

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

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Abstract

This paper analyses the extent to which public works programmes – a subset of social protection initiatives – can better promote gender equity in the rural economy. The paper draws on empirical research carried out in Ethiopia and India on two national flagship public works programmes.

We find that to date gender equality objectives have mostly only been incorporated into public works programmes as secondary goals, despite the evidence on the gendered nature of rural poverty and vulnerability. Where programmes are cognisant of such inequalities – for example, life-cycle vulnerabilities, constraints to access productive resources and unequal divisions of labour in the household, programmes can better support the positive impacts and reduce gendered inequalities. Relatively simple design changes combined with an investment in more strategic implementation practices and capacity strengthening initiatives are needed to enhance the potential of public works programme to contribute to a transformation of gender relations to support more equitable opportunities for women in the rural economy.

Key words: Gender equity, social protection, public works, India, Ethiopia

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1. Introduction

A cohesive society aims to minimise inequalities, marginalisation and disparities in both the social and economic spheres to reduce poverty and vulnerability. Economic growth in many countries, however, is accompanied by worsening inequalities. In particular, while strides have been made to reduce inequalities between men and women particularly since the mid-90s through platforms such as the Beijing call for Action, gender inequality remains a huge challenge across the world and an impediment to progress towards poverty reduction and development³. Women often remain marginalised from mainstream economic, political and social opportunities: recent data from SocialWatch (2009⁴) shows that while progress is being made, particularly in political empowerment, economic equity between men and women continues to show disparate results, with as many countries regressing as those where there is progress.

As part of the rural poverty reduction agenda in many countries, both national governments and international donors are increasingly investing millions of dollars in social protection programmes. To date, however, the extent to which these programmes have considered gender-related discrimination and marginalisation as well as the effects of gender inequality on poverty, have, overall, been limited. Such a narrow approach has occurred despite decades of evidence on the challenges that women in particular face in the rural sector, including, for instance, limited access to credit, inputs, information and training; greater time pressure and constraints due to domestic and care activities; unequal ownership and access to productive assets and discrimination in the labour market particularly in terms of types of employment and lower wages (World Bank, 2008).

As we argue in this paper, addressing these gender disparities in the rural economy must be central to social protection programmes in order to successfully support poverty reduction and promote a more cohesive society with increased economic opportunities for poor men and women and their families. In this paper we discuss the experiences of a sub-set of social protection programmes – public works schemes – and assess the extent to which they have incorporated gender equality as a way to support programme aims to tackle rural poverty and promote agricultural productivity. In particular we look at how programmes can reduce inequalities and discrimination in three spheres: the household, the labour market and the community. We focus on two large public works programmes in Ethiopia (the Productive Safety Net Programme) and India (the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural

³ Countries even just failing to meet the goal of gender parity in education will face considerable costs, both in forgone economic growth and in reductions in fertility, child mortality, and malnutrition. Countries off-track in female primary and secondary school enrolment could lose 0.1–0.3 percentage point in annual economic growth between 1995 and 2005 and an average of 0.4 percentage point between 2005 and 2015 (Abu-Ghaida and Klasen, 2002).

⁴ <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/9626>

Employment Guarantee Act). Our analysis draws on a desk-based review and mixed methods primary research carried out in 2009⁵.

2. Applying a gender lens to social protection, risk and vulnerability⁶

Social protection is an increasingly important approach to reduce vulnerability and chronic poverty with millions of national and international resources being invested into social protection programmes annually. In both middle and low income countries, government-led social protection schemes are also increasingly seen as contributing to a more socially cohesive and inclusive society. To date, however, there has been a greater focus on economic risks and vulnerability – such as income and consumption shocks and stresses – and only limited attention to social risks. Social risks however – such as gender inequality, social discrimination, unequal distributions of resources and power at the intra-household level, and limited citizenship – are often just as important, if not more important, in pushing and keeping households in poverty. Indeed, of the five poverty traps identified by the 2008-9 Chronic Poverty Report, four were non-income measures: insecurity (ranging from insecure environments to conflict and violence), limited citizenship (a lack of a meaning political voice), spatial disadvantage (exclusion from politics, markets, resources etc. due to geographical remoteness), and social discrimination (which traps people in exploitative relationships of power and patronage) (CPRC, 2008).

2.1 A “transformative” approach to social protection and poverty reduction

Social protection can be defined as encompassing a sub-set of interventions for the poor – carried out formally by the state (often with donor or INGO financing and support) or the private sector, or informally through community or inter-and intra-household support networks – which seek to address risk, vulnerability and chronic poverty.

Poor households typically face a range of risks that include political, environmental, economic and social risks. Vulnerability to risk, and its opposite or alternative, resilience, are both strongly linked to the capacity of individuals or households to prevent, mitigate or cope with such risks. Vulnerability is influenced by individual and household demography, age, dependency ratios, location, social capital, the ownership of assets, and access to resources.

Drawing on Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler’s (2004) framework of social protection, the objectives of the full range of social protection interventions fall under four headings: *protective*: providing relief from deprivation (e.g. disability benefits or non-contributory pensions); *preventive*: averting deprivation (e.g. through savings clubs, insurance or risk diversification); *promotive*: enhancing real incomes and capabilities (e.g. through inputs transfers); and *transformative*: which seek to address concerns

⁵ In each country a survey was conducted interviewing 100 participant households, 8 focus group discussions and 16 life histories across different life stages (adolescent, married, single and elderly). The research was conducted in four villages.

⁶ This section is based on Holmes and Jones (2009)

of social equity and exclusion (e.g. through anti-discrimination laws and sensitisation campaigns). Importantly, the ‘political’ or ‘transformative’ view extends social protection to arenas such as equity, empowerment and economic, social and cultural rights, rather than confining the scope of social protection to respond to economic risks which translates to responses narrow responses based on targeted income and consumption transfers (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004) (see Box 1). Indeed, the critical features of this conceptual framework include a recognition that economic and social risks are intertwined and often mutually reinforcing, and of the need to address the structural causes of poverty, including power relations, in order to provide a sustainable exit strategy from poverty (see Figure 2).

