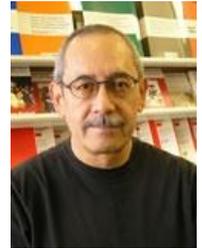


CHILD POVERTY INSIGHTS

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Just give money to the poor – and children will benefit

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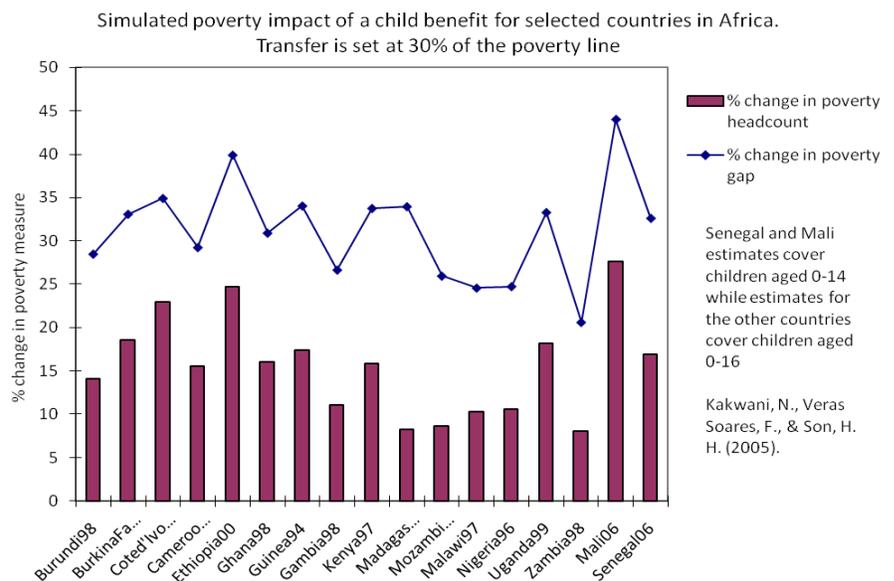
What are the main messages for policymakers from your book *Just Give Money to the Poor: The Development Revolution from the Global South*?

The main message from the book (Barrientos, Hanlon and Hulme, 2010) is that direct transfers to households in poverty are an essential component of poverty reduction and development strategies in the South. Growth generates economic opportunity and basic services support human development. Direct transfers to household in extreme poverty enable them to access services and link up to growth.

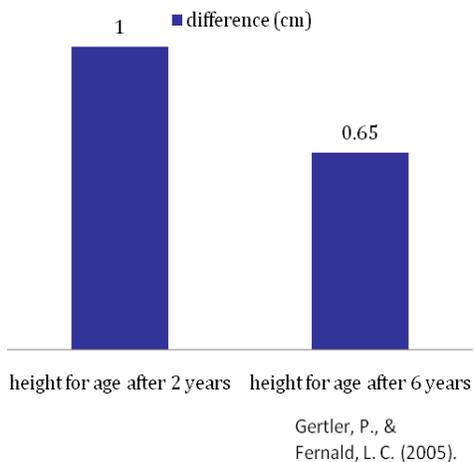
The book provides an accessible account and assessment of the [rapid growth of social protection programmes in developing countries in the last decade](#). This is described as a ‘quiet’ revolution in development thinking. Large scale programmes like *Bolsa Família* in Brazil, the *Child Support Grant* in South Africa, or the *National Guarantee Scheme* in India reflect Southern responses to poverty and deprivation. The book argues that the emergence of innovative antipoverty programmes in many developing countries demonstrates that knowledge on how to eradicate poverty is already freely available if only we care to learn from the South.

At UNICEF we are particularly interested in the impacts of social protection and cash transfers on children – what is the evidence on these impacts?

Children are the majority of the world’s poor, and any serious attempt to reduce poverty must consider the impact of policy on children. Moreover, permanent and sustainable exit from poverty requires that policy makers focus on children’s development. Malnutrition, deficient health care and immunization, limited schooling, and early entry into the labour market raise the likelihood of poverty, and contribute to ensuring poverty persist across generations. Innovative social protection programmes



Difference in height for age between OPORTUNIDADES treatment (joined 1998) and control (joined 2000) groups in 2003 for 2-6 year olds



emerging in the South have incorporated these insights in setting programme objectives and design.

Human development transfer programmes in Latin America (also known as conditional cash transfer programmes in the international policy discourse), Mexico's *Oportunidades* or Brazil's *Bolsa Família*, combine cash and in-kind transfers with schooling and health care utilization strongly focused on children, with the aim of breaking the intergenerational persistence of poverty. Impact evaluation of Mexico's *Oportunidades* has identified significant improvements in child nutrition, health status and schooling. Human development focused programmes are increasingly influential in Africa and Asia.

