INTRODUCTION

Social cash transfers (SCT) have increasingly become an important component of social protection programmes in sub-Saharan Africa. The purpose of many poverty-targeted programmes is to improve the food security situation among beneficiary populations. Vulnerable populations in sub-Saharan African countries often face high levels of food insecurity, which disproportionately affect households living in poverty. Children are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, as adequate diet and nutritious foods are crucial for child development.

Food security can be defined as “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (World Food Summit, 1996). For this to be fulfilled, the four dimensions of food security have to be met: availability, access, utilization and stability.

SCTs can potentially have an impact on all four dimensions of food security. Through increased purchasing power, households may invest in their agricultural practices and increase household level production. Households with increased economic access to food are able to purchase more food and more diversified products. Finally, a regular household income may stabilize food consumption across time and reduce food gaps over the year.

There is currently no single food security measure that captures all dimensions of food security, instead, a number of different measures that complement each other have to be used in order to capture the different elements of food security. Common measures of food security are: spending on food, dietary diversity and food frequency, consumption behaviours and experience of food insecurity as well as self-assessed measures.

This research brief brings together evidence of cash transfers impacts on food security from eight impact evaluations of social cash transfer programmes in sub-Saharan Africa. All evaluations include some component of food security and together capturing several dimensions of food security.

EVALUATIONS REVIEWED

Results summarized here are obtained from impact evaluations of SCT programmes that form part of the Transfer Project (follow-up survey years in parentheses): Ethiopia SCTP (2014), Ghana LEAP (2012), Kenya CT-OVC (2009), Lesotho CGP (2013), Malawi SCTP (2014), Zambia MCTG (2014), Zambia CGP (2014) and Zimbabwe HSCT (2014). All evaluations include a baseline and at least one follow-up and a comparison group; an overview of the sample sizes and design of the evaluations are presented in Table 1.
fewer meals or go to sleep hungry because there was not enough food. Households were asked if any child (0-17 years) had to: eat smaller meals or separate or used to construct food security scales, such as the household food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT evaluations. Some evaluations include food insecurity access scale (HFIAS) which was used in the Zambia MCTG, Zambia CGP and the Zimbabwe HSCT eva...
In addition, significant impacts on diet quality were found in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia where dietary diversity scores were used. The only insignificant effect on diet quality was reported in Lesotho, where a food consumption score examined. In the Zambia MCTG and GCP evaluations, significant increases were found on expenditures of nutrient rich food items, including meat and dairy.

**IMPACT ON FOOD CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOURS AND EXPERIENCE OF FOOD SECURITY**

In the Zambia CGP and Zambia MCTG evaluations, results from the HFIAS showed an improved situation, with both a decrease of the actual scale points and a reduction in proportion of households classified as food insecure. In Zimbabwe, there was a small increase in households classified as food secure according to the HFIAS although only statistically significant at the 10% level. However, additional research using Zimbabwe evaluation also found a decrease in the HFIA score. Findings from the LEAP evaluation in Ghana show improved levels of household food security as well as child specific food security. However, these indicators were not measured in the comparison group and only reflect changes among LEAP beneficiaries over time. In Lesotho, Malawi and Ethiopia, questions regarding the behaviour and experience of food security were analysed separately. In Lesotho, there was a weak impact (p<0.1) on decrease of households where an adult member had to go to sleep hungry and no reduction in households eating smaller or fewer meals. In Malawi there was a reduction in the proportion of households worrying about not having enough food among the poorest 50% of the evaluation sample.

**Coping strategies related to children**

In Lesotho, SCTP programme has shown an impact on coping strategies related to children with a decrease in the proportion of households where children had to eat smaller or fewer meals. Coping strategies related to children were also included in the evaluation of the Malawi SCTP, but no significant impacts were identified.

**IMPACT ON COPING WITH SEASONALITIES**

In most settings, the food security situation is not constant over the year but fluctuates seasonally. In the Lesotho CGP evaluation and the Ethiopia SCTP evaluation, households were asked about the number of months over the year that they were not able to cover their food needs. In Lesotho, there was an impact of the cash transfers on reducing the average number of months with extreme food shortage; however no impact on the same was found in Ethiopia.
DISCUSSION

This review of eight SCT programme evaluations has shown that cash transfers have an impact on several different dimensions of food security. All evaluations show a positive impact on at least one food security measure. The two evaluations from Zambia show an impact on several measures: increase in expenditure of food, increase in number of meals per days, increased consumption of nutrient rich food items as well as increased proportion of food secure households according to the HFIAS.

A limitation of the current evidence is that food security measures are mainly measured at the household level, which leaves a gap in knowledge regarding the intra-household distribution of food consumed and the food security situation among children. A few evaluations include child-specific questions, however to improve the knowledge of food consumption among children and to make stronger links between food security and nutrition status, we need individual-level indicators.

In the cases where there are few or weaker results, these may be related to a number of different factors, such as:

1. The amount of time between the last transfer and time period captured in the survey. If households are asked about their consumption the previous week and the transfer was given months earlier, the effect is likely to be smaller compared with if households were asked about the previous month. For example, in the case of Lesotho, the last transfer was made on average three months before the survey and the respondents were asked about their food consumption seven days before the survey.

2. The predictability of the transfers. This affects whether households view the cash as a permanent change in their income or a windfall. The latter perception tends to yield lumpy spending such as paying down debt or investing in livestock as in Ghana, for example.

3. The value of the transfer. For example in Malawi and Zimbabwe impacts on food security are positive and much stronger among the poorest households for whom the value of the transfer is much larger. In Ghana the initial value of the transfer was only 7% of consumption and raised significantly after the evaluation. In Zambia, where food security impacts are strongest, the transfer as a share of beneficiary consumption is also one of the largest.

Despite limitations across countries, results point to the conclusion that SCTs have a large impact on food security, not only through increased consumption, but also through improved quality of diets and less severe experiences of food security.

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\[\text{References}\]

1. FAO 2008. An introduction to the basic concepts of food security.

All impact evaluation reports reviewed can be found at https://transfer.cpc.unc.edu/