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Norms, Equity and Social Protection: A Gender Analysis of the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia

Melisew Dejene Lemma^a, Tesfaye Semela Kukem^b, Siera Vercillo^c and Logan Cochrane^{de}

^aInstitute for Policy and Development Research, Department of Journalism & Communication, Hawassa University, Awasa, Ethiopia; ^bInstitute for Policy and Development Research, Hawassa University, Awasa, Ethiopia; ^cSchool of Environment, Enterprise and Development, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada; ^dCollege of Public Policy, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Ar-Rayyan, Qatar; ^eInstitute for Policy and Development Research, Hawassa University, Awasa, Ethiopia

Abstract Social protection programmes do not generally account for gendered power dynamics. Oftentimes, they target women only as beneficiaries, which can intensify gendered disparities. This case study uses a mixed methods research approach to conduct a gender analysis of the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia. We find the programme has progressive gender equity goals, but these are not well implemented. Since special provisions for women are neglected in the case study sites, they do not challenge unequal social norms nor recognize unequal roles and responsibilities. Alongside implementing the gendered provisions, we recommend further research into the ways that the programme can challenge discriminatory social norms.

Keywords: gender; equity; norms; social protection; Ethiopia

1. Introduction

Many governments are turning to social protection measures, such as cash transfers, subsidies and public works programmes to support the intensified health and economic needs of vulnerable populations triggered by the global COVID-19 pandemic, as countries with stronger social protection systems are better coping with ongoing shocks (ILO, 2020). The uneven economic and health repercussions of COVID-19 clearly demonstrate that governments and institutions need to pursue more inclusive and rights-based social protection systems (Devereux, 2021). Since the mid-1990s, social protection systems have spread across the global south. With the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank's Atlas of Social Protection Indicators of Resilience and Equity states that 139 countries globally are utilizing social assistance, social insurance and labour market programs. In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there are hundreds of public works programs and at least 46 African nations have

cash transfer programs (Holmes and Jones, 2013; Ojong and Cochrane, 2022). This paper assesses the extent to which one of the largest social protection programs in Africa is delivering on its gendered objectives.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals also suggest that to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, public services and infrastructure, social protection policies need to value and provide for unpaid care and domestic work, including through the promotion of shared responsibilities between women and men within the family and wider community. Social protection is prioritized as a critical pathway to strengthening gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by the most recent United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women (2018). Yet, most social protection strategies, policies and programs are blind to gender disparities in norms, relations, divisions of labour, legal protections and resource access, which often lead to a reinforcement of gender inequalities, rather than a reduction (Hidrobo et al., 2020; Jones and Holmes, 2011; Sabates-Wheeler and Rolan, 2011). Where social protection policy and programs do recognize gender differences, they tend to strive for gender equality by increasing women's participation in public works and cash transfers, treating them narrowly as beneficiaries, without considering their unique needs and constraints relative to men's (Jones and Holmes, 2011). Some programmes rely on women's disproportionate reproductive burdens, particularly the caring of children to fulfill public works aims. By not reshaping gendered power relations within households, communities, markets and governance, social protection programmes risk reinforcing gender inequalities and, therefore, undermining women's rights.

There is well-established literature on the gendered dimensions of poverty (Chant, 2011; Folbre, 2021; Mcferson, 2010). The 2017 Global Gender Gap Report revealed that the average difference between women and men in access to education, livelihoods, health and civic engagement stood at 32 per cent among 144 countries, with only 68 women having access for every 100 men on average (World Economic Forum, 2017). Strikingly, the gender gap in those suffering from moderate to severe hunger has also jumped to 10 per cent in 2020 from 6 per cent in 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with women suffering disproportionately from shocks and stressors to global food supply chain disruptions (FAO, 2021). Broadly, women in SSA tend to experience poverty and other vulnerabilities more than men because of the multitude of restrictions placed on their ability to access land, credit and many other resources needed to generate income (Mcferson, 2010). Women's disproportionate reproduction responsibilities, alongside social norms that tend to constrain their mobility, also serve as barriers to generating income for women to the same extent as men (Kabeer, 2008b). Women and girls also tend to have weaker labour and land rights than men, and they struggle disproportionately with legal discrimination. Their predominant work in unregulated sectors like domestic care and within family businesses can also put women in more vulnerable positions than men (Kabeer, 2008a; 2008b). Striving for gender equality across all of these dimensions requires

mainstreaming changes at multiple levels and across institutions, including within households, communities, markets and governance by making context specific special provisions for women that serve to alleviate these constraints.

Despite the recognized importance of gender equity for strengthening human rights-based interventions, the above approaches to understanding and transforming multiple gendered dimensions of poverty, including social norms, have not been well reflected in social protection theory, policy and programming generally (Holmes and Jones, 2013; Kabeer, 2008a; Molyneux, 2006). Even the recent expansion of social protection programmes worldwide in response to the COVID-19 pandemic related shocks have largely unaddressed gendered disparities in their design, likely exacerbating existing inequalities between women and men (Hidrobo et al., 2020). Social protection that addresses uneven gendered power dynamics would include collecting sex-disaggregated data and considering it in all vulnerability assessments used to develop planning (Jones and Holmes, 2011). All programmes should at least involve both women and men, tackling uneven structural power dynamics, including those involving land and labour. Programmes should also be monitored and evaluated for how they potentially affect women and men differently, both positively and negatively, and further shifting support to minimize the latter. This paper explains participants' perceptions and experiences of the special provisions made for women and wider gendered power dynamics in the design of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) that were raised by participants. We detail the way these special provisions translate into practice in southern Ethiopia and document the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing these special provisions.

