

Influence Of The Hunger Safety Net Programme On Socio-Economic Well-Being Of Vulnerable Groups During The Covid-19 Pandemic In Loima Sub County, Turkana County, Kenya

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Abstract- Initiated in 2009, Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Program (HSNP) serves as a crucial source of unconditional income support for vulnerable households during severe droughts. Despite the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the HSNP persevered unchanged, even as the pandemic wreaked havoc on Kenya's economy, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups. The National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) reported a 90% surge in urgent assistance needs from August 2020 to February 2021, with Turkana County facing substantial challenges. This study examines the HSNP's resilience during the pandemic and its potential impact on the 7117 registered households. The lack of adaptation in payment cycles, household cash value, and targeted beneficiaries poses a considerable risk of exacerbating poverty and food insecurity. The scarcity of research on the HSNP's effectiveness during the pandemic emphasizes the urgency of addressing this knowledge gap. The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the HSNP's effectiveness in enhancing the economic and social well-being of vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study pursues three specific objectives: assessing the HSNP's impact on food security, health outcomes, and education of vulnerable households during the pandemic. Utilizing Social Capital Theory and Human Capital Theory as theoretical frameworks, the study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The chosen research design, a descriptive survey design, offers a comprehensive understanding of the population under study. The focus is on primary beneficiaries in Loima sub-county, with 308 out of 372 distributed questionnaires returned, validating the survey design's effectiveness. Data collection involved semi-structured questionnaires and interviews with HSNP beneficiaries. Quantitative data underwent SPSS analysis, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Findings on food security, healthcare, and education reveal a diverse range of respondent perceptions within the HSNP context during the pandemic. Positive views on food availability, accessibility, and utilization coexist with skepticism and contrasting opinions. The study highlights the positive impact of HSNP on healthcare, with beneficiaries reporting funds' use for medical expenses. Social well-being improvements are attributed to social interactions and support facilitated by HSNP. Regarding education, positive effects on enrollment, attendance, and completion rates are evident. Recommendations to strengthen the HSNP include program flexibility, expanded coverage, digital payment solutions, and sustainable partnerships. For food security, proposed measures include enhanced program communication, targeted interventions, and sustainable food practices. In the education sector, recommendations focus on increased parental engagement, addressing technological barriers, and fostering collaborations.

Index Terms- Hunger Safety Net Program, Vulnerable households, COVID-19 pandemic resilience, Socio-economic outcomes

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite global abundance, poverty persists as a pressing issue, impacting 2.2 billion people, with 21,000 deaths daily attributed to hunger and malnutrition-related illnesses (UNDP, 2018). Children, particularly affected by poverty, face heightened vulnerability (UNDP, 2018). Adding to the challenge is the absence of social protection for 80% of the global population, hindering their ability to build resilience and manage vulnerabilities (UNDP, 2018).

Social cash transfer programs have emerged as a potential solution to poverty and inequality in developing nations, offering income or consumption assistance to low-income individuals (UNDP, 2018). Aligned with global development goals, these programs, such as Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, aim to reduce extreme poverty globally, benefiting over

750 million individuals by 2010 (UNDP, 2018). Scholars recognize social cash transfers as promising strategies for economic inclusion, especially for vulnerable groups.

According to Beegle, Coudouel, and Monsalve (2018), social cash transfers provide a lasting income source, enabling households to manage expenses, accumulate assets, and enhance decision-making within the family. Social protection, a crucial tool against poverty and inequality, includes social transfer programs that have contributed to global development goals, particularly in education and health. Cash transfer programs, with roots dating back to 20th-century Europe, have become global phenomena, positively impacting health, nutrition, and education in countries like Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and others (Garcia & Moore, 2008). Social safety nets, supported by the United Nations, align with human rights principles and are increasingly popular worldwide, especially in Latin America, Central Europe, Africa, and Asia (World Bank, 2017). In the global south, social cash transfer programs have driven reforms in financial inclusivity, digital innovation, leadership empowerment, and social protection systems (UN). The African Union advocates for policy frameworks to expand social protection commitments (World Bank, 2017).

In the Americas, the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Chile have implemented impactful social cash transfer programs, addressing poverty, providing financial assistance, and enhancing social welfare. In Europe, the UK's Universal Credit, Spain's Ingreso Mínimo Vital, and Portugal's Complemento Solidário para Idosos are notable examples. Asian countries like Thailand, China, and India have implemented conditional cash transfer programs for education, minimum livelihood guarantee, and financial inclusion, respectively. In Africa, Ghana's LEAP program and Ethiopia's PSNP target vulnerable populations, offering cash transfers for improved livelihoods.

Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP), initiated in 2009, provides unconditional cash transfers bi-monthly to extremely poor and vulnerable households, aiming to meet basic needs and enhance resilience to shocks. While the HSNP has garnered significant investment, information on its implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic is limited, raising questions about its effectiveness. This study seeks to evaluate the HSNP's impact on economic and social welfare in Loima sub-county, Turkana County, Kenya, during the pandemic.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly strained the Kenyan economy, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups. Turkana County witnessed a 90% surge in urgent assistance needs between August 2020 and February 2021, as reported by the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA). Despite the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) being specifically designed to provide regular and emergency cash transfers to vulnerable populations, its implementation remained unchanged during the pandemic. This lack of adaptability, spanning payment cycles, household cash value, and targeted beneficiaries, raises concerns about exacerbating poverty and food insecurity among the 7117 households registered under the HSNP in Loima sub-county, Turkana County.

The scant research on the HSNP program's efficacy during the COVID-19 pandemic in this specific locale highlights a critical knowledge gap that requires immediate attention. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of the HSNP program on the economic and social well-being of vulnerable groups in Loima sub-county, Turkana County, Kenya, during the pandemic. By evaluating the program's effectiveness in mitigating the adverse effects of the pandemic on vulnerable households, this research aims to offer valuable insights.

The study will specifically investigate the program's influence on the financial situation, food security, health outcomes, education, and social protection of its beneficiaries. The findings will not only contribute essential knowledge to fill the existing gap but will also provide policymakers, development partners, and stakeholders with crucial information to enhance the HSNP program. This evidence-based approach is vital for addressing the challenges faced by vulnerable households, especially during emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic in Loima sub-county, Turkana County. Through a thorough analysis of the program's impact, this study aims to guide necessary improvements, ensuring a resilient and effective response to the unique needs of vulnerable populations in emergency scenarios.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the impact of the HSNP program on the food security of vulnerable households in Loima sub-county, Turkana County, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. To assess the effect of the HSNP program on the health outcomes of beneficiaries in Loima sub-county, Turkana County, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. To explore the impact of the HSNP program on the education of beneficiaries in Loima sub-county, Turkana County, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both the Kenyan economy and public health, especially among vulnerable groups, underscores the critical importance of effective interventions. The Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) plays a pivotal role in alleviating the adverse effects of such crises. However, a substantial knowledge gap exists regarding the HSNP's effectiveness in safeguarding the economic and social well-being of beneficiaries during the pandemic in Turkana County, Kenya.

This study addresses this knowledge gap by thoroughly examining the program's influence on the financial situation, food security, health outcomes, education, and social protection of beneficiaries in Loima sub-county, Turkana County. The outcomes of this research can significantly contribute to evidence-based decision-making, influencing resource allocation and implementation strategies, thereby

facilitating program enhancement. Additionally, the study adds to the existing literature on the efficacy of social protection programs in crisis situations, providing valuable insights for future research endeavors and informing policy decisions.

Ultimately, the findings of this study hold the potential to enhance the overall effectiveness of the HSNP, thereby strengthening its support for vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkana County, Kenya, and similar contexts. This research not only addresses an immediate knowledge gap but also contributes to the broader understanding of the role of social protection programs in crisis response, paving the way for more resilient and impactful interventions in the face of unforeseen challenges.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, a comprehensive review of theoretical and empirical studies is undertaken to examine the variables of interest, accompanied by the presentation of a conceptual framework for the study. Focusing on three crucial aspects—namely, (1) the correlation between the HSNP Program and the health of beneficiary households, (2) the impact of the HSNP program on the food security of beneficiary households, and (3) the influence of the HSNP program on the education of beneficiary households—the literature review serves as a robust foundation for the research. Through this review, gaps in the existing literature are identified, elucidating areas where the current study aims to contribute valuable insights during the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkana County, Kenya.

2.1 Social Protection Program and Food Security of Vulnerable Groups During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The global surge in food insecurity among vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the implementation of social protection programs worldwide, with researchers investigating their impact on food security. Notable positive outcomes have been observed in various countries: Maripuu and Parvinen (2021) reported favorable effects of programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the USA, Martins et al. (2021) found positive impacts in Brazil, López-Osses et al. (2021) highlighted success in Chile, and Devereux et al. (2020) identified improvements in Malawi. However, challenges in program implementation emerged, including inadequate funding, administrative delays, and communication barriers in the USA, as noted by Maripuu and Parvinen (2021), and limited funding and administrative difficulties in Brazil (Martins et al., 2021). In Uruguay, Castrillo et al. (2021) found eligibility issues, and López-Osses et al. (2021) identified coordination problems in Chile, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and accessible delivery methods. Challenges persisted in Ghana and India, with Nkegbe et al. (2021) reporting ineffectiveness in Ghana's LEAP and PFJ programs due to logistical challenges, and Aggarwal et al. (2020) revealing shortcomings in India's PDS and NREGA programs. Devereux et al. (2020) highlighted similar challenges in Malawi, emphasizing the importance of funding and effective targeting. Moreover, studies showed that social protection programs positively impacted the health of vulnerable groups during the pandemic, as seen in Bussolo et al. (2021) and Huicho et al. (2020) for low- and middle-income countries, and in various studies across Italy, South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya. However, these positive outcomes were accompanied by challenges such as administrative difficulties, funding issues, and limited outreach, underscoring the necessity of addressing these challenges for effective program implementation globally (Makhado & Magadzire, 2021; Adekunle et al., 2021; Assefa et al., 2021; Gitonga et al., 2021). This synthesis of empirical reviews provides insights into the complexities and effectiveness of social protection programs, emphasizing the need for targeted, well-funded, and effectively implemented initiatives to address the multifaceted challenges posed by the pandemic on vulnerable groups globally.

