

A qualitative evaluation of a conditional cash transfer programme in Mexico: recipients' perspectives of long-term results

Uma avaliação qualitativa de um programa de transferência condicional de renda no México: perspectivas dos beneficiários sobre os resultados a longo prazo

Una evaluación cualitativa de un programa de transferencias monetarias condicionadas en México: perspectivas de resultados a largo plazo de los beneficiarios

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The Mexican conditional cash transfer programme (CCT), *Prospera*, was a leading poverty reduction strategy for over two decades. The programme, under the framework of CCT programmes, had two objectives with differing time horizons, short term alleviation of income poverty and a longer-term objective of breaking intergenerational poverty. The aim of this paper is to explore the recipients' perspectives in relation to the CCT programme in Mexico and whether they perceived it achieved its long-term objectives. A qualitative method was adopted with 47 interviews conducted with recipients with over 15 years enrolment in the programme. Analysis results suggested that the recipients were aware of the long-term objectives of the programme, understanding education being key to breaking intergenerational poverty, and that they felt the programme had enabled children of recipients to break from cycles of poverty. The paper sought to highlight the value of qualitative evaluations to form part of future evaluations in measuring the long-term success of CCT programmes.

Keywords: Conditional Cash Transfers; Mexico; *Prospera*; Social Protection.**RESUMO**

O programa mexicano de transferência condicionada de renda (TMC), *Prospera*, foi uma das principais estratégias de redução da pobreza por mais de duas décadas. O programa, no âmbito dos programas TMC, tinha dois objetivos com diferentes horizontes de tempo, alívio de curto prazo da pobreza de renda e um objetivo de longo prazo de acabar com a pobreza intergeracional. O objetivo deste artigo é explorar as perspectivas dos destinatários em relação ao programa TMC no México e se eles perceberam que ele alcançou seus objetivos de longo prazo. Foi adotado um método qualitativo com 47 entrevistas realizadas com beneficiários com mais de 15 anos de inscrição no programa. Os resultados da análise sugeriram que os beneficiários estavam cientes dos objetivos de longo prazo do programa, entendendo que a educação é a chave para quebrar a pobreza intergeracional, e que eles sentiram que o programa permitiu que os filhos dos beneficiários quebrassem os ciclos de pobreza. O documento procurou destacar o valor das avaliações qualitativas para fazer parte de avaliações futuras na medição do sucesso a longo prazo dos programas TMC.

Palavras-chave: Transferências Monetárias Condicionadas; México; Próspera; Proteção social.**RESUMEN**

El programa mexicano de transferencias monetarias condicionadas (TMC), *Prospera*, fue una estrategia líder en la reducción de la pobreza durante más de dos décadas. El programa, en el marco de los programas de TMC, tenía dos objetivos con diferentes horizontes temporales, el alivio a corto plazo de la pobreza de ingresos y un objetivo a más largo plazo de acabar con la pobreza intergeneracional. El objetivo de este artículo es explorar las perspectivas de los beneficiarios en relación con el programa de TMC en México y si percibieron que logró sus objetivos a largo plazo. Se adoptó un método cualitativo con 47 entrevistas realizadas a beneficiarios con más de 15 años de inscripción en el programa. Los resultados del análisis sugirieron que los beneficiarios eran conscientes de los objetivos a largo plazo del programa, que entendían que la educación era clave para acabar con la pobreza intergeneracional y que sentían que el programa había permitido a los hijos de los beneficiarios romper los ciclos de pobreza. El documento buscaba resaltar el valor de las evaluaciones cualitativas para formar parte de futuras evaluaciones para medir el éxito a largo plazo de los programas de TMC.

Palabras clave: Transferencias monetarias condicionales; México; *Prospera*; Protección social.**ARTICLE HISTORY****Received:** 19-04-2023**Revised Version:** 26-09-2023**Accepted:** 26-09-2023**Published:** 30-10-2023**Copyright:** © 2023 by the authors**License:** CC BY-NC-ND 4.0**Manuscript type:** Article**ARTICLE INFORMATIONS****Science-Metrix Classification (Domain):**

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Main practical implications:Long-term outcomes of the *Prospera* programme according to recipients of the programme offering a qualitative approach to programme outcomes.**Originality/value:**A non-econometric presentation of outcomes of the *Prospera* programme according to recipients who were enrolled in the programme for a minimum of 10 years.

INTRODUCTION

Since their inception in the 1990s in Latin America, Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes (CCTs) have become a key policy in tackling global issues of poverty and inequality. Their diffusion has been rapid, particularly in Latin America where versions of CCTs have been implemented in 19 of the 23 countries in the region (Sugiyama, 2011) but have also spread to Asia and Africa. The CCT programmes vary in design but they generally provide cash transfers to eligible households; the transfers are distributed conditional on positive behavioural changes made by that household. Unlike traditional social assistance programmes, CCTs set their objectives over different time horizons, with the attached conditions seeking to induce increased demand for educational and health services amongst poor households. Although the cash transfer does act as short term poverty alleviation via income boosts to the household, the primary objective of these programmes is a reduction in intergenerational transmission of poverty. Fostering human capital accumulation is not only an objective of CCT programmes but a priority in development. Such capital accumulation through education and utilisation of health and nutritional services is important for breaking intergenerational poverty traps (Barham et al, 1995; Levine and Jellema, 2007). Conditional cash transfer programmes aspire to prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty by encouraging positive behavioural change and enabling human capital accumulation through improved usage of health and educational services for the poor.

