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Title

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF E-PAYMENT IN REDUCING CORRUPTION IN THE MTUKULA PAKHOMO PROGRAM AT KASIYA COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Corruption remains a significant challenge in social protection programs across developing countries, including Malawi, where it undermines the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at supporting vulnerable populations. This study assesses the effectiveness of electronic payment (e-payment) systems in reducing corruption within the Mtukula Pakhomo program, an unconditional cash transfer scheme targeting ultra-poor households in Kasiya Community, Lilongwe District. The program, introduced under Malawi's National Social Support Policy, provides financial aid to elderly-headed households, those with disabilities, or chronically ill members to meet basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education.

The research objectives are to evaluate the efficiency of e-payment in service delivery, examine levels of transparency, accountability, security, and reliability, and identify challenges faced by beneficiaries. A descriptive case study design was employed, using a qualitative approach with purposive sampling of six beneficiaries for in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

Findings indicate that e-payments offer advantages over manual cash systems, including enhanced privacy, convenience, and reduced opportunities for bribery and deductions by middlemen. Beneficiaries reported feeling safer with electronic transfers, as funds are received directly via mobile phones, minimizing public exposure and theft risks. However, efficiency is hampered by frequent delays of 4-7 months, unexplained variations in payment amounts, and poor communication from program officials. Transparency and accountability are weak due to lack of clear explanations for payment calculations and absence of accessible grievance mechanisms. Security is generally perceived positively, but reliability suffers from inconsistencies, leading to low trust. Challenges include exploitation by local agents charging unauthorized fees, limited digital literacy among elderly beneficiaries, and inadequate support for issues like lost SIM cards or delayed payments.

The study concludes that while e-payments have reduced some forms of corruption by limiting human intervention and creating digital audit trails, their full potential is unrealized due to infrastructural, communicative, and governance shortcomings. Recommendations include establishing clear complaint channels, eliminating illicit fees, improving beneficiary education on system use, and enhancing oversight to prevent exploitation. These insights contribute to literature on digital governance in social protection, offering practical guidance for policymakers to strengthen programs like Mtukula Pakhomo, ensuring they are transparent, equitable, and effective in alleviating poverty.

Keywords:e-payment, corruption, Mtukula Pakhomo, social protection, Malawi, Kasiya Community

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Introduction

Corruption is still a serious problem in social protection programmes in many developing countries, including Malawi. These programmes are meant to help the poorest and most vulnerable people, but they are often affected by dishonest practices that reduce their effectiveness and make people lose trust in them. Common problems include stealing of money, asking for bribes during payment, favouring relatives or friends when selecting beneficiaries, and changing programme records for personal or political benefit. These practices take away resources meant for the poor and make poverty and inequality worse by leaving out those who truly need support.

In Malawi, the Mtukula Pakhomo programme is one of the most well-known social protection programmes. It was introduced under the National Social Support Policy to provide unconditional cash transfers to very poor households that are unable to support themselves through labour. These households are often headed by elderly people, people living with disabilities, or those who are chronically ill and unable to work regularly (Government of Malawi, 2020). The main aim of the programme is to help vulnerable households meet their basic daily needs. These needs include buying food, accessing health care services, and supporting children's education. By helping households to meet these basic needs, the programme also contributes to improving overall living standards and human development.

Since the programme was introduced, Mtukula Pakhomo has helped to expand social safety nets across the country. It has improved the lives of many beneficiaries by providing regular financial support, which has helped reduce extreme poverty and improve household stability in many communities.

Despite its good intentions and early successes, the programme has still faced problems of corruption and poor management. Reports and assessments have shown cases of mismanagement, loss of funds, and problems in how cash transfers are handled. These problems include situations where local officials ask beneficiaries for bribes, reduce the amount of money beneficiaries are supposed to receive, or deliberately ignore eligible households because of favoritism or political connections (Chibwana, 2021). These unethical practices do not only violate the rights of beneficiaries but also reduce the effectiveness and trustworthiness of the programme. As a result, many people who qualify for support do not receive it, and the programme struggles to fully achieve its goal of reducing poverty.

Many countries have turned to digital solutions, especially electronic payment (e-paying) systems, to improve accountability and transparency in social protection programmes and to deal with long-standing governance problems. These systems allow money to be sent directly to beneficiaries through bank accounts or mobile money platforms. This reduces the need to use

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physical cash and limits contact with middlemen who may be involved in corrupt practices. Evidence from different parts of the world shows that digital payment systems can greatly improve service delivery and help prevent fraud. For example, studies from countries such as Niger, Kenya, and India have shown that e-payment systems reduce opportunities for corruption, shorten payment delays, and improve targeting by ensuring that money reaches the correct beneficiaries safely and in full (Aker et al., 2016).

