

Syllabus

Social Assistance in Developing Countries (Masterseminar)

M.WIWI-VWL.0187

Summer semester 2023

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Room: Blauer Turm, MZG 8.151

Office hours: By appointment

Introductory meeting: April 21, 2023 – 12-14:00 (Zoom)

Mid-term meeting: May 12, 2023 – 10-18:00 (Zoom)

Term paper deadline: June 9, 2023 – midnight

Seminar: June 16/23, 2023 – 10-18:00 (to be announced)

Course Description

Social assistance programs have become increasingly popular to stabilize incomes and increase prosperity in developing countries over the past two decades. In this seminar, we focus on conditional and unconditional cash transfer. We will discuss aspects of the implementation, design, and targeting of such transfers. In a series of specialized topics, we will then unravel how effective cash transfers are to improve poverty-related outcomes in different regions, in post-conflict settings, during pandemics, and as disaster relief. We will also discuss issues such as the behavior of voters in response to assistance policies, compare cash transfers and active labor market policies, and shed light on the ambiguous effect of cash transfers on female (economic) empowerment as well as gender-based violence. Moreover, we will examine the widespread hypothesis that recipients of unconditional transfers lack the incentive to work or to care for their economic future self-responsibly.

Eligible Participants

The seminar is open to MA students in development economics, international economics as well as MA programs in business economics or the MA in Modern Indian Studies.

Course Requirements

To acquire **6 credit points**, students will have to write a **research paper**, prepare a **presentation**, participate in the **discussions**, and briefly **discuss two papers and one outline of another student**.

Seminar Paper

For the seminar paper, you should define a self-selected research question that is within the topic chosen/assigned to you. In the description of each topic you can find inspiration for potential research questions. When choosing the research question, consider whether enough literature is available to thoroughly discuss and answer the question.

The seminar papers must be *well structured*, written in *active voice*, *concise (as clear as possible, short sentences, avoid unnecessary repetition)*, written in *English*, comprising of *10-12 pages* (12pt, 1 ½ spaced, excluding bibliography and exhibits). Despite its shortness, the information density of your paper should be very high. You should aim to cite a minimum of *30-50* scientific references in total. The papers should be analytical and critical, develop a coherent argument, drawing own conclusions and should go beyond the pure summary of existing literature. In addition students should compose a short *abstract of about 200-300 words* (key question and main results).

Writing well will be key for your grade in this course. Systematically learning how to do so, will help you not only in this course but throughout your Master program. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to read (at least) chapter 1 – 8 of the following book:

Reid, Natalie (2010). *Getting published in international journals: writing strategies for European social scientists*. [Bereichsbibliothek Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften \(BBWISO\)](#). Signatur: 16 : A 1310 Rei

You can find guidelines on formatting your paper and other writing tips here: <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/a69e7da00d66d8eff849cfda49b2881e.pdf/Guidelines%20for%20writing%20theses.pdf>

Presentations

The presentations should have a maximum length of **20 min** focusing on the central insights of the research papers. The speaker should use slides and should be able to answer short questions during the presentation. Please do not merely present text on your slides but illustrate your arguments with figures, graphs and tables wherever possible. Keep your audience in mind and prepare a well-structured, interesting and educational presentation, and do not in any case only read out your paper.

Discussions

In addition, each student will be assigned to discuss two fellow student's papers. The discussions should follow the presentation of the respective student and briefly last roughly 5 minutes. The discussion should be a (respectful) critical reflection of the paper and presentation (content, structure, unclear points) and come up with two or three questions to start a discussion (please be prepared to voice your own opinion about these questions). Moreover, all students should briefly read through the papers of the other participants before the seminar to facilitate a good discussion after the presentations.

Timeline

Preliminary meeting

21.04.2023 (12-14:00)

Meeting: Introduction to topics and clarification on registration procedure

Interim Meeting

10.05.2023 (midnight)

Deadline: Upload your proposed outline via Studip. Name your file “Outline_Topic-Number.pdf”

12.05.2023 (10:00-18:00)

Meeting: Discussion of seminar paper outlines.
(Students will discuss each others outline, and receive feedback from advisor)

Term Paper and seminar

09.06.2023 (midnight)

Deadline: Send your seminar papers until **11:59pm** to jzenker@uni-goettingen.de. Please, also upload your paper to Studip. Name your file “Paper_ Topic- Number.pdf”

13.06.2023

Deadline: Upload the presentation slides to Studip. Name your file “Slides_Topic-Number.pdf”

16/23.06.2023 (10:00-18:00)

Meeting: Seminar with presentations and discussions.

Grading

The grading consists of two components:

- Term paper [70%]
- Presentation of the term paper [30%]

Furthermore, in order to pass the course, participants must

- be present and actively participating during **all** seminar dates from beginning till end
- submit all written course requirements (draft outline and research paper) on time
- peer-discuss an outline of another student
- peer-discuss two papers at the final meeting
- achieve a grade exceeding or equal to 4.0 on the term paper
- achieve a weighted average grade exceeding or equal to 4.0 on all components

Reading List

The reading list for this course is on Zotero and continuously updated:
https://www.zotero.org/groups/2483905/ugoe_econ_sad_seminar

Please, create a free Zotero account (if you don't already have one). Once you have logged into your account, please click the link above and then “join” the group. Once you have clicked on the “join” button, I will receive an email request that enables me to give you access to the group.

When your request was approved (I will try to do so within 24 hours), please click on the link above again, scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on “group library”. You should now be able to see the topic folders of the seminar.

For each topic, you will find recent research articles, which (in addition to the introductory readings) can be used as a starting point for your literature search. However, the seminar paper should include references well beyond the reading list. Some recommended readings, like reports from international organizations or systematic reviews, summarize a lot of literature. For your literature analysis, it is useful to carefully consider some of the individual studies that are cited in these reports and reviews. However, avoid to purely repeat the reports’ or reviews’ summaries of individual studies in your seminar paper.

