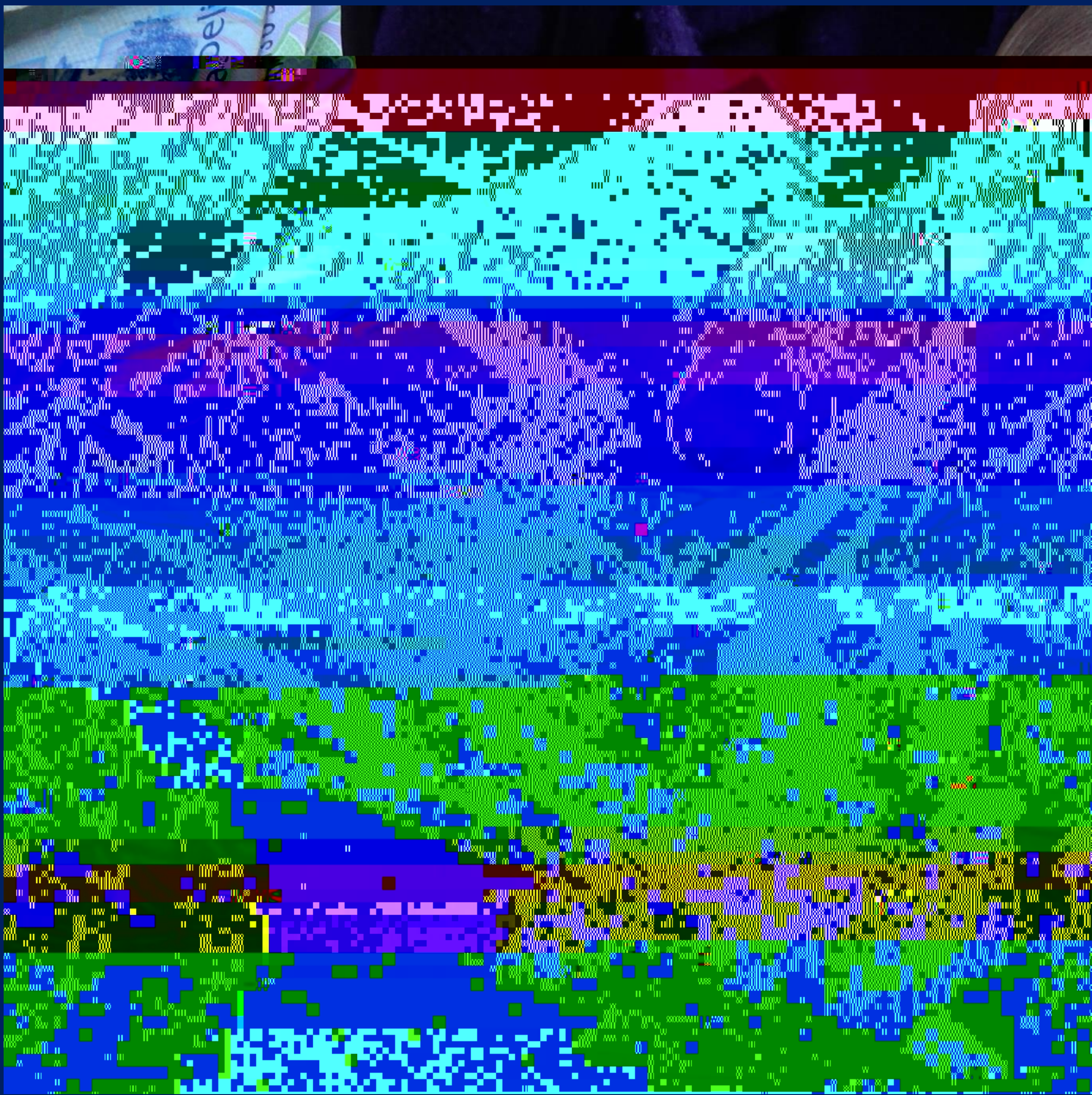
Social cash transfers, generational relations and youth poverty trajectories in rural Lesotho and Malawi



An ESRC-DFID-funded three-year collaborative research project

(ES/M009076/1)

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Research report

July 2019

, which disburse cash to poor and/or vulnerable people, have proliferated across sub-Saharan Africa over the past two decades. There is growing evidence that these address

are an increasingly popular element of social protection strategies, disbursing regular payments to vulnerable individuals or households. Over the past two decades, they have proliferated across sub-Saharan Africa. By 2016, 40 out of 48 African countries had an unconditional cash transfer programme ς twice as many as in 2010 (Hagen-Zanker et al 2016). Sustainable Development Goal 1 now requires states to employ social protection measures, and cash transfer schemes are heavily promoted and funded by donors (Barrientos 2013; ECA et al 2012; Fiszbein et al 2013; UN 2014). Some schemes aim to achieve social change through conditions such as requiring school attendance, but most cash transfers in Africa are άunconditionalέ.

