Holding cash transfers to account

Roundtable event - 25th April 2013

Chair:
Nicola Jones - ODI

Speakers:
Paul Bukuluki - Makerere University
Khalid Dubai - Interaction in Development
Bassam Abu Hammad - Al-Quds University
Onyango W. Ouma - University of Nairobi
Kerry Selvester - Associacao de Nutricao e Seguranca Alimentar, ANSA
Mohammed Shaheen - Al-Quds University

Main Issue: Citizen involvement in CTs governance and accountability: why is it that important and how it can support state-citizen relations.

Nicola Jones PPP

The poor and the vulnerable are those least likely to benefit from economic growth. Change for them is more likely to come from politics. Brazil and other countries which explicitly acknowledge a legal right to social protection are examples of the importance of politics.

Notwithstanding the material benefits of CTs for their recipients, we need to focus on the how and why these benefits are delivered. We need to ask: Is it a gift or an entitlement? Does it create dependency or improve people's dignity? Is it provided by a lone agency or a coordinated partnership of civil society or donors?

A second issue we need to focus on: information flows as they are pivotal on how communities see the transfer.

A third issue is the opportunities for regular feedback, for M&E and for capacity building.

And a fourth issue we need to focus on are the programme implementers' capacities: do they have the time and ability to solicit; and do they have the time to listen with empathy?

Thus the aim of this roundtable is to explore CTs grievance mechanisms; feedback mechanisms; and participatory evaluation; and to reflect critically on governance issues in relation to the provision of a guidance document to DFID.

1st Theme Grievance Mechanisms

Questions to explore:

- What works and what not?

- What form could these mechanisms take? (e.g. government versus NGO versus private sector/third party?)

- How can they be better institutionalised?

- How can their use be encouraged?

- How can we learn from aggregated grievances?

K. Selvester PPP, Mozambique

- Such mechanisms are non-existent in this country and there are issues with accessibility, transparency and accountability. Accessibility problems are due to high levels of illiteracy, limited education and also age as older people face mobility problems. Transparency problems are related to inadequate understanding of the pathways to voice complaints and can be tackled through the creation of an environment of high levels of confidence and absence of fear or of reprisal. Accountability problems can be tackled through aggregation and analysis of complaints.

- The main barriers to access and use of grievance mechanisms:

Lack of a sense of entitlement; people consider the transfer to be a gift and thus do not complain.

Information flows' barriers due to distance or illiteracy with people unable to use technology to effectively communicate.

Special characteristics of the beneficiaries involved such as old people or children; how to enable them to complain.

There are very few examples of such systems that work.

- The way forward involves:

Dialogue and debate about appropriate grievance systems

Efforts to increase a sense of entitlement

Decrease the reluctance of service providers

Ensure adequate resources

Trouble-shooting, particularly at the beginning of programme implementation, so that people do not lose faith after their first complaint.

K. Dubai PPP, Yemen

What works and what not?

- Grievance channels: According to managers there is an open door policy; yet in reality there is no system to lodge and redress grievances despite the fact that there are many complaints and thus people cannot channel them. A 'lubrication fee' is often needed. Moreover, many people choose not to complain due to fears of being excluded from the programme.

- What was suggested to do: field visits by SWF officials/ creation of an independent department under the Ministry of Social Affairs given that people do not trust implementers/ launch of a telephone hotline/ establishment of a district local committee/ use of the village leader/ development of beneficiary committees/ use of NGOS that have a good reputation/ development and distribution of complaint forms (although the issue is how people with limited education will be able to fill them).

- Lessons learnt: it is clearly understood that the open door policy is not working. Most of the grievances are related to the application process and eligibility. There is a need for

a parallel independent system to deal with grievances, but this system has also to improve access to information and clarify responsibilities and legitimate expectations.

Discussion

- Christian Aid's representative (V. Murtagh) brought up the corruption issue, given that cash is involved. She also expressed concerns that in some cases people need to spend money to gain access to a cash transfer programme despite fulfilling its eligibility criteria. Another problem is the long process of establishing the necessary bank account required to pay beneficiaries' cheques with beneficiaries finally getting their transfer too late. In these cases Christian Aid ended up giving directly cash to people instead of distributing cheques.

