Oxford Policy Management

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Working Paper

How can lump-sum cash transfers be designed to improve their productive potential?

February 2016

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ISSN 2042-1257 (Print) ISSN 2042-1265 (Online) ISBN 978-1-902477-27-5

Acknowledgements

This working paper was prepared by Rodolfo Beazley of Oxford Policy Management (OPM). and Maham Farhat of Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA). The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of OPM or IPA. We would like to thank Valentina Barca for her comments and suggestions.

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1 Introduction

Cash transfer programmes are one of the most popular welfare policies in the developing world and are also backed by a large and rigorous evidence base. These schemes transfer cash regularly to households in need and the evidence shows that in order to maximise impact, these transfers need to be regular, reliable and predictable. A large number of evaluations have shown positive effects on household consumption, as well as on access to health and education services, nutrition outcomes and asset building (DFID, 2011; World Bank, 2014).

Besides the effects on consumption and human capital, the productive impact of cash transfers has been increasingly scrutinised. Despite the fact that this is often not the core objective of these programmes, transferring substantial amounts of cash could have productive effects at household and community levels. From this viewpoint, cash transfers could not only reduce poverty by increasing consumption expenditure but also by enhancing the productivity of beneficiaries and stimulating local growth. If this were true then the potential of cash transfers would be enormous.

If the goal is to enhance the productive impact of cash transfers, it is important to identify what aspects of these programmes can be modified in order to magnify this impact without undermining the more traditional and core effects. **In this paper we study whether complementing frequent transfers with lump-sum payments could increase the productive impact of cash transfers.**

This research question is relevant for many cash transfer programmes in different parts of the developing world. If lump-sum payments did significantly increase the productive effects of such programmes, then minor changes to programme designs could reap huge benefits and all at relatively little cost. Increased productive effects could not only contribute to poverty reduction by addressing some of the key issues behind underdevelopment but could also increase the support and consensus for cash transfer programmes. Strangely, this is an area of research and policy that has not been studied with the depth required.

The present paper addresses this gap by providing theoretical arguments supporting the proposition that lump-sum payments could increase the productive potential of cash transfers when combined with regular and small transfers. We also review the limited international evidence on the productive effects of lump-sum transfers, regardless of whether they are coupled with frequent and small-size payments or not, in order to provide evidence and assess the validity of the theoretical relationship between lump-sum payments and productive effects. Since the effects of frequent and small-size payments on consumption have been widely studied elsewhere, this paper focuses on the effects of lump-sum transfers. We focus exclusively on cash transfer programmes, leaving aside other interventions that are likely to have greater and more direct productive effects, such as microfinance and asset transfer schemes, technical and vocational education and training, and employment programmes. We are interested in exploring the productive potential of lump-sum payments in cash transfer programmes rather than *any* policy with productive potential.

This paper is organised as follows: Section 2 provides a background to cash transfer programmes while Section 3 presents the theory of change, looking at the productive effects of cash transfers. It also explores the implications of changes in cash transfer frequency and

size and reviews the evidence on lump-sum payments from existing evaluations. Section 4 concludes with an exploration of the policy implications of lump-sum payments.

2 Beyond social protection: the productive role of cash transfers

2.1 The social protection role of cash transfers

Cash transfers are increasingly at the centre of social protection policies in the developing world. There has been an exponential growth of cash transfers in the last 15 years, as has been widely documented (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009); a trend which has remained sustained in recent years partly because of a widespread expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2014). For example, the World Bank global inventory of social safety nets indicates that, in 2010, there were 21 African countries (about half the region) that had at least one unconditional cash transfer programme in place but by 2013 the number had almost doubled, reaching 37 countries. Globally, the number of countries implementing these programmes increased from 27 in 2008 to 52 in 2013 (World Bank, 2014).

The expansion of cash transfers in the developing world started in middle-income countries and then moved to low-income nations. These programmes emerged in rural contexts and were later adapted to urban settings. Cash transfers have thus been shown to be a versatile policy tool, capable of contributing to reducing chronic poverty as well as inter-generational poverty, seasonal and transitory poverty caused by exogenous shocks (such as natural disasters and conflict) and addressing economic events such as rising food prices or recessions. Cash transfer programmes have also targeted different populations, like the poor and vulnerable, the elderly, children and the disabled, as well as those able to work but unemployed or underemployed.

