



Community Participation in Targeting Elderly Beneficiaries of Cash Transfer Programmes in Konoin Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: *This study examined the role of community participation in the identification and targeting of elderly beneficiaries under the Older Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT) programme in Konoin Sub-County, Bomet County, Kenya. Guided by Participatory Communication Theory, Principal-Agent Theory, and Empowerment Theory, the study explored how local actors, social knowledge, and inclusive processes shape targeting accuracy, legitimacy, and empowerment outcomes. A descriptive cross-sectional design employing a mixed-methods approach was adopted. Data were collected from 45 elderly beneficiaries and 15 key informants using structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, and analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings reveal that village elders and community committees played a central role in beneficiary identification and verification, with public barazas, household visits, and community referrals serving as key participatory channels. Approximately 75% of respondents reported improved identification of the most vulnerable elderly, 69% indicated reduced exclusion errors, and 80% perceived the targeting process as fair and trustworthy. However, 24% of respondents expressed concerns regarding favoritism or exclusion, particularly affecting socially isolated or less vocal elderly persons. It is evident that while participatory targeting enhances transparency, legitimacy, and social empowerment, its effectiveness depends on the structure, oversight, and inclusivity of participatory mechanisms. The study concludes that community participation is pivotal yet inherently nuanced, requiring deliberate institutional support to ensure equitable outcomes. It recommends strengthening capacity-building for community actors, integrating local knowledge with formal verification systems, and institutionalizing monitoring and accountability in promoting inclusive participation of marginalized elderly groups for effective cash transfer programmes.*

Keywords: *Community participation, Cash transfer programme, Targeting, Elderly beneficiaries, Social protection, Kenya*

How to cite this work (APA):

Sempeyo, S., Oino, P. G. & Chepkirui, A. (2026). Community Participation in Targeting Elderly Beneficiaries of Cash Transfer Programmes in Konoin Sub-County, Kenya. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 10(1), 68 – 80. <https://doi.org/10.59765/hrv63>.

1. Introduction

Social protection has become an essential policy instrument for promoting social justice, reducing poverty,

and enhancing the wellbeing of vulnerable populations across the globe. Among the different forms of social protection, cash transfer programmes have gained prominence due to their ability to provide direct financial support to households, improve food security, and increase

access to education and healthcare services (Barrientos, 2013; World Bank, 2018). Older persons, in particular, represent a socially and economically vulnerable group due to factors such as the absence of formal pension schemes, declining family support, and increased health-related needs in later life (HelpAge International, 2019).

In Kenya, the government has recognized the vulnerability of older adults and implemented the Older Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT) programme, which targets individuals aged 70 years and above who lack stable sources of income. The programme provides regular financial stipends aimed at improving the economic security and wellbeing of the elderly, while also contributing to broader social and developmental outcomes (Republic of Kenya, 2019). A key feature of the OPCT is the incorporation of community participation in the identification and targeting of beneficiaries. Local structures, including chiefs, village elders, and community committees, are tasked with validating and nominating eligible beneficiaries, with the goal of enhancing transparency, fairness, and the legitimacy of the programme.

Despite these mechanisms, several challenges persist in the targeting of beneficiaries. Evidence from Kenya and other sub-Saharan African countries suggests that community-based targeting, while improving local accuracy and acceptance, may also be influenced by local power dynamics, favoritism, and social hierarchies, which can lead to inclusion and exclusion errors (Platteau, 2004; Ellis, Devereux, & White, 2009; Devereux, Sabates-Wheeler, & Guenther, 2015). Moreover, operational challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, irregular disbursements, and limited monitoring compromise the effectiveness of participatory targeting (Mwangi & Were, 2017).

At the local level, Konoin Sub-County in Bomet County presents a unique context for studying community participation in cash transfer targeting. The sub-county is predominantly rural, with subsistence agriculture as the main source of livelihood, limited pension coverage, and widespread socio-economic vulnerability among older adults. These factors make community knowledge and participation critical for accurately identifying the most vulnerable elderly beneficiaries. However, there is limited empirical evidence documenting how these participatory mechanisms function in practice, the perceptions of local stakeholders, and how participation impacts fairness, transparency, and effectiveness in targeting. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the role and effectiveness of community participation in targeting elderly beneficiaries under the OPCT programme in Konoin Sub-County.

2. Literature Review

Cash transfer programmes both conditional and unconditional are widely recognized for enhancing

household welfare, smoothing consumption, and increasing access to essential services among vulnerable populations (Barrientos, 2013; World Bank, 2018). Older persons constitute a particularly vulnerable category due to limited formal employment histories, inadequate pension coverage, and weakening traditional family support systems in an era of demographic ageing (HelpAge International, 2019). Consequently, social pensions and cash transfers to the elderly have been highlighted as vital policy tools to reduce poverty and improve wellbeing in low- and middle-income countries (Lavers & Hickey, 2021).

