

RESEARCH BRIEF

Impacts of the Child-sensitive Social Protection Programme in Burkina Faso: Midline Brief

Key findings

This brief summarizes the findings of the midline impact evaluation of a child-sensitive social protection programme in Burkina Faso. The study aimed to assess the short-term impacts of the programme on household poverty, expenditures, food security and economic activities, as well as on women and children. This is complemented by an assessment of the fidelity of the programme's implementation to the programme design. Key emphasis is placed on uncovering gender dynamics within the households as part of the research agenda on the Gender-Responsive and Age-Sensitive Social Protection (GRASSP) programme by UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight. The following are the key findings from the study:

- Beneficiaries appreciated the cash transfers and complementary interventions, and were generally satisfied with the payment schedule of the cash transfers and the use of mobile money to deliver the payments.
- Beneficiaries and stakeholders highlighted several concerns and challenges with programme implementation. This included the potential for excluding vulnerable people such as older persons and persons with disabilities from the programme as targeting was conducted via self-registration. There was a concern that the transfer size was inadequate for larger households. In addition, the recipient of the cash transfers were household heads who were predominantly male, and this could have had adverse repercussions in polygamous households where male heads were more likely to share the cash transfers with their favourite wives.

- Delivery of the cash transfers via mobile money was also hindered by poor network coverage, long distances to mobile money booths, illiteracy and the lack of identification.
- The programme increased the number of daily meals consumed and decreased food insecurity by 30 per cent. The programme had protective impacts on household expenditures, against a general worsening trend in expenditures.
- The programme reduced the poverty gap by 11 percentage points, but had no impact on the poverty rate. In addition, headcount poverty reduction was detected in the heterogeneous analysis, but not the overall estimates.
- Most encouragingly, the programme increased investments in livestock, agricultural inputs and engagement in non-farm enterprises.
- The programme improved children's material well-being, particularly clothes and blankets. However, there were no impacts on the incidence of illness, injury or stoppage of work by household members or caregivers due to illness/injury.
- Unexpectedly, there was a shift in the allocation of time to household chores and economic activities, as the share of weekly household chores and economic activities performed by children, especially girls, increased, while that of adults decreased.
- The programme increased the school participation of girls aged 6 to 17 years, but had no impact on frequent school attendance and temporary withdrawal from school.
- Women who benefited from the programme reported having a good quality of life, feeling happy, and having greater control over their savings and earnings compared to non-beneficiaries. Insights on the gender dynamics showed that most household decisions on schooling and health, finances and income-generating activities were mostly taken by men, while women were mainly responsible for household work and caregiving.

Introduction

Background and programme design

In response to the high prevalence of multidimensional poverty among children in Burkina Faso, UNICEF Burkina Faso, in collaboration with the Permanent Secretariat of the National Council for Social Protection and Save the Children, initiated a child-sensitive social protection programme (CSSPP) in 11 municipalities across four regions (Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-North, East and North) of the country. The CSSPP comprises a combination of cash transfers, nutrition, and water and sanitation improvement strategies. The package of interventions differs across the four regions and were implemented between 2020 and 2023.

The programme combines cash transfers, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and nutrition-related services. The cash transfer amount is FCFA 16,000 (about US\$30) per month per household regardless of household size. The beneficiaries are paid every three months through electronic transfers. Household beneficiaries of the cash transfer were selected using a national assessment tool that is used to construct a national database of the poor and vulnerable in Burkina Faso.

Study design and methodology

This study is undertaken as part of the GRASSP research programme (2018–2024) led by UNICEF Innocenti and funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom.

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the impacts of the programme on poverty, household expenditure, food security and economic activities?
2. What are the impacts of the programme on children's material well-being and health?
3. What are the gendered impacts of the programme on time use, schooling and women's participation in decision-making?
4. Does cash combined with WASH and nutrition interventions ('cash plus') have a higher impact on gender equality outcomes than cash alone?