Many countries have started using digital solutions, especially electronic payment (e-paying) systems, to solve long-standing governance problems. In Malawi, efforts have been made to introduce electronic payment methods in the Mtukula Pakhomo programme and other social cash transfer programmes. However, these systems have not been fully reliable and have been difficult to use in some areas. While some pilot areas have experienced improvements in accountability, faster transactions, and higher beneficiary satisfaction, other areas have faced serious challenges that reduce the effectiveness of the e-payment system. These challenges include poor infrastructure for digital financial services, especially in rural and remote areas, low levels of digital and financial knowledge among beneficiaries, limited access to mobile phones or bank accounts, and weak mobile network coverage (Kadzamira & Mvula, 2022). These mixed results show that introducing technology in low-resource settings is complex and requires solutions that are designed to address local conditions and challenges.

Because of these complex situations, this study looks at how well electronic payments help reduce corruption in the Mtukula Pakhomo program, focusing on the experiences of people in the Kasiya Community, Lilongwe District. The study wants to see how digital payment systems actually work in real life, not just in theory. It will explore whether switching from manual cash payments to electronic transfers has lowered corruption, made beneficiaries happier, improved accuracy in giving help, and made the program more transparent. The study will also look at the opinions of local administrators and other stakeholders, as well as the challenges beneficiaries face when using digital payment systems.

The study aims to provide clear evidence on how electronic payments help promote good governance in social protection programs, and qualitative data. The findings will be useful for policymakers, development partners, and program managers who want to strengthen social safety nets in Malawi and similar places. The study also adds to research on digital governance and ways to fight corruption. Its main goal is to give guidance on how to better plan, run, and monitor social cash transfer programs to make sure they are effective, fair, and trustworthy.

Even after the Mtukula Pakhomo programme started, there have still been reports of corruption. These include illegal deductions from payments, delays in receiving money, and people receiving money who are not real

beneficiaries (Nyirongo, 2023). Because of these problems, many beneficiaries do not trust the old cash payment system, as it can easily be manipulated (World Bank, 2021).

Electronic payment systems send money directly to beneficiaries' accounts, which removes the need for middlemen. For this reason, e-payments are seen as a possible solution to these problems. However, there is little information about how effective e-payments are in reducing corruption in Malawi's social protection programmes. This study addresses this gap by examining whether electronic payments have reduced corruption among Mtukula Pakhomo beneficiaries in Kasiya Community.

The main objective is to find out how effective electronic payments are in reducing corruption among Mtukula Pakhomo beneficiaries in the Kasiya Community. Specific objectives include assessing the efficiency of the e-payment system in service delivery, examining the level of transparency, accountability, security, and reliability, and identifying challenges faced by beneficiaries.

Research questions are: How long does it usually take for the money to reach the beneficiary? Have beneficiaries experienced delays? Have they noticed missing, reduced, or unexpected payments? What are the main challenges faced when using e-payment?

This study adds more knowledge to fighting corruption in social security programs and promoting digital payments. The findings help understand how electronic payments reduce fraud, improve efficiency, and target beneficiaries better, providing recommendations for similar programs.

Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of existing studies and ideas about how electronic payment systems can reduce corruption in social cash transfer programs, with a special focus on Malawi's Mtukula Pakhomo program. It looks at what other researchers have found globally and locally, and how these systems are working in real communities like Kasiya. The chapter also explains important terms and explores both the benefits and challenges of using digital payment methods. Finally, it introduces key theories that help explain why some people accept these systems and why others face problems using them. This review helps to build a strong background for understanding how electronic payments can make cash transfer program more fair, transparent, and effective.

E-paying (Electronic Payment) is a digital transaction system where funds are transferred electronically to beneficiaries' mobile money or bank accounts (GSMA, 2022).

Mtukula Pakhomo is a Malawian social cash transfer program targeting ultra-poor households (Government of Malawi, 2020).

Corruption is the misuse of public power for private gain, including embezzlement, bribery, and fraud (Transparency international, 2023).

Chibwana (2021) found that when the Mtukula Pakhomo program first started, there were many problems caused by corruption. For example, some people were involved in what is called “briefcase banking,” where money was handled unofficially without proper records. There were also cases where beneficiaries received less money than they were supposed to because of unauthorized deductions. These problems showed that the manual way of giving out cash was not safe or reliable, and it allowed people to misuse the system for personal gain.

The Government of Malawi (2022) reported that after introducing biometric-based electronic payments in the Social Cash Transfer Programme, there were fewer cases of “ghost beneficiaries” people who were falsely listed to receive money. This new system also helped improve how the programme was monitored and managed. These changes suggest that corruption, which was a big problem before, has decreased because the electronic system makes it harder for people to cheat or misuse funds.

Nyirongo (2023) pointed out that although the use of electronic payment systems helped to reduce corruption by limiting the need for people to physically handle cash, it also introduced new problems. For example, issues like poor internet connectivity, power outages, and technical system failures sometimes disrupted the payment process. These challenges created new opportunities for dishonest individuals to take advantage of the system. In some cases, delays and errors in digital transactions made it easier for corrupt officials to manipulate payments or ask beneficiaries for extra fees to fix problems. This shows that while digital systems can help improve transparency, they also need strong infrastructure, proper training, and consistent supervision to work effectively and prevent new forms of corruption.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021), the introduction of electronic payment systems brought several important benefits for the people receiving cash transfers. For example, many beneficiaries found the process to be more convenient because they no longer had to travel long distances or wait in long lines to collect their money. The system also offered greater privacy, as people could receive their payments directly into their accounts without others knowing how much they received. In addition, the use of e-payments gave beneficiaries more independence in managing their funds, since they could decide when and how to use their money without pressure or interference. These improvements helped to build trust in the system, with many beneficiaries feeling that it was fairer and more transparent than the old manual method. Overall, the move to e-payments helped to improve how people viewed the social cash transfer programme.