Box 1: Social protection instruments

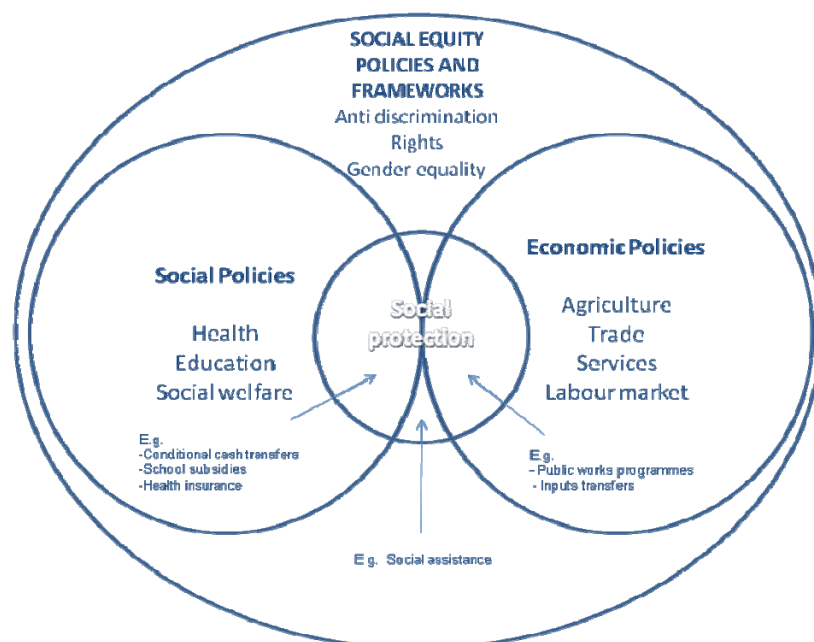
Social protection refers to a set of instruments (formal and informal) that provide:

- social assistance, e.g. regular and predictable cash or in-kind transfers, including fee waivers, public works programmes
- social services targeted to marginalised groups
- social insurance to protect people against risks of shocks
- social equity measures to protect against social risks such as discrimination and abuse

“Transformative interventions” include changes to the regulatory framework to protect ‘socially vulnerable groups’ such as people with disabilities or victims of domestic violence, against discrimination. The transformative elements might occur in the design of core social protection policy and programmes, or as explicit linkages to complementary interventions, such as micro-credit services, rights awareness campaigns and skills training.

Source: Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004

Figure 2: Equity and Social Protection



Source: Holmes and Jones, 2010

2.2 Poverty and vulnerability from a gender perspective

Men and women experience poverty and vulnerability differently. They are not only affected by the same risks differently but also face diverse types of risks. In relation to economic vulnerabilities, women are often paid less, have higher employment insecurity and low education/literacy which keep them in low-skilled casual work, face constraints in balancing income-generating opportunities outside the home with domestic responsibilities, encounter mobility constraints, and language barriers.

Social sources of poverty and vulnerability are also as important as or more important than economic ones. Women face greater time poverty due to domestic and caring tasks, household decision-making power is often concentrated in a husband's hands, and this is sometimes reinforced by physical violence. Single women can be especially vulnerable to labour shortages, social stigma and lack of access to assets. Women may also suffer from limited opportunities to speak and influence at the community level, being marginalised from community decision-making and planning. This may intersect with other forms of social exclusion, for example of minority groups, marginalised castes and displaced populations from linkages to political elites and access to identification documents.

These economic and social gender-specific vulnerabilities are often multiple and interlinked, significantly contributing to high levels of chronic poverty and vulnerability. In the absence of formal mechanisms to mitigate risks, traditional systems of reciprocity and social solidarity are an important source of support for rural households. However, in many contexts these mechanisms are under

increasing strain and are losing efficacy, meaning that households are resorting to negative coping strategies with long-term detrimental effects.

2.3 Applying a gender lens to public works programmes

Public works programmes are a subset of social protection programmes, generally defined as public labour-intensive infrastructure development initiatives which provide cash or food-based payments. Such programmes have a number of potential technical and political attributes. They provide income transfers to the poor through employment and are often designed to smooth income particularly during ‘slack’ or ‘hungry’ periods of the year and they often build infrastructure, such as rural roads, irrigation, water harvest facilities, tree plantation, school and health clinic facilities. Public works programmes are more effective when they include community involvement in the planning and selection of projects undertaken with public works labour including the creation of infrastructure that is most needed by the community - a sense of community ownership of the asset is more likely to result in the maintenance of that asset (World Bank, 2009).

There are, however, a number of common challenges, including how to balance the objectives of quality infrastructure development with poverty reduction goals, and the level at which to set benefit levels so as to be adequate as to make a difference in people’s lives and not stigmatise participants, but not so high as to necessitate quotas which are more complex to administer and manage (Subbarao, 2003). Provisions for support must also be made for the poor who are unable to work through complementary programmes so as to ensure a minimum of equity (Bloom, 2009).

In particular, a review of public works programmes has highlighted that there are also particular gender-specific challenges when designing and implementing public works programmes⁷. For instance, **women’s participation is generally limited** (except among the very poorest, landless and those who belong to lower caste groups [Kabeer, 2008; Webb, 1992 quoted in Dejardin, 1996]) unless women’s care responsibilities are explicitly factored into the design and the design allows for women’s participation on a flexible basis (Subbarao, 2003; Kabeer, 2008; Dejardin, 1996; Bicus, 2004, McCord 2004⁸) - as the ILO (2002) states “the work requirement imposes heavier time and effort costs on poor women – who are typically already overworked – than on poor men, who are more likely to be underemployed” (ILO, 2002). Moreover, programmes often target household heads, thereby excluding women in male-headed households from equal participation (Antonopoulos, 2007) and in contexts of job scarcity women may be pressured by men not to compete for public works jobs (e.g. in Burundi and Tanzania [Dejardin, 1996; Dejardin, 1996]). **Piecemeal rates and work allocation may be gender-biased** – they are typically based on male work norms, meaning that even if there are formal provisions for

⁷ It is important to note that relatively few programmes have been assessed through a gender lens (Quisumbing, 2004)

⁸ Note that a 2004 evaluation of the Labor Intensive Works Programme in Afghanistan found that ‘While a stated beneficiary group was women, no design features or monitoring addressed gender. There was no evidence that any women were hired’ (Bicus, 2004).

equal wages, women end up being paid less (Antonopoulos, 2007). There is often a distinction between 'heavy' versus 'light' work whereby these definitions are often based on cultural norms of work rather than the actual difficulty and physical exertion required for such work (Kamanga, 1998; Quisumbing, 2004). And **women's representation in public works-related decision-making structures is often inadequate** and therefore their views are not considered in the design and choice of community assets (Dejardin, 1996).

In addition, the design of public works programmes has focused largely on the productive sphere of work and has generally not sought to redistribute the costs of social reproduction, thereby reinforcing the existing gender-based division of labour (Antonopolous, 2007). Infrastructure projects have been the dominant type of community assets built through public employment guarantee programmes and little attention has been paid to projects that provide social services or those that target the efficiency and enhancement of public service delivery (Antonopolous and Fontana, 2006)⁹. Given the significant unpaid work which typically falls on women's shoulders, Antonopolous (2007) argues that one way through which poor women could be remunerated for their care work is by expanding public works programmes to include social sector activities¹⁰. Given that social services are by their nature highly labour-intensive, such activities would be well suited to workfare schemes. Examples of this in practice are limited to largely middle-income countries. The EPWP in South Africa for instance has attempted to address these challenges which the social component of the programme, in relation to early childhood care and support for home based carers for those affected by HIV-AIDS.

3. Assessing Ethiopia's and India's flagship public works programmes from a gender perspective

3.1 Ethiopia Case Study: The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)

Agricultural and rural development is a core component of Ethiopia's economic growth and poverty reduction strategy. Among the poorest countries in the world, Ethiopia's agricultural sector accounts for 46 percent of national GDP and 90 percent of exports. It also accounts for 85 percent of employment, and 90 percent of the poor depend on the sector for their livelihood (World Bank, 2008).

