



IMPACTS OF THE HARMONISED SOCIAL CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME ON COMMUNITY DYNAMICS IN ZIMBABWE

BACKGROUND

The **Harmonised Social Cash Transfer (HSCT)** was introduced in 2011 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (MoLSS) to “strengthen the purchasing power of 55 000 ultra-poor households who are labour constrained through cash transfer”. The first transfer was provided in February 2012. The programme aims to enable beneficiary households to increase their consumption to a level above the food poverty line, to reduce the number of ultra-poor households and to help beneficiaries avoid risky coping strategies such as child labour and early marriage. Moreover, the programme is expected to lead to improved nutritional status and to improved outcomes for children in health and education. Eligible households receive bi-monthly unconditional cash payments that range in size from US\$10 to US\$25 per month based on household size. The HSCT is intended to harmonize with and complement existing social protection programmes, notably the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) and Assisted Medical Treatment Orders (AMTO). The HSCT is jointly funded by the Government of Zimbabwe and UNICEF through the multi-donor aligned Child Protection Fund (CPF). By June 2013 32 591 households with 152 016 household members, including 97 561 children, were in receipt of an unconditional cash transfer in 13 districts of Zimbabwe (20 percent national coverage).

Targeting is conducted through application of a household survey by the national statistics agency and verification by Department of Social Services (DSS) and UNICEF, guided by the HSCT Manual of Operations.

THE EVALUATION

This brief presents the analysis and findings from a qualitative research case study conducted in October 2012 in Zimbabwe. The study is part of a two-year mixed methods quasi-experimental impact evaluation. The qualitative study component compared beneficiary households from two of the HSCT Phase 1 implementation districts (Goromonzi and Chivi) with non-beneficiary households from similar control districts (Seke and Masvingo). It was carried out through triangulation based on focus groups and in-depth key informant interviews. A range of selected participatory tools was employed, including social mapping and well-being analysis, livelihood scoring, institutional mapping (Venn diagrams) and household income and

expenditure analysis. The research team also undertook in-depth household case studies.

RESEARCH AREAS AND KEY FINDINGS

The study examined the impact of the cash transfer in three interrelated areas: household economy, local economy and social networks. The main findings of the research included the following:

Household economy impacts. The HSCT mainly functions as a safety net for the beneficiaries as designed by the programme. The HSCT has enabled households to become more self-reliant and better meet their food requirements and the

educational needs of their children, without the need to sell assets or increase borrowing. The transfer has increased the creditworthiness of beneficiary households and enabled many of them to reduce casual labour, increasing work in their own fields, which in some households was complemented by increased investments in productive inputs (e.g. fertilizers). For the elderly and physically constrained individuals the transfer has provided them with an opportunity to ‘rest’. Decisions on allocation of the transfer were typically made by the head of the household – well over half of the beneficiary households were headed by woman, de facto making them the main decision makers on how the HSCT was spent.



Local economy impacts. The perception of respondents was that the HSCT has not yet resulted in significant changes in the local economy. The transfer has enabled smaller shops located close to pay points and beneficiary households to benefit during and immediately following paydays. The trading volume of larger shops is determined by the seasonal agriculture calendar, festive periods and, more regularly, the income of salaried civil servants. It does not appear that the HSCT has resulted in opportunistic price increases in targeted areas. It is important to monitor the impact of the transfer on availability of labour and corresponding wage rates as the programme continues and expands. This is because findings show that HSCT has significantly reduced the need for beneficiaries to engage in casual labour (*maricho*), but with no indications that this has affected the availability of *maricho* in the market or wage rates because the programme is small in relation to the total population size, and labour supply is abundant.

Social networks. The HSCT enables beneficiaries to become more self-reliant and gain self-esteem. The HSCT is gradually enabling some individuals to rebuild and solidify their existing social networks and better engage with their communities, for example through church offerings, funeral contributions and, generally, through increased opportunities for reciprocity among friends and neighbours. While

the HSCT has created some tensions and jealousy in the community among beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, it has not overall affected the relations among community members.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The study also explored how and why various HSCT operational arrangements affected impacts and identified a number of important operational recommendations that can inform future rounds of HSCT transfers:

Improve the timeliness of the transfers to beneficiaries. The delays and uncertainty surrounding payments seriously affect beneficiaries' ability to plan and budget and shopkeepers' ability to restock and invest. The effects are disproportionately worse for the most vulnerable households that may have to continue depleting their assets or become heavily indebted when payments do not come on time. It is recommended that the payments be delinked from the payment audit reports and that payments are provided on time.

Consider the role of community power structures within programme operations. Despite not being part of the programme or being consulted, the traditional leaders and councillors do deal with a number

of grievances related to the HSCT, particularly the targeting. Given this and the purportedly high exclusion errors, careful consideration of the grievances of community members and engagement with the traditional authorities are warranted.

Provide further support to Child Protection Committees (CPCs). To improve implementation and operations at community level, adequate and ongoing support, including capacity development, should be provided to CPCs in order for them to perform their functions effectively.

Improve communication and awareness raising. Linked with the engagement of local power structures, a more comprehensive and periodic communications strategy targeted at the community level (as opposed to pay points) will help all community members better understand the purpose of the programme and diffuse unnecessary resentment and tension within the community.

Ensure complementarities among programme initiatives. Better integration of complementary services into a package of support for beneficiary households will build their resilience, enhancing their ability to shift their resources from dealing with immediate shocks and daily needs to longer-term economic investments.

REFERENCES

Oxford Policy Management. 2013. Qualitative research and analyses of the economic impacts of cash transfer programmes in sub-Saharan Africa. Zimbabwe country case study report. Rome, FAO.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit : <http://www.fao.org/economic/ptop/programmes/zimbabwe/en> **or write to:** ptop-team@fao.org



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