Also, please consider this helpful repertoire of cash transfer related research papers from GiveDirectly: <https://www.givedirectly.org/cash-research-explorer/>

Introductory readings

- DFID (2011). **Cash Transfers**. Evidence Paper, DFID Policy Division, April 2011.
- Dodlova, Giolbas, and Lay (2016). **Non-contributory social transfer programmes in developing countries: A new data set and research agenda**. *GIGA Working Paper*, No. 290.
- Hagen-Zanker et al. (2016). **Understanding the impact of cash transfers: the evidence**. *ODI Briefing*, July 2016.

Topics

PART I: Overview of program types

1. Social assistance in developing countries – History, policy aims, key issues, regional overview

In the last decade, the theory and practice of social assistance programs has advanced at a rapid pace in developing countries. This topic should give an overview of the history of social assistance in developing countries, provide a concise categorization of policy aims and program types, identify key issues in the emergence of social assistance programmes, and assess the potential of social assistance policies to address poverty and vulnerability in developing countries. You can also compare regional differences in the emergence and the success of social assistance programs.

2. Conditional cash transfer programs – Inter-generational outcomes

Many successful social programs focus on the intergenerational effects, where transfers are conditioned to poor families on investments in the human capital of children and other family members. Research questions under this topic should discuss the effectiveness of interventions on the intergenerational transmission of human capital.

3. Non-contributory pension schemes

Over the last two decades, social pensions have become a popular policy tool to support the elderly in low-income contexts. Research questions under this topic may investigate how social pension affects the labor supply and well-being of eligible elderly. Moreover, research questions may be concerned with spill-over effects of pension payments to children co-residing in pension-households.

4. Unconditional cash transfers – Incentives

This topic is concerned with long-standing questions like: Do cash transfers enable the poor to structurally transform income portfolio? Do recipients invest parts of transfers to create a sustainable economic future for themselves? Or do cash transfers, in contrast, create disincentives for labor supply and encourage recipients to rely on external sources for survival?

5. Unconditional cash transfers – Humanitarian, disaster, post conflict

Can cash or food transfers help to establish food security in ultra-poor settings or after natural disasters (e.g. droughts, storms, etc.)? What challenges do policy makers face? Post-conflict, war-torn states struggle to deliver basic services to their citizens and require outside intervention from international organisations to assist internally displaced populations during and post-conflict. This topic should cover literature on policies and interventions implemented in recent conflict-ridden countries. Do certain myopic interventions do more harm than good?

6. Active labour market policies

Active labor market policies like, vocational skills and business training initiatives, public works programs, and employment services all aim to increase income by enabling participants to help themselves instead of just handing cash or in-kind transfers. Under this topic we will discuss the effectiveness of such programs. Two foci could be how the effectiveness of programs compare across middle- and low-income countries; or whether these programs effect men and women differently.

PART II: Implementation and design

7. Implementation -- Cash vs. in-kind

Transfers can be distributed to those in need in the form of cash, but also in the form of vouchers, food, or other “in-kind” items. This topic is concerned with the questions how the different transfer types impact on well-being, and whether certain types are particularly suited for specific contexts.

8. Implementation -- Design and efficiency

The implementation of a (cash) transfer programs requires policy makers to decide on a number of non-trivial design choices. For instance, whether or not to condition eligibility on individual or household characteristics; how eligible individuals can apply/identify themselves to/for a program (e.g. identification through fingerprints or ID documents), whether to provide stand-alone transfers or combine them with skill training opportunities, grants, assets, or other complimentary components; whether to give cash directly or deposit it in a bank account, etc. In this topic we will discuss case studies which examine such design choices.

9. Targeting

Under this topic we will discuss the (possible) efficiency gains of targeted versus non-targeted transfers. I.e., do programs perform better in improving well-being when schemes try to identify those most in need, or do they perform just as well if a scheme is distributed universally. What are the challenges of targeting in practice?

10. Does respondent gender matter?

It is a long standing notion that social transfer do more good in the hands of women compared to men. Women are thought to prioritize spending on food, education and health expense particularly for children. However, is there clear evidence to support this claim?

PART III: Special topics

11. Cash transfers and female empowerment

Interventions that aim at increasing economic opportunities for women have gained traction in recent years. This topic should review the following questions pertaining women's empowerment policies: What is the effect of women's empowerment interventions that aim to promote recipient households' welfare outcomes? What are the pathways through which these interventions can affect human development? What institutional factors can support/limit the effectiveness of such interventions?

12. Cash transfers and gender-based violence (GBV)

The implementation and effectiveness of policies to tackle GBV have come into question. This topic should critically review the existing policies to address GBV in developing countries. What can be said about the external validity of certain programs to address GBV? Are there any ethical concerns when designing policies dealing with sensitive issues like GBV?

13. Cash transfers and pandemics

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a massive global public health crisis. Existing research from economic sciences can provide valuable insights into formulating effective policies to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the current pandemic. This topic should discuss the

economic policies during previous pandemics, and what measures can be replicated for the existing pandemic.

14. Social assistance programs and political economy

The final topic discusses the political determinants of the social policy reforms that occurred in developing countries. This topic should discuss the literature on the political economy of social assistance. Do politicians manipulate the enforcement of conditional welfare programs to influence electoral outcomes? Do social programs effect electoral behaviours?

15. Leakage and corruption

Weak institutions in poor countries are known to foster corruption. This does not stop at the implementation of social assistance programs. Leakage is a common problem that policy makers and international organizations face when implementing such programs. Summarize the evidence on leakage severity, types, reasons, consequences and potential protection mechanisms.