Despite their potential benefits, cash transfer programmes face persistent targeting challenges. Traditional proxy means tests and administrative eligibility criteria often fail to capture contextual vulnerabilities, resulting in both exclusion and inclusion errors in beneficiary lists (Coady, Grosh, & Hoddinott, 2004). These targeting inaccuracies are particularly pronounced in contexts characterized by informal economies and weak administrative data systems. To address these gaps, community-based targeting has gained traction as a participatory approach that leverages local knowledge and social networks to identify individuals most in need of assistance (Alatas, Banerjee, Hanna, Olken, & Tobias, 2012). Participatory targeting is argued to enhance fairness, transparency, and legitimacy in the identification process, particularly where formal data systems are weak (Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

Empirical studies on community involvement in cash transfer targeting reveal a complex picture. In sub-Saharan Africa, participatory mechanisms have sometimes improved programme outcomes by enhancing accuracy in local vulnerability assessments and strengthening acceptance of beneficiary lists (Ellis, Devereux, & White, 2009). However, participatory processes are often shaped by local power dynamics, social hierarchies, and competing interests, which can lead to elite capture, favoritism, and the exclusion of marginalized groups (Platteau, 2004; Kidd & Wylde, 2011). While community engagement can build programme ownership, it may also reproduce existing inequalities if not well structured or supported (Devereux, Sabates-Wheeler, & Guenther, 2015). Recent studies indicate that social tensions and perceptions of unfairness can arise in participatory targeting where local networks dominate decision-making or marginalize certain groups (Ulriksen, Hansen, & Nygaard, 2019).

In Kenya, the government's social protection framework has expanded to include targeted cash transfer schemes for vulnerable populations, prominently including the Older Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT). Under this programme, eligible older persons (typically aged 70 years and above who are poor and without formal income) receive regular stipends intended to improve their wellbeing and economic

security (Republic of Kenya, 2019). The OPCT incorporates community structures such as local committees, chiefs, and public barazas into the identification and vetting of beneficiaries with the intention of fostering participatory targeting, enhancing transparency, and ensuring inclusion of the most vulnerable (Republic of Kenya, 2019).

Recent literature highlights both positive impacts and persisting limitations of these interventions in Kenya. Several studies confirm that cash transfers significantly improve welfare outcomes, such as food security, household consumption, and access to services among elderly beneficiaries (Omolo, 2010; Sika & Ondieki-Mwaura, 2025). Evidence also indicates that targeting processes that combine community input with administrative mechanisms, such as proxy means tests, can better identify the most vulnerable individuals, particularly in urban informal settlements (Lavers & Hickey, 2021). However, gaps remain in understanding how community participation specifically shapes the identification and targeting processes at the grassroots level. Operational shortcomings such as bureaucratic delays, irregular disbursement, and perceived lack of transparency continue to affect programme credibility and equity (Mwangi & Were, 2017).

At the local level, Konoin Sub-County in Bomet County provides a compelling context for empirical investigation. The sub-county is predominantly rural, with subsistence agriculture as the main livelihood and limited pension coverage for older adults. Such contexts rely heavily on local knowledge and social networks to identify vulnerable individuals for social protection programmes. Despite the formal integration of participatory mechanisms, there is limited empirical evidence documenting how these processes function in practice, how stakeholders perceive them, and how they impact fairness and transparency in targeting elderly beneficiaries. This study therefore seeks to examine the role and effectiveness of community participation in the identification and targeting of elderly beneficiaries under the cash transfer programme in Konoin Sub-County, Kenya.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in three interconnected theoretical perspectives that together explain the dynamics of community participation in the targeting of elderly beneficiaries: Principal-Agent Theory, Participatory Communication Theory, and Empowerment Theory. These frameworks collectively illuminate how governance structures, communication processes, and community agency influence the fairness and effectiveness of social protection targeting mechanisms. The Principal-Agent Theory provides a foundational lens for understanding the

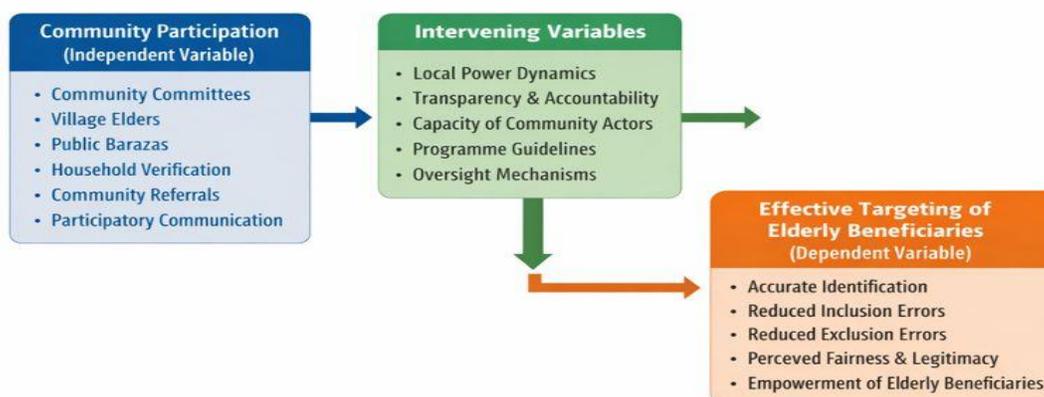
relationship between programme administrators (the principals) and local actors involved in implementation (the agents). Originating in economic and organizational studies (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Eisenhardt, 1989), this theory has been widely applied in public administration and social policy to explain problems arising from information asymmetrical and misaligned incentives. In the context of cash transfer programmes, local officials, chiefs, and community committees act as agents who possess critical local knowledge but may also operate under varied incentives or pressures (Falk et al., 2018). When principals' social protection policymakers and programme managers delegate targeting responsibilities to these local agents without adequate oversight, accountability, or alignment of incentives, errors in beneficiary selection may occur (Baland & Platteau, 1996). Empirical studies have shown that weak monitoring of local agents can lead to elite capture or favoritism in community-level targeting (Platteau, 2004), which can distort programme equity and reduce the effectiveness of social assistance (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). This theoretical perspective underscores why formal delegation of targeting roles to communities must be accompanied by robust accountability mechanisms to mitigate agency problems.

