

Helpdesk Research Report: Social Protection and Access to Education

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Query: Please identify lessons learnt from social protection measures (such as school grants, cash grants and school feeding programs) to reduce the financial barriers to accessing schools in difficult environments.

Enquirer: AusAID Fiji, Education

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1. **Overview**

Financial barriers can greatly limit access to education for the poor. The key financial burdens of schooling are direct costs (school fees), indirect costs (uniforms, stationary, other learning materials and transportation) and opportunity costs (time for household tasks and foregone wage labour). Macro-level barriers in situations of conflict and fragility (lack of capacity or will to provide primary education and underinvestment in education) overlay financial and other barriers to accessing education.

The goal of 'Education for All' and the Millennium Development Goals have raised the profile of efforts to alleviate financial barriers to schooling. Such efforts have taken place in a range of contexts, from middle-income countries to low-income conflict-affected and fragile states. They include a variety of social protection measures:

A. Cash transfers programmes

Alongside the provision of 'free' universal services, cash transfers can alleviate opportunity costs and out-of-pocket expenses, such as travel, textbooks and uniforms. Transfers can be unconditional or conditional. The requirement for conditional cash transfer programmes is that recipients commit to undertaking certain behavioural changes in exchange, such as enrolling children in school and maintaining adequate attendance levels. Scholarships, bursaries and stipends are also a form of conditional cash transfer, designed to help maintain school enrolment for students who have performed well academically.

There is an ongoing debate concerning whether transfers aimed at improving access to schooling should be conditional. Evaluations have found that conditional transfers have increased school enrolment and attendance rates among poor families. In addition, scholarships have helped poor households to maintain access to education. Many have been targeted specifically at girls, and have been successful in expanding girls' access to education. Unconditional cash transfer programmes, however, have also been shown to generate strong benefits, such as improved school attendance. Experience indicates that families will often prioritise spending on education even where it is not a condition. Chapman argues that

conditional transfers may have more of an impact where demand for child labour is high (opportunity cost) or discrimination against girls or other marginalised groups is high.

There is concern that since conditional cash transfer programmes require adequate education infrastructure, they are often implemented in communities that already have school services. This may exclude poor, remote or dispersed communities and their households. Attention needs to be paid to how to implement such programmes in areas with limited service provision capacity, such as through community schools or accreditation of non-state providers. There is also a danger that conditions can exclude the very groups in need of transfers. Stipend qualification criteria, for example, can be exclusionary. They are received by girls who are able to do well, many of whom come from affluent families. Girls from poorer families who may not do as well in exams are more likely to be excluded from the programme.

B. Abolition of fees

The abolition of school fees and provision of 'free' universal services has been implemented in many countries in order to remove financial barriers to enrolling and maintaining children in school. Careful planning and prior analytical work is necessary in order to calculate and compensate for foregone fees. The provision of school grants is a common mechanism to replace the revenues collected through fees. Preconditions for the sound functioning of school grants include: simple implementation guidelines and training; a reliable school registry and reliable enrolment data; and an effective financial system for transferring resources. Challenges include the financial sustainability of grants; and the effectiveness and transparency of grant mechanisms.

C. School feeding programmes

School feeding programmes include meals served in school and take-home rations conditional on school attendance. These programmes aim to increase the net benefits of schooling enough to change household behavior and to increase children's access to schooling. There is evidence that school feeding programmes increase school enrolment, reduce absenteeism, enhance participation and contribute to learning through avoiding hunger and enhancing cognitive abilities. Some programmes incorporate special provisions for girls' nutrition. Others have been targeted at remote areas, particularly in conflict-affected and fragile states. The programmes eliminate the need for children to travel long distances for mid-day meals and provide for some of the necessary caloric intake usually provided by families.

Feeding programmes have been commended for having a dual focus of increasing enrolment and improving learning and cognitive abilities through nutritional benefits – absent in other programmes aimed to increase school participation. They have been criticized, however, for being more costly. School meal programmes are commonly provided to all children in a targeted school, which results in the provision of transfers to children who would have attended school anyway, including children from high-income homes. If learning and cognitive benefits to school-aged children are found to be small, then it may be more effective to increase school participation through small, cash-based programmes. Other criticisms include: a decrease in teacher time as they are taken out of class to prepare and serve meals; lower attendance in schools that don't receive food; larger class sizes in schools that do serve food and in some cases, a rise in fees in these schools.

