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Relevance of Conditional Cash Transfers for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Developing Countries

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Abstract

Conditional cash transfer schemes were identified as one of the major driving forces behind poverty reduction in most developing countries during the implementation of the *Millennium Development Goals* and the subsequent *Sustainable Development Goals*. However, relevance of conditionality obligations of beneficiaries and service providers to sustain the conditional cash transfer schemes and make them relevant to the *Sustainable Development Goals* appeared to have encountered a number of challenges. This paper examined the circumstances under which beneficiaries and service providers fulfilled their conditionality obligations in conditional cash transfer schemes and its relevance to the *Sustainable Development Goals* implementation in developing countries. A systematic review technique was employed to analyse 60 articles. It was found that, improved health care, improved educational level, increased consumption level, poverty reduction, and among others are relevant to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. Policy dilemma, time frame dilemma, infrastructural capacity and poor macroeconomic policies were some of the constraints in conditional cash transfers to be addressed to secure better implementation of *Sustainable*

Development Goals. It is therefore suggested that expansionary and contractionary policies be instituted to control macroeconomic indicators where necessary, more infrastructure should be provided and timelines of cash transfers should be monitored in order to make the intervention more relevant in the implementation of the *Sustainable Development Goals*.

Key Words: Relevance, Conditionalities, Cash Transfers, Sustainable Development Goals, Developing Countries

ABBREVIATIONS

CCTs	Conditional Cash Transfers
CT	Cash Transfer
CSG	Child Support Fund
DFID	Department for International Development
GFRP	Global Crisis Response Programme
ILO	International Labour Organization
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against poverty
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of Change
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfers

Introduction

Even though poverty reduction has been the main focus of development in the last four decades, much of the efforts to reduce poverty in the early years of poverty campaigns were centred on the macroeconomic stability. While macroeconomic stability has a role to play in poverty reduction, rigidities in some economies, especially those in the developing world, appear to have thwarted this effort (Domfe, Osei & Ackah, 2013). In view of this, multidimensional approaches to poverty reduction including targeting and addressing the needs of the poor have been embraced by some governments and the international donor communities. This became especially pronounced during the implementation of the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) when ‘Goal 1’ was dedicated to programmes and strategies to reduce poverty. One such strategy proposed by the international donor community was social protection mechanism with the main intention of improving well-being through human capital development (Waters, 2010).

While some gains were made in poverty reduction through social protection strategies during the era of the MDGs, a lot more gains are expected during the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Social protection packages have always come in different forms – sometimes as an intervention to reduce the impact of an adverse condition to welfare or as a mechanism of socio-economic empowerment (Devereux, 2007; Cichon, Behrend and Wodsak, 2011). This arrangement appears to be consistent with objectives of the SDGs. For instance, SDG 1 aims at addressing an end to poverty as a lot more than 800 million people around the world still live on less than \$1.25 a day (UNDP 2015). Again, SDG 2 marked steps to end hunger by 2030. This may entail promoting sustainable agriculture through investment and supporting vulnerable groups.

One key example of social protection that was actually used in the developing world to improve welfare during the implementation of the MDGs was the cash transfer. Indeed, countries such as South Africa, Zambia, Mauritius, Ghana, Mexico, Brazil and others adopted cash transfer schemes as a potential strategy to reduce poverty. According to Arnold, Conway and Greenslade (2011: p.15), “Cash transfers are direct, regular and predictable non-contributory cash payments that help poor and vulnerable households to raise smooth incomes”. It guarantees food security, income security and other safety nets by providing recipients to obtain a range of goods and services of their choice through the market mechanisms (Doh, Afranie, & Bortei-Doku Aryeetey, 2014). These cash transfers can be conditional in which case the beneficiaries have to fulfil some obligations to qualify for the cash (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009) or unconditional with no strings attached (Hanlon, Barrientos, & Hulme, 2009). Conditional cash transfers promote increased demand through an *income effect*, by increasing the income of the household and cushioning them against the conditions to be fulfilled (Baird, Ferreira, Özler, & Woolcock, 2013)