- In Palestine authorities also used to give cheques but now they provide cash to beneficiaries' bank accounts and thus corruption is rather limited. This is one of the strengths of the Palestinian CT. Yet corruption issues have emerged in the application process according to existing complaints in West Bank. Dr Bassam Abu Hamad said that in Gaza other agencies give cash directly to people, but again corruption issues have been noted not in cash delivery but in application process and eligibility.

- In Uganda the CT programme uses categorical targeting so corruption issues were minimal. One of the main problems was that many people lacked birth certificates to verify their age and subsequently their eligibility; in these cases people from the local community gathered and confirmed their age. Moreover, in the Ugandan CT a private mobile banking organisation has been involved and the use of technology has minimised corruption in cash delivery.

- Likewise in Kenya there were only a few isolated complaints, e.g. somebody who got less money that he was supposed to. Current efforts are focusing on improving the efficiency of the cash delivery system.

- The establishment of individual bank accounts is an effective way to tackle corruption in cash delivery. Distributing money directly to people, especially through the involvement of powerful local leaders such as commune leaders, can increase corruption and allow them to keep cash for personal use.

- One of DFID representatives asked about the costs of complaining and noted that we are not aware in advance of how many people will complain and that we will always perhaps underinvest resources in establishing effective grievance mechanisms. The important issue is to move towards a system improvement exercise without focusing too much on donors' requirements.

- Barrientos pointed out that what is needed is the induction of beneficiaries. Meetings have to be organised in every locality to explain clearly the programme to all community members. In that way people become aware of what they are supposed to do, what their obligations and rights are and how they get the transfer. However, he stressed that his experience is based on Latin American conditional CTs, while those presented in the report are unconditional. He said that in Latin American CCTs beneficiaries have a constant relation with programme implementers and social workers as they need to register with health clinics and schools and there is a whole system with social workers checking compliance with programme requirements and when identifying failure of compliance further investigate. Thus it seems that due to conditionalities CCTs have a better structure in place compared with UCTs.

- The representative from RAND said that we need to consider the issue of expectations when we try to figure out the amount of complaints we will get. First we need to inform people about the grievance mechanisms and make them understand their rights and how to use these mechanisms. However, research in OECD countries found that people

from disadvantaged backgrounds do not use such mechanisms much compared with middle-class people. Furthermore, when people of disadvantaged backgrounds do lodge a complaint, their complaints are less often resolved compared with those lodged by better-off people. Another determinant factor is culture, with Scandinavians being those more prone to complain as they are trained to lodge complaints and Scandinavian systems being the most effective among the OECD countries.

Expectations left aside, he added, we need to build a system capable of dealing with complaints. Thus even in OECD countries with hotlines in place and the appointment of an ombudsman as an independent authority to investigate and address complaints, complaints are made yet they are not always resolved.

Because even if we have grievance mechanisms in place and people are aware of them and do make complaints, this does not automatically entail that these mechanisms are going to resolve everything. Thus another important issue is to provide incentives to those responsible to resolve these complaints to deal with them efficiently. In some cases this is closely linked to governance issues. In countries with multi-level governance (commune, district, municipal etc.) we need to make sure that different levels dealing with complaints-resolution do not collide.

Complaints have no cost, so where we need to focus is on establishing systems to deal with complaints.

To sum up, he said, it will help to have grievance mechanisms, but on the other hand we need to be pragmatic and realise that having such mechanism does not mean that they will resolve everything.

- Nicola Jones remarked that having effective grievance systems may also avoid media frenzy to complain and exaggerate problems.

- MacAuslan (OPM) noted that grievance systems should also determine what targets they will have, what types of complaints they will deal with. There are different types of complaints, that is, at the beginning of programme implementation we usually get complaints about targeting, then we tend to have complaints about the transfer not being delivered on time etc. He suggested that perhaps different types of complaints can be distinguished and dealt with by different agencies, thus we may end up with two types of grievance mechanisms. He also said that we need to set incentives for effective complaints-management.