Cross-cutting lessons

Integrating supply and demand-side interventions: Rapid expansion of access through the removal of tuition fees or cash transfer programmes can undermine service quality (through overcrowding, insufficient teachers and shortage of school facilities and textbooks) unless there is also increased investment in service provision. Similarly, while school feeding programmes can improve enrolment, attendance and contribute to learning, whether these translate into improved education outcomes depends on the quality of teaching and availability of school materials. Access and quality issues cannot be seen as sequential but need to be conceptualised in a mutual supportive way. Planning for a greater supply of resources to meet increased enrolment requires a solid database on key inputs.

Embedding social protection measures in comprehensive programmes: Measures designed to increase access to schooling must be part of a more comprehensive reform package, such that sufficient supply of teachers, classrooms and textbooks are available for the start of the school year. Other reforms may include curriculum reform and the promotion of various innovative programmes, such as alternative basic education. School feeding programmes, which are often considered as hunger interventions and separate from the education sector, should be embedded in national education plans.

Moving beyond access: Access and service utilization should be seen only as an 'intermediate' outcome. Attention should be paid to whether those enrolled as a result of social protection programmes complete more years of schooling, learn more, and earn higher wages as adults. There is a need to adopt a curriculum and create a school environment that is relevant and accessible. There is also a need to sustain the demand for education, in particular that of girls, through opportunities for further education and post-school employment.

Addressing gender barriers: Interventions to address socio-cultural biases against schooling for girls may also need to be addressed alongside efforts to target the enrolment of girls. This is especially needed where such biases play a bigger role than cash incentives. In other cases, substantial increases in school enrolment of girls have resulted in more positive attitudes toward educating girls.

Political commitment: Political leadership and sustained political commitment is important for the introduction and scaling up of social protection programmes aimed at improving access to schooling. This is particularly the case where such programmes are a major departure from current policies.

2. Cross-cutting literature

Dryden-Peterson, S., 2010, 'Barriers to Accessing Primary Education in Conflict-Affected Fragile States: Literature Review', International Save the Children Alliance

http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/Barriers_to_access_Literature_Review_Final.pdf

This literature review stresses that macro-level barriers in situations of conflict and fragility (lack of capacity or will to provide primary education and underinvestment in education) overlay all other barriers to accessing education. These other barriers often intersect and include poverty, residence, gender, minority discrimination and displacement. The review discusses various barriers and interventions that have helped to improve access to education:

- Poverty: the direct costs (school fees), indirect costs (uniforms, stationary, other learning materials and transportation) and opportunity costs (time for household tasks and wage labour) can be large barriers to education for the poor. *Conditional cash transfers, which offer resources to households that enrol and keep their children in school, have been successful in enrolling and retaining the poor children they target.* There are some criticisms, however, that such programmes could be more efficient in reaching excluded children in remote areas, where poverty and ethnicity, language and region intersect to create large barriers.
- Region and rural/urban residence: high transportation costs (long distances from school) and high opportunity costs in rural areas (time and labour to collect firewood, fetch water, herd livestock) are barriers to accessing education. *School feeding programmes (in-kind transfer to families) have been effective in increasing enrolment and attendance of children (and lowering drop out rates) in remote areas, particularly in conflict-affected fragile states.* They eliminate the need for children to travel long distances for mid-day meals and provide for some of the necessary caloric intake usually provided by families. There are some criticisms, however, that these programmes can have negative consequences: they have resulted in a decrease in teacher time as they are taken out of class to prepare and serve meals; lower attendance in schools that don't receive food; larger class sizes in schools that do serve food and in some cases, a rise in fees in these schools.

- **Gender:** the exclusion of girls from education is more pronounced in conflict-affected fragile states. This is in part because conflict can exacerbate inequalities and increase the vulnerabilities of women and girls. The opportunity costs associated with girls' school attendance; girl-unfriendly structures, cultures and environments; and gender-based violence are all key barriers to girls' access to education. *In addition to conditional cash transfers and school feeding programmes, scholarships have also been successful in expanding girls' access to education.* In Bangladesh, for example, a scholarship programme has increased girls' enrolment and contributed to changing cultural practices and transforming the gender-nature of the society.

