



Strengthening resilience of rural households through improved social protection



Food Post/Bread for the World

Bangladeshi mothers receiving information about maternal and child health and nutrition

Millions of very poor people who depend on agriculture are frequently exposed to shocks due to extreme weather and volatile prices. Even with strong agricultural growth, an [estimated 400 million](#) people will remain at risk of hunger in 2030. Conflict and climate change may further increase these numbers.

Adequate social protection programs help vulnerable people address immediate needs, protect and augment their assets and human capital, and move out of poverty.

PIM's research on social protection, led by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in partnership with governments and development agencies, has supported increased investment in social protection programs, reaching roughly 8 million beneficiaries in Ethiopia, more than one million beneficiaries in Bangladesh, and more than one million in Tanzania.

As part of a pilot initiative in Bangladesh called the [Transfer Modality Research Initiative \(TMRI\)](#), IFPRI and the World Food Programme evaluated the provision of benefits to 4,000 ultra-poor women and their 21,600

KEY PARTNERS

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), UN World Food Programme, World Bank

YEARS

2012–2016

RESEARCH AREA

Social Protection for Agriculture and Resilience

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Tanzania

CORRESPONDING RESEARCHERS

[Akhter Ahmed](#) and [Shalini Roy](#) (IFPRI) – Bangladesh case; [Daniel Gilligan](#) (IFPRI) – Ethiopia case; [Katrina Kosec](#) (IFPRI) – Tanzania case

Key facts

- › Continued exposure of poor and vulnerable rural people to chronic deprivation and episodic shocks entrenches poverty and passes it to the next generation. Emergency relief is expensive to administer and not always timely.
- › Social protection programs provide predictable assistance to the vulnerable and build resilience against shocks.
- › PIM's research on social protection has helped to support increased investment in social protection programs in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, delivering benefits to millions of people.

family members from 2012 to 2014. Using a randomized controlled trial design, the research team evaluated the impact of four different types of transfers—cash, food, a combination of cash and food, and a combination of either cash or food with complementary behavior change communication (BCC) related to nutrition—on beneficiaries' income, food security, and child nutrition.

The researchers found robust evidence that all transfer modalities improved income and food security, but only cash transfers linked to nutrition BCC improved child nutritional status. IFPRI's assessment showed that cash transfers with nutrition BCC reduced child stunting by more than 7 percentage points—a huge achievement that is three times the national average decline over the same period. The study contributed to the decision to add nutrition BCC to the Vulnerable Group Development Program, the largest social protection program for destitute rural women in Bangladesh. The 2015 monitoring report of Bangladesh's National Food Policy Plan of Action and Country Investment Plan included an extensive summary of the TMRI study findings and concluded that they were highly relevant for the implementation of the National Social Protection Strategy.

Ethiopia's [Productive Safety Net Programme \(PSNP\)](#) is a large-scale social protection intervention that delivers benefits annually to approximately 8 million people. The PSNP includes a mix of public works employment and unconditional cash and food transfers to promote food security and stabilize asset levels for very poor households. IFPRI has worked with local researchers since the program began in 2005 to study key aspects of design, track benefits, and measure impact.

Lessons from the research have since been incorporated into the program. For example, although PSNP has helped to improve household food security, it has not reduced stunting or wasting among participating children, according to an IFPRI-led assessment of the program's impact on child nutritional status. The assessment drew attention to issues of diet quality and the fact that PSNP did not encourage children's consumption of pulses, oils, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, or animal-source proteins. Most mothers had not had contact with health extension workers, nor had they received information on good feeding practices. Their water practices, such as boiling drinking water, were poor as well. These findings, along with work by other researchers, informed recent changes to the program. Ongoing research will track the impact of these reforms.

In 2013, the government of Tanzania approved the implementation of the [Productive Social Safety Net \(PSSN\)](#) program, a nationwide community-based conditional cash transfer (CB-CCT) program that targets those living in extreme

Lessons learned

- › Transfer programs are effective in improving household incomes and food security.
- › Transfers alone may not be sufficient to improve child nutritional status and health.
- › Linking transfers to messaging or to actions related to child nutrition and health may increase their effectiveness in improving these outcomes.
- › Rigorous research on social protection that engages key stakeholders has the potential to shape future implementation and increase benefits to poor and vulnerable households.

