

Analysing the Community Development Worker (CDW) Program's Impact in Linking Citizens to Social Grants on Poverty Alleviation: A Case Study of the Western Cape Province of South Africa

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KEYWORDS Community Development. Participatory Community Development. Alleviation of Poverty. Social Grants

ABSTRACT This research study was conducted in order to investigate the extent to which the CDWP has been effective in linking local communities to social grants, which are provided in an endeavour to alleviate poverty. It made use of a mixed methods approach, with both qualitative and quantitative research methods being employed to conduct a case study in the Eden District Municipality. The research sample comprised 250 respondents to a questionnaire and 31 key informants who participated in in-depth interviews. A participatory community development framework was used to conduct the study, owing to its emphasis on achieving equal opportunities, access and participation and sustainable economic and social change. Although it was found that the CDWP played a significant role in linking citizens to social grants, thereby making a positive contribution towards the alleviation of poverty, it was also found that the politicising of the program, a lack of awareness of the program in some areas and a lack of resources to support the programs all hindered its effectiveness. Consequently, a clear policy framework, the proper alignment of community development services across all sectors and levels, increased financial support and the depoliticising of the program can all be identified as vital components for enabling the CDWP to fulfil its mandate successfully.

INTRODUCTION

During the apartheid era, the South African social welfare system was characterised by cruel imbalances and social injustices, which favoured the white minority over the black majority of the population. Social injustices ranged from racial discrimination, repression and acts of violence against members of the black majority, the suppression of liberation movements, poverty and debilitating inequalities (Apartheid to Democracy 2016). This system was conservative, residual and divisionary in nature, ranking people according to race, with whites being the most privileged race and blacks being the least (Patel and Selipsky 2010). According to Luka and Maistry (2012), the most onerous task for community development in South Africa is to overcome the legacy of colonialism and apartheid,

which was characterised mainly by racially segregated settlement patterns and a grossly unequal distribution of resources. Among the most malign manifestations of the apartheid system were the establishment of tribal homelands and the Bantu Education Act, whose sole intent was to “train and fit” black people for their subservient roles of labourers, workers and servants in the evolving apartheid society (Apartheid to Democracy 2016). This social engineering resulted in vast pockets of economically disadvantaged racial groups living in underdeveloped communities, which, in turn, generated a vast array of socio-economic problems and inequalities for the post-apartheid government to redress.

According to the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), the democratic government has introduced a wide-ranging number of develop-

mentally-oriented pieces of legislation and policies, in a bid to reverse the injustices of the past and to combat the alarming rates of poverty which continue to prevail in South Africa. Despite the steady progress which has been achieved, the contribution of the local government sector continues to be impeded by obstacles, particularly in the rural areas, where service delivery has been reported to be slow (Raga et al. 2012). According to Raga et al. (2012), this unpleasant state of affairs has resulted in the identification of an urgent need for a total overhaul of the service delivery system, in order to deal effectively with the harsh realities which prevail in rural communities at present.

The Community Development Worker Program (CDWP) was initiated as a response to the slow and ineffective pace of service delivery, particularly to rural populations, from the period between 1994 and 2003 (Gerber and Motlhake 2008). In his State of the Nation Address of 2003, former president Thabo Mbeki emphasised the need to give priority to overcoming these lingering social imbalances. He proposed the creation of a public service echelon of multi-skilled community development workers (CDWs), who would be responsible for maintaining direct contact with the people in the areas in which they live. The main objective of the CDWP is to improve the delivery of services to the people, to facilitate community development and to work jointly towards sustainable economic and social upliftment, with one of its focal concerns being the alleviation of poverty through the facilitation of applications for social and indigent grants (DPSA 2003). Consequently, the program plays a crucial role in serving as a link between communities and many government services and programs (SA News 2013). It is also intended to combat poor service delivery through achieving better coordination and integration across departments, agencies and different spheres of government (DPSA 2013).

According to Tanga and Gutura (2013a), the role of social security grants should never be underestimated, as they help communities in a great many ways, through ensuring food security, enabling parents to buy school uniforms and to pay school fees, which, in turn, ensures that children are enrolled in and attend school, increasing the access which people have to credit by increasing their creditworthiness, alleviating poverty in households, and also by raising the

bargaining power of women in households. Accordingly, this study endeavoured to conduct an analysis of the extent to which the CDWP has successfully linked citizens to social security services as one of its main priorities.