2.2 Social Protection Program and Health Status of Vulnerable Groups During the Covid-19 Pandemic

In response to the global challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, social protection programs have been implemented worldwide to safeguard the health of vulnerable groups. This review synthesizes studies examining the influence of such programs on the physical, mental, and social well-being of vulnerable populations during the pandemic. Positive impacts were evident in studies by Bussolo et al. (2021) and Huicho et al. (2020), indicating improvements in physical and mental health, and enhanced access to healthcare among vulnerable groups in low- and middle-income countries. In Italy, Cucinotta et al. (2021) found that social protection programs alleviated anxiety and depression, contributing to improved mental health outcomes.

Extending this analysis to Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Kenya, studies by Makhado and Magadzire (2021), Adekunle et al. (2021), and Assefa et al. (2021) highlighted the positive impact of social protection programs on health outcomes in these countries. However, challenges in program implementation were identified globally. Inadequate funding, administrative difficulties, and limited outreach were major obstacles noted by Bussolo et al. (2021) in low- and middle-income countries. Similarly, Huicho et al. (2020) identified administrative delays and limited funding as significant hurdles in Peru, while Cucinotta et al. (2021) found challenges in reaching all vulnerable groups in Italy.

Studies conducted in South Africa (Makhado & Magadzire, 2021) and Nigeria (Adekunle et al., 2021) revealed administrative difficulties, limited funding, and inadequate outreach as major challenges. Notably, challenges in Nigeria's cash transfer programs, school feeding programs, and public works initiatives were linked to administrative delays, limited funding, and coordination issues. Adekunle et al. (2021) emphasized the vital role of effective program implementation and sufficient funding to support vulnerable groups during crises.

The study by Assefa et al. (2021) in Ethiopia underscored the challenges faced in reaching all vulnerable groups during the pandemic, including complex application processes and limited coverage. The authors recommended more inclusive and efficient approaches, such as digital solutions and streamlined application processes, along with ensuring adequate funding. Similarly, Gitonga

et al. (2021) in Kenya noted challenges in adapting social protection programs to the changing needs of vulnerable groups, advocating for innovative solutions like mobile money platforms and expanded program coverage.

In summary, while social protection programs have positively impacted the health status of vulnerable groups globally during the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges in their implementation have hindered effectiveness. Addressing these challenges, including ensuring adequate funding, efficient targeting, and innovative approaches, is crucial for the continued success of social protection programs in safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable populations.

2.3 Social Protection Programs and the Education of Beneficiary Households

Various studies have investigated the influence of cash transfer programs on education-related expenses, revealing diverse impacts across different regions. Kakwani, Son, and Khandker (2019) highlighted the positive effect of the Hunger Safety Net Program in Kenya, demonstrating its ability to assist households in covering school expenses and subsequently improving academic performance. Similarly, research on conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs in Latin America, such as Scriven, Rawling, and Rubio (2003), indicated favorable outcomes, including increased school enrollment and retention. Notably, limited research has explored the effects of these programs in sub-Saharan Africa.

Wangui Wanyama's (2018) study in Eldoret West Sub-County identified a robust positive correlation between cash transfers and school retention. However, the study's regional focus and descriptive methodology limit its generalizability. In contrast, a study on Ecuador's Bono de Desarrollo Humano (BDH) program by Schady, Pounce, and Osterbeek (2008) employed randomized experiments and regression designs to assess the program's impact on school enrollment. The findings suggested that the program effectively incentivized poor households to send their children to school, resulting in a significant increase in enrollment for children in the lowest income quintile. Nevertheless, the program exhibited no significant impact on children in families around the second quintile, leading to the recommendation of targeting cash transfer programs specifically to households in the lowest income quintile for maximum impact on school enrollment.

Duryea and Morrison's (2004) cross-country study in Colombia, Mexico, and Nicaragua explored the impact of CCT programs on school attendance and child labor. While CCTs increased school attendance, they did not improve academic performance or reduce child labor. The authors emphasized the necessity of complementing CCT programs with broader policies addressing poverty and enhancing access to education to tackle the root causes of poor school performance and child labor.

Durr-E-Nayab and Shujaat Farooq's (2012) investigation in Pakistan evaluated the impact of a cash transfer program on school enrollment, attendance, and retention among children from low-income households. The program successfully increased school enrollment by 13.5%, but it did not significantly influence attendance or retention. The authors argued for the importance of addressing underlying issues such as education quality, facilities, and teacher absenteeism to achieve sustainable improvements in education outcomes alongside cash transfer programs.

In conclusion, while cash transfer programs have demonstrated positive impacts on school enrollment, more research is essential to assess their effectiveness on school retention and attendance, particularly in sub-Saharan African countries. Tailored solutions addressing regional challenges are crucial, as indicated by Kakwani, Son, and Khandker (2019). The studies collectively highlight the need for complementary efforts, including targeted policies and improved education quality, to maximize the positive outcomes of cash transfer programs on education in diverse contexts.

2.3 Theoretical Review

The current study employs Social Capital Theory and Human Capital Theory to explore the relationship between the HSNP Program and its socio-economic outcomes on beneficiaries in Loima, Turkana County during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social Capital Theory underscores the role of social networks and relationships in poverty alleviation and livelihood enhancement, facilitating access to resources, opportunities, and support systems. It can enhance resilience during crises, offering information, financial aid, and access to credit, aiding beneficiaries in overcoming economic challenges. However, potential inequalities in social capital distribution and its limitations in addressing structural issues are acknowledged.

Concurrently, Human Capital Theory emphasizes investments in education, health, and training for improved socio-economic outcomes. It posits that enhancing knowledge and skills contributes to increased productivity, income, and employment opportunities. The study acknowledges challenges such as substantial investments, time delays in impact, and structural barriers to access quality education. The integrated use of both theories aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social and human capital contribute to the program's impact and address potential limitations.

Under Social Capital Theory, the study examines how the HSNP Program fosters social networks among beneficiaries, contributing to poverty alleviation and enhanced livelihoods. This theory is applied to elucidate the impact of the program on social cohesion and resilience during the pandemic. On the other hand, Human Capital Theory assesses how the program enhances education, skills, and health, leading to increased productivity and economic opportunities. Previous studies, such as Narayan and Pritchett (1997) and Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004), provide foundations for the application of these theories in examining the relationships between social networks, economic development, education, and economic growth.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The primary objective of this study is to examine the correlation between the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) and the socio-economic well-being of beneficiaries in Loima, Turkana County. The HSNP will be considered the independent variable, with its

measurement encompassing factors such as the amount, intervals, medium of payment, and the number of beneficiaries. The dependent variable will be the socio-economic welfare of the beneficiaries' households, assessed through health, education, and food security indicators.

Health, encompassing physical, mental, and social well-being, will be evaluated based on the expectation that the HSNP positively influences these aspects by providing financial support for health services and medication. Similarly, education will be assessed through school enrollment rates, attendance, completion rates, and access to basic education services, with the anticipation that the HSNP positively impacts education by supporting school fees and providing educational materials. Lastly, food security will be evaluated by the degree of access to safe, nutritious food, with the HSNP expected to have a positive effect by offering financial support for food and other household necessities. Past research has demonstrated the positive impact of cash transfer programs, including the HSNP, on health, education, and food security within beneficiary households.

The study will also consider household characteristics, such as size, composition, and demographics, as an intervening variable influencing the relationship between the HSNP and the socio-economic well-being of beneficiary households. For instance, larger households may require more financial assistance to achieve food security and better health outcomes. Previous research has affirmed that household characteristics can influence the impact of cash transfer programs on beneficiary households. In summary, the study's conceptual framework underscores the interplay between the HSNP and the socio-economic well-being of beneficiary households in Turkana County, acknowledging household characteristics as an intervening variable. Through these explorations, the study aims to offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of the HSNP in enhancing the socio-economic well-being of beneficiary households in Turkana County while preserving their dignity.

