



Impact Evaluation in the Field

Utilizing Qualitative Methods in the Ghana LEAP 1000 Impact Evaluation

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Introduction

Evidence shows that almost all stunting takes place before a child's second birthday. To reduce this risk, the Ghana Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) 1000 cash transfer programme targets poor and vulnerable households with pregnant women and infants under one year (for details, see [Brief 1 in this series, Ghana LEAP 1000 Impact Evaluation: Overview of Study Design](#)). LEAP 1000 is being rigorously evaluated using a mixed methods approach, which includes both quantitative and qualitative methods, to understand impact and inform future scale-up decisions. Quantitative measures will indicate if LEAP 1000 reduces child poverty, stunting and other measures of well-being, while qualitative research explores in more depth the reasons why and how this may or may not be happening. This methodological brief focuses on the qualitative component of the evaluation, and how robust evidence can better inform policymakers in decision making to benefit children and the households they live in.

The Challenge: Understanding why impacts occur in cash transfer programmes

Traditionally, impact evaluations have relied on quantitative data that are collected from a relatively large and representative sample of households using standardized survey instruments to produce comparable and generalizable findings. However, these structured surveys are not always able to capture the complexities of why impacts occur or the context in which they occur. The why, or the pathways and processes, may be dependent on contextual factors or work through variables not included in surveys.

Qualitative data can a) enhance overall evaluation validity through triangulation, capturing different dimensions of what is being studied, and/or influencing the interpretation of quantitative results; b) provide rich narratives that illustrate

the processes hypothesized in the theories of change; and c) highlight descriptive examples as case studies and examples shared with decision-makers to paint a more complete picture.

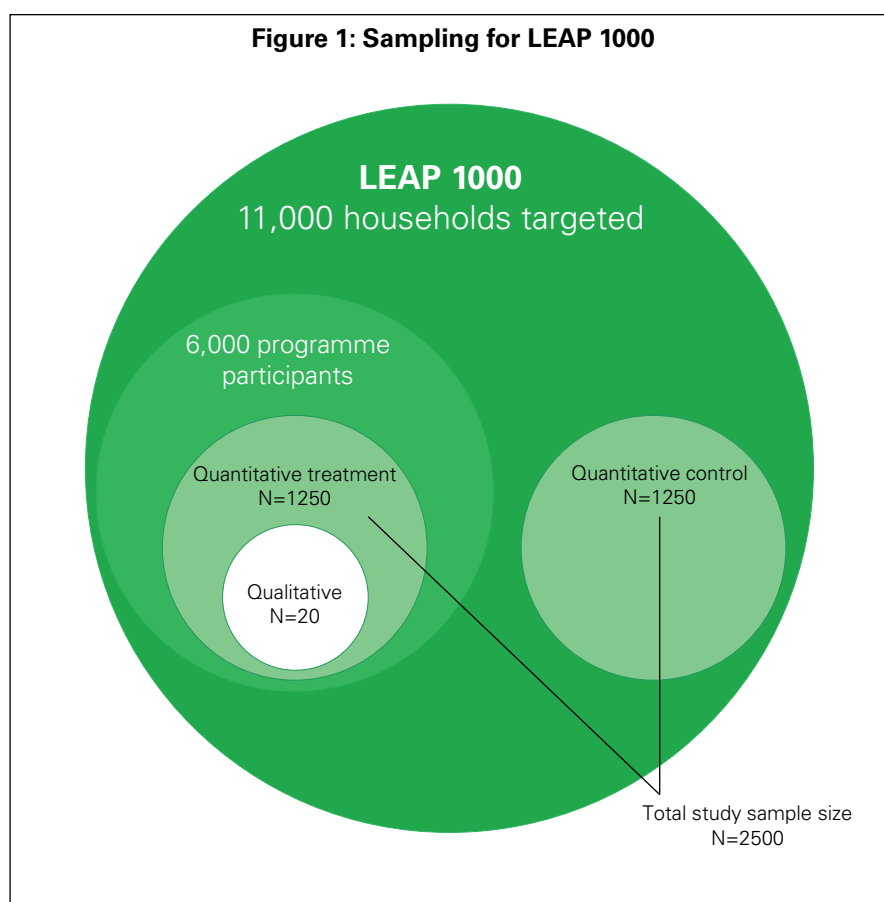
Approaching the Challenge: Embedded longitudinal qualitative study

