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April 11, 2020 – Women receive cash through the governmental “Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme” during full lockdown in Lahore, Pakistan, to fight against the spread of COVID-19 coronavirus. (A M Syed)

The Use of Cash Transfers in Humanitarian and Development Settings

There is an increased interest among governments and multilaterals in how cash transfers can be used as a response to the dual humanitarian and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is limited evidence about the effect of cash transfers as a response to COVID-19, evidence from previous cash transfer evaluations can inform what to consider when designing, scaling up or improving cash-based interventions for tackling COVID-19 challenges. The purpose of this rapid review is to communicate results from evaluations of cash transfers that can be used when designing or scaling up cash transfer interventions as a response to the humanitarian and financial crisis caused by the COVID 19 pandemic. This note provides lessons from 28 evaluations of cash transfers.

The review summarises lessons of positive and possible adverse effects in the use of cash transfers. Through highlighting existing knowledge, the brief can improve the impact of cash related programmes supported by national or local governments, or through international co-operation. Links to the reference evaluations allow for follow up learning.

Evaluation evidence is key to learning from the past and a way to leverage known successes.

The **COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition** is a network of the independent evaluation units of countries, United Nations organisations, international NGOs, and multilateral institutions. Participants work together to provide credible evidence to inform international co-operation responding to the COVID-19 pandemic – helping to ensure lessons are learnt and that the global development community delivers on its promises. **The Coalition is about learning with the world.**

Main message:
Prioritise analysis, even under emergency conditions

The main message of this rapid review is that the impact of cash transfer interventions will depend on the context and the specific objectives of the intervention. The effectiveness of a conditional cash transfer in a specific setting can potentially be influenced by the extent to which the objective of the financing can be measured as well as by its associated monitoring costs. Operational staff should pay careful attention to the local context and to the design of the incentive scheme.

It is therefore essential to prioritise analysis before designing, scaling up, improving and implementing cash programmes. Such analysis should also include any possible adverse, unintended and higher level effects. It is also essential to describe how the cash intervention is likely to lead to the desired outcome (theory of change/programme theory) and to apply this in the design of the programme. Analysis should include long-term considerations, conditionality, implementation, safeguards and risks, and gender concerns. This analysis should also include coherence considerations, such as whether targeting fewer people with additional measures at the cost of the many is appropriate.

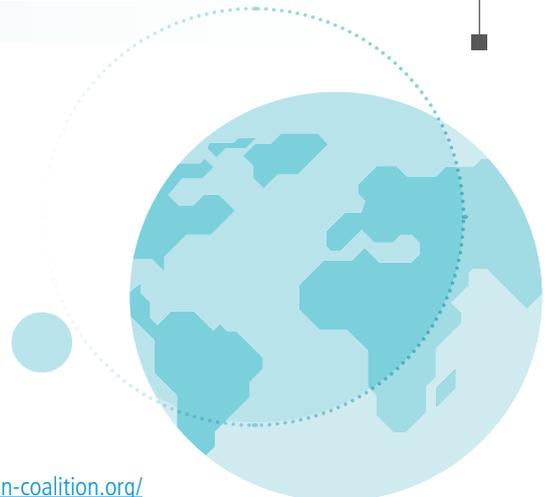
Definition of cash transfers

Due to the general interest in the transfer of money or vouchers as a response to the crisis, this review adopts a broad definition of cash transfers.

Cash transfers include all transfers of cash or vouchers to individuals. Cash transfers to firms and other types of organisations fall outside of the scope of this review. Transfers can be either conditional or unconditional. Conditional cash transfers imply that individuals will only receive transfers if they comply with specific behavioural conditions, i.e. the use of incentives to alter behaviour. Examples of pre-defined requirements could include health check-ups, health status, school enrolment, work, etc.

Cash transfers can be universal or means-tested. In general, means-testing and conditionality will increase the transaction costs of cash transfer interventions. Cash transfers can be part of a social protection system providing a long-term response to poverty and vulnerability. They can also be utilised in a humanitarian response instead of providing in-kind support to meet urgent needs.

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Source: World Bank Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund (SIEF) website, "Evaluation of cash transfers" (Accessed 23 November 2020).
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/sief-trust-fund/brief/evaluations-conditional-cash-transfers>.



