

Medium-term Impacts of Integrated Social Safety Nets: Cash Transfers, Information Meetings, and Home Visits for Child Development

Richard Akresh[‡], Damien de Walque^{*}, Harounan Kazianga[†], Abigail Stocker[‡]

[‡] University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

^{*} World Bank

[†] Oklahoma State University

EEA Congress, Bordeaux, August 28, 2025

Motivation

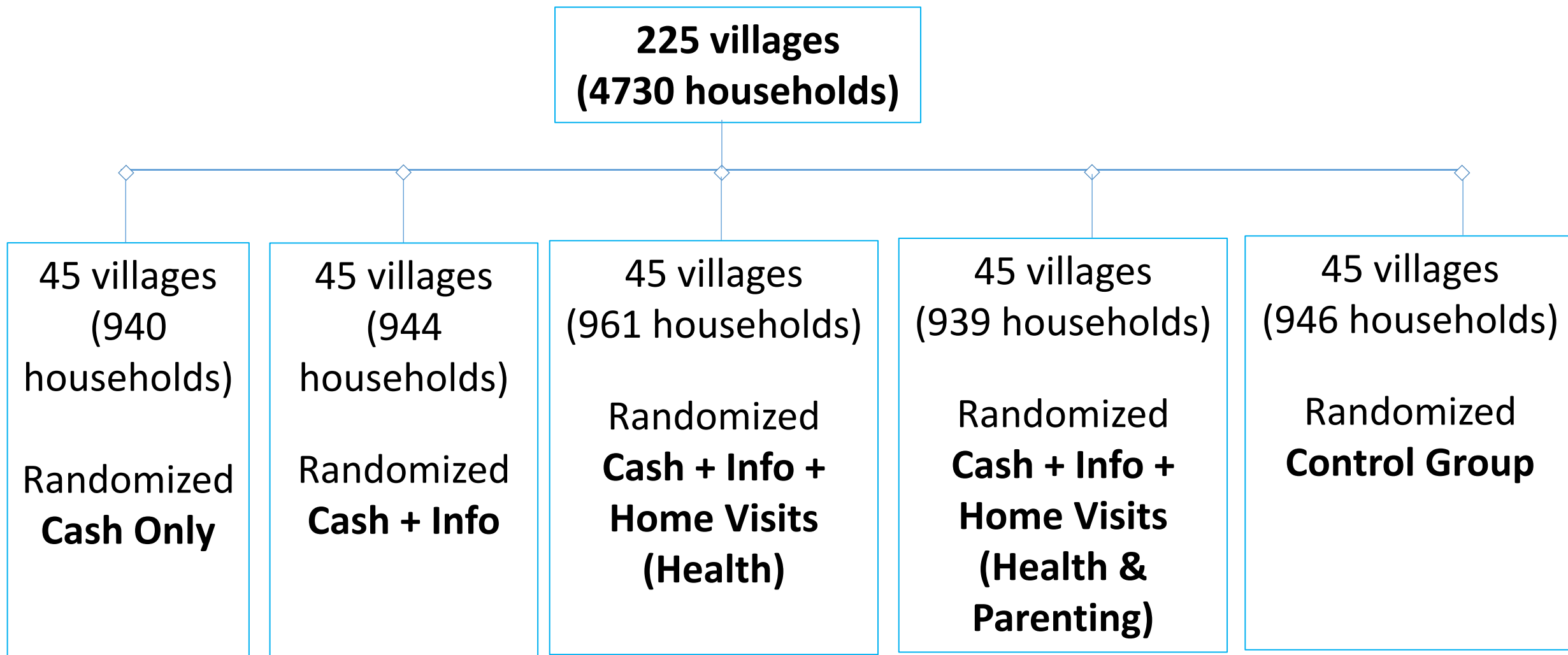
- Social safety nets for poor families—cash transfers critical component
- Lots of RCT evidence that cash works
- Yet over 240 million children in poor countries not reaching their potential (health, education, early childhood development)
- Governments have been searching for alternative, complementary approaches
 - Families might lack information on best practices
 - Quality of parenting behaviors matters
- Many governments/NGOs try kitchen-sink approach doing everything
- **This Project:**
 - Try to understand whether adding components to create an **integrated social safety net** is effective
 - What components matter?