The review stresses the importance of integrating demand-side and supply-side interventions in education reforms. Access and quality issues, for example, cannot be seen as sequential, but need to be conceptualised in a mutual supportive way, such that quality of education does not suffer with increased enrolment. Conditional cash transfers, for example, are ineffective if there are no concurrent supply-side interventions to increase the availability of schools in remote areas. Large public investments are necessary – specifically in areas of school construction, fee abolition, and training and compensation of teachers. Evidence demonstrates that such interventions can greatly expand access, including for the hardest to reach children.

UNESCO, 2010, 'Reaching the Marginalised', EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, UNESCO, Paris
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001866/186606E.pdf>

This report includes a section on social protection programmes that can broaden opportunities in education. They can be targeted not only at the very poor, but also at the most marginalised groups or regions. These programmes range from cash transfers to employment-based safety nets and interventions to support nutrition. Support for education can be direct, including stipends, bursaries, fee waivers and funding for transport and books; or it can be incidental, resulting from employment creation, nutrition programmes or other measures that enable households to get through difficult periods.

Cash transfers: Key issues to consider in designing cash transfer programmes are the scale of transfer and the terms of transfer. Large-scale programmes have had a significant effect on poverty partly because the money they provide represents a large increment in the income of the very poor. It is important, however, for policy-makers to consider the marginal benefit of increasing transfers and the potential trade-off between reaching more people and providing larger transfers. Regarding terms of transfer, some programmes condition cash transfers on specific education and health requirements for children. Such programmes have resulted in greater school enrolment and in some cases an increase in transitions to secondary schools, particularly in rural areas. Unconditional cash transfer programmes can also generate strong benefits, however, such as declines in absenteeism. Thus, social protection can have an effect even in countries that are unable to implement and monitor conditional transfers.

School feeding programmes: Well-designed programmes that include micronutrient fortification and deworming can provide significant nutritional benefits – and increase school attendance, participation and educational achievement. Many programmes incorporate special provisions for girls' nutrition. There is uncertainty however, over the ideal scale of the benefits and the most effective delivery mechanism. There is some limited evidence that a combination of on-site meals and take-home rations have the strongest effect on enrolment. There are various limitations to school feeding programmes: by targeting schools rather than individuals, they risk providing large transfers to children from high-income homes instead of to those with the greatest need. In addition, some critique such programmes for failing to address malnutrition at more critical stages – during pregnancy and up to age 3. It is important that school feeding is incorporated into wider anti-poverty programmes, such as reducing hunger and malnutrition.

UNESCO, 2007, 'Education for All by 2015: Will We Make It?' EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, UNESCO, Paris <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001548/154820e.pdf>

This report discusses initiatives aimed at improving equity and access to education. The abolition of school fees along with compensatory grants to schools; and cash transfers to targeted households to assist with indirect expenses have increased in recent years. Cash transfer programmes have been found to have increased participation in primary school, improved attendance and reduced grade failure and drop-out rates. They can also be integral in increasing transition rates from primary to secondary school (e.g. Cambodia's scholarship for girls who transition to secondary school). Such programmes, however, have faced various challenges and difficulties. These include:

- Weak monitoring and administrative capacity
- Problems with payment systems and shortage of facilities
- Political interference in the selection of beneficiaries
- Exclusion of poor and isolated communities, with large programmes operating in communities that already had school services
- Failure to integrate direct support to schools with other school improvement policies
- Failure to plan for and address the impact of increased enrollment, leading to overcrowded schools, poor education quality and shortage of basic facilities and teachers

In order for cash transfer programmes to be successful, they must be transparent and credible. Further, the expected consequences of higher enrollment should be fully assessed and integrated into national and donor plans. Funds are necessary for additional teachers, classrooms and learning materials.

3. Cash transfers: conditional and unconditional

Künnemann, R. and Leonhard, R., 2008, 'A Human Rights View of Social Cash Transfers for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals', Brot für die Welt and Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst, Bonn / Stuttgart
<http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/a-human-rights-view-of-social-cash-transfers-for-achieving-the-mdgs/pdf>

Social cash transfers have expanded in middle income countries and in low income countries through pilot programmes. Such transfers (including social pensions) have increased children's enrolment in school and attendance.