5. How do contextual factors and programme design shape programme impact? (e.g., religion, household structure, access to services/amenities, community/ethnic norms)

A mixed-methods approach was designed to examine the impact of the cash plus transfer programme on households, children and women. Quantitative baseline data were collected between January 2020 to May 2020, prior to the start of interventions in June 2020. A follow-up survey was conducted 12 months later from June to July of 2021 for the midline assessment. Out of the 2,772 households interviewed at baseline, 2,736 (representing 98.7 per cent) were successfully re-interviewed at midline. The survey was conducted in four regions: Boucle de Mouhoun, Centre-North, East and North. To assess the impact of the programme intervention, the quantitative analysis uses a difference-in-differences (double difference) estimation strategy. This approach compares the changes in outcomes over time between the treatment and comparison groups.

Qualitative data were also collected to deepen insights on the impacts and programme implementation process. This was achieved through 33 key informant interviews, 32 in-depth interviews and 35 focus group discussions. Data-collection activities were carried out by UNICEF Innocenti and the *Institut Supérieur des Sciences de la Population* with logistical support from UNICEF Burkina Faso. The qualitative analysis uses a thematic analysis approach.

Findings

Programme implementation

TARGETING AND SELECTION PROCESS

In the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, beneficiaries were generally appreciative of the cash transfers and the programme. Key informants also reported that the programme had generally been successful and had provided relief to extremely vulnerable families.

Conversely, key informants pointed out the problems with the targeting approach, which was based on self-registration. This approach potentially excluded households that were not aware of the exercise or were unable to travel to the main town for registration due to the lack of income, limited mobility (older persons) or physical disability. One concern was that the recipients of the cash transfers are heads of households who are predominantly male. Key informants highlighted that this was a problem as these prevented women from benefiting

from the transfers or from influencing how the transfers were spent. One key informant highlighted this challenge and recommended a review of the targeting approach:

“Now at the level of women, we wish that the cases are divided, the man has a share, the woman also has something ... we had pointed out that the money is intended for women, you know we are in Africa, the man is the head of the family, it is the woman who manages the home, it is a little complicated. For us, if the programme is to continue, they should review the cash transfer system so that women are also considered.”

– Key informant, implementing partner regional office, Ye, Boucle de Mouhoun

Further discussions with key informants also revealed that in polygamous households, the husbands were more likely to share the cash transfers with a favourite wife (typically the youngest) and her children. They highlighted the need for reviewing how polygamous households should be enrolled in the programme, and especially to consider each wife and her children as a household to avoid some being disadvantaged and having conflicts.

TRANSFER AMOUNT, FREQUENCY AND DELIVERY MECHANISM

About 85 per cent of the beneficiaries had received the intended quarterly amount of FCFA 48,000 (three or four payments). Beneficiaries expressed their appreciation for the cash transfer payment modality and payment schedule. Beneficiaries and key informants also pointed out that the transfer size could be increased to enhance productive impacts and increase food security in larger households. The delivery of the cash transfers via mobile money was viewed favourably, with beneficiaries and stakeholders highlighting the greater privacy and security derived from using mobile phone platforms. However, challenges such as poor network coverage, long distances to mobile money booths, illiteracy and the lack of identification hindered access to the mobile cash transfers for some beneficiaries. Stakeholders also admitted that despite the multisectoral nature of the programme, cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration was weak.

Programme impacts on key outcomes

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: IMPACT ON POVERTY, FOOD SECURITY AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Beneficiaries used the cash transfers to purchase food, clothes, school fees and health care. The analysis shows that the programme increased the number of daily meals consumed by beneficiary households by about 10 per cent (relative to the baseline) and reduced food

insecurity by 30 per cent. Although there was a general decline in expenditures in both beneficiary and non-beneficiary households over time, the programme had protective impacts as it had positive impacts on food expenditures. The programme also reduced the poverty gap by 11 percentage points, but had no impact on the poverty headcount (rates) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Programme impacts on poverty and food security



