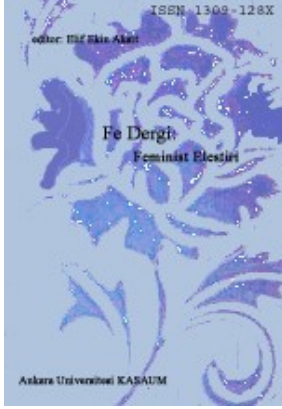


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**Social Protection: Opportunities for Promoting a  
Gender Equality Agenda**

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## Social Protection: Opportunities for Promoting a Gender Equality Agenda

Rania Antonopoulos\* and Kijong Kim\*\*

*Recent social protection initiatives in developing countries offer a valuable policy space to address gender equality agenda. Various instruments to secure the income and livelihood of vulnerable families can promote women's empowerment. Active participation as a producer, rather than passive receipt of public transfers as a consumer, in the initiatives can transform the gender dynamics in the society as well as in their family. In this paper, using a life-cycle framework, gender specific risks and vulnerabilities are identified, and assessment of current social protection policies—social pension, input subsidies, food security, education and health services, and employment guarantee programs—follow. The social protection policies bear the potentials to enhance women's position through equal paid work and social care.*

*Keywords: Social Protection, Transformation, Productive Inclusion, Employment Guarantee Programs.*

### Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliğini Artırmak İçin Bir Fırsat Olarak Sosyal Koruma

*Gelişmekte olan ülkelerde son zamanlarda gerçekleştirilen sosyal koruma inisiyatifleri toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği gündemine dokunarak önemli bir politika alanı sunmaktadır. Savunmasız yoksul hanelere geçim geliri sağlayan çeşitli araçlar kadının güçlenmesinde de faydalı olabilir. Bu girişimlerde, tüketici olarak kamu transferlerinin pasif alıcısı olmak yerine, üreten olarak aktif katılım, hem toplum hem de aile içinde toplumsal cinsiyet dinamiklerini dönüştürebilir. Bu yazıda öncelikle, yaşam döngüsü analiz çerçevesi kullanılarak toplumsal cinsiyet temelli risk ve kırılabilirlikler tespit edilmekte ve daha sonra mevcut sosyal koruma politikaları – emeklilik, girdi teşvikleri, gıda güvenliği, eğitim ve sağlık hizmetleri ve istihdam garantisi programları – değerlendirilmektedir. Sosyal koruma politikaları ücretli çalışma ve bakım iş ve yükünü dengeleyerek kadının statüsünü geliştirme potansiyeli taşır.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Koruma, Dönüşüm, Üretken Katılım, İstihdam Garantisi Programları.*

## Introduction

Social protection has emerged as a strategic component in the policy agenda of developing countries. In the past, social protection schemes in developing countries were introduced as a “safety net” with the aim to guard against rapid deterioration of living standards of households that periodically face being in or near poverty. Gradually it became clear that stop-gap safety net interventions had short-lived impacts, because the underlying issues that had locked people in or near poverty in the first place were still left intact. Equally important, the recent global crisis highlighted that countries with well-integrated social protection systems were better prepared to have timely and effective responses. From its more restricted one-off protective function, the focus of social protection policies has by now shifted to that of investing in longer-term, integrated large scale population coverage interventions.

We propose that transformative social policies should be based on life-cycle of women's needs. They include securing the needs and safety of children—nutrition, education, and health; equitable employment guarantees for working age women with accompanying programs to lower their unpaid work burden; and social pensions for the elderly and disabled persons.

This paper aims to contribute to current discussions from a gender perspective. Section 2 offers a general background on the emergence of social protection and on how it is linked to economic and social policy.

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Section 3 intends to facilitate gender awareness on issues social protection invites, and examines opportunities they are presented from the standpoint of empowerment and promotion of equality for women. Particular attention is paid on two social protection instruments that have gained currency over the last decade, namely, conditional cash transfers and employment guarantee programs.

### **Social Protection: Context, Concepts, and Definitions**

Over the years, the objectives, targets, and meaning of Social Protection (SP) have evolved substantially.<sup>1</sup> The call in recent times is for expansion (Social Protection Floor initiative) and coherent integration of the SP policy within the framework of an inclusive growth agenda. Before we move on to gender issues of SP, SP policy will be framed in the larger context of economic and social policy.