This paper assesses both the gender equity mandate and equality outcomes of Africa's second largest social protection programme, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia, through a case study conducted in two *woredas* in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State. Using mixed methods and social norms theory, we examine the specific gender equity-based issues recognized in the latest version of the PSNP implementation manual (IV) and assess how this manual translate to gender equality in southern Ethiopia. While the effectiveness of social protection for reducing poverty has been widely studied, the focus on the gender dimensions in programme design and implementation is relatively dated (e.g. *Gender and Development* special issue 2 on social protection, 2011; Holmes and Jones, 2013; Patel et al., 2013). These studies provide guidance on the potential of design changes to enhance social protection for gender equality. This paper explains how some of these design changes play out in the specific context of southern Ethiopia where there is one of the largest and most progressive public works programmes aimed at strengthening gender equality. Investigating the gendered outcomes of a progressive social protection programme is worth considering for (re)designing future programs in ways that go beyond simply including women as beneficiaries to transforming uneven gender relations and power dynamics on the African continent. This paper also

emphasizes the need for social protection to redress inequitable social norms and structural factors that perpetuate women's vulnerability to poverty, as opposed to simply including women or targeting them in their capacity as mothers to meet their practical needs (Holmes and Jones, 2013).

This paper begins by reviewing the gender, development and social protection literature. We also briefly outline the social norms theoretical framework and position it within this literature. This review is followed by contextual information about the case study sites, the PSNP programme specifically, as well as the study design, and methods employed. Combined results and discussion section of the PSNP implementation manual's gender mandate, outcomes and concluding remarks are presented in the final sections.

2. Gender norms, equity and social protection

Policy and programmes have become increasingly concerned with the social factors that make particular groups of people disproportionately vulnerable to multiple dimensions of poverty beyond a lack of income, such as poor health, education, living standards, disempowerment, quality work, threats of violence, and living in environmentally hazardous areas (Holmes and Jones, 2013).

Since the 1970s, feminist scholars have furthered understandings and evidence of the links between gender inequality and poverty that increases ones' vulnerability to risks, shocks and stressors (Chant, 2011; Folbre; 2021; Kabeer, 2008b). Gender as a social construct conveys the 'masculine and feminine characteristics that are embedded in cultural constructions' (Kilonzo and Magak, 2014, p. 2) Women and men experience and cope with shocks differently depending on their gendered roles, responsibilities and capabilities (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011). Policy intended to reduce vulnerability requires focusing both on reducing the shock and stressors that a vulnerable group experiences, as well as the context in which these vulnerabilities occur (Holmes and Jones, 2013). Feminist theory and practice is about explaining and changing the socially constructed norms and factors or systems that lead to differences in vulnerabilities between men and women.

Social norms are the beliefs and practices about a certain group of people that are normalized within a society. The beliefs and practices could include 'a typical action[,] an appropriate action[,] or both' (Paluck and Ball, 2010 cited in Mackie et al., 2015, p. 7). Mackie et al. (2015) observed that social norms maintain social expectations in a certain group and are shaped by social approval or sanctions. Our examination of social norms is defined by Cristinna Bicchieri's (2006, p. 8) narrower conception of them as 'informal rules' that lack legal enforcement and differ from formal provisions. Gender norms in the form of rules and roles assigned to, and expected of, women and men by a specific society or context, inculcate existing socioeconomic institutions and influence policy, programming and beyond. The theoretical framing of social norms is useful for clarifying the social processes that structure the production, distribution and

consumption of goods and services in society associated with poverty and vulnerability. These structures are primarily understood as historically generated systemic patterns of relationships and power dynamics (Eyben and Napier-Moore, 2009).

Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment requires dealing with the existing 'sociopolitical space' through orienting policy and practice toward rights-based approaches that redress the discriminatory social norms on which institutions are based (Homes and Jones, 2013). Reducing discriminatory and unfair gender norms requires promoting gender equity or the process of being fair through making special provisions that compensate for disadvantages between women and men. These special provisions will lead to equality in outcomes (Barker et al., 2009; Holmes and Jones, 2013). Otherwise, policies and programmes risk reinforcing and magnifying inequitable norms and vulnerabilities.

Social protection programmes have had an important part in 'smoothing' income since the 1960s and are increasingly expected to address the root causes of poverty. Maintaining a decent standard of living for citizens of a country could be achieved through government-supported protection and preventative measures when there are shocks and stressors like that of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. Social protection measures could also include 'promotional' endeavours or interventions that enhance incomes (Holmes and Jones, 2013).

