



RESEARCH BRIEF

No. 12 - 2016

The effect of a large-scale national school grants and cash transfers programme on enrolment and attendance



Knowledge, evidence and research

The **Knowledge, Evidence and Research (KER)** component of the **Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS)** programme aims to generate increased knowledge and evidence for policymakers of what works to promote girls' education in South Sudan, about programmatic causality and impact, and to provide evidence about what may be scaleable and transferable to other contexts. The KER develops an evidence base for the project interventions, linking inputs to outcomes and impacts, and gathers broader information about what works in girls' education. The programme gathers data continuously through the South Sudan School Attendance Monitoring System (SSSAMS), twice yearly through LQS, yearly through school sample survey, and then has set piece Baseline (2014), Midline (2016), and Endline (2018) survey waves.

Overview

A rigorous independent analysis of the impact of GESS 2014-2016, based on the national SSSAMS data set, found that: **capitation grants and cash transfers make schools more likely to remain open, increase their enrolment numbers, and increase attendance rates, despite the prevalence of substantial ongoing levels of violence and conflict.**

Natural control demonstrates impact of Capitation Grants Capitation Grants support teacher allowances, and along with Cash Transfers, support payments that lead to improved learning environments. Overall enrolment and attendance

have risen over the period, but in order to attribute any of this growth to the programme, a comparison needs to be made between schools reached by the programme and those not (in order to estimate the counterfactual). In the absence of a randomised selection of schools, we can take various approaches to get as close as possible to a true experiment.

First, regression analysis can control for observable differences between schools (such as location, exposure to conflict, and type of management).

Second, rather than just looking at the level of enrolment, looking instead at the growth in enrolment (conditioning on the prior year's enrolment level) controls for any unobserved differences between schools that do not vary over time.

Third, a natural experiment can be exploited. In 2015, around a quarter of schools that qualified to receive grants did not actually receive them due to administrative hold-ups at the State Ministries of Finance (SMoF), some of which were sent to schools inconsistently, providing a natural control group of schools. This group therefore has similar characteristics to schools that did receive grants, with the only difference being that they did not receive the grant.

The positive estimated effect of grants on enrolment withstands all of these additional levels of scrutiny.

Cash Transfers' impact on girls' enrolment

A similar approach is taken for Cash Transfers, with the exception that there is no similar natural experiment in which schools received grants. However as Cash Transfers are more tightly focused on girls only, identification of the effect can

be found by focusing on the difference in enrolment growth between girls and boys, which again supports the finding of positive effects.

There is no evidence that these positive results result in a reduction in enrolment in any neighbouring schools that do not receive these interventions.

Data

Data on school enrolment and attendance is taken from SSSAMS, an innovative platform providing real-time national reports on school enrolment and attendance using a combination of SMS and paper reports from schools. SSSAMS also includes records for which schools received Capitation Grants, Cash Transfers for girls, and other interventions, as well as other background variables which we use as control variables, school GPS locations, control type, and level.

As the main outcome data is self-reported and linked to payments, there is potentially an incentive for schools to over-report enrolment and attendance. Several checks are applied to ensure that this is not the case.

- First, the information system requires a demanding level of detail on individual pupils, making over-reporting difficult and risky.
- Second, pupil admission registers are counter-signed by the chair of the School Management Committee (SMC) and the Payam Education Supervisor (PES), providing an independent check. These registers are then entered by separate local officials and supported by regular visits of project and education staff.
- Third, automatic checks on enrolment numbers are performed, searching for duplicate student names and unusual patterns across years or grades, checking for unusual attendance patterns. In person checks are made by NGOs as part of their routine support to schools, and evaluators from GESS carry out surveying throughout the life of the project.
- Fourth, self-reported enrolment levels correlate with those found by in-person enumerators in a sample of schools.
- The next step, on which we are now working, is to join this analysis up with learning and examinations data at scale, to analyse the disaggregate impact of GESS interventions on learning outcomes.

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