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‘Income for the Whole Family’: Exploring the Contribution of Social Grants to Rural Household Income in Ngqushwa Municipality, Eastern Cape Province of South Africa

Priscilla Gutura and Pius Tangwe Tanga

University of Fort Hare, P. Bag X1314, Alice, 5700, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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ABSTRACT This paper explores the contribution of social grants on the household income of beneficiaries staying in rural areas in South Africa. The study used a sample of 541 beneficiaries from Ngqushwa Municipality, who were either administered questionnaires, interviewed or participated in a focus group discussion. The findings reflect that the beneficiaries expected the grant to cover ‘all costs’, which is contrary to the grants’ purpose of contributing towards costs. Social grants were the only and main source of income for most households. Social grants were mainly the sole source of income for most households. With a culture of family ties and reciprocity among participants whereby they stayed in extended families and took care of each other, beneficiaries showed concern on the grants failing to provide enough income to live on, as the grants were too low and had not kept up with inflation. Therefore, the social grant beneficiaries had cultivated a culture of credits as they borrowed money, as the grants were insufficient to meet the basic needs. Nevertheless, survival without social grants seemed impossible for most beneficiaries, and hence they advocated for increase in the monetary value of social grants.