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1,000 Days of Social Protection for Central and Eastern Africa

Regional Study Report



Economic
Policy
Research
Institute

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASAL	Arid and semi-arid lands (Kenya)
BCC	Behaviour change communications
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CCT	Conditional cash transfer
CSFVA	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis
CT	Cash transfer
EPRI	Economic Policy Research Institute
GFA	General food assistance
GDP	Gross domestic product
HSNP	Hunger Safety Net Programme (Kenya)
IYCF	Infant and young child feeding
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
MNCH	Maternal, newborn, and child health
MPI	Multi-dimensional Poverty Index
NCD	Non-communicable disease
NEC	Nutrition and Education Counseling (Rwanda)
NNP	National Nutrition Programme (Ethiopia)
P4P	Purchase for Progress
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme (Ethiopia)
RCT	Randomised controlled trial
SSN	Social safety nets
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
UCT	Unconditional cash transfer
USD	United States Dollar
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WFP-RBN	World Food Programme Regional Bureau for Central and Eastern Africa in Nairobi



Executive Summary

THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS: WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

The 1,000-day window of opportunity (hereafter referred to as “the first 1,000 days”), roughly demarcated as lasting from the time of conception to a child’s second birthday, are internationally recognised as the most critical time for cognitive, neurological, and physical development. Malnutrition and undernutrition, prolonged periods of illness, and general poor performance on health and nutrition indicators during the first 1,000 days can have lasting and detrimental impacts on a child. Moreover, stunting, which often occurs due to insufficient intake of key nutrients in utero and during the first 1,000 days, exerts irreversible and negative effects on a child’s cognitive and physical development, thereby hindering a child’s future educational performance and human capital development. High prevalence of stunting and malnutrition also have macroeconomic consequences, and the cost of malnutrition can range from 2 to 3 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in global estimates and to as much as 16 per cent in countries most affected by malnutrition. As such, attention to good nutrition throughout pregnancy and ensuring that a child accesses sufficient levels of nutrients directly following birth and up to his or her second birthday are imperative.

In recognition of the critical period of the first 1,000 days, countries have introduced a variety of approaches to safeguarding maternal and child nutrition and health, and tackling the various causes of malnutrition. These approaches oftentimes feature diverse efforts, actors, and sectors working together, some of which include nutrition-sensitive interventions and social protection programming, the combination of which in the form of nutrition-sensitive social protection offers the potential to effectuate long-term and sustainable improvements vis-à-vis health, nutrition, and food security. As such, this study reviews the applicability of nutrition-sensitive social protection programming in improving results over the first 1,000 days, specifically within the Central and Eastern Africa region, which is characterised by high levels of childhood stunting and acute and chronic malnutrition, but which is simultaneously the site of expanding national social protection systems.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF STUDY

The World Food Programme Regional Bureau for Central and Eastern Africa in Nairobi (WFP-RBN) requested the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) to conduct a study into the subject of nutrition-sensitive social protection and its potential to enhance nutrition outcomes across the first 1,000 days. The study aims to understand how social protection policies and programmes in the region, with a particular focus on social cash-based and in-kind transfers, can be utilised to positively impact nutritional indicators relevant to the first 1,000 days. The study is intended to respond to the following questions:

1. How can existing nutrition-sensitive interventions and social protection programmes, particularly cash transfers, that do not necessarily have explicit nutrition objectives be used to achieve nutritional outcomes and impacts during first 1,000 days?
2. As part of this, how can existing social protection programmes be linked to complementary interventions to maximise their impact on nutrition outcomes during the first 1,000 days? In line with this, the study will explore the applicability of the ‘cash plus’ model for the region, wherein cash transfers are linked to complementary, capacity building components.
3. With one of the most challenging design components being the targeting approach, how can programmes best identify and reach the most nutritionally vulnerable women and children under the age of two years?
4. What examples and common elements can be developed for social protection programming to achieve nutritional outcomes and impacts during the first 1,000 days, whilst recognising that all countries have different entry points and objectives for their existing social protection policies and programmes?

In order to achieve the above aims, this study constructs a theoretical framework; presents an overview of international best practices in programming addressing the first 1,000 days, as well as existing evidence on nutrition-sensitive social protection programming; outlines the Central and Eastern Africa region’s performance on maternal, child health, and nutrition indicators relevant to the first 1,000 days, as well as the current social protection environment in the region; develops overarching principles and recommendations for future programming in

the region, targeted at policymakers and other involved actors, particularly the WFP-RBN and WFP country offices in the region; and finally, presents a 'cash plus' model for the WFP-RBN.

INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES FOR THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS

As part of addressing malnutrition's three causes – basic, underlying, and immediate – two types of interventions have been introduced: nutrition-specific, which focus on the immediate causes relating to nutritional deficiencies; and nutrition-sensitive, which focus on the underlying and basic causes. In terms of registering positive outcomes on key nutrition and health indicators over the first 1,000 days, a combination of the two types of interventions has proven effective, though nutrition-sensitive interventions generally have more relevance for achieving long-term and more sustainable improvements. Within the portfolio of nutrition-sensitive interventions, behaviour change communications (BCC), if administered in culturally appropriate ways and working through community-level structures, cover a range of topics relating to the first 1,000 days, and international evidence points to the efficacy of BCC in maximising programme impacts.

Going beyond traditional nutrition-sensitive interventions, however, nutrition-sensitive social protection stands to truly bring a multi-sectoral approach to tackling the complex and interrelated factors behind malnutrition and poverty. Nutrition-sensitive social protection, for the purposes of this study, is defined as comprehensive interventions that target the most vulnerable and address the causes of malnutrition, and which can include social safety nets (SSN) to reduce vulnerability; protect income, crops, and assets; ensure basic needs are met; and secure access to nutrition diets, healthcare, and improved WASH conditions. The objectives and design of nutrition-sensitive social protection programming are essential to realising success, and in particular, there are various options in

Finally, within CTs, it is imperative that programme implementers set transfer values that are sufficient and that enable beneficiaries to meet programme objectives. In the context of nutrition-sensitive social protection interventions with a first-1,000 days' focus, various data and information sources on, *inter alia*, performance on nutrition and health indicators, local markets, disaggregated poverty levels, and surveys on household food and nutrient consumption can all contribute to setting appropriate transfer values.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NUTRITION-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN AFRICA

While programme implementers should tailor nutrition-sensitive social protection interventions to be context-specific, the above points and others, highlight some best practices in improving results across the first 1,000 days. The Central and Eastern Africa region may find more nutrition-sensitive social protection programming applicable to its contexts, given that the region performs poorly on child and maternal nutrition and health indicators but features some of the continent's more advanced social protection systems. Furthermore, national governments in the region have shown commitment to further improving health and nutrition, introducing various programmes and policies for doing so, and international partners also can provide important support to the fight against malnutrition.

For its part, the WFP-RBN and WFP Country Offices have long-standing involvements in SSNs, school feeding programmes, and nutrition programming, and thus can use these experiences as entry points for greater participation in nutrition-sensitive social protection programming in Central and Eastern Africa. With a high-level landscaping of international best practices for nutrition-sensitive social protection and WFP's own strategic documents, expertise, and mission as a backdrop, this study offers the following recommendations and principles:

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