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Refocusing the public works agenda to take account of economic and social risks

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# Gender inequality, risk and vulnerability in the rural economy: refocusing the public works agenda to take account of economic and social risks<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Smallholder farmers and poor rural households are vulnerable to both economic and social shocks which hamper their participation in agricultural activities. Well-designed social protection programmes can help to reduce both the risk and vulnerability by building resilience to shocks and stresses. Although the gender-specific challenges of women's largely unequal involvement in agricultural activities are generally well-articulated, social protection policy and programming have not adequately recognised the gendered experiences of poverty and vulnerability and the extent to which gender inequality affects both social protection programme design and outcomes. To maximise the linkages between social protection and agricultural growth, and to improve the effectiveness of both for reducing poverty and improving food security, it is imperative that gender-sensitive measures are integrated into policy and programme design and implementation. In this paper we focus on a subset of social protection programmes - public works schemes - which aim to tackle rural poverty and food insecurity and/or promote agricultural productivity. We use two case studies of large public works programmes, i.e. the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in India, to analyse the extent to which gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities are considered in programme design and implementation. Both programmes aim to support agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods through creating community agricultural assets and infrastructure and improving incomes for poor households. Our analysis 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 public works programme effectiveness.

**Key Words:** Gender, women, social protection, public works programmes, Ethiopia, India

**JEL:** I38, J16.

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## Introduction

Recent renewed attention to agriculture has focused on the importance of agricultural growth for poverty reduction. Agricultural growth supports poverty reduction both directly and indirectly, spurring economic growth more broadly, increasing incomes and opportunities in both farm and non-farm activities and enhancing food security (World Bank, 2007).

Smallholder marginal farmers and poor households dependent on agricultural daily wage labour however face significant challenges to engaging productively in agricultural activities. Poor households are vulnerable to both economic and social shocks and stresses such as indebtedness due to economic, social or life-cycle events, food insecurity, health problems, productivity loss, lack of access to inputs, information and markets, gender discrimination in ownership of assets and discrimination in the labour market. The imperatives of keeping people in productive activity as well as supporting them in taking advantage of new opportunities have been important drivers in the search for ways of reducing risk and vulnerability (Farrington, Holmes and Slater, 2007).

Well-designed social protection programmes can offer one such way to both reduce risk and vulnerability and support agricultural growth by building resilience to shocks and stresses and reducing the perceptions of high risk in the agricultural sector, which may otherwise prevent the poor from venturing into new opportunities (Farrington, Holmes and Slater, 2007). However, to date, while the gender-specific challenges of women's largely unequal involvement in agricultural activities are generally well-articulated (e.g. lack of access to credit, inputs, information and training; time poverty due to domestic and care activities; lack of ownership and access to productive assets; discrimination in the labour market (World Bank, 2007), social protection policy and programming have not adequately recognised the gendered experiences of poverty and vulnerability and the extent to which gender inequality at multiple levels (community, household and intra-household) affects both social protection programme design and outcomes (Holmes and Jones, 2009). To maximise the linkages between social protection and agricultural growth, and to improve the effectiveness of both for reducing poverty and improving food security, it is imperative that gender-sensitive measures are integrated into policy and programme design and implementation.

The aim of this paper is to focus on a sub-set of social protection programmes—public works schemes which aim to tackle rural poverty and food insecurity and/or promote agricultural productivity. We focus in particular on two case studies of large public works programmes in Ethiopia (the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)) and India (the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)) drawing on a desk-based review and recent fieldwork (in April, August and September 2009) to analyse the extent to which gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities are considered in programme design and implementation. Both these large national programmes aim to support agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods through creating community agricultural assets and infrastructure and improving incomes for poor households.

Section 2 of the paper discusses the conceptual framework highlighting the importance of understanding gendered economic and social risks at the individual, household and community level, and reviews the extent to which gender considerations have been integrated into public works programmes in developing country contexts. Sections 3 and 4 present findings from the Ethiopian and Indian case studies, respectively, and the final section concludes, highlighting key policy implications.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: GENDERED ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RISKS<sup>2</sup>**

Social protection is an increasingly important approach to reduce vulnerability and chronic poverty, especially in contexts of crisis. 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 meaningful 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).

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<sup>2</sup> This section is based on Holmes and Jones (2009).

## ***Conceptualising social protection***

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 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.

### **Box 1: Transformative 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;
- 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;

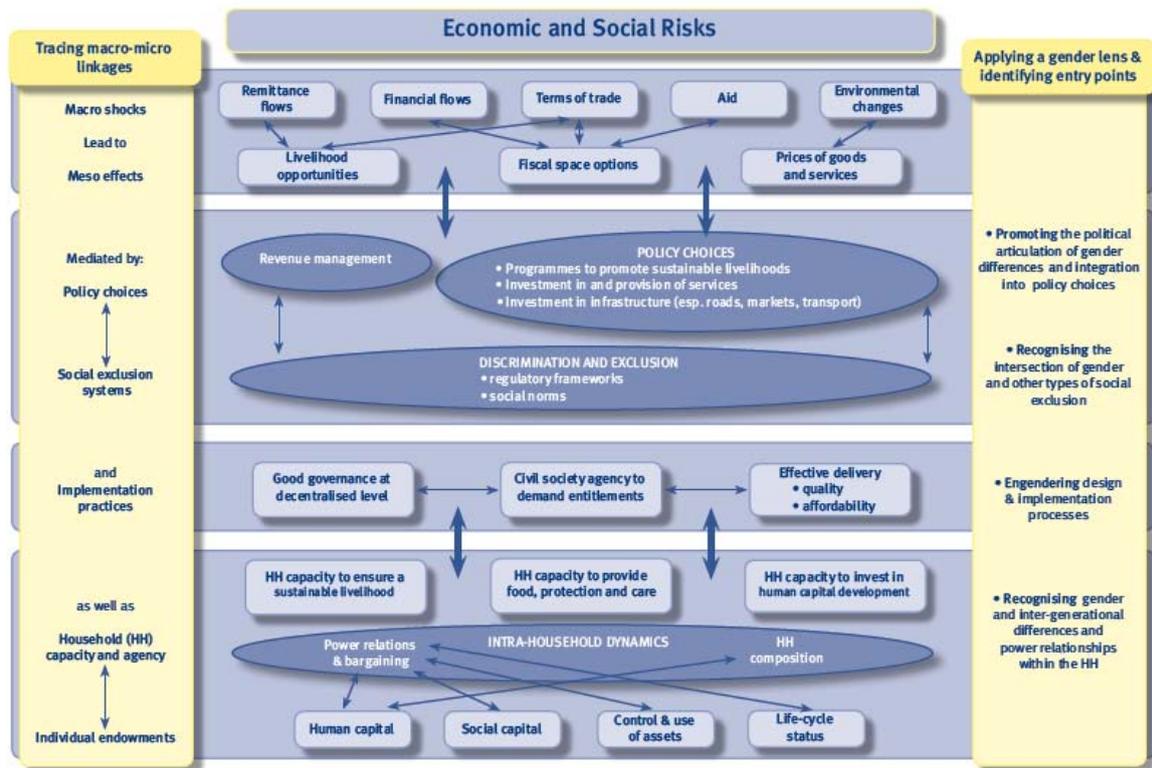
“Transformative interventions” include changes to the regulatory framework to protect ‘socially vulnerable groups’ such as people with disabilities or victims of domestic violence, against discrimination. The transformative elements might occur in the design of core social protection policy and programmes,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

Source: Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004

### ***Conceptualising gender dimensions of economic and social risks***

Both economic risks (including the economic impact of environmental and natural risks) and social risks are influenced by gender dynamics and have important differential impacts on men and women. Figure 1 below demonstrates how economic and social risks can be reinforced or mediated from the macro to the micro level through, for example, policy interventions, discriminatory practices embedded in institutions (e.g. social exclusion and discrimination in the labour market), and community, household and individual capacity and agency. Opportunities to enhance the integration of gender at each of these levels are highly context specific, and depend on the balance between government, non-governmental and informal social protection mechanisms within a country as well as the profile of the government agencies responsible for the design and implementation of formal mechanisms.

