

Using evidence to link social protection to nutrition in Ethiopia

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Highlights

Evidence impact

- The finding that Ethiopia's Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP) did not affect preschool nutrition outcomes contributed to the explicit inclusion of components to support nutrition in the fourth phase of the programme.
- The researchers are using metrics and instruments from the 3ie-supported evaluation to evaluate the nutritional components introduced into the fourth phase.

Factors that contributed to impact

- The PSNP aimed to lower child malnutrition, but there was no assessment of the programme's effects on children's nutrition before the 3ie-supported evaluation.
- Findings came at a time when donors and the government were concerned about progress on the national nutrition strategy.
- The research team at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) drew from its long-standing monitoring and evaluation partnership with the Food Security Coordination Directorate that implements the PSNP.
- The evaluation findings were well timed to contribute to the scheduled review of the PSNP and the design of its fourth phase.

Impact evaluation details

Title: [The Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia: impacts on children's schoolin...](#)

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Context

Ethiopia's PSNP is one of the largest social protection programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa, providing participating communities with a mix of public works employment and unconditional transfers. The programme's objective is social protection for food-insecure communities, so as to prevent asset depletion at the household level, to create community assets and to stimulate markets. The household-level impacts of public works have been widely studied, but much less is known about their effects on intra-household resource allocation and the consequences of these decisions for children's human capital formation.

Since 2006, IFPRI has been working with the Ethiopian government and its PNSP development partners on the design and implementation of a large-scale, longitudinal household survey of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Development partners include a consortium of donors, such as the World Bank, UK aid, USAID, the Canadian International Development Agency and Irish Aid, which are represented on the Food Security Coordination Directorate that implements the PSNP.

Although the objectives of the PSNP explicitly include contributions to reduced malnutrition of children under 5 years, nutrition outcomes did not feature in the regular evaluations. There was also concern that public works could contribute to increased child labour. The 3ie-supported evaluation – led by researchers from IFPRI, Ethiopian Development Research Institute and Cornell University – responded to these issues and came at a time when the donors were looking to work on nutrition and the government was reviewing its national nutrition strategy.

The PSNP was set to undergo a major government and donor review in 2013 and 2014 to assess whether it should change, continue or end. The 3ie-supported work that began in 2012 was expected to feed into this process, showing whether the programme had had an impact on human capital formation.

The evaluation examined the PSNP's impacts on the health status of preschool children, children's schooling, and the incidence and level of child labour. The evaluation also looked into whether these impacts varied by age and sex of the child and whether they varied by sex of the household head.

Evidence

In 2008, when PSNP payments were low, participation in the programme lowered the completion of grades for both girls and boys. Child labour on the family farm also increased, although for boys this was offset by reductions in domestic labour. However, as PSNP payments increased, these adverse outcomes reversed. In 2012, the programme increased girls' grade attainment between 6 and 14 per cent (depending on the age of the child), improved schooling efficiency by 10 to 20 per cent and reduced labour for boys.

On nutrition, the evaluation found the PSNP had not reduced stunting or wasting amongst children from participating communities. The evaluation highlighted issues of dietary quality and the fact that the programme had not encouraged consumption of pulses, oils, fruits, vegetables, dairy products or animal-sourced proteins. Most mothers had not had contact with health extension workers, nor had they received information on good feeding practices. They also did not regularly boil drinking water.

Evidence impacts

Informing inclusion of nutrition-sensitive components in the PSNP

The evaluation findings, along with other research, informed the redesign of the PSNP. Surprised to see that one of their flagship programmes did not have an impact on nutrition, the implementers asked researchers from IFPRI to provide input into the design of the next phase of the programme in order to make it more responsive to nutritional outcomes for children in participating households. As a result, PSNP IV included mechanisms for nutritional improvement. One such mechanism was counting participation in nutritional behaviour change workshops against days of work under the PSNP.

Informing subsequent evaluation of the PSNP

Recently, researchers from the 3ie-funded evaluation, along with a larger research team led by IFPRI, received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to evaluate whether the nutrition-sensitive components introduced as part of PSNP IV are working. The researchers are using metrics and instruments designed in the earlier evaluation.

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