However, *conditionality obligations* attached to the conditional cash transfer could be a potential barrier to the sustenance of the programme and the current global post-2015 agenda, Sustainable Development Goals. It is in connection with this concern that the paper sought to examine circumstances under which beneficiaries and service providers fulfil their conditionality obligations in conditional cash transfer programmes in the developing countries and its relevance to the implementation of the SDGs. Among the conditionality obligations are improvement in educational outcomes, evidence of improved health and nutritional statuses, evidence of poverty alleviation, skills acquisition, women’s empowerment, social cohesion, increased economic productivity and growth among others (Lancet, 2009; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Barrientos & Nino-Zarazua, 2009; Barrientos & Nino-Zarazua, 2010; Lichand, 2010). A close observation of these conditionality obligations of cash transfers portrayed an alliance with the SDGs.

This study may become necessary in revealing the true state of conditionality obligations by the beneficiaries, service providers and its relevance to SDGs implementation in ensuring optimal benefits. Additionally, it seeks to provide understanding of how cash transfers are used as an effective mechanism to reduce intergenerational poverty and how they could be fashioned to play key roles during the implementation of the SDGs. The paper is divided into six sections including introduction: methodology, theoretical perspective, discussions, conclusion and policy recommendations.

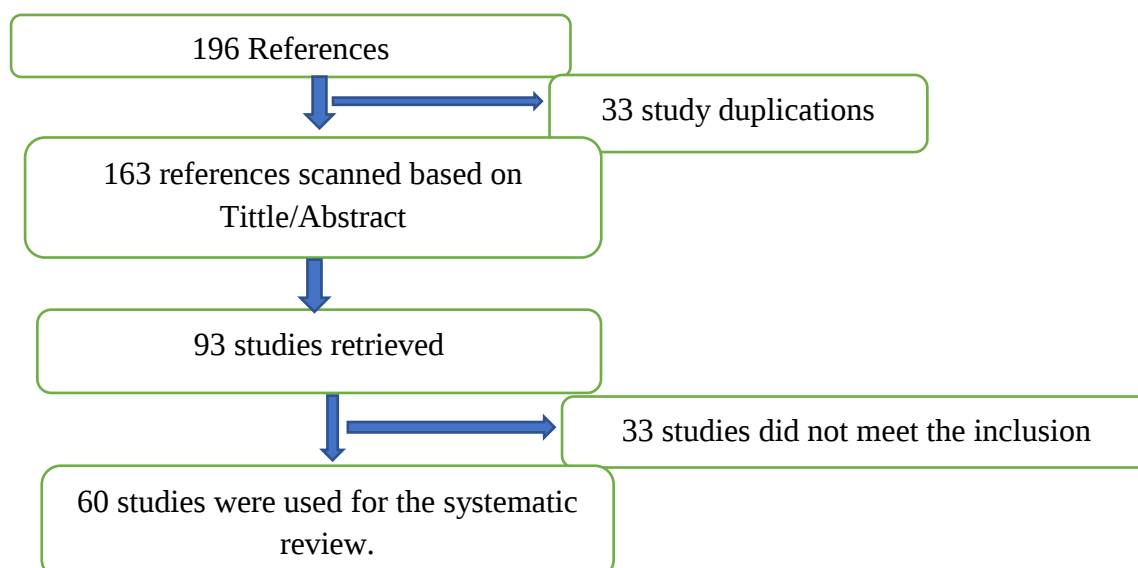
Methodology

The study adopted systematic review as the main analytical approach. Google scholar, JSTOR, Wiley Online, Taylor and Francis, Social Science Journal were the search engines used. The inclusion criteria were based on published journal articles, documents, and reports on empirical research and other materials such as textbooks, conference proceedings and technical papers with focus on cash transfers in developing countries.