Kadzamira and Mvula (2022) highlighted that many beneficiaries of the social cash transfer programme associated digital payment methods with quicker and more efficient service. Because the money was

delivered electronically, the process became faster compared to the older manual system, which often involved delays and long waiting times. As a result, there were fewer complaints from beneficiaries since they were receiving their payments on time and with less confusion. The researchers also noted that these improvements in service delivery made the payment system appear more transparent and trustworthy in the eyes of the recipients. This suggests that digital payments not only improved efficiency but also helped to build confidence in the program by reducing opportunities for corruption and increasing accountability.

Abrahams (2020) observed that in South Africa, the use of biometric verification systems. Such as fingerprint scanning and facial recognition helped to remove a large number of fake or non-existent recipients from the social grant database. These “ghost recipients” were individuals who were fraudulently registered to receive money, even though they did not actually qualify or even exist. By using biometric technology, the system was able to verify the true identity of each beneficiary, making it much harder for dishonest individuals to steal money from the program. As a result, this technological approach increased the reliability of the system and helped build greater trust among legitimate users, who felt reassured that the money was going to the right people. This example shows how digital innovations can strengthen the fairness and accountability of social protection programs.

The National Statistical Office (NSO, 2022) found that many elderly people receiving social cash transfers in Malawi tend to prefer getting physical cash instead of using digital payment methods. This preference is largely because older recipients often have limited experience with technology, making them less confident in using mobile phones or electronic platforms. As a result, these digital systems can sometimes exclude older beneficiaries from easily accessing their money, creating a risk that they might miss out on important financial support. This finding highlights the need to consider different approaches for vulnerable groups when implementing electronic payment systems to ensure everyone can benefit.

The Reserve Bank of Malawi (2023) reported that some agents involved in the electronic payment systems have been charging illegal fees to the beneficiaries. These extra charges were not supposed to happen and take away some of the money meant to support vulnerable people. Because of these unauthorized fees, the financial benefits that the e-payment system was designed to provide are reduced. This problem undermines the main goal of the program, which is to deliver social cash transfers fairly and efficiently. The report suggests that there is a need for stronger supervision and regulation to protect recipients from such unfair practices and ensure that they receive the full amount they are entitled to.

According to GSMA (2022), one of the major challenges faced by people with low levels of literacy when using electronic payment

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systems is the way these systems are designed. Many digital platforms have complicated user interfaces that are not easy to understand, especially for individuals who are not familiar with technology or who cannot read well. In addition, some systems only use languages that many users do not speak or fully understand, making it even harder for them to navigate the platforms.

These two issues of poor design and language barriers do make it difficult for people in low literacy communities to use digital financial services confidently. As a result, many potential users may avoid the system altogether, leading to lower adoption rates and increased risk of exclusion from important financial support programs.

Batista and Vicente (2020) pointed out that poor mobile infrastructure and frequent network disruptions are major problems that affect the success of electronic payment systems, especially in rural areas such as Kasiya. In these places, mobile network coverage is often unreliable or completely unavailable, which makes it difficult for people to receive digital payments on time. Even when users have mobile phones, they may not be able to access the service because of weak signals or power outages. These technical issues not only delay payments but also create frustration and discourage people from trusting or using the system. This evidence shows that for e-payment programs to be fully effective in remote communities, improvements in infrastructure are necessary to ensure that all beneficiaries can access their money reliably and consistently.

This study draws on three complementary theories to understand the role of e-paying systems in reducing corruption in the Mtukula Pakhomo program in Kasiya is Principal-Agent Theory, technology acceptance model (TAM) and Institutional theory. Together, these frameworks provide a multi-dimensional lens through which to analyze the effectiveness, acceptance, and implementation challenges of electronic payments in social protection.

Principal-Agent Theory, developed by Jensen and Meckling (1976), helps us understand the relationship between those who give instructions or resources called principals and those who carry out tasks on their behalf called agents. In the context of the Mtukula Pakhomo program, the government or donors act as the principals, while local officials or mobile money agents are the agents responsible for delivering cash to beneficiaries.

At times, these agents may misuse their position, especially when there is weak supervision, and when they know more about the system than the principal. This can lead to corruption, such as making unauthorized deductions, delaying payments, or registering fake beneficiaries to steal money.

Principal-Agent Theory helps explain why these problems happen. However, the introduction of electronic payment systems has helped reduce these risks by limiting human involvement, creating digital records that are easy to track, and making the payment process more transparent. In this study, the theory is useful for showing how

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e-payments has changed the level of corruption in cash transfer programs and helped improve fairness and accountability.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), introduced by Davis in 1989, helps explain why people choose to accept or reject a new technology. According to this model, two major factors influence a person's decision to use technology which is Perceived Usefulness, firstly is how much someone believes the technology will help them in their daily life and Perceived Ease of Use, like how easy the technology is to learn and operate. This model is very important when looking at how people in rural communities like Kasiya in Malawi are using electronic payment systems.

