

The State of Evidence on Social Cash Transfers in Africa Transfer Project Workshop Brief 2017

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The annual workshop of the Transfer Project, “The State of Evidence on Social Cash Transfers in Africa” focused on new challenges arising from moving from fragmented programmes to integrated social protection systems, combining cash transfers with complementary (also referred to as ‘plus’) interventions, as well as the assessment of social protection in emergency contexts.

This year’s workshop was organized through the [Transfer Project](#) by the [UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office \(WCARO\)](#), [UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti](#), the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#), and the [University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill \(UNC\)](#), in Dakar, Senegal, from 7 to 9 June 2017. Approximately 125 social protection [experts and stakeholders](#) from over 30 countries gathered for the workshop to review the rigorous evidence from impact evaluations across Africa. In recognition of the complexity of this work and the continued growth of cash transfer programmes globally, the workshop brought together researchers, policymakers, and development partners to debate, discuss and reflect on current experiences, new evidence and future directions (see [workshop concept note](#)).

Since the first Transfer Project workshop in 2011, these annual meetings have provided a platform for productive discussions around cash transfers in the African context. National stakeholders have valued the opportunity to share their experiences, learn from each other’s successes and failures, and discuss how to strengthen national social protection strategies and policies. This year, for the first time, the workshop was held in Francophone Africa. The setting facilitated greater participation of representatives from West African countries that had not previously engaged with the Project to the same extent, expanding discussion to include more emerging and diverse cash transfer schemes. In addition, views and experiences from

academics, donors and government actors resulted in a dynamic dialogue leading to the unique combination of “[creative, rigorous, frank and fun behaviour](#)” the workshop is known for.

Formally, the workshop objectives were to:

1. Advance the knowledge, implementation and scale up of evidence-informed social protection strategies, highlighting the role of research in informing social protection policies and programmes;
2. Influence key stakeholders, including policymakers and donors, to increase their commitment to social protection interventions that are evidence- and human-rights based; and
3. Develop deeper insight through continued research into the constraints and opportunities involved in both humanitarian and development settings, and moving from single social policy instruments to integrated social protection systems.

AGENDA

After welcoming participants to Dakar, familiarizing participants with workshop goals and an icebreaker, the [agenda](#) featured 8 topical sessions over the 2.5 days:

- **Transfer Project Book launch / Myth-busting** – introduced key aspects and evaluations conducted under the Transfer Project and presented a summary of research findings from the book, [From Evidence to Action: The Story of Cash Transfers and Impact Evaluation in Sub-Saharan Africa](#). A key component of the workshop was setting the record straight on [common perceptions](#) (or ‘myths’) around adverse impacts of unconditional cash transfers which are often utilized in policy debates but are not borne out by the evidence.



- **Productive impacts, livelihoods and resiliency** – presented qualitative and quantitative findings on how household dynamics and livelihoods change as a result of transfers through case studies in [Senegal](#), [Lesotho](#) and [Malawi](#). An emphasis was also given to innovative ways to measure the impacts on direct beneficiaries and ‘spill-over’ effects on non-beneficiaries (e.g. measurement of ‘resilience’ and simulation methods).
- **Cash plus and system linkages** – provided an [overview](#) of motivation and design of ‘cash plus (Cash+)’ programming to better coordinate or integrate interventions for improved outcomes. An example of social protection and agriculture integration was given in the context of Malawi, followed by an interactive roundtable discussing ongoing and planned interventions and evaluations in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.
- **Health, food security and nutrition** – explored whether [national cash transfer programmes can improve morbidity and health seeking](#), as well as [food security and child nutrition](#), using cross-country analysis and a Mali case study. A recurring debate on this topic centres on the weak evidence to date of impacts of cash alone on child nutrition, and what accompanying measures are most promising for improving child stunting and wasting in a cost-effective manner.
- **Children’s education, labour and productive activities** – discussed impacts of cash transfers on children’s time use and human capital development using [Malawi](#), [Lesotho and Zambia](#) as case studies. The session brought into focus a [gender perspective](#) and explored innovative (alternative) methodologies such as ‘photo voice’ for collecting qualitative data on children.
- **New thinking on social cash transfers and poverty: Urban populations and the limits of Proxy Mean Tests (PMTs)** – brought together [new evidence](#) showing limitations of common targeting techniques (e.g. PMTs) and explored alternative/hybrid methods for targeting and profiling using [Zambia as a case study](#). The session also discussed unique components of urban programming and promising practices for successfully translating programmes from rural to [urban settings](#).
- **Emerging work in fragile contexts** – familiarized participants with the challenges of conducting evaluations in fragile and crisis settings, and discussed innovative approaches to programming and research in such contexts from [Madagascar](#), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Sahel (West Africa).
- **Innovative work and unpacking pathways** – presented innovative directions in exploring unanswered questions relating to relative impacts of cash versus in-kind, electronic payments, impacts on intimate partner violence, child multi-dimensional poverty, and the [psychology of poverty](#), drawing on evaluations from DRC, [Niger](#), Kenya, [Malawi](#) and Zambia.