#### **- Economic Policy, Social Policy, and Social Protection**

The overarching goals of economic and social policy are growth of output (and its counterpart, income) and improvement in citizens' standard of living. Economic policies concern growth and stability of productive systems and distribution of growing income and wealth among owners of productive resources. Social policy interventions contribute to wellbeing and social cohesion by ensuring a wider sharing of prosperity through redistributive actions. To a large degree, reduction of income poverty and multiple inequalities, including their gendered forms and dimensions, reflect the *joint impact* of effective economic and social policies. Social protection interventions are part of social policy.

Social policy spending in this framework performed a social but also an economic function. Alongside private demand for consumption and investment, government spending on infrastructure, social services, and income maintenance programs is a part of aggregate demand. In fact, it was instrumental to the stability and healthy expansion of private sector growth. In that context, government's social spending is a counter-cyclical economic policy. It places a floor to economic downturns and propels economic activity towards growth in times of prosperity. In addition, multiplier effects of social spending further stimulates aggregate demand of private sector. The effects are found to be particularly strong in their capacity to create jobs whenever public investments are channeled to the naturally more labor-intensive sectors of services, such as education and health.<sup>2</sup> Social sector and social protection spending has a particularly strong economic and redistributive content through employment generation.

The secure job creation is especially important in view of recent global economic trends, characterized by jobless growth, informalization of work arrangements and global contagion of financial speculation. These undesirable trends have taxed especially the poor<sup>3</sup>: they have kept substantial segments of the world's population in chronic poverty, unable to meet basic needs and highly vulnerable to covariate (i.e., correlated to incidence of floods and droughts), idiosyncratic (i.e., ill-health) and systemic risks (i.e., structural economic characteristics of development paths and social relations that reproduce fundamental inequalities).

Social protection is a life-line for the poor: in a globally integrated world unintended consequences have raised the risks of destitution. Social protection can also be a contributing factor to inclusive growth. It can mobilize underutilized domestic labor resources, stimulate demand for consumption and, if properly planned, it has the potential to promote localized growth in territories that most need it.

#### **-Definitions and Taxonomy of Instruments**

**Social policy** encompasses a host of principles, legislation, institutional arrangements, and concrete actions the State undertakes with the aim to *improve the welfare and living conditions* of the population. A substantive part of social policy has always involved provisioning of basic physical infrastructure, public goods, and social services, including health and education and active labor market interventions. Added to this function of the state has been the undertaking of a host of initiatives that provide **social protection**.

**Social protection systems** (also known as social security systems) embody a society's pathways to *safeguard the standard of living* of its citizens. Preventing, mitigating, and helping overcome adversities that

otherwise would increase income volatility, and hence, vulnerability to income insecurity or poverty. Two predominant forms are *social insurance* and *social assistance*.

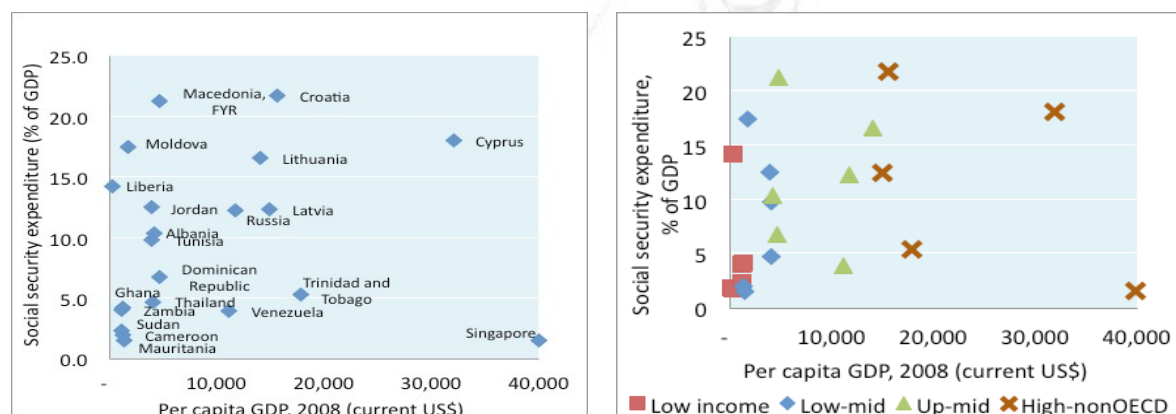
*Social insurance* schemes provide protection against loss of income due to old age, unemployment, and injury or illness. Entitlements of benefit to retirees, those temporarily out of work or physically no longer able to work, are funded through a pay-as-you-go pulled insurance system, paid out of mandated contributions made by workers who are currently employed, their employers, and the State (via general taxation revenue).<sup>4</sup>