By using this theory, the study can also explore how beneficiaries feel about the fairness, reliability, and transparency of the e-payment system. It helps identify problems such as low digital literacy, fear of using technology, and language barriers. All of these challenges can prevent people from fully benefiting from the program. Therefore, TAM gives a helpful foundation for understanding and improving the way digital payments are introduced and used in rural settings.

Another important theory used in this study is Institutional Theory, introduced by Douglass North in 1990. This theory helps us understand how both formal rules like government policies, regulations, and official procedures and informal norms such as community beliefs, traditions, and levels of trust in technology affect the success or failure of new systems such as electronic payment methods.

In rural communities like Kasiya, the effectiveness of digital payment systems is not only about the technology itself. It also depends on the environment in which the technology is introduced. For example, if the area lacks good network coverage or mobile infrastructure, or if people are used to handling cash and do not trust mobile money, it becomes harder for e-paying to work well. Additionally, if local leaders or powerful individuals resist change maybe because they benefit from the old manual cash systems this can block progress. Also, the lack of clear rules or oversight for mobile money agents can lead to problems like extra charges or poor service.

By using Institutional Theory, this study is able to explore how social, cultural, and infrastructural factors influence whether digital payments are accepted and sustained over time. It shows that for e-paying to succeed in places like Kasiya, it's not enough to just introduce the technology the surrounding institutions and community attitudes must also support the change.

This chapter reviews studies about how electronic payment systems help reduce corruption in Malawi's Mtukula Pakhomo social cash transfer program. Before e-payments, there were problems like fake beneficiaries, money theft, and unfair deductions. After switching to digital payments, these issues reduced because the system became more secure and transparent. Beneficiaries found e-payments faster, safer,

and more private, but some challenges still exist like poor internet, dishonest agents, and difficulties for the elderly or less educated to use the system. The chapter also uses three theories which are Principal-Agent Theory, Technology Acceptance Model, and Institutional Theory to explain why e-payments work better when the technology is trusted, easy to use, and supported by good infrastructure and community understanding.

Methodology

This chapter explained in details the procedures and methods that were used to conduct the study on the effectiveness of the electronic payment (e-payment) system in reducing corruption in the Mtukula Pakhomo programme in Kasiya Community, Lilongwe District. The chapter described the research design, research approach, study area, target population, sampling technique, sample size, data collection instrument, pilot study, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. These methods were chosen to ensure that reliable, relevant, and credible information was collected directly from beneficiaries who were using the e-payment system.

The study adopted a descriptive case study design. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to focus on one specific community, Kasiya, and to examine the real-life experiences of beneficiaries within their natural setting. The case study design made it possible to gain an in-depth understanding of how the e-payment system was operating and how it was affecting corruption, service delivery, transparency, and accountability within the Mtukula Pakhomo programme.

A qualitative research approach was used in the study. This approach was suitable because the study aimed to understand beneficiaries' opinions, feelings, experiences, and challenges rather than to measure numerical data. Through qualitative methods, the researcher was able to capture detailed explanations of issues such as delayed payments, unclear payment amounts, exploitation, and communication gaps, which could not be fully explained using quantitative methods alone.

The study was conducted in Kasiya Community, located in Lilongwe District. Kasiya is a rural area where many households depend on social cash transfer programmes such as Mtukula Pakhomo for their survival. The community was selected because it had fully implemented the e-payment system and beneficiaries had sufficient experience using it.

The area also faced challenges such as poor communication, limited access to technology, and governance issues, which made it suitable for examining the effectiveness of electronic payments in reducing corruption at community level.

The target population of the study consisted of Mtukula Pakhomo beneficiaries in Kasiya Community. These individuals were directly receiving social cash transfers through the e-payment system and were therefore best positioned to provide information on how the system functioned. Beneficiaries were able

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to describe issues related to efficiency, transparency, accountability, security, reliability, and challenges faced when receiving payments.

The study used purposive sampling to select participants. This sampling technique was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to deliberately select beneficiaries who had direct experience with the e-payment system. Participants were chosen based on their availability, willingness to participate, and ability to provide relevant information about the programme. Purposive sampling ensured that the data collected was rich, relevant, and directly linked to the study objectives.

The study involved a sample size of six Mtukula Pakhomo beneficiaries. Only six participants took part fully out of 10 participants in the face-to-face interviews, resulting in a 60% participation rate among those selected. Although the sample size was small, it was adequate for a qualitative case study because the focus was on obtaining in-depth information rather than generalizing findings to a larger population. The number of participants allowed the researcher to conduct detailed interviews and carefully analyze individual experiences.

The main data collection instrument used in the study was an interview guide. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that allowed participants to freely express their experiences and opinions regarding the e-payment system. The questions focused on key areas such as efficiency of service delivery, transparency and accountability of payments, security and reliability of the system, and challenges faced by beneficiaries. The use of an interview guide ensured consistency in data collection while allowing flexibility to probe for more information when necessary.

