



Benchmarking a Child Nutrition Program to Cash Transfers

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Craig McIntosh and Andrew Zeitlin

Evidence to Action Symposium



A woman wearing a hijab and a patterned dress is sitting on the floor of a market stall. She is surrounded by various goods, including baskets of produce, bags of rice, and other items. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. On the right side, there is a large, stylized target graphic with concentric circles. The text "The logic of cash benchmarking" is written in a bold, yellow font across the center of the image.

The logic of cash benchmarking

Cash vs kind



Photo credit: Andrew Aitchison / Getty via Vox.com

“Given the state of current research, neither of us can say definitively whether livestock or cash is better — or under what circumstances one might be better than the other. But the answer is in easy reach if only someone would conduct a thorough experiment to test the two approaches. It is irresponsible of us not to do so.”

Chris Blattman, Open letter to Bill Gates, [Vox](#), [March 2017](#)

Cash as benchmark



SNAPSHOT October 12, 2015

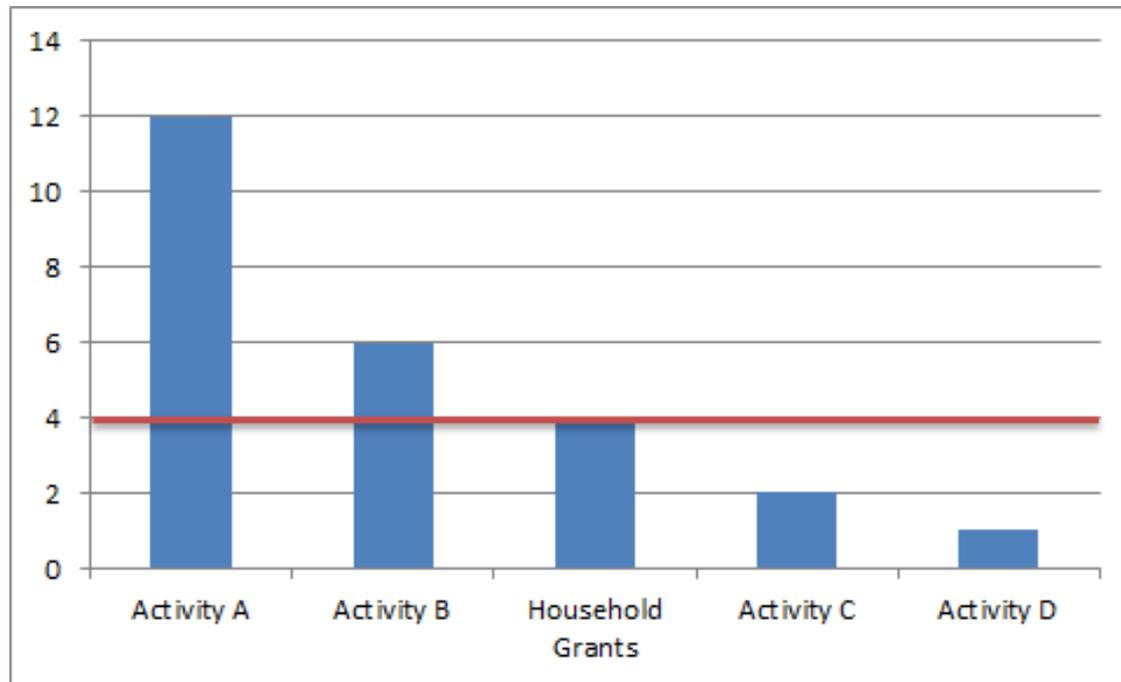
Economic Develop...

Worth Every Cent

To Help the Poor, Give Them Cash

By Michael Faye, Paul Niehaus, and Christopher Blattman

Cost-effectiveness 'hurdle rates' for specific outcome dimensions



Nuances, pt. 1

Multiple dimensions of impact

Typical development programs have objectives and impacts over **multiple dimensions** of beneficiaries' lives.

No reason to expect that cash will reflect 'best practice' or dominate a specific alternative on all dimensions.

Benchmarking lays bare the **tradeoffs implicit in policymakers' choices.**

Nuances, pt. 2

Fixed expenditure per beneficiary?

'Strict' benchmarking: hold beneficiary population and expenditure per household fixed.

Broader notions recognize that cost-effectiveness may not be maximized for the same expenditure/capita and targeting rules.

If so, policymakers will face tradeoffs that will depend not just on average effects but on the *distribution* of impacts.

