

# Gender and social protection in sub-Saharan Africa: a general assessment of programme design

by Raquel Tebaldi, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)

## 1 Introduction

In the last decade, an increasing number of developing countries have started implementing social protection programmes with the objective, among others, of contributing to the eradication of poverty. In Africa, in particular, there has been an impressive growth in the number of non-contributory programmes over the last 15 years targeting poor and vulnerable households and individuals and serving various purposes such as reducing poverty and vulnerability, and improving health, education and food security among beneficiaries. Although the gender dimension of social protection has received little attention until recently, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that the impacts of these programmes are not gender-neutral and that there is a lot of potential to promote gender equality when gender-sensitive considerations are taken into account in programme design, implementation and evaluation.

In a recent mapping of social protection programmes from Africa (Cirillo and Tebaldi 2016) covering 18 low-income countries (LICs)<sup>1</sup> in the sub-Saharan region,<sup>2</sup> different programmes targeting different population groups were found for almost all of them—usually a combination of school feeding, cash transfers and/or public works. This Policy Research Brief seeks to provide an overview of gender-related issues in the design of these social protection programmes based on documental analysis<sup>3</sup> informed by gender-sensitivity criteria found in the specialised literature (Holmes and Jones 2010; Antonopoulos 2013; de la O Campos 2015; UN Women 2015; Newton 2016; ODI 2016). The main programme design features that were observable in LICs based on this analysis are detailed in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**

Design features and countries

Type of programme	Design feature	Countries
School feeding programmes	Take-home rations for girls	Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali
Cash transfers	Links to social services and/or training	Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Zimbabwe
	Electronic or bank payments	Ethiopia, Liberia, Madagascar, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal
	Preference for targeting women or child caregivers as transfer recipients	Guinea, Madagascar, Niger, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Senegal, Togo
Public works	Quotas or targets for women's participation	Comoros, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda
	Gender-differentiated tasks (e.g. less physically intense tasks allocated to women)	Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Mozambique, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda
	Childcare facilities (or inclusion of childcare as a task option for beneficiaries)	Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Mozambique, Niger, Togo, Uganda
	Flexible working hours for women	Ethiopia, Mozambique, Liberia, Niger, Tanzania

Source: Author's elaboration.

When it comes to considering the gender-sensitivity of the design of social protection programmes, it is important to differentiate between practical and strategic gender needs. Whereas the first set of needs comes from women's practical experiences (which are defined by unfair systems of labour division based on gender), strategic gender needs arise from women's structurally defined subordinate condition in relation to men (Molyneux 1985; Moser 1989). Thus, it is possible that these features may be seeking to deal

with women's practical needs but not really addressing their gender-specific strategic needs. For instance, in public works programmes, gender-differentiated tasks are presented to attract more women as beneficiaries, but usually this also reinforces the traditional gender-based work division.

It is also important to highlight that the analysis is limited to an assessment of programme design features and intends to bring attention to the fact that, although many programmes may be planned with a gender-sensitive design, it does not mean that their implementation will follow suit. Notwithstanding the main focus of this brief being on LICs, experiences from lower middle-income (LMICs) and upper middle-income countries (UMICs) from the same region are also described to provide a broader regional overview. More specifically, the brief covers three types of interventions which are most commonly found in the region: school feeding programmes, cash transfers (conditional and unconditional) and public works.

## 2 School feeding programmes

Even though the gender gap in primary and secondary education has generally been improving in Africa—according to the African Development Bank, from 2005 to 2012 the ratio of girls to boys rose from 87 per cent to 91 per cent (AfDB 2015)—less than 70 per cent of young women<sup>4</sup> in sub-Saharan Africa were expected to achieve basic literacy by 2015 (UNESCO 2015). Among the many measures that can be employed to address the gender gap in education, school feeding programmes are a very popular type of social protection intervention (present in almost all countries), and these programmes are believed to have positive impacts on children's enrolment and attendance, particularly for girls. However, coverage is lowest in LICs, where they are needed the most (WFP 2013; UNESCO 2015).

School feeding programmes are usually provided either as in-school/on-site feeding, whereby food is delivered at schools directly to the students, as take-home rations or a combination of both. A recent study looking into the influence of these different modalities on primary school enrolment, particularly for girls, in the sub-Saharan African context found that school feeding programmes in general resulted in an increase of about 10 per cent in enrolment, but this impact varied by programme modality and beneficiary gender. On-site provision of food presented stronger effects for the first year of treatment in the first elementary years of schooling, and the combination with take-home rations proved effective beyond the first year, especially for the girls receiving this extra benefit (Gelli 2015).

Cirillo and Tebaldi (2016) profiled 16 school feeding programmes in 15 African countries, of which six were being implemented in LICs.<sup>5</sup> At least half of them involve the provision of on-site meals complemented by take-home rations for girls (Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali) to promote equal participation of both sexes in the programmes. Togo's school feeding programme, in particular, provided meals via the existing system of preparation and distribution by 'village women' and local parent-teacher associations (PTAs), establishing a fixed value per meal prepared by these workers.