Research Questions

- Can combining **cash**, **information**, and **home visits** in an integrated social safety net remove household barriers to change and improve child development?
 - Does adding **village level information meetings** to a **cash transfer program** improve their effectiveness?
 - Does adding **home visits** on top of the **information meetings** further improve child outcomes?
- Do these beneficial effects last once the intervention ends?

This Paper

- Randomized program evaluation of integrated social safety net program in rural Burkina Faso administered by government



Main Contributions

- One of the first papers to evaluate RCT of an integrated social safety net intervention focused on providing **cash**, **information**, and **home visits** in the same setting (Carneiro, 2021)
- First paper to separate out the role of **cash** versus **information** versus **home visits** to understand what role each plays in improving child development
- **Medium-term effects:** Due to insecurity in parts of Burkina Faso and COVID, endline survey delayed 15 months after treatment intervention ended

Overview of Results

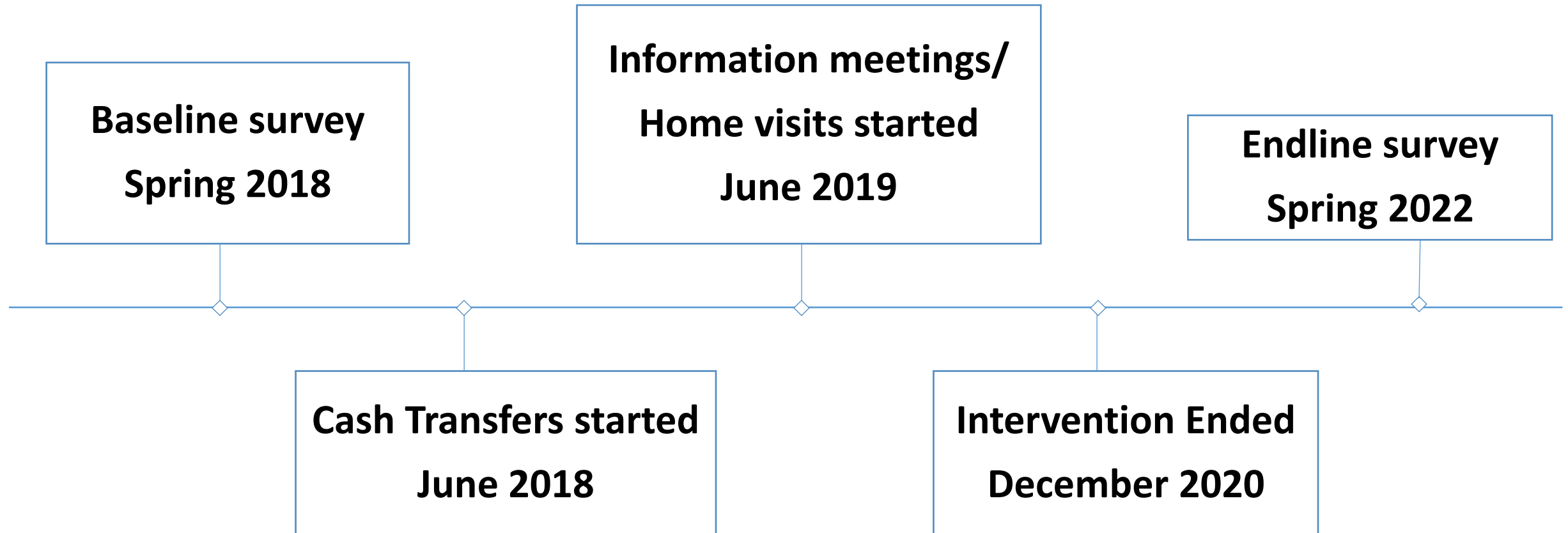
- **Cash + information + home visits medium-term impacts:**
- **Fertility and Pregnancy**
 - Fewer pregnancies, older age at each pregnancy, more medically assisted childbirths
- **Health Behaviors**
 - Improved child nutrition, more bednets & prenatal visits, increased handwashing
- **Education**
 - Increased school enrollment, years of school, improved grade progression
- **Early Childhood Development**
 - Improved Strengths & Difficulties psychological assessment, only prosocial behaviors
 - No impacts on Denver assessment (language, gross/fine motor, personal social)
- Limited medium-term impacts of cash transfers: Education, ECD-prosocial behaviors
- No impacts of information

