Learning Brief

USING CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION STATUS OF GIRLS

The Adolescent Girls Initiative – Kenya (AGI-K) Learning Series
**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Household cash transfer platforms should be pilot-tested at small scale to determine their efficiency and address any challenges identified prior to its adoption and roll out.
- Clear accountability mechanisms for school cash transfers need to be established at the onset of the project to enhance transparency and proper use of the cash for the intended purposes.

**Introduction**

Adolescent girls in Kenya face a number of risks and vulnerabilities that can affect their health, education status, and general well-being. The Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya (AGI-K) is currently delivering multi-sectoral interventions, targeting violence prevention, education, health, and wealth creation, to adolescent girls aged 11–15 in two marginalized areas of Kenya:

1. The urban slums of Kibera in Nairobi, and
2. Wajir County in north-eastern Kenya.

A Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) design is being used to compare the impact of four different intervention packages, along with their associated costs, to assess if and how intervening in early adolescence will impact girls’ lives as they transition into early adulthood. Save the Children in partnership with Population Council is implementing the project in 79 villages in Wajir County.

This learning brief is one of three, prepared in the course of the implementation phase of the project, focusing on key areas of best practice and lessons learnt. These briefs aim to share learning with specialists and civil society learning networks, and help inform future design and management of adolescent girls’ programmes in hard to reach or marginalized communities.

**The Education Conditional Cash Transfers**

To contribute to improved education outcomes among adolescent girls in Wajir, the AGI-K project design included conditional cash transfer (CCT) where girls are supported to attend school and transition to the next grade upon meeting two conditions i.e. enrolling in school and attaining 80% school attendance. The CCT has four components:

a. Payment of school fees per term for girls who meet the two conditions capped at a maximum of KES 700 and KES 5,000 for primary and secondary schools respectively.

b. Cash transfer to household heads of KES 3,000 per term divided into two payments of KES 1,500 for each of the girls participating in the AGI-K programme, subject to the girl meeting the above conditions.

c. School kits provided to girls participating in the program upon meeting the two conditions. The school kit consists of an exercise book, one ball-point pen, a bar of soap, one tube of petroleum jelly, a pair of underwear and four packs of sanitary pads.

d. School incentives provided to schools where girls participating in the education interventions are attending. This is KES 500 per term for each girl in the AGI-K programme attending a day school. This fund that is meant to enable the schools create enabling environment for safe learning of girls, as well as incentivize data collection, is conditioned on enrollment.
Why condition the Cash Transfers?

During a needs assessment conducted in 2014, it emerged that domestic chores were among the main reasons why most girls were kept out of school in Wajir. Parents without alternative labour for such tasks opted to keep girls at home to do these chores, which included among others looking after livestock and fetching water. To meet these needs and to support the households (HHs) to release their girls to attend school, the AGI-K project provided KES 3,000 per term to HHs with eligible adolescent girls. These funds were provided on condition that the households would regularly let their girls attend school. To further promote girls’ attendance in schools, the school incentives were provided to motivate the teachers to track girls’ school attendance and follow up with their parents in case of absenteeism. Girls on the other hand were provided with school kits containing basic learning and hygiene items to enable them to comfortably manage their menses, therefore reducing cases of school absenteeism attributed to menstrual management difficulties.

These four components were made conditional to ensure that all the stakeholders involved in ensuring girls attend school regularly effectively play their part, with failure to do so resulting in them losing these benefits. This approach is aimed at boosting school attendance, retention and transition among the adolescent girls, as well as improving their educational outcomes.

Key Learning Points

Testing of Cash Transfer (CT) platforms for households (HHs) should be considered to identify any challenges before being rolled out.

The AGI-K programme used the existing Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) platform for its household cash transfers. –The HSNP is a household cash transfer aimed at reducing extreme hunger and vulnerabilities of communities in four counties, among them Wajir County, by delivering regular and unconditional cash transfers. The platform was chosen because most of the HHs in Wajir, including a considerable number of those participating in the AGI-K programme, were already registered for HSNP cash transfer, eliminating the need to establish a separate platform.
However, at the beginning of the implementation, it emerged that only about half of the HHs participating in the AGI-K programme (1,200) could access the cash transfers provided through the HSNP platform. The remainder of the HHs had difficulties in accessing their cash and they had to find alternative ways. This included opening new bank accounts for those who possessed national identity cards which was also a challenging exercise given the remoteness of the programme sites and the distance from Wajir town, where banking facilities are based. Even though most HHs found it difficult at first to open bank accounts, majority of them (98% of eligible HHs) had opened or provided accounts to be used for their cash transfers by the second year of implementation. The long duration taken by the HHs to open their bank accounts to some extent seemed to have impeded total collaboration by the community members who were not receiving their share of the HHs cash transfers. As a result, some caregivers withheld their girls from participating in the program activities until they received their cash transfers. In addition, the bank agents through whom the HSNP cash transfers could be accessed by the beneficiaries were not available in all the programme sites. Based on the prohibitive distances between the agents and some project sites, some HHs could not easily access their funds, as it would cost them more to go and withdraw the cash from the agents therefore they opted not to go. As a result, it was concluded that had pilot-testing been done to determine the efficiency of the available cash transfer mechanisms, then these challenges would probably have been identified prior to the adoption and rolling out of the CT platform used by the AGI-K project.