- Vicky Murtagh (Christian Aid) said that her organisation is part of HAP.

Murtagh said that in line with the HAP principles her organisation and other NGOs involved aim to build complaints systems that promote inclusiveness and a sense of ownership and thus make beneficiaries confident to lodge a complaint. Complaints are handled by field officers, and when complaints on a specific issue continue, it becomes a formal complaint and an independent officer goes and checks. Community groups are also set up to deal and facilitate complaints. Christian Aid is also in the process of creating a webpage in its website where beneficiaries of all its programmes can make a complaint. Yet Murtagh noted that overall people tend not to complain much and that 80% of the grievances the organisation gets have to do with issues of authority corruption. And she also stressed that it is important to be clear and set barriers on what people can and cannot complain about.

- M. Molyneux said that for her the key question is how to give voice to marginalised people and what role is there for NGOs and advocates.

- The representative of HelpAge said that over the last ten years her organisation is monitoring the implementation of programmes providing assistance to old people. As a good practice she mentioned the local groups HelpAge has created at each community which include members of families with old people, and are used to evaluate not only cash transfers (such as social pensions) but also public services. The NGO has applied

this model in all regions it operates. And she said that although contexts are different, new models of M&E have to be created and implemented and address the main challenge: how to ensure that the interests of old people are aggregated and reach policy makers at national level.

- The representative of an NGO working on disability issues pointed out that apart from age, specific forms of disability increase people's difficulty to voice their complaint. She stressed that usually those who speak out and tend to speak on behalf of people with disabilities in surveys are urban, male and middle-class members of these groups. Thus the issue is who we are not listening to and how to reach her/him. Apart from disabled people, members of ethnic minorities are also often excluded and remain voiceless.

- A. Barrientos noted that we must not focus exclusively on grievance mechanisms and bureaucratic processes. Complaints can also be channelled through political channels. For example, in Brazil the federal government asks municipal governments to fill specific quota in terms of providing social assistance to eligible beneficiaries. When local governments fail to fill their quotas and assist the number of people they were expected to, the federal government exposes their failure to the public and voters will never re-elect those that failed to deliver. Thus apart from bureaucracy, there are also political processes through which one can voice complaints and demand change.

2nd Theme Feedback Mechanisms

Questions to explore:

- What works and what not?

- What is the appropriate balance between information provision and communications versus spaces for community dialogue?

- What role can civil society groups play in strengthening these mechanisms/channels?

P. Bukuluki PPP, Uganda

- In the case of Uganda, creativity and agency are involved in the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms. During payment days, programme implementers meet with transfer recipients and provide them the opportunity to raise questions and any other concerns they have; these meetings are also used as a forum to give feedback to recipients on implementation issues. Yet these efforts are spontaneous and not systematic or structured and therefore may not capture all issues of concern in a systematic way.

- Monthly and quarterly meetings are also organised by local leaders as a forum for interaction with the community and beneficiaries. But not all of them participate; women and alternative recipients often do not attend these meetings. Moreover, alternative recipients for old and frail people do not always report back to the recipients who complain that they are not informed and do not get any feedback. In addition, some beneficiaries choose not to raise their concerns due to fear of losing the transfer. There are also concerns of limited facilitation and motivation.

- Missed opportunities do exist: the use of local community-based channels such as CBOs in passing critical information and feedback is limited. Community media such as local radios which can be a good avenue to engage community have not been systematically used in the programme. Speakers were not used to inform community members about the programme.

- Community feedback meetings have also not been integrated into the programme and again the largest shortcoming was the limited involvement of civil society and particularly of CBOs at district and community levels which affected the level of engagement.

