

Interventions to promote female labour force participation – Experience from Ethiopia

Introduction:

Gender equality and economic empowerment of women are reinforcing elements in the promotion of female labour force participation. Outcomes account to various socioeconomic and environmental vulnerabilities faced by women. Poor rural households in Ethiopia often present higher risks for women in this regard. They include unequal wages, education, training, resources and financial services; and vulnerability to shocks, such as illness or death of family member, loss of job or their livestock, market price and environmental fluctuation. The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia has interesting features which were designed to tackle these issues, and nowadays reaches almost one crore beneficiaries.

Background:

The PSNP is an Ethiopian public works programme launched in 2005. It is part of a larger food security strategy to boost consumption through the provision of food and cash transfers. Programme objectives in food security are combined with the creation of community agricultural and infrastructure assets and maintenance of household assets. Support is given directly to households which are unable to work and in exchange of labour for households which are able to work. The programme introduced a sensitive gender approach with social protection responses to gender-specific socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Salient elements of the design of the programme concentrate on women participation and asset creation features. First, the promotion of women participation was designed based on the recognised social and economic risks women face, such as labour shortfalls, diverse physical capabilities and poverty of time. It also includes participation of women in the governance of the programme at all levels. Second, the creation of certain categories of assets was designed based on the needs and conditions of women, such as fuel-wood sources and community water. These features were asserted and strengthened overtime in implementation of the programme, considering the contribution of efficient monitoring and evaluation processes and relevant participation and feedback from stakeholders.

Details of the Intervention:

Interventions of PNSP with relevant gender impact were undertaken in the household, community and programme governance levels. They pertain to salient gender-sensitive features of scheme. In the household level, these features account for equality between men and women in their conditions to perform jobs. For instance, in the household level, the programme accounts for maternal and childcare responsibilities by allowing pregnant and lactating women to transition from public works to direct support, and by providing childcare facilities. In addition, women are allowed to attend public works in flexible time due to their time poverty¹ – women often accumulate household and farming works on the side of public works. All these benefits given to women do not affect their wage payments. In the community level, women participate in the decision-making process alongside men. Their voices can be heard, and their needs can be considered an important feature of programme implementation, including the selection of assets and tolls which will be used in the completion of project works. In the programme governance level, women are encouraged to take participation as leaders in their worksites and in programme administrative bodies, such as the sub-national Food Security Taskforces.

Impact:

PSNP has made significant impact in enhancing female participation in labour force in rural Ethiopia. The design of the scheme contributed considerably by recognising the aforementioned gender-sensitive elements in its core features. By addressing the particular needs of women, the programme also showed indirect outcomes such as increasing effects on quantity and quality of food consumption, coverage of basic education expenses, and creation of and access to community assets and services, such as water for drinking, irrigation and livestock. In addition, both men and women were reported to have profited from the participation of women in works and in their communities, generating greater security between them. Indirect impact in the self-esteem of women and their decision-making power was also noteworthy, with an increased valorisation of women by their male counterparts.

Source: Jones, N, Tafere, Y, Woldehanna, T. (2010). Gendered risks, poverty and vulnerability in Ethiopia: To what extent is the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) making a difference? Overseas Development Institute. London, UK.

¹ Time poverty is the concept that individuals do not have enough discretionary time – the time available after engaging in necessary activities like sleep and in the committed activities of paid and unpaid work – to engage in activities that build their social and human capital. Time poverty thresholds define a level of discretionary time below which individuals are considered to be “time poor.”