**Figure 1: Impact pathways of vulnerability to economic and social risks**



Source: Holmes and Jones, 2009

## Gendered economic risks

The differential distribution of resources (financial, social, human and physical capital) between men and women, as well as differential social roles and responsibilities means that the options available to men and women to respond to macro-level shocks and stresses are likely to vary. Economic risks can include declines in national financial resources and/or aid flows, terms of trade shocks or environmental disasters. Stresses might include long-term national budget deficits and debt, lack of a regulatory framework and/or enforcement of health and safety standards at work and lack of an economically enabling environment. Given men’s and women’s differential engagement in the economy, such as the labour market, the impacts of macro-economic shocks are highly gendered. For example, in times of economic crisis, women are often the first to lose jobs in the formal sector, such as in Korea during the financial crisis of 1997/1998 (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 2009). Yet in other parts of East Asia, including Indonesia and the Philippines, women gained in overall employment due to their lower wages and lower levels of union organisation (ibid). Cuts in public expenditure are also likely to affect women more in many contexts because they typically have greater responsibility for household health and education access (Quisumbing et al., 2008). The

effects on men and male identities of economic malaise are also increasingly recognised. Silberschmidt (2001), for instance, highlights the way in which rising unemployment and low incomes are undermining male breadwinner roles, and resulting in negative coping strategies, such as sexually aggressive behaviour and gender-based violence, in a bid to reassert traditional masculine identities.

At the meso or community level the impacts of economic shocks are mediated by, for example, gender segmented labour markets and institutional rules and norms (e.g. absence of affirmative action to address historical discrimination of women and marginalised social groups) which leads to poor access and utilisation of productive services by women. Women in general have less access to credit, inputs (such as fertiliser), extension services and, therefore, improved technologies (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 2009), which undermines their resilience to cope with stress and shocks.

How poor households are able to cope with and mitigate the impacts of shocks and ongoing stresses also depends on a number of factors at the micro and intra-household level. The vulnerability of household members is likely to vary according to the composition of households (e.g. dependency ratios, sex of the household head, number of boys and girls in the household), individual and household ownership and control of assets (land, labour, financial capital, livestock, time, and so on), access to labour markets, social networks and social capital and levels of education. Women typically have lower levels of education, have less access, ownership and control of productive assets and different social networks to men, leading to lower economic productivity and income generation, and weaker bargaining positions in the household. In times of crisis, underlying gender biases may mean that women's or female-headed households' assets are more vulnerable to stripping than those of men, the impact of which may be lengthy if what has been sold cannot be replaced. Byrne and Baden (1995) also argue that in times of crisis, women's bargaining position and entitlements may also be reduced more rapidly than those of male members of households.

### **Gendered social risks**

Social sources of vulnerability are often as or more important barriers to sustainable livelihoods and general well-being than economic shocks and stresses (CPRC, 2008). At a macro-level, social exclusion and discrimination often inform and/or are perpetuated by formal policies, legislation and institutions (e.g. low representation of women or minority

groups in senior positions). In many countries, efforts to ensure that national laws and policies are consistent in terms of providing equal treatment and/or opportunities to citizens irrespective of gender, caste, race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality and disability are often weak or uneven. Moreover, although there have been considerable improvements over the last two decades in part due to international movements to address social exclusion, the enforcement of existing anti-discrimination policies and laws is often under-resourced, especially at the sub-national level. Changing entrenched social practices and values often requires a pro-active approach (e.g. affirmative action measures such as quotas for women for political office) with high-level political commitments and monitoring mechanisms needed to tackle informal practices and resistance.

At the meso- or community level, absence of voice in community dialogues is a key source of vulnerability. For instance, women are often excluded from decision-making roles in community-level committees, and this gender-based exclusion may be further exacerbated by caste, class or religion. Some excluded groups are reluctant to access programmes or claim rights and entitlements fearing violence or abuse from more dominant community members. Another critical and related variable is social capital. Poverty may be compounded by a lack of access to social networks which provide access to employment opportunities but also support in times of crisis. It can also reinforce marginalisation from policy decision-making processes.

At micro- or intra-household level the patterning of multiple potential sources of social vulnerability depends on household composition (nuclear versus extended; female- versus male-headed; high versus low dependency ratio), but broad trends can be identified. Social risk is related to limited intra-household decision-making and bargaining power based on age and/or gender, and time poverty as a result of unpaid productive work responsibilities and/or familial care work can reduce time available for wider livelihood or coping strategies, and may contribute to women tolerating discriminatory and insecure employment conditions and/or abusive domestic relationships. Life-course status may also exacerbate intra-household social vulnerabilities. Girls are often relatively voiceless within the family, and a source unpaid domestic/care-work labour. The elderly (especially widows) also tend to face particular marginalisation as they become to be seen as non-productive and even a threat to scarce resources.

## ***Applying a Gender Lens to Public Works Programmes***

In this paper we focus on a subset of social protection programmes--public works--which are generally defined as public labour-intensive infrastructure development initiatives which provide cash or food-based payments. Such programmes have a number of technical and political benefits. They provide income transfers to the poor and are often designed to smooth income during 'slack' or 'hungry' periods of the year<sup>3</sup>; address shortage of infrastructure (rural roads, irrigation, water harvest facilities, tree plantation, school and health clinic facilities); are typically self-targeting due to the low benefit levels and heavy physical labour requirements (Subbaroa, 2003)<sup>4</sup>, and as such entail more limited administrative costs than many other social protection interventions. They are also politically popular as they require that programme beneficiaries work and are seen to be helping themselves (Bloom, 2009), whereas cash transfers, for instance, especially those which are unconditional, can sometimes be challenging to generate support for, particularly from middle class voters (e.g. Behrman, 2007). Additional benefits are found especially in programmes which involve communities in the selection of projects undertaken with public works labour including the creation of infrastructure that is most needed by the community and a sense of community ownership of the asset and a greater likelihood of maintenance of that asset (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 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 benefits 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).

A review of historic and existing public works programmes in developing country contexts and the extent to which issues of gender equality are embedded in programme design

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<sup>3</sup> Note that in middle income countries, a 2009 World Bank review found that workfare programmes were typically initiated to cope with one-time large macro-economic shocks (del Ninno, Subbarao and Milazzo, 2009). By contrast in low-income countries they are typically motivated by poverty relief and seasonal unemployment concerns.

<sup>4</sup> Other targeting methods include self-selection in combination with other methods and geographic targeting (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 2009).

indicates that a range of approaches have been developed to facilitate women's participation including:

- institutionalisation of explicit quotas for female programme participants (e.g. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), India's historic Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana programme and current NREGS programme, South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP));
- provisions for gender-specific lifecycle needs including allowing women time off for pregnancy and breast-feeding (e.g. as in Botswana's Labour-Intensive Rural Public Works Programme, Ethiopia's PSNP, India's NREGs), provision of work close to participants homes (e.g. India's Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra) and of crèche facilities (e.g. in Ethiopia's PSNP and India's NREGS), and flexibility in terms of women's working hours so they can balance their domestic and care work responsibilities (e.g. Ethiopia's PSNP, permanent part-time employment in South Africa's EPWP in KwaZuluNatal);
- consideration of the particular circumstances of female-headed households, including household-level contracts for female headed households (e.g. South Africa's EPWP) so that work can be shared more flexibly, and quotas for female headed-household participants (e.g. Ethiopia's PSNP);
- guarantee of equal wages for men and women (Ethiopia's PSNP, India's Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra, NREGS);
- provisions for women to take on programme supervisory roles (e.g. Bangladesh's Rural Maintenance Programme, Botswana's Labour Intensive Rural Public Works Programme);
- support so that women participants are better able to save through the establishment of savings groups (e.g. Nepal's Dhalugiri Irrigation Project) and have access to credit (e.g. Bangladesh's RMP, Ethiopia's PSNP) in order to be able to graduate from public works programmes;

- linkages to complementary services that will empower women more generally including provision of adult literacy classes for women (e.g. Senegal’s Agence d’Ececuton des Travaux d’Interet Public); and
- mechanisms which ensure that the type of work undertaken benefits women either due to the nature of the community asset created (e.g. improvements in transport and roads which ease women’s time burden in collecting water or fuelwood as in Zimbabwe’s Rural Transport Study or Zambia’s Micro-Project Unity) or through provisions for women’s involvement in decision-making processes about what types of community assets should be built using public works labour (e.g. Ethiopia’s PSNP, India’s NREGS, Zambia’s MPU).