Burkina Faso Social Safety Net Pilot Project

- **Transfer amount** (paid quarterly):
 - Households up to 4 children: 30,000 FCFA (~\$60 USD)
 - Households with 5+ children: 40,000 FCFA (~\$80 USD)
- **Information**: quarterly village sessions + monthly meetings for groups of 25-30 mothers
- **Home visits**: 2 home visits per month

- Baseline randomization balance ([Table 2](#))
- Village attrition
 - Baseline 225 villages/Endline 74 villages, due to conflict, but balanced and no differential attrition across treatment arms
- Household attrition: only 2.7% in the 74 villages safe to return to

Burkina Faso Social Safety Net Pilot Project Timeline

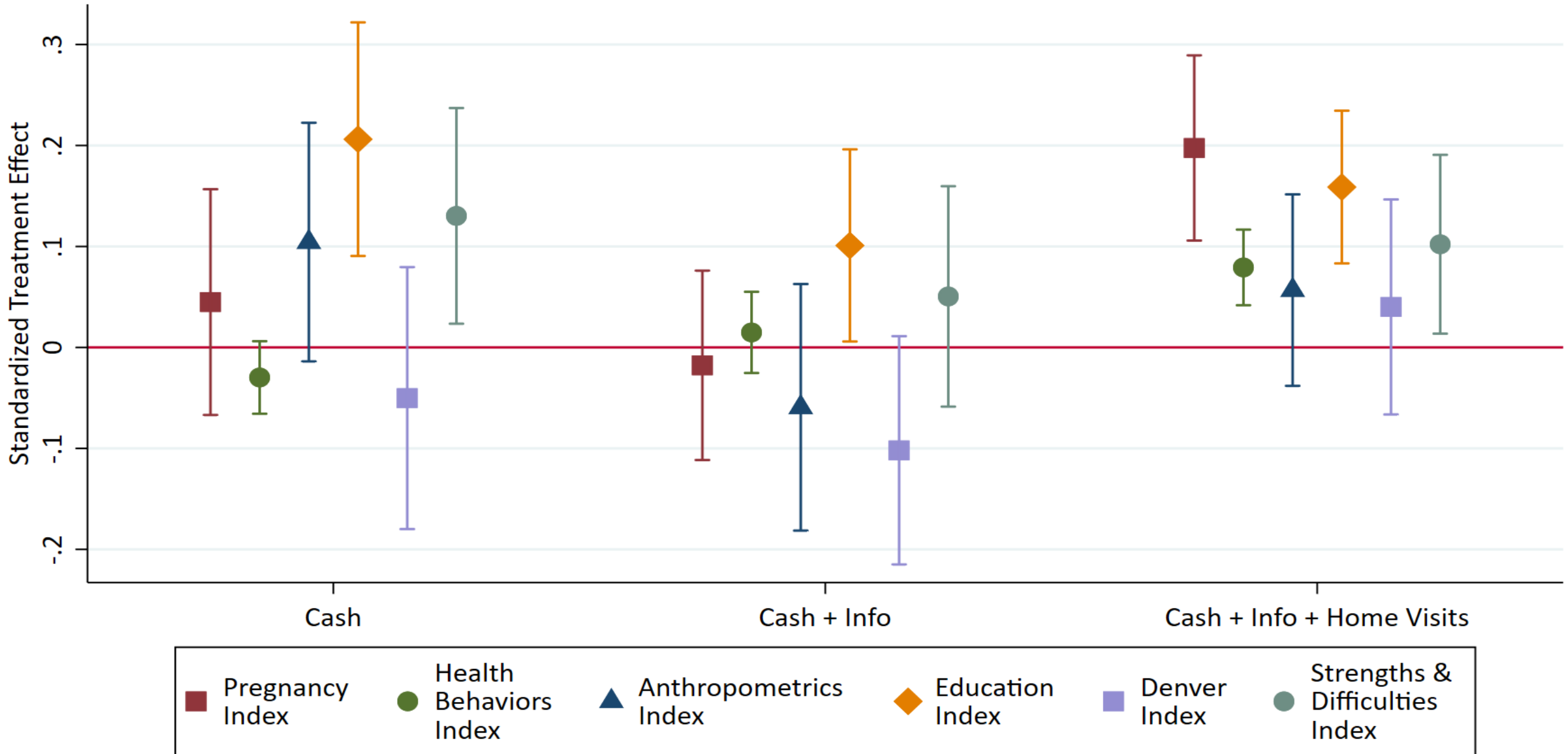


Econometric Specification

$$Y_{ihvc1} = \alpha + Y_{ihvc0} + \beta_1 T1_{hvc} + \beta_2 T2_{hvc} + \beta_3 T3T4_{hvc} + \gamma_c + \delta \mathbf{X}_{ihvc} + \epsilon_{ihvc}$$

- T1: Cash transfers only
- T2: Cash + information
- T3T4: Cash + information + home visits
- Include commune strata fixed effects, LASSO procedure to select X's
- Standard errors clustered at unit of randomization (village)
- Strategies to address large number of outcomes & SE with small sample sizes
 - Creation of indexes for families of outcomes [Kling, Liebman, Katz (2007)]
 - Randomization inference p-values (Young, 2019)

Treatment Effects on Indices



Impact of Treatment on Pregnancy Age

	Age at first pregnancy	Age at 2nd pregnancy	Age at 3rd pregnancy	Age at 4th pregnancy	Age at 5th pregnancy
