Public works programmes in developing countries: Reducing gendered disparities in economic opportunities?

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Gender and social protection research project

Gender analysis of:

- Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) - 8 million participants, donor and government funded

- India’s Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 50 million households, a constitutional right
Gender inequality in the rural labour market

Women face marginalisation and discrimination in the rural labour market:

• Unequal pay
• Higher rates of unemployment and underemployment
• Highly represented in insecure and casual work
  • Low literacy and skills
  • Constraints balancing income-generating opportunities outside the home with domestic responsibilities
• Mobility constraints
• Institutional bias
• Social exclusion and discrimination
Public works programmes (1)

• Provide income transfers through employment

• Smooth income, particularly during slack or hungry periods

• Build community infrastructure, such as roads, irrigation, schools and health clinics

• Are more effective when include community involvement
Public works programmes (2)

However, challenges include:

• How to balance objectives of quality infrastructure with poverty reduction goals
• What level to set benefits
• Provisions of support for those unable to work

And gender challenges include:

• Under-representation of women
• Gender biased payment and undervaluation of women’s work
• Under-representation of women in decision-making structures
• Focus on productive sphere at expense of considering redistribution of costs of social reproduction
Have Ethiopia and India’s PWP s sought to address these gendered inequalities? (1)

PSNP:

• Quota for women’s participation
• Flexible working times and crèches
• Direct support during late stages of pregnancy and nursing
• Promotion of women’s involvement in community decision-making structures about the programme
• Gender-sensitive community assets
Have Ethiopia and India’s PWPs sought to address these gendered inequalities? (2)

India:

• Quota to ensure women’s participation (1/3)
• Crèche facilities
• Preference for single women to work close to residence
• Equal wages
• Women to be represented in local vigilance and decision-making committees
Impacts: Reducing gender disparities? (1)

- Relatively high participation of women
- Better (equal) pay and more remunerative job alternatives
- Support to immediate income and consumption needs (food and services)
- In Ethiopia, some reports of greater respect accorded to women from their husbands
- Community perceptions changing in Ethiopia of women’s ability to contribute to work activities
- Greater articulation of women’s views in community meetings in Ethiopia
- Increased social capital
Impacts: Reducing gender disparities? (2)

However:

• Limited control over income
• Gender-bias in wages, “light work” work for women
• Discrimination of single women
• Lack of childcare facilities
• Ad hoc implementation of direct support as well as gender-sensitive other provisions in Ethiopia
• Limited meaningful participation in community meetings
Policy implications

• Ensure vulnerability and poverty assessment for informing programme design is gender-sensitive

• Mobilise political support for integrating gender concerns in programme design and implementation

• Invest in capacity building and sensitisation on gender equality for programme implementers

• Embed sex-disaggregated M&E indicators within programme design