A **secondary objective** of our work is to learn about how features of transfer design and value contribute to the cost-effectiveness of cash for specific outcomes.

So why benchmark with *cash*?

In a world of multiple programmatic objectives, it may not be possible to establish a global 'best practice'.

Cash features:

- Low costs of delivery
- Evidence of efficacy (at least in the short term, and at least for direct recipients)
- Potential to leverage beneficiary knowledge of needs & solutions
- Revealed preferences -- subject to market, intra-household, and behavioral constraints.



Study Design

Policy Question: Household Grants or In-Kind Program?

Intensive Multi-Faceted Programming

- Might be effective by addressing multiple challenges at once
- Aims to increase both supply and demand for health promoting services
- Nutrition + water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions

Unconditional HH Grants

- Overhead on HH grants is low, especially with mobile money
- Instead of comparing expensive programs to nothing, why not compare to equivalent amounts of grants?
- Grants allows beneficiaries to make decisions that reflect their own priorities

Gikuriro

Integrated Nutrition and WASH Program

- Aims to promote better nutrition and health through:
 - **Village nutrition schools**, growth monitoring and promotion by trained community health workers
 - **Community health clubs**, access to improved latrines and hand-washing facilities
 - **Farmer Field Learning Schools**, distribution of seeds and livestock
 - **Savings** and Internal Lending Communities
 - **Nutrition- and WASH-related** capacity development and training to district government employees and health workers
- Two cohorts of enrollees augmented by newly eligibles over time
- Administered by Catholic Relief Services, in consortium with the Netherlands Development Organization, SNV, funded by USAID

Unconditional Household Grants

- **Household grants**, typically with no conditions on how the money can be spent (beyond standard non-permissible uses), to eligible households via **mobile money**
- In this evaluation, households received one of two forms of grant:
 - **HH grant equally sized** to the the anticipated cost of the Gikuriro program (which was far lower than the typical GiveDirectly grant in other contexts)
 - **Larger grant** sized to be as cost-effective as possible given costs of administering cash transfers
- Administered by GiveDirectly and funded by USAID and Google.org



Program Eligibility

Both programs were administered to vulnerable households, defined by Gikuriro as:

- **Criterion 1:** Households in with a malnourished child
- **Criterion 2:** Households in the poorest poverty categories (Ubudehe 1 or 2) with children under the age of five
- **Criterion 3:** Households in poorest poverty categories (Ubudehe 1 or 2) with a pregnant or lactating mother



Costing

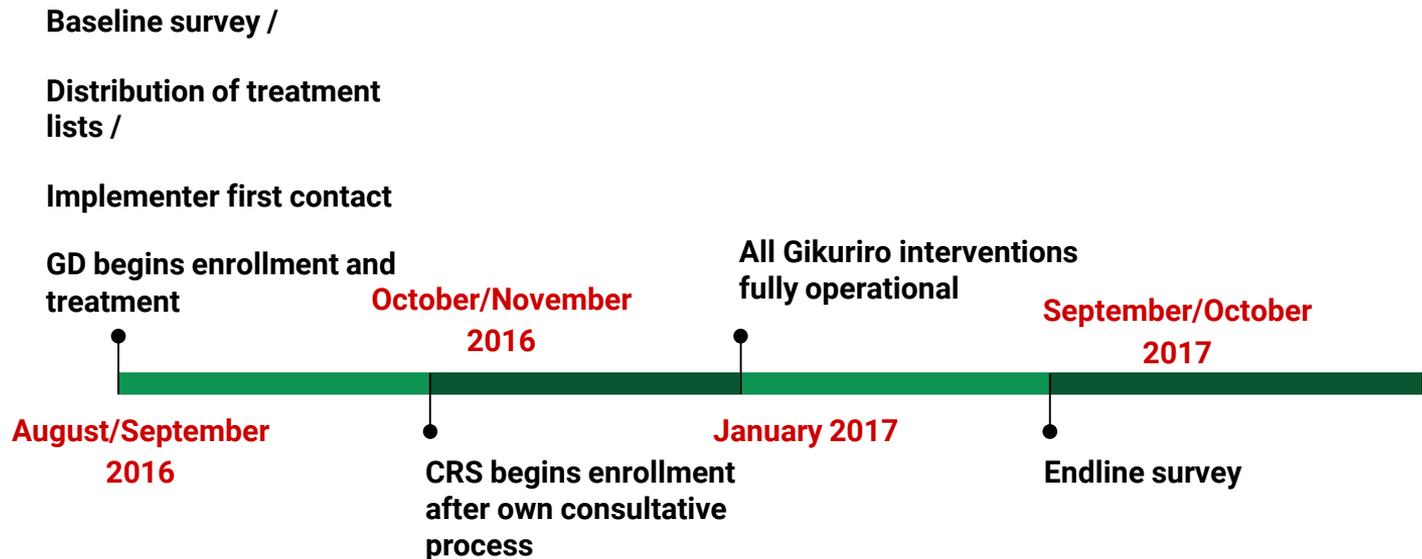
- **Pre-program cost estimates from Catholic Relief Services**
- **No M&E**
- **Scaled**
- **Holding total costs to USAID constant**
- **Regression results adjusted based on actual costs**

