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Evaluation of the Impacts of Social Protection Schemes in Rural Gambia

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Abstract. *Global agriculture (including that of The Gambia) and food security faces increasing challenges, with almost half of the population living in extreme poverty. This article examines the Impact of Unconditional Cash Transfers on very poor rural households severely affected by the shocks of food insecurity in The Gambia. It also explores and evaluates the influence of gender on cash based transfers impacts (unconditional cash transfer in the rural Gambia). Qualitative methods of research through the use of survey questionnaire interview was administered for primary data collection for onward impact evaluation. The research objectives are to measure the effectiveness of Cash transfers schemes in addressing food shocks in rural Gambia. Also, to provide some key policy recommendations to protect rural dwellers from the interruption or loss of income. The population of focus in this study are the direct supported beneficiaries of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) funded Cash Based Transfers program implemented by the World Food Program in The Gambia in 2015. A total of 100 questionnaires interviews were administered in November, 2016. The 100 Respondents / Interviewees were drawn from the one thousand six hundred and eighty-two (1682) very poor supported household heads in five (5) clusters (Chargel, Manneh Kunda, Draman, Medina Tunjang and Daru) of the Central River Region of The Gambia. Consideration for the inclusion of about 27% of female headed household beneficiaries to serve as respondents was also factored as criteria during respondent's selection. Initial cluster sampling techniques was applied, out of which a simple random was applied to select out the final respondents for the data collection. The UN World Food Program country office moderated the field data collection in the form of training and orienting five (5) data collectors stationed in the region as Community Health Nurses and Community Development Assistants respectively.*

Keywords: Agriculture, Unconditional Cash Transfer, Poverty Reduction, Social Protection, Gender

Introduction

According to FAO (2015), despite some significant gains in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on poverty and fight against hunger in 2015, yet an unacceptably large number of people and households still lack the food they need for an active and healthy life. It is worth underscoring that the 1996 World Food Summit held in Rome committed about 182 state governments who all pledged to eradicate hunger with an immediate view of scaling down the number of undernourished people to half by not later than 2015. However, there appears to be continuity of an unprecedented increase in hunger and malnutrition prevalence globally with an estimated number of nearly 1 in every 9 people experience chronic hunger, and 1 in every 6 people in developing countries being underweight (FAO, 2015).

The Gambia like in many other African countries, farming systems exhibit a high degree of heterogeneity, livelihood strategies, population pressures, access to markets, institutions, and agro-ecological conditions. Despite the Gambia's ratifications and commitments to numerous agricultural supportive instruments, the country and its regions continue to be challenged and failed to reach the international hunger targets. (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2015).

In general, farmers in The Gambia produce for home consumption and sell any surpluses at disappointing prices to either local markets or to the middlemen from the neighboring Senegal. The sector is predominantly subsistence, rain fed with very little irrigation or use of improved seeds and fertilizers. In regions where population growth is rapid and rural population density is high, the size of the average household's farming system has been rapidly declining. Thus exposing the Gambia to be considered as a country where food insecurity has become endemic owing to repeated incidence of crop failure, incidence of animal disease outbreak, rising food prices and the lack of adequate support mechanisms to victims.

This article examines the Impact of unconditional cash transfers on very poor rural households severely affected by the shocks of food insecurity in The Gambia. It also explores and evaluates the influence of gender on cash based transfers impacts (unconditional cash transfer in the rural Gambia). Qualitative methods of research through the use of survey questionnaire interview was administered for primary data collection for onward impact evaluation. The research objectives are to measure the effectiveness of Cash transfers and Food aid schemes in addressing food shocks in rural Gambia. Also, to provide some key policy recommendations to protect rural dwellers from the interruption or loss of income. The structure of the article is organized as follows: Section 2 provides the evaluation of Social Protection Schemes in rural Gambia. Section 3 deals with the data, methodology, and empirical evidence. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations are elucidated in section 4.

Evaluation of unconditional cash transfers in rural Gambia

The studies conducted in 2014 by a constituent of multi-stakeholders' humanitarian country team on food security using a harmonized framework and overall response plan defined by the Government of The Gambia (GoTG) within the framework of The Gambia Strategic Response Plan 2015 and the Humanitarian Needs Overview. The Government, UN agencies and Civil Society Organizations in the fight against food insecurity and hunger revealed the unprecedented challenges in realizing food self-sufficiency (food security) largely due to a wide range of climate-related factors. Thus, erratic and declining rainfall patterns have rendered the agriculture sector very risky and food security a huge development challenge. Lack of mechanization and diversification has also led to dependency on a single major cash crop (groundnuts), resulting in some more volatile exchange rate earnings. Cereal yields are generally low, with an average of roughly 1.5 tonnes/Ha compared to an estimated potential of 3-4 tonnes/Ha for cereals. For this reason, food self-sufficiency is relatively low, with an estimated national ratio of about fifty percent (50%) of needs met and the remaining 50 per cent imported. The lack of supporting infrastructure (irrigation, roads, storage, research and development) has also created bottlenecks that limit the growth of the agriculture sector. In addition, distress migration of active labor workforce in the rural Gambia continues to result in the loss of a vital dynamic part of the workforce, with negative consequences for agricultural productivity (Gambia Strategic Response Plan, 2015). Most of the extreme poor in The Gambia are reportedly to live in the rural areas, whose main source of livelihood is dependent on agriculture.