Before conducting the main study, a pilot study was carried out in a nearby community that was also benefiting from the Mtukula Pakhomo programme. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the interview guide, assess the clarity of the questions, and estimate the time required to conduct each interview. Feedback from the pilot study helped the researcher to rephrase unclear questions and improve the flow of the interview guide. This process increased the reliability and validity of the data collection tool.

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with the selected beneficiaries. The interviews were conducted at locations convenient for the participants to ensure comfort and privacy. The researcher explained the purpose of the study before each interview and obtained consent from participants. Interviews allowed the researcher to observe non-verbal cues and ask follow-up questions for clarification, which helped in obtaining detailed and accurate information.

Data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved carefully reading and re-reading interview transcripts to identify recurring patterns and themes. Responses were grouped according to the study objectives, such as efficiency, transparency,

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accountability, security, reliability, and challenges. The themes were then interpreted and discussed in relation to existing literature and the study objectives. This method allowed the researcher to systematically organize and present qualitative findings.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by securely storing the data. Participants were assured that the information they provided would be used strictly for academic purposes. Respect, honesty, and voluntary participation were upheld during the research process.

This chapter described the research methodology used in the study. It explained the research design, setting, target population, sampling technique, sample size, data collection instrument, pilot study, data collection procedure, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations. The methods used ensured that the study effectively assessed the effectiveness of the e-payment system in reducing corruption in the Mtukula Pakhomo programme in Kasiya Community.

Results

study recorded a 60% response rate. Only 6 beneficiaries out of 10 who were purposively selected participated fully in the interview process. Since the study relied on in depth interviews, the participation ensured that detailed experiences, opinions, and challenges of beneficiaries were effectively captured, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Demographic information was collected to provide background context to the participants and to better understand how personal characteristics influence experiences with the e-payment system. The respondents varied by gender and household responsibilities, which offered different views on the Mtukula Pakhomo programme in Kasiya Community.

Gender is important in the research because it helps to understand the different experiences from both males and females on how the e-payment system works. It also allows for better recommendations that benefit all beneficiaries and make the research not bias.

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Male	2	33.3%
Female	4	66.7%
Total	**6**	**100%**

The findings indicate that female respondents formed the majority (40%), while males accounted for 20%. This reflects the design of the Mtukula Pakhomo programme, which largely targets vulnerable households, many of which are female headed.

Respondents explained that the e-payment system in the Mtukula Pakhomo programme uses mobile phones and payment cards to send money to beneficiaries. First, beneficiaries are registered in the programme

and given a payment card. The card is linked to their mobile money account. To receive the money, beneficiaries need access to a mobile phone. When the programme sends the payment, the money is transferred electronically to the beneficiary's mobile account as Chirwa & Kaphale (2020) discuss these issues in their analysis of mobile money use in social protection programmes in Malawi.

As one of the respondent said “They do send the money in our phones through registered then we go and withdraw the money make us to no longer stand in a waiting line like before”

One respondent explained that this system is easier to use than the old cash payment system because money is received privately. Under the old system, beneficiaries had to collect cash at public payment points.

Most respondents confirmed experiencing delays in payment. They explained that these delays were not isolated incidents but a recurring problem. Payments often arrived late, making it difficult for households to plan and cover urgent needs. Beneficiaries further explained that programme officials rarely provided explanations for the delays, leaving them confused and frustrated.

One responded said that: “it takes about 6 to 7 months just for me to receive the money which does not satisfy my basic needs since the money come late nad after a long period of time”

Some beneficiaries were forced to speculate about the reasons behind late payments. These experiences are consistent with findings by Devereux (2016), who observed that administrative blocks, weak coordination, and logistical challenges commonly cause delays in social cash transfer programmes in many African countries.

Respondents indicated that the e-payment system has made receiving money easier compared to the previous manual cash method. The system ensures privacy and reduces pressure from relatives or lenders at public payment points. However, some beneficiaries found it challenging if they did not own a mobile phone, requiring them to borrow one to receive their money. Despite this difficulty, most respondents preferred the e-payment system over the old method of receiving direct cash.

One respondent noted that “explained that receiving money through the e-payment system is easier and more comfortable because it is done privately”.

However, some respondents explained that the system can be challenging for beneficiaries who do not own mobile phones. In such cases, beneficiaries are forced to borrow phones from relatives or trusted individuals in order to receive or confirm their payments. This can sometimes cause delays or inconvenience. Similar challenges related to phone ownership and access have been reported in earlier studies on mobile money use in social cash transferprogrammes in Malawi (Chirwa & Kaphale, 2020).

Respondents generally perceived the e-payment system as more efficient than previous cash-based methods. They highlighted that electronic payments provide greater convenience and reduce quarrels and public pressure.

“Under the manual system, people who had lent beneficiaries money would often wait at payment points and confront them, demanding repayment”. One of the respondents explained that.

Although delays and inconsistencies sometimes undermine efficiency, the system is considered better because it ensures privacy and minimizes stress during payment collection. This view aligns with Hanlon, Barrientos, & Hulme (2010), who reported that electronic payment systems improve privacy and reduce public pressure on beneficiaries compared to manual cash payments.

