

The potential of cash-based interventions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment

A multi-country study



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1. Introduction

Over the past decade,¹ the World Food Programme (WFP) has increased its use of cash-based transfers (CBTs)² to assist persons who are food insecure, with CBTs considered an effective tool to contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”. In 2017, WFP provided 1.3 billion USD in cash transfers, up from 880 million USD in the previous year and being 30 percent of the total food assistance provided. 19.2 million people (51% females / 49% males), across 61 countries with 98 operations, were assisted through cash transfers in 2017.

Concurrently, gender equality is central to WFP’s work, being a prerequisite for achieving SDG 2 and so sustained food security and nutrition. Thus SDG 5 – “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” – is central to WFP fulfilling its mandate.

Given the growing importance of cash-based interventions (CBIs) to humanitarian and development assistance, the centrality of gender equality to sustainable and empowering changes, and finite resources, it is critical that WFP programming and operations be evidence-based and guided by reliable and credible information.

The study on *The Potential of Cash-Based Interventions to Promote Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment* sought to explore how CBIs can contribute to achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE), as ends in themselves and for food security and nutrition outcomes. Where changes in GEWE were experienced, the study sought to understand women’s and men’s perceptions of how and why changes occurred. This is not an impact study or an evaluation. Instead, it is formative research to inform WFP’s policies, processes, programming and future research, such as the *WFP CBT and Gender Impact Evaluation Window* scheduled to start in 2019.

The study was guided by the following five questions.

- (i) What GEWE outcomes have been achieved through or by CBIs?
- (ii) How can CBIs contribute to GEWE, as ends in themselves and as needed for sustained food security and nutrition outcomes? Which programme features – programme governance or planning processes, transfer, conditionalities, complementary interventions, technology etc. – are essential for GEWE outcomes?
- (iii) What are the apparent causal linkages that may explain how and why CBIs contribute to achieving GEWE outcomes?
- (iv) Where CBIs are used, how are/can market-related engagement (e.g. retailer engagement, markets for change, market support) contribute to GEWE?
- (v) What are the institutional factors that enable the CBIs to contribute to achieving GEWE outcomes?

¹ The published statistics on WFP’s CBTs date from 2009, when 1.1 million people were provided 10 million USD in 10 countries. (Source: WFP website: <http://www1.wfp.org/>)

² For the purposes of this study, the term ‘cash-based transfers’ (CBTs) refers to the transfer – cash or value vouchers – provided to beneficiaries. The term ‘cash-based interventions’ (CBI) refers to the interventions inclusive of all programme features, such as messaging, conditionalities and complementary interventions.



This report is the culmination of seven months of research, comprising desk reviews, field work in six countries, a practitioner survey and a learning workshop. The report has seven sections. Section 2 describes the study methodology. Section 3 describes and analyses the types of programme features common to WFP CBIs examined in the study. Section 4 describes and analyses the seven dimensions of food security and nutrition-related changes and eight dimensions of gender equality-related changes reported by women and men. Section 5 discusses four contextual issues observed across the six case studies. Section 6 presents the study's findings, including a conceptual model linking CBIs with food security-, nutrition- and gender-related outcomes and the programme features and processes that supported the achievement of equitable and empowering impacts observed. Finally, Section 7 proposes recommendations to strengthen WFP's work that uses cash-based assistance. Summaries of each of the six CBI case studies are provided in Annex 6.

2. Study methodology

The study consisted of four parts: (i) a desk review; (ii) fieldwork comprising six CBI case studies; (iii) a practitioner survey; and (iv) a learning workshop. The detailed study methodology is included in the “Study Outline” document and the data collection tools annexed to this report.³

2.1 Desk review and conceptual model

Building on reviews conducted by entities such as the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and UN Women, the desk review summarised (i) core concepts and conceptual frameworks for CBTs, CBIs and GEWE; and (ii) existing evidence on the linkages between CBIs and GEWE outcomes. The desk review contributed to framing the study.

Drawing on work undertaken by the ODI,⁴ a conceptual model was developed to connect CBI programme features and processes with food security-, nutrition- and gender-related outcomes (Figure 1). The conceptual model informed analysis of the information gathered from the CBI case studies.

