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Lessons learnt from Social Transfer Project (STP) implementation in the Somaliland Corridor

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This paper was prepared by the ILED TIPF Social Protection Team, with support from the STP partners and information from the STP MEAL, the TIPF learning activities and independent TPM. The TIPF learning agenda aims to adjust the program, inform future programming and strengthen the National Social Safety Net system by building evidence around best practices and documenting and disseminating this knowledge. The learning agenda mobilizes a wide range of tools and stakeholders across the country, including the Government, the Social Protection Donor Working Group, and other agencies.

Introduction

The STP programme in Somaliland was initiated in 2021 for 3 years till the March 2024 and is building on the 2020 pilot of a first child benefit to IDP households in Hargeisa, with support from Save the Children, member of the Somali Cash Consortium. While the programme coverage and duration has been limited by its financial allocation, the programme allowed to achieve key outcomes that could support future programming at both beneficiary and institutional levels.

The STP program was launched in Somaliland in 2021 and is set to run for three years until the end of 2023. It builds on a pilot program from 2020, which provided a child benefit to IDP households in Hargeisa with the support of Save the Children, a member of the Somali Cash Consortium. Despite being limited by its budget and timeline, the program achieved key outcomes that can inform future programming both at the beneficiary and institutional levels.

The STP Social Transfers schemes and their expected outcomes

SOCIAL TRANSFER PROGRAM

EXPECTED OUTCOMES



ST1 - To enhance human capital through the first 1,000 days and improve access to health and nutrition with behavioural nudges

Over 5000 pregnant women are receiving monthly transfers for 24 months to support their access to health and nutrition. Implemented through selected Mother and Child Health centers.



ST2 - To support the poorest youth (aged 15-21 unemployed) to access productive activities (categorical targeting)

Over 1000 youth received monthly transfers for 12 months to support their participation in skills training, including funding for their training and a start-up package to establish their own economic activities.



ST3 - To Protect the Elderly from COVID-19 Impact

Over 3000 vulnerable individuals aged 55 and above, selected by their communities, received 12 monthly transfers to mitigate the socio-economic and health impact of the pandemic.

What Have We Learnt So Far

The ST2 scheme targeting unemployed youths has started only in July 2022, it is therefore too early to evaluate its outcomes but some implementation aspects are covered in this brief.

The ST1 scheme was successful in achieving its objective of increasing demand for MCH services among targeted mothers, including antenatal and postnatal care, nutrition screening, and deliveries in facilities. The increase was particularly significant during the registration period in 2021 and then it reduced in 2022.

ST3, despite its short duration, had a positive impact on targeted elders' access to water and soap as well as access to health supplies, supporting their ability to cope with some of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the transfer value was considered too low in a context of multiple crises and shocks, to have a significant impact on their food security and overall socio-economic status. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggested that targeted elders contributed to school fees for their younger household members.

While the ST1 generated an increased workload at the MCH centers, some of which had difficulties coping, ST2 found it easier to integrate into an already dynamic network of TVET centers. However, the cost of training was particularly high and exceeded the budget, resulting in a reduction in the number of youth able to access training.

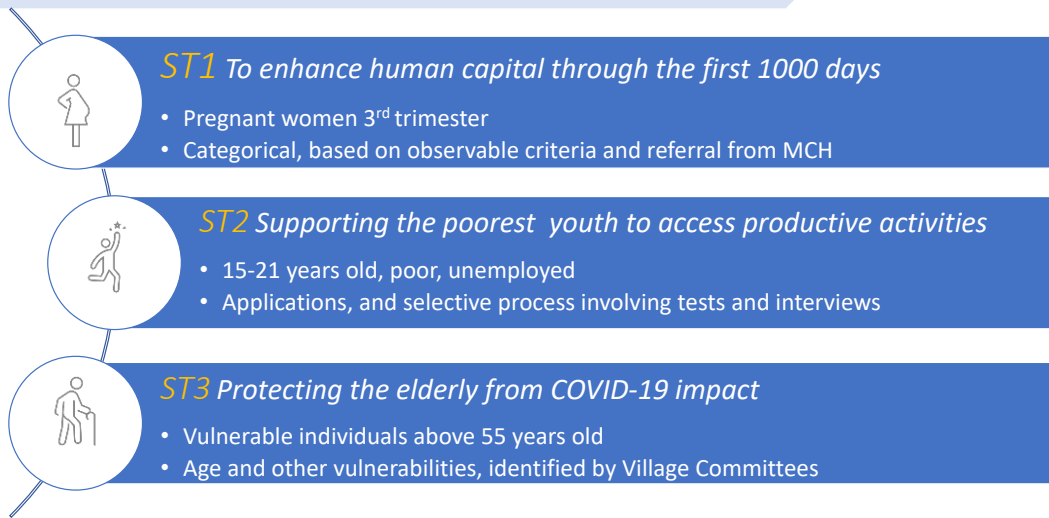
At the institutional level, STP has strengthened the government's social protection capacities as many government staff have participated in social protection training opportunities. Additionally, the program contributed to the development of the Somaliland Social Protection policy, providing inputs including the lessons learned from the STP implementation experience. The Somaliland Social Protection Policy document was finalized in May 2022 and is currently awaiting Ministerial approval.