Complementing this governance lens, Participatory Communication Theory emphasizes the role of communication processes in facilitating genuine community involvement in decision-making. Rooted in the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and later expanded by Servaes (1999), participatory communication prioritizes dialogue, mutual understanding, and joint problem-solving rather than one-way information dissemination. Research on participatory development argues that when communication structures allow for community voice and negotiation, targeting processes become more inclusive and responsive to local vulnerability realities (Cornwall, 2008; White, 2015). In African social protection contexts, scholars have noted that participatory forums—such as public barazas or community validation meetings—provide avenues for community members to contest and refine lists of potential beneficiaries, thereby reducing blind spots inherent in technocratic targeting (Devereux et al., 2015; Samson et al., 2021). However, effective participation hinges on power dynamics within communities, levels of information literacy, and the degree to which facilitators encourage equitable dialogue (Gaventa, 2006). Failure to address these dynamics can lead to processes that are participatory in name only, reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than democratizing decision-making (Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

While participatory communication focuses on process, Empowerment Theory shifts attention to the outcomes of participation for individuals and social groups. Empowerment is defined as the process through which

people gain greater control over resources, decisions, and the conditions that shape their lives (Zimmerman, 2000). In social protection research, empowerment has been linked to improved self-esteem, strengthened social networks, and enhanced capacity to claim rights (Narayan, 2002; Alkire et al., 2013). When elderly persons and community members actively engage in targeting processes, they may experience greater agency and sense of ownership over social protection interventions (Mayoux, 2017). Studies in sub-Saharan Africa emphasize that empowering mechanisms such as inclusive decision-making forums and transparent criteria sharing—can reduce social isolation among the elderly and foster community solidarity (Ulriksen et al., 2019). Yet, empowerment is not automatic; it requires supportive structures that enable marginalized voices to be heard and respected (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005). Without intentional design, participation may be symbolic, rewarding already powerful actors while further sidelining women, the socially excluded, and the frail elderly (Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Pérez, 2020).

Together, these theories offer an integrated framework for examining community participation in targeting elderly beneficiaries of cash transfer programmes. The Principal-Agent Theory highlights the governance risks and accountability gaps that can emerge when local actors wield discretionary power. Participatory Communication Theory foregrounds the processes of dialogue and engagement necessary for legitimate and inclusive targeting. Empowerment Theory shifts focus to the transformative potential of participatory targeting how it can enhance agency, visibility, and social inclusion for elderly populations. By situating the study within these theoretical perspectives, the research not only investigates whether community participation occurs, but also how and with what consequences for the equity and effectiveness of cash transfer programme implementation in Konoin Sub-County, Kenya as informed by the conceptual framework below:



Source: (Sheila et al. 2025)

Figure 1: Relationship between community participation and beneficiary targeting

The conceptual framework illustrates how community participation influences the effective targeting of elderly beneficiaries under the Older Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT) programme. Community participation, treated as the independent variable, includes the involvement of community committees, village elders, public barazas, household verification, community referrals, and participatory communication mechanisms. These forms of engagement enable the use of local knowledge and collective decision-making in identifying vulnerable elderly persons. The relationship between community

participation and targeting outcomes is shaped by intervening variables such as local power dynamics, transparency and accountability practices, the capacity of community actors, adherence to programme guidelines, and the presence of oversight mechanisms.

