare states. Together with other social security programmes like housing Reconstruction Development Programmes (RDPs), there was widespread empirical evidence which demonstrated consensus that social grants had
symbolically served as an important part of the renewed social compact between citizens and the post-apartheid government.

- The empowerment of recipients in a social context allowed people to enter into existing systems of social reciprocity on which the impoverished and vulnerable often depended on for their survival, especially in rural areas. The aptitude for strengthening existing, deeply rooted informal social protection systems and social networks has been associated with rural areas where societies reap more from the prism of socio-economic homogeneity and communitarianism.

- Weighing in three levels of empowerment, competence, subjective and objective, there was more evidence of social grants enhancing objective empowerment in urban than in rural areas. Low educational levels among rural grant-recipients, inter alia, reduced their propensity to transform social security into their own competence and human development. While the rural–urban migration and surging structural and chronic unemployment among the urban population blurred poverty dichotomies, the empowerment of social grants still manifested itself in islands of investments and entrepreneurial ventures.

Practically, grants empowered otherwise marginalised rural–urban household members, such as the elderly and disabled, enabling them to participate in systems of social reciprocity: their control of resources enabled by grants inserted them more firmly into systems of mutual assistance and reciprocity, than they might otherwise have accomplished. Grants, however, constructed more communitarianism in rural contexts where social capital was embedded in a shared culture, facilities and resources. For example, communal taps, rivers, grazing pastures and grant pay points.

Although literature has documented a range of negative effects that can potentially accompany social grants including growing dependency, displacement of private savings and increasing fertility rates, realistically there was little evidence to back these concerns. Beyond confirming the rural–urban dichotomy within the Polokwane Local Municipality, empirically examining the alleged creation of opportunities for patronage and corruption, distorting markets and creating a range of perverse incentives such as disrupting remittances, disincentivising work in Ga-Maja village and Seshego township, there was scant evidence. Rather the study found that on the ground:

- Social grants empowered, especially urban recipients, to leverage and multiply their resources including, their time, energy and innovation in sustaining a livelihood more than their rural counterparts.
- Social grants therefore contributed to and strengthened existing systems of livelihood and productive activity. Grants provided an important material basis for recipients and their households to engage in livelihood-supporting activities. They also introduced a flexibility to capture opportunities as well as mitigate shocks. The cash value of social grants allowed recipients to explore options and even found other ways of making a living.
- The study, however, found that savings and investments were almost non-existent as younger recipients could only access the CSGs which were
meagre while the bigger grants were accessible to less energetic recipients who were not as entrepreneurial as the former.

- Social grants allowed, especially rural communities, to enter into existing systems of social reciprocity on which the impoverished and vulnerable often depended for their survival. Grants, therefore, created and strengthened existing, deeply rooted informal social protection systems and social networks.

- Urban women were more involved in self-employment activities and informal employment than their rural counterparts and urban men. Logically, the slight superiority of women in the demographics could not entirely explain their leading role in remunerative work within households. But perhaps the ratio of households headed by females, the engagement of urban men in formal and informal employment and investments in vending livelihoods, could explain their dominance of women in remunerative livelihoods. While the literature generally associated gendered roles within households with rural patriarchal societies, the notion of tertiary qualifications being attained by only men in both study areas in the survey seemingly countered this perception.

- More balanced decision-making gender ratios in rural areas could be due to migration trends which saw men migrating to urban cores leaving households headed by women who then had the autonomy to decide the how income, including grants and remittances, would be spent. Similarly, the dominant decision making by urban women was not entirely due to an inherent sub-urban independent trait but the dominance of households headed by females.

- The assertion that social grants should be avoided as far as possible unless the recipients were close to death did not hold ground as the empirical survey found that grants were largely well-targeted and received by the deserving poor.

- That the SOAG appeared to be more distributable among the whole household, could be it was a relatively bigger amount or the decency compromised by acknowledging usage of the CSG, Foster Care Grant (FCG) and Dependency Care Grant (DCG) beyond the recipients’ needs.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The research affirmed the positive development effects of social grants and that they were, to a significant extent, economically and socially empowering. Additionally, it also reinforced the case not only for sustaining them but encouraged the thought that social grants programme should be expanded through scaling-up benefits and/or extending eligibility, especially in rural areas, without overlooking the presence of urban poverty.

The study also identified and investigated cases of fungibility of grants both in rural and urban areas. With most unemployed members within grant-receiving households dependent on grant income, measurement of fungibility and/or net
effects on intended individuals was obscured. However, by wearing different lenses, it was possible to discern that the interpretation of the fungible usage of social grants could represent some flexibility and social empowerment without which targeted individuals could not yield social networks and respond to their often-changing circumstances.

The study also identified the need to continue to strive to make social grants accessible and efficient. In the past, the effectiveness of social grants had been underpinned by administrative inefficiencies and unsanctioned eligibility practices. Although many of these negatives had been addressed and contained in post-apartheid South Africa, the on-going challenge remained to make social grants accessible to eligible applicants, especially in rural areas and informal settlements. The purview of the paper acknowledged that understanding the context, dimensions and dynamics of poverty in rural and urban South Africa was preponderant to conceptualising the setting within which state social grants were received and utilised and their disaggregated effects on sustainable poverty alleviation. The study concluded that not only were the effects of social grants dichotomous between rural and urban grantees but were also peculiar to individual households.

References


