The Child Support Grant in Doornkop: Lessons for Scaling up Developmental Impacts

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OVERVIEW

- The CSG is achieving key poverty alleviation outcomes with multiple positive family support effects.
- However, there is weak synergy between the CSG and other public services, meaning CSG recipients spend grant money on items which should be freely available to them.
- The fact that individuals use public money to buy or supplement state services reveals public service inefficiency and the erosion of citizen rights.
- The findings of this study support the call to better co-ordinate and align National, Provincial and Local public and NGO services to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and rights delivery.

What is the Child Support Grant?

The CSG is a monthly state-funded cash grant of R280 (in 2012) given to the primary caregiver of a poor child. The grant reaches over 11 million children which makes up approximately 55% of the total number of children in South Africa. The caregivers of CSG children are overwhelmingly (96%) women (Vorster & de Waal, 2008).

Study summary

The aim of this research was to assess the gender dynamics and impact of the CSG in Doornkop, a poor area of Soweto. A household survey was conducted with 343 beneficiary and non-beneficiary women who were the primary caregivers of children in their households. Additional follow-up interviews were conducted. The findings may be generalized to other poor urban areas with high uptake levels of the CSG.
How is the grant used?
The majority of recipients used the CSG to pay for food, followed by school fees, health, and transport. Follow up interviews revealed that recipients also used the money on pre-paid electricity and water.

Economic profile of participants
The grant is well targeted at poor households and particularly the very poorest. Of all households with children in Doornkop, 82% received one or more CSG. These are mainly homes in which the CSG is the only regular source of income, although it is usually complemented by other diverse income streams such as small business activities (24% of participants) and casual work (24% of participants). Only 13% of participants had formal employment. The research found that many fathers never pay private maintenance for their children (61% of fathers no longer with the child's mother). Caregivers, almost exclusively female, shoulder huge domestic and care burdens, especially when caring for young children (44% of all children were under 5 years old). These responsibilities significantly constrain caregivers’ flexibility in undertaking livelihood activities.

Use of the CSG

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of CSG</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay for food</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for school fees and uniforms</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for medicine and health services</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for transport</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pay off debts</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save money/put money aside for future use</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for household or family events</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy airtime</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for business costs</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for a child minder to look after your child</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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“There are those who are saying it’s small, it’s not enough, but it’s making a difference to them. The grant is actually helping. It’s actually adding value to [them] and to the unemployed. It gives [them] a sense of responsibility. It gives [them] dignity to actually be parents to the children and to actually assist in running the household” (SASSA official, Doornkop)
The synergy between the CSG and other services

The research revealed that some children did not have access to free school uniforms and the primary school nutrition programme. Beneficiaries also spent grant monies on health, transport, electricity and water that should be made available to them without charge. Such expenditure is due to inefficiencies in the delivery of public services and difficulties in gaining access to some of the free services to which poor residents are entitled. This significantly erodes the value of the grant.
Policy recommendations

1. It is important to build on and improve the workings of existing social programmes.
2. The scaling up of access to basic services will go a long way in improving the impact of the CSG. An example is the City of Johannesburg’s social package (free water, electricity and sanitation services) which has been extended to all CSG beneficiaries.
3. Improved access of CSG beneficiaries to free school uniforms, school nutrition programmes and free schooling is needed.
4. The private maintenance system still continues to fail South Africa’s children. Improvements are urgently needed in the maintenance court system.
5. Public and private service providers in Doornkop need to improve the coordination of services and find innovative ways of working with the community to address the challenges that they face.

Conclusions

1. The CSG is a social investment that builds human capabilities rather than drains public resources.
2. The efficient co-ordination of National, Provincial and Local public services is critical not just for improvements in public administration, but also to deliver entitlements to citizens and to promote social development.
3. In order to scale up the developmental impact of the CSG, it needs to be combined with asset building and increased income-generating activities; social support and support for care work; and better co-ordination of both public and NGO services in poor communities.

References:


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