



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

WFP EVALUATION

IMPACT OF CASH-BASED TRANSFERS ON FOOD SECURITY AND GENDER EQUALITY IN EL SALVADOR

While women and men in El Salvador are equal before the law, barriers prevent women from accessing the same opportunities. Only 45.4 percent of women participate in the labour market, compared to 74.4 percent of men. Violence against Salvadorian women is among the highest in the world.

Since 2010, El Salvador has encountered a period of extreme weather conditions characterized by droughts, floods and erratic climatic events. This has resulted in significant crop losses, endangering food security within the Dry Corridor and beyond. Of the country's 262 municipalities, 145 regularly suffer from severe droughts.

WFP's [Food Assistance for Assets \(FFA\)](#) intervention focused on small-scale farming households that mostly rely on wages and agriculture for income, experience low food security and are adversely impacted by droughts.

The impact evaluation, delivered by OEV and World Bank's DIME department, assessed the impacts of specifically inviting women to work outside the household as part of the FFA programme and receive a direct transfer. This is contrasted with a group of households receiving an unconditional cash transfer (UCT) and a comparison group not participating in the project. Outcomes include food security, consumption, gender equality, household decision making, and women's social and economic empowerment.

WFP impact evaluations measure changes that can be attributed to a specific programme through a credible counterfactual. They are managed by the WFP Office of Evaluation upon the request of country offices, and usually undertaken during programme implementation over a multi-year period.

KEY EVIDENCE

Overall, the evaluation found that WFP's programme had a significant, short-term impact on households' food security during the interventions, and that participating in FFA for Women had an impact on women's economic empowerment that lasted several months after the programme ended. These results support the theory tested by the evaluation and suggest that offering women an opportunity to receive cash transfers in exchange for participating in activities outside the house can be an effective way of supporting women's economic empowerment.

CASH-BASED TRANSFERS (CBT) AND GENDER IMPACT EVALUATION WINDOW

The impact evaluation is part of the [Cash-Based Transfers and Gender Impact Evaluation Window](#) which was created by the WFP Office of Evaluation (OEV), Cash-based Transfers (CBT) Division, and Gender Office in partnership with the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) department.

Through the window – portfolios of evidence across countries – OEV seeks to understand the impact of CBT interventions on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as food and nutrition outcomes.

March 2024

DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

The impact evaluation's first hypothesis is that involving women in activities such as asset creation through participation in the FFA programme, and participating in educational sessions, would directly impact:

- their time use (shifts towards paid work outside the home)
 - their earnings, as they are paid directly for their work
- The second hypothesis is that – in the medium run – these combined shifts in time use and earnings could impact women's economic empowerment by altering:
- their perceptions of gender norms, attitudes, agency, consumption patterns and physical, social & psychological well-being

Randomized control trial

To identify the causal impacts of the WFP programme, the impact evaluation employed a clustered randomized control trial design (detailed in the [inception report](#)).

The **75 PROJECT COMMUNITIES** were randomly assigned into **one of the two intervention groups** or the **comparison group**. Then, in each community, **WFP** worked with local leaders and government officials to identify approximately **20 of the most vulnerable households** within each community for a total initial sample size of **1,491 households**.

- **25 Communities - FFA for Women Group: 497 households** received a conditional cash transfer USD 300 (disbursed over 3 months) where the primary *female* decision maker was registered to work on the asset, attend training sessions and receive the transfer.
- **25 Communities - Unconditional cash transfer (UCT) Group:** WFP often uses unconditional cash transfers to support vulnerable households, however, little is known about how this impacts women's control over decision-making in the house. **494 households** received an unconditional cash transfer (USD 300 lump sum) where the primary decision maker (usually male) was also registered to receive the transfer. This helps to understand what would happen if WFP had transferred cash to a household without targeting women or supporting them to engage in livelihood activities.
- **25 Communities - Comparison Group: 500 households** were scheduled to receive USD 300 (disbursed over 3 months) after the endline surveys were completed.