M. Shaheen PPP, West Bank

- In West Bank the way the Palestinian state deals with population demands is not necessarily characterised by a high degree of democratisation. This became evident as people who participated in this project and report said that it was actually the first time that they were able to speak. Indeed this was the first qualitative assessment of a programme in Palestine, the first to give voice to people. The cultural and political context in Palestine along with the limited capacity of the state to listen to people's concerns, have not allowed so far people's voices to be heard. Not only is the state dealing with issues of a protracted emergency situation, but it also uses a top-down approach. Decisions on programme eligibility are taken at central level. Feedback mechanisms are neither clear nor systematic. NGOs are unaware of different aspects of the programme and no public relations department exists to address people's requests for information or disseminate programme materials in a systematic way. Coordination among social protection players is weak. And as people failing to get a response turn to the media, the latter focus on negative cases and not on success stories; media dramatic and unbalanced accounts do not improve programme effectiveness but harm more its reputation and people's trust. Due to inadequate information provided, people tend to ignore that the Palestinian authority also contributes to the programme and thus state-citizens relations are not strengthened but undermined due to negative publicity. Moreover, Palestinians continue to believe that such programmes are largely a responsibility of the international community and constantly demand its assistance.

Discussion

- The representative of HelpAge mentioned that in Africa civil society platforms are often used to provide feedback for social protection interventions.

- However, Mr Bukuluki said that in Uganda such platforms are strong at national levels but at lower levels and particularly at community level they are actually non-existent.

- In Kenya although civil society has a strong presence, civil society organisations do not 'walk with' government actors and there are no synergies to bring together their interests.

- Likewise, in Mozambique civil society is vibrant at national level but rather weak at local level and it seems more like civil society and government operate as two parallel systems with the former having even less accountability than the latter. Given that the creation and effective use of such platforms can be costly within a context of scarce resources, what is most needed is high level of coverage, improved accountability mechanisms and best use of available resources by all actors involved. Also some consistency as in Mozambique resources are few while interests and focus topics change at the expense of sustainable interventions.

- In Gaza the operation of many NGOs with their own projects and lack of coordination has led to problems of fragmentation and duplication. What the government needs to do is not to provide all the services but to regulate the provision of services. On the other hand, NGOs themselves do not give that much information to government authorities, although at the same time they complain for attracting limited state attention.

- One of DFID representatives pointed out that the issue is not simply to have a feedback system in place but also to effectively respond to the feedback. She then asked what institutional arrangements are needed to do that.

- Nicola Jones said that among other things a central database and a national registry system are needed.

- Minister Daoud Al Deek from Palestine repeated that feedback mechanisms are important to inform positive policy change. Analysis of the complaints voiced by people is going to be used by his ministry to feed back into programme design. The use of a central computerised system is also going to reduce exclusion errors. All these changes are immediately necessary as after the Arab Spring the social agenda is becoming increasingly important in the region, while the discourse has also changed and instead of charity, now rights and entitlements dominate the terminology in social assistance interventions. However, he expressed his inability to follow multiple donors' requirements and aims as the ILO speaks about the Social Protection Floor, UNICEF about the need for child-sensitive policies and other agencies for gender-sensitive interventions. Different donors demand different things and his ministry often ends up facilitating the dialogue between donors in order to reach a consensus. With the aim to maintain the social cohesion of the Palestinian society his ministry is currently updating the National Social Protection Strategy for 2014-2016 with assistance received from the European Union and other donors. International experience is considered to be good and valuable to consolidate national institutional policies.

- Nicola Jones asked about any good examples of feedback mechanisms.

- Mr Bukuluki said that in Uganda programme implementers participate in meetings with beneficiaries and enable them to voice their concerns. This is important but again no further action is taken to address these concerns.

- Vicky Murtagh (Christian Aid) said that in Bangladesh in response to the devastating effects of a cyclone her organisation in partnership with a local NGO created women's groups whose members were trained as disaster risk reduction volunteers; these women also got involved in microfinance activities build around a revolving fund so that in the event of a new disaster and loss of assets they would be capable of using their savings to recover. Women received training and became aware of their rights and gradually improved their confidence and started speaking to local officers and making demands. Although they initially did not participate in community meetings, as men realised their potential, they were happy to accept women and allow them to get more involved in community affairs.