What is noteworthy, however, is that most programmes only include a limited number of these mechanisms in their design, thus limiting their potential impacts on gender equality at the intra-household and community levels (see Table 1 in Appendix 1). Indeed this is reflected in the gender assessments of historic and existing programmes, where they exist. It is important to note that relatively few programmes have been assessed through a gender lens (Quisumbing and Yohannes, 2004), but among those that have key concerns that emerge include the following:

- women’s participation (except among the very poorest, landless and those who belong to lower caste groups (Kabeer, 2008; Webb, 1992 quoted in Dejardin, 1996) is generally limited 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; Johnson, 2004<sup>5</sup>) and helps to overcome women’s socio-cultural mobility constraints (McCord, 2004). “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” (Devereux, 2002);
- women’s representation in public works-related decision-making structures is often inadequate to promote their voice; proactive efforts are required, including for

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<sup>5</sup> Note that a 2004 evaluation of the Labor Intensive Works Programme in Afghanistan found that although a stated beneficiary group was women, no design features or monitoring addressed gender. There was no evidence that any women were hired (Johnson, 2004).

example the formation of small grassroots organisations which can help integrate women (Dejardin, 1996);

- piecemeal rates may be gender-biased – they are typically based on male work norms, meaning that even if there are formal provisions for equal wages, that women end up being paid less (Antonopoulos, 2007);
- programmes often target household heads, thereby excluding women in male-headed households from equal participation (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,
- 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).

More importantly, however, 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 (Antonopoulos, 2007). As discussed, infrastructure projects have been the dominant type of community assets built through public employment guarantee programmes. Little attention has been paid to projects that provide social services or those that target the efficiency and enhancement of public service delivery (Antonopoulos and Fontana, 2006). However, as a focus on social risks and vulnerabilities highlights, women are not only income poor but are also overly taxed in terms of the time they have to allocate to care work and domestic tasks. As a consequence, the overhead unpaid work time (Harvey and Taylor 2000) that poor women have to spend in securing inputs for household production use and in providing care for family members is of concern and constitutes a dimension of asymmetry between them and the rest of the population (Budlender, 2002).

Antonopoulos (2007) expands this line of argument and maintains that 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. She cites the example of the care work that many poor women in South Africa provide to people living

with HIV/AIDS, work which is necessary because of the under-resourcing of public care services. One way through which poor women could be remunerated for their care work is by expanding public works programmes to include social sector activities. Given that social services are by their nature highly labour-intensive, such activities would be well suited to workfare schemes. “It is reasonable to make the assumption that in comparison to infrastructural projects, [social service activities] use more labor and fewer machines or other intermediate inputs” and are also well suited to ‘unskilled’ women workers. After all, many poor unskilled women are already carrying out such work, but unpaid and within the household.

Several examples of initiatives which promote the use of public works labour in the social sector can be found, but interestingly these have been largely in middle-income countries and have targeted urban areas. For instance, in South Korea following the 1997/1998 economic crisis, one of the four categories of work included in the emergency public works programme that the government created involved work in ‘social service and charity organisations such as community centers and welfare institutions’ (Lee 2000:7 quoted in Antonopoulous, 2007). In Argentina, the Programa de Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados which was similarly established to tackle the high level of unemployment triggered by the Argentina 2001 financial crisis, provided cash transfers in exchange for 20 hours of community service per week. Within this programme women were often involved in food distribution, and frequently for community projects in which programme participants were already engaged, and men in construction-related activities (Esquivel (2008, Faur (2008a, 2008b)). Ghana’s National Youth Employment Programme is another example of a public works initiative that has a social services component, but in this case seeks to address youth unemployment and vulnerability irrespective of urban/rural location. Men and women under 35 years receive a stipend in exchange for work as community education teaching assistants or auxiliary health workers.<sup>6</sup>

But certainly the most advanced initiative addressing care economy issues and one which includes an explicit gender focus is South Africa’s Early Child Development (ECD) component of the EPWP programme. One of three components of the EPWP<sup>7</sup>, the ECD-EPWP aims to achieve multiple goals simultaneously: reduce poverty, improve childcare,

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ghanadistricts.com/home/?\\_id=37&sa=3674](http://www.ghanadistricts.com/home/?_id=37&sa=3674)

<sup>7</sup> In addition to investment in social services (R600 million), EPWP also provides R15 billion for labour-intensive government-funded infrastructure projects and R4 billion for work opportunities in public environmental improvement programmes (Antonopoulous, 2007).

provide employment opportunities for women and promote the professional development of women working in the childcare field. The programme ‘can free parents and other adult carers to take up opportunities for education and employment’ (Department of Social Development 2006: 12 quoted in Lund, 2009). The government provides training and employment opportunities in non-profit private sector organisations in the ECD field, providing an interesting model of a private-public partnership in public works activities. While the programme has been criticised on a number of levels (including under-resourcing, slow roll-out, favouring employment among younger rather than older women, greater proportion of facilities in urban than rural areas, Parenzee and Budlender (2007)), the programme has nevertheless had an important impact to date on job creation for women which builds on their capacities and provides skills training as well as contributes to strengthened social services (Lund, 2009).

In the next part of the report we therefore draw on the design and implementation issues that have been raised in this section in order to assess the extent to which two of the world’s largest public works programmes focusing on rural poverty reduction and food security promotion are contributing to greater opportunities for women and simultaneously addressing unequal intra-household and community gender dynamics.

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

### ***Agriculture, poverty reduction and gender in Ethiopia***

Agricultural and rural development is a core component of Ethiopia’s economic growth and poverty reduction strategy. Among the poorest countries in the world<sup>8</sup>, 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 country’s agricultural development strategy as laid out in the national five-year Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty

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<sup>8</sup> Per capita income is US\$ 200 per annum and at 2 US\$ per day PPP the poverty headcount is 81% (UNDP, 2007). According to the Welfare Monitoring Surveys and Household income and Consumption Expenditure Surveys reported by MOFED (2008), about 39% of the Ethiopian population is below the nationally defined poverty line (2200 kilocalories and plus essential non-food items). The United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Report for 2007-09 ranked Ethiopia 169<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index.

(PASDEP) (2005/6 to 2009/10) emphasises large-scale commercialisation of agriculture<sup>9</sup>, the promotion of rural non-farm enterprises, rural-urban linkages, specialised support services for differentiated agro-ecological zones, as well as ensuring food security at the household level and tackling vulnerability through strengthened formal safety nets and an improved land tenure system (Teshome, n/d). There is also a strong focus on promoting gender equality in order to ‘unleash women’s potential’. The PASDEP in turn builds on a series of policies put in place in the 1990s included a more supportive macro-economic framework, liberalized markets for agricultural products, and a widespread agricultural extension programme, as well as the agricultural strategies of the Agricultural Development-Led Industrialisation and the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP) which focused on enhancing the productive capacity of smallholder farmers, promoting crop diversification, shifting to a market-based, promoting up food security and building up the fragile livelihoods of pastoral communities.