The variables and their relationship for this study are as shown in the figure 1

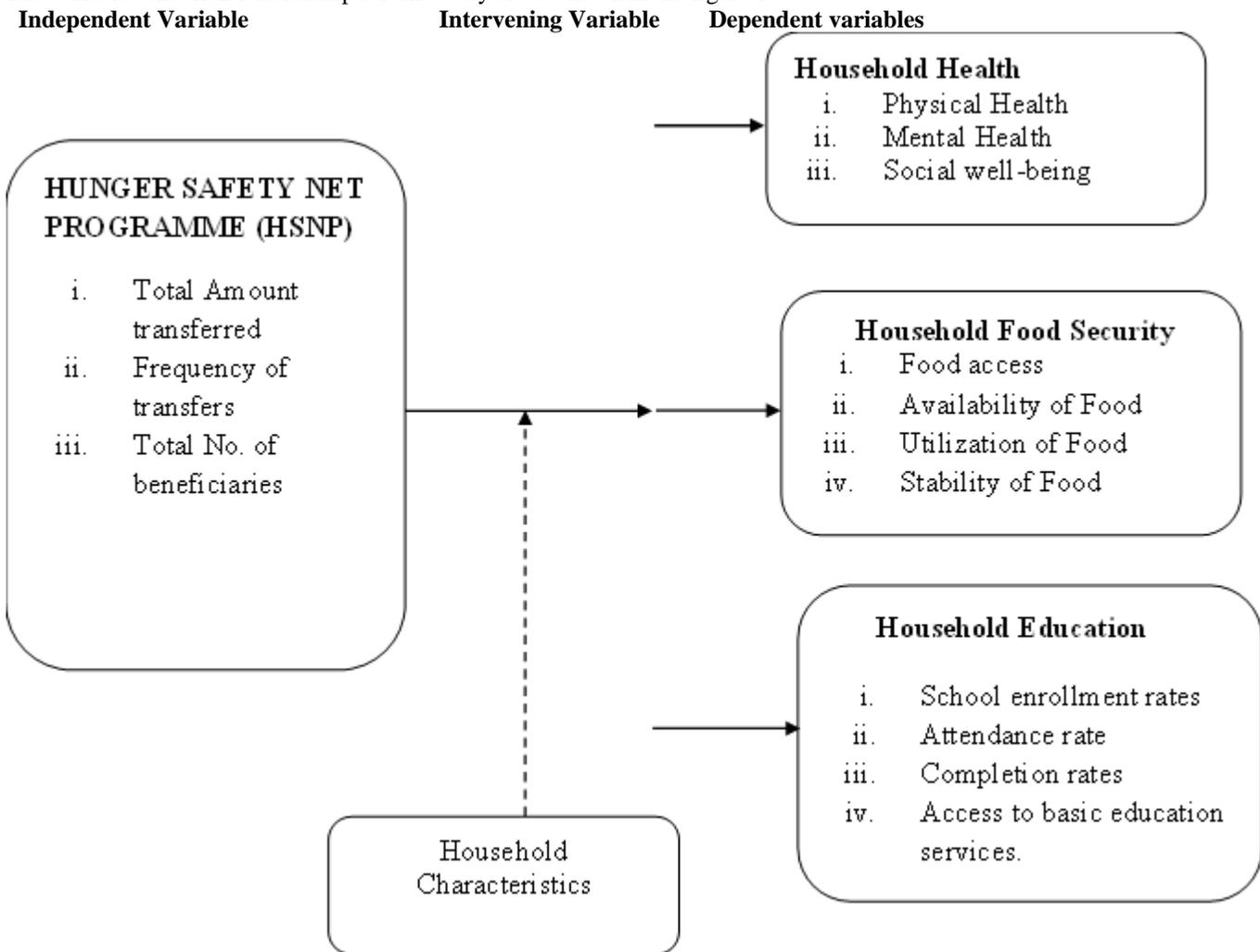


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.5 Recap of Literature Review

This section provides an extensive overview of the literature relevant to the study, highlighting the positive impact of social protection programs on the food security and health status of vulnerable groups amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. While past

research has demonstrated these positive effects, challenges such as inadequate funding, ineffective targeting, and poor implementation have constrained the overall effectiveness of these programs. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that social protection initiatives effectively provide vulnerable groups with sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, fostering good physical, mental, and social well-being during the pandemic.

Furthermore, the literature underscores the positive impact of cash transfer programs on school enrollment, emphasizing the need for additional research to assess their effectiveness on school retention and attendance, particularly in sub-Saharan African countries. To investigate the link between social and economic development, poverty reduction, and livelihood improvement, the study employs Social Capital and Human Capital Theories. The conceptual framework, as presented in this chapter, illustrates the intricate relationships between the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP), the socio-economic well-being of beneficiary households in Turkana County, and household characteristics as an intervening variable. Through an exploration of these relationships, the study aims to provide original insights into the effectiveness of the HSNP in enhancing the socio-economic well-being of beneficiary households in Turkana County.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodology employed in this paper to establish a systematic approach for data collection, analysis, and the extraction of pertinent insights pertaining to the research subject. The choice of research methods has been carefully considered to facilitate a comprehensive examination of the topic under investigation. Additionally, this chapter provides a thorough overview of the specific procedures implemented for data collection, organization, and analysis, ensuring a meticulous and well-structured research process.

3.1 Research Design

The selected research design for this study was a descriptive survey design, widely acknowledged for its effectiveness in offering a precise representation of a population or phenomenon by capturing information on diverse characteristics, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). This design has been successfully employed in prior studies, such as Muga and Iravo's (2017) analysis of the impact of the Kenya Social Protection Programme on household welfare in rural areas of Kisumu County and Omolo et al.'s (2014) investigation into the effect of social protection programs on the well-being of households in Kenya, both demonstrating positive impacts on household well-being. The descriptive survey design facilitated the collection of data from a substantial sample of respondents, allowing for a comprehensive description of the research variables. Data pertaining to the influence of the HSNP on the socio-economic well-being of beneficiary households in Turkana County were obtained through a structured questionnaire. The data collection process was carried out with utmost consideration for the participants' needs and rights, ensuring the fulfillment of ethical considerations.

3.2 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Sampling To establish an appropriate sample size for this study, Fisher's formula, a widely accepted method for calculating sample size in research studies, was employed. The formula is expressed as:

The formula is given as:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the margin of error (usually set at 5%). For this study, the population size is 7117 and the margin of error is 5%. Thus, the sample size can be calculated as:

$$n = 7117 / (1 + 7117(0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 372$$

Rounding up to the nearest whole number, the study necessitated a sample size of 372 participants. It is imperative to highlight that this calculation is grounded in Fisher's formula, a widely recognized approach for determining sample size in research studies (Fisher, 1935). A well-considered sample size is critical to securing reliable and valid results while mitigating sampling bias (Cochran, 1977).

To ensure the representativeness of the sample, a stratified random sampling methodology was employed, selecting participants from the four wards in Loima sub-county, Turkana County. The sample was drawn from each stratum in proportion to its population size, aligning with the recommendation of Babbie and Mouton (2018). This approach minimized the risk of sampling error and enhanced the overall representativeness of the study. Following the identification of strata, respondents were chosen through a simple random sampling technique, ensuring that every element in the population had an equal opportunity for selection (Cooper & Schindler, 2019). This method guaranteed an unbiased selection process, providing each respondent an equal chance of participation.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

To ensure the authenticity of primary data obtained from HSNP beneficiaries, this study employed a combination of questionnaires and interview guides. Questionnaires provided a systematic format, facilitating efficient data collection within a concise timeframe. They not only ensured respondent anonymity, fostering open and truthful responses, but also proved to be a cost-effective approach for

interviewing a substantial number of participants across a diverse geographical expanse (Malhotra, 2006; Walliman, 2011). The administration of questionnaires was carried out in households within the study area.

Conversely, interviews offered greater flexibility, enabling the establishment of rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. As such, key informant interviews (KIIs) were undertaken to gather data directly from HSNP beneficiaries. This dual-method approach aimed to capture comprehensive insights, combining the structured efficiency of questionnaires with the interpersonal nuances achievable through interviews.

3.7 Data analysis techniques

Upon the completion of fieldwork, the amassed data underwent meticulous analysis. Quantitative data were processed using SPSS software version 24, a widely acclaimed tool for statistical analysis (Fernández-Collado, 2016). The software facilitated the application of diverse statistical techniques, unraveling and interpreting the quantitative data. To uphold academic integrity, proper referencing and source citation were integral throughout the data analysis process, mitigating any risk of plagiarism. All relevant sources or references leveraged during the analysis were duly acknowledged and cited. Descriptive statistical methods, including frequency distributions, means, standard deviations, and percentages, were employed to succinctly present and summarize quantitative findings. These statistical measures afforded a lucid overview of the data, aiding researchers in discerning patterns, trends, and relationships within the variables of interest. The results were presented systematically, effectively addressing the research questions.

For the analysis of qualitative data, a thematic approach was adopted. Rigorous scrutiny, coding, and categorization of qualitative data were conducted based on central themes and emerging patterns from responses. The qualitative analysis sought to identify recurring themes and extract insightful perspectives aligning with the research objectives. Upholding academic integrity, proper referencing was consistently applied to recognize any pertinent sources or literature influencing the interpretation of qualitative data (Bazeley, 2013). Through these rigorous data analysis methodologies, coupled with meticulous referencing and citation practices, this study aimed to yield precise and reliable findings, enriching the existing knowledge base in the field.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section unfolds with an exploration of the response rate, signifying the percentage of participants who effectively completed the questionnaires. Subsequently, a comprehensive overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the research participants is presented. This encapsulates crucial elements such as age, gender, and educational background, providing valuable insights into the composition of the sample.

4.1 Influence of the HSNP Program on the Food Security of Vulnerable Households During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) on the food security of vulnerable households in Loima sub-county, Turkana County, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Four parameters—availability of food, accessibility of food, utilization of food, and stability of food—were employed for assessment.

4.1.1 Availability of Food

The examination of food availability is integral to understanding the HSNP's impact on vulnerable households during the pandemic. Respondents were asked to express their views on how the HSNP influenced food availability in their households. Participants were surveyed on the statement, "The HSNP program increased the availability of food in my household during the COVID-19 pandemic." Results indicated 11% agreement and 9% strong agreement, reflecting positive perceptions. Conversely, 30% disagreed, and 35% strongly disagreed, suggesting significant skepticism. Additionally, 15% remained neutral. Further, respondents rated their agreement with, "The HSNP program helped ensure my household had enough food to eat during the COVID-19 pandemic," on a scale of 1 to 5. Findings showed 16% agreed and 9% strongly agreed, while 30% disagreed, and 30% strongly disagreed. Moreover, 15% were neutral. The results presented in Figure 4.1.