Cash Arm	-0.020 (0.220) [0.930]	-0.016 (0.228) [0.941]	0.038 (0.224) [0.870]	0.328 (0.279) [0.248]	0.367 (0.412) [0.375]
Cash + Info Arm	-0.016 (0.193) [0.944]	-0.103 (0.209) [0.627]	-0.140 (0.221) [0.523]	0.162 (0.285) [0.599]	0.581 (0.435) [0.181]
Cash + Info + Home Visits Arm	0.297 (0.202) [0.139]	0.379* (0.210) [0.069]	0.475** (0.236) [0.046]	0.930*** (0.296) [0.001]	1.038** (0.468) [0.035]
Observations	1,051	984	914	811	688
Control Group Mean	18.71	21.56	24.16	26.51	28.95

Impact of Treatment on Fertility

	# times pregnant	Indicator medically assisted birth	Pregnancy index
Cash Arm	0.026 (0.127) [0.835]	0.009 (0.021) [0.678]	0.045 (0.067) [0.512]
Cash + Info Arm	0.021 (0.121) [0.856]	-0.003 (0.020) [0.890]	-0.018 (0.056) [0.748]
Cash + Info + Home Visits Arm	-0.290** (0.117) [0.011]	0.036* (0.018) [0.056]	0.198*** (0.055) [0.000]
Observations	1,051	1,029	1,051
Control Group Mean	4.63	0.96	0.00

Health Topics for Information and Home Visits

- Compliance with 7 prenatal visits
- Exclusive breastfeeding 0-6 months
- Feeding the child 6-23 months
- Consumption of foods rich in micronutrients (Vitamin A, Iron and Iodine)
- Early breastfeeding and breastfeeding technique
- Food groups
- Diet of the pregnant woman
- Prevention of anemia, malaria in pregnant women
- Feeding of breastfeeding women
- Iron supplementation in vit. A and prevention of malaria in breastfeeding women