Consequently, these severely directly affected poor households in the rural communities and altered household food production and supply chains. Household food insecurity has threatened social cohesion in the rural communities of the rural Gambia, as well as many other related threats. The disruption posed by the crisis has reportedly severely affected the Gambia, thus leaving an estimated total population of about 566,868 (28% of the total population). Assessment studies revealed that out of the affected populations, an estimate of 442,429 are considered food insecure, 67,068 are both severely and moderately malnourished, 45,944 pregnant and lactating mothers, 11,427 refugees and are therefore in need of humanitarian assistance (Gambia Strategic Response Plan, 2015).

Poverty in The Gambia is highlighted to be more prominent and concentrated in rural areas (Gambia Humanitarian Response Plan, 2016). Other studies argued that a similar pattern appears to reflect at the global level. Globally, latest estimates indicate that of these rural poor (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2015).

The end of 2015 witnesses the re-evaluation of Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) targets outcome, and the subsequent observation of a new global commitment to sustainable development that also requires a reshaping of the world's food system. Young and his colleagues (2001), reveals that small family farms around the developing world continue to be of relevance in the drive towards sustainable household food security since the beginning of settled agriculture.

Essentially, in the case of The Gambia, similar studies pointed out aggravated customary land tenure systems to be part of the numerous contributing factors leading to the crumbling of farming systems that fails to allow for the development of land purchase or rental markets. Customary tenure institutions exclude women from land ownership, prevent more efficient farm size structures and inhibit investment. In many high population regions, micro holdings have forced farmers to diversify into the rural non-farm economy in order to maintain their livelihoods. It is estimated that approximately 45% of rural income in Gambia is earned from non-farm activities including trading, agro-processing, and service provision in the non-farm economy (Hazel et al. 2014).

In conclusions, it is worth noting that although increasing demographic pressure implies increased labor availability relative to land, there remains significant variation within communities and across gender lines in distributions of household resources. Household typologies based on resource endowments are useful for exploring and designing appropriate technologies corresponding with those endowments. Within farms another level of variability exists caused by the different levels of land use intensity and the ability of farmers to apply inputs (crop residues, manure, refuse, fertilizer) to some fields (homestead), yet exploiting others distant fields. Davis and his colleagues (2016), further examined and argued that a long-term interplay of geological and landscape conditions, and plot management have generated such often called within-farm soil fertility gradients. The heterogeneity of African farming systems including the Gambia can also be reflected from a broader dimension of wide institutional variation, for instance, input and output market access, physical and knowledge infrastructure, service provision, and an enabling policy environment. The interaction between these socio-organizational and more technological conditions influences to a large extent the socio-technical transition pathways towards sustainable production intensification and enhancing food security (Davis et al., 2016).

Data, methodology and empirical evidence

Methodology

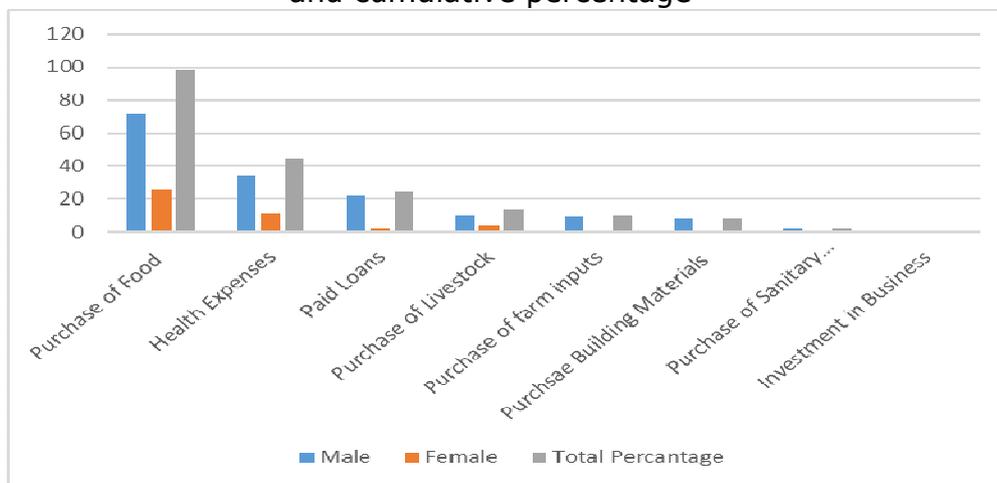
The evaluation uses a qualitative method to study unconditional cash transfer supported beneficiaries of Upper Fulladou West District of the Central River South Region of the rural Gambia. Multi-cluster study was

initiated based on proximity of distance to develop a map out and sample cash based transfer beneficiary communities for population to be studied. Primary data collection survey using one-to-one interview approach was implemented from a total of one hundred respondents, facilitated by trained community development assistants and health nurses in the Central River South of the Gambia. Data entry and coding based on themes identified on the questionnaires preceded data analysis.

