

# Evaluation of the BOTA Foundation's programmes, Kazakhstan

## Summary note 3:

### Overall conclusions from the qualitative research

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#### FURTHER INFORMATION

This briefing note is issued by Oxford Policy Management as part of its independent evaluation of the BOTA Foundation's programmes. The findings are not attributable to BOTA.

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## Introduction

The BOTA Foundation in Kazakhstan is implementing three programmes to help improve social and economic outcomes for low-income households with children or young adults. These are the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme that provides regular cash transfers to poor households; the Tuition Assistance Programme (TAP) that disburses grants for higher education; and the Social Services Programme (SSP) that offers funds to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to support vulnerable groups.

Oxford Policy Management was contracted to evaluate the programmes. This summary note is a reflection on the findings from two rounds of qualitative research conducted across all three programmes between May 2011 and December 2012. It takes a view across the BOTA Foundation's programmes as a whole and notes achievements to date and challenges for the remaining period of implementation.

The remainder of this introduction sets out the context within which BOTA's programmes were designed.

## Design parameters

Strategic decisions about the target beneficiaries and the objective of the programmes were taken by those overseeing the funding of the programme—the World Bank and the governments of Kazakhstan, the USA and Switzerland—rather than by the implementation team. These decision-makers set the following parameters:

- **Target groups.** The main target groups were defined as children and young people, pregnant and lactating women at risk of anaemia and their new born infants, children and young people with disabilities, orphans and children without parental care. For all categories of beneficiaries, the programme was focused on low-income beneficiaries.
- **Programme objectives.** It was decided that the programme would have a 'human capital development' objective as well as being a poverty alleviation initiative. The World Bank developed the original design of BOTA, proposing the three-programme structure that was approved by the Board of Trustees.

The BOTA programmes operate within a set of constraints linked with the origins of the financing for the programme and the procedures that the governments overseeing the disbursement of the funds put into place. The most important constraints, according to one of the implementing NGOs, were and continue to be:

- **A fixed timeframe.** The programme was designed to last no more than five years and has to be completed in 2014. This meant that it had to have a fast start-up. There was strong pressure from the funders and the Board to start disbursing funds across all three programme strands as early as possible.
- **Requirement to remain independent of government.** BOTA was not allowed to cooperate closely with government bodies during the start-up or implementation of its programmes as its governing documents required that it remain 'independent' of the Government of Kazakhstan. This meant, for example, that routine data collected by local governments (*akimats*), such as lists of children of pre-school age, could not be used when the CCT was being set up. However, BOTA, was able to use government owned buildings, such as libraries and community halls, for meetings about CCT and for conducting enrolment.

### A note on the BOTA Foundation structure

The BOTA team is managed by two US-based NGOs, IREX and Save the Children US, who have been contracted by the BOTA governing board to design and deliver a programme that benefits the target beneficiaries within the constraints outlined above. The governing board of BOTA comprises mainly Kazakh child welfare, health, education and economy experts and public figures. The World Bank advises the board and the funders under a service agreement with the three government funders and has a 'supervision agreement' with BOTA.

### Outline of the programmes

The BOTA Foundation developed implementation plans and performance targets for the three programmes on the basis of the World Bank's initial design as follows:

1. **CCT.** In the first two years of the programme this provided regular cash transfers to low-income households containing three target beneficiary groups: children aged four to six, pregnant and lactating women, and children with disabilities. Transfers were conditional respectively on take-up of early childhood education, on training to increase knowledge of, and improve attitudes towards, anaemia among pregnant and lactating women, and on training to improve home-based care for children with disabilities. In the third year of the programme a fourth beneficiary group was added: unemployed young people aged 16-19 years whose conditionality involved attending livelihood oriented training provided by the state and gaining work experience.
2. **TAP.** This targets young people from low-income households to support them into and through higher education. The grants are accompanied by a programme of training and skills-building as well as general moral support from BOTA staff to students.
3. **SSP.** This provides grants to NGOs to support the creation of new social services and extend the reach of existing social services aimed at the main target beneficiary groups. SSP also offers grants to improve the social service delivery system and offers workshops to build the capacity of grantees in technical areas.

A proxy means test instrument (PMT) was developed to assess whether beneficiaries meet the 'low-income' criteria of BOTA within the tuition grants activity and the conditional cash transfer programme. According to Save the Children US, it was a '*timesaver, a way to keep administration down and ... ensure efficiency and transparency in decisions about including individuals or households*' in the programme.

## The relevance of BOTA's programmes<sup>1</sup>

BOTA's programmes can be assessed from the perspective of the relevance of their target groups to the intentions of the funders, the wider policy environment and the critical social issues in the country. We also consider the relevance of the programme design for responding to the needs and constraints of these groups.

### CCT

The focus on early childhood development, anaemia and home care for children with disabilities has been confirmed by respondents as being relevant to the social policy challenges in Kazakhstan.