The Mexican CCT programme, Prospera, has been used as a model of a successful anti-poverty programme (Lustig, 2011) yet as the programme reaches new milestones, a more nuanced evaluation from the academic sphere is questioning its ability to break intergenerational transmission (Winters and Chiodi, 2011; Yaschine, 2012). But the evaluations surrounding the debate on whether Prospera is able to fulfil its primary objective have failed to incorporate feedback from individuals and households enrolled into the programme. As research strategies in CCT studies are mostly undertaken by economists, considerable use of econometric models are employed in attempts to identify causal links between CCTs and social outcomes (Simoes and Soares, 2012). Typically, CCT programmes, like Prospera, are understood principally in terms of their material impacts on the recipient - if the cash transfer has resulted in significant positive impacts upon material measurements, it is largely regarded as positive overall (MacAuslan and Roemenschneider, 2011). Feedback from and the experiences of CCT recipients are often neglected in quantitative impact assessment studies seeking to evaluate whether the programmes are meeting their intended objectives (Kudat et al., 2006; Teater, 2011). A number of studies have undertaken qualitative analyses of CCTs (Molyneux, 2006; Molyneux and Thomson, 2011; Ramirez, 2020) but have been outweighed by a focus on quantitative research. Molyneux (2008) highlighted how recipients of CCTs programmes should have a voice in design, implementation, and evaluation of these programmes. However, in a follow up of her work, examining CCT programmes in Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador, that there was little sign of principles of empowerment and evaluation being mainstreamed into the programmes (Molyneux and Thomson, 2011). Findings from qualitative studies such as those by Adato (2008) also highlighted that the perspectives and understandings of the objectives of CCTs often differed significantly from those of the designers of the programmes. This paper seeks to provide a platform for some form of evaluation directly driven by the recipients of Mexican CCT programme. The aim of this paper is to evaluate to what extent the Mexican Prospera programme is achieving its long-term objective of reducing intergenerational transmission of poverty, using qualitative research methods. This study specifically addresses key issues necessary for evaluating the long-term trajectories of the programmes; knowledge of CCT objectives from the viewpoint of recipients; impacts upon human capital accumulation, specifically impacts on health and education outcomes; determining whether children are genuine beneficiaries of the programme; and identifying social barriers to the programmes' effectiveness and success.

Conditional Cash Transfer programmes emerged in the late 1990s with the intention of alleviating poverty, both immediate and the transmission of intergenerational poverty, through investing in human capital by increasing the demand for basic social services. Unlike traditional forms of social assistance programmes in which eligibility for cash benefits is dependant only on socio-economic necessity, CCTs are given to eligible households contingent on positive behaviours which improve human capital accumulation. They manoeuvre poor households to utilise basic social services via two distinct steps. The first is to remove barriers to access of these services¹. This is done by providing the cash to offset against the costs of social services. The programmes seek to stimulate demand for these services and thus invest in health and education by providing a cash incentive which can reduce the direct costs associated with these services. The second step is to attach 'conditionalities' or 'co-responsibilities' to the income transfer in order to prompt utilisation of services.

A general recognition from these evaluations is that CCTs have demonstrated multiple positive effects upon socio-economic outcomes. These have included increased primary and secondary enrolment in school (Behrman et al, 2011; Bourguignon et al 2003; Rawlings and Rubio, 2005), improvements in nutrition and health indicators amongst children in recipient households (Gertler, 2004; Rawlings, 2005), significant positive effects upon height and weight of recipient children

¹ Whereas CCTs remove barriers to access of services, it is worthy of note that a combination of CCT with efficient supply-side interventions is required to maximise effects (Ranganathan and Lagarde, 2012).

(Gertler, 2004), a reduction in child labour (Attanasio, et al, 2010) and a fall in poverty levels (Soares et al, 2010). The central objective of CCT programmes to prevent intergenerational transmission of poverty is where the programmes attract the greatest enthusiasm. Human capital accumulation has been shown to be key in breaking intergenerational poverty traps (Levine and Jellema, 2007), therefore the way in which policies can encourage capital accumulation for children within the poorer socio-economic cohort has become a priority for development agendas (Oke and Suliaman, 2012). The main difference between CCTs and UCTs (Unconditional Cash Transfers) is that CCTs provide cash contingent on certain behavioural requirements, for example a minimum school attendance threshold. In a meta-analysis of 76 reports analysing CCTs and UCTs, Baird et al (2013) found that effect sizes for school enrolment and attendance are always larger for CCT programmes compared to UCT but the difference was not significant. In Latin America CCTs are more widely implemented than UCTs (Haman, 2019), hence the focus on CCTs in this paper. If CCTs can demonstrate that their short-term effects can translate into longer-term successes, they may offer a solution to what has become a key policy question for developing countries; how to break intergenerational transmission of poverty.