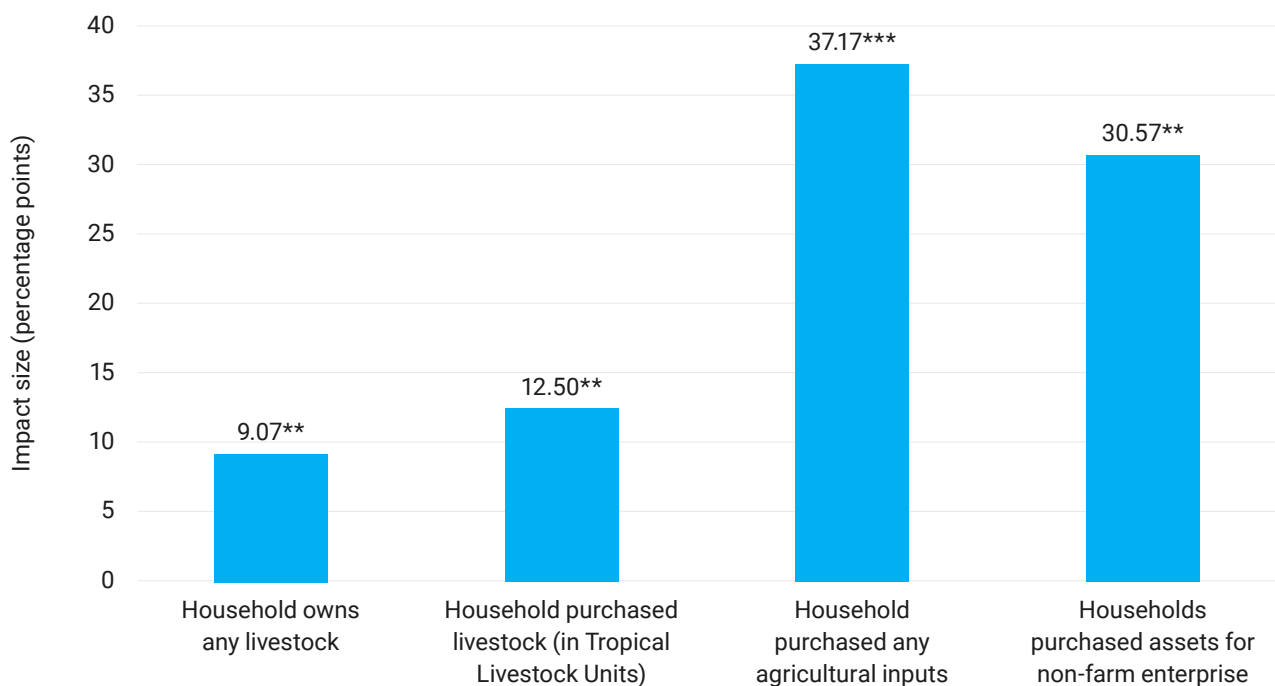
Notes: ** and * denote impacts statistically significant at 5 per cent and 10 per cent significance level, respectively.

There were notable impacts on economic activities (see Figure 2). The programme increased investments in livestock and agricultural inputs. This was consistent with qualitative evidence, as beneficiaries reported using the cash transfers to diversify their livestock and invest in income-generating activities such as rearing chicken or running small businesses selling rice, coffee or doughnuts. For some women, the programme enabled them to purchase valuable assets that provided a safety net from shocks. One respondent explained:

“The amount of money helps us a lot because when I got it (the money), this time I bought a donkey to fetch water for me and my children, and I also bought a cart.”

– Female focus group discussion respondent, Namounou, East (treatment)

Figure 2: Programme impacts on economic activities



Notes: *** and ** denote impacts statistically significant at 1 per cent and 5 per cent significance level, respectively.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S MATERIAL WELL-BEING AND HEALTH

The programme improved children's material well-being by decreasing the likelihood of a child not having clothes (14 percentage points) and blankets (34 percentage points). There was a reduction in the likelihood of children lacking the three basic material needs of shoes, clothes and blankets. However, the programme had no impacts on the incidence of illness and injury among household members, treatment-seeking, and stoppage of work by household members or caregivers who became sick or injured.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: GENDERED IMPACTS ON TIME USE, SCHOOLING AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Time use on household chores and economic activities

The programme resulted in shifts in intra-household labour allocation between adults and children, as well as gender differences among children. Children benefiting from the programme increased their time spent in household chores by 7 per cent, and this

increase was mostly observed among girls. Yet, hours worked by adults in household chores decreased by 9 per cent. This finding demonstrates an unintended and unexpected substitution effect, with the burden of household chores increasing for girls. Similar shifts in time use are observed in the distribution of hours worked in economic activities. Children benefiting from the programme spent more time working in economic activities (9.9 per cent), while the time spent by adults, especially men, declined (12 per cent). Again, the impact among children is mainly observed among girls. The programme also increased the number of days spent by boys and girls on farm work, but had no impacts on adult males and females. Qualitative interviews shed light on the prevailing gender division of labour within households. Both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries reported that women were generally responsible for household work, contributed to livestock rearing and occasionally helped with farm work. Men had their role as the breadwinners who earned income from agricultural work.