The qualitative evaluation design used in LEAP 1000 is an embedded longitudinal cohort and its aims are to:

1. Describe the context in which the programme operates to facilitate a holistic interpretation of impact;
2. Identify the mechanisms and processes that facilitate or impede impact; and
3. Determine the subjective meaning of the programme for participants, beyond the objective/quantitative determination of the degree of impact.

As shown in Figure 1 (overleaf), the qualitative sample is referred to as "embedded" as it is selected from the larger quantitative sample. With the sample households, the researchers integrate qualitative and quantitative techniques throughout the evaluation process: in design, data collection (simultaneously in the baseline and follow-up surveys), analysis and interpretation of the results. The expected result is a highly contextualized understanding of the LEAP 1000 programme, as well as a rigorous examination of its impacts.

The 20 households (ten in the Northern Region and ten in the Upper East Region) that are selected from the baseline quantitative sample were done so purposively, which means the evaluation team identified specific characteristics of households and women that they wanted to ensure were included in the sample (for more details on purposive sampling, see methodological brief [No. 10, Overview: Data Collection and Analysis Methods in Impact Evaluation](#)).



For the qualitative evaluation of LEAP 1000, the purposive sample was chosen to include geographic characteristics (e.g. region) and women’s characteristics (i.e. parity and pregnancy). As shown in Table 1, within each region, one district, five communities, and ten households are included to provide contextual insights and a greater depth of understanding about how LEAP 1000 is working. The two households selected in each community contain:

- One woman who was pregnant with her first child at time of targeting or who has only one child under one, and
- One woman who has three or more children, including one child under one.

This approach allows for a comparison of experiences across regions and districts, as well as between the two categories of women defined by parity and pregnancy.

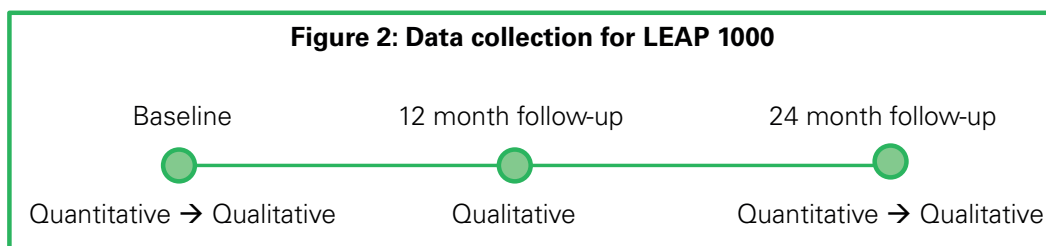
The qualitative data collection consists of audio-recorded in-depth interviews with LEAP 1000 recipients, accompanied by field-note observations of their communities. As shown in Figure 2, the interviews and observations will occur three times over the course of the evaluation: at baseline and 24 months, closely following quantitative data collection; and additionally at around 12 months (midline). A window of about 24 months between the rounds of quantitative data collection usually provides enough time for recipients to get used to their increased income and start counting on it. The intermediate qualitative follow-up at 12 months can provide early insights on the impact of the programme and the

Table 1. Sampling Scheme for Qualitative Evaluation (n=20)

Region	UPPER EAST										NORTHERN									
District	Bongo										Karaga									
Community	1		2		3		4		5		1		2		3		4		5	
Household/Woman	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

channels (e.g. reductions in stress, women’s empowerment, expectations about the future, etc.) through which the programme is working. This may inform the development of the tools for the endline data collection.

insights can help researchers formulate additional questions that should be captured in the final round of quantitative data collection.