Accountability mechanisms should be established at the onset before the school cash transfers are made

To enhance accountability of the programme interventions in schools, school Boards of Management (BOMs) through their respective head teachers were sensitised on the AGI-K interventions. There were challenges in reaching all the school BOMs in 59 villages benefiting from the education interventions because of distances to the villages and available time to reach them. To address this, the project adopted the Training of Trainers (TOT) approach, where school head teachers were sensitised on the education interventions. They were then expected to share the same information with other members of the BOMs and teachers in their respective schools. This however did not happen in most of the schools, as the head teachers failed to disseminate the information, leaving the rest of the BOMs and teachers with little information on the education interventions. As a result, programme staff had to continuously engage with the parents and teachers on what the project was doing in the schools.
To enhance accountability, engaging the Ministry of Education (MOE) officials including auditors in the sensitisation process would have helped to emphasise the need for transparency and information sharing by the school head teachers. The school head teachers would have been compelled to share information such as how much the schools received in form of cash transfers and what they did with the funds. This would probably be made easier if the MOE officers ensured adherence to the requirement for schools to publicly display the amount of cash transfers received and their usage in schools’ notice boards which would then allow querying by any interested stakeholder, including the parents and other BOM members. To make this a reality, future projects should consider including this as an additional condition to provision of school incentives during the payment of the school cash transfers.

School kits distribution should always include training on the proper usage and disposal of sanitary pads.

Distribution of the school kits containing basic hygiene items was meant to assist in reducing school absenteeism attributed to difficulties in menstrual hygiene management (MHM) by adolescent girls in schools. While the girls were excited to receive these kits, some of them especially the young adolescents did not know how to use the sanitary pads correctly. It is therefore necessary to have a session demonstrating the correct use of the sanitary pads, including their disposal, during the distribution of the kits. Although AGI-K project staff tried to do this, there was an assumption that since the Government of Kenya was already distributing sanitary pads in schools, the girls already knew how to use them. Teachers in schools also claimed to have previously trained the girls on the use of the sanitary pads before AGI-K began supporting them with the kits. However, it was realized during the latter stages of project implementation that some girls still did not know how to use the sanitary pads. This was partly because there were very few female teachers (none in some schools) to train the girls on correct use of the sanitary pads, as the girls may not have felt comfortable being taught by male teachers.
Tracking of regular school attendance can be enhanced with a well-motivated and committed teacher.

The project is using the biometric system to track school attendance - where the finger prints of the girls enrolled into the program are used to verify their identities. The system uses smart phones installed with mobiotics application to record the data, and finger print scanners to read the beneficiaries finger prints.

However as indicated above, with limited information trickling down to the rest of the school fraternity by the school head teachers, it was difficult to get other teachers to fully support tracking of school attendance. The tracking was often done only when the head teachers were present in schools, but with their many responsibilities they were frequently out of school, some carrying along with them the phones used as part of the biometric system thereby interfering with the biometric attendance tracking.

A group of adolescent girls in Dasheq primary school recording their school attendance using biometric registers. Tracking school attendance using biometric system ensures the integrity of the data collected by eliminating manipulation since the actual beneficiaries bio-data requires them to be physically present.
It was established through engagement with other teachers in the school that with little motivation such as incentivising a few teachers to oversee the tracking process consistent and proper school attendance tracking would perhaps have been achieved. This was only being done in very few schools but provided insights on how the attendance tracking could be improved. To increase the commitment of the head teachers in ensuring that all teachers use and support attendance tracking system such as the one used by the AGI-K project, the system should have perhaps been designed in such a way that it benefits or feeds into the general school attendance tracking and reporting as much as it provides project-specific information.

**Need to develop a back-up system for data collection for school attendance.**

Most programme sites in Wajir had no mobile phone network coverage, making it difficult to transmit collected school attendance data to the project database on real-time basis. Moreover, mobiotrics application used for the biometric data collection required frequent upgrading that was only possible with internet connectivity. This required the project staff to physically travel to the villages, collect the phones and update the applications before returning them to the schools, translating into high expenditures incurred by the project while conducting this exercise, as well as inconsistency in data collection. This challenge persisted even after the project innovatively designed an offline system (mobile servers) for data collection from the field for subsequent transmission to the project database once staffs were within reliable mobile phone network. Nonetheless, the mobile servers ensured that the data collected, though not real-time, was still available to inform programme management decisions.

**General observation**

Regular school attendance among adolescent girls participating in the project

Through the support of the AGI-K project, about 2,260 girls were supported to regularly attend school ensuring that they stayed in schools longer and probably away from harmful practices such as early marriages among others. Continued support to these girls’ education will perhaps ensure that they improve on their literacy and numeracy skills and possibly their general well-being. Provision of school incentives seemed to enable some schools to improve their learning infrastructure and hire more teachers to attend to the adolescent girls in the schools. These observations will however be verified during the project’s mid-line evaluation to be held between July and October, 2017.
Recommendations

• Households’ cash transfer platforms should be pilot-tested at small scale to determine their efficiency and address any challenges identified prior to its adoption and roll out.
• Consider piloting the biometric attendance tracking system in multiple areas including the most remote areas to ensure the applications system designed for capturing biometric data is simple, user friendly and requires minimal maintenance.
• Innovatively develop other mechanisms to complement existing ones e.g. using offline mobile phone servers to collect data from remote locations for subsequent submission to the project monitoring platforms from the mobile servers.
• To enhance accountability, Ministry of Education (MOE) auditors need to be involved during the sensitization of the head teachers to reiterate the importance of prudent financial management as well as highlight courses of redress for any deviation from the Ministry’s standards on any public school funds. The MOE auditors should also be engaged in auditing the use of the funds following the same mechanisms used in auditing other government funds.
• School kits distribution should be accompanied with behavior change messaging including demonstration of proper use and disposal of hygiene items.

This learning brief highlights some of the lessons learnt from the implementation of the education conditional cash transfers between 2015 and 2016. Further lessons and recommendations will be documented and shared following the mid-line and end-line evaluation of the programme by the Population Council in 2017 and 2019 respectively.

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