Cash Transfer Programming

Impact assessments & monitoring

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Cash is nowadays one of the key pillars of humanitarian aid, especially since the establishment of the Grand Bargain. After a successful expert meeting on Cash Transfer Programming in August 2017, organized by DRA and KUNO, some questions remained unanswered. These were mainly questions on the assessment of the impact of Cash Transfer Programs. Therefore, KUNO joined forces with Humanity X (Leiden University), Ground Truth Solutions, Wageningen University and DRA to organize an expert meeting on the impact of cash.

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Introduction

On Thursday 24 May 2018 KUNO, Humanity X and DRA organized a half-day workshop at the Humanity Hub in The Hague on the impact assessment and monitoring of Cash Transfer Programs (CTPs). Many humanitarian organizations working with CTPs, struggle with how to clarify or assess their impact. The workshops dealt with evaluation design of CTPs and presented best practices.

The working session was relevant to humanitarian professionals, both program officers and monitoring & evaluation officers, working with CTPs. The program offered insights into beneficiaries' perceptions of CTPs and offered tools to assess the impact of CTPs.

Speakers:

- **Elias Sagmeister,** Ground Truth Solutions
- **Marrit van den Berg,** Wageningen University & Research Centre
- **Arvid Halma and Thomas Baar,** Humanity X (Centre for Innovation, Leiden University)

1. Aid recipients feedback: Elias Sagmeister

Elias Sagmeister works at Ground Truth Solutions (GTS), an organization that has the ambition to help aid agencies and clusters incorporate the feedback of aid recipients into programs and responses. Ground Truth Solutions tracks the Grand Bargain commitments from a field perspective. They interview local staff, local partners and recipients on their perceptions of the relevance, fairness and timing of the programs. These interviews are done repeatedly, so metrics can be developed about the performance of a program or response. An example is the Cash Barometer, developed in cooperation with The Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP). With the Cash Barometer, GTS makes sure that the perspectives of aid-recipients are included in the programming, and that best practices are distilled. In other initiatives, GTS focuses on beneficiary feedback.

Elias Sagmeister: "We look at user experiences of cash transfers. For instance, we see if the conditions are there to use cash. Also, we focus on user satisfaction. How do we measure this? For instance, we ask for feedback about the different delivery mechanisms for cash (e.g. prepaid card, M-Pesa, SIM card, bank account). Then we can compare, because user satisfaction varies between delivery mechanisms. However, sometimes we cannot be sure if the feedback is about the delivery mechanism or about the program itself. We asked what they value. Two key issues are flexibility and trust."

Sagmeister then explained how Ground Truth Solutions carries out their research. "We do human-centred research. We do a desk review and a Ground Truth Perception survey, and we map user journeys. These user journeys are very important. First, we arrange qualitative user interviews to get information about the 'user journeys'. Then we make profiles out of these user journeys: these profiles differ in terms of gender, location, the extent of social support, etc. Subsequently, the profiles are used to develop use archetypes, also called 'personas'. Personas are helpful while designing a program: one can design for a range of typical users, instead of designing for the 'average user'. The user journeys can then be matched with personas, and the steps in the process can be described in the words of the persona. Then one can distil positive and negative points in the user journey, and with this feedback the user journey can be improved. It turned out, for instance, that the communication towards the beneficiaries is not always sufficient and clear. Recipients did not know for how long the cash program lasted, or how they would receive the cash. This led to uncertainty and mistrust, while trust is one of the most important factors to make the program work."

The main takeaways and recommendations from Elias:

- Address pain points within existing mechanisms and improve them, instead of looking for a ‘perfect’ mechanism.
- Invest in communication with individual users.
- Invest in ‘cash plus’: deliver something in addition to the cash, for instance supporting with choices, planning for the future, linking with certain groups, entrepreneurial training. The beneficiaries would like to have some extra support for the long term.