The provision of cash to low-income groups with eligible household members is found to be a relevant policy measure for many recipients. The small amounts of the cash and the relatively short period during which it is delivered may not always have a discernible poverty alleviation effect in beneficiary households. But the evaluations have noted that there is some seasonal variance with some households reporting the cash transfer as an important—or, for some, the only—source of household income during winter months if work is unavailable.

As for the imposition of conditionalities these vary in their relevance. For pre-school-age children the requirement to enrol in early education services certainly addresses an identified problem; the value of requiring an 85% attendance rate is less clear since it leads to a very large variation in the conditions that children must meet depending on whether their facility is open for four hours a week or 40. The training modules that formed part of the conditionalities for pregnant and lactating women were often considered relevant, but more so before the

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<sup>1</sup> This summary is structured using the evaluation criteria of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These analyse in turn the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, impact and sustainability of the programme under review.

birth, while for households of children with disabilities the 2012 evaluation raises questions about the relevance of the training programme for this diverse group of participants who each have very specific needs.

### TAP

The 2011 assessment concluded that the TAP, in the form it took from 2009-2011, was relevant in addressing lack of funding as one of the main barriers preventing young people from low income households from achieving higher education. It documented that the grant recipients felt a transformational impact from becoming a TAP scholar and also confirmed that the TAP complements the government programmes and policies in higher education.

It is clear that for the TAP students from the 2009-2011 rounds, lack of funding was the major constraint to accessing a university education. Without BOTA they might have gone to college; trained in a short course that could get them into quick, if low paid, employment; attended a less prestigious local university with lower fees but of lower quality; or studied on less expensive evening courses that would take longer to complete. But most likely they would not have been able to study at all:

*“He would have continued working at the brick factory where he had a summer job if he hadn’t got this grant.”*

*(Parent of a TAP grantee, 2011 assessment)*

Grantees interviewed for the 2011 study were clear that TAP had not only given them a great opportunity to study, but that it motivated them to study hard. They said they had also gained confidence, social and life skills and expanded horizons from the training workshops provided by BOTA and from the community service elements of the programme. The relevance of the TAP grant to graduates from the 2009-2010 rounds has been confirmed with eight out of the 11

respondents interviewed (albeit an extremely non-representative sample) having gone on to employment or further higher education study. Respondents to the 2012 assessment confirm, on the whole, that the TAP continues to target students from low-income households for support. The high level of relevance of the TAP that was found in the November 2011 assessment has been slightly compromised by the new focus on two-year college courses for 11th-grade school leavers and on 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year university students. Questions have emerged about whether the TAP is pushing students to take college courses that they otherwise would not choose or has forced students to choose two-year courses where three- or four-year courses are more typical and appropriate. With regard to university students, the 2012 assessment raises questions about whether these students would have completed their studies without BOTA funding anyway, as they are so highly motivated and so close to completing, and therefore the TAP grant is a nice bonus, but not fulfilling the essential role it appeared to be fulfilling in previous rounds for 11th grade students wanting to enter university, but otherwise very unlikely to be able to.

## SSP

The SSP has been targeting similar beneficiary groups to the CCT but has been making interventions on the supply rather than the demand side.

The SSP to date has been invested mainly in the development and replication of social services for children with disabilities, children and young people in difficult life situations and those at risk. Early childhood development services have also been supported, but to a lesser extent. Investment in the development of maternal and child health services began later, with the first grants in that sector being awarded in September 2012.

Most areas of work and target beneficiary groups considered relevant by multilateral organisation key informants and NGO respondents are

encompassed in the existing SSP priorities. Funding is a major constraint for NGOs and therefore the provision of funding through grants is a relevant intervention. Another constraint is lack of knowledge and expertise among NGOs that can constrain innovation and dilute impact.

Almost all NGO respondents were positive as to the usefulness of BOTA seminars and training for their work and gave specific examples of new ideas and areas of work they had had as a result of attending.

The intensive support provided by the SSP staff in the planning, application, implementation, monitoring and reporting cycle has clearly been relevant for building NGO capacity.

## Efficiency and effectiveness

Overall the qualitative evaluation has confirmed that the BOTA programme has been implemented across all three activities with high levels of effectiveness for those that receive the benefit.

There are some questions about targeting, particularly in relation to non-applicants for the TAP and the CCT—has BOTA done enough to ensure that all those who are eligible have had enough information and opportunity to apply for support? This question has an implication for any assessment of efficiency. If efficiency is to be measured by the ratio of administrative costs to the value of the benefit then, for the CCT in particular, it could have been in BOTA's interests to focus on maximising the number of applicants in fewer oblasts, perhaps maintaining its presence in the three poorest rather than six. The fact that BOTA has chosen to extend its coverage to a smaller number of households in each of a larger number of locations suggests that efficiency in this sense has not been a primary driver of the programme design.

