



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



Challenges to women's role in managing food security

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



Invest in implementation capacity

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

FAO (2011) Women in agriculture: closing the gender gap for development . The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11. FAO, Rome.

FAO and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). *The Right to Adequate Food, Fact Sheet No. 34*. Geneva: FAO and OHCHR, undated.

Holmes, R. and Jones, N. (2013) *Gender and Social Protection in the Developing World: Beyond Mothers and Safety Nets*. Zed Books.

UNICEF (2012) Recommitting To Child Survival: A Promise Renewed. UNICEF ESARO. Accessed at: http://www.unicef.org/esaro/Child_survival_a_promise_renewed.pdf

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). *Strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development*. Report of the Secretary-General. New York: ECOSOC, 2007.

Walsh, M. (1998) Women in Food Aid Interventions: Impacts and Issues, Time for Change: Food Aid and Development, WFP, Rome, 23-24 October



ODI is the UK's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues. We aim to inspire and inform policy and practice to reduce poverty by locking together high-quality applied research and practical policy advice.

The views presented here are those of the speaker, and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI or our partners.

Overseas Development Institute
203 Blackfriars Road, London, SE1 8NJ
T: +44 207 9220 300

www.odi.org.uk

Initial.surname@odi.org.uk



Shaping policy for development

odi.org.uk