Impact of Treatment on Health

	Child gets vitamin A	Child gets iron	Mother gets vitamin A	Mother gets iron	Child fully vaccinated
Cash Arm	0.016 (0.039) [0.673]	-0.032 (0.041) [0.452]	-0.036 (0.026) [0.190]	-0.020 (0.016) [0.212]	-0.014 (0.051) [0.776]
Cash + Info Arm	-0.010 (0.041) [0.794]	-0.020 (0.039) [0.626]	-0.029 (0.029) [0.360]	-0.041* (0.021) [0.054]	-0.088 (0.059) [0.169]
Cash + Info + Home Visits Arm	0.075** (0.035) [0.041]	0.009 (0.041) [0.850]	-0.008 (0.025) [0.737]	-0.010 (0.018) [0.613]	-0.016 (0.053) [0.786]
Observations	1,028	1,028	1,028	1,028	1,028
Control Group Mean	0.49	0.62	0.85	0.94	0.51

Impact of Treatment on Health (2)

	Child uses mosquito net	Food group diversity index	Mother washes hands after toilet	Mother washes hands before feeding	Child no diarrhea last month	# prenatal visits	Breast feeding	Health behavior index
Cash Arm	0.017 (0.050) [0.741]	0.055 (0.139) [0.692]	0.000 (0.020) [0.998]	0.024 (0.023) [0.308]	0.075* (0.038) [0.053]	0.055 (0.105) [0.616]	-0.006 (0.008) [0.513]	-0.030 (0.022) [0.178]
Cash + Info Arm	0.088* (0.051) [0.091]	0.043 (0.122) [0.703]	-0.006 (0.020) [0.765]	0.045** (0.021) [0.036]	0.006 (0.029) [0.826]	0.186* (0.104) [0.091]	-0.003 (0.006) [0.694]	0.015 (0.024) [0.536]
Cash + Info + Home Visits Arm	0.135*** (0.041) [0.002]	0.295*** (0.094) [0.002]	0.032** (0.015) [0.046]	0.050*** (0.019) [0.008]	0.089** (0.036) [0.018]	0.199* (0.100) [0.060]	0.001 (0.004) [0.823]	0.079*** (0.023) [0.001]
Observations	1,028	259	1,144	1,144	1,028	1,032	1,032	1,028
Control Mean	0.73	0.17	0.94	0.93	0.61	4.67	0.99	0.15

Impact of Treatment on Anthropometrics

	Arm			
	Height-for-age Z-score	circumference-for-age Z-score	Weight-for-age Z-score	Anthropometrics index
Cash Arm	-0.155 (0.101) [0.126]	0.281*** (0.093) [0.005]	0.080 (0.090) [0.372]	0.104 (0.071) [0.138]
Cash + Info Arm	-0.189* (0.107) [0.082]	-0.006 (0.084) [0.933]	-0.032 (0.111) [0.790]	-0.059 (0.073) [0.425]
Cash + Info + Home Visits Arm	-0.041 (0.096) [0.666]	0.170** (0.073) [0.018]	0.073 (0.070) [0.289]	0.057 (0.057) [0.314]
Observations	1,841	1,841	1,841	1,841
Control Group Mean	-1.19	-1.10	-1.25	-0.06

Impact of Treatment on Education

	Enrolled in school	Years of school	Any school completed	Progression (completed/expected)	Education index
Cash Arm	0.111*** (0.036) [0.005]	0.156 (0.116) [0.191]	0.101*** (0.036) [0.010]	0.039 (0.030) [0.216]	0.206*** (0.069) [0.008]
Cash + Info Arm	0.050 (0.031) [0.106]	0.091 (0.096) [0.347]	0.050* (0.029) [0.093]	0.025 (0.026) [0.356]	0.101* (0.057) [0.081]
Cash + Info + Home Visits Arm	0.081*** (0.024) [0.001]	0.266*** (0.083) [0.002]	0.077*** (0.022) [0.002]	0.059*** (0.022) [0.006]	0.159*** (0.045) [0.002]
Observations	5,128	5,128	5,128	4,595	5,128
Control Group Mean	0.46	2.17	0.57	0.52	0.03

Early Childhood Development

- **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)**
 - 25 items across 5 different scales ([Appendix](#)-detailed items)
 - Each statement scored as “Not True”, “Somewhat True”, “Certainly True”
 - 1. Emotional problems scale
 - 2. Conduct problems scale
 - 3. Hyperactivity scale
 - 4. Peer problems scale
 - 5. Prosocial scale
- Total Difficulties scores-summing scores from first 4 problems scales

