

The impact of research on the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)

Summary

For over 30 years, responses to food insecurity in Ethiopia were dominated by emergency food aid. While this food aid saved lives, it often failed to protect livelihoods and this became a growing concern. In response, during 2005 the Ethiopian Government revised its emergency food aid system and launched the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) - a more productive approach to providing a safety net to vulnerable populations. Furthermore, between 2010 and 2014, the Ethiopian Government stepped up its efforts to address both relief and development, with harmonized donor support. Through this more developmental approach, the PSNP provides a safety net for households that are both chronically food insecure and poor, and often affected by shocks. With an objective to assure food consumption, and simultaneously to protect and develop assets along with services, PSNP operates across widespread geographies and rural communities to determine eligibility to receive payments, based on specific criteria. Such payments are made to households that can contribute to Public Works (labor), or if labor is limited or impossible, unconditional support is provided. Through this infrastructure, PSNP contributes to a local enabling environment for community development.

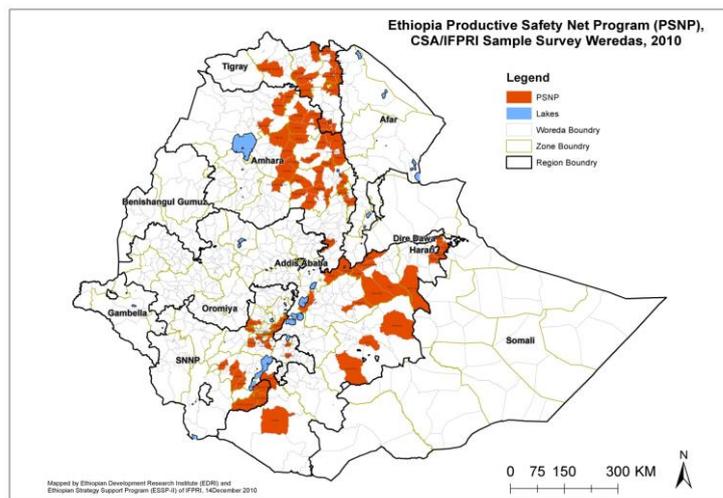
Making a program of this magnitude well-targeted presents many challenges. Nevertheless, through IFPRI's research into regular, fact-based monitoring of the allocation mechanism and appropriate targeting to assess change, this has impacted decisions within communities to assure PSNP works as it was intended, and that it continues to provide a supportive, fair, transparent and measured mechanism to overcome food insecurity in Ethiopia's poorest households.

Background to research

IFPRI has been conducting bi-annual assessments of the PSNP since 2006 to assess impacts and outcomes of all components relating to the Ethiopian Government's program to assist chronically food-insecure woredas. PSNP is now in its third phase, with an established 'graduation' from food insecurity by means of regional benchmarks.

Relying on large-scale surveys implemented by the Central Statistical Agency (CSA) of beneficiary households, IFPRI's role is to assess the performance of PSNP using data from the same communities and households to enable comparison to be made on how household well-being changes over time (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sample survey woredas



Source: Programme Performance Report - July 2013

There are five main elements that combine to achieve the PSNP objectives which include: transfers for food insecure households - conditional and unconditional; transfers for households affected

by shocks; public works to create sustainable infrastructure; strengthening the effectiveness of PSNP implementation and coordination between program implementers and other development and relief efforts. Therefore, when evaluating the PSNP, each of these required due consideration within the research.

Key players

- People who are food-insecure, poor and labor constrained
- Ethiopian Government
- Donor organizations
- Community program implementers
- Researchers from IFPRI and the Central Statistics Agency
- Researchers from Dadimos and University of Sussex
- Micro-finance representatives

Approach

In order to evaluate PSNP's targeted system, IFPRI used quantitative survey data from households in four major regions covered by the PSNP: Tigray, Amhara, Oromiya and SNNPR.

The survey comprised several outcome measures that included: months of food security, dietary diversity, livestock holdings, value of productive assets and probability of starting a non-farm business.

