

MAKE SOCIAL PROTECTION SCHEMES WORK FOR DROUGHT RESILIENCE: LESSONS FROM ETHIOPIA'S PSNP

During the last decade social protection instruments have gained popularity among policy responses to drought. Several governments in sub-Saharan Africa have integrated cash transfer and public works schemes into their strategies for food security and disaster risk management. Looking at Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), one of the largest programmes of this kind in the region, our author examines which structural bottlenecks have to be removed for social protection schemes to contribute to drought resilience in the long term.

By Mesay K. Duguma

As part of Ethiopia's food security programme, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) was launched by the Ethiopian government and a group of its development partners in the year 2005. The programme targets the food-insecure population in chronically food-insecure rural districts and aims to bridge food gaps, prevent asset depletion at household level and create assets at community level. For this reason, the PSNP is primarily designed to provide predictable support (food or cash) to households with predictable needs – those households that are chronically food-insecure. In its major component, which covers approximately 80 per cent of the programme participants, it targets healthy and able-bodied adults to carry out public works; as part of its smaller component, vulnerable clients who have no other means of support, including the disabled and elderly, receive unconditional food and/or cash transfers. Besides the standard components, the PSNP comprises risk financing and contingency funds at the regional and district levels that are to be used to expand coverage in the case of drought emergencies. Therefore, both through its public work component and risk financing and contingency funds, PSNP seeks to provide a platform for drought risk management practices and resilience building at household and community level.

A wide range of literature exists regarding the role of social protection in reducing chronic poverty and vulnerability to disasters as well as in facilitating long-term investment in human and physical capital. But is this confirmed by experience on the ground? According to Devereux et al. (2008), Headey et al. (2012) and Jones et al. (2010) experience in Ethiopia shows that productive safety nets can make a valuable contribution to protecting assets against “distress sales” for food and non-food needs, improving household food security, raising household incomes and enhancing resilience. But other findings suggest quite the opposite. Béné, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2012) found that the positive achievements of

the programme were rather shallow as regards guaranteeing complete protection of its beneficiaries from the impacts of severe shocks. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2011) did not find evidence that PSNP protected households' livestock in times of climate or economic difficulties/shock, while Gilligan et al. (2009) documented that PSNP had little impact on participants on average, due in part to transfer levels that were far below programme targets.

REASONS FOR POOR PERFORMANCE

In order to identify the factors responsible for the poor performance found in the studies, interviews were conducted with federal and sub-national level government stakeholders in Ethiopia. They revealed the following constraining factors that had undermined the impact of PSNP for drought resilience over the years:

Lack of common understanding on the concept of “drought resilience”. Some stakeholders lacked clarity in distinguishing between the contributions of short-term responses and long-term development measures with respect to their relevance in building up drought resilience. This had

weakened the focus on proactive and long-term measures within PSNP which are useful in building the internal capacity of poor rural people who frequently deal with the negative impact of droughts.

Inadequate co-ordination and harmonisation. The implementation of the programme suffered from weak co-ordination among government stakeholders at federal, regional and lower levels due to the lack of a clear mandate (role and responsibility) of stakeholders. In addition to this aspect, the contingency fund and risk financing of PSNP has been poorly integrated in the overall Disaster Risk Management (DRM) framework. As a result of this, there was weak harmonisation of PSNP activities with early warning information to ensure early action which depends on fast and timely utilisation of the contingency fund.

Decentralisation and capacity gap. The study identified organisational, technological and financial capacity gaps at multiple levels. This has been more pronounced in pastoral and emerging regions of the country (including Afar, Somali) in which years of neglect by previous governments caused a sharp develop-



Farmers producing teff in Mekelle region in Northern Ethiopia.

Photo: Michael Brüntrup

Since 2005, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) has provided assistance to more than 7 million people, with annual transfers averaging 300 million US dollars. According to the 2014 Program Implementation Manual (PIM), the estimated maximum annual programme caseload till 2020 will be 10 million clients/ beneficiaries, consisting of 8.3 million chronically food insecure individuals and with the capacity to support an additional 1.7 million transitory beneficiaries if need exists. The programme is currently operational in six regions in the country including Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, Afar and Somali.

ment imbalance with the rest of the country. For instance, lack of skilled man power for design and supervision of land rehabilitation technologies under public works, shortage of other resources (equipment including vehicles) and poor public infrastructures remain serious problems in Afar region. By the time of the interview, it was reported that the region owned only two trucks to distribute emergency forage (obtained through aid) to all the districts in the region. As a result, field experts were unable to reach remote districts in time.