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2. Evaluation or monitoring? Marrit van den Berg

Marrit van den Berg is a lecturer in development economics at Wageningen University and Research Centre. At the expert meeting, she gave advice on impact measurement and impact evaluation. “Plan your impact evaluation together with the project, which means that the evaluation is planned from the start and incorporated into the program. Make sure you do a proper baseline, define an appropriate control group, and randomize. Set up realistic targets and make the indicators SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely). There should be indicators at each relevant step of the chain, so you could measure at each step instead of just the whole program. Specificity in indicators is also essential: do you measure what you want to measure? The indicators should be targeted to the program. Just remember that a program is always an intervention in context: there are other things happening and also other interventions taking place. What is then the impact of your program?”

After this, Van den Berg elaborated on the problems of impact evaluations. She said that the main question is: “What would have happened without the project or program?" But the problem is: you cannot identify this. "When you do an impact evaluation, an appropriate control group is needed. There should be a 'treatment' group and a 'comparison' group, and you should randomize. For ethical reasons, you should randomize at a community level, not at a household or individual level. Randomization is important, because biases can occur, for instance self-selection bias (when people are selected because they offer their participation), or program placement bias (when selection takes place in an area where a program has already been carried out)."

Finally, Van den Berg posed the question of the added value of new impact assessments on Cash Transfer Programs: "The positive impact of cash transfer programming has already been proven. Most of the time, adequate monitoring of the results of Cash Transfer Programs should be sufficient."

The main takeaways and recommendations from Van den Berg:

- Do a proper baseline.
- Don't forget the costs when you are comparing programs.
- Only do a robust quantitative impact evaluation when you can do it well and when it is worth the costs.
- Most of the time, monitoring the results of Cash Transfer Programs might be sufficient; only assess the impact of new, innovative things.

"It has already been proven that cash transfers have a positive impact. Don't try to measure the impact of cash again. Measure the impact of new, innovative things."

3. How can data be used to monitor CTP? Arvid Halma and Thomas Baar

Arvid Halma, from Humanity X, elaborated on retrieving insights into data. "In 2016, Humanity X cooperated with World Food Program. WFP rolled out a Cash Transfer Program in Lebanon. In the program, 800,000 refugees were supported. UNHCR gave out a credit card, and every month WFP transferred an amount of money to that card. There were 500 contracted shops where the recipients could buy food and non-food items. In total, an amount of $20 million was transferred per month."

Because the 'cash' was transferred and used digitally, they realized that every transaction was a data observation: "We saw, for instance, a peak of transactions at the beginning of the month, just after the money transfer to the credit card. We wanted to delve deeper, and so we created an interactive 'dashboard', so that data could be interpreted in the field office. Indicators were summarized and categorized, and this resulted in a scoring matrix for the field office. Indicators include the time of the transaction and networks of transactions." These indicators were linked to specific shops. Arvid Halma: "We could then see which shops were popular at certain times. When there were deviations, we could look further into it. For instance, when there was a peak in transactions at night in a certain shop that was actually closed, it could be a case of fraud. This detection is a nudge to delve deeper into potential fraud situations. But you should be aware, not all anomalies are fraud."

The same data can also be used to visualize mobility movements, for instance seasonal migration: "It could be seen that in the harvest time, more people left the cities for the countryside".

The main takeaways and recommendations of Halma and Baar are the following:

- You could use data for program design and implementation.
- Data can also be used for program monitoring.
- Accountability towards recipients and donors could be enhanced when data is being used for monitoring and possible fraud detection.

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4. Takeaways from the breakout sessions

- There is a difference in assessing impact in large-scale and small-scale projects. Extensive quantitative evaluation is only useful in large cases and when done right.
- You can also just monitor, not full force evaluation. If you notice behaviour that is possibly deviant, you could look at it.
- If the donor requests an impact assessment: talk with the donor, what does the donor want to do with it? Reduce unnecessary workload.
- Qualitative data is important. For instance: user experiences, include feedback of aid recipients.
- There is still no standard way to measure the impact of cash on the gender balance (power in household?).