The workshop also offered a [poster session](#), as well as smaller simultaneous sessions that enabled participants to discuss key issues specific to a single country or theme in a smaller group setting, including:

- **Regional response to shocks and crisis** – explored the potential of cash transfers in responding to weather-related shocks in East and Southern Africa, and how programmes can better be structured to be prepared to respond quickly when crises arise.
- **Autonomisation des familles bénéficiaires ... quelle stratégie pour le PNBSF?** – deliberated on empowerment of beneficiary households of Senegal’s transfer programme and design features of the national programme to enable improved outcomes.
- **Designing child sensitive social protection systems and providing rigorous evidence** – reflected on UNICEF’s experiences reconceptualising programme design to enhance child protection outcomes (focusing on violence against children) in Zimbabwe and on ethics of randomized-controlled trials and research in the context of a child grant programme in Mozambique.
- **Using the evidence to bust the myths: advocacy and communication for social protection** – UNICEF Ghana and Save the Children shared learnings on how rigorous evidence can be used for advocacy and to influence policymakers.

The workshop closed with a panel of Government and donor perspectives on take-away messages and priority research questions and directions going forward, followed by organizers’ reflections on the successes, limitations and way forward for national programmes in Africa. Not to be missed was the prize ceremony (Transfer Project Workshop Oscars) and recognition of best presentation, panel and poster, most engaging duo debate and of course, the winner of the previous evenings’ checkers’ tournament.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Participants shared the most up-to-date evidence on social, economic and productive impacts, dispelling myths, and addressing current issues governments face with policy and implementation of cash transfer programmes. Presentations also featured innovative ways to address challenges around targeting, mobile payments and local economy impacts, stimulating stakeholders to think more creatively about the next generation of programming and evaluation potential. Emphasis was on the regional context and knowledge generation, and how locally evaluated programmes can drive the unique features of African programmes and policy.

Two specific areas that generated a lot of excitement were assessing the impact of **social protection in fragile and humanitarian contexts**, including the respective methodological implications, and the concept of **Cash Plus (Cash+)**, coordinated or complementary interventions to existing social protection programmes to enhance social and economic impacts.

Improving targeting practices: A closer look at the Proxy Means Test (PMT)

- The ultimate success of poverty-reduction programmes relies on how well we are able to identify poor households or individuals;
- PMTs are commonly used to identify recipients of social protection programmes using observed indicators of economic welfare;
- New [evidence](#) examining performance of PMTs in nine countries in Africa suggests PMTs do not necessarily perform better on standard metrics as compared to alternative methods (universal, categorical), and in particular have higher exclusion errors (exclude poor individuals); and
- Ultimate choice of method should depend on diverse factors, including costs of targeting, transparency and timelines.

Social protection in fragile settings

Social protection is increasingly implemented in response to crises, however research and evaluation in these contexts is less commonly undertaken. Discussion focused on how the Transfer Project and national programmes can contribute to this gap in a meaningful way, including:

- What are the challenges of evaluating cash-based interventions in emergency contexts (highlighting timelines, ethics, funding and need for creativity in evaluation design)?
- What are practical design features to enable existing social protection programmes to be more risk-informed and shock-responsive?
- What are high potential (productive and social) 'plus' interventions or additional coordination considerations in a fragile context?
- How can implementation move from emergency response to nascent social protection systems?

Cash Plus (Cash +)

Despite broad, positive impacts of cash transfers, evidence shows that their full potential impacts may not be realized in the face of:

- Supply side constraints (access to clean water, health facilities, schools, markets), or
- Information gaps (knowledge on nutrition, productive input technologies, natural resource management techniques, etc.).