The Prospera programme has been widely supported since its implementation and strength of the programme is that it has been subject to regular evaluations which were intrinsic to the programme's design. Short-term snapshots of data have shown significant impacts from the programme in nutrition and health (Fernald et al, 2009; Ramirez-Silva, et al, 2013). Prospera has also led to higher school enrolment rates in both rural and urban areas resulting in an improvement in education levels (Parker and Todd, 2017; Parker, Rubalcava, and Teruel, 2009). The increase in enrolment has also resulted in a reduction in child labour rates (Skoufias and Parker, 2001) and delayed reproductive age by extending school enrolment of girls (Gonzalez de la Rocha, 2008). In terms of its impact on income distribution, Campos Vazquez et al (2016) found that Prospera was responsible for a direct effect equivalent to 1/5 of the decline in Mexican Gini-coefficient between 1996 and 2006. Todd et al (2010) found that Prospera relaxed liquidity constraints for households and improved their productive activities.

Looking at the evidence from authors concerning short-term and long-term effects of Prospera, it is apparent that most academic interest has focused on short-term econometric impacts. The research into longer-term effects is limited but includes the following; Saucedo Delgado et al (2018) conducted a longitudinal analysis of Prospera with panel data from the Mexican Family Life Survey and they concluded the long-term effectiveness of the programme in tackling poverty was doubtful. They found that utilisation of health and education services was not sustainable in the long-term by poor households thus challenging the assumption of an accumulation of human capital. Conversely, Tirado-Alcaraz (2014) analysed Prospera's influence in alleviating rural poverty using a balanced panel and applied a regression model. His results suggested that the programme did impact poverty in the long-term as the ratio of monthly household income to food poverty line was higher for participating households. Longer-term utilisation of basic services has also been reported with positive effects upon the resulting human capital accumulation (de Brauw and Hoddinott, 2011; de Janvry et al, 2006). The evidence however is entirely drawn from quantitative evaluations of the programme neglecting any qualitative assessments.

This study aims to add to existing literature by collecting the experiences and perspectives of recipients and administrators assessing the long-term objectives of Prospera.² With some programmes now implemented for over two decades, there has been considerable opportunity to evaluate their impacts. However this has been limited mostly to measuring the short-term effects. Recently UNICEF (2018) has called for more mixed-method evaluations, particularly for measurement of longer-term outcomes. As it stands very little is known of the long-term success or otherwise of the programmes and whether human capital accumulation amongst recipients of Prospera is contributing to a reduction in intergenerational transmission of poverty. This study seeks to address the long-term outcomes problem by presenting social research which gives expression to the experiences and perspectives of recipients of CCT programmes. Fisher et al (2017) has suggested that whilst some qualitative research has been conducted, the primary focus of these studies has not been on the recipients' perspectives of the long-term impacts of CCTs. The findings of this study may provide useful insights into the progress of the Mexican Prospera programme and how far its objectives are being realised. This could be beneficial to Mexican policymakers in assessing the success of the programme by other than purely quantitative measurements whilst also useful for academic research in detecting underlying social mechanisms extrapolated from recipient viewpoints.

At the time of Prospera's implementation, one in every five Mexicans was living in extreme poverty, figures which were higher in the rural areas of the country, and 40% of the extreme poor were children (Levy and Rodriguez, 2005). Levy (2007) in his design of the initial programme said that the poverty figures, added to the inefficiency of the federal government's approach to reduce poverty, required a programme aimed at alleviating poverty in the short term as well as the long-term. The short-term strategy was for the cash transfers to alleviate poverty through redistribution of income, whilst the long-term was to introduce extended benefits for Mexico's poor, ensuring enrolled households would 'have access to sufficient levels of nutrition and healthcare, while they also benefited from the knowledge and capacities acquired through

² In terms of defining long-term, the paper considers ten years as a definition of long-term. This follows other papers covering long-term outcomes in CCTs (Behrman and Parker, 2008; Freije and Rodriguez, 2008)

adequate basic education' (Levy, 2007, p5). The objective of Prospera, as presented in the 2015 version of its Rules of Operation, is to 'strengthen the effective realization of social rights in order to enhance the capacity of people living in poverty, by means of actions which better develop their capacity in terms of access to food, healthcare and education, and to other dimensions of well-being to contribute to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty' (SEDESOL, 2014, p5). Households only receive their cash transfer if the members of the household comply with the co-responsibilities of the programme (health and nutrition – attending appointments and planned workshops. Education – attendance at school on a consistent basis).

METHODS

The study sought to evaluate the Prospera CCT programme using qualitative data collected during field work in Mexico between February 2017 and June 2017. The data collected was a snapshot of the experiences of recipients and Prospera front-line officers interviewed as follow up interviews were not conducted.

Data used in this analysis was generated from research conducted by the researcher with no external sources of funding. It was decided not to approach the Prospera National Coordination Office directly in order to avoid any possibility of selection bias which may have stemmed from influence from the federal or state Prospera officers. The Prospera National Coordination Officer was made aware of the study intentions but was not involved in the sampling procedures of participants in the study. The field research was conducted in three locations; two municipalities in Estado de Mexico (Xalatlaco and Valle del Chalco) and one municipality in Chihuahua state (Ciudad de Juarez). Random sampling using recipient lists provided by the Mexican Department for Family Affairs (DIF) was not possible due to inconsistent information in the lists and to the difficulty in arranging interviews based on agreed scheduling owing to the failure of participants to attend. The study adopted the use of gatekeepers who introduced the researcher to Prospera *vocales* and Prospera Service Officers, arranged attendance at Prospera meetings and at distribution centres where the researcher could approach potential participants about the study. The gatekeepers were members of the Community Promotion Committee and represent the recipient community³. Prospera Service officers were also approached during these visits. The gatekeeper facilitated follow up house visits to individuals who had been approached in order to secure consent from those willing to take part in the study. Officials from the Prospera programme were not involved nor did they participate in any data collection during the fieldwork. This was to ensure no interference from the programme which could endanger findings and also to establish an understanding with participants that the research was an entirely separate entity to the CCT programme itself. The findings of one focus group were discarded as it was later discovered that a Prospera official in the programme had posed as a recipient in order to manipulate the findings.