These factors can either enhance or constrain the effectiveness of participatory processes by influencing fairness, inclusivity, and credibility. The dependent variable is the effective targeting of elderly beneficiaries, reflected in accurate identification, reduced inclusion and

exclusion errors, enhanced perceptions of fairness and legitimacy, and empowerment of elderly persons. Overall, the framework demonstrates that while community participation is central to improved targeting, its success depends on supportive institutional and governance conditions that ensure equitable and transparent implementation.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design with a mixed-methods approach to examine community participation in the identification and targeting of elderly beneficiaries under the Older Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT) programme in Konoin Sub-County, Bomet County, Kenya. The target population comprised elderly beneficiaries aged 70 years and above, community leaders, local committee members, and programme administrators involved in beneficiary identification and vetting. Using purposive sampling, a sample size of 45 elderly beneficiaries was selected to capture lived experiences of the targeting process, alongside 15 key informants drawn from local leadership and programme

implementation structures to provide contextual and institutional perspectives. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to elderly beneficiaries, in-depth interview guides for key informants, and focus group discussion guides to elicit collective community insights. Data collection followed ethical approval and informed consent procedures, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for participants' dignity. A pilot study involving 10 respondents from a neighbouring ward was conducted to test the reliability and validity of the instruments, leading to refinement prior to the main study. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis, enabling triangulation and a nuanced understanding of participatory targeting practices, effectiveness, and associated challenges.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Community Participation in Identification and Targeting of Elderly Beneficiaries

Table 1: Community Participation in Identification and Targeting of Elderly Beneficiaries (n = 45)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Community leaders were involved in identifying eligible elderly beneficiaries	21 (46.7%)	17 (37.8%)	3 (6.7%)	3 (6.7%)	1 (2.1%)
Local committees participated in verifying eligibility of beneficiaries	19 (42.2%)	16 (35.6%)	5 (11.1%)	4 (8.9%)	1 (2.2%)
Community meetings were used to discuss beneficiary selection	15 (33.3%)	18 (40.0%)	6 (13.3%)	4 (8.9%)	2 (4.5%)
The targeting process was fair and transparent	14 (31.1%)	17 (37.8%)	6 (13.3%)	5 (11.1%)	3 (6.7%)
Community participation helped identify the most vulnerable elderly	20 (44.4%)	16 (35.6%)	4 (8.9%)	3 (6.7%)	2 (4.4%)
Some deserving elderly persons were left out of the programme	9 (20.0%)	12 (26.7%)	7 (15.6%)	10 (22.2%)	7 (15.5%)

Community participation is crucial for accurate targeting of elderly beneficiaries. Table 1 above presents quantitative responses from beneficiaries regarding their perceptions of participation in the identification and targeting process. The results indicate that a majority of respondents (84.5%) agreed that community leaders and committees were actively involved in identifying and verifying eligible beneficiaries. Community meetings were also used, though to a slightly lesser extent, for discussing selection criteria. Despite these positive perceptions, 20%–22% of respondents expressed concerns that some deserving elderly persons were excluded, highlighting limitations in reach and potential gaps in transparency. These findings align with Principal–Agent Theory, which posits that government (principal) delegates responsibilities to community actors (agents), and effectiveness depends on proper oversight and incentive alignment (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Qualitative interviews provide a deeper understanding of these dynamics. One respondent stated, *“The village elders helped select those who truly had no one to support them. Without their guidance, some of us would have been left out”* (Beneficiary, Konoin Sub-County, 2025). Key informants emphasized the centrality of local knowledge: *“We know our community members well; we ensure that those who are really in need are prioritized, and those who are capable but forgotten are brought to the programme”* (Community Leader, Konoin Sub-County, 2025). These insights corroborate findings by Bonilla et al. (2017), who documented similar processes in Zambia, and by Mohamed (2017) in Wajir, Kenya, highlighting that community involvement improves both fairness and targeting accuracy.

Evidently Many elderly beneficiaries emphasized that community leaders possessed intimate knowledge of household circumstances, vulnerability levels, and social histories that could not easily be captured through formal administrative records. One respondent noted that community leaders “know who lives alone, who is sick, and who has no children to help them,” highlighting the importance of localized social knowledge in identifying genuine need.

These findings align closely with evidence from other Global South contexts. Studies in Zambia and Malawi similarly report that community-based targeting improves the identification of vulnerable populations by drawing on local social networks and shared knowledge (Handa et al., 2018; Bastagli et al., 2016). In Kenya, Mohamed (2017) observed that community leaders and committees played a decisive role in identifying beneficiaries for social protection programmes, particularly in rural and pastoralist settings where formal data systems are weak. The present

study corroborates these findings while extending them to the specific context of elderly beneficiaries in Konoin Sub-County.

From a theoretical perspective, these results are well explained by Participatory Communication Theory, which emphasizes inclusive dialogue, collective deliberation, and locally grounded decision-making. The involvement of community leaders and committees reflects participatory processes through which eligibility criteria are interpreted and applied within culturally familiar settings. For elderly people, many of whom have limited literacy or mobility—such participatory mechanisms provide accessible avenues for engagement that formal bureaucratic processes often fail to offer.

However, the findings also reveal important limitations. While 73.3% of respondents agreed that community meetings were used to discuss beneficiary selection, a notable minority expressed neutrality or disagreement. Qualitative accounts explain this variation. Some elderly persons reported that although meetings were held, not all beneficiaries were able to attend due to illness, frailty, or distance. Others indicated that participation in meetings did not always translate into meaningful influence, as decisions were sometimes perceived to be shaped by a few dominant voices. This suggests that while participatory spaces existed, participation was uneven, echoing critiques in the participatory development literature that formal inclusion does not always guarantee substantive voice (Chambers, 1997).