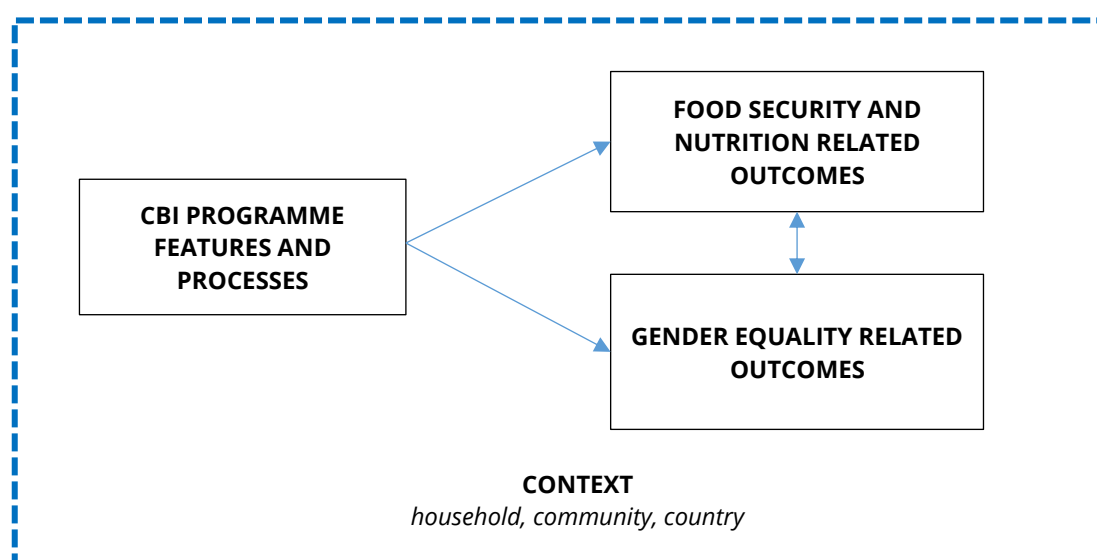


Figure 1: A conceptual framework connecting CBI programme features and processes with food security-, nutrition- and gender-related outcomes.

³ See Annex 1: Study outline and Annex 2: Focus group discussion running sheet

⁴ Bastagli, Hagen-Zanker, Harman, Barca, Sturge, Schmidt and Pellerano, 2016, *Cash transfers: what does the evidence say? A rigorous review of programme impact and of the role of design and implementation features*, London, <https://www.odi.org/publications/10505-cash-transfers-what-does-evidence-say-rigorous-review-impacts-and-role-design-and-implementation>.



The assumptions underlying the conceptual model are that:

- (i) CBIs contribute to food security and nutrition-related outcomes;
- (ii) CBIs can have gender equality-related outcomes and can reinforce gender inequalities;⁵
- (iii) gender equality-related outcomes influence food security and nutrition-related outcomes;
- (iv) in the absence of gender equality-related outcomes, CBIs will not be equitable nor sustainable; and
- (v) contextual factors – at the household, community and national levels – influence gender (roles, relations, responsibilities, rights) and outcomes.

2.2 CBI case studies

Field work for the six case studies was undertaken between July and October 2018. The case studies were qualitative, with a focus on stakeholders' – primarily women and men direct beneficiaries' – perceptions and personal accounts of participation and change in the CBIs of focus.

The study set out to cover a range of operations, contexts, activity types, programme features and geographical areas. From within this range, the study purposively sampled cases of good practice in CBIs, as identified by CBT and gender advisors in the regional bureaux. The positive deviance approach in sampling for 'good practice' was intended to enable learning from successes. That is, the sampling method sought to identify the food security and nutrition-related and gender equality-related outcomes that were possible through CBIs and the design of the programme features that led to the outcomes.⁶ To achieve this, two criteria were used to identify CBIs for the case studies.

Criteria 1: The CBI should have clear gender equality-related outcomes such as public /community leadership, financial independence / income / livelihoods, time use (unpaid), sexual reproductive health and rights. Selected CBIs should have achieved outcomes beyond gender ratios among beneficiaries and programme personnel, protection outcomes (such as related to gender-based violence or intimate partner violence), and equitable decision-making over the use of a transfer.

Criteria 2: The CBI should have programme features that led to the gender equality-related outcomes. This study sought to identify proven or promising features that can be replicated, developed/refined and taken to scale. The features may not necessarily have been designed with the intent of achieving gender equality-related outcomes, but there should be a strong logic of how the features or models led to gender equality-related outcomes.

⁵ Terms – including gender, gender-transformation, gender equality – are defined in the "Concepts" section of the WFP Gender Toolkit.