Cash Transfers

1. Humanitarian-development nexus: When designing cash transfer programmes as a crisis response, potential development and adverse effects should be considered to maximise impact and ensure sustainability.

■ **Five evaluations identify risks of short-termism and suggest solutions. They emphasise the need to pay sufficient attention to longer-term development objectives.**

Possible risks of not taking the long-term perspective into account are reported in an evaluation in Nepal, where food security outcomes may receive less attention than the distribution of cash. The evaluation finds that food/cash for assets projects at the community level are shaped by an understanding of food and cash distribution as the primary goal of schemes, rather than the assets created being linked to intended food security outcomes (WFP, 2019a). An evaluation from Lebanon finds that cash was provided to increase school attendance among Syrian children, but the effects were limited due to overcrowding in schools (AIR and UNICEF, 2018). The evaluation highlights the importance of being mindful of supply challenges when increasing the demand for services.

Possible solutions are suggested by evaluations from Jordan, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Philippines: In Jordan, one evaluation recommends linking cash-based general food assistance to livelihood approaches/resilience programming in order to integrate more transformational approaches for the beneficiaries, who were likely to require support for the medium term. Another evaluation in Jordan suggests that when designing humanitarian cash transfer programmes, funding volatility and consistent support should be considered at the outset. In addition, integrating the local cash transfer programme into the national social protection system would enhance the reliability of this support (Natali and de Hoop, 2020). An evaluation in Somalia advises combining cash with the rebuilding of natural resources (soil, water) to help support environmental resilience (Daniels and Anderson, 2018). One evaluation of “cash-for-work” programmes in the Syrian Arab Republic shows how working on water dams, forestation and other long-term infrastructure support not only natural resources, but also the acceptance of the general public towards support for vulnerable groups. On the other hand, short-term “cash-for-work” initiatives in the Philippines in response to Typhoon Haiyan were advised to adopt a stronger focus on sustainable livelihoods (Hanley et al., 2014).

■ **Interventions should pay attention to national priorities and programmes and prioritise co-ordinating efforts, also with non-humanitarian partners, to ensure sustainability**

Evaluations report that poor UN co-ordination constrained potential effectiveness in some cases. An inter agency evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan response finds that differing cash approaches across clusters in the same regions and markets constrained the scope for positive collective impacts. In Ethiopia, different cash-for-work rates among agencies negatively affected implementation (Hanley et al., 2014; WFP, 2019d, 2018e).

Coherence and co-ordination can promote sustainability. Two evaluations addressing responses to the Syrian regional crisis note that engagement with national political leadership is essential to ensure that formal cash transfer co-ordination mechanisms function effectively under national frameworks and leadership and that large-scale cash transfer programmes embrace national concerns, such as the inclusion of host populations (WFP, 2018b; 2018e).

Three evaluations identify significant benefits of co-ordinated approaches across UN agencies and that common platforms provide a good opportunity for collaboration. An evaluation in Somalia finds that joint UN efforts to establish a common registration system and data-sharing protocols allow for more accurate targeting. In the Syrian regional crisis response, UN co-ordination around a common cash platform in Lebanon, despite encountering operational difficulties, was found to increase both efficiency and effectiveness (Daniels and Anderson, 2018; WFP, 2018b). An evaluation of international humanitarian assistance finds that cash distribution in Jordan provides a greater opportunity for collaboration and co-ordination between humanitarian and non humanitarian partners and the government of Jordan (Global Affairs Canada, forthcoming). The evaluation finds that the Regional Refugee Resilience Plan in Jordan created a common “cash-for-work” platform supporting the sharing of experiences and setting standards.

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2. Conditional and unconditional cash transfers: Policy makers should carefully consider the context and the aim of the interventions before determining whether to use incentives to alter behaviour and how to design the incentive scheme, i.e. conditionality and type of conditions.

■ Several evaluations demonstrate that cash transfers work well in emergency settings benefiting individuals, in particular the most vulnerable people.