Perceptions of fairness and transparency further reveal this tension. Although over two-thirds of respondents (68.9%) viewed the targeting process as fair and transparent, nearly one-fifth disagreed, and others remained neutral. Qualitative data illuminates the sources of these concerns. Some respondents felt that personal relationships with leaders influenced selection, while others believed that socially isolated or less vocal elderly persons were overlooked. A key informant acknowledged that local leaders occasionally faced pressure from relatives or community members to include specific individuals, even when eligibility criteria were not fully met. These findings resonate strongly with Principal–Agent Theory, which explains the risks that arise when authority is delegated without adequate oversight. In this context, the government acts as the principal, while community leaders and committees serve as agents responsible for identification and verification. Although agents possess superior local information, their discretion can lead to bias, favoritism, or elite capture if accountability mechanisms are weak. Similar challenges have been documented in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, where community-based targeting improved legitimacy but remained vulnerable to

manipulation in the absence of robust monitoring systems (Hickey & King, 2016; Devereux et al., 2015).

Despite these challenges, the majority of respondents (80.0%) agreed that community participation helped identify the most vulnerable elderly. This finding underscores the value of community engagement in recognizing forms of vulnerability that extend beyond income, such as disability, social isolation, and lack of family support. Qualitative narratives highlighted cases where elderly persons living alone or suffering from chronic illness were included specifically because community members advocated on their behalf. This reflects the principles of Empowerment Theory, which emphasizes collective responsibility and the strengthening of social support systems to protect marginalized groups.

However, the persistence of exclusion errors is evident in responses to the statement that some deserving elderly persons were left out of the programme. Nearly half of the respondents (46.7%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, indicating that community participation, while beneficial, was not sufficient to ensure universal inclusion. Qualitative accounts revealed that elderly persons living in remote areas, those without strong social ties, or those unable to attend meetings, were particularly vulnerable to exclusion. This finding highlights a critical limitation of empowerment-oriented approaches: the most vulnerable are often least able to participate, thereby requiring additional institutional safeguards. Comparable findings have been reported in studies of elderly and disability cash transfers in Kenya and South Africa, where participatory targeting improved overall accuracy but failed to fully capture socially invisible populations (Seekings, 2017; Government of Kenya, 2016). These parallels suggest that

community participation must be complemented by proactive outreach, standardized verification procedures, and effective grievance redress mechanisms.

From the foregoing analysis, community leaders, committees, and participatory forums significantly enhanced contextual accuracy, legitimacy, and responsiveness of the targeting process. At the same time, the findings expose persistent challenges related to fairness, inclusiveness, and accountability. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data demonstrates that community participation is neither inherently equitable nor inherently exclusionary; rather, its outcomes depend on how participatory mechanisms are structured, supported, and monitored. These findings directly address the study’s first specific objective and validate the assumptions of the conceptual framework. They also justify the combined application of Participatory Communication Theory, Principal-Agent Theory, and Empowerment Theory, as no single theoretical lens sufficiently explains both the strengths and weaknesses observed. Ultimately, the results underscore the need for a balanced approach that values community knowledge while strengthening institutional oversight to ensure that the most vulnerable elderly persons are not left behind.

4.2 Primary Actors Involved in Beneficiary Identification

The identification of eligible elderly beneficiaries for the Older Persons Cash Transfer Programme (OPCT) in Konoin Sub-County is mediated through multiple actors at the community level. Table 2 presents the distribution of primary actors involved in beneficiary selection.

Table 2: Primary Actors Involved in Beneficiary Identification (n = 45)

Actor Involved	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Village elders	18	40.0
Community committees	15	33.3
Chiefs / Assistant Chiefs	7	15.6
Community-based organizations	3	6.7
Social welfare officers only	2	4.4
Total	45	100

The results indicate that village elders were the most prominent actors, involved in 40% of beneficiary identification cases. Their high involvement reflects their recognized authority, deep local knowledge, and ability to

assess vulnerability in a culturally informed manner. Community committees were also significantly engaged, representing 33.3% of the actors, highlighting the institutionalization of local participatory structures in

programme governance. Chiefs and assistant chiefs accounted for 15.6%, reflecting the formal role of local government administration in oversight. Community-based organizations (CBOs) and social welfare officers alone had relatively limited involvement (6.7% and 4.4%, respectively), suggesting that the programme relies heavily on traditional and semi-formal community structures rather than exclusively on formal bureaucratic actors.

Interviews with beneficiaries and key informants provided rich contextual understanding. A beneficiary noted: *“The elders know everyone in the village. They helped select the truly needy elderly. Without them, some people would be missed”* (Beneficiary, Konoin Sub-County, 2025). Similarly, a social welfare officer explained: *“We depend on the elders and committee members because they understand local vulnerabilities better than we do. Our role is mainly oversight and verification”* (Social Welfare Officer, Konoin Sub-County, 2025). These narratives emphasize the complementary roles of formal and informal actors, where traditional authority and local knowledge enhance identification accuracy, while government officers provide accountability and adherence to policy guidelines.