## 3 Cash transfers

In Africa in general, cash transfer programmes are very much focused on reaching children (Cirillo and Tebaldi 2016), and adult

women are often included among the beneficiaries, usually in their capacity as heads of households and/or as mothers/caregivers (de la O Campos 2015). Considering all countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the same study identified around 70 cash transfer programmes, most of which (around 60) are unconditional.

Some programmes combine unconditional and conditional transfers by employing varying benefit levels (which may include an unconditional basic benefit supplemented by transfers that are conditional on certain education and/or health outcomes) or by limiting the application of conditionalities to regions where there is adequate provision of social services. In cases where transfers are targeted at poor households in general (with many population groups as their potential beneficiaries), conditionalities usually apply only to households with children. An alternative to this design is found in programmes which opt for 'soft conditionalities' (meaning co-responsibilities that are established between programme implementers and the beneficiaries, for which non-compliance is not punished), training or awareness sessions about the programme's objectives. Moreover, at least four programmes were found to require or explicitly encourage the birth registration of the beneficiary children,<sup>6</sup> a design option that, when employed in a non-exclusionary way as a complementary service to beneficiaries, is considered a positive feature in terms of enabling women's and children's access to social services (Holmes and Jones 2010).

Though many of the programmes target poor and vulnerable households in general, at least 16 cash transfers specifically mention orphans and/or groups affected by HIV/AIDS in their objectives, target groups or eligibility criteria. Cash transfers targeted specifically at orphans and vulnerable children have been found to be delivered mostly to women in female-headed households and to result in increased access to and control over resources in the hands of these women (though this happens in a context where they already have power over the household's spending choices), but also to reinforce traditional gender norms that assign care responsibilities first and foremost to women (FAO 2015). Cash transfers targeted exclusively at people living with disabilities<sup>7</sup> or to elderly people<sup>8</sup> were profiled only in LMICs and UMICs in the region.

Of the 24 cash transfer programmes profiled from LICs in the region, 16 are unconditional cash transfers, 3 programmes mix conditional and unconditional benefits, and only 5 are conditional cash transfers. Most of these are targeted at poor/vulnerable households in general (which may include members who are people living with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children or elderly people) and seek to provide beneficiaries with improved conditions for accessing educational and health-related services as well as improve the nutritional status of beneficiary households. In fact, at least 10 LICs seek to provide linkages with social services and/or training sessions as complementary measures to the cash transfer programmes (see Table 1). Five programmes were found to be targeted specifically/exclusively at children,<sup>9</sup> and at least seven demonstrate a preference for targeting women as the transfer recipients, considering them representatives of their household and/or their children's primary caregiver. Most of the programmes distribute the money to beneficiaries through designated pay points, but at least three programmes are using mobile phones to deliver the benefits,

and at least eight provide the option of payment via banks or microfinance institutions, which is highlighted in the literature as having the potential to enable women's access to financial services (Holmes and Jones 2010).

#### 4 Public work programmes

Public works programmes can improve community infrastructure and women's quality of life by implementing projects that are relevant to their needs by making some of their daily tasks less time-consuming. In this regard, the literature highlights Ethiopia's and South Africa's public works programmes for building sanitation facilities such as ecological latrines and for including the regeneration of common lands, planting, reforestation and wasteland development projects. South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme, in particular, is highlighted for including care services within its job offerings from the start (Antonopoulos 2013; Newton 2016).

Most of the 13 profiled public works programmes implemented in LICs in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>10</sup> incorporate some level of gender awareness in their design. Twelve of them establish explicit quotas (usually ranging from 30 per cent to 50 per cent) or targets for women's participation.<sup>11</sup> Comoros' programme includes a component that links mothers and young children in areas of the intervention to nutrition services. After identifying a low level of women's participation (around 9 per cent of all participants), Guinea's labour-intensive public works (LIPW) programme set out to conduct awareness-raising campaigns and included 'soft' public works activities, which traditionally attract more women. Conversely, Liberia also set out to encourage women's participation in non-traditional productive roles. Seven programmes also determined that childcare could be provided by childcare facilities on-site and/or by some of the beneficiaries, to encourage women's participation. More flexible working hours are also a common gender-sensitive provision in public works programmes, and in the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), women could be offered the possibility of working half days.

Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is the second largest public works programme in the world; its implementation manual contains many gender-aware and -sensitive provisions (Government of Ethiopia 2014), such as:

- temporary direct support: pregnant and lactating women and primary caregivers of malnourished children are eligible for a transfer without the prerequisite participation in public works;
- facilitating linkages to health and nutrition services for temporary direct support beneficiaries, but also for public works participants, who were encouraged to participate in nutrition behaviour change communication sessions;
- promotion of equal participation of women and men in decision-making structures;
- promotion of women's participation in leadership positions;
- establishment of women's workload at 50 per cent of that of men's;
- allocation of 'light work' to women; and
- provision of childcare facilities at each work site or at the village level.