The methods of data collection primarily focused on semi-structured interviews which were conducted with recipients and representatives of the Prospera programme (*vocales* and service officers). The total number of semi-structured interviews was 49 and the data was supplemented with eight focus groups which were completed with the number of participants in each group ranging from five to seven. Of the total interviews, 38 were with recipients of the Prospera programme, and the remaining 11 were conducted with Prospera representatives (*Vocales*, n=4 and Service Officers, n=7). In terms of gender ratios of the sample, all semi-structured interviews with Prospera recipients were female (n=38). This was due to female heads of households being the recipients of the cash transfer as per Prospera programme stipulations. The gender ratio of Prospera representative interviewees was predominantly female (female n=9, male n=2). Of the total number of participants attending focus groups (n=44), the majority of these were female (n=41) which was again due to the female heads of households being the focus of the programme and those who attended health clinics and Prospera locations. For the focus groups, 3 males did attend as requested by their partners who were in attendance of the focus group.

The data was collected from adults over 18 years of ages who had consented to participate; no children were interviewed for the study. Age was asked for the purposes of confirming eligibility but was not recorded so an average of the age of participants was not recorded. To be eligible for the purpose of analysis, only participants who were still enrolled in the programme but also had been recipients of the programme for a minimum of 15 years were included. This was due to those being currently enrolled were accessible via the sampling technique adopted by the study and the minimum period of enrolment was utilised to ensure that recipients had longer-term experiences of the programme. The latter was clarified by those recipients who confirmed they were enrolled when the programme changed its name from Progresá to Oportunidades (2002).

³ Community Promotion Committees (CPC) and the Single Spokespersons (SiSp) 43 are also appointed to represent the beneficiary community. Their main aims are to: i) inform and provide guidance to the beneficiaries they represent, and to share the aims of the program; ii) monitor the beneficiary homes closely to ensure that there will be an improvement in their health, education and food conditions; iii) represent them before Prospera, local and municipal authorities or other institutions; iv) conduct proceedings for the benefit of their community to implement productive or social projects; and v) carry out actions to strengthen social oversight (Davila Larraga, 2016).

The semi-structured interviews and focus groups were open for wide discussion of topics but the general guide laid out for the researcher followed questions which addressed perceptions related to; understanding of the objectives of CCTs, perspectives on the actual impacts of the programme upon human capital accumulation indicators, whether children of households enrolled in the programme were benefitting from the programme, what barriers existed to the programme fulfilling its potential, and other factors which the recipients considered relevant or they wished to discuss in their individual evaluation of Prospera.

Interviews were transcribed and translated by the researcher together with the notes and any additional supplementary information in order to maximise the clarity of the transcriptions. Open coding was used to identify concepts and themes within the data. The analysis then implemented axial coding to further refine the concepts which had previously been developed until themes emerged from within the data. The process meant that major themes were produced from the data in line with selective coding following techniques developed by Strauss and Corbin (2008). The collection, transcription, translation, coding and analysis were all conducted by the author.

RESULTS

Knowledge of Prospera Objectives

Overall there was a clear understanding by recipients that the Prospera programme was a policy approach to help those within the poor socio-economic cohort of Mexican people. They also demonstrated an understanding of the educational, health and nutrition benefits of the programme and why they had been included in the programme. Conditionality was understood and there was a majority understanding that if these conditions were not met, the cash transfers would be withdrawn. There was confusion amongst recipients as to the source of the Prospera programme, some believing that it was not apolitical and was linked to the incumbent governmental administration and thus vulnerable to withdrawal if a new administration took power. This misperception was exacerbated through reports by some recipients who claimed front-line officers were pushing a political agenda and proclaiming that the Prospera programme or its funds would be withdrawn if recipients did not vote in a certain manner.

"You see a lot of people think that they have to vote for PRI (Ruling party - *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*/Institutional Revolutionary Party) they think if they do not than Prospera will end. A lot of people here think that way." – Prospera Recipient, Female.

"I have seen it before. We have been in the line waiting (for cash transfer delivery) and the Prospera people have been walking along the line telling people they can only have the money if they vote for PRI in the local elections. They told if we did not, we would not receive anything (cash transfer) next time." – Prospera Recipient, Female.