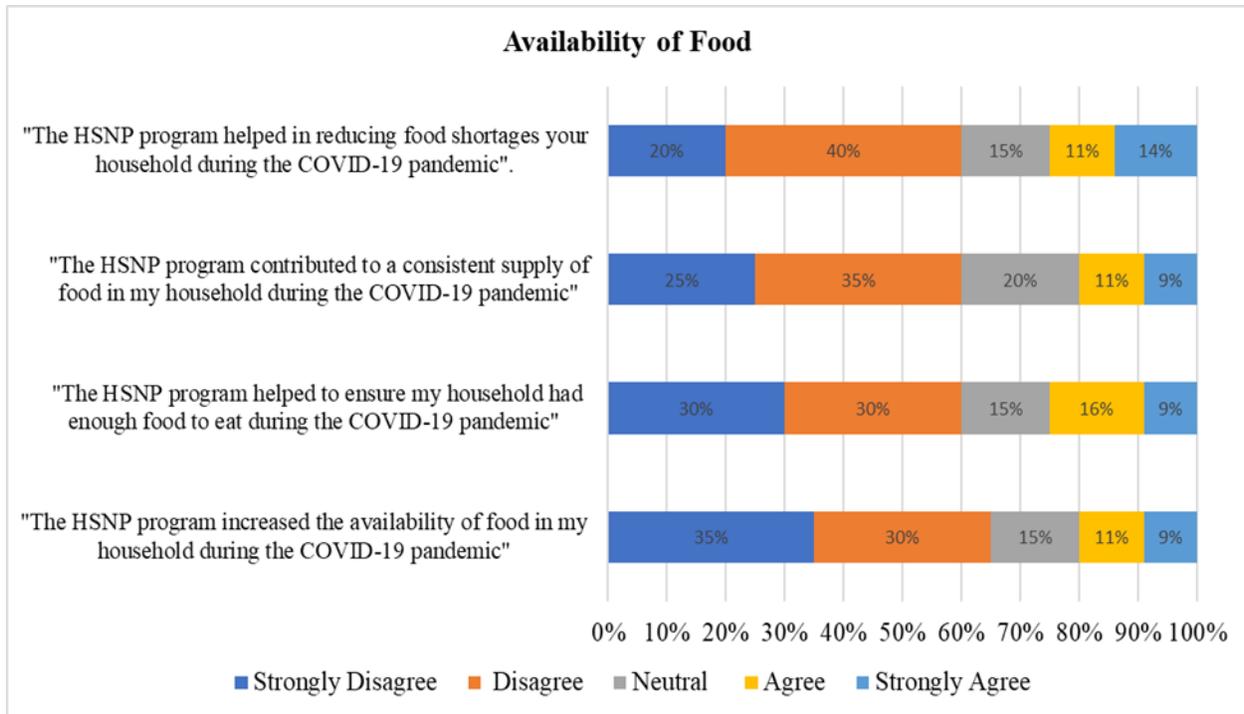


Figure 4. 1: Availability of Food

The study aimed to explore the perceived impact of the HSNP program on consistent food supply. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with, "The HSNP program contributed to a consistent supply of food in my household during the COVID-19 pandemic." Results revealed 11% agreement and 9% strong agreement, with 35% in disagreement and 25% strongly disagreeing, while 20% were neutral. Respondents also assessed the program's effectiveness in reducing food shortages in their households. The outcomes showed 11% agreement and 14% strong agreement, with 40% in disagreement and 20% strongly disagreeing. The nuanced responses highlight varying perspectives on the program's impact.

In alignment with the literature, the study reflects diverse outcomes, emphasizing the importance of localized insights into poverty alleviation programs during crises. The variability underscores the need for context-specific assessments to comprehensively understand program effectiveness.

4.1.2 Accessibility of Food

The second parameter, accessibility of food, was evaluated to gauge the HSNP's impact during the pandemic, as presented in Figure 4.2.

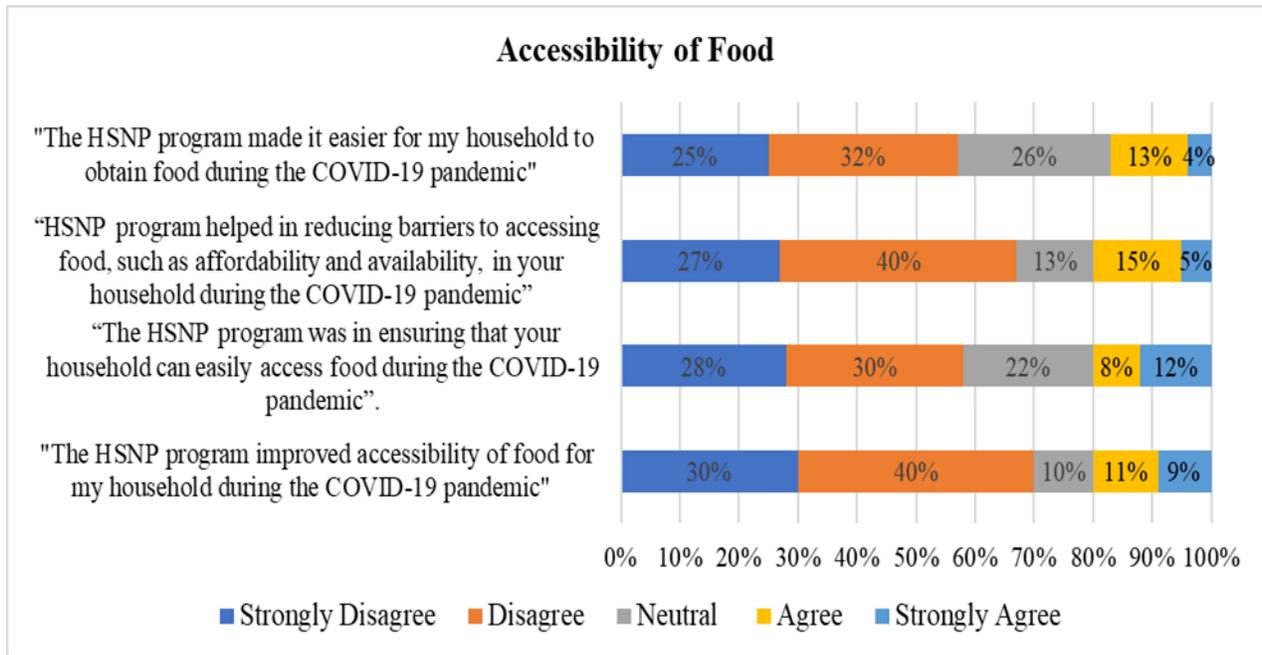


Figure 4. 2: Accessibility of Food

Participants were asked about the statement, "The HSNP program improved accessibility of food for my household during the COVID-19 pandemic." Results indicated 11% agreement and 9% strong agreement, while 30% disagreed, and 40% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 10% remained neutral. On the statement, "The HSNP program was instrumental in ensuring that your household can easily access food during the COVID-19 pandemic," 8% agreed and 12% strongly agreed. Conversely, 30% disagreed, and 28% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 22% were neutral.

To understand the program's role in reducing barriers to food access, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with, "HSNP program helped in reducing barriers to accessing food, such as affordability and availability, in your household during the COVID-19 pandemic." Findings showed 15% agreement and 5% strong agreement, with 40% in disagreement and 27% strongly disagreeing. Thirteen percent remained neutral. Perceptions regarding the program's impact on easing the process of obtaining food were also assessed. The results revealed 13% agreement and 4% strong agreement, with 32% in disagreement and 25% strongly disagreeing, while 20% were neutral. The diverse range of perspectives among respondents on food accessibility aligns with the complexities highlighted in the literature. Localized insights from key stakeholders further enrich the discussion, confirming the validity and complexity of the findings.

4.1.3 Utilization of Food

The third parameter, utilization of food, was examined to assess the HSNP's impact on vulnerable households during the pandemic, as presented in Figure 4.3.