Income transfers to households in poverty will impact children's development even where programmes are not directly focused on children. Studies on the impact of social pensions, for example, also

show impacts on child development.

Girls are a particular concern for UNICEF in many contexts – what is known about the impacts of social protection on female infants, schoolchildren and adolescents?

The gender impacts of social protection programmes vary depending on objectives and design. Programmes focused on children's development usually route the transfers through the mother, with the expectation that they will ensure the additional resources are used effectively. In some human development focused programs, improving girls' development is reflected in differential transfer amounts. Because women live, on average, longer than men, a majority of direct beneficiaries from social pensions are women. This has some implications for girls' outcomes. In South Africa, for example, girls show improved schooling and nutrition in households with female pensioners. The challenge is to further strengthen the gender dimension of programme objectives and design.

Do social transfer programmes help reduce child labour or are the impacts more complex?

Few social protection programmes aim to reduce child labour explicitly, although programmes focused on raising school enrolment and attendance do so implicitly. The issue is that children's time can be spent at school, at work, and in other activities (play for example). In practice, it is hard to measure changes in time use of children accurately. Social protection programmes have demonstrated effectiveness in raising children's schooling, and overall show some reduction in child labour outside the home. But it is hard to observe changes in child labour, especially girls', inside the home. As a result, we must be cautious in answering this question. Perhaps the policy focus should be on ensuring that children complete the schooling cycle, as this will improve their prospects in the labour market, while working hard to eradicate child labour in hazardous occupations.

Are child-focused transfer programmes the best way of targeting benefits for poor children or do children benefit from other types of transfers?

Studies on a variety of transfer programmes give some confidence in saying that all transfers focused on households in poverty will benefit children. At the same time, they show that transfer programmes which are specifically focused on children tend to have stronger impacts on their welfare. Studies on Mexico's *Oportunidades* show significant improvements in school enrolment outcomes for girls and boys, and particularly for girls of secondary school age.

It is also important to pay attention to the scope of child-focused transfer programmes. South Africa's Child Support Grant provides transfers to children in poor households, but relies on other programmes and policies to ensure children access health care, nutrition, etc. Mexico's *Oportunidades* packages these interventions within an integrated programme. Chile's *Chile Solidario* goes one step further in integrating interventions on seven dimensions of wellbeing:

income, employment, health, education, housing, registration and intra-household relations. Integrated antipoverty programmes can address more effectively the multidimensional nature of poverty, especially extreme and persistent.

Conditional Cash Transfers have become very popular, but is the practice of conditionality desirable and feasible in countries with low levels of/poor quality service delivery?

Conditions in antipoverty programmes are not new. Public works and employment guarantees make transfers conditional on beneficiaries providing labour, as a means to encourage households in poverty to self-select into the programme. Human development focused programmes require beneficiary households to ensure their members access primary health care and children are at school. In this case, conditions are intended to ensure that programme objectives are achieved.

In low income countries with significant deficits in health and schooling infrastructure, conditions cannot be implemented simply because beneficiary households could not comply with them. This is common sense, but misses the point about conditions. In Latin America, human development focused programmes aim to improve levels of human development as a means of breaking the intergenerational persistence of poverty. If this was also the main objective adopted in low income countries with limited service infrastructure, unconditional transfers will not be successful. The point is to ensure that antipoverty programmes plan direct transfers to poor households in combination with improvements in service infrastructure.

Can poor countries afford to 'give money to the poor' – are these programmes affordable?

Social protection programmes are affordable in most contexts. South Africa spends around 3.5% of GDP on social assistance grants and Lesotho spends 2.4% of GDP on its social pension, but they are the exception. Mexico's *Oportunidades* and Brazil's *Bolsa Família* absorb around 0.5 to 0.7% of GDP. In low income countries, [finance is a harder constraint on expanding social protection](#). There are many sources of financing for social protection: domestic taxes and revenues from the exploitation of natural resources; redirecting expenditure from underperforming programmes; revenues from debt cancellation; and international aid. Social transfer programmes have high set up costs and for this reason international assistance is important in low income countries. Nonetheless, sustainability and legitimacy requires domestic political support and finance in the medium term.

Some General Resources

- Barrientos, A., and DeJong, J. (2006). ['Reducing child poverty with cash transfers: A sure thing?'](#) *Development Policy Review*, 24(5), 537-552.
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- Gertler, P., and Fernald, L. C. (2005). Impacto de mediano plazo del Programa Oportunidades sobre el desarrollo infantil en áreas rurales. In B. Hernandez Prado & M. Hernández Avila (Eds.), *Evaluación Externa de Impacto del Programa Oportunidades 2004: Alimentación* (Vol. 3, pp. 51-85). Cuernavaca: Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública.
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