A key issue is whether to provide unconditional or conditional transfers. There is little data that indicates that conditionalities lead to higher school attendance than unconditional transfers. This paper advocates for unconditional transfers and outlines some of the key criticisms of imposing conditionalities:

- If a conditionality is not met by one of the children and their households are excluded from the programme, the other developmental benefits of cash transfers will also be eliminated.
- Often, families 'punished' by exclusion are the poorest of the poor and screening them out is counter-productive
- Conditionalities deprive the poor of the freedom to take the appropriate decisions to increase household welfare. It is based on the presumption that poor people are irresponsible and don't know what is good for their family. This presumption is usually shown to be false; instead, experience indicates that families increase their use of schools and health centres if a certain minimum income is available to them.
- Conditionalities fail to consider that the respective services in many areas may be very weak or distant. It may not be possible for those in the most vulnerable households in these areas to take advantage of them at reasonable cost.

The paper also addresses issues of targeting. It stresses that 'exclusion errors', whereby an eligible person is not reached by the programme' can be extremely detrimental. Given difficulties in handling

criteria for eligibility, it may be preferable to avoid selection in social cash transfers particularly in situations of generalized poverty as in rural Africa.

Chapman, K., 2006, 'Using Social Transfers to Scale up Equitable Access to Education and Health Services', Background Paper, Department for International Development, London

<http://www.educacionenvalores.org/IMG/pdf/social-transfers-back.pdf>

This paper discusses the impact of demand-side interventions, in particular social cash transfers, on access to education and health services by the extreme poor. Key points include:

- *Social transfers can reduce demand-side barriers, in particular costs, of chronically poor households.* Alongside the provision of 'free' universal services, they can alleviate opportunity costs (lost income from children giving up work) and out-of-pocket expenses, such as travel, textbooks and uniforms.
- *Social transfers (conditional and unconditional) have increased poor people's demand for education services.* Conditional cash transfer programmes, for example, have increased school enrolment and attendance rates among poor families. Scholarships have helped poor households to maintain access to education. Unconditional cash transfers have also improved school attendance. Evidence shows that people will often prioritise spending on education even where it is not a condition.
- *Social transfers can enhance long-term cognitive ability by improving nutrition in children's early years (pre-school).* Unlike in-school feeding programmes, they can also benefit other household members.
- *Conditional transfers are most likely to be effective in increasing equitable access to services where demand for child labour is high (opportunity cost) or discrimination against girls or other marginalised groups is high.* Unconditional transfers are more likely to impact on human development where vulnerable groups have sufficient access to information to make informed choices about education. They may also be more appropriate where service coverage is poor.
- *There is a danger that conditions can exclude the very groups in need of transfers.* While payments that are made on condition of exam performance have resulted in higher pass rates, for example, girls who are less likely to do well in exams are the ones more likely to drop out of school without the extra payment. In addition, the poor who live in remote or disperse communities may be unable to fulfill the requirements of accessing services.
- *In some cases, conditional cash transfer programmes are specifically implemented in areas where there is adequate education service provision. This excludes those in areas lacking such services, who are likely to be among the most vulnerable.* Attention needs to be paid to how to implement such programmes in areas with limited service provision capacity, such as through community schools or accreditation of non-state providers.
- *Investments need to be made in both the supply-side and demand-side.* Rapid expansion of access through the removal of tuition fees or conditional cash transfer programmes can undermine service quality unless there is also increased investment in service provision. In Nicaragua, for example, teachers receive a modest bonus per child participating in the programme, half of which is to pay for school materials.
- *Social transfers can complement other forms of social assistance such as removal of user fees, fee waivers and exemptions, or scholarship and stipend programmes.* They also need to be implemented alongside interventions that address other barriers, such as access to information, discrimination by providers and cultural constraints.

Samson. M. et al., 2007, 'The Social and Economic Impact of Cash Transfers', Social Transfers Evidence Base, Synthesis Document, Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI), Cape Town
<http://faqs.hungersafetynet.org/Samson%20-%20evidence%20on%20social%20transfers.doc>

This paper provides a synthesis of key findings from the evidence base on the impact of cash transfers, including impact on education. It finds that conditional and unconditional social transfers have had positive effects on schooling indicators (rates of enrolment, advancement, absences and drop-outs) The effects are greater for those groups and contexts where enrolment prior to the transfer is low (e.g. secondary school students; low income countries). It notes though that there is a gap in evidence on the impact of conditionalities themselves.