*Social assistance* addresses acute or chronic poverty, vulnerabilities of old age and children, or the aftermaths of natural disasters through transfers of cash or in-kind. With larger segments of people in poverty, *noncontributory* social assistance interventions, financed by tax revenue in general, have been the main focus in low and middle income countries.<sup>5</sup> The safety nets have evolved into much more permanent interventions with countries building stronger administrative and institutional capacities and expanded population coverage. Initiatives can be grouped into four broad categories<sup>6</sup>:

- (a) Conditional cash transfers directly to mothers or primary caregivers of children and adolescents aim to encourage retention of school children within the education system.
- (b) Employment Guarantee programs and public works programs provide a job and pay wages to unskilled and low-skilled members of poor households who cannot find paid work.
- (c) Subsidies or free access of food, services, and productive inputs ensure basic requirements as well as productive capacities in the form of vouchers, cash, in-kind rations, fee removal, and grants for inputs and assets for production (i.e., fertilizers, a sewing machine, small animals, etc.).
- (d) Social pensions are cash stipends to the elderly, disabled, orphaned children, or people living with dilapidating illness, such as HIV/AIDS.

Affordability of such programs has been a great concern for low-income countries. Yet, data show that high levels of SP spending (as a percentage of GDP) are actually compatible and viable in low-income countries; similarly, higher levels of per capital GDP, i.e., middle-income countries, may allocate only small fractions of GDP to such SP programs. As Figure 1 indicates, the amount of spending on social protection as shown (on the vertical axis—referred to as social security at times) is not influenced exclusively by the income group a country belongs to (horizontal axis). ILO (2008)<sup>7</sup> estimated that a comprehensive social protection program, which includes old-age pension, child benefits, basic health care, and employment guarantee programs, would cost between 4 to 10 percent of GDP of low-income countries.

Figure 1: Social protection as a percentage of GDP, various countries



Source: Authors' calculations based on World Social Security Report 2010–2011 (ILO), annex, table 25 data; and World Development Indicators 2008 (in current USD).

This general introduction provides a context that allows us to discuss more particularly social protection and social assistance initiatives from a gender perspective, to which we turn next.

### **Social Protection Through a Gender Lens: Opportunities for Promoting a Gender Equality Agenda**

Social Protection (SP) initiatives in developing countries have focused on social assistance that entails noncontributory transfers, to address income poverty and deprivations of basic services. Many countries are expanding the scope and scale of social assistance measures so that gradually and progressively a comprehensive SP policy for all citizens is put in place. From a gender-equality perspective this opens valuable space for a consideration of current practices at the domestic and international levels so that women's empowerment concerns may be included in the unfolding current dialogue.

### **-Underpinnings of a Social Protection Framework That Promotes Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality**

Choices of SP instruments depend on the intended vulnerability to tackle but also on the perception of poverty. From the perspective of women's economic empowerment this is a point worth dwelling upon.

Women's economic and social empowerment is a process and an outcome. As an outcome it is manifested in the degree of achieved autonomy (legal, material, and physical), equality (in opportunities, rights, and outcomes) and voiced influence (in strategic decisions that affect their lives within and beyond households). As a process, empowerment involves transforming gender-based *inequality-(re)producing relations* so as to enable women's full participation in economic, social, political, and cultural structures.<sup>8</sup> From this standpoint, the SP initiatives, while redressing gender-specific risks, can promote women's empowerment, provided they are informed by the objectives of increasing autonomy, equality, and voiced influence. Amartya Sen drew attention in the early 1990s to the critical difference between "protection"-oriented SP interventions and those that lead to "promotion," the latter referring to initiatives that increase and promote the ability of people to secure a livelihood. This distinction serves as a pertinent entry point for the purpose of this discussion.

Consider a few gender-informed alternatives that can potentially promote food security: a family cash-transfer for purchases of necessities—made payable to women as they are the key managers of the household's well-being; free delivery of staple food (rice, maize, milk, etc.) directly to female heads of households; and agricultural extension services plus price subsidies of fertilizers and seeds, dedicated to women farmers. All three initiatives have an identical objective: reduction of food insecurity. Yet, the process through which deprivation is addressed is different in the (implicitly) assigned *positioning* of the beneficiary.