The confusion over the origin of the cash transfers has been reported with CCTs elsewhere; Yildirim et al (2014) found similar uncertainties reported by recipients of the Turkish CCT. Whilst other studies have not reported clear findings from recipient feedback, quantitative studies have shown that CCTs do have immediate electoral rewards for incumbent administrations (De la O, 2013) although this does not necessarily lead to long-term attachment to a single party or particular politician (Zucco Jr, 2013). And this research certainly suggests that the organisation of Prospera is not as transparently apolitical as is outlined in the CCT standard operating procedure guidelines. When recipients referred to government influence and the Prospera programme as a whole, they regularly referred to these entities interchangeably between a federal, state and municipal level. This perhaps represents misunderstanding on behalf of the recipients or could represent that they understand the differing levels of influence of the programme. Regarding their testimonies regarding political manoeuvring, since the programme's closure, it has been highlighted that many municipal level Prospera agents were manipulating political participation at a state and federal level (Kidd, 2019).

Whilst the majority of recipients of the programme understood that the cash transfer had conditions attached which were requirements for the continued enrolment in the programme, a number indicated that they saw the transfer as unconditional;

"The programme has been a big help. Now we have the money that we can send our children to school, the money allows us to afford the things they need. Uniform, bags, utensils, do you know? We hope Prospera continues so we can afford to still send our children to school." – Prospera Recipient, Female.

The responses may have alluded to the fact that the income transfer was for the purpose of decreasing the costs associated with school attendance, but from observations, it appeared that the recipient viewed school enrolment as something they could now afford rather than a co-responsibility which was a requirement if they wanted to continue within the programme. If this is the case, it would appear to contradict the assumption that recipients may spend their money on temptation goods (John, 2008) if conditions were not attached. Of those who were aware of the conditions of the programme, they in turn informed their children of the nature of the programme and conditions attached to the cash transfer. This ultimately brought the children in as active participants and proactively sought to continue education without absenteeism.

"The progress depends on them [enrolled children] they know the better marks they get the more scholarship money they will receive. My son is always telling me 'I have to work hard mum, this will get me an extra 1000 pesos, so another 1000 pesos for university.'" – Prospera Recipient, Female.

"He told me that he knew he had to go to school and he knew he had to get good grades because otherwise we would not receive Prospera anymore. We do not pressure him but he understands it is important too." – Prospera Recipient, Female

Recipients reported on their relationship with front-line officers of the Prospera programme. A majority said their relationship was effectual or that they had a good relationship with Prospera, with only two respondents reporting that they had a strained relationship. However this relationship was generally associated with the targeting of the programme and not with the conditions and monitoring of the programme.

Awareness of the objectives of the Prospera programme was generally high amongst recipients interviewed. They understood that the programme was there to 'help the poor' and not a blanket welfare system open to all applicants. Whilst the respondents generally knew the overall objectives of Prospera, many believed that the short-term objectives were the priority of the programme. The recipients demonstrated an understanding of the long-term objectives of the Prospera programme even if they did recognize them as the priority; a number of participants highlighted the change in opportunities the programme had brought about in comparison to their own childhood opportunities. Long-term objectives were less frequently mentioned by interviewees yet of those who did, the majority recognised children as the principal beneficiaries of the programme. This is an interesting finding as the only other study which examined the perspectives of recipients with regards to the impact of a CCT was Oduenyi et al (2019) in their study of the Nigerian CCT programme. The study was specifically looking at health and the recipients largely reported satisfaction at the immediate improvement in health status of their communities. But whilst their study may have not explored the long-term perceived benefits, their findings suggest that the recipients did understand that the programme had objectives over differing time horizons.

"To me it has helped us. My children now have a different rhythm to life than before. They had seen the change, and they live different to how I have had to live." – Prospera Recipient, Female.

"It is an amazing example for us as parents and to other children that we are capable of becoming someone and no longer having to stay at the level you were. It has been a massive help. The children, they have a brighter future, more opportunities." – Prospera Recipient, Female.

Respondents were asked if they felt they had enough access to information regarding the objectives of the programme. Of the respondents who addressed this question, nearly all of them said they had access to Prospera officials to confirm any misunderstandings. Many of the participants said that they regularly discussed the programme with friends, neighbours and other recipients and this was the best method for learning about amendments to Prospera. Service officers of the programme reported being confident that the majority of recipients fully understood the programme and the conditions attached.

"They are reminded at regular schedules of the requirements of the programme. The teachers where their children attend are required to sign documentation of proof of attendance. The same at health check-ups. They are fully informed and this happens consistently. I would be surprised if a single recipient did not understand the co-responsibilities (conditions) of Prospera." – Prospera Service Officer, Female.

All Prospera representatives interviewed were aware of the programme objectives and the conditions attached. Over half spoke with clarity that the programme was apolitical and not sourced by incumbent administrations. When asked about

the main objectives of the programme, nearly all respondents reported that children enrolled in the programme were the main beneficiaries and the objective was to alleviate intergenerational poverty.

Human Capital Accumulation

The respondents all recognised that the cash transfer the household received was primarily for children's educational needs. Respondents acknowledged that they did use cash transfers for basic consumption needs and highlighted that the money had enabled the family to eat more nutritiously. Nevertheless the majority of respondents did report that cash transfers were spent mainly on educational needs such as stationary, school books, uniforms and shoes.

"Well of course, because even though I think people see the cash transfer are important, it is actually only given in order to make the other aspects possible. If you cannot afford the necessities for school, this is why the programme includes these." – Prospera Recipient, Female

The respondents, both recipients of the programme and the Prospera representatives saw education as potentially the most valuable component for achieving the programme objectives. Many of the respondents spoke of how Prospera was initiating a desire to study and to aim for some social mobility.