Research suggests social cash transfers effectively among their target populations, improving consumption, nutrition, school enrolment and childhood immunisation levels (Barrientos and DeJong 2006; Case et al 2005; Miller and Tsoka 2012; Miller et al 2011; Woolard et al 2011). Most evaluations have focused on the intended direct beneficiaries, namely children and elderly people, to the neglect of young adults. Some evidence suggests recipients are more likely to get jobs and start enterprises (Ballard 2013) and may in some circumstances άgraduateέ from poverty (DFID 2011). Social cash transfers are expected to enhance the human capital of the next generation (DFID 2011), but evidence from Africa on longerchoiceέ, aggressively marketed with their adoption often a condition for aid. Scholars such as Hickey (2010) and Ballard (2013) have associated the emergence of social cash transfers with άinclusive neoliberalismέ. Multilateral agencies, notably the World Bank, favour social cash transfers as a policy intervention that will promote investment in human capital, empower recipients and support the informal sector, without creating dependency (Ferguson 2007). Hickey (2010) argues they further service the neoliberalising global economy by operating as a form of governmental power: in subtle ways they shape the behaviour of poor people, producing autonomous economic actors who take responsibility for their own development. Garmany (2016) however argues that the extent to which programmes are successful in achieving this is mixed and complex.

However, the proliferation of social cash transfers is not entirely donor-driven, and they do not simply embody neoliberalism but may also draw on welfare-state arguments (Ferguson 2007). Some governments have adopted social cash transfer programmes against the advice of donors, or, as in Lesotho, without consulting them (Pelham 2007). Barrientos (2013) suggests their expansion is largely driven by national politics. From a social contract perspective, social cash transfers represent outcomes of bargains between governments, social groups and citizens (Hickey 2011). They are sometimes used by government to contain dissent, indicating that poor people themselves have played a role in their proliferation (Ballard 2013). The introduction of pensions might also reflect generational power relations operating on a national stage.

between these political and economic processes and social cash transferă ʎϒǀͿ·Ǒǘă ϩƴ social relations are important but under-researched. Several scholars have asserted that social cash transfers cannot ultimately address chronic poverty because they fail to challenge the neoliberal economic structures at its root (Adesina 2011; Sandberg 2012). For Hickey (2011), social cash transfers help prop up a development strategy that offers young people little hope of employment. Ballard (2013), however, points to ongoing debate as to their redistributive role, while Ferguson (2007) suggests they can be both pro-poor and neoliberal. Social cash transfer schemes differ in their targeting of particular groups (e.g. based on age, orphan status, poverty), the designated recipient (e.g. caregivers of children), level of benefit and any conditions. The selected design both reflects political and economic processes and shapes their impacts on social relations, through symbolic and discursive as well as economic means.

The research was designed to provide a wider and deeper understanding of social cash transfers than previous analyses. It set out to answer to answer the following empirical questions:

- How do specific structural power relationships, particularly generational relations, shape young people's poverty trajectories?
- How have the social cash transfer schemes operating in Malawi and Lesotho intervened in these structural power relationships, and with what consequences for young people's poverty trajectories?
- How are political and economic power relationships between national and international institutions implicated in the design and implementation of social cash transfer schemes?

Understanding how social relations shape poverty requires detailed case studies using qualitative research (Farmer 2005; Harriss 2007). The research was undertaken in two rural villages with which the team had more than a decade-long relationship. The Lesotho village of 44 households is in the [illegible]ity is food insecure and employment opportunities (locally and beyond) are diminishing. The Malawi village of 72 households is in densely populated Thyolo District. Some employment is available on nearby tea estates, and there are many markets in the vicinity, but households have access to little land and very few assets.

We combined individual interviews which generate rich [illegible] with participatory group activities that examine local narratives and social dynamics. Data collection comprised six components:

Information was collected from each household about demographics, livelihood activities, assets and income sources. Similar profiling exercises were conducted in Malawi in 2007 and Lesotho in 1996/7 and 2008 enabling us to identify changes since the social cash transfer programmes were introduced.

Interviews were conducted with young adults, aged 18-34, who had participated in a previous research project in 2007/8. Of around 80 young people who participated in the earlier research, 60 were interviewed. Most were still resident in the villages, but others were living elsewhere, in some instances in town. Our research for this project explored their experiences over the intervening 8-10 years, including their experiences of cash transfers within their households and the wider community.

We interviewed members of 12 households in the Lesotho village, 8 in the Malawi village that were receiving transfers. Because cash transfers to the Malawi village had been rather irregular, we also interviewed members of 4 households in a village in a neighbouring district where cash transfers had been more regular. We interviewed all available household members aged 10 or older individually about the impacts of social cash transfers on relations of generation, age and gender within and beyond the household.

Following preliminary analysis of interview data, 8 groups of 3-10 young adults from each village participated in three diagramming activities. These explored in greater depth their aspirations, constraints and perceived impacts of cash transfers on household and community relations, experiences of the processes that produce and perpetuate poverty, and how social cash transfers intervene in these.