Respondents showed limited understanding of how the amount of money they receive is determined. Many beneficiaries stated that they were not clearly informed about how payment amounts are calculated. Some respondents explained that the amount they received sometimes changed without any explanation, which caused confusion and dissatisfaction.

Although the programme is reported to consider factors such as household vulnerability and the number of dependents, beneficiaries felt excluded from the decision making process. They reported that they were not informed when changes were made to payment amounts, making it difficult for them to understand why they received more or less money at different times.

One beneficiary stated “I do not clearly understand how the amounts we receive are determined, and payment amounts sometimes change without any proper explanation, creating confusion and dissatisfaction.”

Lack of clarity in payment determination has been identified as a major challenge in social cash transfer programmes. When beneficiaries do not understand how payment amounts are calculated or why they change, it reduces trust in the programme and weakens accountability (Barrientos & Hulme, 2008).

Views on transparency and accountability were mixed among respondents. Some beneficiaries expressed concern after receiving less money than expected, despite being informed of a specific amount in advance. These unexplained reductions raised questions about transparency and accountability within the e-payment system.

One respondent explained “We are not told about many things concerning the Mtukula Pakhomo such that they do not tell us the reason why money is delayed sometimes”

Another respondent explained that beneficiaries are not given a clear breakdown showing how their payment amounts are calculated. As a result, they find it difficult to verify whether the amount received is correct. Similar findings were reported by

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Barrientos and Hulme (2008), who noted that limited information sharing and poor communication with beneficiaries weaken transparency and accountability in social cash transfer programmes.

Many respondents reported that they had experienced changes in payment amounts without receiving any explanation from programme officials. This lack of information made beneficiaries feel uncertain and reduced their trust in the system. Respondents explained that they were not told why amounts changed, whether payments were reduced, or how such issues could be reported or corrected.

One respondent explained “Sometimes they do send me more money and sometime less money and they do not tell me the reason behind which gives me a lot of doubts concerning the system”.

Similar findings were reported by Barrientos and Hulme (2008), who argued that poor communication and lack of beneficiary involvement weaken transparency and accountability in social cash transfer programmes.

In terms of security, most respondents reported feeling safe when using the e-payment system. Beneficiaries explained that electronic transfers protect their privacy because money is received directly through mobile phones rather than at public payment points. This reduces the risk of theft, interference, or unwanted attention during payment collection.

One respondent said that “Electronic transfers protect my privacy, as no one else is able to see and interfere with my money during payment collection”.

These findings suggest that beneficiaries generally perceive the e-payment system as secure, especially when compared to the previous manual cash payment system. Aker et al. (2016) observed that digital payment systems increase beneficiaries' sense of security by allowing them to receive transfers privately and withdraw money at a time of their choosing. Their study noted that reduced physical cash handling lowers the risk of robbery and social pressure, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

Despite feeling secure, many respondents expressed low confidence in the reliability of the e-payment system. Delayed payments and inconsistent payment amounts caused beneficiaries to doubt whether they would receive the correct amount at the right time. Some respondents reported uncertainty about when payments would arrive, which affected their ability to plan household expenses.

"We do not receive enough money and since things are expensive this days" Another respondent said.

These concerns reduced trust in the system, even among beneficiaries who preferred e-payments over cash payments Barca and Chirchir (2016). Note that weak management information systems and technical challenges often reduce confidence in electronic payment systems, particularly when

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grievance and feedback mechanisms are poorly developed.

Respondents identified several challenges when using the e-payment system. One of the major issues highlighted was poor communication. Beneficiaries reported that when problems such as delayed or incorrect payments occurred, they often did not know where to report or whom to contact for assistance. This lack of clear complaint channels created frustration and uncertainty, making it difficult for beneficiaries to resolve issues in a timely manner.

One respondent explained "When problems such as delayed or incorrect payments occur, we often do not know where to report or whom to contact for assistance"These findings are consistent with observations by Barca and Chirchir (2016), who noted that many social cash transfer programmes lack functional complaint mechanisms, leaving beneficiaries unable to resolve payment-related problems effectively.

Respondents reported that the challenges they faced sometimes resulted in missed or delayed payments. Beneficiaries explained that delays often occurred because they could not reach the right officials or because complaint procedures were unclear. As a result, some beneficiaries had to wait longer than expected to receive their funds, which affected their ability to meet household needs.

"Since we lack where to place our complaints, which causes us to just continue waiting for the delayed money and hoping for the day it will arrive" One of the respondents explained.

Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2015) noted that the absence of effective feedback and complaint mechanisms in social protection programmes makes beneficiaries more vulnerable to abuse, errors, and exclusion. They explained that when beneficiaries do not have clear and accessible ways to report problems such as delayed payments, incorrect amounts, or mistreatment by officials, these problems often remain unresolved. As a result, beneficiaries are forced to tolerate unfair treatment or continue waiting for assistance without support.

