Improving Community Workers' and Beneficiaries' Well-being through a National Conditional Cash Transfer Program in the Dominican Republic

Sector(s): Crime, Violence, and Conflict, Finance, Gender, Health, Social Protection

Fieldwork: Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)

Location: Dominican Republic

Sample: 11,491 households eligible for ProSoli

Target group: Families and households

Outcome of interest: Earnings and income Social service delivery Gender-based violence Health outcomes

Intervention type: Cash transfers Coaching and mentoring Conditional cash transfers

Partner organization(s): Gabinete de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales (GCPS)

In countries with conditional cash transfer programs, volunteers or modestly-paid community workers often play a significant role in supporting beneficiaries in complying with the program requirements upon which their cash transfers are conditioned. Despite the important role that these community workers play, there is little research on their impact on the well-being of beneficiaries or on how best to recruit and select community workers in order to maximize productivity and beneficiary outcomes. In partnership with the Government of the Dominican Republic, researchers are evaluating the impact of a conditional cash transfer and community worker program on beneficiary wellbeing. Researchers will also distinguish between the impacts of cash transfers alone and community worker visits, compare the impacts of paid versus volunteer community workers, and evaluate the impact of different community worker recruitment techniques.

Policy issue

Conditional cash transfer programs, which offer poor households cash grants conditional upon a set of requirements (such as school attendance, visits to health care facilities, or participation in information sessions), have rapidly expanded in the past decade.[1] A body of evidence has shown that conditional cash transfer programs can reduce poverty and positively impact beneficiaries' health, nutrition, and school attendance in the short-term.

Volunteer or modestly-compensated community workers are often the primary interface between recipients of conditional cash transfers and their governments. In countries with conditional cash transfer programs, these community workers often support beneficiaries in complying with the program requirements upon which their cash transfers are conditioned. Despite the significant role that these community workers can play, there is little research on the impact of their support on the well-being of beneficiaries, or on the most effective strategies to recruit and motivate community workers in order to maximize both productivity and beneficiary outcomes. In addition, there is little research on the impacts that volunteering as a community worker position can have on the volunteers themselves.

Context of the evaluation

The Dominican Republic's national conditional cash transfer (CCT) program Progresando con Solidaridad (ProSoli) reaches over one million of the country's lowest-income households. Poor and extremely poor households are identified through the

government's Single System for the Identification of Beneficiaries (SIUBEN), which determines the national poverty line. All individuals or households who fall under the national poverty line automatically qualify to receive ProSoli.

ProSoli recipients receive digitized payments directly into limited mandate bank accounts, which are tied to debit cards that can only be used at authorized merchants to purchase food. Selected participants can also purchase gas and electricity using ProSoli. As part of the program, volunteer community workers called enlaces familiares conduct home visits and organize neighborhood meetings for ProSoli recipients. During the visits and meetings, collectively called acompanamiento, enlaces familiares and beneficiaries discuss topics such as health, education, income generation, and access to information technologies as well as ProSoli, its requirements, and the cash transfers. ProSoli benefits are conditional upon regular school attendance for participants' children and routine health check-ups.



Azua province, Dominican Republic, 2015. Photo: Laura Pulecio | J-PAL/IPA

Details of the intervention

In partnership with the Government of the Dominican Republic's Cabinet for the Coordination of Social Policies, researchers are conducting a multi-armed randomized evaluation to measure the impact of ProSoli and its different components on beneficiaries and program volunteers. Specifically, researchers will evaluate the impact of ProSoli with and without the acompanamiento on the education, health, and financial wellbeing of program beneficiaries, their participation in the labor market, and their compliance with program requirements. Researchers will also compare the impacts of hiring paid, paraprofessional enlaces to the status quo of employing volunteers and examine the impact of different techniques for recruiting the enlaces.

Researchers will create about 500 clusters of neighboring households eligible for ProSoli in the provinces of Santo Domingo, Distrito Nacional, Santiago, San Juan, Azua, Barahona, and Bahoruco, and randomly assign each cluster to one of five groups:

1. Cash transfers: Households in some clusters will receive only the ProSoli cash transfers, without the addition of the socio educational acompañamiento. By comparing these households to the comparison group, researchers will be able to measure the impact of the transfers themselves on beneficiaries.
2. Cash plus volunteer enlaces recruited through referral: Households in some clusters will receive the standard ProSoli package of cash transfers and acompañamiento administered by volunteer enlaces familiares. In these clusters, which were designed to mimic the status quo ProSoli program, the enlaces will be recruited through referral from local ProSoli supervisors.
3. Cash plus volunteer enlaces recruited through public advertisements: Households in some clusters will receive the standard ProSoli package of cash transfers and acompañamiento administered by volunteer enlaces familiares. In these clusters, enlaces will be recruited through a public advertisement. By comparing these clusters to the status quo clusters, researchers will be able to determine how a competitive application process, rather than referrals from within their social networks, affects enlaces' job performance.
4. Cash plus paraprofessional enlaces: Households in some clusters will receive the ProSoli package of cash transfers and acompañamiento administered by professional enlaces. In these clusters, enlaces will be recruited from local colleges using a public advertisement, and will be paid a part-time salary. By comparing these clusters to those with volunteer enlaces, researchers will be able to determine whether paid workers are more or less effective than volunteers, and whether the added cost of enlaces' salaries might be warranted given the potentially larger impacts.
5. Comparison Group: The comparison group will not receive monetary transfers or socio educational acompañamiento until the end of this evaluation.

Taking advantage of an oversupply of community worker candidates, researchers will randomly select which qualified applicants actually receive the enlace positions in groups two, three, and four. By comparing the selected applicants to qualified candidates from the same neighborhoods who are not selected, researchers will be able to measure the effects of being selected as a community worker on the workers themselves.

Researchers will conduct surveys of program beneficiaries to measure impacts on food security, schooling, health, and intra-partner violenceafter one year and three years. They will also survey enlaces to measure outcomes including income, labor market participation, public service, and subjective well-being.

Results and policy lessons

Study ongoing; results forthcoming.

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1. Bastagli, Francesca, Jessica Hagen-Zanker, Luke Harman, Valentina Barca, Georgina Sturge, and Tanja Schmidt, with Luca Pellerano. 2016. "Cash transfers: what does the evidence say? A rigorous review of programme impact and of the role of design and implementation features." London: Overseas Development Institute. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10749.pdf