

Oxford Policy Management

Bihar Child Support Programme

This note provides an overview of the Bihar Child Support Programme (BCSP), a pilot experiment that tests whether a conditional cash transfer (CCT) aimed at pregnant women and mothers of young children can help improve child nutrition outcomes. Findings will support the Government of India's consideration of scale-up in Bihar, and may also help in strengthening existing centrally- and state-funded CCT programmes. The sections below discuss programme objectives, the implementation design, the evaluation strategy, current project status and next steps.

About the Bihar Child Support Programme

The BCSP is being implemented in two blocks in Gaya District. Starting with a pre-pilot programme in August 2013, the pilot implementation started in September 2014 and will continue until at least April 2016.

The pilot is testing three things:

- **Impact:** As a policy instrument, does a CCT have a significant impact on service delivery uptake and population level behaviours? To what extent is this sufficient to improve child nutrition outcomes?
- **Effectiveness:** Whether it is possible for the Government to implement on a reasonable scale the high quality systems required to deliver a monthly, conditional cash transfer, in a way that is sustainable and further scalable.
- **Relative cost-effectiveness:** The CCT amount per month to beneficiaries is the same as the amount budgeted per beneficiary for take home rations. The evaluation has been set up to assess whether greater nutrition impact would be achieved through either the take home rations or through routing the same amount of money directly to beneficiaries.

Case study

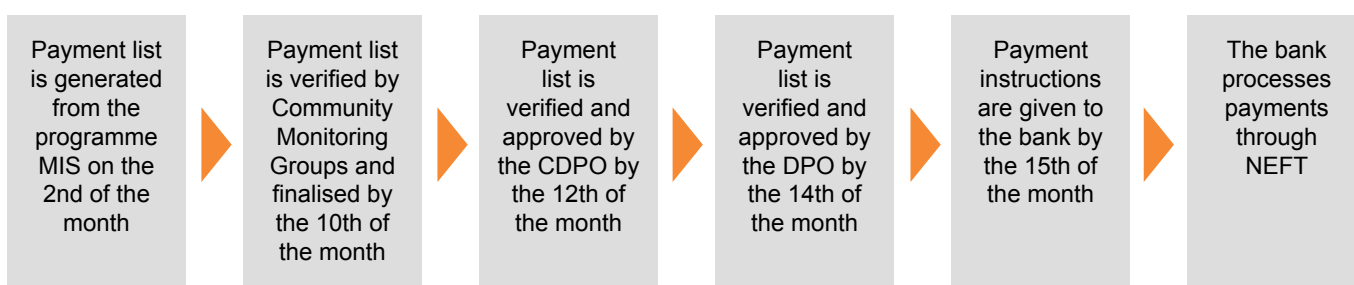
Under the BCSP, women are registered at the end of the first trimester of pregnancy and are eligible to receive **INR 250 per month** until the child is three years old (i.e. for a total of 42 months). Women receive the money only if they meet certain conditions, which include:

Soft Conditions				
	Monthly Attendance at Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Days	Weight Gain Monitoring during Pregnancy	Child Growth Monitoring	Correct Treatment of Diarrhoea (ORS and Zinc)
				

The pilot is set up to test different configurations of conditions, to help understand which are most amenable to change as a result of a CCT. There are also a set of bonuses when a child turns two and three years old, conditional on a number of factors, including, for example, if a child is not underweight (to promote mothers to undertake other complementary actions to promote positive outcomes). In total, a mother can receive up to **INR 15,500** conditional on meeting all conditions throughout the duration of her programme enrolment.

The Anganwadi Worker is responsible for registering beneficiaries, and recording their adherence to conditions, using a customised mobile phone application. Data is transmitted to a server, which generates payment lists. Payment lists are reviewed and approved by the relevant Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) and District Programme Officer (DPO). Funds for the programme are held in the DPO’s official bank account and an instruction is given to the bank to execute the payments, which are made through **direct bank transfers** using NEFT (National Electronic Funds Transfer). The State Government transfers funds in advance to the DPO based on utilisation certificates of previous expenditure. This ensures that cash is delivered on time (within 20 days of the end of the month), leakages and fraud are minimised through using banks’ own systems of verification for enrolment and withdrawal, and transaction costs are kept low.