Because of the limitations of cash alone, and because various programmes and services often target the same or overlapping populations, there is growing interest in cash+ programming, which comprises coordinated or complementary interventions or linkages to services. In planning such initiatives, it is important to consider they are 'fit for purpose' and ensure that design responds to both the right bottlenecks as well as national capacities. Moreover, evidence on effectiveness of such initiatives is limited and more research is needed.

Key discussions and questions considered:

- When is the right moment to think about cash+? After or during expansion of coverage?
- What are the methodological implications and challenges of assessing a cash+ model, including rigorous measurement of synergies between programme components?

While many advances have been made in expanding and optimizing design of social protection programming across Africa, it should be noted that woven throughout many discussions was the common difficulty in finding political will to finance cash transfer programmes, and the shifts in the funding landscape. Cash transfers are too often portrayed as a short-term measure and are subsequently perceived as costly and unaffordable. Discussions emphasize that evidence can be used to advocate for cash transfers as a strategic investment

opportunity for governments that has proven cost-effective in many countries. In particular the [local economy effects](#), showing that transfers lead to community multipliers has been instrumental in convincing ministries of finance that these programmes have potential as an investment, rather than solely a cost. The role of research and impact evaluations tied to national programming has a powerful place in informing policies and implementation, as well as investments in social protection.

MEDIA COVERAGE

The gathering of stakeholders around the topic of cash transfers generated significant interest in the [Senegalese media](#). Government, UNICEF, and FAO representatives praised the potential benefits of cash transfers in developing and fragile settings – and their use in the region and beyond. Various articles highlighted cash transfers as a critical opportunity to invest in Africa’s youth on the eve of a demographic transition. While political will for social protection is still lacking in some settings, it is increasingly being recognized as a key development tool.

About 150 million people have escaped extreme poverty through social protection and cash transfers. When we are in a situation of weather shocks, for example, cash transfers help people. If local markets respond or function properly, [people] have access to staple foods immediately.

Ms. Coumba Sow
FAO Regional Team Manager for Resilience
in West Africa and the Sahel (REOWA)

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Using evidence to bust myths

As the workshop closed, it was apparent that there is a **critical need to continue advocacy for the role of cash transfer programmes** as a safety net for poor and vulnerable populations, as perceptions of adverse effects (not supported by evidence) are widespread. As more governments invest in and scale-up cash transfer programmes, it will be necessary to continue expanding knowledge on the potential capabilities of these programmes in different settings and of varying programme designs.

2. Cash transfers are not a silver bullet

While transfers can produce significant impacts across a range of important development domains, even with successful implementation, improvements in other areas remain unchanged. Future programmes and research need to focus on the best ways for cash transfers to be integrated with complementary programmes, to achieve synergistic results.

3. Invest in future generations

Additionally, at a time when Africa faces a demographic shift, **focus on and investment in youth** through cash transfer programmes, cash plus programming and impact evaluation is especially relevant. This topic has emerged as one of the possible key focus areas for the

next Transfer Project workshop, and has the potential to be an important direction of programme development across the region.

4. Expand research in fragile and emergency contexts

Finally, there is space for **expanding research and programming into new frontiers**, such as fragile contexts or emergency settings, and for delving deeper into mechanisms by which transfers operate to fine-tune programmes. Participants addressed the need for better targeting, closer examination of differential impacts, the need for operational studies, and continuous innovation in research methodology. The need for combining quantitative and qualitative research to produce a more in-depth understanding of each issue was highlighted.

As government policies and programmes evolve and scale-up, the demand for evidence in the context of national programmes in partnership with national researchers and stakeholders is more crucial than ever. Research through the Transfer Project will continue to support evaluation needs at the country level. Through this annual workshop and other information exchanges, the region can be better informed on the affordability and effectiveness of social protection initiatives and how cash transfers contribute to achieving global goals.

For more information, please visit the [workshop page](#) in [English](#) or [French](#). For more information on the Transfer Project, or to sign up for our newsletter, visit our [webpage](#).

Are you a cash transfer expert? Take our [‘Who wants to be a Transfer Project Millionaire’](#) quiz to test your knowledge of African national programming. The winning team at the workshop got 100% correct answers!