Instead the CCT has attempted to improve its efficiency by steering volunteers towards encouraging applications from households who are very likely to pass the PMT, leading to a pass rate of close to 100% among applicants. This saves on the costs of administering tests to

households who are subsequently rejected; but in this case the trade-off for this efficiency gain is the risk that there are households that could have applied but that did not hear about the test. Given, however, that BOTA is restricted by its charter as to the extent it can cooperate with government to reach eligible community members, and assuming that BOTA is not aiming to maximise the number of beneficiaries in the areas where it operates, the job of informing, and ensuring opportunities to apply for, eligible individuals and households has been adequately efficient and on the whole effective.

The PMT as an instrument for fair and transparent inclusion or exclusion in support programmes according to the low-income criteria being applied by BOTA appears on the whole to have the confidence of community members in CCT programme areas that were interviewed for these studies and of TAP applicants, whether successful or non-successful.

The SSP appears to be reaching increasing numbers of vulnerable target group beneficiaries through grants to social services NGOs which are delivering more effective services. The second-round study noted a marked increase in the systematic provision of technical assistance to NGOs since the first round:

*“We have received enormous experience in implementing projects that are new for us. We have learned a lot about correct financial management and accounting. Our organisation has grown professionally”*

*(NGO, recipient of two SSP grants)*

Whether it is this, or the NGOs themselves, stimulating innovation, the services described by respondents during interviews for this round of the assessment reflect more interesting and complex services addressing more deep-seated social problems.

Teething problems with the language and administrative systems of the SSP have been addressed continuously and BOTA has developed a grant-making scheme that both minimises the risks of making grants to small, inexperienced NGOs and builds their capacity to implement increasingly large grants while at the same time ensuring that larger and more experienced NGOs can expand their reach to the target beneficiaries with larger grants.

There could be more cross-fertilisation between the three programme delivery mechanisms, such as by volunteers in the CCT programme actively supporting community groups to apply for funding to the SSP and promoting the TAP among the schools and students in their villages. Some synergies across the three activities have been noted with SSP grantees supporting TAP application and information processes in some parts of the country.

## Impact

BOTA has been having a positive impact on recipients across all three activities. The SSP appears to have widened the reach of existing NGO services to target beneficiaries and to have supported the emergence of new NGOs able to meet the needs of target beneficiaries in some parts of the country.

The TAP has offered an otherwise inconceivable opportunity of accessing and completing higher education to 841 young people from low-income households across the country. This opportunity may lead to better employment opportunities upon graduation, but only a longer term evaluation can assess the full impact on the whole cohort of TAP grantees.

The CCT has offered some help in terms of small amounts of cash to tens of thousands of households and this cash appears to have been particularly important in households where income is affected by seasonal employment opportunities:

*“The usefulness in the winter was considerably more ... We counted the days until the moment we could go and take out the transfer”*

(Beneficiary of the CCT for home-based care, Akmola)

The cash appears to have helped households mainly to eat more nutritious food, ensure payment for medical services and for transport to receive antenatal health services and in some cases to pay for early childhood education services where payment is required. Where payment for kindergarten is not required, the cash has been used, among other things, to equip children with the clothes, stationery and shoes that they need for attendance at pre-school. Where delays have occurred in initial transfers to communities newly enrolled in the CCT programme, savings have been spent in some cases on larger and more expensive household needs such as furniture or household equipment. All of these findings from the qualitative evaluation will be corroborated and quantified by the quantitative impact evaluation for which the results will be made available later in 2013.

Increasing demand for early education services appears to have, in some villages where the BOTA CCT programme is operational, stimulated supply of these services.

The BOTA programme has had some impact on attitudes and knowledge about anaemia among pregnant or lactating women, but has had less impact on ensuring attendance at post-natal health services or on improving home-based care of children with disabilities. Parent training for parents of pre-school-aged children has been well received by all who have participated and

they report changes in their own behaviour with their children and more positive parenting interaction.

The CCT has also created a 2,500-strong volunteer force that has been trained in interactive learning methods for adults.

## Sustainability

The BOTA programme was never designed to be sustainable beyond the planned five-year delivery period, but the studies nevertheless suggest several possible future roles in the Kazakhstan social policy environment focused on vulnerable children and young people that build on the existing programme.

The volunteers represent a potential force for community development and public policy implementation as they can carry key public policy messages and have been trained to mobilise community action. The volunteer force could similarly play a valuable role in community needs assessments and research that can inform social policy.

BOTA could develop a role as an independent monitoring / accreditation / training body for children's NGOs that are developing and delivering social services for the government. There is also the potential for a role as a broker between the corporate sector wanting to develop corporate social responsibility programmes and NGOs able to reach vulnerable groups and ensure they benefit from such funding.

The TAP has the potential to be a programme of interest to large corporate employers and therefore could be sustainable for a small number of grants with private raised funding.

The PMT has the potential to be of use to the government in fine-tuning and targeting its social assistance programmes.

### THE SERIES

This is part of a series of summary notes covering the evaluation of BOTA's programmes. Other notes so far are:

1. Findings from the baseline survey of the CCT
2. Findings from the operational evaluation of the CCT