Three in-depth interviews are conducted with each woman at baseline, 12 months, and 24 months follow-up. During these interviews, qualitative researchers seek to elicit contextualized stories and examples of programme impact(s) with an emphasis on how the impacts are achieved and/or how certain factors impede the achievement of a desired impact. This potentially may lead to new hypotheses and theories about – for example – why and how the programme improves or doesn’t improve nutritional outcomes in beneficiary households. Although this approach is considered to be inductive, or data driven, the researchers draw on the conceptual model developed for the quantitative evaluation to inform the focus and content of their questions and probes.

The interviews are guided by a semi-structured guide organized around the following general themes:

Baseline: Economic and social context of the household, child and mother health and healthcare experiences, nutrition and feeding practices, and family dynamics.

12-month follow-up: How has cash changed the constraints, how is cash spent, who benefits? Have caring practices changed? What are continuing challenges?

24-month follow-up: Probe the successes and failures reported at first follow-up, do they still exist? What has changed? How has cash affected how a household cares for child?

This design ideally allows for an interplay between the methods. For example, all the information from the quantitative household survey is available at the baseline and follow-up for the qualitative researchers. The data provide information about changes in household composition and a starting point for questions about topics like social support, schooling and production activities of household members. Additionally, the qualitative data collection at the 12 month follow-up may give some early insights on the impact of the programme and the channels (e.g. reductions in stress, women’s empowerment, expectations about the future) through which the programme is working. These

In addition to the individual-level interviews, at each stage a community observation guide is also followed. It aims to capture key understanding of the context and characteristics of the communities, in particular the agricultural production, infrastructure, availability and location of resources, presence of other development programmes, and more.

In their analyses of the data and interpretation of impact, the qualitative researchers give equal importance to the objective and subjective pieces. Both forms of data are viewed in concordance with its intended contribution to provide a more holistic, contextualized understanding of programme impact. If findings are not aligned between the quantitative and the qualitative data, the researchers work together closely to analyze and interpret the potential meanings of these contradictions.

Applicability to Other Contexts

The benefits of in-depth analysis that qualitative methods provide are described above; however, a common criticism of qualitative methods is that findings are not generalizable due to the small samples and non-representative sampling techniques. While not necessarily generalizable, by obtaining rich, contextualized understanding, qualitative findings can provide transferable insights that can be adapted to the context of other settings.

Other qualitative methods may be utilized, depending on the aims of the impact evaluation. Individual interviews beyond those with the direct beneficiaries (e.g. community leaders), case studies, or focus group discussions may also be appropriate. For example, in Malawi, researchers designed a similar evaluation, but chose to have in-depth interviews with key informants (to understand how the programme affected the use of community services) and focus group discussions (to understand perceptions about the programme and social relationships). Different methods may be selected for a number of reasons, such as to make the evaluation more participatory, provide detailed accounts of experiences, or bring out the differences in people’s views to stimulate critical reflection on programme impact.

Summary and Main Messages

- The design of the LEAP 1000 evaluation is sophisticated in the way it captures the objective and subjective pieces: there is an information exchange between the qualitative and quantitative components, but the qualitative findings are also valuable as a stand-alone source of information.
- By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches through a mixed methods evaluation, researchers can reduce the limitations of each technique, triangulate results and have an improved and more contextualized understanding of the complexities of the impacts.
- The purpose of the qualitative component of the LEAP 1000 evaluation is to have a deeper understanding of the processes and mechanisms driving or impeding impacts. The qualitative data provides policymakers with an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of children and their families represented in the numbers and figures, making their decisions better informed.

Further Reading

Pozarny, Pamela and Barrington, Clare. (2016). Qualitative Methods in Impact Evaluations of Cash Transfer Programmes in the Transfer Project in Sub-Saharan Africa. In *From Evidence to Action: The Story of Cash Transfers and Impact Evaluation in Sub Saharan Africa*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

Handa, Sudhanshu. (2015). *Malawi Social Cash Transfer Programme Impact Evaluation: Overview of the Study Design*. Transfer Project Research Brief 2015-04. Chapel Hill, NC: Carolina Population Center, UNC-Chapel Hill.

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