Five evaluations (WFP Pakistan, 2018; WFP, 2019b, 2018b, 2018e; Daniels and Anderson, 2018) identify that **both unconditional and conditional** cash transfers enhance intra-household control over decision making, in particular for women. At the same time, some evaluations flag the need to understand more about the effects of cash transfers on intra-household decision making. One evaluation even finds that women lose control over decision making in the Syrian regional context. Eleven evaluations (WFP, 2019b, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018e, 2017b; WFP Kenya, 2018; Daniels and Anderson, 2018; Hanley et al., 2014; DEval, forthcoming; Dunlop, Ellina and Smith, 2018; UNHCR, 2017) further demonstrate that **both unconditional and conditional** cash transfers improve the coverage of basic needs for beneficiaries, most clearly regarding food security.

Five evaluations (Global Affairs Canada, forthcoming, 2019; DEval, forthcoming; Daniels and Anderson, 2018; WFP, 2019b, 2018a; Granlund, 2020) find that **unconditional** cash transfers respect the dignity of the beneficiaries as the transfers allow them to take decisions on how to best spend the money. On the other hand, **conditional** cash transfers are more effective in fostering specific outcomes helping beneficiaries to retain their dignity. One evaluation (Hanley et al., 2014), for example, suggests that conditional cash transfers, such as cash for assets, are more effective than unconditional cash transfers in helping people to regain their livelihoods.

Cash-for-work as a specific conditional cash transfer can be the most effective in supporting people in ways that retain their dignity (DEval, forthcoming; Global Affairs Canada, forthcoming). For example, an evaluation (Global Affairs Canada, 2019) finds that the opportunity to work gave beneficiaries a positive feeling of self-worth.

Relevant research and evaluations

The following academic literature strands provide relevant further reading:

- Conditional cash transfers involve incentive schemes, which are well-researched in the field of economics. See, for example, agency theory and behavioural economics.
- Development evaluations of results-based financing targeting the individual (results based financing, results-based payments and pay for performance).
- Also, a vast body of evaluation literature covering Mexico's Prospera programme (previously called Oportunidades and Progresa).

■ Several evaluations show that cash transfers can be effective at the community level, in particular when designed to support national social safety net systems.

Three evaluations (Daniels and Anderson, 2018; WFP, 2019c; Hanley et al., 2014) find that cash transfers have positive effects on national social safety net systems when the transfers are specifically designed to support such systems, for example enhancing shock agility. In the Syrian regional crisis, involving host communities in cash-based transfer programmes was found to help reduce some tensions between hosts and refugees. However, cash transfers have mixed effects on social cohesion, and three evaluations (WFP Kenya, 2018; WFP, 2018b, 2018e) report evidence for social tensions arising when certain groups, notably refugees, were provided with a cash transfer that was not available to host populations.



Cash Transfers

2 (continued). Conditional and unconditional cash transfers: Policy makers should carefully consider the context and the aim of the interventions before determining whether to use incentives to alter behaviour and how to design the incentive scheme, i.e. conditionality and type of conditions.

■ **However, where there are social tensions, conditional – rather than unconditional – cash transfers, or those that involve beneficiaries working to improve local infrastructure, can be more effective.**

Two evaluations (ODI, 2016; Global Affairs Canada, forthcoming) find that cash conditioned on education, nutrition and health supports beneficiary investment in education and health and increases attendance in school and regular antenatal and neonatal health check-ups. One evaluation (DEval, forthcoming) finds positive psychosocial effects of conditional cash transfers, including enhanced mental resilience and trust. It also finds positive effects on the local infrastructure, from improved waste collection and recycling systems to the use of parks and public gardens (DEval, forthcoming). This is further supported by the visibility of beneficiaries working on communal infrastructure and thus fostering social cohesion.

Future *ex ante* evaluations could consider including questions about the relative effectiveness of conditionality and design of the incentive scheme.

3. Implementation: Policy makers should consider local economic conditions and context before deciding on the value and transfer modality of cash transfers.

■ **Transfer values need to be sufficient and be responsive to price inflation, in particular in unstable economies with high inflation.**

Four evaluations (WFP Kenya, 2018; WFP, 2018b, 2018e, 2017b) signal the importance of ensuring that transfer values provide a meaningful level of support to beneficiaries and their families and are responsive to price inflation. If values are too low or not responsive to price inflation, food insecurity might occur with a drop in cash transfers (WFP, 2018b). The evaluation (WFP, 2018b) further recommends monitoring the local rental market and informal lending to ensure that cash does not have a negative effect on rent prices or create increased pressure for beneficiaries to pay off their debts. Another evaluation (WFP Kenya, 2018) reports an increase in commodity prices, but also reports confounding factors such as drought, poor logistics infrastructure, seasonal changes and distant source markets for agricultural commodities.