Adato, M. and Bassett, L., 2009, 'Social Protection to Support Vulnerable Children and Families: The Potential of Cash Transfers to Protect Education, Health and Nutrition', AIDS Care, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 60-75
http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/301436_915029589.pdf

This report discusses the potential of cash transfers to protect the human capital of vulnerable children and families based on a review of documents on cash transfer programmes around the world. The impact of cash transfers on education is reviewed on pages 62-66. In general, it finds that cash transfers have the potential to increase and protect children's education by covering school expenses, compensating for lost income when children are sent to school rather than work and providing an incentive for attendance when transfers are conditional.

Conditional cash transfers

World Bank, 2009, 'Conditional Cash Transfers: Reducing Present and Future Poverty', Policy Research Report, World Bank, Washington DC
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCCT/Resources/5757608-1234228266004/PRR-CCT_web_noembargo.pdf

The report presents findings from conditional cash transfer programmes. The section on the effects on school enrolment and attendance states that virtually every programme that has had a credible evaluation has found an improvement in school enrolment. While most popular in Latin America, such programmes have extended to countries in Asia, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Cambodia – although, they are often referred to instead as 'scholarships' or 'stipend' programmes. In these countries, many of the programmes target girls and have resulted in increased female enrolment in schools.

The report emphasises that service utilization should only be seen as an 'intermediate' outcome, however, and attention should be paid to whether those enrolled as a result of such programmes complete more years of schooling, learn more, and earn higher wages as adults. It notes one study that found that beneficiaries of conditional cash transfers did not necessarily learn more than children in the control group. Still, the report notes that transfers may still contribute to higher wages in the future.

Son, H. H., 2008, 'Conditional Cash Transfer Programs: An Effective Tool for Poverty Alleviation?', Economics and Research Department Policy Brief Series, no. 51, Asian Development Bank, Manila
http://www.adb.org/Documents/EDRC/Policy_Briefs/PB051.pdf

This brief discusses issues related to the rationale and implementation of conditional cash transfer programmes and assessments of their effectiveness. While such programmes can be a means of achieving socially optimal levels of investments in human capital, critics argue that they are too costly, their administrative requirements are too high, and they can be perceived as demeaning by imposing conditions regardless of preferences. Evaluations have found that programmes have had a positive effect on education, with higher enrolment rates. This effect is particularly high in countries where pre-

programme enrolment rates are extremely low. Such programmes do not necessarily impact, however, on school attendance rate, on school achievement, or in attracting drop-outs to school. The brief advocates that these elements should be integrated into the design of conditional cash transfer programmes or as complementary interventions. In addition, interventions to address socio-cultural biases against schooling for girls may also need to be addressed alongside efforts to target the enrolment of girls. This is especially needed where such biases play a bigger role than cash incentives (e.g. Turkey). In other cases (e.g. Mexico and Nicaragua), substantial increases in school enrolment of girls have resulted in more positive attitudes toward educating girls.

The brief also emphasises the importance of supply-factors in increasing access to education. A presumption of the conditional cash transfer approach is that the supply of education services is in place. This may not be the case in some countries; as such, there is no guarantee that successes of such programmes in some countries can be duplicated in others. Low-income countries with limited social service infrastructure need to integrate supply-side issues in order to avoid policy inconsistency and resource wastage. Further, there is also no guarantee that translation of higher educational earnings will lead to higher earnings as the absorption capacity of skilled labour in low-income countries may be low – and thus the returns to education. A key concern is the low returns to education in the rural sector.

Scholarships/ bursaries/ stipends

Gardener, J. and Subrahmanian, R., 2006, 'Tackling Social Exclusion in Health and Education: Case Studies from Asia', Report prepared for DFID Asia Division, GHK Consulting Ltd., London
<http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/tackling-social-exclusion.pdf>

This paper outlines lessons from interventions to counter social exclusion in health and education in Asia. Of particular relevance to this query is the profile of the Female Stipend Programme (FSP) in Bangladesh. It aims to increase girls' enrolment in grades VI-X through the provision of stipends and tuition waivers. Conditions of the stipends and waivers include a minimum 75 percent attendance rate, a minimum 45 percent performance in school exams, and deferred marriage until the qualifying exam or the age of 18. The programme contributed to a vast expansion in girls' enrolment in secondary school such that it is now generally accepted (even in more traditional, rural areas) that girls can and should attend secondary school. Lessons learned from programme implementation include:

