

## Impact of Unconditional Cash Transfer Scheme on the Food Security Status of the Elderly in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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**Abstract :** Moderate economic growth in developing and emerging countries has led to improvement in the food consumption and nutrition situation in the last two decades. Nevertheless, about 870 million people, with a quarter of them from Sub-Saharan Africa, are still suffering from hunger worldwide. As part of measures to reduce the widespread poverty and hunger, cash transfer programmes are now being implemented in many countries of the world. While nationwide cash transfer schemes are few in Sub-Saharan Africa generally, the available ones are more concentrated in East and Southern Africa. Much of the available literature on social protection had focused on the poverty impact of cash transfer schemes at the household level, with the larger proportion originating from Latin America. On the contrary, much less empirical studies have been conducted on the poverty impact of cash transfer in Sub-Saharan Africa, let alone on the food security and nutrition impact. To fill this gap in knowledge, this paper examines the impact of cash transfer on food security in Nigeria. As a case study, the paper analysed the Ekiti State Cash Transfer Scheme (ECTS). ECTS is an unconditional transfer scheme which was established in 2011 to directly provide cash transfer to elderly persons aged 65 years and above in Ekiti State of Nigeria. Using survey data collected in 2013, we analysed the impact of the scheme on food availability and dietary diversity of the beneficiary households. Descriptive and Propensity Score Matching (PSM) techniques were used to estimate the Average Treatment Effect (ATE) and Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) among the beneficiary and control groups. Thereafter, a model to test for the impact of participation in the cash transfer scheme on calorie availability and dietary diversity was estimated. The results indicate that while households in the sample are clearly vulnerable, there were statistically significant differences between the beneficiary and control groups. For instance, monthly expenditure, calorie availability and dietary diversity were significantly larger among the beneficiary and consequently, the prevalence and depth of hunger were lower in the group. Econometric results indicate that the cash transfer has a positive and significant effect on food availability and dietary diversity in the households. Expanding the coverage of the present scheme to cover all eligible households in the country and incorporating cash transfer into a comprehensive hunger reduction policy will make it to have a greater impact at improving food security among the most vulnerable households in the country.

**Keywords :** calorie availability, cash transfers, dietary diversity, propensity score matching

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