Since 2004, agricultural growth has been strong, stemming from an increased area under cultivation and productivity improvements in staple crops in pockets of the country. However, despite a decade of concerted investment, “Ethiopian agriculture remains stubbornly low input, low-value and subsistence oriented, and subject to frequent climatic shocks” (World Bank, 2008). Rural poverty and vulnerability are pervasive throughout the country with an estimated 45.4 percent of the rural population living below the nationally defined poverty line (compared to 36.9% in urban areas) (MOFED, 2002)<sup>10</sup>. Poverty is deeper and severer in rural areas<sup>11</sup>, especially in food insecure regions, where agro-climatic conditions<sup>12</sup>, highly limited market access, poor infrastructure, remoteness, land degradation and a lack of formal insurance mechanisms render households particularly susceptible to shocks (Dercon, Hoddinott and Woldehanna, 2007). As a result, farmers tend to be risk-averse and less likely

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<sup>9</sup> The aim is to diversify beyond coffee, including floriculture, horticulture and spice marketing (Teshome, n/d).

<sup>10</sup> Note that although the PASDEP emphasises that the rural poverty headcount and severity have declined significantly over the course of the implementation of the first PRSP, the baseline percentage is not provided – only for urban poverty.

<sup>11</sup> According to the 2004 Welfare Monitoring Survey, on average, the income of the rural poor is 12.1% far from the poverty line, while it is 10.1% for the urban poor (Central Statistical Agency, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Dercon, Hoddinott and Woldehanna (2007) found that drought was the most common self-reported ‘worst shock’ experienced between 1999 and 2004 in the 2004 Welfare Monitoring Survey, followed by health-related shocks (death or illness of family head or spouse). Market-related shocks (inability to sell outputs, decreases in output prices, difficulty in obtaining inputs or increases in input prices) were substantially less common (ibid). IFAD estimates that about one third of all rural households live in pastoral or drought-prone areas that are particularly vulnerable to risky weather conditions

(<http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/ethiopia>.)

to adopt new technologies, in turn further undermining productivity growth (World Bank, 2008).

Rural deprivation is also reflected in accelerating rates of rural-urban migration as people seek to escape ecological destruction, drought, famine and in some regions, war. In areas where ecological degradation is greatest in the Northern regions of Tigray and Amhara, scarcity of arable land combined with population growth has led to a surplus of labourers on smaller landholdings who seek better employment opportunities in urban areas. As Ezra, (2001) emphasises, rural out-migration is largely a response to push factors related to ecological degradation and poverty in rural areas rather than a response to pull factors from urban areas. It has also been exacerbated by major socio-political disruptions in recent decades as the country has experienced a succession of governments characterised by stark ideological differences, each involving substantial population movements within the country.<sup>13</sup>

Experiences of rural poverty and vulnerability in Ethiopia are also highly gendered. Women play a significant role in agricultural productivity (carrying out an estimated 40 to 60 percent of all agricultural labour<sup>14</sup> (World Bank, 2008) but suffer from unequal access to resources and capacity building opportunities on a number of levels. Although data is not available at an individual level, household level data highlights differences in the patterning of male and female-headed households' vulnerability. 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), in part at least because female-headed households are more labour-poor so have fewer available ex-ante coping mechanisms than their male counterparts. The WMS found that while only 32 percent of male-headed households reported that they would struggle to raise 100 birr in a week to cope with a crisis, 53% of female-headed households maintained they would be unable to do

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<sup>13</sup> Prior to 1974, the country was ruled by a traditional monarchy, which was overthrown by a socialist military dictatorship, notable for its destructive economic development policies and human rights record. The present government proclaimed a market-oriented economic policy and introduced an ethnically-based federal system.

<sup>14</sup> 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 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).

so. Moreover, women reported that they would be more likely to rely on loans or gifts from relatives whereas men were better able to depend on sale of livestock or crops (Central Statistical Agency, 2005).

Overall there are significant differences in human capital levels between men and women. Literacy rates for rural women are just 19 percent compared to 43 percent for men, and although the gender gap is closing in primary school enrolment rates over time in rural areas (in 2004 it was 34 percent compared to 31 percent), at secondary school level boys are still almost twice as likely to be enrolled as girls (11 percent compared to 6 percent). In the case of health, women appear to suffer from poorer health, with the prevalence of self-reported illness higher for women (26 percent) than men (23 percent) (ibid). In times of crisis women are also likely to disproportionately absorb the impacts as evidenced by declining Body Mass Index indicators (Ezemenari, Chaudhury and Owens, 2002).

In terms of access to resources there are also marked gender differences. First, local labour markets are segmented by gender, with women systematically earning lower rates (Sharp, Brown and Teshome, 2006). Quisumbing and Yohannes (2004) found that 26 percent of men participate in off-farm labor 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. Moreover, men earn 2.7 times what women earn.

Second, in the case of land tenure, recent legislative changes (beginning with land reforms in March 1997) have brought about important changes in women's ability to secure land tenure in their own right, although the implementation of these changes has varied significantly across regional states. Holden et al. (2007) found that following a low-cost, rapid, and transparent community land registration process, female heads of households in Tigray were more likely to rent out land, because tenure security increased their confidence in doing so. Overall, however, women's ownership rights remain limited, as it is generally accepted that only the head of the household – typically the husband – can be a landowner. Women who separate from their husbands are likely to lose their houses and property, and when a husband dies, other family members often claim the land over his widow. Moreover, while female headed households with land can get access to public loans, married women need to secure the permission of their husbands first. Women are further constrained by cultural norms about the gendered division of agricultural labour. Gebreslassie (2005) identifies two important barriers in this regard which shape the limited implementation of women's legal right to

control land: lack of ownership of oxen with which to plough the land and cultural taboos that constrain women from ploughing and sowing.

Third, there are major gender biases in terms of access to agricultural extension services and inputs<sup>15</sup>. While Ethiopia has one of the highest ratios of agricultural extension staff to farmers globally, female access to extension services is relatively low. According to the 2005 Citizen Report Card study, 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. Key reasons for lower access to extension service are thought to include greater time poverty and thus higher opportunity costs for women, lower educational attainment, and lack of empowerment, along with cultural norms about women's work and mobility, all of which may lower female demand for extension services. There are also important supply side constraints. These include a lack of targets regarding female participation against which Development Agents are monitored, low numbers of female agents<sup>16</sup> and inadequate attention to married women farmers' training needs. Married women are assumed to work in horticulture and manage small livestock and the training is tailored accordingly, but in reality they work alongside their husbands in contributing agricultural labour to a significant degree and should receive equal extension services and credit for inputs. However, a gendered analysis of the expenditure on the Other Food Security component of the Safety Net programme—an initiative which focuses on the provision of credit and subsidies for agricultural inputs found that expenditure on men was up to three times as high as that on women in some regions (e.g. in Amhara State expenditure on men was 36 percent compared to just 11 percent on women) (Regional Food Security Bureaus, 2005 quoted in World Bank, 2008). This is not only important from an equity standpoint but also from a productivity perspective as evidence from other countries in the region shows that when women have equal access to extension services output increases (ibid).<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, although gender machineries have been established at all government levels in Ethiopia, investment in capacity building efforts for staff employed in these posts as well as

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<sup>15</sup> This section draws heavily on the World Bank's excellent 2006 on gender and agricultural productivity in Ethiopia.

<sup>16</sup> Other studies in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate increased access for women when female agents deliver extension services (Saito and Weidemann, 1990). Female enrollment ratios in agricultural colleges are low (12 percent of females versus 88 percent of males in the three grades in 2005) and drop outs are high (45 percent of all female students dropped out in 2003-2005), yielding only 9 percent female graduates in 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Dercon et al., (2008) found that receiving at least one extension visit reduces headcount poverty by 9.8 percentage points and increases consumption growth by 7.1 percent.

adequate resourcing and integration into decision-making and planning processes has been insufficient. Gender budget analysis shows that not only has the budget for gender machineries been miniscule (in 2000-2001 for instance it represented just 0.017 percent of the national budget), but within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development expenditure on the Women's Affairs Department has declined between 2002 and 2006, making these Departments almost exclusively reliant on donor support.