"It gives them that desire to study, if it all works as it should it gives people hope, a desire to study and move forward in life." – Prospera recipient, Female

"I have my daughter and in her case, she can study thanks to the programme and she wants to keep studying and you have to keep that desire to keep studying and receiving the programme." - Prospera recipient, Female.

These responses align closely with the work by Garcia et al (2017) who analysed the impact of CCTs on educational aspirations of both parents and children. Whilst their study employed a quasi-experimental evaluation, they found a positive impact for educational aspirations for both children and parents. Parents were 10.9 and children 20.2 percentage points more likely to aspire to post-secondary education due to the programme. These findings were echoed in the sentiments of this study's respondents.

"My youngest always looks up to the eldest and where he is and he wants that too. I don't know if he would without the scholarship." - Prospera recipient, Female.

"Yes of course, it is hard work for them, now our children have university, if not they may have had children, that would have meant no more studying or university" - Prospera recipient, Female

Therefore the responses in this study appear to support the notion that Prospera can function to boost long-term educational impacts, as discussed in Garcia et al's (2017) study of the Mexican CCT. Parents reporting the increased aspirations of their children, and themselves recognising the programme's effect upon educational outcomes, indicate a widespread awareness of the importance of education in enabling long-term human capital accumulation.

The respondents also agreed that Prospera was having a significant impact upon their household's health and nutrition. They were aware that these were also key aspects for the long-term outcomes of the programme and a growth of human capital. The recipients of Prospera shared the view that the general health in their area had improved directly due to the programme and that health service utilisation had increased:

"All the members of the household, husband and children, so all of us, them too have to attend these appointments, because this also benefits us, because they check for any diseases or illness in the family, for us women too mammography and all this, and this helps us because we do need to help ourselves too, the alternative would be us trying to check these things and we never know what is maybe lacking or how we are ill." - Prospera recipient, Female.

As the above extract also demonstrates, the respondents were aware of the importance of healthcare, it wasn't just a co-responsibility where attendance was mandatory, it was an opportunity to improve the health of themselves and their

family. A supply side health provision meeting the demand-side, especially as one recipient pointed out 'I think the benefits for health for mothers and children is vital, because many of the recipients do not have easy access to the things you might take for granted'. This acknowledgement of the importance of health and nutrition also translated into awareness amongst respondents that it was part of the long-term investment in the human capital of children. Previous empirical research in Mexico has indicated that improved health and nutrition does translate into healthy generational outcomes (Rivera et al, 2004). The spending patterns and the perspectives of respondents which emerged from the qualitative analysis suggested that Prospera was positively affecting child nutrition leading to positive longer-term developments:

"We have been able to eat different things in the household, and not just rely on the same food every day, this has made not just the children happier, but me too. You can see the difference it makes, as they are happier and look forward to the meals." - Prospera recipient, Female.

"We want to make sure that, that the children are healthy and their nutrition is correct. It is important right? I mean they need to be strong, and the nutrition can help them concentrate and become better people." - Prospera recipient, Female.

Both these excerpts are supported by previous empirical research. The former highlights the findings by Leroy, et al (2009) that CCTs were positively affecting child nutrition and thus later physical development from systematic review. This followed from an increase in household income through the cash transfer having a positive effect on the quality of the household diet and nutrition. The second supports the assumptions of Ruel and Hoddinott (2008) who claim that good nutrition could prove to be essential to the physical and cognitive development of children. The respondent appears to support this notion, and suggests that the nutrition aspect to Prospera could be key to producing positive long term results from such interventions.

Long-term aspirations of recipients

As Prospera's long-term explicit objective is to break cycles of intergenerational poverty it is important to consider how the programme has influenced the aspirational mentality of recipients. This section explores how deeply recipients understood the long-term objectives of Prospera and how it contributed to their expectations of their children's social mobility. Similar to evaluations which look at the material impacts of the programmes, it is necessary to examine in some detail how recipients perceive the longer-term benefits of these programmes.

Prospera and the social and political narratives which accompany it, can influence aspirational changes among the recipients. Discussions on ending intergenerational poverty, encouraging social mobility, and promoting human capital investment may extend the aspirational expectations of recipient households. Ascertaining these aspirations in recipients, and whether they feel that expectations are being met or have been met, can give an indication of the prospects for success of the long-term objectives of Prospera. It was clear from the discussion with respondents, that their aspirations mirrored the discourses which accompanied the long-term objectives of the programme and the end to intergenerational poverty:

"It is for them, the children, the children more than anything because the programme is there for the children because the help is aimed at them more than anything. Their future." - Prospera recipient, Female

"The objective of the programme? The objective is the children, specifically girls, improved education, attendance, and then the health talks and interventions, its investing in the children, to improve their futures." - Prospera recipient, Female

The majority of the respondents in this study had relatively young children who were still in primary education and therefore long-term aspirations were a major facet of their understanding of the programme. These were largely positive, seeing education as a major facilitator of improved social mobility. However there were a number of respondents who had had children move through the programme and graduate and they therefore presented a unique perspective of the long-term success of the programme:

"Well I am blind, so it is almost impossible for me to work, I could have had to make my children stay at home, but like with other people I know, my son is at university now." - Prospera recipient, Female.