Problem Statement

Levels of poverty in South Africa appear to be rising continuously, despite the many policies and pieces of legislation which have been formulated in order to accommodate the multi-faceted nature of poverty in the country, one of which is the CDWP. According to the report of 2013 of Statistics South Africa (2013:2), the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, said "I am so acutely aware that the levels of poverty among vulnerable groups, such as children and women, still remain a major challenge". This acknowledgement does not seem to be at variance with the evidence which has been provided by empirical research. Lehohla (2014) explains that 21.7 percent of South Africans live in extreme poverty, while 37 percent are not able to afford even basic necessities. The rampant service delivery protests provide grimly eloquent testimony to the extent of poverty-stricken and unemployed sections of the population, whose abject circumstances are aggravated still further by poor service delivery. Although the government introduced the CDWP with the express purpose of alleviating poverty, its apparent failure to make any significant impression on the levels of poverty in South Africa raises questions concerning whether or not the program has managed to fulfil its mandate. Consequently, an empirical investigation is needed, in order to determine the effectiveness of the program as a means of combating poverty through the facilitation of social grants to disadvantaged communities, which is the brief of this study.

Social Protection Systems in South Africa

The welfare system in South Africa during the apartheid era was characterised by great disparities in terms of service delivery, which tended to be regulated by racial criteria. The attaining of democracy in 1994 ushered in a new era, which was founded on democratic principles, and introduced a developmental welfare system with equal treatment, in terms of social security, being given to all citizens, irrespective of colour,

race or origin. Triegaardt (2005) explains that there are at least two common forms of social security in South Africa, namely, social assistance and social insurance, and they function as safety nets to protect people from chronic poverty by providing the basic necessities for survival.

Social Assistance

Two types of grants are paid to the elderly in South Africa: the War Veterans Grant (WVG) and the Old Age Grant (OAG). The WVG is paid to veterans of the Second World War (1939-1945) and the Korean War, who must be sixty years of age or over or disabled, in order to satisfy the criteria in terms of Section 11 of the Social Assistance Act of 2004 (Act No. 13 of 2004). This group of beneficiaries is statistically negligible, comprising 171 people, as of May of 2017 (SASSA 2017). Beneficiaries of this grant receive R1 540 per month and their numbers are declining rapidly, as a result of natural attrition (SASSA 2017). The OAG has been central to the efforts of the post-apartheid government to universalise welfare (Lekezwa 2011) and is a means-tested grant, which is payable to people over the age of sixty years who have either South African citizenship or permanent residence in South Africa.

The Foster Care Grant (FCG), a grant which is paid on behalf of children, is paid to foster parents in terms of Section 8 of the Social Assistance Act of 2004 (Act No. 13 of 2004) (SASSA 2013a). According to SASSA (2017), this grant provides financial assistance to families who care for children other than their own, who have been deemed to be in need of financial assistance by the court and the amount paid to recipients, as of May of 2017, is R890.00 per month. Another grant which is paid on behalf of children is the Care Dependency Grant (CDG). It is available for disabled children below the age of 18 years and it can be received by either adults or children who suffer from HIV or AIDS, who require full-time care at home owing to their condition. The amount which is payable to recipients is R1600.00 per month (SASSA 2017b). The Child Support Grant (CSG) is paid to the primary caregivers of children who satisfy the criteria which are laid down in Section 6 of the Social Assistance Act of 2004 (Act No. 13 of 2004) and the CSG has the highest number of recipients. In May of 2017 the national total was 12,084,441

and an amount of R380 per month is paid on behalf of each individual child (SASSA 2017). The grant plays a pivotal role in the alleviation of poverty and assisting families to make up for shortfalls in terms of the material support which impoverished parents are able to give to their children.