The findings resonate strongly with Principal-Agent Theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). The government, as principal, delegates beneficiary selection to local actors (agents) who are better positioned to understand community vulnerabilities. The reliance on village elders and community committees demonstrates the necessity of information symmetry; when agents are embedded within social networks, the risks of misidentification and exclusion are reduced. However, the limited involvement of formal actors highlights potential weaknesses in oversight, which can lead to elite capture or bias if local actors are insufficiently trained or accountable. This aligns with Handa et al. (2018), who argued that community-led identification enhances targeting but requires checks to avoid exclusion or favoritism.

From the Participatory Communication Theory perspective (Servaes, 1999), the engagement of multiple community actors ensures that beneficiary identification is a dialogic process, incorporating local knowledge, feedback, and social norms. Beneficiaries and community members are not passive recipients but active participants, enhancing the legitimacy and acceptability of the programme. Similarly, Empowerment Theory (Kabeer, 2005) underscores that elderly beneficiaries gain indirect agency when local actors

advocate for inclusion on their behalf, particularly in contexts of low literacy and limited mobility.

Within the study’s conceptual framework, the actor-driven identification process directly affects programme accessibility, equity, and social inclusion. The framework posits that actor engagement, local knowledge, and participatory structures mediate the relationship between programme design and outcomes for elderly beneficiaries. High involvement of elders and committees ensures that vulnerability criteria are applied effectively, increasing the likelihood that benefits reach those most in need.

These findings align with both global north and south evidence. In Latin America, studies on Mexico’s Progreso/Oportunidades and Brazil’s Bolsa Familia show that local councils and committees are critical in verifying eligibility and preventing exclusion (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Bastagli et al., 2016). In Africa, Mohamed (2017) found similar patterns in Kenya, where village elders and local committees facilitated OPCT beneficiary identification. Conversely, Handa et al. (2018) cautioned that overreliance on local actors without adequate oversight could inadvertently exclude marginalized individuals, a concern partially reflected in the 20–22% of beneficiaries in this study who felt some deserving elderly were left out.

The data collectively underscore that community actors are central to programme effectiveness, particularly in rural contexts like Konoin Sub-County. Village elders and community committees not only identify beneficiaries but also provide social validation, facilitate trust, and enhance transparency. Chiefs and social welfare officers provide essential policy oversight but are secondary to local actors in practical implementation. These dynamics reflect the interplay of formal and informal institutions in social protection programmes. However, the data also highlights a gap in inclusion, with a minority of eligible elderly still left out, emphasizing the need for capacity building, standardized guidelines, and complementary monitoring mechanisms to strengthen accountability. Integrating qualitative feedback illustrates that participatory processes are meaningful not only for operational efficiency but also for empowering communities, consistent with both Participatory Communication and Empowerment Theories.

4.3 Perceived Effectiveness of Community-Based Targeting

Table 3: Perceived Effectiveness of Community-Based Targeting

Aspect of Targeting	Yes	No
Helped identify poor and vulnerable elderly	34 (75.6%)	11 (24.4%)
Reduced exclusion errors	31 (68.9%)	14 (31.1%)
Improved trust in the programme	36 (80.0%)	9 (20.0%)
Reduced corruption or favoritism	27 (60.0%)	18 (40.0%)

The perceived effectiveness of community-based targeting in the Elderly Cash Transfer Programme in Konoin Sub-County was generally positive, indicating that local participation plays a critical role in enhancing programme management. As Table 4.4 shows, 75.6% of respondents agreed that community involvement helped identify the poorest and vulnerable elderly, demonstrating that participatory approaches leverage local knowledge to ensure inclusivity. Qualitative findings support this observation; for instance, a community leader noted, *“The village elders know the households struggling the most. Their involvement ensures that those who really need the money are included”* (Community Leader, KI-03, 2025). This reflects the principles of Participatory Communication Theory (Servaes, 1999), which emphasizes that local actors’ involvement ensures contextually relevant decision-making and enhances access for marginalized populations. Similarly, Empowerment Theory (Rappaport, 1987) is reflected in the way communities exercise agency over social protection interventions, ensuring that older adults’ voices and needs are represented in programme delivery.

In terms of reducing exclusion errors, 68.9% of respondents reported that the community-based targeting mechanism successfully minimized the omission of eligible elderly beneficiaries, although 31.1% indicated that some deserving individuals were still left out. Qualitative insights suggest that exclusion can result from subtle social dynamics; for example, a female beneficiary explained, *“Sometimes, even when the elders know someone is poor, if they are not vocal in meetings, they may be overlooked”* (Female Beneficiary, 70 years, FGD, 2026). This aligns with findings from Handa et al. (2018) in Zambia, which revealed that while community participation improved targeting accuracy, residual exclusion persisted due to social hierarchies and selective visibility of vulnerable groups. The Principal-Agent Theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) is particularly relevant here, illustrating how information asymmetry between

community actors (agents) and programme authorities (principals) can result in partial inclusion, emphasizing the need for oversight and clear communication to safeguard fairness.