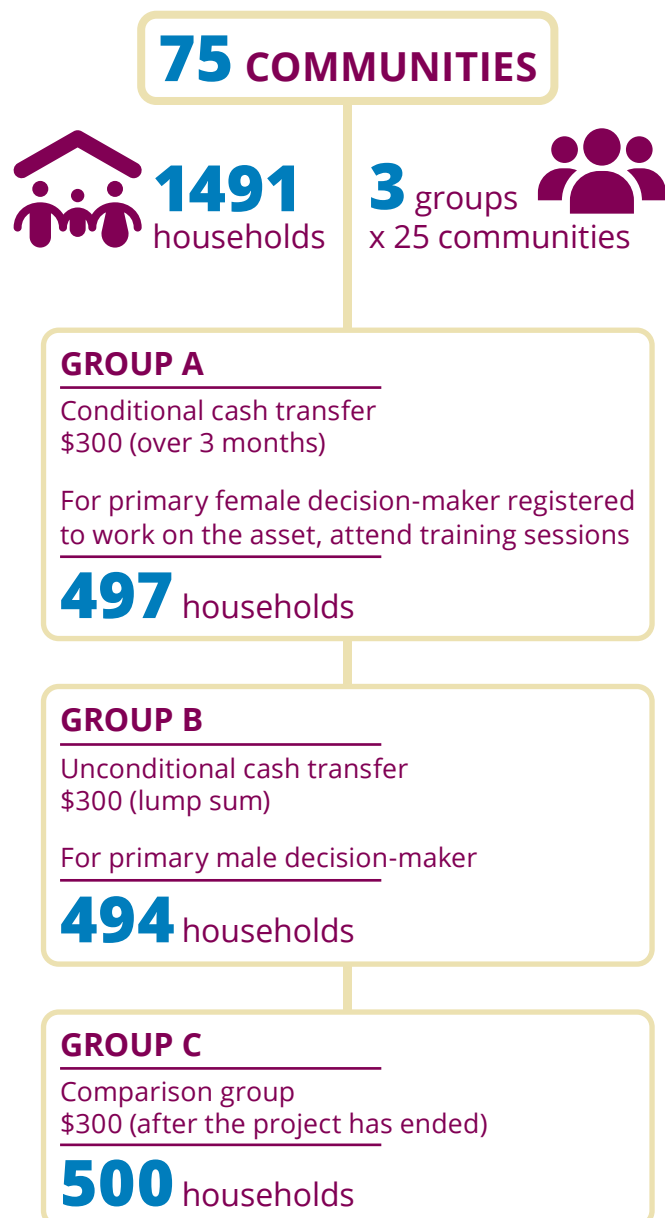
Data was collected in three rounds with all **1,491 households**: at baseline (February 2021), prior to the project start; at midline (August 2021), while the project was ongoing; and at endline (December 2021), after the project had concluded.

WFP/Versative



“ During the implementation of the project, my children got sick [...]. So, I had to buy medicine... I thought I was very blessed to receive this money at that moment because this need came up and I was able to address it.”

Beneficiary woman, FFA for women group










WFP/Diego Santamaria

“ At the end of the day, the project strengthened our relationship as a couple. [...] The change was strengthening. [...] Mainly, the perception that one has about sexism... When you participate in these type of projects, inevitably, this changes you: you are more aware of the situation. ”

Beneficiary man, FFA for women group

IN A SNAPSHOT

A summary of findings against **five evaluation questions**

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 What is the impact of women's participation in FFA on their social and economic empowerment?</p> | <p> The impact was positive and statistically significant along several important dimensions (agency, attitudes, perception of norms) at midline and endline.</p> <p>During the programme: household consumption in the FFA for Women group improves relative to the comparison group. Also, women in the FFA for Women group experience a more favorable perception of community norms for women compared to the comparison group. Men in the FFA for Women group have a more favorable view of women's time use.</p> <p>After the programme ended: women in the FFA for women group do not experience the same loss of agency that women in the UCT group do, indicating that targeting women with FFA helped them maintain decision-making authority over consumption. Women in the FFA for Women group experience a change in attitudes: a positive change in attitudes towards time use but a negative shift in attitudes towards women's agency over consumption compared to the comparison group.</p> <p>Also, after the programme concluded, FFA for Women group, along with UCT group, showed significant increases in their well-being scores, reflecting positive experiences observed in qualitative findings as well.</p> |
| <p>2 What is the impact of an unconditional cash transfer to the household on women's social and economic empowerment, as well as on household income and welfare?</p> | <p> The UCT and FFA for women improve food security during the programme but the impacts fade in the long run.</p> <p>After the programme concluded, women in the FFA for women group do not experience the same loss of agency that women in the UCT group do. Both the UCT and FFA for Women groups showed significant increases in their well-being scores, reflecting positive experiences observed in qualitative findings as well.</p> |
| <p>3 Does FFA affect the probability and/or reasons for respondents' migration?</p> | <p> The WFP programme does not find any statistically significant impact on migration.</p> |
| <p>4 Are there heterogeneous impacts of the transfer based on respondents' exposure to community violence?</p> | <p> The impact of the programme was significantly lower for women that reported feeling unsafe in their locality at baseline.</p> |
| <p>5 Does participation in FFA affect key food security outcomes of interest?</p> | <p> At midline, both the UCT and FFA for Women households showed significant improvements in food security compared to the comparison group.</p> <p>However, by endline, after the programme concluded, the short-term food security gains disappeared, indicating that the programme's impact on food security was temporary, and tied to its duration.</p> |

