



# Cash Transfer as a Social Protection Intervention:

Evidence from UNICEF  
Evaluations 2010-2014

UNICEF Evaluation Office  
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# Background

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- 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

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- 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

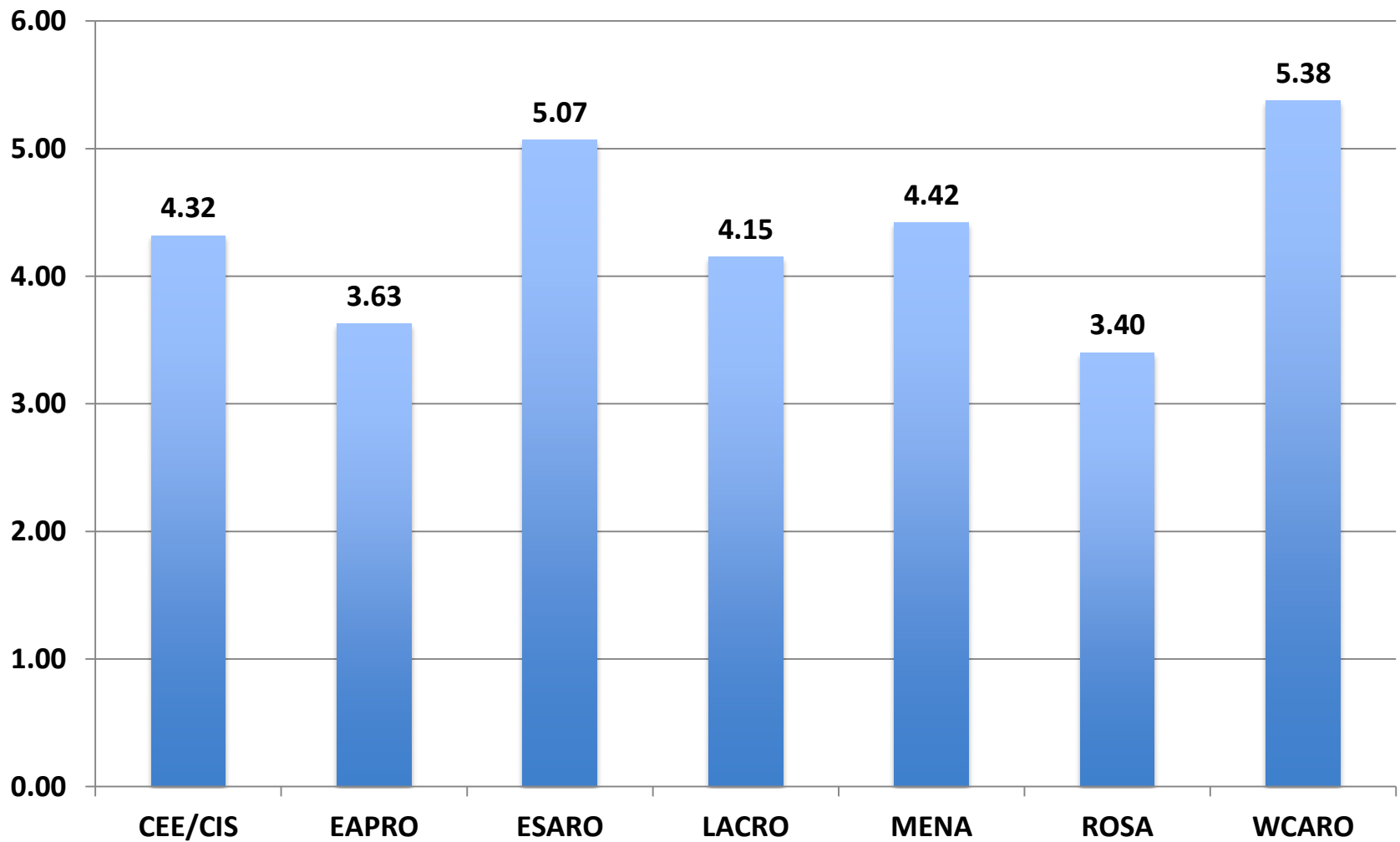
## Methodology / Limitations

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- 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

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# Major Findings: Nutrition & Food Security

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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)

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- 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

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- 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)

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- 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



Make technical support available earlier on in the process



Examine cash transfer programmes in humanitarian contexts



Expand the evidence base beyond cash transfers

For more information, please contact:  
Samuel Bickel or Tina Tordjman-Nebe  
Evaluation Office  
[sbickel@unicef.org](mailto:sbickel@unicef.org); [ttordjmannebe@unicef.org](mailto:ttordjmannebe@unicef.org)

United Nations Children's Fund  
3 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
Tel: 212-326-7000  
[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

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