### ***PSNP objectives***

The evolution of the PSNP builds on decades of Ethiopian experience in targeting emergency aid and public works programmes. The institutional structures; the key role of community representatives; the asset, income and livelihood criteria for household selection; and the division of beneficiaries between public works and direct support beneficiaries according to their ability to work all represent important elements of continuity in the PSNP design and have played an important role in its relatively timely roll out (Sharp, Brown and Teshome, 2006). There are, though, risks that shortcomings of predecessor programmes may be perpetuated, including disadvantaging labour-poor households and pressures to minimise the number of non-working beneficiaries (ibid). However, a critical shift in focus of the previous relief system and the PSNP is a focus on longer-term sustainable solutions rather than emergency-based appeals, including identifying the chronically poor and food insecure and providing more stable and predictable cash-based transfers with multi-annual resources to finance small-scale productive public works (Pankhurst, 2009).

The PSNP, launched in 2005, is one of two main components of the Ethiopian government's Food Security strategy. Reaching over 7 million chronically food insecure individuals<sup>18</sup>, the PSNP aims to smooth the 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 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

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<sup>18</sup> 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.

extension, fertiliser, credit and other services to enable households to “graduate” from the PSNP. Here we focus on the gender aspects of the PSNP, and its linkages with the OFSP.

### ***Integration of gender dimensions in 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 are 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 as well as provision of community crèches to enable women with small children to be able to work.<sup>19</sup>

Second, women’s participation in public works activities is recognised as important as manifested in particular 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, Brown and Teshome, 2006)<sup>20</sup>.

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 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.

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<sup>19</sup> The PIM states that “Communities are encouraged to use assistance provided under Direct Support as a vehicle for managing child care activities (Crèches)”

<sup>20</sup> 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 there is also some attention to gender issues. 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).

In terms of the first weakness regarding quality of participation, 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 among local communities and capacity building of officials at all levels in terms of 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 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 about 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. However, 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, p. 21), 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, Brown and Teshome, 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.<sup>21</sup>

The conceptualisation of community assets created through public works activities also has important gender implications. There is a strong focus in the Policy Implementation Manual (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

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<sup>21</sup> 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.

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.

## ***Gendered impacts of PSNP***

### **Impacts at the individual and household level**

The translation of a programme design document into practice is always an imperfect science as programmes are not implemented in a vacuum but rather interact with pre-existing socio-economic, institutional and cultural conditions and systems. In this section we analyse the tangible as well as intangible impacts of the programme on gender relations at the household and community levels, drawing on existing evaluations as well as fieldwork from two regional states, Tigray and SNNPR.

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 percent 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 (World Bank, 2008).

Nevertheless, both the 2008 Government of Ethiopia gender evaluation<sup>22</sup> 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.

Improved consumption stems not only from the cash or grain equivalent payment which programme participants receive on a monthly basis, but also due to increased possibilities to

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<sup>22</sup> 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.

access credit and avoid distress sale of assets. In addition to the formal credit provisions that households can access through the OFSP (which again appears to be characterised by significant variations across and within regional states<sup>23</sup>), our 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.

Importantly, the PSNP payments have also reduced the vulnerability of households to engaging in distress sale or use of assets. In SNPPR, households reported that their reliance on measures such as harvesting immature coffee berries (which has significant negative implications in terms of profits), renting out their land and trees to others and keeping ‘hara’ cattle for others<sup>24</sup> had also decreased since they joined the programme. Similarly, families were relying less on the out-migration of family members to urban areas to make ends meet.

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 SNPPR 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.

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.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to these tangible benefits, programme participants also identified a number of intangible gains since joining the programme. Men and women alike in our fieldwork emphasised the importance of greater psychological security in times of crisis which the programme affords. Overall families feel better able to cope with shocks and associated worries about providing for the food security and well-being of their family as at least they now have a minimal safety net.

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<sup>23</sup> See Sharp, Brown and Teshome, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> This refers to a practice whereby farmers tend the cattle of others so that they have access to the animal dung which is used as a fuelwood source.

<sup>25</sup> Interviews in 3 woredas with programme implementers and female beneficiaries in August and September 2009 in Tigray and SNNPR.

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 SNPPR 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.

At the community level, the 2008 evaluation identifies the creation of water harvesting facilities and land rehabilitation initiatives as a positive development for women and men. This view was echoed in our fieldwork by some, and there was also a particular focus on the gains which the creation of training facilities in the community as a result of PSNP labour had brought to both participants and non-participant in our SNPPR sites.

A number of intangible community-level impacts were also highlighted. 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.

These positive impacts notwithstanding, programme implementation still has considerable room for improvement if the gender-related provisions in the PIM are to be realised. Overall, gendered notions of work with regard to food security and agriculture have been largely reinforced rather than dismantled, and the impacts on unequal gender relations within the household have been very limited.

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 Sedama 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 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.

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.<sup>26</sup> 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 protection from harsh working conditions and with risks of adverse infant health consequences.

### **Impacts at the community level**

Similarly, while the community assets outlined in the PIM include provision of water points and fuel-wood sources closer to the village to reduce women's time burden, few community members or programme implementers were aware of these provisions and thus they were not prioritised in decision-making processes about which community assets to focus on. This varies somewhat across regions; the 2008 evaluation found some cases of good practice but these appear to be the exception rather than the rule. Awareness of the provision to use public works labour to support agricultural activities on female headed-households private land appeared to be even lower, and no examples were found in our fieldwork sites.

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.<sup>27</sup> However, our fieldwork suggested that

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<sup>26</sup> 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).

<sup>27</sup> Note that Sharp, Brown and Teshome (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

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 to women's economic empowerment 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.<sup>28</sup>

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 violence<sup>29</sup>, 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, Brown and Teshome, 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

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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%.

<sup>28</sup> 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).

<sup>29</sup> 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.

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.

### ***Drivers of programme impacts***

A number of political-institutional and socio-cultural drivers have contributed to the mixed implementation record of the gender dimensions of the PNSP as follows:

#### **Political /institutional drivers**

The level of political commitment towards ensuring that the gender dimensions of the PSNP are effectively implemented appears to be relatively limited. It is true that to date there has been considerable emphasis on ensuring that female-headed households are well represented in the quotas for programme participants in each local administrative area (kebele) and that women are encouraged to participate in public works activities, and/or provided with direct support during pregnancy and lactation. However, efforts to ensure that other design components such as attention to addressing women's time burden and ensuring that women have equal access to agricultural extension services and resources, have been much weaker.

First, there appears to be very limited resources invested in providing capacity building for officials about the gender dimensions of the programme at national, state, district and community levels<sup>30</sup>, as reflected in the very low levels of knowledge about these provisions among officials at all levels. Even where there was awareness of some of the gender-related provisions, they tended to be accorded a low priority and/or deemed unrealistic within the resource constraints of the institutional and community environments in which the

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<sup>30</sup> Key informant interviews in Addis Ababa, April 2009 and September 2009; in Tigray and SNNPR in August and September 2009.

programme is being rolled out. The main coordinating body, the Bureau of Food Security, emphasised that its priority is addressing the dearth of agriculture-related infrastructure and environmental degradation issues, and that public works labour is a key mechanism by which to achieve these aims in the context of tight resource constraints. In other words, the conceptual linkage between addressing gender inequalities and programme effectiveness, has not been effectively made to date.

Not surprisingly, the level of knowledge among community members was even more limited, and officials admitted that there was no budget to invest in community awareness-raising activities. While there are community meetings related to the programme these do not appear to have a systematic design or to promote synergies with other gender-related initiatives such as the Women's Package but according to participants are focused largely on practical logistical issues.