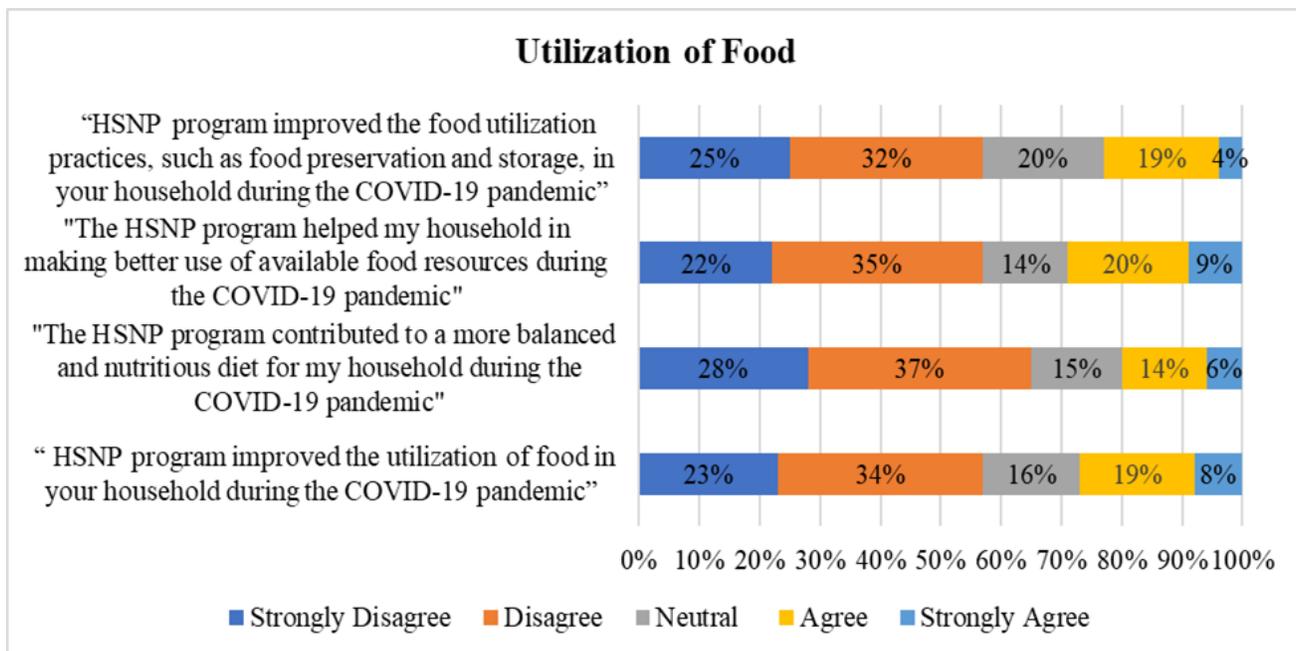


Figure 4. 3: Utilization of Food

Participants were asked about the statement, "The HSNP program improved the utilization of food in your household during the COVID-19 pandemic." Results showed 19% agreement and 8% strong agreement, while 34% disagreed, and 23% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 16% remained neutral. Regarding, "The HSNP program contributed to a more balanced and nutritious diet for my household during the COVID-19 pandemic," 14% agreed and 6% strongly agreed. Conversely, 37% disagreed, and 28% strongly disagreed. Moreover, 15% remained neutral.

To assess the program's role in better utilizing available food resources, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with, "The HSNP program helped my household in making better use of available food resources during the COVID-19 pandemic." Results showed 14% agreement and 9% strong agreement, with 35% in disagreement and 22% strongly disagreeing. Fourteen percent remained neutral.

Participants were also questioned about the program's impact on food utilization practices such as preservation and storage. The results indicated 19% agreement and 4% strong agreement, with 32% in disagreement and 25% strongly disagreeing. Furthermore, 20% were neutral.

Assessing the utilization of food resources within the context of the HSNP program during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals a diversity of opinions among respondents. While some acknowledge the program's positive impact on food utilization, a significant portion holds differing views. This diversity aligns with the complexity highlighted in the empirical literature.

In addition to the quantitative data, this study incorporated qualitative data analysis and sought insights from government agencies, NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), and local leaders. Their perspectives align with the mixed responses observed among the surveyed population, providing a comprehensive view of the program's strengths and weaknesses in relation to food utilization. This convergence of insights from both quantitative and qualitative sources enriches the discussion, affirming the validity and complexity of the findings.

4.1.4 Stability of Food

The fourth parameter, stability of food, was assessed to understand the HSNP's impact on vulnerable households during the pandemic, as presented in Figure 4.4.

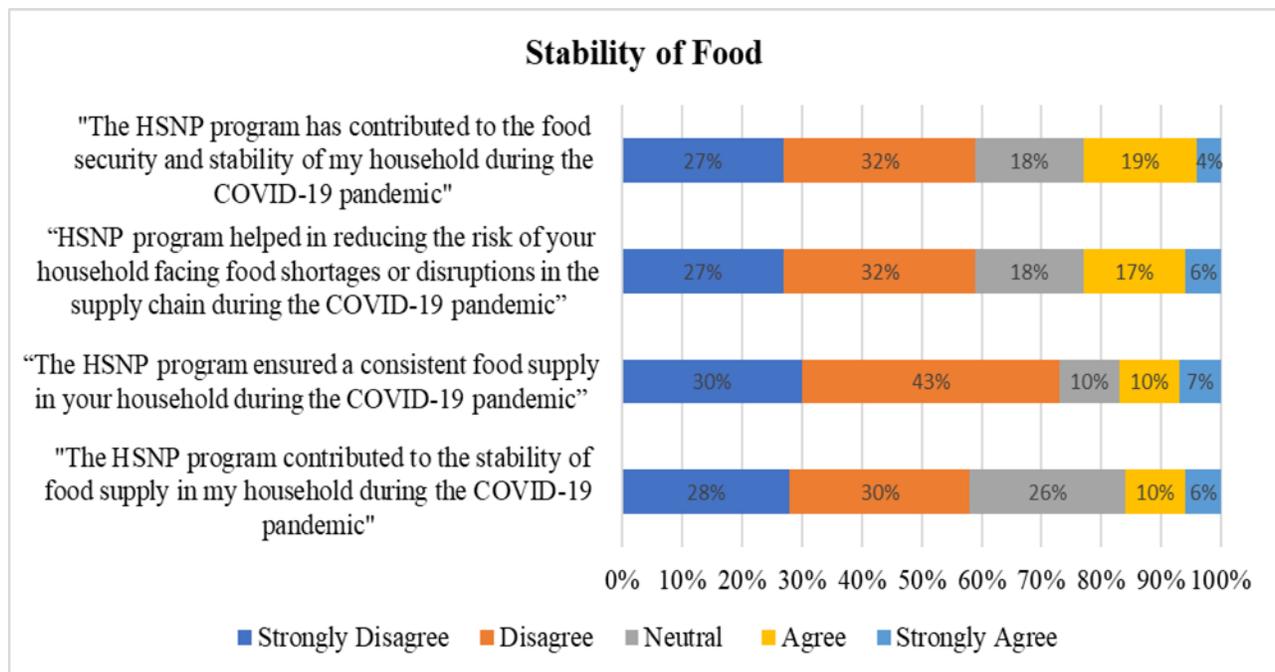


Figure 4. 4 : Stability of Food

Participants were questioned about the statement, "The HSNP program contributed to the stability of food supply in my household during the COVID-19 pandemic." Results showed 10% agreement and 6% strong agreement, with 30% in disagreement and 28% strongly disagreeing. Additionally, 26% remained neutral. Regarding, "The HSNP program ensured a consistent food supply in your household during the COVID-19 pandemic," 10% agreed and 7% strongly agreed, while 32% disagreed, and 30% strongly disagreed. Moreover, 20% remained neutral.

To gauge whether the HSNP program helped in reducing the risk of households facing food shortages or disruptions in the supply chain, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with, "HSNP program helped in reducing the risk of your household facing food shortages or disruptions in the supply chain during the COVID-19 pandemic." Results showed 11% agreement and 6% strong agreement, with 32% in disagreement and 27% strongly disagreeing. Eighteen percent remained neutral.

Finally, participants were questioned about the program's overall contribution to the food security and stability of their households during the pandemic. The findings revealed 13% agreement and 4% strong agreement, with 32% in disagreement and 27% strongly disagreeing. Furthermore, 18% remained neutral. Assessing the stability of food supply within the context of the HSNP program during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals a spectrum of opinions among respondents. While some respondents expressed positive sentiments on the program's impact on food stability, a notable portion held differing opinions. This variation in responses aligns with the multifaceted nature emphasized in the empirical literature.

In addition to the quantitative data, this study incorporated qualitative data analysis and sought insights from government agencies, NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), and local leaders. Their perspectives shed light on the factors contributing to food supply instability during the pandemic. Lockdowns, restrictions on movement, and economic challenges emerged as significant barriers to food availability and affordability. The logistical challenges faced by beneficiaries in accessing cash payments also added to the difficulties in securing food. Furthermore, the infrequent payment cycles and unchanged payment amounts did not adequately address the increased cost of living and food price inflation.

This convergence of insights from both quantitative and qualitative sources enriches the discussion, affirming the validity and complexity of the findings. It emphasizes the importance of considering a holistic approach that incorporates not only quantitative data but also qualitative insights from key stakeholders. In summary, the findings on the stability of food supply highlight the need for context-specific interventions that address the multifaceted challenges faced by vulnerable households during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. The inclusion of qualitative data and insights from government agencies, NGOs, CBOs, and local leaders strengthens the discussion, confirming the complexities of achieving food supply stability and overall food security.

4.2 Influence of the HSNP Program on the Health Outcomes of Beneficiaries During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The second objective of this study was to evaluate the influence of the HSNP program on the health outcomes of beneficiaries in Loima sub-county, Turkana County during the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this objective, the study assessed the influence of the HSNP program on physical health, mental health, and social well-being.

4.5.1 Physical Health

Physical health, a key parameter, was assessed in Loima sub-county using Likert scale questions. Results (Figure 4.5) indicate positive perceptions: 35% rated health as "Good," 25% as "Excellent," with 20% at "Fair." About 50% agreed the HSNP program positively influenced physical well-being during the pandemic. Notably, 45% acknowledged the program's role in meeting basic health needs, while 50% rated it effective in improving health outcomes.

