



Researching How Cash Transfers Impact Communities in Sindh, Pakistan: Q&A with REFANI-Pakistan's Qualitative Researcher

May 2016

1) You work in Pakistan conducting research for the REFANI study, what is your role and experience working in the country?

Currently, I am the qualitative researcher for the REFANI-Pakistan study, working in collaboration between [Action Against Hunger](#) and [ENN](#). Previously I worked for the Institute of Water Resources Engineering and Management Science of Mehran University in Pakistan, supporting young scholars and researchers in their field work. I have also worked with the World Bank in Pakistan, as well as conducted my own research on female farmers and access to water in Sindh.



A focus group discussion in Dadu, Pakistan (credit: Zubaida Metlo)

2) What is the value of collecting qualitative data, as opposed to quantitative data?

Quantitative data generates objective, conclusive and numerical figures. On the other hand, qualitative data is broad, non-statistical, exploratory and descriptive. So while quantitative data is crucial for recording facts about a group of people such as ethnicity, poverty, livelihood and occupation etc., collecting qualitative data will reveal insight into their opinions, hopes, motivations and reasons. Combining these two kinds of data can provide the chance to find out about people's complicated living circumstances and realities, as well as explore their ability to cope with household dynamics, especially in frugal economic situations and difficult social conditions.

2) What is the objective of collecting qualitative data in the [REFANI-Pakistan study](#)?

Since 2013, Action Against Hunger and its partners have been implementing the [European Union](#) funded Women and children/infants Improved Nutrition in Sindh ([WINS](#)) program, aimed at improving the nutritional status of women in Sindh through community management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) programming, improved nutrition practices, food security, WASH and evidence-based advocacy. The REFANI-Pakistan study is aligned with this ongoing intervention, investigating the nutritional status of women and children who only receive the EU-WINS

educational programming, compared to those who receive cash/vouchers, in addition to the programming, for a total of four study arms (for details on the study arms please see the REFANI – Pakistan brief [here](#)).

Considering the various types of interventions, the qualitative study has two objectives. The first is to help interpret the quantitative findings on the impact of the different interventions on childhood nutrition status, taking into account possible changes in behavior, decision-making processes, use of the cash transfer and more. I really focused on what, and why, the recipients chose to spend the cash/voucher. The second objective is to investigate the existing social and economic structure under which our targeted groups live, both in the community and in the household. I tried to find out who provides cares for the family during difficult periods, who makes decisions on child health and nutrition, if they received any help from relatives or older children, how income was generated and any other activities carried out to reduce the level of poverty in the household. Considering that poverty is only one factor affecting child nutrition, it was also important for me to dive deeper and find out information on nutritional status, food security, health-seeking, women's empowerment and household dynamics.

3) What kind of qualitative data is being collected for the REFANI-Pakistan study and what valuable information may it show?

The qualitative data collected covers two separate time periods; during the cash distribution, and post-distribution. The data was collected from two groups; the community level (poor and very poor households), and REFANI mothers (those with malnourished children, and those without).

We collected all of the data through focus group discussions (with recipients and non-recipients), key informant interviews and community level interviews. We also gathered 114 village profiles which helped establish the context in which the study was set (social, cultural and economic detailed information). In addition to the local population and recipients, we spoke with Action Against Hunger staff, EU-WINS staff, REFANI field officers, NGO staff based in the community and a wide range of people who work in health, education and public administration.

Utilizing different data collection methods and interviewing a large range of people allowed us to get a wider and deeper picture of how the community as a whole feels about the intervention, if they think it works and whether it has a positive or negative impact on their lives. Since we had multiple rounds of data collection for each type of interview, at different time periods, we were able to take note of changes in the lives of the recipients as the intervention continued, and after it ended. This allowed us to follow the recipients, throughout various periods, and understand which factors had an impact on their lives. In June we will go back and collect the last round of qualitative data which will show us how the household has managed in the six months since the intervention has ended.

4) How may the qualitative data collected from the REFANI-Pakistan study fill some of the evidence gaps that exist on the nutritional impact of cash-and-voucher based food assistance?

There is great value in collecting qualitative data for the REFANI-Pakistan study, as it will indeed assist the quantitative data in filling some of the evidence gaps identified in the [REFANI](#)

[Literature Review](#). Specifically, I believe we can begin to answer some questions we have about the community and make informed inferences on the current nutritional situation. Examples of questions we will try to answer are: What are the causes of acute malnutrition? Does the shortage of food lead families to behave in certain ways? Why aren't women encouraged to work for a salary? How do women decide to use their cash/voucher, especially if it's a woman who is making this kind of decision for the first time? Is there increased tension in the family since the woman now has the power to decide how to spend the money? The data will also help us to understand more about breastfeeding practices, religious/traditional practices, health nutrition and hygiene issues, intra household dynamics, female empowerment and decision making power and how all of these issues may have an effect on nutritional status of women and children.

We noticed that some families spent money they received from the intervention on amulets from religious leaders, because they think it will ensure children's health. This kind of detailed information is not very well-documented, nor linked with actual nutritional status, but it is certainly useful to know how local communities perceive and fight against malnutrition with traditional practices. If we know how they view child health, what they spend their money on and what motivates them to act, then we might be able to help them better in the future.

6) Do you think that qualitative data and analysis on cash interventions could inform future policies or programs on cash or nutrition-sensitive projects?

That is the overall aim of the REFANI project; to produce robust evidence which can advise and influence key decision-makers in policy and practice. I hope that the qualitative data, combined with the other data collected from each study will provide a chance for policy makers to understand how people are actually living and how to best help them. Knowing more about the people and communities which we are trying to help would ideally inform the creation of more effective policies and programs, be it with cash, vouchers or behavior change communications.

7) Can you share any interesting result(s) from the preliminary analysis of the data?

I am currently in the process of analyzing the data, and I still have one more round of data collection, however I can say that the results will be very interesting.

For example, one male participant who receives cash from the intervention told me, 'they [children] demand visiting to funfair and asking for toys. So we purchased for them because this money is for children (sic.)' This interview reveals one of the many ways intervention recipients choose to spend the cash transfer, and what they think is most valuable to purchase. For me as a researcher, this demonstrates just how much there is to analyze in these situations.