Cash Transfer as a Social Protection Intervention:
Evidence from UNICEF Evaluations 2010-2014

UNICEF Evaluation Office
18 August 2015
Background

- A large portion of **UNICEF’s social protection investments** focus on supporting government-led cash transfer programmes (advocacy and technical assistance to designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating cash transfer programmes), in addition to support to national policy development.

- Are cash transfers working in low- and middle-income countries? Is UNICEF’s current focus on cash transfers an **effective way of achieving results for children**?
Purpose / Objectives of the Evaluation Synthesis

• To inform the **roll-out of UNICEF’s Strategic Plan**, and future policies and programmes on **Social Inclusion**, by
  
  • Reviewing quality and coverage of evidence in the field of social protection (2010-2014)
  • Presenting sectoral impacts of cash transfers as well as cross-cutting findings
  • Providing recommendations to strengthen UNICEF engagement in cash transfer programming and beyond
Methodology / Limitations

• Review of **42 evidence documents** found in UNICEF’s Evaluation and Research Data Base (ERDB)

• Included most recent impact evaluations from all “Transfer Project” countries using strong methodologies

• Key limitations: **limited visibility of correlated social inclusion initiatives** that accompany cash transfer programmes; scarce data/research on certain potential impacts (e.g. child protection)
Quality of Evidence by UNICEF Region
Major Findings: Nutrition & Food Security

- Strong and consistently positive impacts on food expenditure and consumption (purchased and home grown), with a resulting reduction in food stress throughout the year.

- Improved dietary diversity, including more proteins, fruits, vegetables and fats.

- Some positive impacts on infant and young child feeding and on stunting.
Major Findings: Child Protection

• Some evaluations see a clear reduction in child labour whereas others see a shift from paid to unpaid work.

• Few studies were designed to measure additional child protection outcomes.

• Some information on the positive impacts of transfers on children’s protection from violence, abuse and exploitation.
Major Findings: Communal Networks & Dignity

- Significant increase of investment in formal (savings, funeral societies) and informal networks (e.g. ceremonies).

- Families receiving grants often share the income and resources with extended family or other poorer families.

- Widespread reports of a much greater sense of self-pride/dignity/worth as a result of increased contributions to the community and greater self-sufficiency.

- The majority of recipients reported a positive outlook on the future owing to a newfound confidence that household basics can be secured.
Major Findings: Implementation & Evaluation

- Transfer programmes of basically similar design can produce very different outcomes in different areas or among different populations. Fitting the programme to the specific social and administrative context is a consistent design concern.

- Targeting is a technically (and ethically) complex issue and many methods are used depending on context.

- Grant size is a critical variable.
Conclusions

• Cash transfers in the hands of poor populations will generate multiple positive outcomes.

• Households exhibit highly rational decision-making.

• Enabling factors that increase impacts are evident.

• Unconditional cash grants generate the broadest range of benefits and offer maximum flexibility and respect for beneficiary views, in line with a rights-based approach to programming.
Conclusions (continued)

• Cash transfers can work well across all contexts, with appropriate modifications.

• Many smart implementation decisions must be taken for benefits to emerge in any context.

• Strongly resourced research approaches are suited for these complex programmes, but there are many issues still to investigate.

• Transfer programmes fit well into UNICEF’s forward-looking vision.
Recommendations

• Increase programme and evaluation attention to ‘Cash Plus’ interventions.

• Consider integrating the cash transfer (or ‘Cash Plus’) modality into programming addressing each of the outcome areas articulated in UNICEF’s strategic plan.

• Update the technical guidance on evidence of impact to be measured through evaluation and research, and on implementation measurement.
Recommendations (continued)

- Make technical support available for an evidence-based approach early in the process.
- Take action to expand the social protection evidence base beyond cash transfers.
- Develop the evidence base on effectiveness of cash transfer programmes in humanitarian action.
RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus on cash plus interventions
- Consider cash transfers for each outcome area
- Update technical guidance documents
- Examine cash transfer programmes in humanitarian contexts
- Expand the evidence base beyond cash transfers
- Make technical support available earlier on in the process

#Unicef
For more information, please contact:
Samuel Bickel or Tina Tordjman-Nebe
Evaluation Office
sbickel@unicef.org; ttordjmannebe@unicef.org

United Nations Children’s Fund
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel: 212-326-7000
www.unicef.org

© United Nations Children’s Fund
August 2015