Trust in the programme was notably high, with 80% of respondents perceiving that community involvement enhanced transparency and accountability. Beneficiaries expressed confidence in the process when local committees and elders participated in decision-making, as one male respondent remarked, *“When the community helps choose who gets the money, we trust that it is fair and not just the chief deciding”* (Male Beneficiary, 65 years, FGD, Konoin, 2025). This observation resonates with global evidence from Latin America, where participatory mechanisms in Brazil’s Bolsa Família and Mexico’s Prospera/Oportunidades programmes increased beneficiary trust, compliance, and programme legitimacy (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Bonilla et al., 2017). Trust is a central component in the conceptual framework of this study, where it mediates the relationship between community participation and effective utilization of cash transfer benefits.

Regarding the reduction of corruption or favoritism, 60% of respondents indicated that community-based targeting contributed to fairer allocation of funds, though 40% still perceived occasional bias. Qualitative narratives revealed that elite influence and social hierarchies occasionally affected inclusion: *“Some families are influential, and at times their relatives get preference, even though we try to be fair”* (Community Committee Member, KI-05, 2025). This finding echoes Bastagli et al. (2016), who noted that while local committees improve accountability, they are not fully immune to favoritism without proper training and continuous oversight. Here, Empowerment Theory underscores the role of collective decision-making in promoting accountability, while Principal-Agent Theory highlights the potential for misalignment between

community actors and programme objectives due to unequal power distribution or information asymmetry.

Overall, these findings suggest that community-based targeting significantly contributes to the management and effectiveness of the Elderly Cash Transfer Programme, particularly in identifying vulnerable beneficiaries, enhancing transparency, reducing exclusion, and fostering trust. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data demonstrates that participatory mechanisms operate through multiple pathways: leveraging local knowledge, supporting agency and empowerment, and mediating relationships between beneficiaries and programme authorities. However, gaps remain in fully preventing

exclusion, favoritism, or elite capture, highlighting the importance of capacity-building for community actors and continuous monitoring. These results corroborate global and regional literature, confirming that while participatory targeting enhances programme legitimacy and social outcomes, it requires ongoing oversight and context-sensitive strategies to maximize effectiveness (Handa et al., 2018; Bastagli et al., 2016; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Bonilla et al., 2017).

4.4 Channels Through Which Community Members Participated in Identification and Targeting

Table 4: Channels for community Participation in Identification and Targeting (n = 45)

Mode of Community Participation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Community barazas/public meetings	16	35.6
Household verification visits	12	26.7
Village committee deliberations	9	20.0
Referrals by opinion leaders/elders	6	13.3
Religious or CBO forums	2	4.4
Total	45	100

This table indicates that public forums such as barazas and community meetings were the most common platforms for beneficiary identification. This supports Participatory Communication Theory, which emphasizes dialogic spaces where information flows horizontally rather than top-down. Household verification visits further strengthened targeting accuracy by allowing committees to assess vulnerability within lived contexts. However, the low use of religious and CBO forums suggests

underutilization of trusted community institutions, which could otherwise enhance outreach to isolated or immobile elderly persons.

4.5 Perceived Fairness and Transparency of the Targeting Process

Table 5: Beneficiaries' Perceptions of Fairness in Community-Based Targeting (n = 45)

Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very fair	9	20
Fair	18	40
Not sure	7	16
Unfair	11	24
Total	45	100

Table 5 above presents the perceptions of elderly beneficiaries regarding the fairness of community-based targeting in the Elderly Cash Transfer Programme. The results indicate that 40% of respondents perceived the targeting process as fair, while 20% considered it very fair, giving a combined total of 60% positive perception of fairness. On the other hand, 24% felt the process was unfair, and 16% were unsure, reflecting a notable minority who either experienced or perceived inequities in beneficiary selection.

Qualitative data from focus group discussions and key informant interviews provide deeper insights into these perceptions. One elderly male beneficiary remarked, *“Most people get selected because of their need, but sometimes you hear that some families are favored because they know the leaders”* (FGD, Male, 72 years, Konoin, 2026). Another female beneficiary noted, *“I trust the village elders, but some disputes happen because not everyone understands why some people are included and others are not”* (FGD, Female, 69 years, Konoin, 2026). These qualitative accounts align with the quantitative findings, suggesting that while the majority view the process as legitimate, challenges such as local politics, favoritism, and lack of clear communication influence perceptions of fairness.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings resonate with Participatory Communication Theory (Servaes, 1999), which emphasizes that transparent, inclusive communication processes enhance trust and legitimacy in community-led initiatives. When beneficiaries are adequately informed and involved in decision-making, their perception of fairness improves, reinforcing programme acceptance and engagement. Conversely, Principal-Agent Theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) highlights the potential for misalignment between programme designers (principals) and community actors (agents). If community actors act in self-interest or lack accountability, perceptions of unfairness may arise, as indicated by the 24% of respondents who reported the targeting as unfair.

