

Show me the money

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Valorization addendum

This addendum describes the relevance of this thesis for policy and practice. This study comes at an important time, given the revolution of social protection programmes in lower income countries over the last two decades. At the same time, policy makers in the developing world are looking for interventions to address the high burden of malnutrition among young children, which has severe impacts on the health, development and economic potential of those affected. The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015, set out an ambitious agenda for policy makers across the world. Target 1.3 calls for the establishment of appropriate social protection floors and target 2.2 calls for ending all forms of malnutrition. This study is at the crossroads of these two targets and examines if and how cash transfer (CTs) programmes can play a role in addressing malnutrition. CTs are a popular form of social protection and have been implemented and scaled up in dozens of low income countries over the last two decades. Therefore, it is important to examine their potential contribution to reducing malnutrition.

The first contribution of this thesis is to highlight what we know thus far on how CTs can help address malnutrition (chapter 2). The answers provided in this chapter help policy makers and development partners to decide on what works best if one of the objectives of a CTs is to improve malnutrition. By looking at past research, it offers lessons for those in the process of designing and implementing CTs to maximize the benefit for populations at risk of malnutrition. For example, elements like the transfer size and the target age group can have a substantial effect on the success of the programme to address malnutrition. This chapter also showed that malnutrition is a multidimensional problem with various underlying determinants. It is important for policy makers to fully understand how these determinants work together and how policy can address such determinants.

The empirical part of the thesis focuses on the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme in Ghana. More specifically, it deals with an extension of the LEAP programme to a new group of beneficiaries, pregnant women and young infants, named LEAP 1000. While this focus makes the thesis particularly relevant for policy makers in Ghana, lessons learnt from LEAP 1000 are likely transferrable to countries at a similar level of development and on a similar growth path. More countries in sub-Saharan Africa are piloting and scaling up CTs targeted to young children with the objective to improve child nutritional status, for example in Zambia (Child Grant Programme) and Mozambique (*Subsidio para a Crianca*). In addition, the target group of this CT makes it uniquely positioned to study the potential and the effect of a CT on young child nutrition.

Next, this study provides contextualized evidence on the determinants of malnutrition in Northern Ghana (chapter 3). It is important to take account of the complex determinants of malnutrition when a policy is designed to address this issue. The findings from this chapter showed that household income and maternal care have a positive relation with health and nutrition of children. Higher prices are negatively associated with nutritional status. Hence, policies that can increase household income, improve maternal care and reduce volatility of prices can all contribute to improvements in the health and nutritional status of children in Northern Ghana. Simulations are an important part of the policy process as they can estimate the likely effect of a policy. Simulations in this thesis show that income growth, improving maternal care and avoiding sudden price shocks have a positive – but rather limited effect – on the reduction of malnutrition. This is important information for policy makers to identify the most effective policies to address malnutrition.

In addition, this thesis is relevant by including household behaviour as an additional determinant of nutritional status. Since infants are cared for by adults living in households, the dynamics of household behaviour and preferences are important considerations for policy makers. For example, parents may have different preferences in which child they want to invest more resources to get returns in the future. Such preferences may have an effect on the effectiveness of policies seeking to address malnutrition, especially when a policy is as fungible as an unconditional CT, which allows families to spend the money as they see fit. The results from this thesis showed that households in general have no strong preference regarding the gender of their children, but that fathers might be more inclined to invest in their daughters compared to their sons. These are important considerations for actors designing and implementing CTs as the expected outcomes can depend on how the intervention is targeted and communicated to the recipient household.

Besides these *ex-ante effects*, the impact evaluation presented in this thesis provides important evidence on the extent to which an unconditional CT can affect malnutrition and its determinants (chapter 5). This is one of the first impact evaluations of an at-scale, government-run CT in West-Africa and therefore offers vital knowledge to policy makers and other actors in social protection in the region. The results from this impact evaluation showed no impact on nutritional status, nor on the two immediate determinants of food intake and health. However, there is a positive effect on one of the three underlying determinants, food security, which is in line with findings from other CTs in the region. The main lesson from this study is that that cash alone is unlikely to yield impacts on young child nutrition and integrated programmes that aim to address multiple underlying determinants at the same time need to be further examined and tested.

While governments across the world, in particular in lower-income countries, are starting to recognize the potential of social protection, this thesis

provides several evidence-based lessons to maximize social protection's potential to help address a significant public health problem such as malnutrition. The findings from this study feed into the policy discourse in Ghana, as well as in sub-Saharan Africa, and can reach actors who are active in the field of social policy design and implementation, such as international organizations, researchers and government officials. Findings from this study have been presented at several international conferences, as well as to policy makers and development actors in Ghana. It is therefore expected that the lessons from this research will continue to influence policy discussions and implementation in Ghana and beyond.