The Productive Safety Net Programme, launched in 2005, is one of two main components of the Ethiopian government's Food Security strategy. Reaching over 7 million chronically food insecure individuals¹¹, the PSNP aims to smooth the

⁹ McCord (2005) identified a small number of programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, which explicitly attempted to address service delivery and gender related care issues including unpaid care work, recognising that women are not only income poor but are also overtaxed in terms of the time they have to allocate to care work and domestic tasks.

¹⁰ If this imbalance is to be addressed, the unpaid work that women undertake to de facto subsidise under-resourced basic and social services, must be made visible in the policy arena and compensated.

¹¹ Some 8.6 million men, women and children were relying on food aid in 2005 (Italrend, 2006) suggesting that the PSNP is now reaching the majority of these.

consumption of chronically food insecure households through the provision of food and cash transfers, prevent the depletion of household assets and to create community assets through a Public Works (PW) programme. For households with available labour, the PW element provides food and/or cash in return for work. For households unable to work (due to pregnancy/lactation, disability, illness or old age), the Direct Support component provides direct transfers of cash and/or food. The second component is the Other Food Security Programme (OFSP) which aims to build household assets through the provision of extension, fertiliser, credit and other services to enable households to “graduate” from the PSNP.

Experiences of rural poverty and vulnerability in Ethiopia are highly gendered. Women play a significant role in agricultural productivity (carrying out an estimated 40 to 60 percent of all agricultural labour¹² [World Bank, 2008]) but suffer from unequal access to resources and capacity building opportunities on a number of levels. While the 2004 Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS) found no statistically significant difference in poverty between rural female-headed and male-headed households, female-headed households (54 percent compared to 48 percent for male-headed) are more vulnerable to household-level shocks (such as illness, death of household member, drought, flood, price shocks, job loss, loss or death of livestock), partly because female-headed households have fewer available ex-ante coping mechanisms than their male counterparts. The WMS also found that 32 percent of male-headed households compared to 53% of female headed households reported that they would struggle to raise 100 birr in a week to cope with a crisis.

Human capital differences between men and women are significant too. Only 19 percent of rural women are literate compared to 43 percent for men, and at secondary school level boys are still almost twice as likely to be enrolled as girls (11 percent compared to 6 percent).

In terms of access to resources there are also marked gender differences. Local labour markets are segmented by gender, with women systematically earning lower rates: 26 percent of men participate in off-farm labour markets compared to 14 percent of women; and that the difference is even greater in the wage labour market - 9 percent for men, and only 2 percent for women (Quisumbing and Yohannes, 2004). Moreover, men earn on average 2.7 times what women earn.

In the case of land tenure, despite recent legislative changes it is generally accepted that only the head of the household – typically the husband – can be a landowner. Women are further constrained by cultural norms about the gendered division of agricultural labour – women do not tend to own oxen with which to plough the land and cultural taboos constrain women from ploughing and sowing.

¹² According to the 2001-2002 Agricultural Sample Enumeration 87 percent of males and 72 percent of females in agricultural households work full time in agriculture. Ethiopia’s Labor Force Survey puts women’s participation in agriculture in 1999 at 39.09 percent, while studies carried out by Ethiopia’s Agricultural Research Organization in 1997 and 1998 in Amhara, SNNP, and Tigray indicate that women contribute between 55 and 58 percent of the labor for crop production, and 77 percent of the labour for livestock production (EARO, 2000, quoted in World Bank, 2008).

There are also major gender biases in terms of access to agricultural extension services and inputs¹³. While Ethiopia has one of the highest ratios of agricultural extension staff to farmers globally (IFPRI, 2009), female access to extension services is relatively low: 28 percent of women reported weekly visits by Development Agents while one third had never been visited, compared to 50 and 11 percent of men, respectively (2005 Citizen Report Card study).

3.3.1 Integration of gender dimensions in PSNP programme design

Overall the design of the PSNP has a relatively strong focus on women's role in agriculture and food security, paying attention to women's specific needs and vulnerabilities on a number of levels. First, there is an analysis of some of the gender-specific vulnerabilities that women face due to family composition, socio-cultural gender roles and lifecycle factors. These include attention to the particular vulnerabilities which female-headed households face, including a general acknowledgement that they tend to be more labour-poor than other households; a recognition that women and men have different physical labour capacities; a recognition that women face higher levels of time poverty than men and should therefore be allowed more flexibility in terms of working times so that they can still accommodate their domestic work and care responsibilities; and the provision of direct support during late stages of pregnancy and during lactation in labour-constrained households as well as provision of community crèches to enable women with small children to be able to work.¹⁴

Second, women's participation in public works activities is recognised as important as manifested in provisions for inclusion of female-headed households in light of their higher concentration among the poorest. In addition, there are provisions (although no specific targets) to promote women's involvement in community decision-making structures about the programme (Sharp et al., 2006)¹⁵.

Third, the type of community assets that are created are also approached through a gender-sensitive lens to a degree. There is provision for activities to be designed so as to reduce women's and girls' time poverty, including the creation of community water sources and fuelwood sources, to reduce the time women and girls need to spend in collecting these materials on a daily basis. There is also a specific provision that public works labour can be used to cultivate the private land holdings of female-headed households.

¹³ This section draws heavily on the World Bank's excellent 2006 on gender and agricultural productivity in Ethiopia.

¹⁴ The PIM states that "Communities are encouraged to use assistance provided under Direct Support as a vehicle for managing child care activities (Crèches)"

¹⁵ The PIM states: "Priority should be given to activities which are designed to enable women to participate and which contribute to reducing women's regular work burden and increase access to productive assets" (Section 4.3.1); *and that*

"Each work team should have a fairly balanced composition taking into account gender, age, skill ability and strength. Women can be part of mixed teams or form their own teams. They can also be team leaders" (Section 4.6.2).

Finally, in terms of governance of the programme, the design recognises the need to include the Women's Bureau, the government agency mandated to address gender equality issues, in the committee structures at the state and district (*woreda*) levels.

There are, however, also a number of important design weaknesses which have implications for the programme's implementation and its impacts on gender relations within the household and community. Arguably the most important shortcomings in terms of the programme's transformative potential are: a) inadequate attention as to how to promote women's meaningful participation in the programme beyond a focus on numbers and b) limited emphasis on addressing unequal gender relations in food security and agriculture productivity at the household and community levels. To borrow the language of Maxine Molyneux, the emphasis is on women's 'practical gender needs' rather than their 'strategic gender interests' (Molyneux, 1984).

Given what is known about deeply culturally embedded inequalities among men and women in the country (Erulkar, 2007), the lack of attention to awareness-raising initiatives for local communities and capacity building of officials at all levels regarding the gender dimensions of the programme's objectives is striking. As Kabeer (2000) has emphasised, empowerment entails as its core the development of agency to exercise choices, but without an investment to ensure that beneficiaries and programme implementers are aware of the rationale for women's participation, meaningful choices are circumscribed.