Out of a total number of 196 documents generated, 60 (28 journal articles, 17 reports, 4 books and 11 conference proceeding) satisfied the inclusion criteria. The key words: *Relevance, Conditionalities, Cash Transfers, Sustainable Development Goals, Developing Countries* were alternated on Booleans operators of ‘AND’, ‘OR’, to generate the literature. There were syntheses of successful implemented cash transfers in some developing countries and how

conditionality obligations were fulfilled and their relevance to SDGs. Below is the flow chart of how literature was retrieved.

Figure 1: Flow chart of summary of literature search



Source: Author's own construct: 2018

Theoretical Perspective

This paper employs triangulation of theories in outlining the theoretical framework for the discussions. Firstly, the framework relies on the *theory of intergenerational poverty* to explain the causes and implications of poverty. Secondly, the *theory of change* is then used to shed light on how social intervention programmes such as conditional cash transfers could be relevant to the SDGs implementation to *break* the cycle of poverty that has engulfed the poor in the developing countries.

Theory of Intergenerational Poverty

The 1965 Oscar Lewis theory of intergenerational poverty posits that poverty is passed on across generations within successional families due to either genetic component or upbringing in society. The theory is premised on an assumption that – *poverty begets poverty*. It contends that as children grow up in poor families, the tendency that they would be poor is very high (Blank, 2010; Townsend 1979; Oscar 1965).

In such circumstances, interventions such as conditional cash transfers become essential in changing the destiny of the children born to the poor family. This often takes place when such intervention programmes provide assistance in the form of *nutrition (SDG 2)*, *health (SDG 3)* and *education (SDG 4)* to improve human capital of the poor. Studies in Ghana have highlighted how conditional cash transfers have increased income of households to improve child nutrition, education, health, poverty reduction and social transformation (Owusu-Addo, 2014; Jones, Ahadzie , & Doh , 2009).

Theory of Change (ToC)