Many beneficiaries admitted that they were uncertain about the proper channels for reporting problems. Some respondents did not know who to contact when payments were delayed, incorrect, or when they lost a phone or SIM card linked to their e-payment account. This lack of awareness contributed to delays in resolving issues and increased beneficiaries' anxiety about the system.

"I do not know who to contact when an issues come and who to ask" One of the beneficiaries said that.

Andersen (2021) notes that unclear procedures and ineffective communication in digital payment systems can significantly increase user uncertainty, leaving beneficiaries unsure about how to resolve issues such as delayed payments, incorrect amounts, or lost access due to a missing phone or SIM card. This lack of clarity often causes delays in problem resolution,

increases stress among users, and may reduce trust in the e-payment system, ultimately affecting the effectiveness of digital payment programs in delivering timely and secure financial assistance.

Some respondents reported mistreatment and exploitation when trying to resolve payment-related issues. For example, beneficiaries explained that certain local committee members demanded money in exchange for providing assistance, such as replacing broken payment cards. Others reported unexpected fees charged by mobile money agents or service providers, which reduced the actual amount of benefits, received and caused financial strain.

One respondent said: "The committee members do demand money from us when we ask them to get our cards when they are broken."

These practices discouraged beneficiaries from seeking help and weakened trust in local support structures. Similar challenges were reported by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2015), who argued that weak local governance and oversight can create opportunities for corruption within social protection programmes.

Respondents suggested several ways to improve the e-payment system. Key recommendations included establishing clear and accessible complaint channels so beneficiaries know whom to contact when payments are delayed, incorrect, or when problems with phones or SIM cards arise.

One respondent stated, "There should be a number or office I can contact immediately if my payment does not arrive or my SIM card is lost."

Participants also recommended reducing or eliminating unauthorized fees charged by local officials or agents to ensure beneficiaries receive the full intended amount.

"Sometimes I am charged extra fee by agents, and it reduces the money I am supposed to get. This should stop." Another respondent said.

Additionally, respondents spoke about the need for better communication and support from programme staff to assist beneficiaries in resolving issues quickly.

Another participant said, "If the staff could guide us whenever there is a problem, it would save time and stress."

In accordance with the findings of Soma, Wati, and Ispriyahadi (2024), digital payment systems that are difficult to use and lack accessible support channels reduce user satisfaction and trust. Their study, conducted on digital payment users in Indonesia, emphasized that responsive customer service, clear reporting procedures, and user-friendly mechanisms are essential to building trust and improving the effectiveness of e-payment systems. This aligns closely with the respondents' suggestions, showing that establishing clear complaint channels, eliminating unauthorized fees, and improving staff support can make beneficiaries feel

more confident, reduce delays, and ensure that payments reach them securely and reliably.

Discussion

These experiences are consistent with findings by Devereux (2016), who observed that administrative blocks, weak coordination, and logistical challenges commonly cause delays in social cash transfer programmes in many African countries.

Similar challenges related to phone ownership and access have been reported in earlier studies on mobile money use in social cash transfer programmes in Malawi (Chirwa & Kaphale, 2020).

This view aligns with Hanlon, Barrientos, & Hulme (2010), who reported that electronic payment systems improve privacy and reduce public pressure on beneficiaries compared to manual cash payments.

Lack of clarity in payment determination has been identified as a major challenge in social cash transfer programmes. When beneficiaries do not understand how payment amounts are calculated or why they change, it reduces trust in the programme and weakens accountability (Barrientos & Hulme, 2008).

Similar findings were reported by Barrientos and Hulme (2008), who noted that limited information sharing and poor communication with beneficiaries weaken transparency and accountability in social cash transfer programmes.

Similar findings were reported by Barrientos and Hulme (2008), who argued that poor communication and lack of beneficiary involvement weaken transparency and accountability in social cash transfer programmes.

These findings suggest that beneficiaries generally perceive the e-payment system as secure, especially when compared to the previous manual cash payment system. Aker et al. (2016) observed that digital payment systems increase beneficiaries' sense of security by allowing them to receive transfers privately and withdraw money at a time of their choosing. Their study noted that reduced physical cash handling lowers the risk of robbery and social pressure, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

These concerns reduced trust in the system, even among beneficiaries who preferred e-payments over cash payments Barca and Chirchir (2016). Note that weak management information systems and technical challenges often reduce confidence in electronic payment systems, particularly when grievance and feedback mechanisms are poorly developed.

These findings are consistent with observations by Barca and Chirchir (2016), who noted that many social cash transfer programmes lack functional complaint mechanisms, leaving beneficiaries unable to resolve payment-related problems effectively.

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Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2015) noted that the absence of effective feedback and complaint mechanisms in social protection programmes makes beneficiaries more vulnerable to abuse, errors, and exclusion. They explained that when beneficiaries do not have clear and accessible ways to report problems such as delayed payments, incorrect amounts, or mistreatment by officials, these problems often remain unresolved. As a result, beneficiaries are forced to tolerate unfair treatment or continue waiting for assistance without support.