Related research outputs

- › Hoddinott, J. F., A. Ahmed, N. Karachiwalla, and S. Roy. 2017. "Nutrition Behaviour Change Communication Causes Sustained Effects on IYCN Knowledge in Two Cluster-Randomised Trials in Bangladesh." *Maternal and Child Nutrition*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.12498>.
- › Roy, S., J. Ara, N. Das, and A. Quisumbing. 2015. "'Flypaper Effects' in Transfers Targeted to Women: Evidence from BRAC's 'Targeting the Ultra Poor' Program in Bangladesh." *Journal of Development Economics* 117 (November 2015): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2015.06.004>.
- › Hoddinott, J. F., I. Ahmed, A. Ahmed, and S. Roy. 2017. "Behavior Change Communication Activities Improve Infant and Young Child Nutrition Knowledge and Practice of Neighboring Non-Participants in a Cluster-Randomized Trial in Rural Bangladesh." *PLoS ONE* 12(6): e0179866. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0179866>.
- › Berhane, G., D. O. Gilligan, J. F. Hoddinott, N. Kumar, and A. Seyoum Taffesse. 2014. "Can Social Protection Work in Africa? The Impact of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 63(1): 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1086/677753>.
- › Berhane, G., J. F. Hoddinott, and N. Kumar. 2017. "The Impact of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme on the Nutritional Status of Children: 2008–2012." ESSP Working Paper 99. Washington, D.C. and Addis Ababa, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI). <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15738coll2/id/131051>.

poverty. The pilot program started in 2010 and was evaluated at the mid- and endlines by a World Bank–led team that included IFPRI/PIM researchers. An [independent study](#) found that “gathering evidence from the pilot was an important aspect in ‘selling’ the program.” The evaluation, [published in 2014](#), provides important information about the impact of the pilot. The report is extensive and thorough in its assessment of impacts on beneficiary communities, which can be summarized as follows:

“On the whole, the community-based CCT program led to improved outcomes in both health and education. Households used the resources to invest in livestock, in children’s shoes, in insurance, and—for the poorest households—in increased savings. This suggests that the households focused on reducing risk and on improving their livelihoods rather than principally on increasing consumption. There is also evidence that the project had positive effects on community cohesion” (Evans et al. 2014, 8).

Based on the positive CB-CCT pilot, evaluations, and reports, Tanzania’s government decided in 2013 to design and implement a countrywide PSSN program.

- › Hoddinott, J. F., G. Berhane, D. O. Gilligan, N. Kumar, A. Seyoum Taffesse. 2012. “The Impact of Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme and Related Transfers on Agricultural Productivity.” *Journal of African Economies* 21(5): 761–786. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejs023>.
- › Sabates-Wheeler, R., J. Lind, and J. Hoddinott. 2013. “Implementing Social Protection in Pastoralist Areas: How Local Distribution Structures Moderate PSNP Outcomes in Ethiopia.” *World Development* 50(1): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.04.005>.
- › Evans, D. K., B. Holtemeyer, and K. Kosec. 2017. “Cash Transfers and Health: Evidence from Tanzania.” *World Bank Economic Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhx001>.
- › See more here: <https://pim.cgiar.org/resource/selected-publications-on-social-protection/>

“As we invest in building a stronger and more resilient economy, we also recognize that many poor households suffer from chronic food insecurity. For these, supported by our development partners, we have put in place a successful social protection scheme called the Productive Safety Net Programme. By providing largely conditional food and cash transfers, the program insures vulnerable households who would have resorted to the sale of important assets, trapping them in a vicious cycle. The program supports the creation of assets such as roads and irrigation systems which enhance resilience of communities. In short, the Productive Safety Net Programme contributes to resilience by creating and protecting personal and community assets. At this juncture, I would like to recognize the contributions of IFPRI researchers in continuously improving this social protection scheme.”

—H.E. Hailemariam Dessalegn, Prime Minister of Ethiopia. May 2014 at the IFPRI 2020 Conference, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.