

A Randomized Control Trial of a Cash for Work Program Targeting the Poor in Comoros

The World Bank

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THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF THE COMOROS SOCIAL SAFETY NET PROJECT (SSNP)

Context

Despite high needs, Comoros has a weak formal social protection system. Political instability, poverty and skilled migration have indeed impaired government's ability to invest in infrastructure and deliver quality basic services. The World Bank's recent assessment of social protection policies and systems found that social protection programs cover only a small part of the population despite the high rates of poverty and vulnerability in the country. Effective social protection policies and programs are of crucial importance for the country's development.

In recent years, part of the agenda to tackle poverty has been the launching of social safety nets programs such as cash-for-work programs. These programs are now widespread in low-income countries and have been carried out in a variety of settings, including Argentina, Ethiopia, India and South Africa.

Despite their pervasiveness, relatively little is known about their impacts on the socio-economic outcomes and welfare of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and on how they can be made more effective. Given the growing popularity of cash-for-work programs and their potentially huge costs, the lack of a strong evidence base is a matter of immediate concern.

Did you know?

Comoros has a weak social protection system despite high needs

Comoros has experienced five military coup since independence in 1975

Intervention

The Social Safety Net Project seeks to provide temporary cash-for-work activities to 4000 poor families and to generate public infrastructures for their communities. 69 villages among the poorest have been selected by FADC (the implementing agency) to receive the intervention.

This program entails:

- 1) Cash-for-work activities providing temporary income to beneficiary households over a three-year period
- 2) Productive public infrastructure for communities (e.g. supporting terracing, water management, reforestation and other climate change activities, etc.).

Evaluation Questions

The impact evaluation is testing the effects the cash-for-work component of the SSNP on socio-economic outcomes and welfare of households. The proposed evaluation addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What are the direct effects of temporary employment cash-for-work program on social and economic outcomes of poor households, and how these effects evolve over time?
- 2) What are the externalities of the cash-for-work program on non-beneficiaries, and through which channels are the latter affected?
- 3) Does the effect of the program vary according to the gender of the recipient?

Policy Lessons

This impact evaluation will generate crucial evidence on the ability of the Comoros Social Safety Net Project in improving social and economic welfare of poor households in the short and in the long run. The evaluation findings will inform scale-up/scale-down decisions about the program in Comoros, and will indicate how development programs can be best implemented in the peculiar context of Comoros Islands. More generally, the evaluation will have policy and operational relevance for other Safety Net Programs in the Africa region and beyond.