Empirical Evidence

Figure 1 summarises recipient household’s utilization of unconditional cash received showing proportionate areas of spending’s by gender with both male and female recipients common spending priority on food, health loan and debts payment, purchase of livestock’s and farm inputs respectively. Conversely, minimal spending priority on purchase on building materials, household sanitary tools and investment in income generation activities was discovered from the results by only male headed household recipients during four (4) months transfer period as opposed to in female headed households despite receiving equal transfer value during the transfer timeframe.

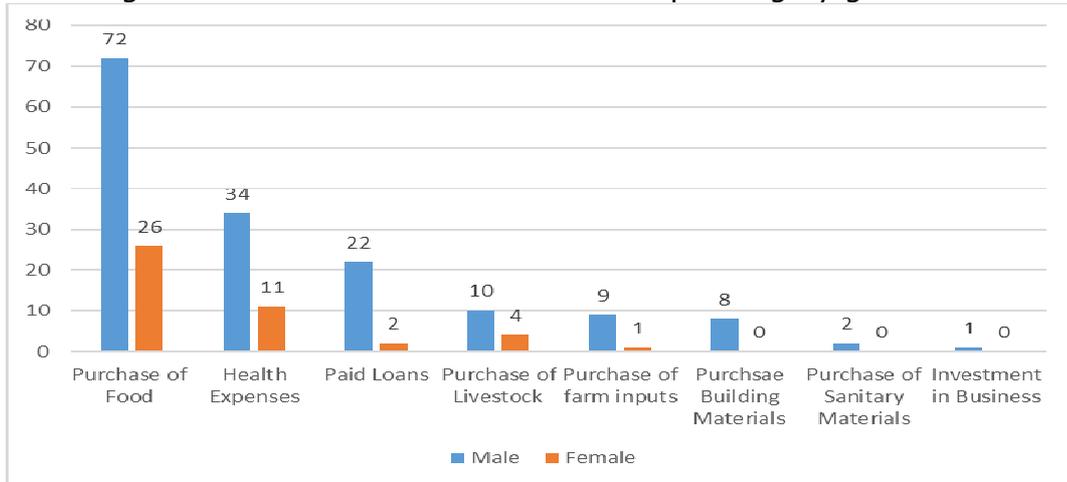
Figure 1. Unconditional cash transfer household recipients spending by gender and cumulative percentage



Source: Own composition based on primary data (2016)

Thus a varying cash utilization by gender with virtually all cash recipients (98%) primarily spending cash on purchase of food, 45% on health expenses, 24% on servicing of debts or loans, 14% on purchase of farm inputs, 10% on purchase of building materials, 8% on purchase of sanitary materials and 1% investment in business (income generating activities).

Figure 2. Unconditional cash transfer spending by gender



Source: Own composition based on primary data (2016)

Figure 2, illustrates the number of households' head by gender from a total number of studied population of 73 and 27 male and female headed household head recipients' on how they spent the cash they benefitted during the four months' transfer period.

Table 1. Cross tabulation by gender of respondent that spend on paying loan

			Paid_Loan20.11		Total
			0	1	
Gender respondent	of Male	Count	51	22	73
		% within Gender of respondent	69.9%	30.1%	100.0%
	Female	Count	25	2	27
		% within Gender of respondent	92.6%	7.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	76	24	100
		% within Gender of respondent	76.0%	24.0%	100.0%

Source: Own calculations based on primary data (2016)

Table 2. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square ^a	5.583	1	.018		
Continuity Correction ^b	4.406	1	.036		
Likelihood Ratio	6.602	1	.010		
Fisher's Exact Test				.018	.013
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.527	1	.019		
N of Valid Cases	100				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.48.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Source: Own calculations based on primary data (2016)

In the cross tabulations analysis (Table 2) using the Pearson chi square test to observe the relationship between Gender and its influence on cash transfers utilization and impact. Male headed vs. female headed households were observed by cash utilization on loan / debts servicing expenses (73% male vs. 27% female). Thus, using positive significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between gender and cash transfers, have revealed an observable significance level indicating 0.018 and 0.013 by gender of cash recipients have proven to be a determinant factor that's significantly influences unconditional cash utilization and impacts.

Conclusions and policy implications

Unlike conditional cash transfers characterized with stringent measures that dictates beneficiaries on how to utilize and spent the received cash, unconditional cash transfers have proven invaluable schemes for improving households wellbeing, reducing food insecurity and potentially facilitates productions by increasing the demands for local products. Thus, increasing multiplier effects on economic activities as they purchase goods from the nearby markets. The results showed that unconditional cash transfer have larger impact on real food availability and spillover effect on household productive assets instead of conditional cash transfer and food aid that limits the choice of beneficiaries. Moreover, our findings also indicate that gender have positive influence on cash utilization through

relationships and empowering interactions in improving the wellbeing of ultra-poor families and constrained households.

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