The findings are corroborated by studies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Handa et al. (2018) observed that community involvement in Zambia’s cash transfer programmes improved transparency and reduced exclusion errors, yet perceptions of favoritism persisted in certain communities due to local social hierarchies. Similarly, Mohamed (2017) in Wajir County, Kenya, reported that while community-based selection enhanced accessibility for vulnerable populations, some older persons still perceived bias, particularly when gender norms and local politics influenced selection. These studies illustrate that fairness in community-led targeting is multifaceted, shaped by both procedural design and socio-cultural dynamics.

Empowerment Theory (Rappaport, 1987) further provides a lens for interpreting these findings. By involving elderly beneficiaries in community meetings, barazas, or verification processes, programmes can enhance agency and voice, which positively affects perceptions of fairness. However, the mixed responses—16% unsure and 24% perceiving unfairness—highlight gaps in empowerment. Some beneficiaries may feel excluded from decision-making, lack clarity on eligibility criteria, or experience barriers to participation due to age, gender, or literacy, limiting their ability to fully engage.

In conclusion, Table 5 findings demonstrate that while community-based targeting is largely perceived as fair by beneficiaries, a significant proportion still experiences or perceives inequities. These findings underscore the importance of structured, transparent processes, robust communication, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that community participation not only functions procedurally but also achieves social legitimacy, trust, and empowerment among elderly beneficiaries. Addressing the challenges of favoritism, unclear eligibility, and limited inclusivity is critical for improving both the operational and perceived fairness of cash transfer programmes.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the role and effectiveness of community participation in the identification and targeting of elderly beneficiaries under the Older Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT) programme in Konoin Sub-County, Bomet County, Kenya. The findings reveal that participatory mechanisms—operationalized through local committees, chiefs, and community forums—are instrumental in enhancing transparency, legitimacy, and the contextual accuracy of beneficiary selection. These structures enable the programme to draw on local knowledge and social networks, which are particularly valuable in rural contexts where formal administrative data are often limited. At the same time, the study highlights that the effectiveness of community participation is contingent on local dynamics and governance structures. Power imbalances, social hierarchies, and personal interests within communities were observed to influence targeting outcomes, sometimes resulting in inclusion or exclusion errors. These findings underscore that while community engagement can foster ownership and accountability, participation alone does not automatically ensure equity. The presence of well-defined roles, oversight mechanisms, and ethical guidance is critical to safeguard fairness and inclusivity in the selection process.

In a broader sense, the study demonstrates that participatory targeting is not merely a technical tool but a socio-political process, embedded within local norms, relationships, and community expectations. When effectively implemented, it strengthens social cohesion, empowers local actors, and enhances the legitimacy of social protection programmes. Conversely, if poorly structured, it risks reinforcing existing inequalities and undermining trust in public interventions. In conclusion, community participation emerges as a pivotal yet nuanced mechanism in social protection targeting. To maximize its potential, programmes such as the OPCT must combine community engagement with rigorous oversight, capacity-building, and transparent criteria, ensuring that participation contributes meaningfully to both equity and effectiveness. These insights offer valuable lessons for policymakers, programme implementers, and researchers seeking to design social protection systems that are not only efficient but also socially responsive and contextually grounded.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness, transparency, and fairness of community participation in the targeting of elderly beneficiaries under cash transfer programmes, particularly the OPCT in Konoin Sub-County.

1. It is recommended that the government and programme implementers strengthen training and capacity-building for local actors involved in targeting. Chiefs, local committee members, and other community representatives should be trained not only on administrative procedures but also on ethical standards, conflict resolution, and inclusive practices. Such capacity-building can reduce biases, mitigate elite capture, and ensure that participatory processes are both transparent and equitable.
2. The study recommends the institutionalization of robust oversight and monitoring mechanisms. While community participation brings local knowledge and legitimacy, it must be complemented by regular supervision and accountability checks from programme administrators. The establishment of independent verification committees or periodic audits could help ensure that beneficiary lists reflect genuine vulnerability rather than social or political influence.
3. The study advocates strengthening the integration of community knowledge with formal targeting criteria. A hybrid approach where local

nominations are cross-checked against proxy means tests or administrative data can enhance the accuracy of targeting while retaining the benefits of community insight. This approach would minimize errors of inclusion and exclusion and improve overall programme efficiency.

4. There is a need to promote inclusive participation, particularly of marginalized groups such as women, the frail elderly, and socially excluded individuals. Strategies could include targeted outreach, sensitization campaigns, and structured platforms where vulnerable voices are heard and considered in decision-making. Ensuring that all segments of the community can participate meaningfully will foster greater legitimacy and trust in the programme.
5. The study recommends continuous research and feedback mechanisms. Periodic evaluations of participatory targeting processes can illuminate emerging challenges, adapt interventions to local contexts, and provide evidence to inform policy refinements. Encouraging a culture of reflective practice and iterative improvement will help social protection programmes evolve in ways that are responsive, fair, and sustainable.

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