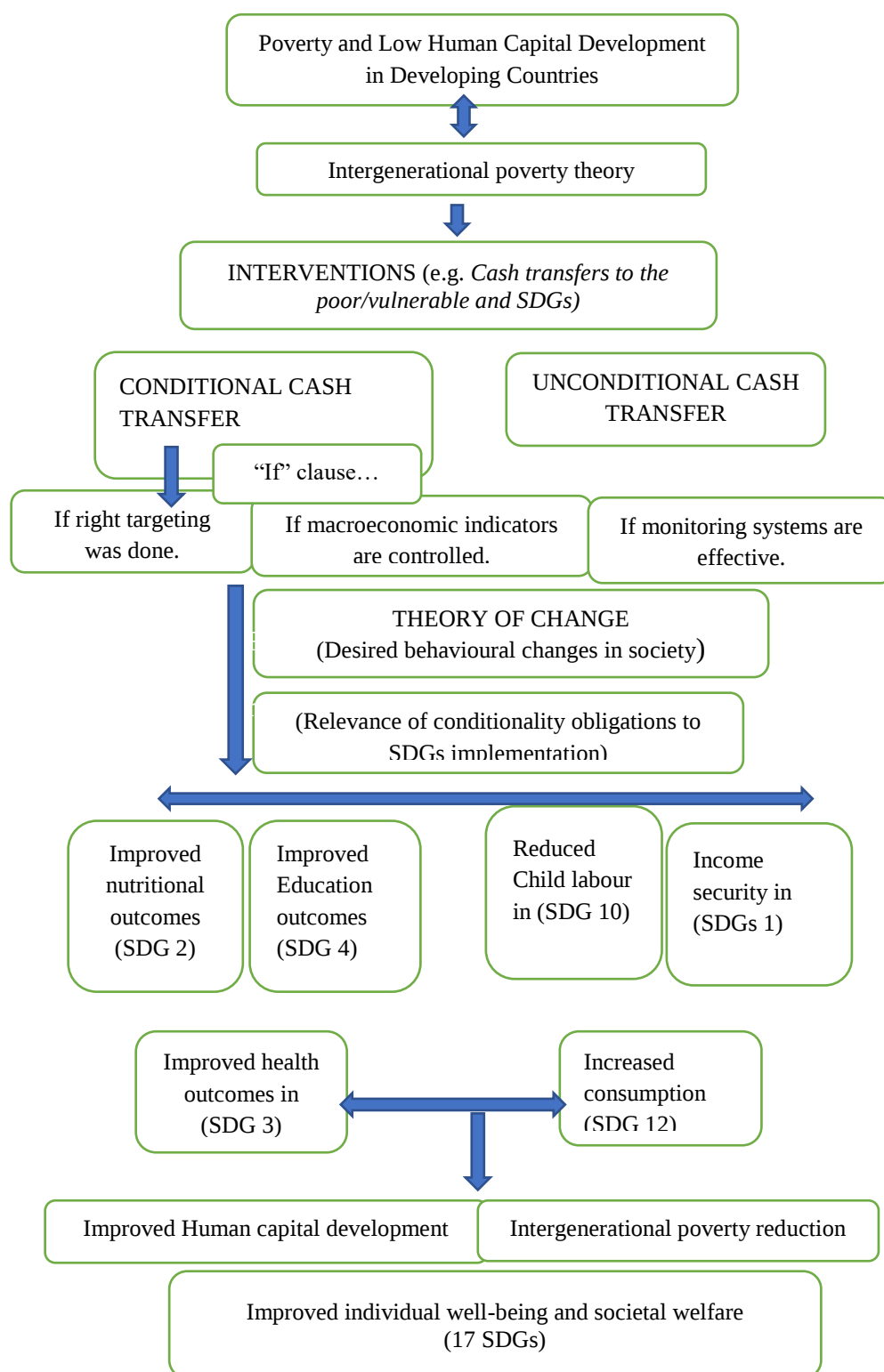
The theory of intergenerational poverty discussed earlier shed light on poverty situation with limited explanations on how the poor would be lifted out of poverty. *Theory of Change* (ToC) developed by Andrea Anderson in 2005, is therefore used in this discussion to complement the ideas of the intergenerational poverty. The ToC is the product of a series of critical-thinking activities leading to the conception of the required short-term changes that are needed to reach a long-term goal expressed by stakeholders (Anderson, 2005).

The intergenerational poverty theory and theory of change are relevant to cash transfer and implementation of SDGs. Some of the relevance of conditional cash transfers are seen as either goals or targets in the SDGs. For instance, Browne (2013), recounts how ToC applied in conditional cash transfers have reduced vulnerability (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5), promote a wide range of social inclusion (SDG. 11) social justices (SDG 16) and in improving state-citizens relations (SDG.8). Once more, Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2011), assessed the *change processes inherent* in cash transfers in developing countries. Their outcomes were that conditional cash transfer interventions improved patronage of preventive health services among the poor (SDG. 3), increased productivity (SDG. 2, 8 & 9) and resulted in general well-being of the people. The above discussions reveal that, there is a strong link between conditional cash transfer, ToC and SDGs in developing countries.

Conceptual Frameworks

The study conceptualizes how conditional cash transfers curtail intergenerational poverty through theory of change (ToC) and its relevance to the post-2015 agenda (SDGs). AS exemplified in the concept in figure 2, poverty and low human capital are developmental challenge in developing countries. This phenomenon has perpetuated due to intergenerational poverty. Interventions such as conditional cash transfers become useful in reducing poverty and improving human capital if the right people are targeted, if macro-economic indicators are controlled and if monitoring systems are effective. The achievement of these may result in desired behavioural changes which may be relevant to the implementation of sustainable development goals (SDGs). These behavioural changes are improved educational status (SDG 4), improved nutritional status (SDG 2), reduced child labour (SDG 10), income security (SDG 1), improved health status (SDG 3) and increased consumption (SDG 12). These achievements may improve human capital and reduce intergenerational poverty, thereby improving individual well-being and societal welfare which are the basic ideas behind the implementation of the SDGs. Therefore, the above concept has clearly demonstrated the relevance of conditional cash transfers to the implementation of the SDGs.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of conditional cash transfer relevance to SDGs