Poor quality of public works under PSNP.

Field visits to Chifra *wereda* (the Amharic word for district) of Afar region confirmed that poor quality land rehabilitation structures built under the public works have further exacerbated land degradation and slowed down regeneration of vegetation. Much of the problem was caused by lack of technical expert advice prior to designing and building structures.

Shortage of funding for complementary livelihood components.

While donors' contributions to PSNP's core programme components have been quite substantial, complementary livelihood programmes such as the Household Asset Building Programme (HABP) have generally received little finance for their implementation. In light of such facts, it has to be stressed that relying solely on regular transfers made through PSNP may not go beyond fulfilling the immediate food needs of households for short-term survival.

“Silo thinking” and limited knowledge and political will regarding a ‘multi-sectoral’ approach.

All government stakeholders interviewed note limited knowledge of multi-sectoral approaches at district and lower level. Furthermore, lack of political will among implementers has been slowing the

process. “Silo thinking” among stakeholders is to blame for PSNP within the Agriculture sector having enjoyed weak linkage with the other sectors, including the health and disaster management. This has hampered progress in terms of synergic relationships with other drought resilience initiatives under the responsibility of various line ministries.

Weak monitoring, follow-up and knowledge management.

There have been reports from stakeholders that some promising results of pilot drought resilience projects by NGOs were not adequately documented and never scaled up, which hampers the sharing of knowledge and skills among stakeholders.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE?

Poverty and inequality are two of the root causes of vulnerability to the impacts of droughts. This is why many of the actions needed to mitigate these impacts require long-term and proactive development interventions. Taking into account the special role that can be played by social protection schemes and the above-mentioned experiences, the following policy implications are drawn to make Ethiopia's PSNP – and safety net programmes in general – work better for drought resilience.

Awareness-raising. Policy-makers should build awareness on drought risk management and the role of PSNP for enhanced drought resilience at all levels, from community to global. These may include use of mass media to create awareness on drought, its multi-sectoral impact as well as its wider implications for national and regional peace and stability. Gatherings for payments could be used to sensitise beneficiaries on drought issues. The linkages of PSNP with other sectors could also be further communicated to develop new, location-specific ideas about raising drought resilience beyond the standard programme.

Better communication. Communication should be improved among donors/NGOs and a government institution, which is decisive for efficient and proper functioning of social protection schemes, drought early warning systems and tailored long-term drought resilience programmes. A regional or national independent platform must be established that consolidates the early warning information on droughts from various sources. This can be in a form of a consortium of various governments, NGOs, research institutions with high profile expertise and reputation.

Mobilising resources. The capacity of individuals, institutions and organisations to use and mobilise resources must be improved. Especially, skill and technology transfer for local PSNP implementers has to be strengthened, the internal capacity of PSNP districts needs to be enhanced. For instance, this would include expanding banking options and complementary business trainings for farmers so that they are able to invest in various sectors (also outside of agriculture) in their community. This could also be used as a source of employment and a buffer in disaster periods.

Quality infrastructure. If social protection schemes are to serve their purpose as long-term development approaches in building drought resilience, then it is important to create and maintain quality infrastructures. Therefore, ensuring the active participation of the most vulnerable group is imperative. In other words, adequate grassroots level community participation from planning to implementation and evaluation should be strengthened. Furthermore, both technical and local human capacity development should be enhanced through learning and experience sharing platforms with the assistance of development partners.

Co-ordination. The impacts of drought are multi-faceted, and its management requires strong multi-sectoral collaboration. Therefore, a robust and comprehensive institution is essential to enhance co-ordination among governments, development partners and non-governmental organisations in carrying out long-term activities towards drought resilience. Thus it is necessary to establish a strong co-ordination unit with solid authority and clear accountability to oversee the coordination of drought resilience activities among sectors.

Knowledge management. Strong monitoring and knowledge management is vital for effective follow-up, reporting and documentation of drought resilience efforts and achievements. Thus it is important to facilitate the exchange of information among PSNP stakeholders and those in the NGO sectors who implemented drought resilience initiatives. This must be accompanied by documentation of lessons learned and scale-up of best practices.

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