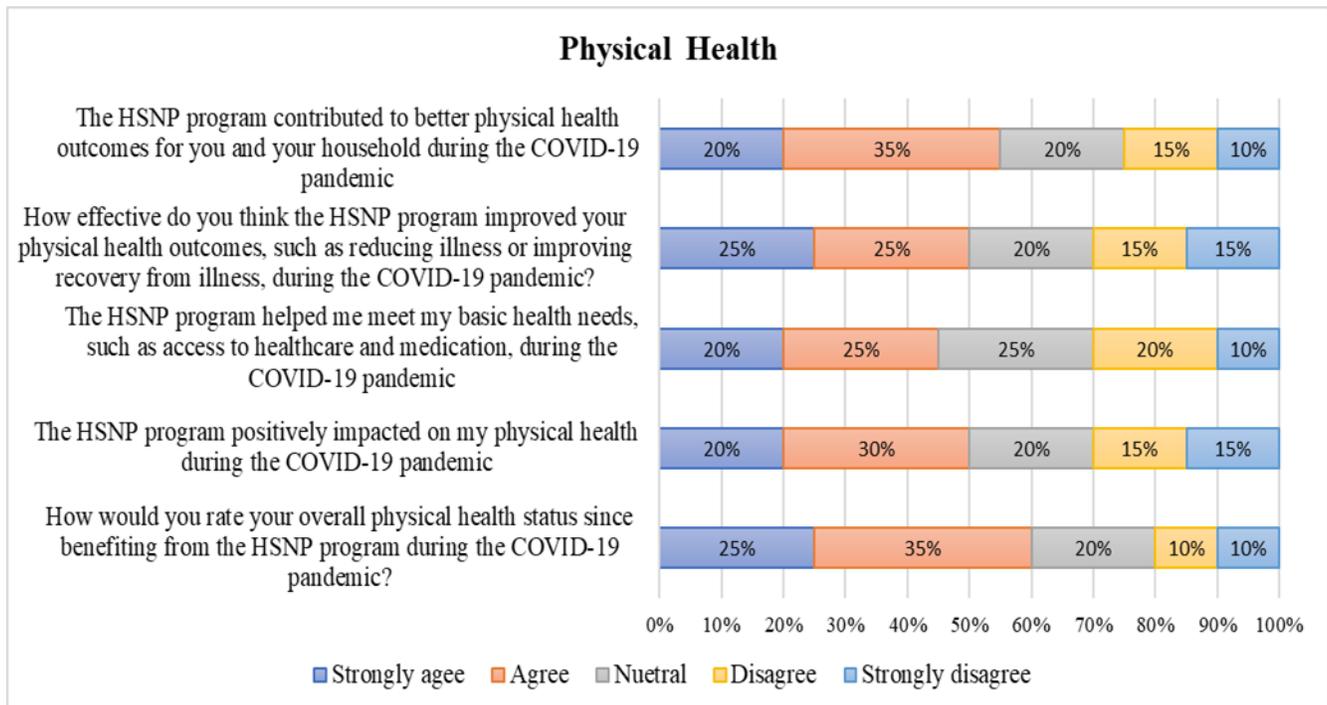


Figure 4. 5: Physical Health

Comparisons with literature (Bussolo et al., 2021; Huicho et al., 2020) support the positive impact of social safety net programs on health outcomes during crises. Respondents recognized the program's influence, aligning with existing research. Quantitative data and beneficiary interviews strengthened the findings, indicating the program's contribution to medical expenses. Considering both quantitative and qualitative data enhances the validity of the study.

4.5.2 Mental Health

Mental health, another crucial dimension, was assessed using Likert scale responses (Figure 4.6). Approximately 40% agreed the HSNP program positively influenced mental health during the pandemic. Comparisons with literature (Bussolo et al., 2021; Huicho et al., 2020) support the role of safety net programs in promoting mental well-being during crises.

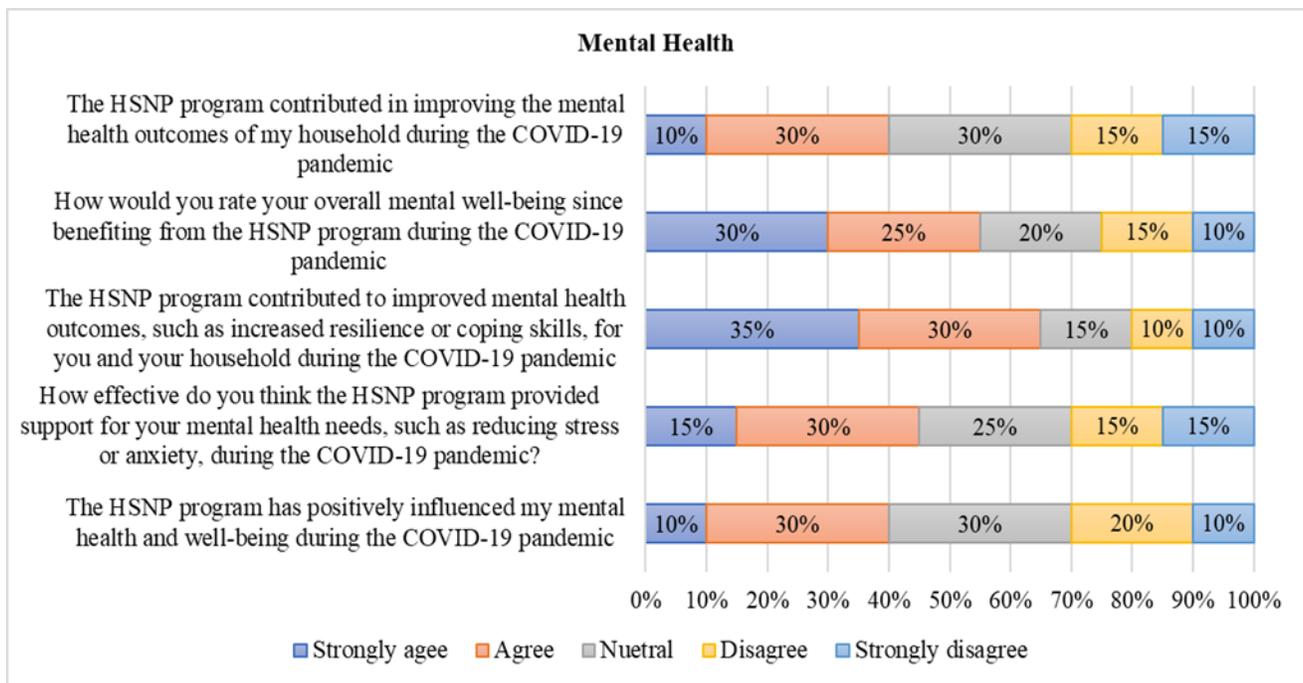


Figure 4. 6: Mental Health

Diverse experiences were noted, with around 30% rating mental well-being as good or excellent. While 40% acknowledged the program's contribution to household mental health, variations in opinions highlight the need for tailored interventions.

4.5.3 Social Well-being

Likert scale questions (Figure 4.7) assessed social well-being. Approximately 55% believed the HSNP program significantly increased social interactions and community engagement. Comparisons with literature (Bussolo et al., 2021; Huicho et al., 2020) align with the positive impact of social safety net programs on community engagement.

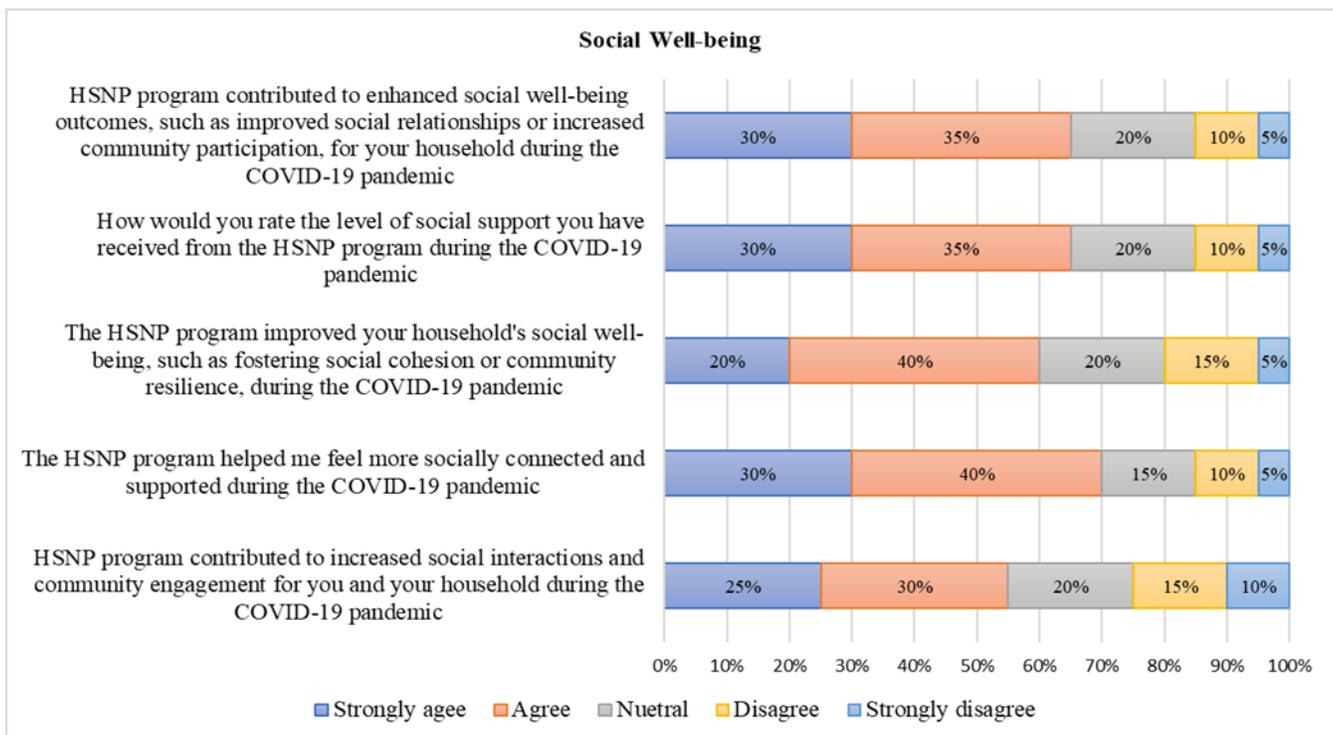


Figure 4. 7: Social Well-being

Results indicated that 70% agreed the program enhanced their sense of social connection and support. Around 60% considered the program effective in improving social well-being, with 65% attributing good to excellent social support from the program. The findings underscore the HSNP program's significant contribution to health and well-being outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing its role in promoting positive physical, mental, and social well-being among beneficiaries.