Schooling

The programme had no significant impact on the frequency of school attendance and incidence of temporary school withdrawal. However, the programme increased the proportion of girls aged 6 to 17 years (5 percentage points) and 6 to 12 years (7.4 percentage points) that have ever attended school. This impact is observed among girls who had never been to school, prior to the beginning of the programme.

Women's agency and participation in decision-making

Women benefiting from the programme reported having greater control over their savings and earnings compared to non-beneficiaries. In qualitative interviews, both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries reported that women are were mainly responsible for the domestic work and unpaid care work, while men made important decisions on economic activities, assets and property, children's schooling and marriage. Women benefiting from the programme reported that they were increasingly asked to share their opinion on some decisions, rather than being informed. Women benefiting from the programme also reported having a good quality of life, feeling happy, having gained some control over their lives, and having experienced or expecting improvements in their life.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: COMPARISON OF THE IMPACTS OF THE DIFFERENT CASH AND CASH PLUS GROUPS

The first group comprises cash only households, the second group comprises households that received cash plus nutrition, the third group received cash plus nutrition plus WASH,

and a final group aggregates all cash plus interventions. A comparison of the different components of the cash plus intervention shows some variation in the programme’s impacts.

Further analysis compared the varied impacts of the different components of the cash plus programme. The first group comprises cash only households, the second group comprises cash plus nutrition households, the third group comprises cash plus nutrition plus WASH, and a final group aggregates all cash plus interventions. The results show that the programme’s impacts varied across these groups (see Table 1). Food expenditures increased across the different groups and reductions in the poverty headcount were also observed in all the groups. Households in all cash plus groups and the cash only group experienced a decline in food insecurity, with the exception of households in the cash plus nutrition plus WASH group.

Furthermore, livestock ownership increased in the cash only group by 9.1 per cent and in the cash plus nutrition group by 10.4 per cent. Households in all the different intervention groups increased their investments in agricultural inputs. The impacts on time use, specifically the number of days spent on farm work increased for both boys and girls, but did not change for adults (men and women) across all the different intervention groups. In addition, the positive impacts on children’s material well-being (clothes and blankets) were strongest in the cash only group, and the likelihood of ever attending school only increased among children in the cash only and cash plus nutrition groups.

Table 1: Varied impacts across the different cash plus groups

Cash only	Cash plus nutrition	Cash plus nutrition plus WASH	Cash plus ‘all services’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty reduction • Substantial reduction in food insecurity • Substantial increase in expenditures • Increase in livestock ownership • Increase in agricultural inputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No poverty reduction • Substantial reduction in food insecurity • Substantial increase in expenditures • Increase in livestock ownership • Increase in agricultural inputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty reduction • No impact on food insecurity • Moderate increase in expenditures • No impact on livestock ownership • Increase in agricultural inputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty reduction • Marginal reduction in food insecurity • Moderate increase in expenditures • Increase in livestock ownership • Increase in agricultural inputs

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: MODERATING ROLE OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ON THE PROGRAMME IMPACTS

The study also analysed the moderating effects of various household characteristics and contextual factors (including gender norms).

Household characteristics

Most programme impacts did not vary by gender of the household head or religion. However, impacts tend to differ among polygamous and Muslim households.

- Positive impacts on livestock ownership and purchases of agricultural inputs were observed in all households irrespective of gender, religion and number of spouses.
- The protective impacts of the programme on food expenditures and poverty gap reduction were observed in all households (irrespective of religion and gender) and in monogamous households, with the exception of polygamous households.
- Food insecurity decreased in both male- and female-headed households, although the magnitude was higher in female-headed households.
- The programme increased the number of meals consumed and asset acquisition in all households (irrespective of gender and religion), with the exception of polygamous and Muslim households.