- Representatives from Mozambique and Kenya suggested that perhaps NGOs and civil society could exert greater pressure on the political system for the development of legitimate feedback systems.

- Pilar Domingo (ODI) asked how we could capture different types of grievances and if there is any example of a programme with a built-in mechanism to capture different types of complaints.

- Mr Onyango-Ouma said that in Kenya beneficiary welfare committees were created and enabled people to get more involved and bring up several issues that the committees tried then to address and move feedback to a next level.

- The representative from RAND mentioned that similar community feedback mechanisms exist in the Filipino CCT (4Ps), that is, women's grievance groups.

3rd Theme Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Questions to explore:

- What would the key ingredients be?

- What is unique about participatory evaluation for CTs as compared to other sectors?

- Who should be involved? How? With what frequency? What should they be doing? (e.g. central government versus community groups?)

W. Onyango-Ouma PPP, Kenya

- Key features of PM&E

Participation to PM&E is key to social accountability and civic engagement.

PM&E focuses on the active engagement of primary stakeholders and it is a communication and learning process. It is geared towards building ownership and empowering beneficiaries, accountability and transparency.

Although primary stakeholders should be active participants, it is still not clear how to involve them; for example what happens when they are children, how do you get them involved in PM&E?

The issue of effectively building the capacity of local people to analyse and reflect is crucial.

Learning should take place jointly and negotiations will inevitable take place as there are different views about the evaluation focus.

The identification of key objectives, indicators and programme outcomes should be collective and collaborative.

In terms of methodology flexibility is also needed given changing circumstances, skills and people involved.

Commitment is also needed to take corrective actions.

Tools that can be used include: citizen report card surveys/ community scorecards/ public hearings/ public opinion surveys/ independent grievance mechanisms.

What is constantly important throughout all these processes is the level at which participants are involved and which is critical for the state-citizens relation. This relation can be constrained if adequate provision is not made for accountability and citizen feedback into CT programmes.

Dr Bassam Abu Hamad PPP, Gaza

- Key findings

PM&E processes should involve local people, agencies and policy makers. PM&E is particularly needed in social protection interventions due to their focus on vulnerable people.

In Gaza programme beneficiaries have not been systematically involved in M&E processes. Structurally there is no specific unit within the MoSA to perform effective M&E and the truth is that such processes have largely been a request of donors, that is to say, that they are externally and not internally driven. However, there is strong ministerial will to deal with it and currently other Palestinian ministries are also attempting to develop effective M&E systems. In particular, in MoSA there is a database and a national registry is now being developed with quantitative indicators expected to be extracted from there. Thus the momentum is excellent as not only donors but also Palestinian institutions are interested to develop these processes.

Their development is taking place gradually, step by step. A new strategy to systematically involve the community into programme design, participation and evaluation means that MoSA should step in and commit to take the lead. Consensus about the new approach has to be built. And there is a need to design clear data systems and processes and collectively define the data needs of all relevant stakeholders and develop quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Heather Kindness, DFID

- There was no time for discussion. Heather was asked to provide the wrap-up. She said that despite the project's speed, she would like to thank all teams involved. She was really pleased with Thursday's event and the rich discussion given that it was an 'octopus' project with so many themes. As Barrientos remarked, she also said that this project is also unique in the sense that it offers a comparative study which is quite rare and not easy to conduct. It has offered many valuable lessons and what now needs to be done is to explore PM&E and why not much has been done in this area. It seems like we are now moving our focus from programme design and implementation to M&E in an effort to improve the use of our resources. These processes not only involve the integration of grievance and feedback mechanisms but also the provision of incentives to enable them to operate effectively. The discussion revealed that it is relatively easy to put them in place but much more difficult to have the system operating. In addition another issue of particular interest is whose voice we end up listening to. This type of qualitative research can show us how best to use research outcomes and build PM&E not only at individual case level but within different contexts through the use of comparative work.-