

Cash Transfers and Social Protection



Interview with Yadigar Gokalp, Executive Director of the Social Risk Mitigation Project in Turkey

IPC: Yadigar, good evening.

Y.G.: Good evening.

IPC: Could you tell us a bit about the conditional cash transfer component of the Social Risk Mitigation Project in Turkey?

Y.G.: Yes of course. The Conditional Cash Transfers programme was quite new for Turkey when it first started in 2002. Actually, at the beginning, the main reason we started the cash transfers programme was because we had two economic crises in Turkey and one big earthquake in the Marmara region. So right after that it was introduced as a new programme, although we had a social protection system in place from 1986. We mostly had in-kind transfers all over Turkey, so with the Conditional Cash Transfers programme we targeted the poorest of the poor population of Turkey, thus becoming one of the components of this huge project called Social Risk Mitigation Project. It also includes institutional capacity development, a component of the Social Solidarity and Assistance institution in Turkey, which is the largest institution dealing with social assistance and social transfers. The other component was the Local Initiatives component, which provides some support for the relatively poor families to set up their small businesses or to support their young children with training programmes. And the other component was the Rapid Response component that was evaluated, again in some places in-kind transfers or cash transfers, but one time only in the form of heating support, food support, those kinds of benefits. So the Conditional Cash Transfer programme was the biggest component of this whole project which aimed, as I said before, to reach the poorest of the poor, and to support at least a sustainable income for a certain period of time, thus building up the assets of the poorest families in Turkey. Of course it had conditionality: for these families the condition was to send their children to school, and if aged 0-6 years, to take them to health centres for immunisation, regular check-ups, etc. Later we included pregnant women in the programme. The condition for them was to give birth in health centres and also get regular check-ups during the pregnancy.

IPC: How was the target of the programme implemented? How many beneficiaries did you or do you still have and how much is the transfer?

Y.G.: We adjusted the programme during the implementation and we had quite a lot of adjustments actually. The reason for these adjustments was that, because we started the programme right after the crisis, we had just two months for the design of the project. For a big country like Turkey it is quite difficult to have a perfect design in two months. So we set up a benefit amount at the beginning for all the children. It was a little bit low for the health support for the children aged 0-6 years. For school-aged kids, for boys and girls, the amount was the same. We reached that amount, which was approximately nine US dollars per child, not per family, by working together with the State Office for Statistics. It was basket-value and opportunity cost for a family to send one child to school, two children to school, so it was calculated in that manner. But later we adjusted the programme when we got the feed-back from the field. Following our monitoring studies it was found that in some locations the amount was really low and not encouraging families to send their children to school. In most of the places, girls were supposed to be encouraged more, since some families had traditional reasons for sending their children to school. So later we adjusted the benefit amount. We differentiated the amount for boys and girls and for primary school children and secondary school children, and increased it for secondary school children so that it might be more effective

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in encouraging behavioural changes among families. The number we targeted at the beginning was 1 million children, but in a very short period of time we actually doubled the number of children. So now we have reached over 2.5 million children and have reached about 1.3 million families all over Turkey. There are no provinces or sub-provinces that are not implementing the Conditional Cash Transfers programme. The implementing process went very well throughout the country and the families really liked the programme. Other institutions that we were coordinating for the follow-up, like line ministries, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health also approved. Thus, we received a lot of support from other line ministries. We had the evaluation reports and they came out really positive in most ways. The Government then decided to continue with conditional cash transfers as a State programme so now it is one of the main programmes of the institution and the Ministry.

IPC: What are the main results of the evaluation that you mentioned?

Y.G.: The main results - some of them of course I can mention here. It was really effective for the education of young girls, specifically their enrolment and attendance at school. It had positive effects on that. It decreased the drop-out rates of those transferring from junior high to secondary school. It also increased the attendance rates for secondary level boys and girls education. One of the things that it seemed not to have much effect on was primary school enrolment. The main reason for that is that it is mandatory for families to send their children to school for eight years and there are fines if they fail to do this. On the other hand we didn't have a main baseline study at the beginning and it was quite early. So when we look at the roll-out - we completed all the roll-outs by 2004 and we had the evaluation study in 2006 and the beginning of 2007 - it was clear that more time was needed to see the real impact of the programme. Though, it was mainly very positive for the kids aged 0-6 years. Immunisation rates increased incredibly. According to our assessment results it was a 12 percent increase, but according to the Ministry of Health, it was more than 25 percent. The programme should definitely continue all over Turkey. The targeting was very objective and worked very well. We reached the poorest of the poor and there were no other effects or any political effects targeting the people. That was very good, according to the evaluation results.

IPC: OK, thank you very much.

Y.G.: You are welcome.

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