Second, gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation has been minimal at best. Although there are records of how many male- as compared to female-headed households are participating in the programme, as discussed above public works site attendance records are not disaggregated by gender, and nor is there a clear record of how long women are exempted from work-based activities during pregnancy or lactation. Similarly, monitoring of community asset creation does not appear to be approached through a gender lens so that we are not able to assess the relative balance of investment in assets designed to reduce women's time burden.

Third, while there is considerable potential for synergies between other gender policy infrastructure in the country, especially the 2008 Ethiopian Women's Package for Development and Change and the 2006 National Action Plan for Gender Equality, limited inter-sectoral coordination in the implementation of the programme at the provincial and district levels appears to have precluded the realisation of such complementarities to date.

Given Ethiopia's high-level of aid dependence, donors play an important role in shaping policy discussions in the country, and thus their role in promoting the gender-related dimensions of the PSNP is a fourth important political-institutional factor to consider. Key informant interviews with donors<sup>31</sup> as well as the gender audit that was commissioned by a consortium of donors in 2007-8 suggest that there is a reasonable degree of commitment to monitoring and assessing the extent to which the programme is tackling the gendered

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<sup>31</sup> Interviews with DFID, Irish Aid, USAID, GTZ, NORAD and CIDA, Addis Ababa, April and August 2009.

dimensions of food security and agriculture. The gender audit raised important issues about programme limitations in terms of women's meaningful participation, although it was more limited in its assessment of the extent to which the programme's intended and unintended household and community level impacts were tackling gender inequalities. To date this gender audit has not been widely circulated (especially below the national level), but a follow up action plan is currently being developed by the DAC Gender Working Group and there is some degree of optimism that some of the recommendations from the evaluation will be integrated into the design of the next phase of the PSNP (2010-2014). CIDA in particular has been actively championing attention to tackling gender inequalities, and has recently funded social development advisor positions in the Food Security Bureaus in SNNPR in order to strengthen attention to gender aspects of programme implementation. Although it is too early to assess the impact of these posts, it will be an initiative worth monitoring over time.

### **Socio-cultural drivers**

There are also a number of important socio-cultural dimensions which will need to be more explicitly addressed so as to strengthen programme effectiveness from a gender perspective. Programme participants are overwhelmingly illiterate or semi-literate and women in particular have often had very limited exposure beyond their village and to opportunities to articulate their views. Expecting women in such communities to be able to formulate and voice an independent vision for how public works activities could strengthen community infrastructure in ways that would most benefit them in the absence of ongoing awareness-raising activities therefore appears to be quite unrealistic. These constraints are reinforced by a strong pro-government orientation among many rural citizens and the absence of a rights-based approach to the programme, both of which limit the space and potential for constructive criticism of programme design and implementation practices on behalf of the community. When programme participants were asked during the course of our fieldwork about how the programme could be strengthened most were at pains to emphasise how grateful they were to the programme for improving their livelihoods and except for expressing a desire for higher transfer amounts, had limited ideas as to how the programme could be improved. The lack of a rights-based discourse additionally hampers the potential for the programme to strengthen citizen demands for more effective government provision: instead the programme is widely seen by participants as a 'gift' from the government which no one wants to jeopardise.

# **India case study: the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act**

## ***Agriculture, poverty reduction and gender in India***

Agricultural development in India has been a significant contributor to fostering both economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 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 (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 poverty: poverty is highly aligned along caste and gender lines. Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Castes (OBC) and women are disproportionately affected by the multiple dimensions of poverty and vulnerability.

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 recent [2005] flagship programme, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, is seen to have an important role to play in transforming rural livelihoods and agricultural productivity in India.

Within the vision of the Government's Five Year Plan for the rural economy there is recognition that women face specific barriers to engaging productively in agriculture. It identifies geographical location, discrimination in human capital development, in the labour market, in access and ownership of productive activities and in participation in decision-making structures and processes as key constraints.

The poor are highly concentrated in rural areas where there has been limited investment in agricultural infrastructure, such as irrigation and watershed development. Seasonal migration is a common livelihood strategy for many individuals and households. In Tribal forest regions, poor people's access to the resources which are located there have been limited, and their own low human capital endowment (e.g., low literacy and poor health services) have resulted in an adverse incorporation into labour markets. Women in particular face extremely

poor literacy rates - 73% of SC women, 79% of ST women, and 61% of OBC and Muslim women are illiterate (11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan).

A large and growing proportion of the chronic poor – especially women - are dependent on casual wage labour. Most ST, and 40% of SC, casual workers are poor, the landless casual workers being the poorest (11<sup>th</sup> Year plan). Women are more highly represented in casual wage work and they are adversely incorporated into the wage labour market where the wage differentials between men and women for casual labour is 30 percent lower for women than for men - and 20 percent lower for the same task (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 2008).

Furthermore, the gender bias in institutions is a key source of vulnerability for women. Women face particular discrimination in ownership of and access to productive resources – while they constitute two-thirds of the agricultural workforce, they own less than one-tenth of the agricultural lands (NAWO, 2008). This is identified as a key challenge in India's 11<sup>th</sup> 5 year plan, where it is recognised that with the share of the female workforce in agriculture increasing, and increased incidence of female-headed households<sup>32</sup>, there is an urgent need to ensure women's rights to land and infrastructure (11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan). A major challenge which small and marginal farmers face is the lack of access to major agricultural services, such as credit, inputs, extension, insurance, and markets and again, this is even more problematic for women farmers because of a pervasive male bias in provision of such services. Lack of access to formal credit services for economic activities, social events and health expenditure is a key factor which pushes farmers into indebtedness with high interest rates and leads to an inability to pay back loans.

The Eleventh Five Year Plan also recognises that women are the principal stakeholders in natural resource use and management, but that even with quotas in place they are underrepresented in the decision making and implementation processes of participatory planning and development programmes.

### ***The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act***

Linked with the vision in India's Five Year Plan to increase employment and agricultural productivity, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was passed in 2005, under the Ministry of Rural Development. The direct objectives of NREGA are to: i) realise

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<sup>32</sup> Current figures suggest that female headed households constitute 20% of all household

the right to work; ii) enhance livelihoods through economic and social infrastructure; iii) address the causes of chronic poverty (drought, deforestation and soil erosion); and iv) transform the geography of poverty. The indirect benefits of NREGA include: i) generate productive assets; ii) empower rural women; iii) reduce rural urban migration; and iv) foster social equity (Ministry of Rural Development, n.d.).

India has a long history with public works programmes, which significantly increased in coverage from the late 1980s. Implementation of public works had been implemented at the state level with assistance from the centre (national level). The programmes were self-targeting with the objective of providing enhanced livelihood security, especially for those dependent on casual manual labour, as well as creating assets which had the potential to generate second-round employment benefits (11<sup>th</sup> year plan).

While NREGA'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 NREGA demonstrate a transformative approach to poverty reduction in its rights based approach. First, and most importantly, NREGA is an Act<sup>33</sup> enshrined in India's constitution, which entitles 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. Secondly, this is the first public works programme, organised and funded from the centre but implemented at the State level, which is national in coverage. NREGA started in 2006 in 200 districts, and from 2008 spread across all the districts in India. Recent data shows that over 30 million households have accessed NREGA employment to date. Third, NREGA marks a shift from allocated work to demand based work. Employment from NREGA is dependent upon 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 requested work has to be given 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.

### ***Integration of gender dimensions in programme design***

The design of NREGA has powerful potential to transform rural livelihoods through its rights-based approach to employment. The design of the Act reflects women's role in the

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<sup>33</sup> Enacted on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2005.

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 Panchayat<sup>34</sup> needs to give a considered choice between individual accounts for each NREGA 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, "Mates" 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 NREGA 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.

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<sup>34</sup> 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.

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 NREGS workers, women and marginalized communities.

At the state level, for purposes of monitoring and evaluation, every state government has a State Council in which women should have one-third representation (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2005). The headquarters of the Central Council in Delhi consisting of up to fifteen non-official members representing Panchayati Raj institutions, organisations of workers and disadvantaged groups includes the provision that “not less than one-third of the non-official members nominated under this clause shall be women’ (Ibid).