4.3 Influence of the HSNP Program on Education During COVID-19

4.3.1 School Enrolment Rates

The study explored the impact of the HSNP program on education in Loima sub-county during the pandemic. Likert scale questions (Figure 4.8) captured responses on school enrolment rates. A remarkable 70% agreed the program significantly enhanced school enrolment, aligning with literature emphasizing safety nets' role in promoting access to education.

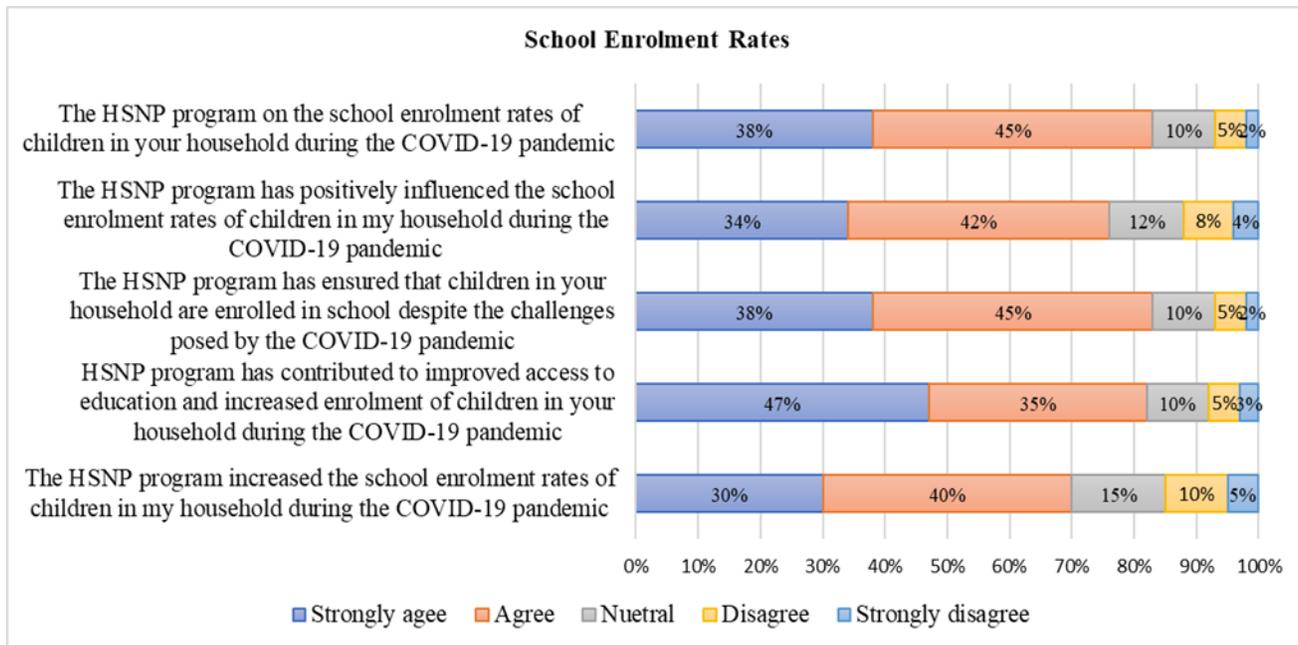


Figure 4. 8: School Enrolment Rate

Notably, 82% believed the HSNP program contributed significantly to improved education access. The program's effectiveness, with 83% confidence, in ensuring children's enrolment despite pandemic challenges aligns with established research, reinforcing the role of social safety nets in promoting education.

4.6.2 Attendance Rates

Attendance rates were measured through Likert scale questions (Figure 4.9). A substantial 75% agreed the HSNP program positively impacted attendance rates, aligning with previous studies emphasizing safety nets' role in overcoming attendance barriers.

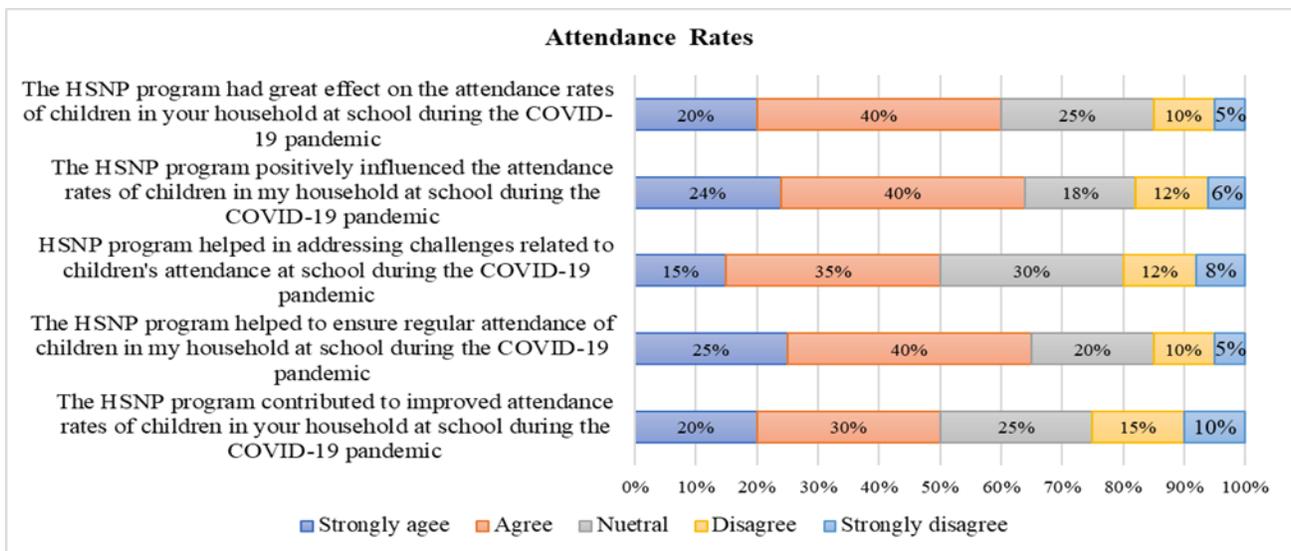


Figure 4. 9: Attendance Rates

Findings indicated that 60% perceived the program's effectiveness in addressing attendance challenges during the pandemic. The positive impact on attendance rates, with 64% indicating moderate to very significant effects, underscores the program's role in supporting education during challenging times.

4.6.3 Completion Rates

Completion rates were assessed using Likert scale questions (Figure 4.10). A majority (55%) believed the HSNP program significantly contributed to improved completion rates, aligning with research emphasizing safety nets' role in facilitating successful education completion.

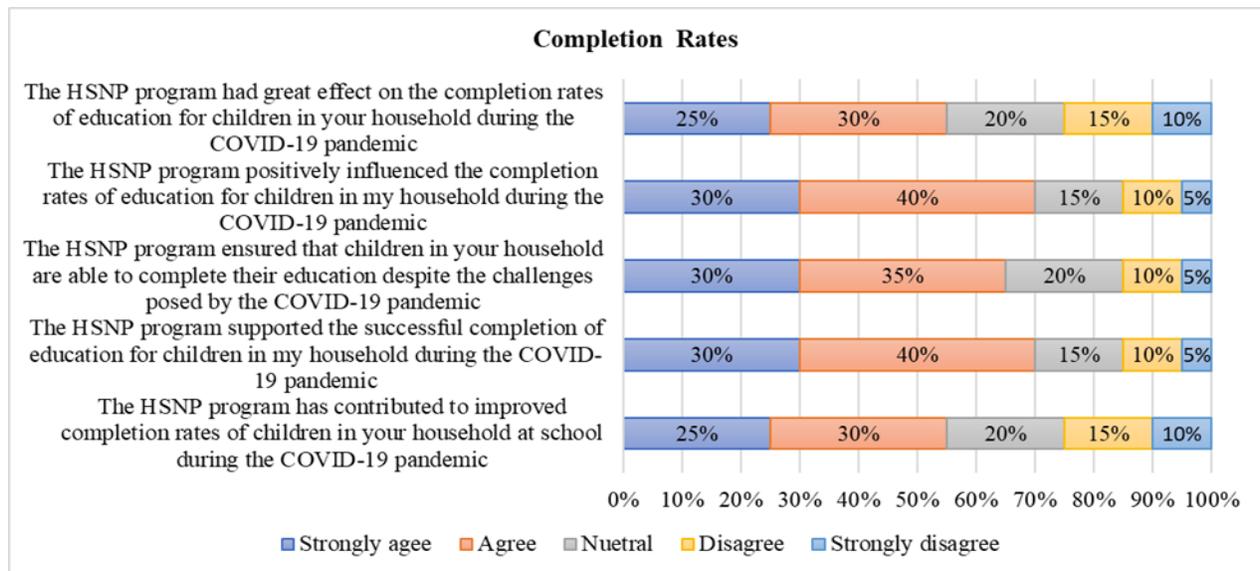


Figure 4. 10: Completion Rates

Effectiveness in ensuring completion, with 65% rating it moderately effective to highly effective, reinforces the program's role in promoting educational attainment. These positive perceptions resonate with existing literature, emphasizing the program's effectiveness in supporting education.