- The scaling up of the stipend programme has been the result of a policy context of sustained political commitment and consensus among all political parties and national elite on the importance of the education.
- Heavy investment in the demand side has resulted in overcrowded classrooms and concerns that the quality of education has been negatively affected, with a particular impact on girls.
- Stipend qualification criteria can be exclusionary. They are received by girls who are able to do well, many of whom come from affluent families. Girls from poorer families who may not do as well in exams are more likely to be excluded from the programme.
- A targeted programme aimed at girls from poorer families, instead of a universal programme, could result in a smaller-scale and more sustainable programme. However, more closely targeted programmes require difficult targeting mechanisms, such as means-testing.
- There is a need to look beyond 'access' and to create a school environment that meets the needs of girls. This may entail curriculum changes to increase relevance and accessibility.
- There is a need to sustain the demand for girls' education through the opportunities for further education and post-school employment.

4. Consumption transfers: abolition of fees

The World Bank and UNICEF, 2009, 'Abolishing School Fees in Africa: Lessons from Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and Mozambique', The World Bank, Washington, DC
http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Aboloshing_School_Fees_in_Africa.pdf

The School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI) seeks to accelerate progress toward quality education for all children by supporting policies that remove cost barriers that prevent parents from enrolling and maintaining their children at school. This operational guide aims to provide guidance and support to countries planning to abolish school fees with respect to the development and implementation of such policies. It outlines practical lessons based on case studies from Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Mozambique:

- **Political leadership:** successful implementation of fee abolition requires strong political leadership at the highest level, particularly when it is a major departure from current policies.
- **Fee abolition as part of more comprehensive reforms:** fee abolition must be part of a more comprehensive reform package, such that sufficient supply of teachers, classrooms and textbooks are available for the start of the school year. Other reforms may include curriculum reform and the promotion of various innovative programmes, such as alternative basic education and school feeding programmes.
- **Careful planning:** prior analytical work is necessary in order to calculate and compensate for foregone fees; and to determine the extent of additional teachers, classrooms and training materials necessary to satisfy increases in enrolment, and how to finance these resources. This requires a solid database on key inputs.
- **Communication and building partnerships:** preparation of fee abolition should include comprehensive communication and consultation to explain the policy, impact and implementation to key stakeholders. It may also require consensus building with opposition politicians who may not have supported this new policy.
- **Phasing in the reforms:** while a comprehensive 'big bang' approach avoids having to make difficult selection decisions and allows all those previously excluded the opportunity to enrol in primary school education, such a major enrolment surge may be problematic. Phasing in the decision may instead allow for more time to mobilise the required teachers, classrooms and training materials – as well as the necessary implementation and monitoring mechanisms.
- **Measures to protect quality:** a key cause of concern with the abolition of school fees is a potential deterioration in the quality of education. Challenges to quality must be addressed before declaring the abolition of fees.
- **Use of school grants to replace fee revenues:** the provision of school grants is a common mechanism to replace the revenues collected through fees. Preconditions for the sound functioning of school grants include: simple implementation guidelines and training; a reliable school registry and reliable enrolment data; and an effective financial system for transferring resources. Challenges include the financial sustainability of grants; and the effectiveness and transparency of grant mechanisms.

5. In-kind transfers: school feeding programmes

Bundy, D. et al., 2009, 'Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, Washington, DC
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099080042112/DID_School_Feeding.pdf

The demand for school feeding programmes has increased in low-income countries affected by the social shocks of the current global crises. This review aims to provide guidance on how to develop and implement such programmes. It highlights three main findings:

- i. School feeding programmes in low-income countries vary in cost, indicating opportunities for cost containment;
- ii. As countries get richer, school feeding costs become a much smaller proportion of the investment in education;
- iii. The main preconditions for the transition to sustainable national programmes are embedding school feeding in national policies and plans, particularly education sector plans (i.e. those aimed at promoting enrolment and attendance); identifying national sources of financing; and expanding national implementation capacity.

There is evidence that school feeding programmes increase school enrolment (particularly for girls), reduce absenteeism, enhance participation and contribute to learning through avoiding hunger and enhancing cognitive abilities. These effects can be augmented when such programmes are supported by complementary actions such as deworming and micronutrient fortification or supplementation. The review emphasises, however, that whether these educational benefits translate into improved educational outcomes depends on endogenous factors, such as the quality of teaching and the availability of textbooks.