Social protection programmes aimed at reducing gendered poverty have tended to use women's disadvantaged position within society for programmatic aims (Holmes and Jones, 2013). Since women are more greatly involved in the informal economy than men, as well as in casual, temporary or part-time employment, this justifies their lower participation in public works programmes. Moreover, women disproportionately take on unpaid responsibilities, which further deters them from participating in public works (Razavi et al., 2012). Studies of social protection programs find that those which do recognize gender inequality, tend to simply target women in their capacity as mothers without challenging the unequal divisions of labour and power dynamics between women and men (e.g. *Gender and Development* special issue 2 on social protection, 2011; Holmes and Jones, 2013). Conversely, public works programmes that strive for women's empowerment, cater to their specific needs by making special provisions that challenge the unequal gender divisions of labour and power dynamics or compensate for it. These special provisions can include providing maternity leave, a basic minimum wage, holidays and rest days, safe and equal working environments, pensions, including survivor pensions and child and age related care; and by supporting women's rights associations and organizing to reduce the pay gap and gap in access to capital between women and men. Social protection that involves only women misses the gender norms and divisions of responsibilities, including within the household that can actually add to women's responsibilities, while men maintain primary decision-making authority and control over household assets. Providing special resources and opportunities to women-only without involving men also risks alienating men, causing potential violent backlash,

as men perceive increasing women's resources as challenges to their authority (Ver-cillo, 2020).

3. Context

Over the past decade, the World Bank and other international observers have praised Ethiopia's development for its economic growth. The country averaged 10.9 per cent GDP growth over the past decade, with particularly strong growth between 2004 and 2014 (Dejene and Cochrane, 2019; UNECA, 2018). Ethiopia's economy is the eighth largest on the African continent and the economic gains, alongside large-scale programmes, have reduced poverty significantly. The Government of Ethiopia suggested that in 2000, 45.5 per cent of the population lived in poverty, which reduced to 23.5 per cent by 2016 (UNDP, 2018). Yet, households remain particularly vulnerable to agro-ecological shocks and stressors, such as drought and land degradation, limited access to markets due to poor infrastructure and a lack of insurance. Ethiopia has been led by a broad development vision, which is represented in the 'Agriculture Development-Led Industrialization' strategy of the mid-1990s, and a state-driven industrial strategy that came in effect in 2003. The comprehensive social protection policy, has been in effect since 2014.

Progress towards gender equity, however, has not kept pace with Ethiopia's GDP growth and poverty reduction (UNDP, 2018). Gendered labour division at the household level mostly leave women disproportionately burdened as women are responsible for almost all household chores. According to the Global Gender Index (since 2014), gender equity across many measures has not been met, albeit some consistent progress has been made in health and survival outcomes (WEF, 2017; see Table 1). A country-based analysis by the OECD (2010, p. 222), on how social norms impact gender equality states that the 'vast majority of Ethiopian women, particularly in rural areas, live in a state of poverty and dependence, and they rarely benefit directly from development initiatives'. Female-headed households are acutely vulnerable to shocks like illness and deaths, drought and price hikes (Holmes and Jones, 2013). Women have been largely absent from policy and planning in Ethiopia, in part due to policy limitations and, in part due to challenges attributed to gender norms within society and where women are less visible in key decision-making positions (Bayeh, 2016). Based on the 2012 data from the Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey (EDHS), Druzca and Abebe (p. 3) argue, 'unequal gender norms limit Ethiopian women's ability to innovate, own land, control resources and income, access credit, and engage in leisure pursuits'. Despite these persistent disparities, there is a positive trend toward gender equity due to the introduction of some policies, such as the revised family code (Cochrane and Betel, 2019). The earlier version of the family code which excluded women from inheritance was then revised to include them. Likewise, the land registration policy facilitated both husband's and wife's registration as users (Kumar and

Year	Global index		Economic participation & opportunity		Educational attainment		Health & survival		Political empowerment	
2017	115	0.656	109	0.604	134	0.82	44	0.979	50	0.223
2016	109	0.662	106	0.599	132	0.84	57	0.978	45	0.231
2015	124	0.64	108	0.608	140	0.74	59	0.978	44	0.232
2014	127	0.6144	103	0.618	139	0.71	82	0.9725	70	0.156

Table 1: Ethiopia's Status in the Global Gender Gap Index.

Source: Compiled from WEF, 2017.

Quisumbing, 2014).¹ Despite this progress in legislation, it is normatively accepted that the household head, who is typically male, owns land. Women who are widowed or separated from spouses tend to lose their property to their husbands or relatives. Married women who are able to access loans and participate in public works also tend to need to seek permission from their husbands to participate (Holmes and Jones, 2013).

3.1. *Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)*

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Government of Ethiopia and its international partners began to shift their focus from the traditional emergency food aid towards poverty alleviation programmes. The largest programme that was born out of this new approach was the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). Launched in 2005, the PSNP was designed towards longer-term solutions rather than emergency based appeals by targeting food insecure households, especially in rural farming communities (Holmes and Jones, 2013). It had three initial objectives: (1) smoothing food consumption throughout the year (e.g. address seasonal hunger), (2) protecting household assets through reducing household vulnerability, and (3) building community assets through the public works programme (Devereux and Guenthe, 2009). The PSNP set out to address more explicit poverty alleviation objectives later in the project, including through asset protection and asset building livelihood promotion. For households that graduate from the PSNP, agricultural extension, fertilizer, credit and other services are also provided.