"Without the programme if I am honest, my son wouldn't have finished high school, he just didn't enjoy learning or school, but he has finished his studies now and he has a good career." - Prospera recipient, Female

This paper complements other recent evidence which has looked at the long-term impacts of CCT programmes. Molina Millan et al (2019) provide a comprehensive review of long-term CCT impacts and Parker and Vogl (2018) have looked specifically at Prospera and manipulated non-experimental national rollout to analyse the different long-term benefits of the programme. This research differs from the majority of these studies, as it has utilized a qualitative method rather than experimentally estimating absolute long-term impacts. The evidence base for qualitative long-term impacts is narrow, but it appears that a number of the recipients enrolled in Prospera did feel that their aspirations had been successfully achieved via the educational achievements of their children.

Educational investments are key to the human capital-based Prospera design and it appears that respondents have also internalised the importance of education into their aspirations of breaking intergenerational poverty and social mobility. It has been argued that the CCT-based discourse which emphasises the importance of education as key to moving out of poverty is overly simplistic (Jones, 2019). However the respondent's adoption of the same rhetoric and discourse shows that they do indeed have a deep understanding of the programme's longer term objectives. For a majority of the respondents, education was the central long-term investment of the programme, and key to breaking intergenerational poverty:

"The Prospera has been a big help, I think here in the family, with my children, we like that we are being looked after, they are helping the people of Mexico, which, that is something we think is really important too. My children to be able to go forward and achieve in school, and work hard and go to university, get a career and live better, these are very important." - Prospera recipient, Female.

"School is an interesting place, it can keep them concentrating on school, the school is a place to be for the children to think about their future, the paths to a better future which is important. These children, not just mine, children all included, that they know that they have to stay in school and work hard and get a job, have their best life." - Prospera recipient, Female.

Education is seen by many of the respondents as the investment which can enable their children to escape intergenerational poverty. A perspective shared by the supporters of the human capital model and Prospera. The aspirations and expectations of these educational investments were seen by respondents as a way of achieving social mobility. This manifested in many responses which listed a desire for their children to study and 'be someone'. Previous research has demonstrated the desire to 'be someone' is pervasive in terms of intergenerational change (Carvalho, 2015). Education was similarly valued as an investment in a study by Jeffrey et al, (2004) with young men seeing it as a means to instil self-worth and 'be somebody'. The programme for many recipients was a pathway to 'being somebody' and a better future out of poverty:

"It [Prospera] helps send them to school, because if not, they can take a different route, and that affects them all. With the help they can achieve something and be someone, someone of importance." - Prospera recipient, Female.

"Our children, they are in school, and they are seeing that this programme is helping them, it is helping us, they are not stupid, they know that the programme is there to benefit them. 'I have to study, it is important' it is like a motivation for them because, 'if I don't study, they will take away my help and I will not become anything'" - Prospera recipient, Female

The repetitive aspiration to 'be somebody' with a degree of significance in society and self-worth is regularly evoked with a desire to achieve a white collar position such as 'manager' or 'professional' (Jones, 2019). An aspiration to attain careers in traditionally white collar employment is consistent in the literature among young people living in poverty (Jeffrey et al, 2004; Crivello, 2011). In this study, recipients did not define any professional aspirations but nonetheless aspirations appeared to reflect an expectation to achieve a level of social mobility and out of poverty.

It has been reported elsewhere in the literature that the aspirations of CCT programme recipients can be exceedingly high and lead to tensions between expected and realised outcomes (Jones, 2019). This study did not appear to present similar findings with many seeing education and Prospera in general as the best way for their children to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, which is a key element in the programme too. A number of recipients reported that they felt that their children were well on the way to realising these aspirations with tertiary education and careers in the foreseeable future. This supports the literature that CCT programmes were changing the educational profile of recipient children (Molina Millan et al, 2019), and demonstrates a shared opinion among the Prospera recipients in this study, that the programme was achieving its longer-term objectives.

Obstacles to the programme

The majority of complaints from respondents were regarding issues with targeting and eligibility. A common grievance aimed at the programme was that of perceived fraud. This was directed at recipients themselves, by other recipients, Prospera officials and members of the community. This shared view referred to recipients manipulating their financial household circumstances in order to gain access to the programme:

"Of course there is fraudulent behaviour but the majority of this stems not from Prospera but the people enrolled in the programme." - Prospera recipient, Female

"and this is the reason why, you don't really have to go to work to go to the meetings, so how is it possible that one person doesn't go the meetings but still gets the money? And then maybe I make a mistake, get the times wrong or day, and I don't attend, they check the attendance list, I didn't go and just like that I lose the cash transfer. And others who don't go frequently, still get the help?" - Prospera recipient, Female

Even where CCTs have positive impacts upon social inclusion within a community, eligibility and targeting can produce social rifts, particularly through jealousy from missing out on eligibility, termed 'nearly-beneficiaries' by Yildirim, et al, (2013). However unlike the Yildirim study, this grievance was not just aimed at recipients of the programme but at Prospera staff perceived to have decision making power:

"Erm, I think, well if you want me to be sincere, I think many people in the community think that the leader of the programme⁴ here, you only get onto the programme if you get on with that person I believe. Because you are a friend, and know her well." Prospera recipient, Female

The CCT programmes have been shown to improve social capital as well as human capital (Attanasio, et al, 2009) so examining issues related to these obstacles is also important. Accusations that manipulation of the programme is common and labels of 'undeserving poor' may serve to diminish the returns in investments in improved social capital within the community. In this instance, the perspectives surrounding eligibility obstacles were not common, and moreover, a number of respondents later reaffirmed that situations have been improved upon:

"As long as Prospera has the capacity to keep checking households then I think that is good, because the end point is to help these people out of poverty, right? So I think with regular checkups, I think issues with scams will disappear" - Prospera recipient, Female.