Gender norms and other contextual factors

Gender norms and attitudes are largely similar among beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. There were no significant differences in the self-reported progressive attitudes and preferences on female genital mutilation, equitable nutrition for women/girls, girl schooling, freedom of movement during menstruation, the use of contraceptives and male participation in childcare. Furthermore, progressive norms were not a significant moderator of the association between the programme and gender attitudes on marriage and contraception, fertility preferences and attitudes towards intimate partner violence. Furthermore, the programme's effectiveness may have been undermined by exposure to the economic crisis and disruptions (schooling, travel, movement) induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, poor rainfall and the violence from terrorist attacks.

Conclusion and recommendations

The evidence shows that the programme had positive impacts on a number of outcome domains, and that these impacts were largely in line with the objectives of the programme. Among households, the programme increased food security and expenditure, participation in economic activities, livestock ownership and reduced poverty. Among children, the programme also improved children's material well-being and school attendance by girls. However, the programme had unintended consequences on the time use of adults and children. There were intra-household shifts in labour allocation between adults and children. The time spent by children doing household chores and economic activities increased, particularly by girls. Conversely, the time spent by adults doing household chores and economic activities decreased. Additional impacts were observed among several indicators of women's empowerment. Women who benefited from the programme reported having greater control over their own lives, savings and earnings, and were happier and more positive about their quality of life and life prospects when compared to non-beneficiaries. The programme had several different intervention groups, and a comparative analysis showed that cash alone had the greatest impacts on expenditures compared with modest impacts in the other groups, while the cash plus nutrition intervention resulted in the largest reduction of food insecurity.

It is important to note that these impacts were achieved in an environment where households were exposed to rainfall shocks, economic challenges and disruptions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, and insecurity from terrorist attacks. On programme design, stakeholders raised concerns about the gender responsiveness of the design, particularly the choice of the household head as the recipient of the cash transfers (household heads were predominantly male). Programme implementation was not without challenges. Access to mobile cash transfers was hampered by poor mobile network coverage and illiteracy. There was limited cross-sectoral collaboration in the implementation of what is a multisectoral intervention. A limitation of this study is that the programme's plus components may have overlapped with contemporaneous interventions by other organizations, which undermines the isolation of the independent impacts of the different plus components.

Programmatic recommendations:

- **Improve the beneficiary selection process to reduce potential inclusion and exclusion errors, and address grievances transparently.** The self-registration process for beneficiary selection may have excluded some of the most vulnerable households that were disabled, too old or too weak to travel to the main town.

- **Strengthen the gender responsiveness of the programme by enhancing communication and sensitization on the involvement of women in the spending of cash transfers and decision-making on economic activities.** The recipients of the cash transfers were the household heads who were predominantly men. In this context, women's autonomy or participation in decision-making over economic matters is limited, which can limit the potential of the programme in achieving gender equality. In particular, payments of cash transfers directly to women or children's mothers in polygamous households should be considered.
- **Increase the adequacy of the transfers and differentiate the amounts according to household size.** There is need for increasing the transfer value to enhance impacts, especially for larger and polygamous households.

Research recommendations

- Determine the long-term effects of the cash plus programme on different outcomes such as poverty, food security, children's schooling and women's participation in decision-making.
- Determine the independent impacts of the individual plus components (e.g., nutrition, WASH).
- Explore the effectiveness of the cash plus intervention on child nutrition outcomes as well as maternal knowledge outcomes.
- Assess how the context of complex insecurity in Burkina Faso shapes the cash plus programme's effect on children's schooling and agriculture.

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Authors

This brief was written by Kaku Attah Damoah and Nyasha Tirivayi on behalf of the Burkina Faso Midline Evaluation Team. The full list of the Evaluation Team and their roles can be found in the midline report.

For more information, see the full report

Bersudskaya, Vera, et al., *Impacts of the Child-Sensitive Social Protection Programme in Burkina Faso: Midline Report*, UNICEF Innocenti, Florence, June 2024.

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