The first addresses income poverty by enabling women beneficiaries to participate in the economy *as consumers, which they otherwise cannot do on their own*. The second, in the case of free rationed food, directly allocates food to those deserving of support because of their *destitution status and inability to cope*. The third approach addresses the income gap through means that enable the beneficiary to *engage productively* in the economy, as a *producer by addressing concerns of social equity*. While all three reduce an identified deprivation, the last one acknowledges it as an outcome of social relations of exclusion, (i.e., women do not receive the same level of agricultural support), that often underpins people's experiences of chronic poverty and vulnerability. In a seminal paper, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004)<sup>9</sup> point out that among SP interventions some are deeply *transformative* in nature, precisely because their ambition is to sever existing *socially binding relations* and constraints. On a world scale, the latter intervention would reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12 to 17 percent, or 100 to 150 million people.<sup>10</sup>

The "appropriate" *transformative* instruments vary for different groups of women, i.e., women that are landless or whose livelihoods are not linked to land cultivation, women that are unable to participate as producers because they have too many responsibilities already within their household, including caring for family members. The key point is to recognize that *how* reduction of income and consumption poverty takes place, intentionally or not, and assigns different *positioning* to the intended beneficiary group.

The SP policy can ensure that unleashing women's potential to secure sufficient incomes (consumption) *on their own right* remains a priority. SP policy must be informed by a vision that "sees" women as active

economic agents and avoid the tendency of *positioning* women in passive recipient roles. Simply put, much like all members of society, women intrinsically possess the ability to engage in income-generating activities as producers and wage-earners.

The gender-awareness can contribute to the consistency with equality and empowerment principles of social protection. To provide some useful inputs in this direction, the remainder of this paper is informed by two overarching objectives:

- (a) To identify gender-specific social and economic risks and corresponding available SP instruments that can potentially be used—based on country-level experiences.
- (b) To explore if and how available SP instruments potentiate (or not) the loosening up of rigid social roles—so that innovative features can be added to steer them in that direction.

### **-Identifying Gender Vulnerabilities, Creating Gender Equitable Opportunities**

Unequal distribution of resources and power affect women's rights, opportunities and outcomes at all stages of their lives. The opportunity in social protection is to explore how gender mainstreaming and gender-programming can influence the custom-tailoring of existing interventions so as to address a host of challenges women face in their life-cycle.

#### **Gender Risks and Vulnerabilities: Early Stages of Life**

Because gender-differentiated risks start from the earlier stages of their life, we begin with the instruments that address vulnerability from infancy to adolescence.<sup>11</sup>

Gender *roles*, inequalities, and deprivations begin inscribing themselves in early stages of life and get solidified in childhood and adolescence. It is well known that birth to two years of age is a “critical window” for the promotion of good growth, health, and behavioral development. Vulnerability to lack of adequate nutrition, medical attention, physical security, and mental stimulation are exacerbated by unequal allocation of resources between boys and girls. Domestic chore needs, child marriage, and a premium on boys' education all add to risks of school withdrawal. Girls are also exposed to sex-trafficking and higher health risk through sexual contact with older males or prostitution. In their childhood, girls are more likely to experience poverty because of deficits in opportunities to develop physical, mental, and emotional capabilities, and at times violation of their physical integrity. A *gendering* process of their formation is unfolding through observation and participation. Positive changes through policy actions can have profound effects on children and most especially on girls.

SP interventions aiming to lose income gap and reduce unpaid work requirements benefit children indirectly, while other measures—expansion of education and health services—benefit them directly. The list below presents domains of currently implemented SP assistance initiatives which can be scaled up:<sup>12</sup> Free infant immunization combined with free pre/post-natal care and nutrient supplements for lactating mothers and infants (Macedonia, Namibia, and Mexico).

- a) Early childhood development centers for pre-school children (very limited coverage; innovative examples that reach poor households are that of South Africa and Mexico).
- b) Free school-feeding programs (Kenya, Bangladesh, India, and other countries).
- c) Removal of health and education fees (Cambodia, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka).
- d) Conditional cash-transfers (Mexico, Brazil, and many other countries).
- e) Social pensions to households with orphaned children (South Africa).

