COMMUNITY-LEVEL INTERVENTIONS FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO FOOD IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES: A COCHRANE REVIEW

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BACKGROUND
The global prevalence of undernutrition is not on a steady decline, with highest prevalences observed in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Physical and economic access to food is crucial to ensure food security. Community-level interventions could be important to increase access to food in LMICs.

OBJECTIVES
To determine the effects of community-level interventions that aim to improve access to nutritious food in LMICs, for both the whole community and for disadvantaged or other individuals or groups within a community.

SEARCH METHODS
Selected 66 electronic databases and trial registries
Date of last search: February 2020
No language or publication status limits

EFFECTS OF INTERVENTIONS

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**1. Unconditional cash transfers (UCTs)** (16 cRCTs, two RCTs, three PCSs):

- May improve food security and make little or no difference to cognitive function and development (high certainty evidence)
- May increase dietary diversity, and may reduce stunting (low-certainty evidence)

- The evidence was very uncertain about the effects of UCTs on the proportion of household expenditure on food, and on wasting (very low-certainty evidence)

- Adverse outcomes: evidence from one trial indicates that UCTs reduce the proportion of infants who are overweight.

**INTERVENTIONS THAT IMPROVED BUYING POWER**

- May result in little to no difference in the proportion of household expenditure on food and that they slightly improve cognitive function in children (high certainty evidence)
- Probably slightly improve dietary diversity (moderate-certainty evidence)
- May make little to no difference to stunting or wasting (low-certainty evidence)
- Adverse outcomes: two PCS reported that CCTs make no difference to the proportion of overweight children.

**INTERVENTIONS THAT ADRESSED FOOD PRICES:**

- Food vouchers (three cRCTs, one RCT): probably reduce price moderation (moderate-certainty evidence)
- May improve dietary diversity slightly (low-certainty evidence)
- May result in little to no difference in food insecurity (very low-certainty evidence)

- Food and nutrition subsidies (one cRCT, three PCSs):
- May reduce dietary diversity among vulnerable populations
- Evidence is very uncertain about the effects of subsidies on food security
- Evidence was very uncertain about the effects of subsidies on dietary diversity

- Social support interventions (one cRCT, one PCS):
- Usually grants probably make little or no difference as to whether households.* Evidence was uncertain about whether social support interventions reduce dietary diversity
- Evidence was very uncertain about the effects of social support interventions on food insecurity or dietary diversity

CONCLUSIONS
The body of evidence indicates that unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) can improve food security, income-generation interventions do not seem to make a difference for food security, but the evidence is uncertain for the other interventions. Conditional cash transfers (CCTs), those that help generate income, and those that help increase food access for food-poor families do seem to permanently improve dietary diversity. UCTs and food vouchers may have a potential impact on reducing stunting, but CCTs, income-generation interventions, or environment interventions do not seem to make a difference on wasting or stunting. CCTs seem to probably impact cognitive function and development but not UCTs. This may be because the contextual factors are very different, and specific conditions such as attending school, visiting the health clinic, and regular health check-ups could result in nutritional and developmental gains.

REFERENCES