Denver Prescreening Development Questionnaire

- **Denver Prescreening Developmental Questionnaire**
 - Language, Fine Motor, Gross Motor, Personal-Social
 - In each of the 4 sections, set of questions for each aged child
 - Yes/No answers for whether the child can do the task/activity
 - Can then measure developmental progress for each child

Impact of Treatment on Strengths and Difficulties

	Total difficulties in average range	Total z-score under -0.5	Prosocial in average range	Prosocial z-score over 0.5	Strengths & difficulties index
Cash Arm	0.079 (0.052) [0.132]	0.081 (0.051) [0.123]	0.039* (0.023) [0.092]	0.032 (0.035) [0.344]	0.130** (0.064) [0.048]
Cash + Info Arm	0.024 (0.052) [0.652]	0.037 (0.054) [0.520]	0.022 (0.019) [0.245]	0.003 (0.031) [0.919]	0.051 (0.066) [0.447]
Cash + Info + Home Visits Arm	0.027 (0.045) [0.561]	0.039 (0.047) [0.427]	0.059*** (0.015) [0.001]	0.060* (0.031) [0.046]	0.102* (0.053) [0.068]
Observations	1,647	1,647	1,647	1,647	1,647
Control Group Mean	0.28	0.28	0.06	0.17	-0.18

Impact of Treatment on Denver

	Total score	Language	Fine motor	Gross motor	Personal social
Cash Arm	-0.010 (0.0301) [0.733]	-0.007 (0.0262) [0.786]	-0.019 (0.0360) [0.608]	-0.021 (0.0335) [0.529]	-0.030 (0.0307) [0.323]
Cash + Info Arm	-0.040 (0.0254) [0.127]	-0.0411* (0.0219) [0.055]	-0.034 (0.0297) [0.261]	-0.0555* (0.0297) [0.074]	-0.024 (0.0299) [0.411]
Cash + Info + Home Visits Arm	0.014 (0.0245) [0.543]	0.013 (0.0217) [0.529]	0.006 (0.0286) [0.829]	0.014 (0.0278) [0.601]	0.027 (0.0270) [0.296]
Observations	2,442	2,442	2,442	2,442	2,442
Control Group Mean	0.47	0.44	0.48	0.52	0.48

Home Visit Possible Mechanisms

- **Why are Cash + Info + Home Visits so effective?**
- Salience: Parents feel like government cares about them and their children
 - Similar effects for home visits focused only on health and home visits focused on health & ECD
- Parents might not understand the group meeting information, think will make changes later, confused, don't believe it, and home visits could change/impact all of these
- Accountability effect: 1-1 relationship, health worker revisits again & again
- **Why limited ECD impacts?**
- Cash might have played a role, increased opportunity cost of parenting
- Program fade-out 15 months after ended

Cash + Info Possible Mechanisms

- Why does cash + information have smaller impacts than cash only?
- Information is misunderstood/crowds out things parents were already doing
- Information comes with government vehicles, big group meetings, very visible: could be linked to insecurity/terrorism versus smaller footprint home visits?
- Lack the data to really pin this down

Extra Slides

Treatment Fidelity

- IPA conducted monitoring checks in Jan, March, June, Sept, and Nov 2020
- For each IPA monitoring check, contacted 63 households in 9 villages selected across the 4 treatment arms
- Asked each household whether the different treatment components relevant for their village given the randomization took place
- During follow-up survey, asked households to answer questions about of receipt of cash transfers, information meetings, and home visits
- Keep in mind, follow-up survey is 15 months after treatment ended

Receipt of Information/Home Visits—Spot Checks

	Recall period (months)	Jan. 2020 In Person	Mar. 2020 In Person	June 2020 By phone	Sep. 2020 By phone	Nov. 2020 By phone
Cash received	3	89%	98%	100%	64%	94%
Quarterly village meetings	3	100%	100%	100%	68%	60%
At least 1 mother group meetings	2	100%	100%	93%	71%	77%
Received home visits	2	83%	76%	79%	67%	46%