Andersen (2021) notes that unclear procedures and ineffective communication in digital payment systems can significantly increase user uncertainty, leaving beneficiaries unsure about how to resolve issues such as delayed payments, incorrect amounts, or lost access due to a missing phone or SIM card. This lack of clarity often causes delays in problem resolution, increases stress among users, and may reduce trust in the e-payment system, ultimately affecting the effectiveness of digital payment programs in delivering timely and secure financial assistance.

Similar challenges were reported by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2015), who argued that weak local governance and oversight can create opportunities for corruption within social protection programmes.

In accordance with the findings of Soma, Wati, and Ispriyahadi (2024), digital payment systems that are difficult to use and lack accessible support channels reduce user satisfaction and trust. Their study, conducted on digital payment users in Indonesia, emphasized that responsive customer service, clear reporting procedures, and user-friendly mechanisms are essential to building trust and improving the effectiveness of e-payment systems. This aligns closely with the respondents' suggestions, showing that establishing clear complaint channels, eliminating unauthorized fees, and improving staff support can make beneficiaries feel more confident, reduce delays, and ensure that payments reach them securely and reliably.

The results show that while the system offers privacy and convenience, it is affected by long delays, unclear payment calculations, limited transparency, and challenges related to accountability and communication. These findings suggest that although e-payments have potential benefits, significant improvements are required to ensure timely, fair, and reliable service delivery.

Conclusion

This study examined how well the electronic payment (e-payment) system reduces corruption in the Mtukula Pakhomo Programme in Kasiya Community, Lilongwe District. The findings show that e-payments improve privacy and reduce public pressure during payment collection, and they help prevent some forms of corruption seen in the old cash system.

However, e-payments are not fully effective. Beneficiaries reported long delays, unclear explanations of payment amounts, and poor

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communication from officials. These issues create opportunities for exploitation, such as extra charges or unfair treatment. While the system is safer than cash, its reliability is affected by delays and missing payments. The study concludes that e-payments can reduce some corruption, but for full effectiveness, there must be clear communication, strong governance, reliable infrastructure, and proper ways for beneficiaries to report problems.

The study involved six Mtukula Pakhomo beneficiaries in Kasiya Community, Lilongwe District, achieving a 60% response rate. Of these, four (40%) were female and two (20%) were male, representing households of different sizes and responsibilities. All participants had experience using the e-payment system, providing valuable insights into its efficiency, transparency, accountability, security, reliability, and challenges. The demographic profile underscores the importance of gender, household context, and beneficiary experience in understanding the system's effectiveness.

The findings of assessing the efficiency of the e-payment System in service delivery of Mtukula Pakhomo programme at Kasiya Community show that the e-payment system has improved service delivery in some ways but remains inefficient overall. Beneficiaries reported that electronic payments are more convenient and private than the previous manual cash system, as money is received through mobile phones or payment cards, reducing public exposure and pressure from lenders and community members. This made the payment process less stressful and more dignified. However, the efficiency of the system is seriously affected by frequent and prolonged payment delays, with most beneficiaries reporting waiting between four to seven months to receive their money. These delays were often not explained by programme officials, making it difficult for beneficiaries to plan for basic household needs. Therefore, although the e-payment system is perceived as easier and better than the old cash-based method, persistent delays and poor communication greatly reduce its overall efficiency in service delivery.

The findings on transparency, accountability, security, and reliability of the e-payment system in Kasiya Community show mixed results. While most beneficiaries felt that the e-payment system is secure and protects their privacy by reducing public exposure during payment collection, transparency and accountability remained weak. Many respondents did not clearly understand how payment amounts were calculated and reported unexplained changes or reductions in the amounts they received, which created confusion, dissatisfaction, and mistrust. Limited communication from programme officials and lack of beneficiary involvement further weakened transparency and accountability. Although beneficiaries generally felt safe using the system, its reliability was questioned due to frequent payment delays and inconsistent amounts, leading to low confidence in whether correct payments would be received on time. Overall, the e-payment system improved

security and privacy but fell short in ensuring transparency, accountability, and reliability.

The study found that beneficiaries of the Mtukula Pakhomo programme in Kasiya Community face several challenges when using the e-payment system, which limit its effectiveness. Major problems included poor communication from programme officials, as beneficiaries often did not know where or how to report delayed or incorrect payments. There were also no clear or accessible complaint and grievance mechanisms, leaving beneficiaries frustrated and helpless when issues arose. In addition, some respondents reported mistreatment and exploitation by local committee members, including demands for informal payments to replace or fix payment cards or to receive assistance. These unauthorized charges reduced the actual benefits received by beneficiaries and increased their vulnerability, especially among those with low literacy levels. These challenges weakened trust in the e-payment system and reduced its ability to fully protect beneficiaries from corruption and service delivery problems.

To Community Leaders and Local Commit

I recommend that communityleaders should stop committee members from asking for money for help and punish those who do.

I recommend that local committees should set up clear ways for beneficiaries to report problems, and display complaint information openly in the community.

To Beneficiaries

I recommend that beneficiaries should be clearly informed about their rights, payment amounts, payment dates, and how to report problems.

I recommend that beneficiaries should report problems together as a group to reduce fear and make their concerns stronger.

Future studies should look at how well complaint systems work in reducing corruption in social cash transfer programmes.

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