

Concept Note: Fifth Transfer Project Research Workshop
Evaluating National Integrated Cash Transfer Programs
April 6-9, 2016, Addis Ababa

Background and rationale

1. UNICEF, FAO and other UN agencies are increasingly being called upon by government partners to collaborate around social protection policies and interventions. A key part of this collaboration is designing research and related studies to demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of specific social protection interventions such as cash transfers, school feeding and other programs designed to reach the poorest and marginalized families. Cash transfer programs in particular have rapidly expanded across sub-Saharan Africa and are seen as a key social protection tool for combating chronic poverty and hunger and increasing investment in human capital. These programs are united by a common premise: that income poverty has highly damaging impacts on human development, and that cash empowers families living in poverty to make their own decisions on how to improve their lives. At the same time, there is increasing interest in linking cash transfers to other social protection measures and complementary services including nutrition, agricultural productivity, and health and school fee waivers.
2. Established in 2008, the Transfer Project (<https://transfer.cpc.unc.edu/>) is a research and learning initiative which supports improved knowledge and practice on social transfers in sub Saharan Africa (SSA). It is led by UNICEF in partnership with FAO and Save the Children, the University of North Carolina as the international academic partner, and national governments and research institutions in each country. It aims to assess the impact of government social transfer programs on a broad range of sectors (e.g. food security, education, health, adolescent well-being, agricultural production, nutrition), understand how, why and in what contexts such programs are most effective for families and children, and to promote broad learning in Africa and beyond. To achieve this, the Transfer Project works closely with policymakers and processes at national, regional and international level on an ongoing basis – not only to produce and share findings of the research, but also to ensure that stakeholders’ priority questions inform the formulation of research questions and that research results flow back to inform design and implementation of programs. Four previous meetings have been organized and a fifth meeting is currently being planned for April 2016.

3. As cash transfer programs expand, a number of design and implementation issues have begun to dominate the policy debate, yet there is a paucity of regional opportunities to share experience and learning. Too often, national policymakers, implementers and monitoring and evaluation specialists are struggling with similar challenges in isolation, and regional learning is left to be gleaned by external experts. The Transfer Project aims to bring together policymakers, researchers, program implementers, and other key stakeholders at regular intervals to share the latest research and lessons learned.

4. The focus of the Transfer Project has been on developing the evidence base on cash transfers in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) due in part to the large number of countries in that region involved in piloting and scaling up programs and the associated need to understand impacts. **With the evidence from SSA now having reached a critical mass and many programs moving from pilot to scale-up and to respond to emergency policy and implementation questions, the Transfer Project is broadening the learning agenda to include (i) combination or integrated approaches linking cash to other services ('social protection plus' models), and 2) cash transfer evaluation experiences from other parts of the developing world. For the first time then, the Transfer Project Research Meeting will include case studies from outside SSA.**

The Transfer Project Research Workshop

1. **Objectives:** The fifth Transfer Project Research Workshop will be hosted by UNICEF Ethiopia and FAO Ethiopia in April 2016. The overarching objective of the meeting is to learn about the impact and operation of cash transfer and 'cash+' programs in SSA and other regions of the world. The specific objectives of the meeting are: 1) to share evidence on impacts of government cash transfer and 'cash +' programs across a range of domains - protective, social, economic and productive; 2) to present and discuss evaluation design options and associated policy and research questions in countries at the early stages of developing an impact evaluation, with a particular emphasis when possible of integrated cash transfer programs; 3) to present experiences on how to construct 'impact monitoring' systems into large-scale on-going programs which can provide evidence on impact as well as responding to dynamic monitoring needs on a routine basis. Following previous Transfer Project Meetings, the format will entail a series of country case studies to be presented by country teams, followed by discussion on implications for the country and lessons that can be applied to other situations and contexts.

2. Who should attend: UNICEF, FAO and Save the Children Country Office colleagues are encouraged to participate, as well as send government partners who either implement or are planning to implement a cash transfer or 'cash +' program and wish to develop a research agenda around impact and effectiveness. Countries should be prepared to present results from ongoing evaluation efforts (either baseline or actual impacts), or if still in design or conceptualization stage, to present their program and evaluation strategy to the workshop to obtain feed-back. Officials from related government agencies such as Finance, Office of the President, Health or Agricultural are also welcome to attend in order to understand how cash transfers can contribute to outcomes in their sectors and their role in contributing to combatting poverty and hunger. Key development partners (e.g. USAID, DFID, Sida) who are stakeholders in the national social protection and agricultural policy dialogue are also appropriate candidates to attend. Presentations and panel discussions will be arranged, providing space to share knowledge and experiences from several countries across SSA and beyond. Given that a variety of approaches are used in the different country contexts, the meeting will also take on a comparative perspective, to maximize cross-country and regional insights into the programs.
3. Funding: Country offices are requested to fund the attendance of key national partners. Limited funds are available centrally (from FAO and UNICEF-Innocenti) to fund the participation of resource personnel and some country representatives if necessary.
4. Next steps: Please contact Jennifer Yablonski (jyablonski@unicef.org), Sudhanshu Handa (shanda@unicef.org) (for UNICEF staff) or Natalia Winder-Rossi (Natalia.WinderRossi@fao.org) or Marco Knowles (marco.knowles@fao.org) if you would like your country to participate in the workshop. An administrative note will be issued by UNICEF-Ethiopia a month prior to the workshop. The country focal point for the workshop is Remy Pigois (rpigois@unicef.org).