The Act however faces a number of weaknesses with regards to effectively incorporating gender issues into its design, with implications for achieving both NREGA’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 NREGA 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 employment and independently access NREGA 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 NREGA 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 NREGA 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 NREGA.

## ***Gendered impacts of NREGA***

### **Impacts at the individual and household level**

One of the most important positive impacts of NREGA 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 NREGA 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 NREGA 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 NREGA 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 NREGS 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 NREGA 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 NREGA, 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. The limited understanding of women's time poverty – where women work more hours than men in a given week and have to allocate their time between market and non-market activities (NAWO, 2008) - and its implications for both domestic and productive activities is also reflected in the dearth of awareness and discussion in NREGA with regards to the possibilities of flexible working hours for women.

The demography of the household also has important implications for how individuals within the family can engage in NREGA. The conceptualisation of “household” as the targeting mechanism for NREGA is problematic on a number of levels. On the one hand, larger households (e.g. joint families with a higher number of adults) are better able to demand employment in NREGA because of labour availability in the house, but on the other hand the benefits are diluted because of the large size – only 100 days are given per household. In our recent study in Madhya Pradesh, men in particular suggested that in extended families, each brother's family should receive a job card. Women however, strongly suggested that each individual adult should receive a job card (also see Gupta, 2009). Indeed, many single women in particular in extended families are not able to claim their entitlements to NREGA independently, and female headed households with limited labour availability (either due to permanent female headship or transitory because of seasonal migration) are often not able to take full advantage of employment especially when the type of work requires men and women to work together in teams.

As the 11<sup>th</sup> 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. Initial findings suggest that NREGA supports both of these objectives to some extent. Income from NREGA has enabled poor households to increase spending on food, health and education as well as increased expenditure on agricultural inputs, such as seeds and fertilisers.

Another important impact of NREGA – although quite tentative – is its impact on credit and loans. While NREGA income is not seen as sufficient to make a huge financial impact on a household, some households suggest that NREGA has helped them get access to loans as well as helping loan repayment. These findings are variable however, and depend on the existing financial status of the family. For many households, income from NREGA 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 NREGA is still largely at the discretion of the panchayat rather than being driven by a demand from households. Women in particular are often given fewer days because of the “lighter” work assigned to them. One of the key challenges therefore that NREGA 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.

One of the biggest indirect impacts reported from our study and found in other studies, is the reduction in the length of time and the number of family members that need to migrate (Samarthan Centre for Development Support, 2007; Jandu, 2008). In Madhya Pradesh, for example, where seasonal migration is an important livelihood strategy, the availability of NREGA employment in the local area has enabled families to reduce the number of days they migrate for and the number of household members. Whereas before whole households migrated, often only the men migrate now for seasonal work in neighbouring states or elsewhere in the state. This has important knock-on effects too, for example on children’s education.

Another important indirect benefit is the changing status of women in the household. The links between women’s status, bargaining power and decision making in the household and improvements in both family welfare and economic productivity are well researched. 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 NREGS has improved women’s economic status and decision making power slightly in some households. In others, women’s contribution to household income from NREGA 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 NREGA 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 NREGA 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.

### **Gendered impacts at the community level**

NREGA-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, NREGA 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 NREGA. 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 NREGA. There has been a general sense of criticism that NREGA 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 NREGS 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 NREGA 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 NREGA 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 NREGA, 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 NREGA have increased faith that the government will provide for them.

## ***Factors influencing the gendered impacts of NREGA***

### **Political and institutional factors**

The greatest political commitment to gender in NREGA has been to ensure that women are represented in employment. Political commitment to a broader understanding of the linkages between gender equality and improved agricultural productivity and poverty reduction however – such as addressing the socio-cultural barriers that women face in demanding and accessing public works programmes, the extent of their domestic and caring responsibilities and life-cycle vulnerabilities, lower levels of human capital and limited access to productive assets, agricultural inputs, markets and financial services - has been weak.

A number of political and institutional drivers have contributed to this. First, there is limited attention to and resources for supporting gender-awareness capacity building at both the implementation and the design level. Where training is given it is largely focused on NREGA implementation processes as well as rural development issues such as watershed management, irrigation etc, however the importance of the linkages to strengthen gender equality and to improve the impacts on rural development have not been adequately made.

Second, there is a lack of inter-ministerial coordination between the Ministry and Departments of Rural Development and Ministry and Departments of Women and Child Development at the state level. While the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) has a gender policy aimed at mainstreaming gender issues throughout the state's different Departments, including rural development, there is no explicit attention to NREGA. Furthermore, our interviews with DWCD suggested that other mechanisms aimed at strengthening gender within other departments, such as gender budgeting and gender cells, suffer from weak capacity and coordinating. The most important potential for DWCD's contribution to NREGA policy and programming in Madhya Pradesh appeared to be based on individual motivation rather than institutional structures.

Third, the overall data collection from NREGA is impressive because of the attempt to improve accountability and transparency of NREGA, and the M&E system goes some way to including relevant sex-disaggregated data. Gender-specific monitoring and evaluation includes questions on: i) whether registration is refused to female headed households or single women; ii) the average proportion of women working on NREGA in a village; and iii) whether there are different task rates for men and women. An important gap is the monitoring of community assets and assessment of the appropriateness and benefits of these from a gender lens, and the limited attention given to ensuring women's participation in social audits.

Fourth, NREGA funds have given the panchayati raj institutions more financial responsibilities and power than previously experienced. While this is a positive step towards strengthening decentralisation of powers within India, the capacity at the local panchayat level is a key weakness in implementation of gender-sensitive programmes. While affirmative action through the reservation of seats for women is a significant and transformative approach for women, this does not necessarily translate into improved awareness of gender inequality or action. Low levels of literacy among women, physical and verbal intimidation and violence, and women standing as "proxies" for their husbands are all factors which limit their

effectiveness as politicians (Jayal, 2006). Furthermore, women do not necessarily advocate for gender equity once they assume political functions, and studies suggest that women representatives often align their policy emphasis along caste rather than gender lines (Vyasulu and Vyasulu, 2000). Despite these limitations, evidence suggests that reservations may lead to women's empowerment and better representation, eventually, and certainly provides an important opportunity to do so, especially for NREGA. For example, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) found that local council presidents in three Indian states invest more in types of infrastructure directly relevant to the needs of their own gender. The implications for NREGA are clear. In order for the implementation of NREGA to go beyond individual motivation to ensure a more gender-sensitive approach, capacity building of gender issues at the panchayat, district and state level is necessary.

### **Socio-cultural factors**

NREGA's rights based approach offers huge potential to the rural poor in India to exercise their right to 100 days employment. This transformative approach also has wider implications for the notion of the state-citizen relation and offers potential gains in political, social and economic empowerment of the poor through the Act. While the weaknesses in implementation have been identified above, it is also important to recognise the challenges on the demand side, that is, of the poor to exercise their right to employment. An overwhelming challenge is the rate of illiteracy among the poor and especially among women, yet gaining NREGA employment requires a multi-layered written application process. Our research also highlighted that entrenched power relations between the community and the government are prohibitive of a more transformative change which would enable villagers to challenge the panchayat's weak implementation of the scheme. In this regard, civil society is playing an important role in raising awareness, mobilising the community to demand employment from the panchayat, and setting up public hearings for grievances.

### **Conclusions and Policy Implications**

Public works programmes have emerged as an important strand of social protection initiatives, 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 National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme are both major initiatives which have made important

advances in enhancing women's role in rural public works programmes. 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 public works programme effectiveness.