The PSNP is a collaborative effort by the donor community (including, but not limited to the EU, USAID, DFID and the World Bank) and the Government of Ethiopia. It involves nearly eight million people in Afar, Amhara, Dire Dawa, Harari, Oromiya, SNNP, Somali and Tigray Regions (Rahmato, 2013).² The Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector in the Ministry of Agriculture and the respective regional governments are responsible for overseeing the management and implementation of the programme (WFP, 2012). As of 2014, the PSNP reached its fourth phase by focusing support to those with disabilities and others who have labour-constraints, while Public Works targets able-bodied individuals (WFP, 2012). The majority of people supported by the safety net and who participated in the Public Works component have been entitled to a conditional cash transfer with ambitions to strengthen community resources. A second segment of people who benefited from the direct support programme have been entitled to unconditional

1 The impact of joint registration (certification), however, is minimal as land ultimately belongs to the state in Ethiopia.

2 Regional Capital of Benishangul Gumuz and Gambella Regions (Gambella City and Asosa) have only recently been made part of the urban portions of the PSNP.

transfers. Direct support has also been granted to those who have met the criteria for entry into the PSNP but have been unable to work.

Several studies find that the PSNP has had positive impacts on many levels especially in terms of addressing short-term distress and chronic food insecurity (e.g. Bahru et al., 2020; Berhane et al., 2014a; 2014b; Bethelhem et al., 2015; Engidaw and Gebremariam, 2020; Gilligan et al., 2009; Porter and Goyal, 2016; Welteji et al., 2017). However, due to the very minimal amount of transfer made available through the PSNP (from Birr 195 to 230 per one able-bodied adult who could participate in Public Works to a maximum of five capable adults per household; see Dejene and Cochrane, 2020; 2021), the expectations of poverty alleviation and graduation are low, which in turn suggests the apparent weakness of the PSNP in alleviating poverty (e.g. Devereux et al., 2008; Rahmato, 2013).

3.2. Study location

This study was conducted in two sites in Southern Ethiopia, one from the Sidama Region and the other from Haddiya. According to the data from Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) Bureau of Agriculture Social Programmes Coordination Unit, in 2016 there were 1,039,959 clients of the PSNP in the Southern Region. This makes up 367,365 household clients of the PSNP. The clients are grouped into two categories, Public Works and Direct Support clients, with a respective proportion of 88.2 per cent and 11.8 per cent. Of the Public Works client households, 63.7 per cent are male-headed and 35.3 per cent are female-headed.³ The Public Works clients are those households with at least one able-bodied adult member who is expected to engage in Public Works activities in order to receive a modest conditional cash transfer amount of Ethiopian Birr 230 per head for a maximum of five capable adult members of a household, for six months in a year. This is approximately 39.7 USD per month. The Public Works activities run from January through June in all of the study areas. Differently, Direct Support clients receive cash transfers for the whole year.

4. Methodology

We adopted mixed methods survey design, involving focus groups, in-depth interviews and a household survey, which took place from May to June 2017 and in July 2018. Purposive sampling was employed to select the study communities and individual participants based on their involvement in the rural PSNP programme, which identified them as being drought prone and more food insecure relative to other communities in the region.⁴ This research seeks to learn from participants and

3 This data is from the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Bureau of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2016.

key informants involved with the PSNP, how they perceived gendered vulnerability to poverty. Combining methods can help to approach people's interpretations of vulnerabilities, social norms, and coping strategies, compared with the assumptions underlying interventions. An in-depth case study, which includes data triangulation between both qualitative and quantitative methods can also help to explain the complex gender and other social relations in a compelling way (Yin, 2018). The first author conducted focus-group discussions (FGDs) with Food Security Task Force Committee members, which is the governing body of the PSNP that makes implementation decisions at local levels. Two separate FGDs with the *Woreda* Food Security Task Force Committee members in both communities were conducted, as well as four separate FGDs with *kebele* Food Security Task Force Committee members in 2 *kebeles* from each community. A total of 46 participants were involved in the FGDs, with 7–8 participants attending each FGD. The main topics discussed in FGDs included programme implementation vis-à-vis female-headed households. Specifically discussed were questions around if the participants thought that women were given equal opportunities (in the PSNP, whether the programme design had taken women's involvement into account, if provisions for women like early departure and/or late arrival were practical, if PWs activities were in proximity to the respective communities). Focus groups were followed by one-on-one in-depth interviews with seven PSNP-Public Works (PW) participants as key informants to corroborate the data from FGDs and the household survey. Key informants were sampled based on their minimum 2-year involvement in the PSNP-PWs programme.⁵

A household survey of 386 households involved in the PSNP-PW was also collected. Although the zones and *woredas* were purposively selected, the two *kebeles* from each *woreda* were randomly selected by employing stratified random sampling. PSNP-PW participating households from the *kebeles* under study were randomly selected from a list delivered by the respective *woreda* (district) food security desks (offices), taking the gender variable into consideration (where a proportionate sample of female-headed households were included). Participant households of this study were grouped into male-headed and female-headed households to draw a proportionate sample from each category. The quantitative data from the household survey was analyzed using SPSS version 20. We employed descriptive and inferential statistics.