Equally important is the limited attention to tackling unequal gender relations within different types of households and within the community. At the household level, while the Programme Implementation Manual (PIM) is cognisant of women's time poverty in terms of the challenges women face in balancing their responsibilities for domestic and care work with participation in productive activities, it does not seek to address unequal decision-making structures within male-headed households governing the use of household resources (income, labour, assets). Involvement in the PSNP is on a household basis as is payment, irrespective of who in the family does the work. In light of findings from the 2005 Participatory Poverty Assessment that 'men had absolute control of decisions and income management in 75 percent of households interviewed' (MOFED 2005 quoted in World Bank, 2006: Appendix 6, p15), this would appear problematic from an equity perspective. In the case of female-headed households, while there is a recognition that they are especially vulnerable due to a shortage of male labour to carry out key agricultural tasks (especially ploughing which cultural norms dictate only men undertake), the programme design nevertheless assumes a labour surplus and that there is adequate adult labour to participate in public works activities. However, in practice this is often not the case, especially if female-headed households have a number of young children and/or sick and disabled family members (Sharp et al., 2006).

At the community level, barriers to equal access to agricultural extension services and credit are also not addressed. As discussed above, there is a widespread assumption that farmers are primarily male and that women play an ancillary role at

best, and thus the organisation of extension support is designed around a male norm.¹⁶

The conceptualisation of community assets created through public works activities also has important gender implications. There is a strong focus in the PIM on the creation of tangible infrastructure (such as roads, terraces, water harvest facilities) involving hard physical labour. However, there is little consideration as to whether these types of assets meet women's and men's needs equally or whether other types of assets might have a greater impact on their ability to contribute to agricultural productivity and food security. For instance, it could be argued that health clinics which are located closer to the community and with a higher ratio of public health outreach workers, or childcare services, are equally important in ensuring a productive and healthy agricultural workforce. Moreover, as it is, the type of community assets considered require labour inputs which are generally more in keeping with a male norm (due to the physical strength requirements) rather than considering a broader range of activities which may be more suitable to the diverse capacities which men and women at different stages of the lifecycle are able to contribute.

Turning to programme governance, it is noteworthy that provisions for women's participation are more substantial at the community level rather than the more influential *woreda* or provincial levels where decisions about resource allocation are made. At the *woreda* and provincial levels, the Women's Bureau, which is arguably one of the most resource-constrained government agencies, has only one voice in the programme implementation committee among multiple government agencies represented. Moreover, there is no provision to ensure that the other members either have expertise in gender issues or link with gender focal points within their respective agencies to ensure that they are informed about the gender dimensions of their respective agencies' programme activities.

3.3.2 Impacts of the PSNP on addressing gender inequalities in economic opportunities

Addressing inequalities at the household level

At the household level, the programme has had a range of positive impacts, meeting a number of women's practical gender needs. Overall participation of women has been relatively high. Women represent 46 percent of safety net participants in Tigray, 42 percent in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) Region, and 37 percent in Amhara, and 53% of Other Food Security programme participants in Tigray, 44 percent in Oromiya, 33 percent in SNNP and 25 in Amhara (World Bank, 2008). Even so, a gendered benefit incidence analysis of Regional Food Security Bureau data by the World Bank found that the total expenditure of the safety net and Other Food Security Programme on women remains lower than that on men (2008).

¹⁶ A gender module has been introduced to the training that extension workers receive but the time allocated to this is very limited and the content is not specifically tailored to agricultural activities, restricting its practical application. Interview with Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Addis Ababa, April 2009.

Nevertheless, both the 2008 Government of Ethiopia gender evaluation¹⁷ and our fieldwork findings confirmed that the PSNP has helped to increase household food consumption and contributed to the costs of providing for children's needs including clothing and education- and healthcare-related costs. This has been particularly important in the case of female-headed households who, prior to the programme, had fewer alternative avenues for support. Fieldwork findings suggest that households also have better access to informal sources of credit within the community as the income they receive from the PSNP is seen as a quasi-guarantee.

In terms of the gender division of labour and power within the household some women noted that they are now accorded more respect from their husbands as a result of their participation in public works activities, even if this does not translate into changes in intra-household decision-making processes. Interviewees in SNNPR also pointed out that some men had revised their attitudes towards women's work capabilities as a result of regular joint work on public works sites.

The direct support provision for pregnant and lactating women has also been an important benefit for many women, although there does appear to be considerable variation in terms of the length of support for which this support is provided (compared to the official norm of 10 months) and the level of comfort women have in exercising their right to this programme entitlement.¹⁸

In terms of intra-household gender relations, programme implementation shortcomings have meant that women's time poverty has not been addressed to any significant extent. Provisions for women to turn up late to public works activities and/or leave early are unevenly practiced if at all, and childcare facilities have been established in very few sites.¹⁹ In the latter case, REST, a major non-governmental organisation operating in Tigray and implementing a large-scale pilot version of the PSNP, maintained that this was in part due to inadequate attention to addressing the underlying reasons for weak demand for such services by programme participants. Public work sites often involve participation by people from several villagers and thus there is some anxiety about leaving children with people unknown to them as well as concerns about the rapid spread of disease if large numbers of children are being cared for together. However, these appear to be easily resolvable practical issues (by grouping children in smaller village-level clusters with carers from the same village) which could be communicated to villagers through awareness-raising activities about the potential benefits of such services. As it is, there were reports that women often take young children with them to the fields without adequate

¹⁷ A gender evaluation of the PSNP was undertaken on behalf of the Government of Ethiopia and a donor consortium by the Helm Corporation led by Barbara Evers was undertaken in 2008. We refer to this evaluation as GoE, 2008 or simply the 2008 evaluation given it is the most comprehensive official evaluation of the gender dimensions of the PSNP to date.

¹⁸ Interviews in 3 woredas with programme implementers and female beneficiaries in August and September 2009 in Tigray and SNNPR.

¹⁹ No childcare facilities were operating in our four fieldwork sites and the 2008 gender evaluation found evidence of crèches in very few cases. For instance, in Kalu woreda the Food Security TaskForce "tried to develop a childcare scheme for PW workers, run by DS beneficiaries and pregnant/lactating women. [However] due to absence of work norms for this activity it was not continued" in GoE, 2008, 84).

protection from harsh working conditions and with risks of adverse infant health consequences.

Another critical weakness relates to the fact that payments from PSNP work go to the head of the household, even if women and children are doing the bulk of the public works activities. The age and gender of participants are generally not recorded on the daily attendance lists (which record only whether or not registered households are present) so no good records are available as to exactly who is participating regularly.²⁰ However, our fieldwork suggested that especially in the sites in Tigray and to a lesser extent in SNNPR, women and to lesser degree children are more regularly involved than men. Unlike cash transfer programmes in many parts of the world where payment is targeted at women, the PSNP payment modality is not contributing significantly to women's economic empowerment in male-headed households or changing decision-making power dynamics within the household. Indeed many women noted that even bracketing the higher value of the grain transfer due to recent food price rises, women largely preferred food- rather than cash-based payments in part because there was less scope for wastage by men on alcohol and food consumption outside the house.²¹

Addressing inequalities in the labour market

Although the payment levels for PSNP activities are low, especially in some locales as we discuss further below, the institutionalisation of a minimum benefit range was viewed positively by participants in SNNPR who argued that they were now less vulnerable to 'labour abuse'. For instance, interviews with teenage girls and young women in SNNPR suggested that the programme had reduced their need to work as domestic employees in nearby towns, roles which are often subject to low remuneration and abuse by employers.

