

From policy commitments to the effective implementation of gender-sensitive social protection programmes¹

Charlotte Bilo and Raquel Tebaldi, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and Maja Gavrilovic, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The sixth and final webinar in the gender-sensitive social protection series looked at the different factors that need to be considered while designing and implementing gender-sensitive social protection programmes. Maxine Molyneux's presentation focused mainly on experiences from Latin America, considering the region's particular political and policy scenarios. Maja Gavrilovic presented a new capacity tool developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to guide policy practitioners on integrating gender into cash transfers and public works programmes. Pamela Pozarny presented some of the lessons learned from in-depth qualitative research conducted by the FAO on the productive impacts of social cash transfers in sub-Saharan Africa.

Maxine Molyneux discussed some of the limitations of cash transfer programmes, which are often seen as a 'magic bullet'. One of the main challenges is the limited understanding of gender relations among policymakers. Gender, as described by Molyneux, is a fundamental principle of social organisation through which inequalities are created and naturalised. Identifying how these are reproduced through social policy, discourses and social norms is a significant challenge that needs to be addressed in public policy.

In Latin America, several cash transfer programmes have started to pay greater attention to gender inequality by including links to saving schemes or providing support to women facing domestic violence. Furthermore, progress can be observed regarding linkages between cash transfer programmes, women's labour market participation and child-care services. Yet most women still do not have access to social protection, and the gender-poverty gap has increased over the last decade in Latin America. Investment in training, childcare and reproductive health services also remains inadequate, especially in rural areas.

Molyneux also highlighted that women still lack voice and representation in the design and implementation of programmes, highlighting the importance of social accountability mechanisms such as participatory monitoring and evaluation tools, community scorecards and social audits. However, to ensure that women make use of these, it is imperative to consider local gender norms and social context, as women might feel afraid to complain. The costs in terms of time and travel expenses might also be too high for them to participate.

Maja Gavrilovic also addressed the question of how to integrate gender into the design of cash transfer programmes, focusing on the rural context. The eligibility criteria and targeting methods used to identify beneficiaries are important. Gavrilovic argued that schemes that target women do not necessarily lead to rural women's empowerment due to intra-household gender dynamics. In addition, some targeting methods may exclude eligible women from receiving benefits—for example, women in polygamous families.

Furthermore, the size of the transfer affects gender relations and gender equality outcomes. Larger transfers can help women meet their practical needs, improve their income generation capacity and productivity and improve their bargaining power within the household. However, changes in women's financial autonomy

can lead to potential tensions between spouses, and thus should be carefully considered. Programme conditionalities should be designed in a gender-sensitive and -transformative way so that they address different gender vulnerabilities and promote shared responsibility with men. Moreover, it is important to monitor the effects on rural women's and girl's work burdens, time poverty and changes in intra-household dynamics.

Gavrilovic also highlighted the importance of raising awareness as a cost-effective way to promote gender equality, more egalitarian relationships between rural women and men receiving benefits, and address discriminatory gender norms. Finally, to more effectively address various gender dimensions of rural poverty and vulnerability and promote women's empowerment, cash transfers should be linked to complementary programmes, such as those offering social, child-care and legal services, food and nutrition training and livelihood support. Yet it is imperative that participation in various programmes does not further overburden women. The Ain El-Sira pilot in Egypt is an interesting example of an innovative cash transfer programme, with a specific goal to empower very poor women socio-economically in addition to supporting their care responsibilities. The transfer was provided as a formal entitlement for reproductive work and included an extra compensation for the time spent on fulfilling the programme's conditionalities.

To assess the extent to which a social protection programme promotes women's empowerment, it is vital to understand local socio-cultural beliefs and traditional perceptions of gender roles and responsibilities. Pamela Pozarny pointed out that transferring money directly to women can even have negative connotations in some contexts. For public works programmes, the case studies showed that women often cannot afford to participate due to time constraints, and when they do, it might impact the intra-household division of labour, in some cases increasing child labour.

Pozarny concluded by highlighting that a wide range of stakeholders should be consulted when designing a programme, including potential beneficiaries. Another key issue is raising gender awareness among all implementing actors. Timely and regular payments are also important for women's economic empowerment, especially if they wish to take up loans. Finally, monitoring and impact evaluations are critical, as they provide in-depth insights into gender equality and women's empowerment outcomes, and operational lessons that can inform new programmes.

References:

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1. This webinar is part of a series on gender-sensitive social protection, a joint initiative of the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to foster a Community of Practice to promote gender equality in social protection. It was held on 2 March 2017 and featured presentations from Maxine Molyneux (University College London), Maja Gavrilovic (FAO) and Pamela Pozarny (FAO).