On top of sociodemographic information, participant households in the survey were asked eight questions based on recommended designs by Holmes and Jones (2013) and the implementation manual detailed in the next section: (1) whether gender equity was assured in beneficiary targeting and selection of the PSNP, (2)

4 This was also based on the first author's previous experience in the communities and contextual knowledge and that helped to ensure community entrée.

5 All *Woreda* and *kebele* level Food Security Task Force Committee members were involved in the FGDs held in their respective communities.

whether or not PW activities were planned by taking women's involvement into account, (3) whether women were given the opportunity to work in the PW activities that they prefer, as opposed to reinforcing their roles as mothers and care providers, (4) if women were not 'forced' to do jobs that are challenging for their health, (5) if women were allowed for late arrival and/or early departure given their household workload, (6) whether women's workload in PW activities were 50 per cent of that of men as per the implementation manual requirements, (7) whether PW activities were in proximity (within the locality or nearby the locality), and (8) if PW activities were scheduled during a convenient time for women (e.g. not during period of excessive heat or heavy rainfall).

4.1. Study limitations

There are key limitations to this study that are worth considering. Given that we selected the two woreda study areas purposively, findings are not generalizable to the wider region and PSNP programme. These case studies simply add nuance to existing findings of PSNP's performance that are context-specific. While we do not make claims about the extent to which some of our findings are applicable to the wider PSNP, we do offer suggestions for further investigations and considerations for the project specifically and social protection programmes more broadly. It is also worth noting that at the time of the study, the PSNP operated in more than 300 hundred woredas in eight regions. These particular case study sites were located in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State, which has some of the lowest levels of coverage of all regions in Ethiopia where the PSNP operates, which also may skew our findings. Regardless, the study is not intended to evaluate the entirety of the PSNP per se, but to offer suggestions for further investigations and considerations in future monitoring, evaluation and planning.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Gender issues in the PSNP IV implementation manual (PIM)

This section conducts a gender analysis of the PSNP by comparing how the special provisions established in the PSNP IV implementation manual (PIM) that are intended to shift inequitable social norms, compare with participant's experiences of the implementation of the PSNP and their perceived outcomes. The most contemporary iteration of the PIM determines both the administrative and programme implementation processes and goals. Among other key dimensions, gender features centrally in the PIM by establishing a set of provisions that explicitly strive to improve gender equity and women's inclusion. The PIM specifically stipulates that gender should be prioritized in programme implementation and that activities and provisions must be 'gender sensitive' through 'enhanced participation in improved rural safety

net, livelihood and nutrition services by food insecure female/male headed households' (MoA, 2014, pp. 2–3). 'Gender equity' is one major principle, out of nine, that calls for a fair representation of both women and men as clients and decision makers in the PSNP (MoA, 2014, pp. 2–5).

The PIM also outlines an independent 'gender action plan' that mainstreams gender equality throughout all nine components of the PSNP (MoA, 2014: Appendix i–iii). The provisions among others, include targeting female-headed and polygamous households; involving women in the annual planning process by consulting them separately from men; evaluating women's perspectives and satisfaction levels by relying on gender disaggregated monitoring and evaluation, including by developing gender sensitive indicators; instilling grievance management and reporting; establishing women networks and ensuring women participate in committees and leadership posts; piloting transfer approaches that enable equal benefit to women based on information about intra-household dynamics; Public Works reduce women's workload (by half) and permit late arrival and early departure options for women; and reviewing existing women extension services. Other notable provisions outlined in the PIM for women are that they are relieved during pregnancy and breast-feeding, but still receive a transfer for up to one year. Lactating and pregnant women are also required to visit at least one health facility, attend a hygiene, reproductive health, childcare and nutrition awareness raising events that is organized at community level by women health professionals. Women are also responsible for periodic immunization of their children.

Gender Action Plan Items of the PSNP

Targeting female headed and polygamous households

Involving women in planning process

Consulting women separately from men

Sex disaggregated monitoring and evaluation indicators

Gender sensitive satisfaction considerations

Instilling grievance management and reporting

Establishing women networks

Ensuring women participate in committees and leadership posts

Piloting new cash transfer processes based on intra-household dynamics

Public works should reduce women's workload (by half)

Permit late arrival and early departure options for women

Reviewing existing women-oriented extension services

Receive cash transfer for one year during pregnancy and breast-feeding leave of absence

Lactating and pregnant women required to visit health facility

Lactating and pregnant women required to attend a hygiene, reproductive health, childcare and nutrition awareness raising events

