

## Lessons from Mexico's Progresa/Oportunidades

Progresa/Oportunidades Progresa/Oportunidades is a conditional cash transfer programme administered by the Federal Government of Mexico. Under this initiative, direct cash payments are provided to eligible poor and vulnerable households, who send their children to primary and secondary schools, and whose mothers and children receive regular preventive care at local health clinics. In addition, eligible households receive grants to improve food consumption and nutritional supplements for young children and pregnant and lactating mothers. Oportunidades reaches over 5.8 million families, or 20 percent of the total population of Mexico. In poorest regions, over 58 percent of the population is covered by Oportunidades.

### Main Features of Progresa/Oportunidades

**Education:** Grants are provided to families who send their children to primary and secondary schools. Grant amounts increase as children reach higher grades.

**Health:** Progresa provides basic health care for all members of the family, with a particular emphasis on preventive health care. This service is provided by government public health institutions, which receive financial transfers from the federal government but are managed by state and local governments.

**Nutrition:** Eligible households receive a fixed monetary transfer for improved food consumption as well as nutritional supplements for children aged between four months and four years, as well as for pregnant and lactating women.

### Impact

Key Successes among households covered by the initiative include:

- Consumption, mostly food intake, has increased by 22 percent.
- Proportion of malnourished children decreased by 17.2 percent.
- Enrolment in secondary school increased by 11 percent among girls, and 7.5 percent among boys.
- Regular health visits have increased by 30–60 percent among young children under 5.
- Disease incidence has decreased by 12 percent among children 0–2 years of age.
- Prenatal care visits increased by 8 percent among first trimester pregnant women, and more than 50 percent of women use contraceptive methods.

### Scaling-up Success

The initiative has been acknowledged for its cost effectiveness, the adequate targeting of beneficiaries, and its ability to sustain its integrity as a rigorously institutionalized anti-poverty scheme. The key enablers for such scaled up success are strong political commitment that survived election cycles, fostering of strong national-local linkages between the federal policy makers and implementers on the ground, and introduction of sound monitoring and fiscal management systems, among others. The monitoring system of Progresa/Oportunidades and the strong promotion of a human development approach are recognized as the main innovations of this initiative. The legacy of Progresa/Oportunidades has yielded important lessons to the world, demonstrating that the overall development impact is higher when redistribution schemes are coupled with interventions aimed at improving human capital of the poor. The experience of Progresa/Oportunidades has informed similar programmes in Asia,

Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, while it also continues to benefit from other ongoing large scale initiatives such as Brazil's Bolsa Familia and India's National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (MGNREGS).

### **Key Drivers of Success in Scaling Up**

Data, monitoring and evaluation: Since its inception, the designers and implementers of the Progres/Oportunidades have been aware of the importance of monitoring and evaluation systems, especially mechanisms through which the final impact could be identified and measured. The solid results respond to three key factors of the evaluation stage: (a) randomized control trials; (b) multiple observations of the same set of families before and after the interventions; and (c) rigorous analysis of the results in order to avoid false claims. This emphasis as well as the periodic monitoring and follow ups, set incentives for independent researchers and academic institutions in identifying both the causal linkages and the estimated quantitative and qualitative impacts.

### **Coordinated approach: Scaling up does not happen in isolation**

At the inception of Progres/Oportunidades it was clear that the CCT programme needed to be coordinated with ongoing similar initiatives. The need to avoid redundancy demanded actions across federal agencies and municipal governments. Even though it is a federally run programme, the state and municipal governments in Mexico played a critical role in delivering and ensuring effective service delivery of education and health services. Substantial intergovernmental collaboration was required for the smooth running of the initiative. This points out to the important fact that CCTs can work adequately only when basic social services exist at an acceptable level of quality.

### **Conclusion**

CCTs are effective in preventing short-term impact of economic and other crises. The existence of CCTs can help families to keep their food consumption levels and, therefore, halt any negative impact on the nutritional intake of children as well to keep children in schools and away from child labour. This observation comes from the fact that countries like Brazil with large CCT programmes were responding better to the crisis than other countries. Mexico managed to include a new stipend designed to compensate for the increase in food prices in the grants schemes of Oportunidades, but this was only possible because the programmes were well established and were working smoothly for some time. Although the long-term evaluations for Oportunidades still show sustained impact of the overall strategy, there are also studies pointing to the fact that the programme may have not been as successful in coping with risks for families in urban settings.