Food Security in the Social Protection Floor Agenda

Integrating a gender-equality perspective

Seminar on social protection as a catalyst for food security and the right to adequate food, ILO, Geneva

Rebecca Holmes, 18th March 2013
Overview of presentation

• The gendered-dimensions of food security
• Why is it important for national social protection floors to be gender-sensitive?
• What would a gender-sensitive, transformative approach to social protection look like?

- Ensuring social protection is gender-sensitive will improve household food security outcomes
- Simple design features and investment in implementation are needed
- Politics matter and should not be ignored
Gendered dimensions of food and nutrition security (1)

Gender **inequality** is strongly linked to food **insecurity**…

- An estimated 60% of world’s undernourished are women (ECOSOC, 2007)
- In some countries, girls are twice as likely as boys to die from malnutrition and preventable childhood diseases (FAO and OHCHR, n.d.)
  - Low status of women
  - Scarce resources
  - Cultural / social norms
Gendered dimensions of food and nutrition security (2)

But conversely, gender equality is strongly linked to food security.

- **Education**: A child born to a mother who can read is 50 percent more likely to survive past her fifth birthday (UNICEF, 2012)

- **Decision-making and bargaining power**: A child’s chances of survival increase by 20 per cent when the mother controls the household budget (Walsh, 1998)

- **Economic opportunities and access to resources**: Bringing yields on the land farmed by women up to the levels achieved by men would increase agricultural output in developing countries between 2.5 and 4 percent (FAO, 2011)
Women’s role in household food and nutrition security

- Women as managers of household food security:
  - Buying food
  - Growing food
  - Processing food
  - Knowledge
  - Feeding practices
But gender inequality and discrimination at household and societal level are key challenges:

- Women’s lower purchasing power
- Limited control and decision-making
- Limited access to and control over economic and financial resources
- Gendered norms restricting opportunities
- Care work burdens and time poverty
Gender-sensitive approach to social protection

Gender-sensitive social protection can contribute to overcoming these challenges in a number of ways (Holmes and Jones, 2013):

1. Increasing the purchasing power of women through increased income
2. Direct food entitlements through food transfers, nutritional supplements or subsidies
3. Increased access to health and education services
4. Supporting access to economic / agricultural resources
5. Enhancing girls’ and women’s skills and knowledge through training and awareness raising
6. Increasing women’s decision-making and bargaining power in the household
7. Supporting a more egalitarian care-work divide
Increasing the purchasing power of women through income

- Across a range of cash transfer programmes evidence demonstrates direct transfers to women have a strong impact on supporting women to meet their “practical” needs – especially in terms of day-to-day food security
  - Evidence shows improved quantity and quality of food
  - Some evidence on improved stunting and wasting rates
- Public works programmes offer employment opportunities but often not adequately designed or implemented in gender-sensitive way
Direct food entitlements through food transfers, nutritional supplements or subsidies

- Food transfers, such as school feeding programmes, demonstrate positive impacts on access to food
- Nutritional supplements at critical life-cycle points such as pregnancy, young children
- Food subsidy programmes blind to intra-household dynamics risk reinforcing gender inequalities in relation to food allocations
Increased access to health and education services

- Increased access to education, particularly for girls, often at secondary school
- Increased access to health care – preventative; reproductive health services
Supporting access to economic resources

- Programmes such as asset transfers, inputs transfers / subsidies and public works programmes aim to provide better access to economic resources
  - Bangladesh asset transfer programme: livestock, land
  - Input transfers / subsidies: agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertiliser – but often gender-blind
  - Public works programmes: support to female-headed households
Transformative potential of social protection must move beyond a focus on income to arenas of empowerment and equity to address women’s strategic interests
Enhancing girls’ and women’s skills and knowledge

- Improved skills through economic-strengthening skills training components
- Improved knowledge – on nutrition – through community talks and health care guidance
- Potential for community leadership positions
Increasing women’s decision-making and bargaining power

- Improved decision-making and bargaining power
  - But along traditional lines
- Increased confidence
  - But little change in agency
- Increased mobility and independence
  - But within acceptance of socio-cultural norms
Supporting a more egalitarian care-work divide

- Risk of reinforcing care work and time burdens for women:
  - Opportunity cost of short-term employment schemes
  - Collecting transfers, adhering to conditions
- But some programmes explicitly address this:
  - Flexible working hours, child crèches
  - Subsidised childcare
What are the implications for programme design and implementation?

What would a gender-sensitive, transformative approach to a national social protection floor look like?

1. Simple gender-sensitive design features
2. Investment in implementation capacity
3. Recognise political economy dynamics
Simple gender-sensitive design features:

- Women’s empowerment needs to be an explicit programme aim
- Programmes need to tackle both economic and social risks
- Opportunities to build on and coordinate with existing programmes and services
- Maximise community-programme interface on the potential of behavioural change communication efforts
- Invest in gender-sensitive M&E
Investment in implementation capacity

• Programme staff capacities need to be supported to increase their professionalism – both in general and specifically vis-a-vis gender sensitivity

• Specific budget lines need to be allocated – these activities are not necessarily expensive but needs to be accounted for, rather than assuming they will happen on borrowed time and resources

• Improve institutional coordination and linkages: agencies mandated with gender empowerment goals need to become more central players in social protection design and roll-out
Politics matter and should not be ignored

- Civil society champions, government planners and donors all need to think more strategically about institutional power dynamics, potential blockages and solutions
- Need to prioritise alliances and coordination mechanisms across sectors and actors
- There can be no technocratic quick fix – a politically negotiated roadmap is essential
References


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