Source: Authors own construct: 2018

Discussions of Major Findings

Development and content of selected cash transfer schemes

Cash transfer schemes were one of the strategies put forward to alleviate poverty in developing countries through the MDGs. The concept of conditional cash transfers originated in Latin American countries in response to the macroeconomic crisis of the 1990s when poorer households demand for social services – education and health had declined considerably.

Many countries have different names and contents of cash transfers. Progres a in Mexico, now called Oportunidades, started in 1997 integrating interventions into health, education and nutrition. In Brazil, the first conditional cash transfer programme was started in 1996/1997 (Bolsa Familia). Some other countries running conditional cash transfers are Colombia's Familasen Accion (2000), Hondura's Program de Asignacion familiar (1999), Nicaragua's Red de protection social (2000), Paraguay's Tekopora (2005), South Africa's Child Support Grants, Ghana's LEAP (2007) and others (Prabhu 2009; Bortei-Doku Aryeetey, 2015; Bortei-Doku Aryeetey, Quartey, Tsikata & Ampaabeng 2009).

Obligations in Conditional Cash Transfers Schemes in Developing Countries and their Relevance to the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

The two proximate purposes of conditional cash transfers are to reduce poverty and improve human capital development through behavioural changes in society (Browne, 2013). These behavioural changes will be helpful to achieve 6 of the SDGs as demonstrated in the concept of this paper. Beneficiaries and service providers fulfil their conditionality obligations when there is evidence of sustained improvement in educational outcomes, improved health and nutritional statuses, reduced poverty status, among others (Lancet, 2009; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Barrientos & Nino-Zarazua, 2009; Barrientos & Nino-Zarazua, 2010; Lichand, 2010).

Accessibility of Health and Educational Facilities and Relevance to SDGs Implementation

Accessibility of health and educational facilities to pre-qualify beneficiaries have been a challenge. In developing countries, geographical, financial accessibility and other supply side constraints have mostly impeded health care and education (Alhassan, et al., 2015). For instance, in Nigeria, the average distance to access health care is 4.51 km with an average transportation fare of N345 (Awoyemi, Obayelu, & Opaluwa, 2011) while in Ghana, the average distance to access school is about 2.5 km with an average termly school expenses of GHC 32.74 - GHC 62.06 (Create, 2010). If service providers are able to make services geographically and financially accessible, then their obligations under the conditionality is fulfilled to make it possible for the beneficiaries to patronize it.

In many countries, education, health and cash transfers are positively correlated. For instance, in Mexico, Progres a resulted in increased enrolment of 20 percent in secondary school for girls and 10 percent for boys. Conditional cash transfers have markedly increased school enrolment, attendance, grade progression and health check-ups in Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Namibia and El Salvador (Williams, 2007). For instance, in El Salvador, in 2005-07, health check-ups by children and mothers increased by 47 and 42 percent respectively (Prabhu, 2009). The achievement of these is a big plus to SDGs implementation.

Improved Human Capital Development and Relevance SDGs Implementation

Again, conditional cash transfer programmes have two main objectives: to reduce poverty and to enhance capabilities of the vulnerable (SDG 1). The cash transfer part seeks to address poverty in the short-run, and the conditionality obligations fulfilment take it further up by building up on human capital (Forget, Penden & Strobel, 2013). Human capital is recognition that people are an important and essential asset who contribute to development and growth (Marimuthu, Arokiasamy & Ismail, 2009). For instance reducing child labour is one of the mechanisms to improve human capital.

