The Role of Social Protection in Advancing Women’s Empowerment: towards sustainable poverty reduction

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Does social protection empower women?

• women often targets of social protection because of vulnerabilities related to gender
• women often transfer receivers because of providers of care and other reproductive roles (Molineux, 2006; Holmes and Jones, 2013)

• are they targets for the right reasons?
• how does gender-bias limits social protection impacts on poverty reduction?
A framework of analysis for rural women’s economic empowerment

Economic Advancement
- Access to:
  - health
  - education
  - productive assets
  - social insurance and financial services
  - technology and extension services
  - the labor market and to income-generating opportunities
  - better community infrastructure

Power and Agency
- membership in rural institutions
- access to social networks
- legal empowerment
- social change in gender roles
- balances intra-household bargaining power
What is the evidence? (1/4)

cash transfers

• evidence from over 22 empirical studies; most evidence from Latin America and SS-Africa

• Access to (small) productive resources and some increase in decision-making on how income is spent

• But outcomes are not realized automatically

• Hardly change intra-household dynamics

• Concerns that *conditionalities* reinforce gender roles

• Evaluation periods too short for evaluating impact on empowerment and changes in gender roles
What is the evidence? (2/4)

asset transfers

• less evidence available, mostly from Bangladesh and India (also overlaps with other livelihood programs)

• Contribution to RWEE is straightforward (asset accumulation)

• sometimes conduit of credit access (collateral or program design)

• But depends on type of asset, training provided, and ability of retaining control of asset
What is the evidence? (3/4)

Public works

- Evidence from Botswana, Argentina, Ethiopia and India
- Problems around direct participation of women because of the nature of public works
- Some have a gender-sensitive design (flex time, crèches, proximity) but often hard to implement
- Do not provide (gender) adequate tools and technologies
- Better results in public works “plus” models, but little evidence on gender-related outcomes
What is the evidence? (4/4)

agricultural subsidies

- few studies look at gender-related impacts; empirical evidence from Africa (Ghana, Malawi)
- little or no impact
- targeting bias towards male-headed households or male farmers
- do not address gender inequalities in access, use and returns to inputs
What are the challenges?

Many - but let’s focus on two:

• Changing the political discourse in SP regarding women– to include reproductive but also economic role

• Integrated social protections systems with clear gender-equality objectives ...
The role of SP for gender equality and women’s empowerment

• gender equality objectives
• gender sensitive design that includes quality complementary services

but also:
• coordination with livelihood interventions
• an enabling environment (rural services, infrastructure, institutions, rights, markets)
gender-responsive social protection systems

- Rural Services
- Infrastructure
- Institutions and Rights
- Markets

Other livelihood interventions

Supplementary services and training

Gender-sensitive social protection schemes
Next Steps for FAO - PtoP

- promoting a different discourse about women in social protection “beyond mothers and caretakers” (Holmes and Jones, 2013)
- promoting coordinated and integrated social protection systems with gender equality objectives
- mainstreaming measurement of gender-related impacts in research on social protection
  - FAO-PtoP starting a series of case studies on women’s empowerment in social protection
  - And impact evaluation analysis of cash transfers on women’s empowerment indicators
Thank you!

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