Approximately 50 in depth interviews were

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	. This reaches 22% of households in programme areas.	Survey data from all surveyed households are entered into the National Information System for Social Assistance (NISSA). The households listed are allocated by the community to one of four categories. A proxy means test is used to assess whether those categorised as ά poorέ and άultra-poorέ qualify as beneficiaries. The Village Assistance Committee presents the list to the community for validation. Complaints can be placed with the Ministry of Social Development.
	(those in the lowest income quintile) that are (no able-bodied adults aged 19-64, or a dependency ratio higher than 3). This covers 10% of households nationally.	Data is collected from households and entered into a Management Information System (MIS). A list of households ranked by vulnerability status is presented to a community meeting for confirmation. Amendments are entered into the MIS and a final ranking is approved at a District level Social Support Committee meeting.

Households are not straightforward structures but differ considerably in form. In Lesotho, rural households are traditionally extended units comprising the (male) head of household, their male descendants, wives and unmarried female offspring of labour the next. Children are frequently moved between households of an extended family, which may reside in close proximity or at a distance. In Malawi, some children were moved between closely related family households, and sometimes even registered as part of more than one household, apparently in order to capture cash transfers. More dramatically, households split and reform over time. When mud brick houses collapse (a common occurrence in the Malawi village), matrilineally related households in close proximity absorb the residents until a new structure is completed Cash transfers cannot keep pace with such rapid changes (see Box 4 for changes in membership of the beneficiary households in the Malawi village during the course of the research).

1	Son moved out, granddaughter moved in
2	Recipient died, granddaughter moved out to stay with parents, taking cash transfer with her
3	Daughter and grandchildren moved out having rebuilt their house
4	Great grandmother died, two grandchildren moved out, one grandchild moved in
5	Adult daughter moved out
6	No change (but 7-year-old daughter stays with grandmother elsewhere)
7	Two grandsons moved out when they married
8	The elderly couple moved into the village from a neighbouring village

Rural households, particularly in Lesotho, are often supported by family members who live and work elsewhere (given the lack of paid employment available locally). Remittances from such individuals [illegible] members living abroad or in paid employment, but these are easily hidden if they stay elsewhere. Moreover, remittances are often sporadic and unreliable, hence including them in assessments of household resources is problematic.

officials recording such changes in households are also the distributors of transfers, people are suspicious that any funds they cease to claim will be embezzled. In Malawi, households that were allocated cash transfers based on the presence of an elderly person, continued to claim that transfer [illegible] individuals continued to receive a transfer, in some instances leading to battles over its ‘inheritance’ (see Box 5).[1]

Households are seldom simple units of consumption. Income is shared, but not exclusively among those identified as household members. In matrilineal southern Malawi, for instance, men talk of obligations toward their natal families that may outweigh those toward their own wives and children. Moreover, sharing among co-resident household members may be uneven, depending partly on the kinship relations. Elderly people often feel an obligation to their grandchildren, but not to their own adult children (who traditionally should support the elderly rather than receiving from them). Younger people may be responsible for older kin, irrespective of whether they reside together. Parents have obligations toward their children, irrespective of whether the children stay with kin elsewhere. Moreover, different social norms apply to the spending of different types of money so it cannot be assumed that cash transfers will be shared in the same way as earned income, for which a person has ‘sweated’.

Unsurprisingly, the households in receipt of targeted cash transfers were not unequivocally the most [illegible] [illegible]olds currently receiving the grant. In both settings, application of a Multi-dimensional Poverty Index

[1] Pseudonyms are used and photographs are illustrative only: they do not portray the individuals profiled.

identified a different set of households as deserving (Box 6).

Community perceptions of deservingness play an influence in community-based targeting. In Malawi, for instance, 7 of the 8 households initially targeted were headed by individuals aged 60 or over. This reflects a view that younger adults are undeserving of

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Unemployed members of the community, including all those are excluded from social cash transfers, should be given jobs.
People with disabilities should automatically be included in the social cash transfer programmes.
Pensions should be increased because the elderly are not only individual recipients, but they also care for orphans, grandchildren and disabled family members.
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Overall, the research we have discussed points to five policy-relevant conclusions:

In both countries, households are fluid, with individuals and resources constantly flowing in and out. Many cash transfer recipients receive remittances from migrant family members. Moreover, households are not bounded units of consumption. In southern Malawi, the typically small nuclear households are often closely connected through kinship and material ties to other, sometimes more prosperous, households located very nearby. Children may be moved between them to capture grants. Changes in circumstance are seldom reported: in Malawi, three recipients had ώinheritedέ transfers, despite substantial changes in household membership, following the death of a beneficiary. Even where selection criteria are initially applied as intende

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Transform 2017 Selection and Identification in Social Protection Programmes

An ESRC-DFID-funded three-year collaborative research project (ES/M009076/1)

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