Cash transfers are probably one of the most studied interventions in the developing world (DFID, 2011). Although further research is needed, particularly about second-order and long-term effects and the impact of alternative designs, there is sufficient international evidence demonstrating that, when implemented effectively, cash transfers can deliver their intended impacts.

The main driver of this cash transfer proliferation is probably the positive impact on consumption that many of these programmes have shown. This effect is in line with the main purpose of most cash transfers, which is to smooth consumption and/or reduce consumption-based poverty. However, cash transfers have also proven to positively impact other welfare dimensions such as access to education and health services, nutrition and asset building, among others. Moreover, it is worth noting that there is little evidence that cash transfers have had substantial negative effects on labour market participation, an aspect that is sometimes contentious (DFID, 2011; Fiszbein and Schady, 2009).

2.2 The productive role of cash transfers

Besides the effects on consumption and human capital, the productive impact of cash transfers has been increasingly scrutinised. From this perspective, even though the main goal of most cash transfers is rarely to foster production and productivity, some programmes have shown positive effects. The evaluations of cash transfer schemes in countries like Mexico (*Oportunidades*), Malawi (Malawi Social Cash Transfer Scheme), Kenya (Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children) and Zambia (Child Grant Programme), among others, have all shown significant productive effects (Asfaw *et al*., 2012; Covarrubias

et al., 2012; Gertler *et al*., 2012; Seidenfeld *et al*., 2013; see also Davis, 2014 for a synthesis of recent evaluation results). Even the social pension *Bonosol*, targeted at the elderly who are usually expected to be less productive, increased the productivity of farmers in Bolivia (Martinez, 2007 in Barrientos, 2012).

Moreover, the productive effects contribute to poverty reduction and also increase the resilience of households by allowing them to diversify their livelihoods (Premand, 2013). As such, they help to build an even stronger case for cash transfers. In countries where there is reluctance to 'give cash for free' (McCord and Slater, 2009), this productive potential can help cash transfers to gain more support and consensus. This also attracts the attention of donors and international agencies, since cash transfers seem therefore to have the potential to address various dimensions of poverty and underdevelopment via a single intervention.

Due to these and other reasons, there is an increasing interest in the productive role of cash transfers. This is evidenced, for example, by a renewed interest in public works programmes across the developing world.[1] This growing interest seems to rely also on the notion that productive cash transfers could be the kind of intervention required in many developing contexts. Social protection and poverty reduction policies cannot eradicate poverty if they are not implemented in contexts of economic growth and development. Therefore, implementing policies that can promote growth while providing social protection is very appealing.

Given the growing interest in improving the productive potential of cash transfers, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed before pursuing this agenda any further. Existing evidence on cash transfers clearly indicates that impacts are conditioned by programme design and implementation. **In this paper we focus our attention on a single design aspect that may substantially affect the productive impact: the size and frequency of the transfers.**

It is important, of course, to define what we mean by 'productive effects'. For the purposes of this paper we define the productive impact as increasing the ability of households to generate income through productive expenditures.

One core caveat in this analysis is that sometimes it is difficult to assess when assets, skills or savings, among others, can be considered as 'productive'. The productive potential of assets is conditioned by many factors, some of which are external and cannot be affected by the cash transfer itself, even if a household continues to receive the transfer in the long run. For instance, a covariate (community-level) shock like floods can damage the productivity of agricultural land and render agricultural inputs like tools and fertilisers ineffective. As a consequence, we focus on investments that have the *potential* to be productive in the short term. In this sense, purchasing assets like tools or acquiring technical skills through training,

[1] The goal of providing social protection while stimulating local pro-poor growth has also led to a renewed interest in Public Works Programmes (PWPs). Schemes like the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee programme in India have led the World Bank to suggest that these programmes 'point to the increased prominence of public works as a safety net instrument and as a driver in shaping social protection systems globally' (Subbarao *et al*., 2013:2). Other countries seem to be following the same path by using PWPs to foster the productive effects of cash transfers (e.g. the Karnali Employment Programme in Nepal, the Tanzania Social Action Fund, and the Malawi Social Action Fund). Furthermore, the productive role of cash transfers is not only enhanced through workfare but also with the provision of micro-credit, skills training and productive assets (for example, BRAC in Bangladesh).

saving or repaying loans are considered productive. Even purchasing livestock, which sometimes can simply be a form of saving, has the potential to be productive.