#### **Gender Risks and Vulnerabilities: Working-age and After**

Social expectations placed on women about their household responsibilities result in gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities. They are accentuated when pre- and post-natal care, family planning, and reproductive rights are absent; and when there is lack of social care services for the disabled, those suffering from protracted illness. In their older age, unless they have access to a pension income, they are destined to live in abject poverty or continue to work despite physical ailments. They continue to carry disproportionately heavy care responsibilities

where prime-age adults are absent due to distress migration, or lost to violent conflicts, HIV/AIDS or other fatal and severely disabling illness.

### Conditional Cash Transfers

Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) is intended to address the destitution through direct transfers with certain conditions to address low levels of utilization of educational and health services for school-aged children and adolescents. Accordingly, CCTs provide a cash stipend, given to mothers, in general. Thus, it achieves the dual goal of closing income gaps and improving health and school enrollment of children.. From a gender-equality point, two features are important: (a) better education and health outcomes for girls and (b) women's empowerment, emanating from a design feature of CCTs that mandates stipendiaries to be the mothers of the children.

For better outcomes for girls, the rules of operation can include provisions of a graduated scale of cash awards, with higher amounts offered for older age children and for girls in particular. *Oportunidades* does exactly that, and excellent results are reported as the enrollment of girls has been on the rise. New generations of healthier and more educated women are in the making and this is no small achievement.

However, CCTs may unintentionally create a different intergenerational path of poverty transmission. As girls grow up in a cultural framework where "motherhood" status is recognized and cash-rewarded (i.e., through state action for "good-mother" behavior), adolescents may also opt-in for CCTs, despite being better prepared for labor markets. In the labor market structures with low female labor force participation (45 percent as opposed to 78 percent for men) young women would be more likely to stay behind raising children. The designation of a mother as a recipient of transfer also limits a woman's opportunities and functions other than being a caregiver.<sup>13</sup> Being a "good mother" is inadvertently equated by CCTs with a full-time dedication of women's time to children's upbringing, and that is what grants them primary "caregiver" status. Under the gender biased concept of care, mother's involvement in the world of work can be compromised. If they are not being availed of means to become actively and productively engaged, it is as if exercising their economic rights is denied. This is unfair to the "mothers", and also sends the wrong signal to children (both boys and girls). Hence, if the intent is to increase household income and women's income in particular, a focus should be on expanding livelihood options for "mothers" or unconditional cash transfers which may be a preferable means of securing a minimum income.

It also concerns critics of the programs that the very conceptualization of "empowerment," measured by changes in patterns of consumption expenditures and improved freedom in mobility, is both extremely context sensitive and limited in terms of transformative processes. Next-generation CCT designs and programs should address these gender specific concerns. For example,

- CCTs can become a *component* of a package of fully "integrated" interventions an example of which is *Chile Solidario*, combining income transfers with health, education, employment, housing, and psychosocial counseling with a clear component on *promoting economic engagement options* for mothers and their graduating daughters. Public service job creation (minimum pay jobs that serve their communities, as discussed later) can be offered to female graduates of CCTs for the first 2 years of their adult working lives.
- CCTs can be delinked from their "motherhood" focus by *expanding* their scope and integrating (or leveraging) existing SP country-level initiatives that can promote women's economic empowerment. In Mexico, for example, a variety of programs can be revamped, including *Programa Hábitat*, *Programa Organización Productiva para Mujeres Indígenas (POPMI)*, *Programa de Empleo Temporal (PET)*, *Programa de la Mujer en el Sector Agrario (PROMUSAG)*, *Programa de Apoyo al Empleo (PAE)*, and *Programa De Estancias Infantiles Para Apoyar A Madres Trabajadoras*.

### -Women's Worlds of Work: Inequalities and Systemic Risks

Women's world of work is a continuum that entails paid formal, paid informal, own-account, unpaid contributing family, unpaid household production, and unpaid care and maintenance work (Antonopoulos 2008). Over the course of their lifetime, girls and women spend time across these domains of work in varying proportions, and they stand at a disadvantage on several grounds.