Table 1: Number of households interviewed by region

Year	Tigray	Amhara	Amhara-HVFB	Oromiya	SNNPR	TOTAL
2006	897	894	-	939	950	3,680
2008	868	867	1,163	861	931	4,690
2010	846	847	1,150	885	917	4,645
2012	991	985	1,103	965	1,048	5,092

Source: Programme Performance Report - July 2013
HVFB = High Value Food Basket

The survey was conducted on the same households, although slight variation in numbers occurred over the operational period of the PSNP. Also, as research began only after implementation, it was necessary to establish a baseline of the surveyed groups, which was achieved by statistical methods.

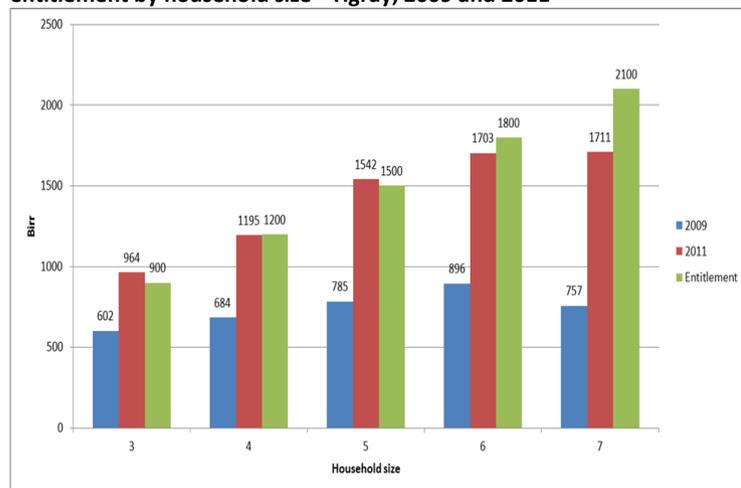
Once results of the impact evaluation were collated and available, several workshops were conducted at federal and regional levels to discuss the findings with all the stakeholders involved in the PSNP. This promoted the opportunity for feedback from all sectors and ensured better interpretation of the data.

Outcome of policy research

One of IFPRI's strengths has been to identify and contribute to resolving operational problems, a critical aspect in this assessment. This capability, together with rigorous methodically measuring outputs, evaluation activities and assessing impacts over time, has resulted in positive outcomes including the following:

- More than 7 million of the country's most impoverished people experienced gains in household food security and asset accumulation.
- Evaluation results from the survey directly influenced three aspects of the PSNP: i) the appropriate transfer levels for individuals involved in the public works component of the program ii) the criteria for graduation from the PSNP iii) the focus on ensuring timely payment of transfers to program beneficiaries.
- IFPRI's research illustrated that full family targeting of transfers across all regions was balanced to appropriately reflect family size, composition and program entitlement in a predictable and timely manner (see example in Figure 2).

Figure 2: Comparison of total payments to full family targeting entitlement by household size - Tigray, 2009 and 2011



Source: Programme Performance Report – July 2013

- The Government of Ethiopia describes IFPRI's evaluation of the implementation and household level impact as "extensive

and comprehensive". Furthermore, it describes the critical role these evaluations have played in measuring success and formulating solutions to problems from an informed basis.

- The World Bank's decision to renew support for the PSNP cited IFPRI's assessments.
- Ethiopia's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development used IFPRI's impact evaluation findings in the support of broader economic and market-oriented approaches to poverty reduction.
- In the most recent review (2013), more than 50 references were made to IFPRI's evaluating work. Additionally, an external independent assessment of IFPRI's work concluded that, "IFPRI has played a key role in the monitoring and evaluation of the PSNP's effectiveness in addressing the formidable food security challenges faced by Ethiopia's poorest citizens."

Lessons learned and next steps

Engaging a complex web of stakeholders and implementers had its challenges. However, through a forum of engagement to iron out contentious issues, and to align the PSNP with its intended purpose, each step has moved the PSNP closer towards a finely-tuned process with consequent and positive developments.

Starting up large-scale representative surveys to measure impact of a government program, and to help steer the implementation of such programs, are becoming an essential and accepted tool in program management in Ethiopia.

Through continuous improvements to survey operations and resultant process change, the PSNP has contributed to placing evidence-based research at the center of decision-making. By doing so, the relief and development agendas of Ethiopia's Government are effectively advancing.

Acknowledgements

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