On the other hand, daily consumption, purchase of durables assets like cars or jewellery and improvement of dwellings are not considered productive. Expenditure on health and schooling is also not taken as productive investment because human capital improvements tend to manifest themselves in the long run. Similarly, any effects of cash transfers on behaviour change or labour supply are not considered. We have kept the conceptual framework simple – limiting our analysis to the household-level impact of a lump-sum cash transfer on productive expenditure.

We now review the evidence on the productive effects of cash transfers, particularly with respect to differences in the size and frequency of transfers. We review the existing evidence in order to assess whether lump-sum payments can have productive effects and thus contribute to the growing agenda of developing productive safety nets across the developing world.

3 Can lump-sum transfers improve productive effects?

3.1 Payment frequency and size

It is widely acknowledged that any efficient cash transfer scheme needs to transfer cash with regularity and predictability so that beneficiaries can internalise the cash transfer in household budgets and plan their expenditure to allow consumption smoothing (DFID, 2011).

International experience suggests that cash transfers designed as safety nets tend to pay cash on a monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly basis (see the summary in Barrientos and Nino-Zarazua, 2010). At the same time, some programmes transfer cash specifically during lean seasons and others right after a disaster (i.e. drought or flood), with the objective of preventing consumption falling beyond certain limits. Others tailor the transfer of cash to fit the school cycle, for example.

In relation to the transfer size, there is a great deal of variation among cash transfer programmes. The choice of the transfer size depends on the primary goal of the programme (food security, promoting education/health behaviour, etc.), as well as the design of the programme (e.g. conditional vs. unconditional; emergency vs. development contexts). In Sub-Saharan African countries, the choice of transfer size has often been made in relation to fulfilling the basic food consumption needs of households and transfer amounts are therefore set as a percentage of households' consumption expenditure or food poverty (Barca and Pellerano, 2014). Moreover, some programmes in the region opt to increase benefits with household size (up to a maximum), like in Ghana, Lesotho and Zimbabwe, while others such as those in Kenya and Zambia offer flat transfers (Davis and Handa, 2015).

As Fiszbein and Schady (2009) suggest, best practice internationally has shown that benefit levels should be determined on the basis of the size of the elasticity of the relevant outcomes to the benefit level, i.e. the benefit level should be set in relation to the desired impacts. However, marginal effects should also be taken into account since larger transfers may not necessarily lead to, for example, better health and education outcomes.

Farrington and Slater (2009) suggest that the optimum cash transfer amounts 'appears to be in the range of 0.5 to 3 times the per capita income'. This wide range is based on a study of British self-employed workers (Georgellis *et al*., 2005), which does not seem to be comprehensive enough to give a meaningful universal indication of the transfer size. A recent FAO review of several cash transfer programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that programme impact on productive expenditure is highly correlated with size: in the programmes reviewed, those including transfers amounting to over 20% of per capita income produced significant results (Davis, 2014).