Research design

- Gikuriro arm, Household Grants arms (4 amounts), control randomized at village level.
- Identical sampling of eligible and ineligible households across all study villages

	Control	Gikuriro	Household Grants			Total
			Small transfers (cost to USAID / received)			
			Lower transfer \$66 / \$41	Middle transfer \$111 / \$84	Upper transfer \$145 / \$117	Large transfer \$567 / \$532
	74 villages	74 villages	22 villages	22 villages	22 villages	34 villages
						248 villages
Ineligible Households	298	297	88	87	88	137
Eligible Households	521	541	165	154	167	246
						1,794

Implementation timeline



Scope of study

- Study evaluates short-run impacts on the first cohort of Gikuriro beneficiaries and household grants recipients
- Not studying life of project impact of Gikuriro or impact of a multi-year household grants program
- Reflects majority of resources devoted to that cohort, but not impacts of longer program treatment

- But remember the first 1,000 days!

Results

A sepia-toned photograph of a river scene. In the foreground, a person is bent over, washing something in the water. In the middle ground, a motorcycle is being washed, and several people are standing in the water. In the background, a group of people is gathered on the bank. The river flows over a low concrete dam. The background is filled with lush tropical vegetation, including palm trees. A large, semi-transparent graphic of concentric circles is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Results – Primary Outcomes

	Gikuriro	Cost-equivalent transfer	Large transfer
	Cost equivalent benchmarking		
Per capita monthly consumption			*** 32% increase
HH Dietary Diversity			*** .52 food groups increase
Total household wealth			
Maternal or Child Anemia			
Height-for-Age			** .09 SD
Weight-for-Age			* .07 SD
Mid-Upper Arm Circumference			*.13 SD

Results – Secondary Outcomes

	Gikuriro	Cost-equivalent transfer	Large transfer
	Cost equivalent benchmarking		
Borrowing		** 73% decrease	
Saving	** 109% increase		* 60% increase
Health Knowledge			
Sanitation Practices			
Productive Assets		*** 30% increase	*** 76% increase
Consumption Assets		** 40% increase	*** 92% increase
House Value			*** 20% increase
House Quality			

Results – Secondary Outcomes

	Gikuriro	Cost-equivalent transfer	Large transfer
	Cost equivalent benchmarking		
Child mortality			*** 68% rate decrease
Pregnancy			
Live Birth			
Births in facilities			
Vaccinations in the past year			
Vaccinations complete			
Disease Burden			
Diarrheal Prevalence			

Treatment Arm Takeaways

13 months after baseline

Integrated Nutrition and WASH Program

- Affected outcome tied to specific component of the intervention the (i.e. savings groups)
- No detectable effect on primary indicators of anemia, dietary diversity, child growth in the study timeframe

Cost-Equivalent Cash Transfers

- Boosted investment, consumption, reduced household debt
- No detectable effect on primary indicators of anemia, dietary diversity, child growth in the study timeframe

Larger Cash Transfers

- Decreased stunting, improved MUAC and WAZ
- Reduced child mortality, improved dietary diversity
- Dramatic improvements in household economic outcomes

Discussion



Cash Benchmarking Conclusions

1) When a program **targets** its interventions at a certain set of behaviors, it can **shift key indicators tied to these behaviors**.

- i.e. Gikuriro savings groups

2) Significant differences across interventions highlight **policy tradeoffs** for cost-equivalent options.

- Savings vs. debt reduction, productive assets, consumption assets

3) The **size of a household grant matters**

- tradeoff between scale and intensity is a feature of both cash & in-kind