



Research on Food Assistance for Nutritional Impact (REFANI)

Overview on Project Implementation

August 2018



OVERVIEW

The REFANI project was implemented from 2014-2018, funded by UK aid from the UK government, and co-financed through humanitarian aid from the European Commission. The REFANI Consortium was comprised of Action Against Hunger, Concern Worldwide, ENN and the University College London (UCL). The project aimed to strengthen the evidence base on the nutritional impact and cost-effectiveness of cash and voucher-based food assistance programmes, as well as identify the mechanisms through which the effectiveness is achieved.

REFANI was developed to build into the Department for International Development's (DFID) Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme (HIEP), contributing specifically towards improving the evidence base for humanitarian practice in emergency settings. Over the course of the project, REFANI partners worked to: (1) create high-quality, relevant research that fills gaps in the evidence base; (2) make results and evidence accessible to both technical and non-technical audiences; and (3) facilitate the successful uptake of

REFANI research by key stakeholders in policy and practice.

EVIDENCE GAPS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The REFANI partners identified several evidence gaps within their comprehensive [literature review](#), published in March 2015. In short, the review found that although complicated, given that the impact pathways of cash transfer programmes (CTPs) are numerous and context-specific, a greater understanding of *how* (i.e. the mechanisms through which) these transfers work is necessary. More evidence is also needed on a range of CTP design features (e.g. timing, duration, amount and frequency), modalities (e.g. cash or vouchers) and recipient targeting criteria. Finally, very little is known about the sustainability of such programmes and their cost-effectiveness, especially over the course of the post-intervention period.

REFANI's research questions were specifically designed to explore several gaps in the evidence base and were investigated through a series of three complementary country studies in Niger, Pakistan and Somalia. REFANI's main research questions revolved around examining the relationship between CTPs and changes to the nutritional status of children in a range of humanitarian crisis settings. Research questions explored the role of complementary interventions, specific design features of CTPs and recipient behaviours in supporting or limiting a CTP's impact on child nutritional status. Additionally, a variety of questions were investigated relating to the cost-effectiveness of CTP interventions, as well as the main drivers of costs incurred through CTP

implementation in crisis contexts. The studies have been designed to offer a degree of comparability and the opportunity to address common research questions using similar methods.

REFANI COUNTRY STUDIES

REFANI's primary activities centred on the establishment of three country studies where cash and/or voucher-based food assistance intervention packages were already being implemented. REFANI worked to determine whether there had been a reduction in acute malnutrition and/or an improvement in micronutrient status and identify the mechanisms through which the interventions worked, as well as the key variables that affected movement along causal pathways (as described in the REFANI theory of change). Finally, REFANI determined the estimated costs and cost-effectiveness of certain interventions in achieving nutritional impact.

The strength of REFANI's research lies in the combination of its studies, which were located within protracted emergency contexts in Pakistan, Niger and Somalia. Each of the REFANI studies are summarised below and in detailed subsequent Study Updates¹ and in the Cost-Effectiveness Analysis (CEA) Update.

STUDY	DESCRIPTION
PAKISTAN <i>(Dadu)</i>	A cluster randomised controlled trial of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different cash transfer (cash, 'double cash' and voucher) programmes on child nutrition status.
NIGER <i>(Tahoua)</i>	A cluster randomised controlled trial of the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of early initiation and longer duration of emergency/seasonal unconditional cash transfers on child nutritional status.
SOMALIA <i>(Afgoye Corridor)</i>	A non-randomised cluster controlled trial assessing whether cash transfers reduce the risk of children developing acute malnutrition.

NUTRITION RESEARCH STEERING COMMITTEE

To enhance the quality of research protocols and outputs, as well as maximise the impact of the research on policy and practice, REFANI convened a multi-

stakeholder Nutrition Research Steering Committee (NRSC) comprised of a cadre of external experts. The NRSC provided: technical guidance on project design; ethical guidance and validation; quality assurance through peer-review of research protocols, outputs and publications; and identification of opportunities and strategies for maximising research uptake. Members of the NRSC included representatives from key donor institutions (DFID, ECHO and USAID), as well as EpiCentre, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), Harvard University, University of Texas at Austin, the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) and country-level experts from each study country.

REFANI OUTPUTS

For a complete overview of the REFANI project, the trials conducted in Niger, Pakistan, and Somalia and results, please refer to the REFANI [Synthesis Report](#) (or the abridged REFANI [Summary Report](#)).

The REFANI Niger [protocol](#) and [impact results](#) articles have been published and are now available. The REFANI Pakistan [protocol](#) and [impact results](#) articles have also been published, as was the Pakistan [CEA](#) impact article. The Somalia impact results article is currently under peer-review, however the [protocol](#) has been published.

For more information and links to additional materials, please visit www.refani.org.

¹ Available on the REFANI website (www.refani.org).