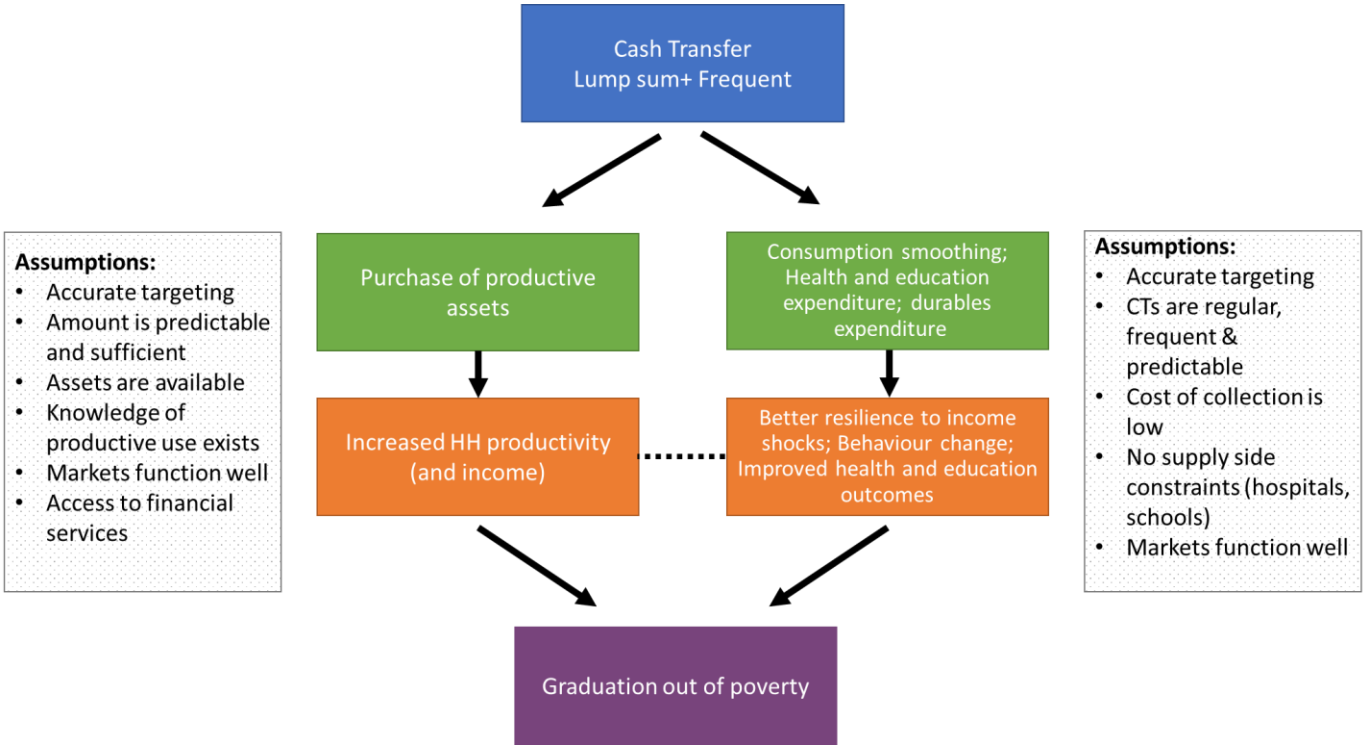
To conclude, existing evidence seems to indicate that for lump sums to have productive impacts, the size of the transfer needs to be set according to the effects pursued. Although this seems somewhat self-evident, in reality it is by no means an easy task since it requires a deep knowledge of local markets and the beneficiaries' skills, among other aspects.

3.2 A rationale for combining lump-sum payments with regular transfers

In this note we define lump-sum payments as cash transfers that take place not more than three times per year with the size of each transfer greater than the size of regular consumption support payments. Although this is a somewhat arbitrary definition, it is based on the analysis of existing cash transfer programme designs in developing countries (Barrientos and Nino-Zarazua, 2010; Davis, 2014).

Figure 1 illustrates the theory of change behind designing a cash transfer consisting of a lump-sum payment combined with regular cash transfers. We assume that the transfer is targeted to poor households and that knowledge of timing and transfer amounts is perfect. The lump-sum component will thus enable households to purchase productive assets because they will be using the regular part of the transfer for consumption smoothing. This naturally assumes that markets function well, that households have knowledge of the productive use of cash transfers, and that the supply side (availability of assets) works well. For example, an investment in productive assets such as fertilisers would lead to increased yields and consequently increased income for the household. When this is supplemented by a parallel strengthening of household capabilities (improved health and education outcomes) through the regular cash transfer, it creates greater household resilience and improves productive potential. It is the combined impact of enabling households to spend productively and improving their resilience to shocks that enables graduation out of poverty.

