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## Linking Research and Action

STRENGTHENING FOOD ASSISTANCE AND FOOD POLICY RESEARCH

# The Guatemala Community Daycare Programme Effective Food Aid Targeting in Urban Areas

The programme has a substantial positive impact on the diet of children. It also complements the basic livelihood strategies of poor urban women working outside the home.

Employment that requires being away from home for extended hours constrains women's ability to manage their household, care for their children, and participate in development programmes. Frequently, women work up to 12 hours a day and commute for 2-3 hours to their place of work. Thus, it makes it almost impossible for these women to participate in development programmes operating in the communities where they live, because they are physically absent from home for extended hours, often up to 6 days a week.

### Characteristics of the Guatemala programme

To address this problem and to alleviate poverty by providing working parents with low-cost, quality childcare within their community, the Government of Guatemala sponsored a Community Daycare Programme (CDP) partly supported by WFP. CDP provides initial training for the care providers, as well as furniture, cooking pots, and utensils and serving plates for 10 children. Monthly funds are provided for

food (\$0.55 per child per day to feed children two meals and two snacks, five days a week), and for educational material and fuel. The programme pays the care providers \$3.33 per child attended per month. Parents are expected to complement this income by paying care providers \$5 per child per month, which corresponds to approximately 3–4 percent of the average monthly wages of participating mothers. Each daycare centre also receives food donations from the WFP (usually 44 pounds of maize, 1 gallon of cooking oil, and 13 pounds of black beans—or 6 cans of fish).

### Insights from IFPRI Research

#### How well does the programme work?

To evaluate the operational aspects of the programme, interviews with care providers, observations in the daycare centres, and focus-group discussions were carried out in all daycare centres operating in the urban slums of three townships of Guatemala City.

The equipment and furniture provided by the programme were received in a timely fashion, but they deteriorated over time and were not replaced. Care providers also received initial training as planned, but most expressed a need for additional training, particularly on using menus and on substituting foods of similar nutritional value to adjust for changes in prices and sea-

sonal availability. Some delays in payments to the care providers were reported and affected morale and motivation. Care providers also consistently expressed concern about the inadequacy of the amount earmarked for food purchases; it was insufficient to ensure an adequate diet for the children.

The distribution of donated food commodities to the daycare centres was perceived as efficient, though some delays were reported, and preferred commodities were not always available. The distribution system also requires that care providers travel to get the commodities from a central point, which is time-consuming.

Overall, however, IFPRI's evaluation found that the programme was operating quite effectively, in spite of the few operational constraints described above. Moreover, the programme seems to be an effective mechanism for targeting food aid to children of poor urban parents whose work patterns may prevent them from participating in community-based programmes that are conditional on regular attendance or frequent contact with programme staff during the daytime.

#### Impact on child nutrient intakes

To evaluate the impact of the programme on children's nutrient intakes, we used a case-control study and a random sample of 1,363 households with children 0–7 years of age from the study area.

The programme has a substantial positive impact on the diet of

children during weekdays: beneficiary children consumed, on average, 20 percent more energy, proteins, and iron, and 50 percent more vitamin A than non-participants. There was no evidence of substitution at home. On the contrary, the home diets of beneficiary children were significantly higher in energy, protein, and iron than the home diets of control children. In addition, a greater proportion of iron and vitamin A intake at the centres came from animal, as opposed to plant, products, and thus were better absorbed and utilized by the body. The benefits of the CDP on preschoolers' micronutrient intakes are particularly important because micronutrients, and especially vitamin A, iron, and zinc, are responsible for most nutrient deficiencies among this age group.

### **Who participates?**

Beneficiary mothers tended to be slightly less educated, have less assets, live in more precarious conditions, and were more likely to be single, compared to their matched controls (mothers from the same neighbourhood who had a child the same age and also worked outside the home, but did not use the programme). They had a smaller household size, but a higher mean number of preschoolers. Beneficiary mothers were more likely to be employed in the formal sector and receive work-related social and medical benefits. Their income was 30 percent higher than the income of working mothers in the random sample. Thus, the programme appeared to be reaching its targeted audience, i.e., poor working parents, and especially single mothers working in the formal sector.

Analysis revealed a very low coverage of the programme in the general population, which seemed to result from low supply rather than poor demand.

### **Implications for Food Assistance Programming**

The CDP is a feasible and efficient mechanism to target and deliver food assistance to poor urban children. It is clearly a type of programme worth investing in as benefits reach targeted beneficiaries (urban preschoolers) and have a significant nutritional impact. Moreover, the programme does effectively support working parents' efforts to seek and secure paid employment away from home, which in urban areas is essential to livelihood security. Its success in reaching single women also contributes to reinforcing their efficiency in managing their dual role as income generators and child caregivers. Thus, the model of the Guatemala CDP is particularly well suited for an urban environment because it addresses the unique characteristics of urban livelihoods.

A constraint often overlooked in urban programming is the inability of working parents to participate in programmes that require attendance or regular contacts with programme staff during the daytime when they are at work. Any type of "conditional transfer" is likely to limit or even exclude the participation of working parents. There are numerous successful food assistance interventions operating through maternal and child health programmes in urban areas. Although effective, these programmes are likely to systematically exclude a key target population—the working

poor and, even more importantly, single mothers who have no choice but to work for their living. Urban programming needs to pay more attention to the particular needs of poor working women and design innovative approaches that will help them complement their basic livelihood strategies, rather than interfere with them.

Marie T. Ruel (2003) "The Guatemala Community Daycare Programme: An Example of Effective Delivery of Food Aid in Urban Areas," International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, D.C. Contact author at [m.ruel@cgiar.org](mailto:m.ruel@cgiar.org).

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