⁶ This study did not seek to determine if a CBI was successful. If beneficiary women and men reported GEWE-related changes, the study sought to understand how and why a change occurred. Was it, for example, due to certain programme features or contextual factors? Or a confluence of programme features and contextual factors? The study also sought to understand the inter-relationships between food security and nutrition-related and GEWE outcomes.



The six CBIs selected are described in Annex 5. Each CBI case study covered three sites. At each site, there was one women-only and one men-only focus group discussion (FGD). A total of 204 women and 200 men participated in 36 FGDs across the six case studies.⁷ Semi-structured interviews with key informants – including WFP employees, retailers, partners and local government authorities – were conducted.

The FGDs involved a gender process analysis⁸ and a discussion on the changes (positive and negative) experienced by the participants, as they perceived resulted from the CBI. The Most Significant Change technique was employed because it supports examination of transformative changes, which are needed for gender equality. The Most Significant Change technique does not use pre-defined indicators, but asks about changes that have occurred, including capturing unintended consequences.

2.3 Practitioner survey

An online survey of CBI practitioners was conducted to understand:

- (i) attitudes regarding gender equality and women's empowerment within cash-based programming;
- (ii) current practices and achieved gender equality outcomes within CBIs;
- (iii) capacities and resources – gender consciousness, skills, access to guidance, training, influence, and budget, technical expertise – to integrate gender equality into CBIs;
- (iv) challenges to integrating gender equality into CBIs; and
- (v) the range of features currently incorporated CBIs that are intended to contribute to achieving gender equality-related outcomes.

The practitioner survey is provided in Annex and the findings of the practitioner survey are summarised in Annex 7.

2.4 Study limitations

As with any study, the choice of tools and techniques meant choosing certain data collection strengths and limitations. The strength of this study's qualitative approach was in gathering multi-faceted information, based on beneficiaries' personal accounts and perceptions of the CBI programme and how and why changes (outcomes) happened. Where changes did occur, the FGDs and interviews provided information to understand the interplay of CBI-related factors – both programmatic and contextual – that led to gender transformations.

A limitation to the qualitative approach is the quantification of changes, such as the degree or extent of change at the individual, household or community-level. There was an average of 11.3 women and 11.1 men per FGD. The emphasis was to learn and discover issues, rather than assess

⁷ Details of FGD participants are included in Annex 3: Focus group discussion participants

⁸ The gender process analysis examined each aspect of the CBI – registration, receipt of transfer, decision-making around and use of the transfer, complementary activities – and determining women's and men's involvement.



or evaluate the CBIs. Three sites were sampled because research has demonstrated that 80 to 90 percent of issues are discoverable in three FGDs.⁹ Nonetheless, caution is required in extrapolating or applying successful programme features from one CBI to other CBIs or contexts or populations.

Ideally, the study would have had women facilitators for women-only groups and men facilitators for men-only groups. The available WFP personnel meant that all FGDs were facilitated by women, except in Rwanda where there was both a woman and a man facilitator. Ideally too, in addition to women-only and men-only FGDs in each site, there would have been a third mixed women-and-men FGD. These were not logistically feasible for this study due to time constraints. Similarly, three days of primary data collection limited the number of key informants who could be interviewed.

There were several field-level challenges in this study. The emphasis on qualitative methods meant that the quality of interpretation and facilitation was fundamental to the quantity and depth of information obtained. Across five countries, the quality of interpretation and facilitation was generally high. For example, in Mali the requirement for Fulani, Bambara, French and English language skills meant that an external interpreter had to be engaged to conduct the FGDs. The interpreter lacked gender and CBI experience which negatively impacted the fluidity, rapport and depth of information obtained in the FGDs and interviews.

Sociocultural norms meant that, in some contexts, women took more time (than men) to feel comfortable in talking in a group setting. While the study teams anticipated this (and therefore proposed 2.5-hour FGDs for women compared to two-hour FGDs for men), it posed a limitation to the magnitude and depth of information obtained from women. In some countries (El Salvador, Jordan and Mali), not all participants were able to attend the full duration of the FGDs due to reasons such as domestic and childcare commitments, paid work commitments, or (in the case of Mali) curfews.

In some case studies (Bangladesh, Egypt and the first cohort for El Salvador participants), the study relied on recollection of events more than a year prior. This may have influenced the accuracy of women's and men's recollections.

To minimise influencing responses, FGD participants were not told that the study was about gender and cash. Instead, they were told that the study team wanted to learn about the CBI

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