#### Time poverty and Vulnerability in the Worlds of Work

Women have the primary responsibility of household-based production and care provisioning. The available time women can potentially devote to paid work, civic and community affairs involvement, skill improvement, and personal rest is severely curtailed. This intra-household inequality is a tax on women's time, and burdens are even heavier when household incomes are insufficient and public services sparse. When combined with total hours of work (all forms of paid and unpaid), women work longer hours than men, as much as an estimated 40 hours more per week in many countries in Asia and Africa.<sup>14</sup> If time poverty is incorporated into current measurements of income poverty, research has recently concluded that poverty and chronic poverty almost double, with a straightforward recommendation that social service prioritization that reduces unpaid work requirements for households in (and near) poverty is critical for poverty reduction strategies.<sup>15</sup>

Women's vulnerable position in the worlds of work is an issue, in addition to women's income-time poverty. Over half of all economically active women throughout the world belong to the most vulnerable worker category—own-account and contributing family work. Own account workers stands at the very bottom of the informal work pyramid and face irregular and unpredictable days of work, very low wages, and no social insurance of any kind. For examples, over 70 percent of employed women in Nepal belong to own-account workers, 65.5 in Rwanda, and 62.1 in Azerbaijan. Worldwide, one out of every four (25 percent of all women workers) are unpaid family contributing workers. The rates are alarming in many instances: in Pakistan 65 percent of all women counted as "employed" are unpaid family workers, in Mozambique, 56.8 percent, and 47.2 percent in Vietnam, as in Table 1.

Table 1: Vulnerable employment in selected countries (% of total women's' employment)

Country	Own-account workers	Contributing family workers	Vulnerable Employment
Rwanda	65.5	30.0	95.5
Mozambique	39.1	56.8	95.9
Pakistan	12.8	65.0	77.8
Vietnam	31.3	47.2	78.5
Nepal	70.6	12.9	83.5
Azerbaijan	62.1	0.0	62.1
Georgia	26.7	37.9	64.6
Bolivia	32.5	34.4	66.8
Egypt	14.8	33.9	48.7

Source: KILM 6<sup>th</sup> edition, ILO 2009.

Note: The data availability years are as follows: Rwanda 1996, Mozambique 2003, Pakistan 2008, Vietnam 2004, Nepal 2001, Azerbaijan 2008, Georgia 2008, Bolivia 2007, and Egypt 2007.

Women in rural areas have dismal levels of access and control over land, productive agricultural assets, and credit or extension services. In Sub-Saharan Africa and in South and Southeast Asia, for example, more than 50 percent of the female labor force is engaged in food production. But the average sub-Saharan region female-owned land is less than 18 percent while in India, Nepal, and Thailand, the ratio is less than 10 percent of women



farmers.<sup>16</sup> Even among landless peasants, women are more likely to work alongside as unpaid “helpers” or find work as domestic workers, receiving no pay or a fraction of the daily rates of their male counterparts.

Self-employment and micro-entrepreneurship are often proposed as the key to poor women’s economic empowerment. Important as it may be, it cannot be hoped to provide in itself the pathway out of poverty for women. On a world scale, less than 3 percent of the population works under an “employer status” and their prosperity is subject to the vagaries of volatilities and risks stemming from every corner of the global economy. Access to credit and inputs and achieving better human capital outcomes for all, are important for women’s equality, but not a panacea.

In summary, women devote too much of their time to unpaid work and too little to paid forms of work. They endure seasonal unemployment as agricultural workers and unpredictable demand for their labor when engaged in irregular and informal types of work; they lack social insurance; and receive lower wages than their male counterparts.

Some of the current country level SP initiatives that can potentially address income gaps and challenges that women face include social pensions for elderly and disabled persons whose care needs are fulfilled by women, input subsidies targeting women, food and service provision, and employment guarantee programs.<sup>17</sup>

### Employment Guarantee Programs

Employment Guarantee Programs (EGP) initiatives account for the largest population coverage among all SP instruments, and they close income gaps through expansion of *livelihood options* via noncontributory employment security.