However, perhaps most tellingly, despite formal provisions for equal payment, men's labour remains more highly valued – both in remunerative terms as well as conceptually. In sites that were located within relatively close proximity to towns with daily labouring work opportunities, in order to get men to participate programme implementers were reportedly resorting to significantly higher payments to men than women. For instance, in Seedama site in Tigray, men reported that they were sometimes given the equivalent payment for four days (4 times 10 birr) for one day's work, especially when semi-skilled construction inputs were required. Given

²⁰ Note that Sharp et al., (2006) found that 50% of the woredas they visited did provide gender disaggregated information on public works and direct support beneficiaries. They found that there were a significantly larger number of female-headed households included as direct support beneficiaries. For instance, in Chira woreda, 59% of DS beneficiary households were female-headed and in Bugna, 73%.

²¹ It is also worth noting, however, that even if these gender dimensions were addressed, that there is widespread agreement that the transfer amount, especially since the rise in food prices brought about the global food price crisis, is too low as to have a major impact on household livelihood security. Although prices have fallen off from their peak during the heights of the global crisis, they have not yet returned to pre-crisis levels (Interviews April and August 2009). Moreover, Woldehanna et al. (2008), for instance, estimated that the transfer amount accounted for just 30% of household food consumption. The limitations of the transfer are also evident in the very small percentage of families who have been able to graduate from the programme to date. REST estimated that even its graduation rate of 4% in Tigray was higher than the government implemented programme average. Interview, Mekele, August 2009.

that men in this area are able to earn between 20-30 birr per day for daily labouring work, public works activities are seen as a last resort for men. One interviewee, for instance, dismissed public works activities 'as only fit for women' as women have fewer market-based opportunities than their male counterparts. Women interviewees also emphasised that at community meetings held at the end of the day's public works activities, programme implementers often urge women to encourage their husbands to participate more actively in the programme as more male labour is required in order to complete planned activities.

More generally, while there is a recognition of differential capacities among men and women in terms of contributing to the hard physical labour demanded by PSNP activities, it appears to be carried out in such a way as to reinforce traditional gender norms which sees women's work and productivity levels as inferior among community members and local officials alike: women are given 'light work' and men 'heavy work'. Moreover, men are seen to be 'shouldering women's burden' by contributing more, without recognising that men and women may have different contributions to make to community development.

Addressing inequalities at the community level

A number of community-level impacts have also been found. Focus group discussions suggested that perceptions were changing to a degree among some men about women's abilities to contribute meaningfully to work activities, and that some women were also learning to articulate their views more as a result of participating in public works activities and related community meetings. The emphasis on women's participation has also resulted in a more active role for the Women's Association in some communities, and to the provision of more information on family planning services, presumably because of the recognition of the importance of having more control over the balance of care work and productive work activities. Some men and women also noted that the community participation elements of the programme had provided more opportunities for citizens to articulate suggestions and concerns about community needs to government officials, although this was still quite limited.

Gains in social capital also emerged as an important unintended benefit of programme participation. Men and women both highlighted that as a result of greater livelihood security they had greater opportunities to become involved in social networks, especially through participation in religious and traditional festivals and celebrations from which they were previously excluded. This new found social inclusion was highly valued by a number of interviewees, and could arguably be said to be of particular significance for women given the generally lower levels of participation and mobility women have in rural village life. In the sites in SNPPR there was also an acknowledgement that village security had increased to a degree as there was notably less theft due to lower levels of desperation among the poor and vulnerable.

The extent to which linkages to other initiatives which seek to address a broader range of social risks and vulnerabilities to which girls and women are subject also seems to be quite weak. While the 2008 evaluation noted that in SNNPR there were

some linkages with the Women's Development Package provision of Community Conversations to discuss issues including early marriage, reproductive health risks (including teenage pregnancies and risk of HIV/AIDS) and gender-based violence²², our fieldwork found no evidence that these dimensions of vulnerability were being considered in the implementation of the project. Similarly, although there have been important legal reforms affording women greater access to land rights, there appears to be no evidence that attention to land rights has been included in PSNP activities, either in the 2008 evaluation or our fieldwork. Indeed, overall opportunities for programme implementers to facilitate community discussions on key social, including gender equality, issues do not appear to have been exploited to any significant extent, despite this being an important provision in the Women's Package for which the Women's Bureau has responsibility.

Finally, in terms of programme governance, women's involvement appears to be much lower than the PIM had envisioned (e.g. Sharp et al., 2006). Although the 2008 evaluation suggests that it varies across regions, in our fieldwork sites we found that even though there was awareness of the provision for women's equal representation on committees that decide upon the community assets to be invested in through public works labour, that it was not well enforced. In one site in Tigray no women were represented and in the others only a small minority. Similarly, at the woreda and provincial levels, key informant interviews with Women's Bureau officials suggested that the focus on gender equality was limited as they were just one agency among a number of sectoral bureau heads, who tended to be overwhelmingly male and not well informed about gender issues in general nor about the gender-related provisions of the PSNP PIM in particular. By the same token, it appeared that Women's Bureau officials were not closely engaged with PSNP implementation issues and so were also not taking advantage to the extent possible of their role on the Food Security Taskforce.

3.2 India case study: the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

Agricultural development in India has been a significant contributor to fostering both economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2009). At the national level, India has moved from a state of food deficits to food surpluses and agriculture remains the largest economic sector in the country (Sourcebook, NAWO, 2008). Despite this, poverty in India is highly concentrated in rural areas, and particularly amongst agricultural labourers. Poor rural households are highly vulnerable to both economic and social risks and vulnerability: the multiplicity of social discrimination in India is one the key causes and contributors to high levels of poverty and it is highly governed by caste and gender. Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Castes (OBC) and women are disproportionately affected by the multiple dimensions of poverty and vulnerability.

²² It should be noted that while questions about the extent to which the PSNP is addressing issues of gender-based violence and other social risks were included in the research design of the 2008 evaluation, surprisingly these were not reported on in the published report.

India's Eleventh Five Year Plan lays out the vision for poverty reduction in India through a three-pronged approach: economic growth, income-poverty reduction through targeted programmes, and human capital formation. To achieve this, a key priority is employment generation in the rural economy and agricultural growth. The government's 2005 flagship programme, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, has an important role to play in transforming rural livelihoods and agricultural productivity in India.

Gender inequality is a significant concern in India. A woman's status and perceived status in the household have important implications for her ability to access and control resources. Women tend to have limited say in decisions other than those on small household expenditures, often face severe restrictions on their mobility and are subject to domestic violence²³.