Women are responsible for periodic immunization of their children

Overall, PIM has the potential to strengthen gender equality as there are a number of special provisions oriented at meeting women's basic needs at the household and community level, alongside involving them in community decision making (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; Holmes and Jones, 2011; 2013; Newtown, 2016). The gender equity provisions outlined in the PIM are quite comprehensive. Firstly, the PIM focuses on improving women's access to a variety of resources, such as human resources (e.g. capacity building), tangible resources (e.g. transfers, public works), and intangible resources (e.g. knowledge, livelihood services, networks). The PIM also restructures its own system (e.g. monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management and other institutional arrangements) by integrating gender-specific demographic data into all activities that involve both women and men. The PIM aspires for women to be involved in annual public works planning by consulting them separately because of social norms that discourage women from having authority and from voicing concerns when men are present. The PIM outlines also implementing social accountability tools to gauge women's satisfaction specifically, including grievance management. In its knowledge management component, PIM's gender policy suggests the establishment of women-networks to work with programme implementers at all levels. PIM also prioritizes female-headed and polygamous households because it is assumed that women in female headed and polygamous households are likely to have resource limitations in relative terms to its PWs labour requirements. These planned activities also recommend that women are not engaged in activities which are risky for their health. For instance, some of the Public Work activities, such as feeder roads construction/maintenance, pond development and other watershed management activities, have physically demanding, labour-intensive activities as they are usually done without the support of machinery.

However, more provisions in the PIM need to explicitly challenge social norms around divisions of labour and resource access and control, as opposed to simply accommodating for them, especially within male-headed households and communities (Holmes and Jones, 2013). Certain provisions made to women, such as awareness-raising sessions about reproductive health or nutrition may perpetuate existing inequitable norms in rural Ethiopia where women are disproportionately overburdened with reproductive care work with little or no help from men. Men should also be encouraged to attend sessions on childcare, nutrition, hygiene and reproductive health issues as noted by FGD participants in one of the communities under study.

Finally, despite the PSNP's focus on having both women and men participate, by targeting and engaging with only household heads and measuring outcomes at the household level, the PSNP misses the impact the programme has on various members within the household, including on reproductive roles and responsibilities that women tend to predominate (Kabeer, 2008b). Feminist research has frequently opened up the household 'black box' in many African contexts, recognizing that rights and resource access and control differ amongst household members and that not all members necessarily have access to a joint family or conjugal fund (see

Shibata et al., 2020, for example). This examination of intra-household gendered roles and responsibilities can better represent the full extent of people's labour, including the additional time spent in food preparation, child care etc.

5.2. Outcomes of PIM in southern Ethiopia

In this paper, we go beyond assessing the plan of the PSNP, which is typical of many gender analyses of social protection programmes (Holmes and Jones, 2013), to also investigate the way this plan is being implemented and the perceived gender equality outcomes by participants in the programme. A recurring theme that emerged from interviews and FGDs about gender equity and the PSNP was related to the targeting of female-headed households and the consideration of female household-heads' unique needs as they were considered more vulnerable than their male counterparts. As outlined in Table 2, the vast majority of survey participants, 89 per cent thought that gender equity was ensured in the PSNP through purposive client targeting of female-headed households. Female-headed households made up 32.4 per cent of households in the study areas, thus, targeting them proportionally due to their perceived vulnerability was considered by many as an important step towards gender

Questions/issues raised	Response	N	%
Gender equity is assured in client targeting	Yes	343	88.9
	No	43	11.1
Public Works activities are planned taking women involvement in to account	Yes	337	87.3
	No	49	12.7
Women are given the opportunity to do those Public Works activities they prefer to (whenever possible)	Yes	262	67.9
	No	124	32.1
	Total	386	100
Women are not forced to do jobs that are challenging for their health	Yes	245	64
	No	140	36
	Total	385	100
Women are allowed for late arrival and early departure given their household workload	Yes	211	54.7
	No	175	45.3
	Total	386	100
Women's workload in Public works activity is 50% of that of men	Yes	164	42.5
	No	222	57.5
	Total	386	100
Public works activities are in proximity (within the locality or nearby the locality)	Yes	201	52.1
	No	185	47.9
	Total	386	100
Public works are timed during a convenient time for women (not during period of excessive heat or heavy rainfall)	Yes	187	48.4
	No	199	51.6
	Total	386	100

Table 2: Gender norms and women involvement in the PSNP-PWs at kebele level, $n = 386$.

Source: Household survey conducted May–June 2017.

equality. Another large majority of those surveyed, 87 per cent also reported that Public Works activities considered women's involvement. This perception amongst participants that gender equity equates to the targeting of female-headed households is in line with the tendency of social protection programmes more broadly, which is to associate gender equality with including women, without necessarily changing the social norms or circumstances that shape their vulnerability (Holmes and Jones, 2013). This perception of PSNP's performance also differs from its overall goals as stated in the PIM, which is to focus on making special provisions to all women, including women in male headed households. This points to a need to have ongoing capacity building for programme implementers and male and female programme participants on the PIM's gender equality goals and objectives (Jones and Holmes, 2011). It is not enough to simply include women or develop plans if those implementing and participating in those plans are not aware of the intended outcomes.