However, PSNP evaluations suggest that despite the gender-related considerations in the design of the programme, its actual implementation has not been able to meet all of these provisions, with evidence showing that flexible working hours and childcare services were not always offered. The programme's effects also varied among female- and male-headed households: on the one hand, women who were heads of households reported difficulties in reconciling their participation in the programme with domestic demands (ODI 2016), and, on the other hand, women from male-headed households reported lacking control over the transfers that were attributed to their households (Newton 2016).

#### 5 Conclusions

This paper sought to contribute to research in the area of gender and social protection by highlighting some of the most salient gender-related aspects of social protection programmes in LICs in sub-Saharan Africa. School feeding, cash transfer (including child benefits, disability pensions and social pensions) and public works programmes are interventions which can positively impact men and women throughout their life cycle. The growing number of social protection programmes in Africa is encouraging, considering that these programmes have a great potential for narrowing the gender gap in income and for redressing women's disadvantageous socio-economic situation.

These programmes are presenting different levels of gender awareness and sensitivity in their design. Even though most cash transfers in the region are not conditional on any specific behaviour by the beneficiaries, a large number of these programmes are seeking not only to provide them with basic income security but are also supplying specific educational activities and/or enhancing the beneficiaries' access to social services, which is essential to women's empowerment. Some of these transfers are also being transferred (by design) preferably to women and possibly enabling their access to financial services when paid via banks or other similar methods. Public work programmes, on the other hand, are also seeking to attract female beneficiaries through quotas or targets for women's participation, gender-differentiated tasks, provision of on-site childcare and arrangements for flexible working hours.

Programme design is crucial to promoting women's empowerment, and this is an area of much debate in the social protection field. It is important to stress, however, that although these design features may seek to address the practical and short-term needs of women, their strategic needs cannot be fully met without a wider set of policies that address the multidimensional inequalities that they experience. Indeed, some of these features, such as targeting women as transfer recipients, may even reinforce traditional gender-based inequalities when solely concerned with their role as mothers and wives and not accompanied by other measures seeking to promote women's empowerment, such as links to training and services that support their access to the labour market. ■

1. Classification based on World Bank 2017 fiscal year data, available at: <<https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>>.

2. The mapping included programmes from: Burkina Faso, Comoros, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The mapping did not include information from: Benin, Burundi,

Central African Republic, Chad, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Somalia or South Sudan.

3. The documental analysis was based on each programme's listed references in Cirillo and Tebaldi (2016).

4. "The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. All UN statistics on youth are based on this definition, as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health" (UNESCO 2016).

5. Ethiopia, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Tanzania and Togo.

6. Examples are Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), Liberia's Social Cash Transfer (SCT) Programme, Senegal's *Programme National de Bourses de Sécurité Familiale* (PNBSF) and Togo's Cash Transfer Programme for Vulnerable Children in Northern Togo.

7. Kenya's Persons with Severe Disability Cash Transfer (PWS-CT), Mauritius's Basic Invalid's Pension and Carer's Allowance, Namibia's Disability Grant and South Africa's Care Dependency Grant and Disability Grant.

8. Botswana's Old Age Pension (OAP), Kenya's Older Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT), Lesotho's Old Age Pension (OAP), Mauritius's Basic Retirement Pension (Universal Old Age Pension), Namibia's Old Age Pension, Nigeria's

Ekiti State Social Security Scheme and Osun Elderly Persons Scheme, South Africa's Older Persons Grant (OPG) and Swaziland's Old Age Grant.

9. Burkina Faso's Nahouri Cash Transfers Pilot Project (NCTPP), Guinea's Cash Transfer for Health, Nutrition and Education, Madagascar's *Le Transfert Monétaire Conditionnel* (Conditional Cash Transfer), Senegal's Conditional Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children and Togo's Cash Transfer Programme for Vulnerable Children in Northern Togo.

10. Comoros's *Argent Contre Travail* (ACT—Cash for Work), Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), Guinea's Labour-Intensive Public Works Programme, Liberia's Youth, Employment, Skills (YES), Madagascar's *Argent Contre Travail* (Cash for Work), Malawi's Improved Livelihoods Through Public Works Programme, Mozambique's Labour-Intensive Public Work, Niger's Cash Transfers for Food Security and Cash for Work, Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP), Sierra Leone's Cash for Work, Tanzania's Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) III/Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) Programme, Togo's *Travaux à Haute Intensité de Main d'Œuvre* (THIMO—Labour-Intensive Public Works) and Uganda's Second Northern Uganda Social Action Fund Project's (NUSAF 2) Livelihood Investment Support Component.

11. For the public works programme in Madagascar, no defined quotas were found in the programme's implementation manual, though it states that women are prioritised in the beneficiary selection process (FID 2015).

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**International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth**  
United Nations Development Programme

SBS, Quadra 1, Bloco J, Ed. BNDES, 13º andar  
70076-900 Brasília, DF - Brazil  
Telephone: +55 61 2105 5000

[ipc@ipc-undp.org](mailto:ipc@ipc-undp.org) ■ [www.ipc-undp.org](http://www.ipc-undp.org)