There is insufficient evidence concerning the benefits and costs of particular school feeding programmes. Both take-home rations and in-school meals appear to increase attendance and possibly educational attainment. There is a need to develop an evidence base that allows for careful trade-offs among targeting approaches, feeding modalities and costs.

Adelman, S. W., Gilligan, D. O. and Lehrer, K. 2008. 'How Effective are Food for Education Programs? A Critical Assessment of the Evidence from Developing Countries', Food Policy Review, vol. 9, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, DC

<http://www.schoolsandhealth.org/sites/ffe/Key%20Information/How%20effective%20are%20food%20for%20education%20programs.pdf>

This report discusses food for education programmes, including meals served in school and take-home rations conditional on school attendance. The aim of such programmes is to increase the net benefits of schooling enough to change household behaviour and to increase children's school participation. The programmes also have the potential to increase learning and cognitive outcomes by increasing the consumption of nutritious food by undernourished children. There is some evidence that in-school meals have contributed both to improvements in school attendance and to better learning efficiency while in school. Food programmes have larger impacts in areas with low school participation and on children with greater initial malnutrition. As such, it may be beneficial to conduct assessments of schools' needs in target areas before starting a food for education programme in order to improve targeting and to tailor the programme to local needs. Programme administrators should also be willing to consider complementary programmes to improve school quality.

Critiques of such programmes argue that they are more costly than other programmes that aim to increase school participation. School meal programmes are commonly provided to all children in a targeted school, which raises the costs of achieving the objectives as it provides transfers to many children who would have attended school anyway. It may be more possible to target take-home rations to groups with greater need, such as poor or female children. They may be more likely to change their behaviour based on the programme.

There is a need for more information and a stronger evidence base on the impact of food for education programmes impact on school attainment, learning, and cognitive development – and how these aspects may be improved through more effective targeting, changes to the size and composition of food transfers, or provision of other schooling and health inputs. There is also no comprehensive side-by-side comparison to other popular programmes, such as conditional cash transfers. If learning and cognitive benefits to school-aged children are small, for example, then it may be more effective to increase school participation through small, cash-based programmes.

Gelli, A., Al-Shaiba, N. and Espejo, F., 2009, 'The Costs and Cost-Efficiency of Providing Food through Schools in Areas of High Food Insecurity', Food and Nutrition Bulletin, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 68-76

<http://www.schoolsandhealth.org/sites/ffe/Key%20Information/The%20costs%20and%20cost-efficiency%20of%20providing%20food%20through%20schools%20in%20areas%20of%20high%20food%20insecurity.pdf>

This paper aims to start to bridge the gap in the evidence on cost-effectiveness of food in school programmes, looking at World Food Programme data from 2005. It provides estimates of yearly expenditures for various modes of delivery (e.g. on-site meals, take-home rations, fortified biscuits) and finds that the provision of fortified biscuits is the most cost-efficient option.

6. Related GSDRC reports

The following GSDRC materials provide additional reading on cash transfers:

Helpdesk research reports

- **Financing and Cost-effectiveness of Cash Transfer Schemes** (July 2010): What does the evidence base on the costing, financing and cost effectiveness of cash transfer schemes tell us? <http://www.gsdr.org/go/display&type=Helpdesk&id=611>
- **Political Economy of Cash Transfers** (August 2010): What does the evidence base on the politics and political economy of cash transfer schemes tell us? What do we know about how questions of affordability have been addressed from a political perspective? What is the nature and scope of that evidence base?

7. Additional information

Author

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Experts consulted:

Donald Bundy (Human Development Network, The World Bank)

Pauline Rose (Visiting Senior Research Fellow, University of Sussex)

Selected websites visited

Asian Development Bank, Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity, Education Policy and Data Centre, Eldis, GSDRC, IDS, Overseas Development Institute, Save the Children, UNESCO, The World Bank

About Helpdesk research reports: Helpdesk reports are based on two days of desk-based research. They are designed to provide a brief overview of the key issues; and a summary of some of the best literature available. Experts are contacted during the course of the research, and those able to provide input within the short time-frame are acknowledged.

Need help finding consultants? If you need to commission more in-depth research, or need help finding and contracting consultants for additional work, please contact consultants@gsdrc.org (further details at www.gsdrc.org/go.cfm?path=/go/helpdesk/find-a-consultant)