Moreover, the participation of women in the PSNP, including of FHH did not necessarily lead to women's involvement in the planning of programme activities. Although the PIM stipulates that women should be involved as decision makers, women participants, in particular, expressed that they were not involved in planning. There was a reported public gathering in each village organized by the *kebele* Food Security Task Force Committee (FSTFC) before annual Public Works activities began. One woman claimed that 'we confirm selected clients with a public gathering at village level' (KII, W1, K2), referring to the community-based selection processes. Another woman representative who participated in the FGD in one of the *kebeles* reported, 'In our *kebele* we replaced two men by their respective wives, for they were repeatedly found to abuse the PSNP money by drinking alcohol'. She argued that women proved themselves crucial for the success of the programme and the PSNP was working towards gender equity. Promoting women's representation and participation in programme governance is a recommended design principle for strengthening the transformative potential of social protection programmes that strengthened women's agency, advocacy and representation (Jones and Holmes, 2011).

The women who were part of the FSTFC were also part of the 'women's league', which is the leading political party's (the then Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front) wing for women. Women who are part of this political party may not necessarily represent the voices of all women. Thus, some women not part of this politics or who were not affiliated with any politics were likely left out of the FSTFC pathways to women's inclusion in decision making processes for the PSNP. This also points to the possibility of a collusion of politics in PSNP affairs, especially at the *kebele* level, which has been found in other studies in similar areas (e.g. Berhanne et al., 2013; Cochrane and Tamiru, 2016; Hoddinot, 2013). Jones and Holmes (2011, p. 45) argue that the local level practice of social protection when viewed from a gendered perspective is 'deeply political' and may reflect more goals of political parties and not equity or empowerment from the perspectives of women themselves.

5.2.1. *Special provisions for women*

Our findings demonstrate why it is necessary to go beyond assessing social protection plans for their gender equality goals to also investigate their implementation processes and outcomes because many of the special provisions made for women as outlined in the PIM were not necessarily implemented. For example, though women participants in the public works activities were supposed to be provided with a list of work opportunities as away to offer flexible opportunities that could accommodate for varied time constraints, interests and other circumstances, in reality, they had very few options available. Though we found that 64 per cent-70 per cent of women participants of the household survey responded positively to the public works activities, nearly 64 per cent-68 per cent of survey participants reported that women were given the opportunity to do a public works activity from a limited list that usually involved constructing village feeder roads, digging ponds and other watershed activities. Moreover, though it was reported in the PIM that women should exercise ‘their choice’ and should not be ‘forced’ to do jobs that were challenging for their health, nearly one in three participants of the household survey had a different experience (see [Table 2](#)). Finally, public works activities tended to reinforce inequitable gender roles and norms with certain activities being denied or assumed of women because they were perceived as activities that women ‘should do’ and/or conversely ‘women could not do’. For example, in rural agricultural practice, in most cases, women were generally excluded from ploughing fields but were encouraged to weed. This is similar to the reviews conducted of 58 health programmes by Barker et al. (2009) who argues that most women-focused health programmes in Ethiopia have design problems as they perpetuate existing inequalities and stereotypes (Newton, 2016).

The PIM also outlined that women were entitled to late arrival and early departure from public works activities, however, the implementation of this special provision was mixed across the study communities. Nearly 55 per cent of participants in the household survey reported that women were allowed to arrive late and leave early because of their household responsibilities, such as childcare and cooking. However, data disaggregation by *kebele* reveals differences in practice from one *kebele* from another. For example, only 26 per cent from *kebele* 1 and 40 per cent from *kebele* 2 confirmed that women were allowed to arrive late and depart early, compared to 69 per cent in *kebele* 3 and 93 per cent in *kebele* 4. These findings align with Cochrane and Tamiru (2016) study which points out that implementation variation is highly localized. The findings of both the FGDs and interviews with key informants suggested that the principle of women’s late arrival and early departure was practical in the respective *kebeles*. This irregularity may be associated with the presence of several supervisors managing different groups in each *kebele*, and the level of awareness of the special provisions permitted by women by each supervisor in charge. It also could be subject to the level of awareness and sense of entitlement of participating women to these special provisions. We also observed a supervisor denying both a

woman and man from participating in a PW session because they were both late by approximately one hour. If the PWs functioned according to the PIM, the woman would have been permitted. In this particular instance, the woman did not push for her right or contest the denial by the supervisor and left immediately without discussion, which is also in line with norms that discourage women from making decisions and contesting authority. The discrepancies between places point to a need to tailor ongoing capacity building for programme implementers and men and women participants in the PSNP alike on these special provisions (Jones and Holmes, 2011).

The PIM also had a special provision that minimizes the PW's workload for women as a way to compensate for the household work burden for women in rural Ethiopia at different points through their life-course. Although the PSNP policy outlines that women's work-load should be half of men's, the majority of the participants of the household survey, 57 per cent, reported that this was not practical, and 43 per cent believed women did half the work of men. Data from FGDs and KIIs substantiates these claims, that ensuring women's workload as equal to men's was difficult to achieve. The varied implementation, as with the departure and arrival provisions, also appeared quite localized due to a range of factors, including both supervisors and clients not knowing about these provisions. An area where implementation seems more in line with the PIM was the temporary shift into direct support during pregnancy and one year following delivery. The FGDs both at *woreda* and *kebele* levels suggest that women were able to receive payments during pregnancy and lactation, and that they were working with the HEW to receive awareness training and vaccinations in all of the communities studied.