Respondents were also asked if they had encountered any difficulties with Prospera service officers. The majority confirmed an amicable relationship with the Prospera front-line officers, although this was more based on the professional context rather than indicative of a positive personal relationship:

"They are fine, I mean we don't know them all that well, I mean maybe someone one month, and then a different person the next, so I don't really know them. This is even more now that we can queue and receive the money with our card and pin." - Prospera recipient, Female.

Regarding the initial application and then continued enrolment, respondents reported that they had not faced any obstacles and that personnel were helpful. Recipients said that receipt of transfers was straightforward and without difficulties, and whilst delays had been common, this had improved significantly:

"It certainly does change, I remember at once stage, it was the case that somebody else could collect your money on your behalf, they could queue up and with your details collect the money for you. It is more, more regulated now, you go, with your card, enter your code and there it is." - Prospera recipient, Female.

⁴ It is unclear to whom the Prospera recipient was referring with the comment 'leader of the programme'. This may have been a reference to the head of the locality's Regional Customer Service Unit who would be responsible for targeting or if she was referring to a more visible Prospera service officer who perceived was determining targeting in the area.

Some of the respondents felt that the practical requirements for adhering to the programme were an obstacle and that the cash transfer amount was not sufficient to warrant these demanding co-responsibilities. This supports findings by Adato et al, (2007) who found that the amount of transfers was reported not to be sufficient from some recipients:

"I need help too but what is the point? Meeting all the requirements? Waste of my time when I can just work." - Prospera recipient, Female.

"I have a business its only small but I can't look after that and attend meetings so I don't go and I don't receive the money." - Prospera recipient, Female.

Unlike qualitative findings by (Yildirim et al, 2013), who reported that nearly 75% of respondents claimed the transfer amount was not enough to meet their basic needs, the transfer sum was not a common issue reported by recipients in this study. It was the capacity to attend regular meetings that respondents felt was an issue for the programme. Whilst this could be seen as evidence that recipients were viewing the cash transfer as a the priority and the co-responsibilities simply as a means to an end for obtaining the transfer, in fact when respondents ranked the priorities of Prospera, cash transfers per se were not a first priority. The ability to attend meetings may be an obstacle for recipients but these responses could equally suggest that the recipients are invested in the long-term objectives of the programme rather than the immediate results of alleviating poverty via the cash transfer.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main findings of the research indicate that whilst the objectives of the programme were understood by the majority, the source of the transfers and the conditionalities attached were not as clear to recipients. They did report that information about the programme was good but that transparency about the apolitical nature of the programme should have been made clearer. The lack of complete comprehension supports similar findings by Kudat et al (2006) and Adato, et al (2007). Despite the cash transfers being a common feature of discussions, recipients had an understanding of the human capital accumulation objectives of the programme, recognizing that their children were the intended targets.

The understanding of these long-term objectives was clear to the respondents who appreciated that human capital was being accumulated and how education and health were key components of the programme in order to provide a better future for their children. Many of the respondents had long-term aspirations for their children which were centred on the human capital formulation facilitated by Prospera, through its education investment. This follows the discourse surrounding these programmes, and the political support which comes from the 'educational promises' aimed at children and society's future. The recipients did report that a number of their children had gone on to higher education had career trajectories and intended to 'become someone'. This suggested that the long-term aspirations they had had for their children had been met, and the majority of these responses placed Prospera as a key factor.

The respondents highlighted a number of obstacles to the long-term realisation of objectives specifically targeting of the programme and perceived unfairness in eligibility criteria, although this was not to the same extent as reported in other studies. MacAusland and Riemenschneider (2011) felt that CCTs created largely negative social impacts and stigmas in the community. This was not reported by the respondents in this study, and issues related to targeting were often aimed at other households unfairly receiving the programme. Recipients generally believed the programme was targeting fairly and household finances were investigated thoroughly.

The study makes two contributions to the current literature on CCTs and their outcomes. Empirically, it has shown the long-term results and outcomes of the Prospera programme and the process of human capital formulation as seen by the beneficiaries; and methodologically, it has undertaken a qualitative approach which presents the perspectives and experiences of the recipients enrolled in the programme. Conditional cash transfer programmes continue to feature heavily in the development policies of many countries and quantitative evaluations provide mainly statistical outcomes at certain end points in the programmes' lifespans. Qualitative data provided by recipients who offer a unique perspective into the long-term effectiveness of the programmes is the key way to fill voids and supplement the data. Policy evaluations of CCT programmes should go beyond the econometric measurements of policy delivery and include a concern for the perspectives, experiences and wellbeing of recipient households. These perspectives can be used alongside traditional measurements to offer a more comprehensive evaluation of the long-term results of these programmes.

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