Socio-economic Consequences of Social Grants

The fundamental purpose of conferring the right to social assistance is to ensure that people living in poverty are able to have access to a minimum income which is sufficient to meet their basic needs for subsistence (Gutura 2011). Different academic perceptions of the socio-economic consequences of paying social grants in order to alleviate poverty have emerged. According to Lekezwa (2011), social grants play an important role in the alleviation of poverty, as a component of the strategy of the government for social and economic upliftment, alongside its public works programs. For Williams (2007), despite the significant role which is played by the paying of grants in the reduction of poverty, the public, policymakers and academics often view the social protection system with a degree of scepticism. Their chief misgiving tends to concern the question of whether or not the payment of social grants results in recipients becoming dependent upon them and discourages them from making any effort to achieve autonomy and self-sufficiency.

According to Williams (2007), a study has demonstrated the benefits in terms of health and nutrition of social grants for children, providing evidence of a substantial improvement in the weight-for-height and height-for-age ratios of female children living with female pensioners, although the payment of the grants appears to have had little comparable effect on male children and none on the well-being of male pensioners. According to Gutura (2011), citing Tanga (2007) and Siebrits et al. (2008), the South African social security system has successfully reduced poverty, regardless of the methodology which is used to quantify the efficacy of social grants or to identify the poverty line.

However, the social security system has received immense criticism from other academic quarters. According to Goko (2013), the risk which the country now faces concerns its budget deficit, which precludes real increases in the

value of social grants, which, in turn, may imply that the living standards of poor people can be expected to slip in the years ahead. It was predicted that expenditure on social grants in 2014 in South Africa could exceed 1 percent of its GDP, which represents a huge expense by the standards of middle income countries, considering that expenditure in the region as a whole is between 1 and 2 percent of the GDPs of individual countries (Barry 2014). South Africa is becoming one of the largest welfare states in the developing world, with the people living on welfare outnumbering those who are employed. By contrast, in 1994 the working class were three times more numerous than those who derived their livelihoods from the welfare system (Goko 2013).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted a participatory community development approach as its theoretical framework, which is based upon the belief that there is real and intrinsic value in having strong, resilient people, community groups and organisations (Greater Shepparton City Council 2010). The framework envisages community development as taking place within a context which is characterised by social, demographic, technological, economic, environmental, political and other types of changes. It plays an important role in achieving equal opportunities, accessibility and participation in democratic processes and sustainable economic, social and environmental change (Standing Committee for Community Development (SCCD) 2001). The approach starts with people in communities coming together in order to tackle the problems or undesirable phenomena which have been identified and then moves on to support the connections which exist between them by acknowledging the fact that individual people, groups and organisations need to learn from one another and to co-operate if consistent and sustainable change is to be achieved (SCCD 2001). The levels of participation in a participatory community development framework may take various forms, including becoming informed, consultation, shared decision-making processes, acting together and being supported through the phases of development (VSO undated). It should be acknowledged that participation in a framework of this type becomes progressively more difficult to achieve at the higher levels as participation and ownership by stakeholders increase,

and that it is considerably easier to achieve general participation at the lower levels than at the higher levels.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach, which permitted the findings to be triangulated, was adopted in order to conduct the study. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to collect data. The rationale for using a mixed methods approach rests on the premise that the limitations of each individual approach will be compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of the other, thereby allowing a more complete and in-depth understanding and analysis of a complex research problem than would be possible through the adoption of one approach alone (Fouché and Schurink 2011). In this study the quantitative data was gathered from beneficiaries of the program and the qualitative data from key informants, who comprised members of communities, CDWs and government officials who were employed by SASSA.

Research Population and Sample

The target population for the study comprised all of the beneficiaries of the CDWP, the SASSA officers, the CDWs, the community leaders and the co-ordinators of the CDWP in the Eden District Municipality. The research sample for the quantitative study was drawn from beneficiaries of the program in 5 municipalities of the Eden District, with 50 respondents being randomly selected from each, making up a total of 250 respondents. The sample for the qualitative study comprised 10 CDWs from the Eden District Municipality's 5 municipalities, one supervisor of CDWs from each of the 5 municipalities, a single program coordinator, 5 SASSA officers and 10 community leaders from the various local communities in the district.