Although gendered grievances management were provided for in the PIM, where women and men were supposed to discuss malpractices separately, it was reported that none of the communities were taking advantage of this in practice. Although the PSNP was intended to organize women in their own networks forming associations of their own making at the community level we also failed to find any such networks in the study communities. This contrasts with Bicchieri's (2016) perspective of social protection programme's potential to promote rights-based theories that foster environments where women and other vulnerable populations can feel empowered to express and have their voices heard, and to have a stake in defining their own destiny. Similar to most social protection programmes the PSNP is the 'promotional' aspects of income generation, particularly for more vulnerable groups (Holmes and Jones, 2013).

Another provision among the PIM gender action plan was that Public Works need to be in close proximity to where participants live, as well as at more convenient times, particularly not during excessive heat and rain to accommodate for the reproductive work burdens and time constraints of women. In this regard, 52 per cent of the participants of the household survey reported that Public Works were organized in their proximity, while the rest, 48 per cent, said they were not (Table 2 furthers the discussion). The distance to Public Works has serious repercussions for rural women's

ability to participate because of the traditional gender division labour that put disproportionately higher demand on women within the household. Having to travel further distances for work also discourages women from participating because of the prevailing gender norms that prohibit women from travelling unaccompanied. We also found that 48 per cent of the participants of the household survey reported this was the case. However, 87 per cent of survey participants rated that Public Works activities in the study areas were not happening at a convenient time for women. In all of the communities studied, Public Works run from January through June, which is mostly in the dry, sunny season (and June is the start of the rainy season, *Kiremt* that runs from June to August).

6. Conclusion

Ethiopia's PSNP, Africa's second largest social protection programme, has clear and strong gender provisions in its implementation manual. However, our findings from a case study in southern Ethiopia suggest that implementation outcomes of the programme in terms of advancing gender equity are mixed. The gender equity provisions in the PIM recognize the unique time constraints and reproductive work burdens of women by making special consultations and allowances for them (e.g. workload reductions, flexibility in work timing, special grievance communication) and by embedding additional benefits, such as maternity leave, awareness raising and reproductive health initiatives. Some of these special provisions made for women are critical for gender equity; they need to also be balanced by making them requirements to men's participation as a way to challenge gender norms and work burdens and as a way to encourage men to participate in stereotypically feminine roles, such as child-care. There is a need for social protection to redress inequitable social norms and structural factors that perpetuate women's vulnerability to poverty, as opposed to simply including women or targeting them to meet their practical needs.

The Public Works scheme was successful in ensuring gender equity in targeting and beneficiary selection, specifically including female-headed households and by providing paid maternity leave, reproductive health care for women and their children, as well as capacity building and awareness raising. However, most of the other equity-oriented provisions were unfulfilled. The workload requirements for women, which should be half compared to that of men, as well as flexibility in work timing, were enforced unevenly across the communities. Women and men were also not consulted separately and implementing such provisions for women involves awareness by supervisors, none of whom were women. Moreover, most participants felt the distance needed to travel for Public Works, specifically for women, and the scheduling of activities were inconvenient. No networks or associations were established to represent different community needs and a large majority of women and men thought that they had little choice in the types of work they could pursue and that current activities compromised their health.

Finally, the representation and consultation of women was politicized and sufficient childcare unavailable. In some instances, gender sensitivity was not necessarily facilitating the transformation of norms, roles and responsibilities. Instead, negative gender norms tend to be reinforced by the program design and implementation. The perceptions about gendered provisions were more pronounced when gender disaggregated analysis was undertaken. Overall, special provisions implemented in the PSNP were promotive towards gender equity in social protection at community level to some extent. Investigating the gendered outcomes of a progressive social protection programme is worth considering for (re)designing future programs in ways that go beyond simply including women to transforming uneven gender relations and power dynamics on the African continent. Further research is needed to gauge the impact of these provisions on gender norms within the household, particularly male headed households as it is missing from the implementation plan and beyond the scope of this study.

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Notes on contributors

Melisew Dejene Lemma (PhD) is an Assistant Professor of Policy & Development Studies, and Journalism & Communication at the Institute of Policy & Development Research (IPDR), and Department of Journalism & Communication, Hawassa University (HU). Currently, he is a PhD Program Coordinator at IPDR, HU, Ethiopia.

Tesfaye Semela Kukem (PhD) is a Professor of Sociology of Education at Hawassa University, Ethiopia. Currently, he is Director of Institute of Policy & Development Research (IPDR), HU, Ethiopia.

Siera Vercillo (PhD) is a Post-doctoral fellow at the School of Environment, Enterprise and Development, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada.

Logan Cochrane (PhD) is an Associate Professor at the College of Public Policy, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar. He is also an Adjunct Professor at the Institute of Policy & Development Research, (IPDR), HU, Ethiopia.

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