PROGRAMME IMPLICATIONS

The evidence supports the hypothesis that targeting women as recipients of cash transfers and offering them opportunities to participate in activities outside the house can impact agency, norms and economic empowerment, at least in the short term. However, it also highlights the need for WFP to reflect on the way it implements programmes, and identifies factors to consider when delivering similar programmes in the future.

Women benefit most when they participate. Understanding barriers and supporting women's participation is essential for improving economic empowerment. In the project arm aimed exclusively at women, just 42 percent of households reported that only women worked on the FFA for Women assets by endline. *Future WFP programmes should consider how the opportunities created by programmes can be effectively communicated to men and women in communities targeted for participation, identify more effective measures for ensuring that women are willing and able to participate in FFA when targeted, and measures for reducing men's participation in FFA projects designed for women only.*

Men's attitudes improve with time and experience. Sensitisation communications can help overcome barriers to women's participation in activities outside the home. Local gender norms, particularly men's attitudes, and perceptions regarding gender norms, may play a role in women's participation and empowerment. Both the quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that men were initially less supportive of women's participation in FFA for women activities outside the home, although not statistically significant at midline. However, by endline, the perceptions of men appear to reverse, and Men's Attitudes towards Women's Agency over Time Use are significantly better in households participating in FFA for Women compared to households in the UCT group. It suggests that men's attitudes can evolve with experience over time, and that initial reservations can be overcome. *Future WFP programmes should consider using additional communications and sensitisation measures to reduce the initial resistance of men in households where women are invited to participate in activities outside the home.*

In addition, safety may present a barrier for women to benefit from WFP programmes. *For future programmes, WFP may want to consider how public safety influences the feasibility of targeting women and supporting them through cash transfers and/or FFA, exploring whether any additional measures can be used to make women feel safe.*

Short-term benefits raise long-term questions. To achieve sustainable improvements in income, there is a need to explore alternative timeframes and types of livelihood support for women. Both the quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that women benefited from participating in FFA in a variety of ways, both during and after the programme. However, despite improvements in subjective well-being and agency, the short-term impacts on women's income from WFP did not translate into significant longer-term non-WFP income at the endline. *To understand what works to overcome these barriers, WFP could consider exploring different durations, such as lengthening the duration of support to women, and livelihood strategies, to identify a combination of support that can build on the short-term improvements in agency and empowerment.*

UCT may have unintended consequences. The effect of unconditional cash transfers on women's agency must be better understood and mitigated. One of the more striking findings is the shift in Women's Agency Over Consumption towards the male heads of households that received unconditional cash transfers. This finding is aligned with past evidence that cash transfers alone may not be sufficient to support women's economic empowerment. *Future WFP programmes that provide unconditional cash transfers to households with male heads should be cautious and ensure it does not undermine women's agency over consumption.*

The FFA for Women intervention in El Salvador appears to be at least one form of intervention that mitigates this potential negative impact on agency, but there could be many others. *Future programmes should consider piloting additional complementary interventions that support women's agency when providing cash transfers.*



“ It helped us quite a lot. We learned how to save, how to administer the money.... The money they gave us.... Also, if we wanted to save, they also showed us how to invest it. That is what we learned. ”

Beneficiary woman, unconditional cash transfer group


WFP EVALUATION in partnership with  **THE WORLD BANK**
IBRD • IDA | WORLD BANK GROUP
Development Economics • Impact

 wfp.org/independent-evaluation

 wfp.evaluation@wfp.org

 @WFP_Evaluation

 Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70, 00148 Rome, Italy

 T +39 06 65131

 Cover photo: WFP/Michael Tewelde