Women face a distinct disadvantage in the labour market compared with men. At national level, women are less than half as likely as men to be employed: data from the fifth Economic Census (2005) show that, nationally, women represent only 19.3% of the total workforce (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2007). Moreover, when women are employed, they are adversely incorporated into the labour market in a number of ways. They are less likely than men to receive cash wages or wages at all (IIPS and Macro International, 2007) and when they do, wages for casual labour are 30% percent lower for women than for men – and 20% lower for the same task (World Bank, 2009). Women are overrepresented in casual wage labour in the agriculture sector, but there is still inadequate recognition of the role that women play in agricultural decision making – an increasing concern, given slow growth in agriculture (ibid).

Women face particular discrimination in terms of ownership of and access to productive resources. Although women constitute two-thirds of the agricultural workforce, they own less than one-tenth of the agricultural lands (NAWO, 2008).

Gender bias in rural institutions is also a key source of economic vulnerability. A major challenge facing small and marginal farmers is lack of access to major agricultural services, such as credit, inputs, extension, insurance and markets. Again, this is even more problematic for female farmers, because of a pervasive male bias in the provision of such services. The proportion of women with bank accounts, savings and loans is marginally higher for women who are employed for cash earnings, on average, but only 10.7% of rural women have a bank or savings account that they themselves use. And, although 35.8% know of a microcredit programme, only 4.4% have ever taken a loan from one (IIPS and Macro International, 2007).

3.2.1 The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

²³ Surveys show that violence remains relatively common for rural women: a third of women living in rural areas have experienced violence and 21% had experienced violence "often" or "sometimes" in the 12 months prior to the survey (IIPS and Macro International, 2007).

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was passed in 2005, under the Ministry of Rural Development. The direct objectives are to realise the right to work and to enhance livelihoods through economic and social infrastructure.

While MGNREGA's conception is based on the historical legacy of public works programmes in India, its actual design departs from its predecessors in a number of important ways. Overall, the new features in the design of MGNREGA demonstrate a transformative approach to poverty reduction in its rights based approach. First, and most importantly, MGNREGA is an act enshrined in India's Constitution, entitling any poor rural household to 100 days of employment. In this way, the legislation goes beyond providing a social safety net and guarantees employment as a right.

Second, this is the first public works programme that has been national in coverage, organised and mainly funded from the central budget but implemented at the state level by the village assembly – the Gram Panchayat – rather than private contractors. MGNREGA began in 2006 in 200 districts, and from 2008 was implemented in all rural districts in all states in India. Recent data show that over 50 million households have accessed MGNREGA employment to date (ref). In 2009-2010, the central budget allocated Rs300 billion (\$6 billion) to MGNREGA. This is around 0.5% of GDP, 3.3% of budget expenditure and 10% of planned expenditure (ibid).

At least 50% of the works are implemented by the Gram Panchayats with no private contractors and an indirect goal of MGNREGA is to strengthen grassroots processes of democracy by means of transparent and accountable mechanisms such as the social audit and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.

Finally, MGNREGA marks a shift from allocated work to demand-based work. Employment in MGNREGA is dependent on the worker applying for registration, obtaining a job card and then seeking employment through a written application for the time and duration chosen by the worker. Under the law, there is also a legal guarantee that the work requested has to be given by the Panchayat within 15 days. If not, the state has to provide an unemployment allowance at a quarter of the wage for each day employment is not given, thereby providing the Panchayat an incentive for effective implementation.

3.2.2 Integration of gender dimensions in programme design

The design of MGNREGA has powerful potential to transform rural livelihoods through its rights-based approach to employment. However, the design of the Act only reflects women's role in the rural economy and women's experiences of poverty and vulnerability to some extent. First and foremost, the Act aims to promote women's participation in the workforce through a quota to ensure that at least one-third of all workers who have registered and requested work under the scheme in each state are women. To support women's participation, crèche facilities are to be provided by the implementing agency when five or more children below the age of 6 are brought to the worksite, and women, especially single women, are

given preference to work on worksites close to their residence if the worksite is 5km or more away (Ministry of Rural Development, 2008).

Secondly, the Act states that equal wages are to be paid to both men and women workers under the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. The Guidelines suggest that when opening bank accounts for the labourers, the bank or the Panchayat²⁴ needs to give a considered choice between individual accounts for each MGNREGA labourer and joint accounts (one for each Job Card holder). It suggests that if joint accounts are used, the different household members (e.g. husband and wife) should be co-signatories and that special care should be taken to avoid crediting household earnings to individual accounts held by the male household head which would leave women with no control over their earnings. Separate individual accounts for women members of the household may be opened in the case of male headed households.

Third, for the supervision of work and recording attendance of worksite, worksite supervisors can be designated for each work. The Guidelines suggest that adequate representation of women among mates should be ensured. Mates must have been educated up to Class 5 or Class 8 (Ministry of Rural Development, 2008).

Fourth, women should be represented in local level committees, the social audit process as well state and central level councils. Local Vigilance and Monitoring Committees which monitor the progress and quality of work while it is in progress comprises nine members (at least 50% of whom are MGNREGA workers). The Gram Sabha is responsible for electing the members of the Committee and to ensure that SC/STs and women are represented on it. The Social Audit Forum also requires representation of women, although the Guidelines also clearly state that lack of representation by any of the required categories should not be taken as a reason for not recording queries and complaints through the Social Audit Forum process. It does however suggest that the timing of the Forum must be such that it is convenient for people to attend - that it is convenient in particular for MGNREGA workers, women and marginalized communities.

The Act however faces a number of weaknesses with regards to effectively incorporating gender issues into its design, with implications for achieving both MGNREGA's direct and indirect objectives. First, while the quota system is in place to ensure a minimum proportion of female workers, the design of the Scheme pays little attention to the socio-cultural barriers (or how to overcome them) that present challenges to women's engagement in the labour market such as cultural norms about women's mobility, employment outside the home and their allocation of time between domestic and productive activities. Furthermore, there is no attention to life-cycle vulnerabilities and no alternative provision of work for pregnant or lactating women. Given that MGNREGA employment entitlement is at the household level, limited attention to household demography and intra-household dynamics can mean that single women within households are unable to exercise their right to

²⁴ The Guidelines state that bank / Post Office accounts are opened on behalf of labourers by an appropriate authority (e.g. Bank or Gram Panchayat). Labourers are not required to open their own Bank account.

employment and independently access MGNREGA entitlements. While there has been a focus on raising awareness about the right to 100 days, this has been uneven across the country. Importantly, there has been limited attention to the implications of women's lower literacy rates in particular, especially with regards to the demand driven nature of MGNREGA which relies on a multi-layered written application process.

Moreover, while the links between women's status and control over resources in the household and household wellbeing and productivity are well known, they are not well articulated in MGNREGA design. Control over resources and financial inclusion of women is an important mechanism for women's economic empowerment and an opportunity to support women's greater decision making over resources in the household, yet the opening of bank accounts in individual or joint names is left to the discretion of the panchayat or bank.

