

***WASHINGTON, D.C., US, September 29 (Infosplusgabon) - With 1.5 billion people covered globally, food and voucher programmes provide an important lifeline for the poor and vulnerable. Understanding how those programmes work, and how they connect to wider social protection systems is key to ensuring food security and helping the poor, says a new World Bank report.***

Social protection systems include programmes that help manage shocks, connect vulnerable people to jobs, and address poverty and food insecurity.

Food, which claims about 61 percent of the poor's expenditures, is a pressing daily concern for people at the bottom of the income ladder. An effective food-based social assistance programme can make a critical difference and help release household resources for other needs.

The study – 'The 1.5 Billion People Question: Food, Vouchers or Cash Transfers?' – has revealed that while countries increasingly support people with cash as a form of safety net, food-based programmes are still important interventions in some contexts.

The analysis, released Thursday, has highlighted how food and voucher programmes remain relevant, and in most circumstances, have improved over time.

“This report explores how countries around the world have successfully integrated social protection mechanisms and food assistance,” said Michal Rutkowski, Senior Director for the World Bank’s Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice. “Understanding how programs have evolved and learning from different country experiences enables us to adopt an evidence-based approach to protecting the poor and vulnerable, and helps policymakers deliver effective interventions.”

According to the study, cash, vouchers, and food transfers are effective in improving food security, with the former two more likely to achieve these goals at lower costs. The report also discusses how the use of modern technology in food programmes shows enormous potential for improving these delivery systems.

Vouchers and cash transfers are shown to complement food-based transfers to support additional policy goals such as in nutrition and agriculture.

“Food and cash-based assistance are often portrayed as alternatives. Yet no social protection system is entirely in one form or the other. The report sheds light on why that’s the case, and

what factors shape decisions around food based programs” said Ugo Gentilini, World Bank Senior Economist and one of the co-editors of the study.

The diversity of contexts within countries – for example the availability of food in local markets– may call for maintaining flexibility in programme choices. Political and economic factors, past practices, and the multiplicity of objectives can also help explain why governments retain food-based interventions.

Case studies of programmes in six countries, namely Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Sri Lanka, and the United States are presented in the study. Although these include middle- and high-income countries, the lessons are relevant to lower-income countries as well.

FIN/INFOSPLUSGABON/JUP/GABON 2017

© Copyright Infosplusgabon