Sampling Techniques

Both probability sampling and non-probability sampling were used to select the overall research sample. Purposive non-probability sampling was used to select key informants from whom the qualitative data would be obtained. By contrast, probability sampling, which accords each member of a target population an equal likelihood of being selected, was used to select

250 respondents to participate in the quantitative study.

Methods Employed to Collect the Data

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect the qualitative data and a structured questionnaire was used to collect the quantitative data from the beneficiaries of the CDWP. The questionnaires were administered face-to-face to the respondents and the one-on-one, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted through the researcher introducing particular topics and then guiding the ensuing discussions with a specific set of questions from the interview guide.

Presentation and Analysis of the Data

The data from the in-depth interviews was analysed through descriptive analysis, which is methodologically ideal for qualitative research which is informed by a critical theory paradigm. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program was used to analyse the data which was obtained from the beneficiaries of the CDWP, which was then presented in the form of graphs, tables and pie charts, in order to enable an easy interpretation and evaluation of the extent to which the CDWP has contributed to the alleviation of poverty through linking citizens to grants.

RESULTS

Presentation of the Findings Obtained from Beneficiaries of the CDWP

Table 1 shows that 91 percent of the respondents had some knowledge of the CDWP, while 9 percent appeared to be ignorant of it. This finding contributes towards validating the overall findings of the study, as it indicates that the data was gathered from a significant majority of

people who were knowledgeable concerning the program.

Table 1: Awareness of the respondents of the CDWP

<i>Knowledge of the CDWP</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes	228	91
No	22	9
Total	250	100

Table 2 provides a comparative analysis of the gender distribution in the research sample with respect to receiving grants. It was found that women who received grants accounted for 60 percent of the sample, as opposed to 22 percent in the case of men and that a total of 88 percent received grants.

Table 3 shows that a majority of 36 percent of the sample had received assistance in the form of information which they had needed, while only 1 percent had approached representatives of the CDWP for advice. Those who had requested both information and referrals accounted for 10 percent of the sample, while 16 percent indicated that they had not received assistance of any sort.

Table 3: Types of assistance received from the CDWP

<i>Nature of Assistance</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Referrals and Information	25	10
Referrals only	30	12
Nothing	40	16
Not applicable	2	1
Information and Advice	23	9
Information	90	36
Advice	40	16

The findings pertaining to the ways in which grants were spent revealed that most of the recipients had been using the money which they

Table 2: Gender distribution of recipients of grants

<i>Gender</i>	<i>No</i>		<i>Yes</i>		<i>Grand Total</i>	
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	13	5	150	60	163	65
Male	18	7	69	28	87	35
Grand Total	31	12	219	88	250	100

received to buy food to feed their households. A total of 88 percent of the sample indicated that buying food was their chief priority when they spent the money which they received from their social grants, while needs in terms of clothing and healthcare were also cited, while 12 percent of the recipients cited expenditures on transport and 7 percent cited the payment of school fees.

It was found that 66 percent of the recipients of grants in the sample received the CSG, which tends to be received by a broad range of age categories, as it may be received on behalf of both children and grandchildren. It was also found that all of the respondents who fell into the 61 years and older age category received the OAG. Some of these respondents also received the CSG, and, in a very small number of cases, Grant-in-Aid.

As is shown in Table 4, a majority of 46 percent of the beneficiaries rated the handling of social grants by the CDWP as being good, followed by 21 percent who rated it as average, 17 percent as poor and 10 percent rated it as 'best'.

Table 4: Ratings of services pertaining to social grants provided by the CDWP

<i>Social grants service rating</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Best	25	10
Good	115	46
Average	53	21
Poor	42	17
Not applicable	10	4
Nothing	5	2

It was found that 42 percent of the respondents rated the CDWP as having been very helpful in linking them to social grants, followed by 24 percent who rated the services of the CDWP as being average, 20 percent as not having been of much help to them and a small minority of 2 percent who rated the ability of the CDWP to link people to social grants as poor.

Presentation of the Findings Obtained from Members of the Staff of the CDWP, SASSA Officials and Community Leaders

The CDWs maintained that they had been very effective in facilitating applications for social grants, as a result of handling cases which had been reported to government officials by members of communities, by ensuring that cas-

es were followed up with the relevant officials. In the words of one of the CDWs:

"I have handled grant cases where a social worker was playing hide-and-seek with the client without attending to the grant issue for some time, but after my intervention through following up, the case took a short period of time to be resolved."