Conditional cash transfers have had a positive impact on reducing children's participation in the labour market while enforcing participation in schools. For instance the Progresa programme between 1997 and 2000 noted that, labour force participation for boys declined between 15-25 percentage points due to the cash transfers. This action resulted in about 65 percent of the increase in enrolment of boys in schools (Skoufias, 2005). Again, in some countries, monitoring and evaluation reports reveal that constraints to human capital development have been reduced (SDGs. 1-4). For instance, in Zambia, school pupils in Kalomo basic school told monitoring officers that the ZmK 40,000 received by their grandmothers is used for food, soap, clothing, books and school expenses

Evidence of Poverty Reduction and Relevance SDG Implementation

Another important aspect of conditionality obligation in cash transfers to SDGs implementation is evidence of poverty reduction through increased demand for goods and services. SDGs implementation is enhanced if conditionality obligations through cash transfers increase income of the households, which directly translates into consumption. Growing evidence has indicated that in Mexico, the poverty gap declined by 12 percent and severity of poverty reduced by 19 percent (Zepeda, 2007). Similarly, in Paraguay, the Tekapora programme led to an increase in the income of the households by 31 to 36 percent from 2005-2007 and such increases led to reduced incidence of extreme poverty to 17 percentage points among the programme beneficiaries and this is exactly what SDG 1 seeks to achieve.

Increased Investment Levels and Relevance to SDGs Implementation

The recipients of cash transfers are mostly vulnerable people who are dependent on other members of their family for their sustenance. Some beneficiaries of cash transfers are physically fit and actively seeking work. SDGs implementation is enhanced if cash transfer beneficiaries are able to invest and become independent through multiplier effects (Schwartz & Abreu, 2007). For instance, Samson, MacQuene and Niekerk (2005), stated that, in South Africa, households receiving cash transfers have labour force participation rates of 11-12 percent higher than households that do not receive the cash transfer. They also have an employment rate of 8-15 percent higher (SDG 1. Target 1a & 1.4). Corroborating the above, in Zambia, about 29 percent of transferred income has been invested in the purchase of livestock, farming inputs, or investment in informal enterprises. It was also evident that asset ownership among conditional cash transfer beneficiaries increased from 4.2 assets to 5.2. (Vincent & Cull, 2009). The study noted that ownership of small livestock has increased seven times, 71 percent of all households invested part of the cash, and 52 percent of cash recipients generated extra income (MCDSS/GTZ, 2007). Not all, an evaluation study on LEAP beneficiaries in Ghana highlighted that, 36.67 percent, 25 percent, 21.67 percent, and 16.67 percent of them used the cash transfer on food, medical care, education, and farm investment respectively (Abbey, Odonkor & Boateng, 2014).

Adequate Food Security and Relevance to SDG Implementation

Access to food is one of the basic necessities of life and actively enshrined in the social protection floors and SDGs 2. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization in 2010 asserted that, in sub-Saharan Africa, about 239 million people were hungry and severely undernourished. Cash transfers are one of the measures to mitigate the effects of food shortages. A study has established over 12 percent increase in agricultural investment by beneficiary households under progress (now Oportunidades) as compared to non-beneficiaries (Gertler et al, 2006). Again, in 1995-2004, the Ministry of Health and Welfare in Brazil noted that about 82.4 percent of the Bolsa Familia beneficiaries reported eating better. Moreover, in Lesotho, the number of conditional cash transfer beneficiaries reporting that they never went hungry increased from 19 percent to 48 percent (Croome & Nyanguru, 2007).

Challenges in Relevance of Conditional Cash Transfer to the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.

The relevance of conditional cash transfer to SDGs implementation may be thwarted by the following:

Firstly, policy dilemmas in cash transfer design: The conditional cash transfer schemes have given rise to policy dilemmas stemming from the numerous objectives of the programme. One such objective is to reduce poverty through a cash grant. However, the beneficiary amount is quite small to lift the poor out of poverty within the limited time frame. For instance Bolsa familia (RS 120=USD66 per household), Mexico's Oportunidades (USD8-17 per child/month, and USD 20 per year per child health), Ghana's LEAP (GHC8-GHC106.00) depending on household size). This may reduce the expected impact on the SDGs implementation.