4.6.4 Access to Basic Education Services

Access to basic education services was measured using Likert scale questions (Figure 4.11). A significant 60% perceived the HSNP program as highly impactful in enhancing access to basic education services during the pandemic. The study indicates that 85% recognized the program's effectiveness in addressing barriers to education access, supporting the view that social safety nets play a crucial role in overcoming obstacles to education.

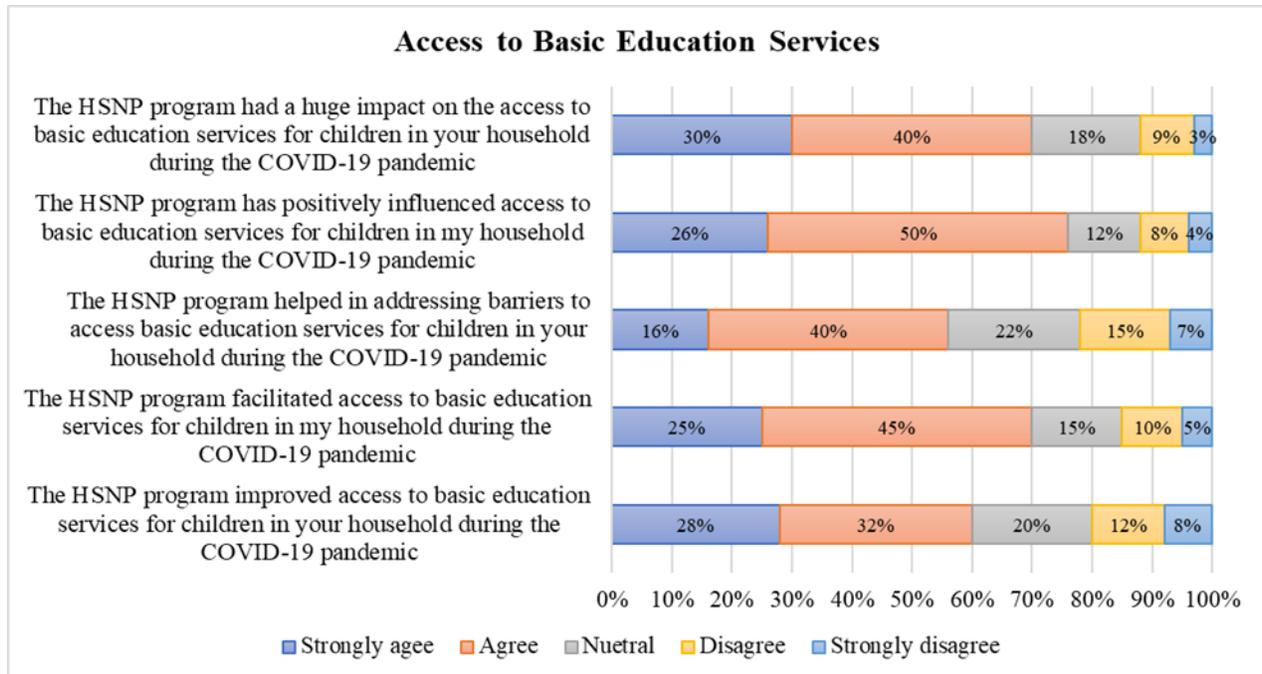


Figure 4.11: Access to Basic Education Services

In conclusion, the positive impact of the HSNP program on education, as reflected in school enrolment, attendance, completion rates, and access to basic education services, underscores its effectiveness in promoting educational opportunities for vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings align with established literature, reinforcing the program's pivotal role in supporting education.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summaries and Conclusions

The study extensively investigated the ramifications of the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) on vulnerable households amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The multifaceted exploration encompassed domains of food security, health outcomes, and education, yielding nuanced insights that amalgamate seamlessly with existing literature.

Examining food security, the study revealed a tapestry of perspectives on the HSNP's influence. Participants presented diverse opinions on food availability, echoing the contextual nature of program efficacy elucidated in literature. The critical dimension of food accessibility surfaced with varied participant responses, underscoring the intricate challenges within social safety net programs, as emphasized by scholars. The evaluation of food utilization exposed a spectrum of viewpoints, indicating the nuanced effectiveness of the HSNP. The call for dietary diversity training pinpointed a specific need among beneficiaries, emphasizing the importance of tailored interventions. Assessing food stability, the study unveiled mixed opinions, mirroring the complex nature of achieving stability in food supply during crises, a theme echoed in existing literature.

Transitioning to health outcomes, the study encapsulated a positive perception of the HSNP's impact on physical health. Satisfaction with improved well-being was coupled with a cautious acknowledgment of the need for continuous evaluation. Mental health emerged as a notable beneficiary, with the program recognized for fostering resilience. The study underscored the heterogeneous nature of mental well-being experiences, prompting a call for targeted interventions. Social well-being flourished under the HSNP, fostering increased social interactions and community engagement, aligning with literature emphasizing the program's role in resilience and community participation.

In the realm of education, the HSNP stood out as a positive influence on school enrolment rates. Participants lauded its role in providing enhanced educational opportunities for children, overcoming barriers and facilitating enrolment. The program's impact on attendance rates further demonstrated its success in maintaining regular school attendance amidst pandemic challenges. Acknowledging its role in supporting educational continuity, the HSNP received accolades for positively influencing completion rates, emphasizing its meaningful contribution to children's educational progress. Access to basic education services was significantly improved, with participants recognizing the program's role in overcoming barriers and enhancing access to educational resources.

In synthesis, the HSNP showcased multifaceted impacts on food security, health outcomes, and education. The fluid integration of participant perspectives with existing literature highlights the need for context-aware, tailored interventions to optimize program effectiveness. Continuous monitoring and research emerge as imperative, ensuring the sustained positive impact of the HSNP in diverse contexts. The study serves as a comprehensive exploration, seamlessly interweaving participant insights with scholarly discourse.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Influence of the HSNP Program on the Health Outcomes of Beneficiaries During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- i. *Program Flexibility and Preparedness:* The HSNP program should integrate strategies addressing global emergencies, ensuring relevance beyond the current pandemic. This adaptive design should include response mechanisms for swift enrollment during crises, accommodating additional vulnerable community members promptly.
- ii. *Expanded Coverage and Timely Disbursements:* Proactive expansion of coverage is essential to mitigate vulnerabilities. Identifying and registering more vulnerable individuals can prevent a slide into extreme poverty. Maintaining a consistent, timely payment cycle is crucial to prevent disruption in beneficiaries' access to essential resources.
- iii. *Digital Payment Solutions:* Transitioning to mobile-based disbursement methods enhances efficiency and reduces infection transmission risks during pandemics. Mobile payments provide direct fund access, promoting safety and convenience. Embracing digital platforms allows real-time updates, facilitating adaptation to evolving circumstances.
- iv. *Partnerships and Long-term Sustainability:* Collaborating with stakeholders, including government bodies, NGOs, and community leaders, is vital for the program's long-term success. Advocating for policy support and securing funding commitments will ensure sustainability and resilience during crises. Nurturing partnerships and evidence-based practices ensures the HSNP program remains a vital safety net, promoting well-being and stability in vulnerable communities.

5.2.2 Influence of the HSNP Program on the Food Security of Vulnerable Households During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- i. *Enhanced Communication and Awareness:* Improve program communication and awareness to ensure every eligible household understands the program's pivotal role. Collaborative efforts with local organizations and targeted campaigns can facilitate effective outreach.
- ii. *In-depth Assessments for Negative Perceptions:* Conduct focused research to identify specific barriers hindering perceptions of participants expressing neutral or negative views. Design custom-tailored interventions addressing unique community needs.
- iii. *Addressing Challenges:* Crucial challenges to address include timely disbursement of funds, increasing monthly payments to match the cost of living, and scaling up during emergencies. Streamlining payments, adjusting amounts, and expanding beneficiaries during crises can comprehensively address food security challenges.

5.2.3 Influence of the HSNP Program on the Education of Beneficiaries During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- i. *Boosting Attendance Rates:* Prioritize community engagement to encourage active participation promoting regular school attendance. Strengthen communication channels connecting schools, parents, and the HSNP program. Tailored support programs and collaboration with schools can address barriers to attendance.

- ii. *Enhancing Completion Rates:* Establish comprehensive support systems, including academic resources and mentorship, to aid students in overcoming educational hurdles. Promote parental engagement through workshops, addressing technological barriers, and implementing targeted interventions. Implement a robust monitoring framework to assess program effectiveness.
- iii. *Improving Access to Basic Education Services:* Streamline program implementation, expand outreach efforts, enhance digital infrastructure, and address socioeconomic barriers. Collaborate with stakeholders to leverage resources and improve access to education services during the pandemic.

5.2.4 Recommendations for Further Studies

An essential area for further studies involves assessing the impacts of HSNP programs during emergencies like pandemics. Investigating how social safety net programs perform during unforeseen crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can provide insights for policymakers and aid organizations. Further studies in this domain are crucial for advancing knowledge and refining strategies to better safeguard vulnerable populations during unexpected crises.

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