■ **The selection of disbursement channel and technology is essential to ensure efficiency and timeliness and to avoid exploitation, but beneficiaries' experiences need to be kept in view.**

Several evaluations (DEval, forthcoming; Dunlop, Ellina and Smith, 2018; UNHCR, 2017; WFP, 2018b, 2018e, 2017a; Daniels and Anderson, 2018) find that innovative technological solutions increased the efficiency of cash transfers, ranging from the use of automatic teller machines and special cards to mobile money and the use of blockchain that can allow for a real-time overview of the transactions and immediate scope for adaptation and troubleshooting. One evaluation (DEval, forthcoming) further suggests that technology made the cash transfer system less exploitable for intermediaries such as foremen at work.

When the transfer system did not work efficiently, one evaluation points to problems with timeliness of cash transfers, such as delayed payments via mobile pay. Three evaluations (WFP, 2019f, 2018b, 2018e) found examples of intermediaries exploiting beneficiaries and conclude that beneficiaries' perspectives need to be kept in view, for example by implementing complaints mechanisms, ongoing monitoring and verification of the prices charged by traders, as well as closer feedback loops with beneficiaries through co-operating partners.

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3 (continued). Implementation: Policy makers should consider local economic conditions and context before deciding on the value and transfer modality of cash transfers.

■ Beneficiaries prefer (unrestricted) cash-based transfers, but vouchers can be more effective when addressing specific concerns.

Two evaluations (ODI, 2016; Daniels and Anderson, 2018) demonstrate that using vouchers rather than providing food commodities as transfer modality helps to address specific concerns, such as malnutrition, but in one case, vouchers led to exploitation, with some retailers charging higher prices to those using vouchers (WFP, 2018b). Among the cash-based transfer modality, evaluations provide evidence from livelihoods transfers, cash-for-shelter, cash-for-work, community savings and loans groups as well as seed funds (Dunlop, Ellina and Smith, 2018; UNHCR, 2017; Global Affairs Canada, forthcoming, 2019). Overall, several evaluations (WFP Pakistan, 2018; WFP, 2018a, 2018d, 2018e; Daniels and Anderson, 2018) found that beneficiaries often prefer unrestricted cash as transfer modality for its flexibility to meet diverse needs, but the modality needs to be adjusted to contextual conditions.

4. Safeguards and risks: To protect the safety and welfare of beneficiaries, cash transfer programmes must evaluate risk and implement safeguards.

■ Social tensions may arise due to targeting. This can be alleviated by either including host populations as beneficiaries or by sensitising them to the benefits of cash programmes targeting refugees.

Global learning about social protection in humanitarian settings highlights the importance of designing interventions that consider the needs and realities of both refugee and host populations. Three evaluations (WFP, 2018b, 2017a; WFP Kenya, 2018) report social tensions arising when certain groups, notably refugees, were provided with a cash transfer not available to host populations. In Zimbabwe, intra-household tensions or social pressures were also noted as a result of targeting. Several evaluations propose suggestions to alleviate such tensions: Either host communities could be included in the cash programmes, or extensive communication and sensitisation can help clarify that the benefits of the cash programme also extend to host communities (WFP, 2018e).

■ Different delivery modes create different risks for beneficiaries and robust safeguards are required.

A number of evaluations identify several protection challenges, such as increased prices in shops for beneficiaries, overcrowding at cash disbursement locations, harassment at cashpoints and in shops, theft of cards, risk of cash being confiscated by others than the beneficiaries, third parties imposing an additional service fee for beneficiaries wishing to obtain cash (Maunder, N. et al., 2018; WFP Kenya, 2018; Daniels and Anderson, 2018; WFP, 2019f; DEval, forthcoming). In Nigeria, the percentage of beneficiaries reporting safety concerns ranged from 3% to 14% for both men and women (WFP, 2019f). In Kenya, gender-based violence occasionally arose when men saw women earning money – and particularly if payments were delayed (WFP Kenya, 2016).