Figure 1: Theory of change for lump-sum cash transfers



3.3 Review of evidence on lump-sum payments

Arguing that lump-sum payments could increase the productive potential of cash transfers does not mean attention is being diverted away from the core objective of most of these

programmes, i.e. consumption smoothing. The issue is instead to assess whether complementing frequent and small-size transfers with larger lump sums could increase the productive effects. If consumption smoothing is achieved via regular, frequent and reliable transfers, then lump-sum payments could be complementary. This is, for example, how the Karnali Employment Programme (KEP) operates in Nepal. In this workfare cash transfer, beneficiaries receive frequent cash for their work (wages) and a lump-sum payment on completion of the project. Since the KEP strives for local economic development as well as to provide a safety net, it is expected that the lump sum will be used in a productive way, increasing the livelihoods and resilience of beneficiary households beyond the duration of the programme.

It is also important to highlight that lump-sum payments do not necessarily have to be unpredictable. Far from this, it could be argued that if any productive impact is desired, lump-sum transfers need to be predictable. The debate about size and frequency of the transfers is sometimes based on comparing regular, predictable and smaller-size transfers with unpredictable lump-sum payments that are the result of implementation failures. Although this type of analysis provides convincing arguments about the importance of the predictability of transfers, it does not address the relation between size and frequency with productive impact. In other words, **we are interested in knowing if predictable lump-sum payments, of a size that responds to a meticulous design, enhance the productive impact of predictable, smaller and more frequent cash transfers**.

Table 1 summarises our review of cash transfer evaluations that included lump-sum payments, either by design or due to implementation failures.

Table 1: Review of cash transfer evaluations

Programme	Source	Type of programme	Lump-sum payment	Productive effects
Citizen's Damage Compensation Programme (CDCP) – Pakistan	OPM (2013a) – Impact evaluation	Relief	Over a 12-month period beneficiary households received PKR 40,000 in two tranches of PKR 20,000 (approximately $200). The programme did not include regular transfers.	The CDCP Phase II transfer had a positive impact on livestock ownership in all target provinces except Punjab. This was attributed to households rebuilding herds lost due to the flooding. The cash transfer also had an impact on the ownership of other productive assets such as blacksmithing tools and motorcycles.
Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) – Ghana	Handa *et al.* (2014) – Impact evaluation OPM (2013b) – Qualitative assessment	Development	Bi-monthly payments by design, although transfers were lumpy and irregular due to implementation problems. For example, households did not receive payments for	Smaller-size households repaid debts and increased their savings. Some households were able to diversify their livelihoods by purchasing grains and animals.

			eight months and then, in February 2012, a triple payment was made.	
Child Grants Programme (CGP) – Lesotho	OPM (2014) – Impact evaluation	Development	Although designed to provide quarterly payments, transfers were unpredictable, lumpy and irregular.	Overall, no strong impact on asset accumulation and productive investments. The cash transfer did lead to increased expenditure on crop production inputs (pesticides and fertilisers) and an increase in the proportion of beneficiary households owing pigs. The CGP effect on livestock investment was limited overall and mainly concentrated in poorer and larger households.
Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE)	OPM (2014) – Impact evaluation	Development	Designed to provide regular bi-monthly payments but double payments were made in the first two payment cycles due to implementation issues.	Households used the transfer to purchase agricultural implements and repay debts. SAGE increased the amount of land owned by Senior Citizens Grant (SCG) beneficiaries (not Vulnerable Family Support Grant (VFSG) beneficiaries)[2], and enabled them to cultivate more of the land they owned. The SAGE programme positively impacted the proportion of both VFSG and SCG households that purchased livestock in the last 12 months, and increased the proportion of VFSG beneficiaries who owned livestock. It also helped VFSG households purchase productive assets.
Givewell Kenya Evaluation	Haushofer and Shapiro (2014) – Impact evaluation	Development	Experiment designed to test three design features of unconditional cash transfers: i) whether the transfer recipient is the husband or the wife within the household; ii) whether the transfer was made in a single	Households receiving transfers were 23 percentage points more likely to have an iron roof as opposed to a grass-thatch roof, and livestock holdings increased by 51% (Purchasing Power Parity $85). Monthly transfers had stronger effects on food security than lump-sum transfers, while lump-sum transfers showed larger effects than monthly transfers on the ownership of particular