At the community level, while there is provision for women's participation in monitoring committees and the social audit process, insufficient attention has been given to the need to overcome prevailing norms which prevent women's participation and voice in community forums, in their ability to access and utilise grievance procedures, and in mechanisms which aim to promote community discussion on the selection and prioritisation of assets created. A narrow conceptualisation of women's engagement in agricultural productive activities has also limited the consideration of the appropriateness of community assets for men and women. While there is potential to support women's "practical needs" through the creation of assets through for example closer water sources, neither the practical needs nor the potential for addressing women's "strategic interests" through improving their status and structured involvement in local area development have been thought through (Gupta, 2009). Arguable, broadening the narrow scope of types of works appropriate to support women's agricultural productivity could include healthcare and literacy / skills programmes as well as improving market access and infrastructure for women and supporting investments and training in other agricultural activities.

Finally, throughout all the levels of programme design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation there is no attention to ensuring that decision makers have expertise in gender issues, nor are there any facilities for providing gender training. The links between the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) and the Department of Rural Development (DRD) (and associates) are very weak. While at the state level there are convergence mechanisms for policy coordination between departments, there are no direct coordination mechanisms between DWCD and DRD with regards to MGNREGA.

3.2.3 Gendered impacts of MGNREGA

Addressing inequalities at the household level

As the 11th Five Year plan envisages, agricultural productivity and human capital development are inextricably linked as mechanisms to achieve poverty reduction

and growth in the rural economy in India. Findings suggest that MGNREGA supports both of these objectives to some extent. Income from MGNREGA has enabled poor households to increase spending on food, health and education. This is particularly important for supporting women's practical needs in their role of caregivers.

Another important impact of MGNREGA – although quite small – is its impact on credit and loans. While MGNREGA income is not seen as sufficient to make a huge financial impact on a household, some households suggest that MGNREGA has helped them get access to loans as well as helping loan payment. These findings are variable however, and depend on the existing financial status of the family. For many households, income from MGNREGA is simply not sufficient to have any further impacts than meeting immediate consumption needs. Moreover, taking collateral against future income requires predictability.

Our research in Madhya Pradesh however suggests that receiving employment days from MGNREGA is still largely at the discretion of the panchayat rather than being driven by a demand from households. One of the key challenges therefore that MGNREGA faces is to improve both the demand and supply of employment from the scheme because potentially one of the most important benefits that the Act offers is giving the household the ability and flexibility to choose employment when it is needed. Given the diversity of poor households' needs and the multiple livelihood strategies they engage in, flexibility to reflect for example, seasonal unemployment especially when work is not needed on own farms or on private farms as well as variations in labour availability in the household, for example due to pregnancy or migration, is important in supporting livelihoods rather than undermining them.

Another important indirect benefit is the changing status of women in the household. Women's status and decision making in the household in India varies due to local customs, social group and religion, but overall women face similar inequalities and discrimination at the household level. Low levels of human capital, limited ownership of assets and control over resources are key factors which constrain women's bargaining power in the household. Our research in Madhya Pradesh suggested that women's employment on MGNREGA has improved women's economic status and decision making power slightly in some households. In others, women's contribution to household income from MGNREGA employment has had no impact on relations within the household. In a number of instances women's income has had no effect on the regular domestic violence and abuse they face often fuelled by husband's alcohol consumption. In some cases however, women's additional employment on MGNREGA has exacerbated household tensions due to the distribution of household work and caring responsibilities when women go out to work. Positive changes in women's status however appear to be especially linked to women's access to MGNREGA income through their own bank accounts. The roll out of bank accounts in the name of women however has been uneven and is entirely dependent on the Panchayat. Bank accounts that have only been opened in men's names, or indeed joint names, are missing an important opportunity to enhance women's independence and decision making over resources in the household.

Addressing inequalities in the labour market

One of the most important positive impacts of MGNREGA for women has been the provision of equal wages. The Act stipulates that the wage rate is set at the minimum unskilled agricultural wage in each state for both men and women and given that in private wage labour women face significant wage discrimination (up to 30% wage differentials), the higher wages is a significant improvement in terms of women's earnings. In Madhya Pradesh for example, women receive approximately Rs. 30 a day (men receive up to Rs. 45) on private land, whereas under MGNREGA they receive approximately Rs. 90.

However, receiving equal wages is highly variable by state. Reports show that women still face wage discrimination, most notably due to high productivity norms and piece-rate payments based on outturn by men which means that women work longer to get the minimum wage, or receive less – this also particularly affects single women when wages are “productivity-linked” and earthworks depends on family-based couples to work together (Gupta, 2009; Palriwala and Neetha, 2009).

Furthermore, while MGNREGA has gone some way in supporting the inclusion of women into a higher agricultural wage labour market, women face specific barriers and challenges which exclude them from participating equally in the scheme. In some areas, cultural norms which prevent women from working outside the home or working with men are reflected in household decisions to only send men for MGNREGA work, thereby denying women's rights within the household to access employment days (Samarthan Centre for Development Support, 2007). Entrenched ideas about the gender division of labour also affect the type of work which is seen as acceptable for women to do. In Madhya Pradesh for example, this means that while women's representation overall is quite high – at 46% - in practice women receive fewer days on MGNREGA because they do “soft” work (such as throwing the soil from digging wells) which requires fewer days work. Other studies have also shown even when women want to work, they have been excluded by the panchayat because of social norms around the “appropriate” type of work women should do (Khera and Nayak, 2009).

Moreover, it is not just cultural and institutional barriers which restrict women's demand and participation, but influences of life-cycle vulnerabilities and women's dual responsibilities in domestic/care and productive activities. There has been limited attention to life-cycle vulnerabilities in the design of MGNREGA and there is no official provision for different types of work to be allocated to pregnant women, although reportedly this does happen on an ad hoc basis. UNICEF (2007) report that some women who are pregnant or appear physically weak have been refused work by the Panchayat (UNICEF, 2007). Women's demand for work and their participation is also influenced by their roles and responsibilities in domestic and care work. While there is a provision for crèche facilities in the design of MGNREGA, the lack of actual provision of child care facilities reflects a serious implementation challenge and a lack of understanding the extent of women's dual responsibilities in the domestic and productive spheres. A recent study found that in four states the provision of

childcare facilities at worksites varied from 17% to 1% (Jandu, 2008). Some women are forced to leave their younger children with older daughters, pulling them out of school for lack of alternative options.

Addressing inequalities at the community level

MGNREGA-created community assets have had varying degrees of impact. There are some reports that community assets have improved, for example, community buildings, plantations, watershed development and irrigation, roads etc. In Madhya Pradesh some households report that the watershed development created through assets has supported a greater production of crops, and infrastructure (e.g. roads) has helped marketing of products. The infrastructure created in our research sites had largely been in the form of wells, but there was criticism by men and women in the village that not only did not all household benefit from the infrastructure (especially the landless) but that wells were not always appropriate. For example, MGNREGA guidelines state that wells must be dug to a maximum depth – in one of our research sites in Betul district however, this was not deep enough to allow water through, so wells were not utilised.