This finding accords with the objectives of the CDWP, which plays an intermediary role between service providers and beneficiaries.

The effectiveness with which CDWs perform this role can also be seen in the facilitating of social grants by creating strong relationships with stakeholders in the areas in which the CDWP is being implemented. One of the CDWs said:

"We are doing a great job, by inviting SAS-SA, Home Affairs and all other stakeholders for information sessions with the members of communities."

Government departments which are invited to participate are able to interact directly with the communities to which they provide services.

The findings also revealed that all of the CDWs from the 5 selected municipalities acknowledged the need for more CDWs to be employed in order to meet the growing need for their services, as at present they are forced to operate under conditions in which there are serious shortages of manpower, thereby compromising their mandate as foot soldiers.

Perceptions of the Supervisors of the CDWS and the Program Coordinator of the Performance of the CDWP in Linking Citizens to Social Grants

The findings which were obtained from members of the staff of the CDWP who were tasked with coordinating the program indicated that the program has done a great deal to improve the living standards of people who had been languishing in abject poverty. One these participants said:

"It is one of the program's key functions (the facilitating of grants) and a lot of people have been assisted, especially in cases in which SAS-SA could not."

The continuous availability of CDWs in communities has enabled the program to make a very significant contribution, as SASSA officials visit communities only occasionally, in the

course of their door-to-door visits. The program coordinator also identified problems which served to impede the ability of the program to fulfil its mandate. Among these is a shortage of CDWs, which has extremely negative implications for the effectiveness of the CDWP in the alleviation of poverty, as some areas of communities are not being reached.

SASSA officials play a crucial role in ensuring that socially disadvantaged citizens benefit from the support which is provided by government-sponsored grants. However, the support which is provided by other players, such as the CDWP, is of equally great importance in the overall endeavour to alleviate poverty. One of the SASSA officials said, with respect to the CDWs:

"They are doing a good job, because we consult them when we make our door-to-door visits."

The findings show that the CDWP is generally perceived to be a relevant and helpful program in the linking of people to social grants. However, the community leaders also maintained that there was a need for more awareness of the services which are provided by the CDWP, as they felt that many people had little knowledge of the program. They suggested that community outreach programs would help to overcome the lack of awareness which tends to be prevalent in some areas at present.

DISCUSSION

The findings, in relation to the perceptions of beneficiaries, of the ability of the CDWP to facilitate the linking of citizens to social grants suggest that it could be concluded that the CDWP has been successful, to a large extent, in providing services in accordance with its mandate. Most of the respondents in the sample were recipients of social grants, with the CSG being the most commonly received grant. The CSG is South Africa's largest social cash transfer program in terms of the number of beneficiaries who receive it, and it is one of South Africa's most successful social protection interventions (Tanga and Gutura 2013b). In total, 66 percent of the respondents acknowledged the help which had been provided to them by the CDWP, with 42 percent rating the program as being very helpful and 24 percent as average. This finding accords with the assertion of Rossouw (2017) that social grants play a pivotal role in the lives

of many people, as they support 33 percent of South Africans.

The dissatisfied portion of 17 percent of the sample, who rated the services as being poor, could suggest either that the service delivery of grant-related services could be improved in certain instances, or that, in the case of the minority of dissatisfied beneficiaries, the problems which they had encountered had been precipitated by factors which had been beyond the control of the CDWs. In cases of this sort, appropriate referrals could be made.

The general consensus among the respondents in the sample was that the program has been very effective in ensuring the facilitating of social grants to beneficiaries. The roles which the CDWP has played have ranged from assisting clients with relevant information concerning grants, the cancellation of air time deductions from grants and the referral of clients to SASSA and other relevant stakeholders. As it was also found that most of the beneficiaries among the respondents had positive perceptions concerning being linked to social grants by the CDWP, it could be suggested the information sessions could have contributed a great deal to these perceptions. This role of the CDWP accords with the first level of the participatory developmental framework, in which communities are informed of the services which are available to them, through community meetings and the distribution of pamphlets, brochures and posters.