[2] SAGE used two targeting methodologies: Poverty targeting through the VFSG and categorical targeting through the SCG.

			lump sum or in nine monthly instalments; iii) and the size of the lump-sum transfer (either $300 or $1,100).	types of assets such as metal roofs. Large transfers produced larger treatment effects than small transfers on most outcomes, but with decreasing marginal returns.
Cash transfer for Disaster Risk Reduction – Nigeria	Bailey (2013) – Feasibility study	Relief	The report recommends paying in lump sums, stating that 'small transfers given on a frequent basis will be more likely to be used for consumption than if cash given in one instalment'.	
Cash for Work Component of Drought Recovery Programme in Turkana and Wajir Districts – Kenya	Frize (2002) in Harvey (2007) – Programme assessment	Relief	The review found that 'larger sums were more likely to be spent on productive assets such as livestock, or setting up small shops' (Frize, 2002 in Harvey, 2007; 37).	
Save the Children cash transfer – Ethiopia	Adams and Kebede (2005)	Relief	The report found that when larger amounts were distributed after the harvest, 'some households made strategic investments which had far-reaching consequences. For instance, cash distributed at harvest time allowed some to renegotiate contractual agreements for crop sharing for the next season. Some households purchased small stock and benefited from higher income/asset levels and social benefits (children remained at home). At the other extreme, between one-sixth and one-third of households purchased an ox (or share of a plough ox), which enabled them to plough their own land and therefore retain the entire production. The practice of renting out land also changed for poor households, with one study finding that 16% fewer households rented out land as a result of the cash intervention.'	

Our review suggests that, overall, robust evidence is scarce and findings are by no means conclusive. Indeed, the few results available are programme-specific and hardly allow for broader conclusions to be drawn. The main reason for this lack of evidence is that programmes have rarely complemented regular transfers with lump sums with the intention of improving the productivity of beneficiaries. In some of the cases reviewed, the lumpiness was the result of implementation failures. It is not a surprise therefore that such payments have insignificant effects on household productivity. Lump-sum payments need to be carefully designed, with amounts that are in line with the programme's objectives, and also need to be timely, predictable and reliable. We find only one (unpublished) study that sets out to test the effect of lump-sum payments by design, and the results from this paper on the Givewell programme indicate that lump-sum payments indeed can have productive effects at the household level (Haushofer and Shapiro, 2014).

Although the evidence available is not enough to prove or reject the theory of change presented in Figure 1 then, the evaluations available do provide some insights about aspects that should be considered and assessed when designing a cash transfer with

complementary lump-sum payments with productive goals. These are developed in the following section.

4 Policy implications

Productive lump-sum payments seem to have different purposes and implications in emergency and non-emergency programmes. While from a productive viewpoint relief programmes usually aim at compensating beneficiaries for the livelihoods lost during the shock and at helping them to cope with future shocks, in development programmes the focus is placed on livelihood enhancement and diversification. Lump-sum payments may have greater chances of increasing productivity in emergency contexts because 'recipients are familiar with the types of investment they need to make to replace lost assets, and the proportion of cases in which funds are mis-directed or dissipated appears to be low' (Farrington and Slater, 2009: 5). In development contexts, however, the potential of lump sums seems to be more related to the entrepreneurial skills of the beneficiaries and the training and management provided by the programme.

Evidence indicates that there are a few design features that may increase productive effects. First, the transfer size needs to respond to the productive impact that is intended to be achieved. If the intention is to support beneficiaries so that they can buy livestock, for example, then the cash they are provided with needs to be sufficient to allow people to do so. For instance, the impact evaluation of the CDCP programme in Pakistan found that the amount transferred was 'not sufficient to buy the livestock lost and far from sufficient to purchase land' (OPM, 2013a). The Oxfam project in Aceh, Indonesia, in the aftermath of the Tsunami, transferred cash to fishermen to purchase boats. It has been reported, however, that the amount of the transfer was approximately only a quarter of the cost of a boat. This resulted in beneficiaries spending the cash on everyday needs or giving it to their wives for their businesses (Adams and Winahyu, 2006).