MESAF's involvement and coordination among government ministries was instrumental in securing program outcomes and ensuring timely implementation, including the shock response components. During the program, an inter-ministerial steering committee was established to advocate for social protection's inclusion in NDP-3, as well as a social protection working group. This coordination has helped improve understanding and accountability within government systems.

The MESAF played a critical role in the implementation of the program, from selecting the targeted districts and villages to mobilizing community leaders and representatives. They also facilitated the participation of National Displacement and Refugee Agency (NDRA) responsible for IDPs and refugees. The Ministry of Health was involved in the ST1, assisting with the selection of MCH centers and providing training. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education collaborated on the ST2, identifying and assessing TVET centers and providing guidance on the most relevant training packages based on labor market needs.

In terms of inclusiveness, the program employed a range of communication and mobilization tools to reach a broad audience and include vulnerable populations, including flyers in key locations as well as social media. However, each social transfer scheme had its own selection approach and eligibility criteria, resulting in varying outcomes.

TARGETING



The ST2 scheme was linked to public works activities, serving as a complement to the skills development component. Concern held meetings with mayors of Hargeisa, Burao and Borama to identify specific areas of work and activities were implemented with them. In addition to cleaning campaigns, the students also served as census enumerators in Borama. This has served to improve the trust between youth and the government, strengthening the social contract.

The ST2 scheme aimed to provide training opportunities to the poorest youth. It succeeded in ensuring gender equity by offering training corresponding to traditional gender roles and imposing quotas for women's recruitment. The scheme also enrolled a diverse group of youth from different backgrounds, such as IDPs as well as youth from rural and urban areas. However, the application process and the training entry requirements inadvertently excluded the poorest and most vulnerable youth who lacked secondary education. Enrolment in the training program was contingent on passing literacy and numeracy tests, as well as interviews. Most of the selected beneficiaries had completed secondary education. Additionally, the provision of start-up grants was contingent on the development of a business plan and final test scores, which effectively left out 50% of ST2 beneficiaries because only half of the students were supposed to receive the start-up grants.

M&E reports indicate that clan representation wasn't considered in a school committee used for community mobilization, because the TVETs didn't care about the clans the students came from. The selection was done based on the student's experience, performance and contribution to the school. However, given the distribution and dominance of a particular clan in Somaliland, this likely exacerbated the exclusion of the marginalized and minority clans who are less socially connected due to clan belonging to a large extent determines the ability to secure a job after graduation.

Although it is still early for the program to have an impact, according to TPM report conducted in December 2022, 90% of beneficiaries claimed the 'skill building program' had a positive impact on their livelihoods, with the MESAF-endorsed internship after the training, seen to increase their chances to employment, although this needs to be confirmed through tracer studies.

Due to the limited information available on integration in the social registry in Somaliland, there is a need for additional data in order to consider integrating the social transfer scheme into the social registry, which could improve the targeting efficiency of the program.

Next Steps and How to Scale Up the Social Transfer Scheme

The Somaliland Social Protection Policy has been submitted to the Cabinet for review and approval. This will be followed by endorsement by Parliament. The approval timeline has been affected by the political instability resulting from the crisis in Las Anod. MESAF staff confirmed the STP's alignment with the Social Protection Policy, which has three pillars. One of these pillars focuses on national social transfers, which provides a system of entitlements to basic minimum income guarantees for all citizens. These transfers aim to ensure that individuals can maintain an adequate standard of living and are better prepared to face economic shocks, especially during key stages of the lifecycle such as childhood, old age, and disability.

Based on the findings of the program, there are several key steps that should be taken to design future programs and ensure their impact.

1. Conduct a thorough evaluation of the ST2 scheme, targeting unemployed youths, to determine its outcomes and identify areas for improvement.
2. Increase the transfer value of the ST3 scheme, targeting elders, to have a more significant impact on their food security and overall socio-economic status.
3. Address the high cost of training in the ST2 scheme to ensure more youth can access training.
4. Strengthen the government's social protection capacities by providing more social protection training opportunities for government staff.
5. Ensure the timely approval of the Somaliland Social Protection policy by the Cabinet and Parliament.
6. Continue the MESAF's involvement and coordination among government ministries to secure program outcomes and ensure timely implementation, including the shock response components.
7. Develop more inclusive selection approaches and eligibility criteria for each social transfer scheme to reach a broad audience and include vulnerable populations.
8. Review the targeting of beneficiaries for ST2 and have an open discussion with the Ministry of Education and address unintentional exclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable youth who lack secondary education in the ST2 scheme by developing more inclusive application processes and training entry requirements.
9. Consider clan representation in school committees used for community mobilization in the ST2 scheme.
10. Build on the ST2 scheme's success in ensuring gender equity by continuing to offer training corresponding to traditional gender roles and imposing quotas for women's recruitment.

11. Somaliland's commitment to investing in social protection, coupled with its stable systems and coordination mechanisms, make it a valuable area for investment and a great opportunity to strengthen and promote social protection.

Additionally, it is important to note that the approval timeline of the Social Protection Policy has been affected by the political instability resulting from the crisis in Las Anod. However, once approved, the STP can align with the policy's three pillars, focusing on national social transfers to provide a system of entitlements to basic minimum income guarantees for all citizens, ensuring an adequate standard of living and better preparedness for economic shocks.