### ***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.

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). 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. 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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## Appendix 1

**Table 1: Public Works Programmes and their Gender Dimensions<sup>1</sup>**

Country	Name of Program	Years Operational	Government or NGO	Main Objective	Rural or Agricultural Target?	Female Participation	Nature of gender focus	Key findings regarding gendered impacts	Note
Bangladesh	Food For Work			Income provision for the poor.	Rural, not necessarily agricultural.	Limited. <sup>2</sup>		Women confined to rural roadside projects, probably because they were the most accessible. <sup>2</sup>	
	Rural Maintenance Program (RMP)	1983-present  In 2006 CARE handed it over to the government	CARE Bangladesh and the Local Government Engineering Department	Income provision for the poor. Pays cash.	Two programs: 1) construction (men and women) and 2) tree plantation and maintenance (women only).	42,000/time with cumulative numbers reaching 180,000 <sup>3</sup>	Women can be supervisors, equal pay for comparable work, women given training and “social development inputs on income generation” where employed in maintenance and tree plantation. Mandates savings as a way of preparing participants for graduation. Helps women obtain micro-credit loans. <sup>3</sup>	Builds self-confidence, entrepreneurial skills, and social inclusion. Women have a higher income after graduation and savings with which to engage in micro-credit schemes. <sup>3</sup>  Over 60% of graduates do not return to poverty, 75% of graduates were earning the same wages they had on the project (1990's study). <sup>2</sup>	

<sup>1</sup> All data in chart, except where noted is from Antonopoulos (2007)

<sup>2</sup> Kabeer, 2008

<sup>3</sup> Rabbani, 2006

<b>Botswana</b>	Labour-Based Relief Programme  Labor Intensive Rural Public Works Programme	Mid 1980's	Government	To provide employment originally after the droughts of the 80's.	Rural, not necessarily agricultural.	60-70%	Women allowed time off for breastfeeding. Women can be programme supervisors.		Short duration of the employment provided meant that no appreciable reduction in poverty was seen.
<b>India<sup>1</sup></b>	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)	2006-present  (still scaling up, started in poorest districts first)	government	To guarantee 100 days of minimum wage labor to rural poor worker and improve land productivity.	Only available to rural workers.	52% overall <sup>4</sup> , however women's participation varies by district <sup>5</sup>	Mandates 1/3 women, allows space for care and feeding of children, offers maternity leave with no financial penalty.	Women's participation in the selection of works is crucial; works need to reduce women's workloads and enhance local natural resources.	
	Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra (EGS)	1972	government	Guarantees work in the state of Maharashtra.	Rural, primarily agricultural works.	close to 50% <sup>6</sup>	Employment was provided close to women's homes; creche facilities were provided and wage discrimination was eliminated. <sup>6</sup>	Women were more likely to participate if they could integrate family responsibilities and work. Also, their status in their families increased. <sup>6</sup>  Women more likely to participate if they were the head of household or if they were younger or of lower caste. <sup>2</sup>  Early in the program, pay was by piecework, which led to	

1 All data in chart, except where noted is from Antonopoulos, R. (2007)  
4 <http://nrega.nic.in/>, 2009  
5 Mehrotra, 2009  
6 Subbarao, 2003  
2 Kabeer, 2008

								women being paid less for their time than men <sup>7</sup> .	
	Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) restructured and renamed Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY)	1989	Government	Guarantees work in rural India, focus on “backward areas” added in 1993.	Rural, primarily agricultural works.		Target of 30% women		
<b>Indonesia<sup>1</sup></b>	Padat Karya	1998	Government	Job creation through a variety of labor intensive projects such as infrastructure.	Infrastructure can include irrigation channels in rural areas.	19.00%	Very heavy physical labor discourages women's participation. Also, the program targets heads of households which excludes women by definition in Indonesia		

<sup>7</sup> Dev, 1995

<sup>1</sup> All data in chart, except where noted is from Antonopoulos, R. (2007)

<b>Malawi</b>	Work for Food	Ongoing	EU, CARE, WVI, etc.		Rural, largely agricultural works	Very high due to men being in MASAF.			
<b>Mexico</b>	Programa de Empleo Temporal (PET)	1995		To develop communities through labor-intensive projects.	Rural, not necessarily agricultural.				
<b>Nepal</b>	Dhaulagiri Irrigation Project (DIDP)	1989	Government with NGO funding from ILO, WFP, UNDP, etc. <sup>8</sup>	To increase food production and alleviate poverty.	Aimed at increasing food production by securing irrigation to small scale farmers.	3000 women trained by 1999 <sup>8</sup>	“Formation and training of Women Saving Groups has proved to be a successful means of improving living standards, and of making families self-reliant and less vulnerable.” They had formed 90 of these by 1999. <sup>8</sup>	Use of piece work has ensured that women are paid at the same rates as men. <sup>8</sup>  The women who participate are most likely to be landless and low caste. <sup>2</sup>	
<b>Senegal<sup>1</sup></b>	Agence d'Execution des Travaux d'Interet Public (AGETIP)	1989-present	Government and WB funded, AGETIP granted special legal status and own charter as independent	Construction of labor intensive infra-structure projects; no poverty criteria.	Largely urban. Expanded into rural areas in the mid 1990's. <sup>10</sup>		In the mid 1990's the program began managing programs for female literacy.		No poverty criteria. AGETIP can calculate the number of person days of labor created, but has no other

<sup>8</sup> Lokollo, 1999

<sup>2</sup> Kabeer, 2008

<sup>1</sup> All data in chart, except where noted is from Antonopoulos, R. (2007)

<sup>10</sup> Van der Lugt, 1997

			organization. <sup>10</sup>						information on impact on people. <sup>10</sup>
<b>South Africa</b>	Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)	2004-present	Government	Poverty relief through job creation; increase employ-ability through training; construct infrastructure in poor commun-ities; build the management capacity of poor commun-ities. <sup>9</sup>	Programs aimed at rural poor; not necessarily agricultural. <sup>9</sup>	50% in Limpopo province 95% in KwaZulu-Natal province <sup>9</sup>	Limpopo has 60% female participation target; KwaZulu-Natal has as first filter households in poverty and second filter female headed households. In the latter, contracts were given to households, not individuals, allowing work to be shared. Days and hours were also flexible. <sup>9</sup>	Participants in Limpopo are not more likely to find employment when their program stint ends than are non-participants. In KwaZulu-Natal, women's participation was so high because they could integrate their family responsibilities with work. Family expenditures on food and education increased with participation, as did social capital and confidence. Begging decreased.	Two main models in simultaneous use, 1) temporary full-time employment (Limpopo) 2) permanent part-time employment (Zimbabwe program in KwaZulu-Natal). Financing is more secure for the latter and thus income security for participants is higher. <sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> McCord, 2004

<b>Uganda</b>	Various rural public works programs in the west				Rural, not necessarily agricultural.	limited			
<b>Zambia<sup>1</sup></b>	Micro-Project Unity (MPU)	1991	Government	Provide jobs for the poor by renovating existing infrastructure.	Rural, not necessarily agricultural. Nearly half of all projects are in remote areas, but they mainly include school, clinic and road rehabilitation. <sup>11</sup>		Tasks were broken into light and heavy, men were to take the latter. Despite this women still had to sometimes subcontract to men for to help in exchange for 50% of their pay (see note).  Women usually participate in the unskilled work of the project cycle, but have found it difficult to get as involved as men in the decision-making. MPU now requires women to represent 50% of committee members. <sup>11</sup>	Construction and rehabilitation of roads has reduced travel distances, which has particularly benefited women. <sup>11</sup>	The “light job” was hauling rocks from the quarry to the road. The “heavy job” was crushing the stone into a road way. However, as the road got longer and longer the women were carrying rocks further and further.

<sup>1</sup> All data in chart, except where noted is from Antonopoulos, R. (2007)  
<sup>11</sup> Kamanga, 1998

Zimbabwe	Rural Transport Study (RTS)	1997	Government with support of ILO and funding from Swedish NGO	The goal was to reduce the burden associated with travel, which women bear.	Rural, not necessarily agricultural. However, projects were mostly aimed at water collection, which could be for food growing purposes.		Design specifically encouraged women, since most transport falls on them		
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