Evaluations suggest ongoing monitoring and verification of prices charged by the trader and close feedback loops with beneficiaries through co-operating partners, as possible safeguards to avoid the exploitation of beneficiaries (WFP, 2019f; 2018b; 2018e). It is important, however, to design feedback mechanisms in ways that meet beneficiary needs and allow for good communication. An evaluation of the Syrian regional response finds that highly automated mechanisms to address queries and complaints did not meet beneficiary needs, concerns or expectations and could at times compromise their dignity (WFP, 2018b).

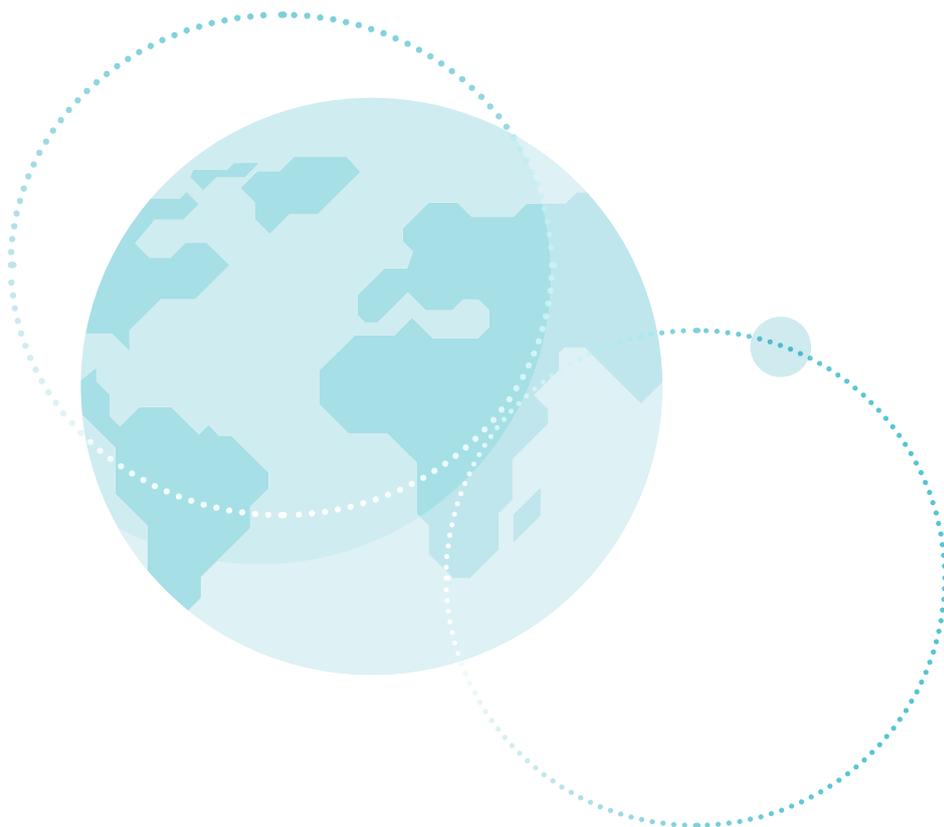
Cash Transfers

5. Gender: Cash transfers can affect households' power and gender dynamics – hence gender concerns should be built in from the start.

All evaluations recommend enhanced attention to these concerns going forward. It should be noted, however, that cash transfers may not necessarily improve gender equality and female empowerment (WFP, 2019e), even when built in from the start, unless the intervention also addresses structural inequalities.

At least two evaluations (WFP, 2019f; 2018b) report that protection and gender considerations are insufficiently built in to programme design from the outset. This has significant effects; in the regional response for the Syrian emergency, for example, a widening gap emerged over time in food security indicators for female-headed households. In Nigeria, several key protection concerns were not considered at the design stage, such as abuses related to the use of mobile money (WFP, 2019f).

With regard to decision making and control over the use of the cash provided, evaluations similarly find mixed results. In some contexts, greater decision-making control (WFP Kenya, 2018) or a shift towards joint decision making between men and women (Daniels and Anderson, 2018) following the use of cash-based transfers occurred. However, the evaluations found no major change in women's status following the increase in decision-making control and gender gaps in consumption and livelihoods had not been alleviated. One evaluation demonstrates that cash transfers did not increase control over intra-household decision making for women; in Zimbabwe, in-kind-transfers led to greater control over decision making (WFP, 2017a).



4 LESSONS FROM EVALUATION

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