Farrington and Slater (2009) suggest that if the amount transferred is too high, households may be encouraged to spend the cash 'on investments beyond the range with which the poor are familiar, or dissipated, or serve as a disincentive to work'. Although there is little evidence to support this, it could be argued that transferring amounts greater than what is required for achieving the productive impact pursued is at the very least an ineffective use of limited resources.

Defining the transfer size according to the productive objective requires having a deep knowledge of the potential productive investments and their costs. This implies an intimate knowledge of local markets and of the skills of beneficiaries.

Setting the transfer amount seems to be relatively easier in relief programmes, since doing so involves finding out what assets have been lost and their new market prices (although the complexity of doing market intelligence in post-emergency contexts should not be underestimated). In development programmes, on the other hand, the transfer design involves assessing the productive potential of each beneficiary and establishing the best way to enhance it.

In any case, it is important to highlight that beneficiary characteristics vary at the household and individual level and that beneficiaries have heterogeneous skills and therefore many different productive potentials. The fact that beneficiaries are receiving transfers because they are all poor, or vulnerable, or are households with children or elderly members, does not mean that they have the same skills and hence the same productive potential.

A critical design feature is that lump-sum payments need to be predictable and reliable. Beneficiaries need to know in advance about the transfer amount and the timing of its disbursement. This allows households to plan their productive investments accordingly. The lumpiness of payments of some cash transfers reviewed in this paper (i.e. in Ghana and Lesotho) were the result of implementation failures rather than deliberate design. Consequently, since the amounts were not designed to meet any productive need and were neither predictable nor reliable, the modest or null impacts are hardly a surprise.

Moreover, for lump-sum payments to have any productive impact, the timing of the transfer needs to be appropriate. Programmes that are designed to support productivity may choose different disbursement times and seasons. Harvey (2007) provides a few examples showing that the productive impact differs if cash is distributed before or after the harvest, while the MASAF programme in Malawi provides payments in planting season rather than the lean season.

Finally, in order to achieve the productive impact desired through cash transfers, particularly in development contexts, there is a need to provide additional support and monitoring. This may be required to prevent beneficiaries from making inefficient investments. However, providing adequate training, monitoring and support can be costly and difficult. The support may also need to be quite comprehensive, particularly if beneficiaries engage in different types of productive activities and hence require different types of assistance. This could mean transforming a basic welfare-focused cash transfer programme into a large, complex programme with multiple objectives and greater costs.

The provision of adequate training, monitoring and cash support to enhance the productivity of beneficiaries is at the core of what is usually referred to as the ‘graduation agenda’. The graduation discourse indicates that beneficiaries, or at least some beneficiaries, should exit cash transfer programmes by engaging productively and sustainably in the labour market. One of the most well-known graduation experiences is BRAC’s programme ‘Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting Ultra Poor’. The reported success of the programme was based on the multi-dimensional support provided. BRAC offered assets such as livestock, leased land, seeds and tools to rural women for use in income-generating activities. The income-generating enterprises were carefully selected and beneficiaries received adequate training. Moreover, a ‘subsistence allowance’ was provided for 18 months, after which the enterprises were expected to produce income. However, programmes like BRAC differ substantially from the more traditional cash transfer schemes studied in this paper. They provide broader benefits, implying higher resource and management commitments and probably a reduced outreach. Essentially, these are two different interventions and asking the cash transfer schemes to provide the comprehensive support offered by programmes like BRAC is challenging and extremely resource-intensive.

Given the increasing interest in the productive potential of cash transfers the role of lump-sum payments in cash transfer programmes should be explored. In theory, combining regular and frequent transfers with lump-sum payments could increase the productive impacts of these programmes without undermining their effects on consumption and other dimensions. However, given the dearth of programmes with systematic lump-sum cash transfers, as well as the limited body of evidence, more research needs to be done to explore this avenue further.

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