These research findings reflect two larger concerns which are discussed in other reports on MGNREGA. The first is that, more broadly, assets created are not benefiting the rural poor to the extent they could be and therefore not harnessing the potential for rural change and poverty reduction originally conceptualised under MGNREGA. There has been a general sense of criticism that MGNREGA has been focusing on employment at the expense of development (Mahaptra et al. 2008). Proponents of women's empowerment and gender equality have also called for a re-focus on the types of works that are offered under MGNREGA and suggest that healthcare, literacy and skills programmes, nutrition and sanitation are some possible alternatives types of work.

The second is that communities in general and women in particular have largely been excluded from the decision making processes about the types of assets to be created in the village. In theory at least, panchayats prepare village-level plans based on local resources and needs. The Gram Sabha is the statutory mandated institutional mechanism for community participation, yet women typically face more limited participation and voice in community decision making in India, limiting the potential for the articulation of their views about appropriate types of assets.

An important indirect effect of MGNREGA at the community level has been its contribution to increased social capital in communities, both amongst men and women, as well as groups of women. Our research suggests that there is a general perception that social networks have strengthened, leading to improved relationships where men and women worked together and supporting informal access to borrowing small amounts of money from each other. However, it is also noted that while certain aspects of social capital has increased, it continues to be built along existing caste lines. While MGNREGA has not challenged existing caste/social group divisions, there is a positive perception in the community because of high participation rates of SC and ST households in MGNREGA, it is contributing to

social justice issues and positively impacting, albeit in a small manner, on social relations at the community level.

While our research found no spill-over effects of improvements in other government services, such as extension services, credit facilities, or basic social service provision, there was some indication that households involved in MGNREGA have increased faith that the government will provide for them.

4. Conclusions and Policy Implications

Public works programmes have emerged as an important strand of social protection, and represent initiatives with strong potential to strengthen women's contribution to agricultural productivity and promote more gender-sensitive approaches to food security for the rural poor. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme and India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act are both major initiatives which have made important advances in reducing gender inequalities and discrimination, in particular in terms of supporting women's practical needs at the household level, promoting women's participation, equal wages and offering better alternative job opportunities in the labour market, and strengthening social capital networks. However, the design and implementation of public works programmes can also have negative effects on gender equality, furthering the economic and social disparities between men and women. For instance, programme participation can put additional pressure on women's time constraints and exacerbate household tensions, cultural norms and institutional discrimination continue to dictate "appropriate" types of work for men and women often with consequences in terms of lower remuneration for women, and despite programme provisions women tend not to be involved in community decision-making and are therefore unable to access the channels to influence the types of community assets which are built through public works labour.

Our gender analysis of these two cases has revealed a number of important lessons which can be used to inform policy dialogues on public works initiatives in other contexts as well as highlighting some key policy areas in the design and implementation of public works programmes which can support a more positive impact on gender equality and equitable approach to public works programmes.

Policy and design

Integrating gender issues into policy and programme design entails strengthening the attention to gender dynamics at the household and community levels as well as ensuring gender-sensitive mechanisms are embedded within programme governance structures.

At the household level, a number of cost-effective measures could have a significant transformative impact. These include the following: First, ensuring the financial inclusion of women through the provision of individual bank accounts supports women's economic empowerment and control over resources. Second, flexible working hours in recognition of women's domestic and care responsibilities and the

option of different types of works according to gendered life-cycle vulnerabilities, such as pregnancy and while breast-feeding are also important for gender-sensitive design. Third, greater recognition of different types of gender-vulnerabilities which depend on household composition, for example female and male headed households, single women in extended households and polygamous households should also be accorded.

For more equitable engagement in the labour market, asset creation should also recognise the fact that involving men and women's participation should build on differential skill sets and not just assign women 'light' or work that is deemed culturally inferior. Encouraging institutional linkages to other services and programmes, such as skills training and activities to support the removal of institutional barriers preventing women's access to productive inputs, credit and markets, would help support women's unequal engagement in agricultural activities and support women's take-up of new and more remunerative opportunities in the agricultural sector.

At the community level, a broader conceptualisation of the types of works necessary for rural productivity can potentially enhance the benefits accruing to women (for example in strengthening human capital development and reducing women's time poverty, especially with regards to fuelwood and water collection and care responsibilities). Putting in place measures such as quotas for women's involvement in community decision making processes, flexible meeting times which are compatible with the structure of women's roles in locations in which they feel comfortable and awareness-raising opportunities could support women's participation and voice in community decision making processes about assets creation. The facilitation of study tours to successful models in other communities would also be an innovative way of disseminating best-practice.

At the level of programme governance, inter-sectoral coordination is vital to promote an understanding of and attention to both gendered economic and social risks and vulnerabilities and the way they intersect. Technical capacity building for staff in governmental gender machineries at all levels to effectively articulate the importance of gender equality for rural development and poverty reduction is vital. Better monitoring and evaluation of data collection and reporting on gender-related programme aims is also needed. Data collection should include questions in terms of who is participating; types of assets created and gender-related benefits; participation in decision-making structures; and budget allocations for capacity building on gender-related programme dimensions.

Implementation issues

As the Ethiopian case study in particular highlights, while gender-sensitive programme design is a critical first step, effective implementation requires strong political will and adequate investment of both human and financial capital. Critically, greater attention is needed to tackle individual equity issues in the implementation of programmes. A key concern is that even with the provision of equal wages in the design of public works, in practice there is a need to ensure that equal wages are

implemented which necessitates a move away from male-productivity based piece-rate norms.

There is an urgent need to raise awareness about the barriers that women face in participation in agricultural activities as a result of time poverty, and how not addressing these barriers undermines aggregate agricultural productivity. Key measures here include implementing adequate childcare facilities and to support awareness raising initiatives about the benefits for women and families of such facilities so as to encourage higher demand.

Another area of implementation which has been glossed over to the detriment of public works programming effectiveness is the need for tailored and ongoing capacity building about the gender-related programme aims among participants and programme implementers alike. Women's education, skills and participation in community level participatory processes need concerted investment in order to contribute to programme design, input into discussions on the appropriateness of assets in the community, and to utilise grievance processes and other such rights-based mechanisms to improve programme implementation. Community awareness of the entitlements and rights provided for in programme documents also needs to be strengthened overall, including the gendered programme components.

In the case of programme officials, it is essential that the approach to gender moves beyond a technocratic task to be completed and instead is conceptualised as critical to programme effectiveness. Linked to this, mechanisms need to be in place where the implementation of lessons from training can be translated into performance indicators which are monitored.

Finally, there should be a focus on maximising linkages, not only between social protection and complementary activities aimed at empowerment, capacity and skills building programmes and access to agricultural inputs and credit but also to support a more strategic use of community conversations/dialogue opportunities to raise awareness about social vulnerabilities and risks for women. Institutionally, linkages and lesson learning between GO and NGO implemented programmes should be promoted through frequent knowledge exchange opportunities and lesson learning among donors and international agencies so as to identify additional complementarities should be encouraged.

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