Secondly, dilemma is in the timeframe: Human capital development acquisition takes a longer time. For the conditional cash transfer grant to cause improvement in intergenerational poverty through ToC, the duration of cash grant may slow the pace of implementation of some SDGs and the achievement of their targets (Prabhu 2009).

Thirdly, infrastructural capacity constraints: Conditional cash transfer programmes work best in countries where there are well-developed infrastructures. Low- and middle-income countries have challenges of physical and financial access to facilities (Adato & Bassett, 2008) as the SDGs (7&9) hope to achieve this by 2030. For instance, an average distance to school in Ghana and Nigeria are 2.5km and 4.5km respectively. There is evidence of poorest households not able to patronize social services due to high transportation costs and great distances to schools and clinics (World Bank 2008a).

Fourthly, unfavourable macroeconomic policies: Developing countries have problems with macroeconomic policies: high unemployment rates, rising inflation, high exchange rates, high interest rates, high import duties, etc. The poor cannot survive when there is greater disproportion of macro-economic burden as against the benefit from the cash transfer grant. Beneficiaries cannot spend on goods and services to increase consumption, make savings and make investments out of the cash transfer in the midst of worsening macro-economic indicators to guarantee smooth SDGs implementation.

Conclusion

Cash transfers in developing countries have been of immense help to the poor. The eligibility and fulfilling of conditionality obligations to sustain beneficiaries on the programme ensure commitment and accountability for both beneficiaries and service providers. The development of a nation is very much dependent on its human capital development, the political ideology,

social and economic policies of the nation. The study sought to examine the circumstances, and relevance of cash transfer to SDGs implementation. The study noted that the conditionalities of improved health, educational outcomes, improved human capital development, reduced poverty levels, increased investment level, food security secured through cash transfers are all relevant to SDGs implementation. Even though there are some implementation challenges of cash transfers which may thwart the smooth implementation of SDGs, developing counties have implemented cash transfers successfully. Therefore, the study concludes that conditionalities in cash transfers are relevant to SDGs implementation.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

It is suggested that the amount of cash transfer given under the conditional cash transfer be increased to act as a catalyst for economic independence of the poor within a short time frame. Those who become economically independent can now plough back their profit and increase their investment level. Different sets of the needy people can now be targeted and selected for the cash transfers.

Governments should create fiscal space to ensure even distribution of infrastructural facilities in their countries. These will reduce rural-urban drift, improve access to social and economic amenities and ensure that the youth remain in the rural areas to support their vulnerable cash transfer beneficiaries to invest the cash in productive ventures.

Again, it is recommended that, the macroeconomic policies in the economies of countries implementing conditional cash transfers should be favourable and pro-poor. The poor with this meagre amount of cash transfer grants may not be able to survive when incomes taxes are high, when inflation is persistent and when exchange rates are also high. Governments are advised to balance between expansionary and contractionary monetary policies, encourage more domestication of products and be biased towards currency devaluation to stimulate demand for local products.

Moreover, it may be very helpful if governments and corporate bodies could provide skill training for the vulnerable. The skills training on vocational, farming, resource use management, investment avenues will help the vulnerable to put into productive use, the cash transfer grants.

It is suggested that international development communities put together pragmatic policies to support developing countries. Policies such as direct foreign investments, demand for local products, elimination of restrictions in transfer of goods and services, South-South co-operation, North-South co-operation may help to address the identified challenges in order for the cash transfer schemes to produce better outcomes during the implementation of the SDGs.

Areas for Further Research

Further research needs to be conducted to know the magnitude of secondary occupation generated out of cash transfers from the beneficiary perspective in Ghana.

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