The process is summarised on the following diagram:



Roles and Responsibilities

The BCSP aims to support and strengthen the delivery of services from the country's Ministry of Women and Child Development (ICDS). **Anganwadi Workers** are at the centre of the BCSP. They register beneficiaries and record adherence to conditions. In turn, demand for their services and counselling is increased. A **Community Monitoring Group** (normally an existing Self Help Group) is engaged to ensure full enrolment, accurate data recording and effective grievance redressal. **Lady Supervisors** monitor the performance of Anganwadi Workers, facilitated by the MIS data generated by the project. **CDPOs** review programme performance and verify payment lists at the Block level. The **DPO** reviews programme performance and verifies payment lists at the District level, and executes payment instructions to the bank. Project staff have been engaged on a temporary basis to support the CDPOs and DPO in their roles. The State Government has an overall oversight role and transfers funds to the DPO quarterly.

Evaluating Impact

A **mixed methods impact evaluation** is being undertaken alongside the pilot, to generate evidence on the questions of effectiveness, impact and relative cost-effectiveness outlined above. A **baseline population survey**, covering 6,600 households, was undertaken in 2013 and a quantitative **midline** survey will be implemented this year, complemented by two qualitative studies. The evaluation uses a **quasi-experimental design**, comparing blocks receiving treatment with matched blocks not receiving treatment. The potential "**pathways to impact**" that the BCSP may have, which will be tested through the evaluation, include:

- **A resource effect:** whether the additional household income received due to the BCSP is translated into increased expenditure on food (and more nutritious food), healthcare and other pro-nutrition expenditures
- **An empowerment effect:** whether the fact that the cash is transferred to the women improves her status within the household and her decision making power, control over resources and time use
- **An incentive effect:** whether beneficiaries change their behaviours and seek out available services in order to receive the money
- **A social accountability effect:** whether beneficiaries pressure service providers to improve the accessibility and quality of services to enable them to meet the conditions

Current Status and Findings

The BCSP started as a pre-pilot across 10 Anganwadi Centres in Sahora Gram Panchayat in August 2013 to test the implementation systems, and was scaled up across two blocks – Atri and Wazirganj – in September 2014, covering 261 Anganwadi Centres. 4,697 beneficiaries were enrolled by the end of May 2015. This means that approximately **79% of eligible beneficiaries** across the two blocks were enrolled. The remaining 21% include: the population covered by non-functional Anganwadi Centres; those who migrate out for long periods of time (e.g. to brick kilns); those who were not interested in the scheme; and those who were unable to open bank accounts (consequently, the programme implementation team is facilitating account opening).

In May 2015, **74% (3,487) beneficiaries met their conditions** and received payment. Payments initially suffered from delays and a high number of bounced back payments (up to 18%), due to errors in transcription of bank account details, dormant accounts, and an inability of some rural bank branches to receive NEFT payments. With field-based support to check bounced-back payments, this was relatively easily solved, with bounced-back payments now under 1% of total payments and **payment times down to under three weeks**. In general, the systems underpinning the CCT have been found to be robust. This is supported by a formal operational review of the programme that was undertaken in March – April 2015 for the period up to March 2015.

Next Steps

A **midline survey** is currently being conducted, in conjunction with two **qualitative assessments**. Further, a second **follow-up operational review** will be undertaken in 2016 to review the evolving and dynamic programme aspects. The evaluation population will include a range of stakeholders encompassing: programme beneficiaries, ICDS functionaries (including Anganwadi Workers), government officials, project implementation staff and Banking Correspondents.

The impact evaluation report will be finalised by **April 2016** - it will enable understanding the impact of the pilot programme and inform the decision to scale-up. It is hoped that the systems learning can be applied to other similar social protection schemes.

About the programme

The Bihar Child Support Programme is a conditional cash transfer aimed at improving child nutrition outcomes. It is being piloted by the Social Welfare Department of the Government of Bihar in 216 Anganwadi Centres. It is funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and is supported by Oxford Policy Management and the Bihar Technical Assistance and Support Team (BTAST). For further information, please contact tom.newtonlewis@opml.co.uk

About Oxford Policy Management

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