The ability of CDWs to bring communities together for information sessions plays an important role in making information accessible, which is one of the cornerstones of the mission of the CDWP and accords well with the aim of the participatory community developmental theoretical framework to promote the involvement of communities in matters pertaining to community development which concern them. Increased levels of involvement on the part of communities play an important part in the achieving of equal opportunities, having access to and participating in democratic processes and sustainable economic development (SCCD 2001).

It was strongly expressed by several of the interviewees that an equal representation of CDWs in all of the municipal wards in which they are working could significantly improve the performance of the CDWP. It emerged that there are many trained CDWs who are unemployed at present, despite the shortages of staff. These

findings present a gloomy picture for the future success of the program and could, to a great extent, preclude the implementation of the participatory community developmental approach, which gives each and every individual member of the communities concerned an equal opportunity to participate in the development process.

Political interference in the implementation of the CDWP was also deemed to be cause for great concern, as it was learned during the conducting of the study that, in many cases, local municipal councillors did not give the CDWs their full cooperation, as they felt threatened by their presence in the communities in which they were working. This tendency, in all probability, stems largely from the dominance of the main opposition party in the province, which perceives the program as a strategy for regaining influence by the ruling party, which is playing second fiddle in the political landscape of the province at present.

The findings of the study, concerning the uses to which money which is received the form of social grants is put, revealed that most of the respondents used their grants to buy food for their entire households, to buy clothing, to meet healthcare needs, to pay for transport and to pay school fees. This finding accords with that of Tanga and Gutura (2013b), concerning the uses to which social grants are put in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Their findings also revealed that the recipients of social grants spent much of the money on supporting the members of their households, which confirms the value of the services pertaining to social grants which are provided by the CDWP to households which are disadvantaged socially, economically and politically.

CONCLUSION

According to the Social Assistance Act of 2004, all South African citizens have the right to social security, a right which is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996). This provision includes all cases in which people are unable to support themselves or their dependants, and it obliges the state to take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources to honour each of the rights pertaining to social security. In accordance with the undertaking which the post-apartheid government has made on

behalf of all of the people of South Africa, the main thrust of the CDWP has concerned acting as a conduit for linking citizens to social grants, in an overall strategy for the alleviation of poverty.

The findings of the study demonstrate that the CDWP has been effective in ensuring the linking of citizens to social grants. It was found that most of the respondents were aware of the existence of the CDWP and had received assistance, which in most cases had been in the form of information and referrals to government departments. It emerged that a very significant majority of 88 percent of the respondents were receiving grants, either for themselves or else on behalf of members of their households.

Consequently, it may be concluded that the CDWP has played a significant role in linking citizens to social security grants in the interests of alleviating poverty, which was confirmed by the SASSA officials, the leaders of local communities and the beneficiaries themselves. However, there remains a need to evaluate the overall effectiveness of social grants as a means of sustainably liberating people from absolute poverty, particularly in the light of the fact that the amounts which are received suffice to keep people at the level of basic subsistence only. The ultimate conclusion which may be drawn is that although social security grants are of great value for disadvantaged households as a means of providing relief from poverty, more far-reaching strategies are required to overcome poverty in a comprehensive manner, through a transformative process which enables communities to make the transition from dependence upon grants to becoming self-supporting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a great need to de-politicise the services which are provided by the CDWP, through collaborative community outreach programs with representatives from across the political spectrum. As both local municipal councillors and the CDWs are stakeholders in community development, high levels of cooperation would be of great benefit to entire communities. The promoting of alliances among stakeholders would also help to ensure that government departments become familiar with the CDWP, the services which it provides and its personnel, which would also contribute significantly towards promoting interdepartmental planning.

There is also a great need for the significantly increased implementation of programs, within both the ambit of the CDWP and in the country as a whole, which enable the members of disadvantaged communities to develop skills which enable them to find employment, in order to move away from a culture of dependence upon grants. It is also apparent from the findings that there is a very great need for increased financial support and the employment of more CDWs, in order to meet the demand for the services which are provided by the CDWP.

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Paper received for publication on May 2016
Paper accepted for publication on December 2016