Unlike the microenterprise and microfinance programming, it provides *security* of access to paid work. Those who are in “regular” formal employment face the vulnerability of insufficient incomes due to the risk of potential job loss and unemployment benefits for a predictable period of time (3 to 6 months on average), and EGPs guard against such insecurity. This instrument can serve as risk mitigation for other vulnerable groups—own-account workers—as shortages of jobs are also a problem. They, too, depend on diversification of sources of income as their earnings from self-employment are highly volatile and, in general, suffer from underemployment and unpredictable spells of no employment at all. Other segments of the population face the opposite risk: For those exposed to extremely high risks of “no paid-job offer at all” or underemployment, access to an employment security benefit for a *predictable* amount of time (3 to 4 months annually) is a good step toward a platform that provides SP for all. EGPs offer minimum (low) wage jobs to those ready and willing but unable to find paid work. In that, this instrument provides the security of a work entitlement when all else fails, and this is why it is referred as “employment of last resort.” EGPs are “demand-driven” instruments; they are ready to be activated upon the needs and demand for paid work by beneficiaries themselves, much like unemployment benefits. .

Countries have introduced such initiatives for diverse reasons and for different lengths of time. They are intended to redress alarming levels of urban youth unemployment (El Salvador); to reduce vulnerability and distress migration of rural agricultural workers during the slow agricultural seasons (India), or prevent distress sale of small assets and livestock of small landholders (Ethiopia); to partially respond to protracted structural unemployment (South Africa). EGPs involve a noncontributory transfer of income in the form of (low) wages. Labor is hired in for a specific numbers of days (i.e., a total of 100 days) in work-projects that produce public “assets”, such as rural infrastructure construction and maintenance,, reforestation, and environmental cleanup. *If* designed properly, EGPs enhance quality of life and productivity, and expand livelihood options that can revitalize local economies (i.e., creation of small cooperatives and microenterprises).

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in India, which is a *permanent* public work-creation program, was introduced to generate employment for members of poor rural households during the agricultural off-season. NREGA in 2005 was voted in as an amendment to the constitution of India, making the state the guarantor of the “right to work.” It provides 100 days of work per year to households located in any of the poor rural districts throughout the country. Work projects so far have been selected with the explicit aim to

improve rural infrastructure, increase agricultural productivity, and enhance livelihood options. The program by now reaches over 50 million households, at a cost of about 1.2 percent of GDP.

The Expanded Public Works Program (EPWP) in South Africa was introduced in 2004 with a five-year target to create a million work opportunities. The program is now in its second phase aiming to double that target. To alleviate the extraordinary problem of chronic and structural unemployment that has averaged about 25 to 30 percent in the post-apartheid era, the mandate of EPWP was to utilize public sector budgets to provide short- to medium-term employment opportunities to unskilled, unemployed workers from poor and ultra-poor households. An innovative feature of the EPWP is the social sectors programs—of particular importance for gender equality, which is the issue we turn to.

### Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment, and EGPs

By creating job opportunities, EGPs also deliver income protection—wages. They represent *productive* SP instruments and recognize women in their *ability to participate in paid work*. Whether it promotes equality and empowerment for women is an open question. Much insight can be gained by addressing two key issues: (a) how are women ensured to have access to EGP jobs and under what conditions and (b) the degree to which selected work projects benefit them.<sup>18</sup>

Women are bound to face inequality patterns in EGPs, much like in the labor market. Entry barriers, job assignment segregation, and other asymmetries women face can be remediated at the design phase. For the most part, EGP job opportunities have typically been created in construction and maintenance of physical infrastructural assets. From a policy point of view, four aspects deserve special mention.

First, women's equitable access to jobs is predicated, on addressing the gender-differentiated supply of labor constraints. The unequal burden on women of unpaid care work hinders their participation in the programs. To address the issue, India's NREGA mandates that: (a) in all NREGA worksites, task some workers with providing and maintaining crèche, shade, and water for children; (b) time-off is made available for lactating mothers to feed young children; and (c) work projects are within a relatively short distance from women's dwellings with a maximum asset at 5 km. But anecdotal evidence suggests that childcare facilities are not always available and as a consequence, girl-children's time is being severely strained. The ability to enforce rules need to be as good as the rules themselves.

Second, the gendered nature of work assignments may exclude women from some jobs. Construction jobs in infrastructure have traditionally been carried out by men. Responding to this challenge, some EGPs have explicitly included targets for women. For example, the overall participation target for women per annum mandated to be 55 percent of workers for the EPWP, and NREGA mandates a 33 percent participation rate for women. The existing evidence shows women overwhelmingly wanting to enroll in EG infrastructural projects<sup>19</sup> and participation rates in some states in India such as Rajasthan are as high as 90 percent.

Third, another critical issue is the underrepresentation of women in semi-skilled categories of public works and their low participation rates as subcontractors and supervisors of projects. The shortfalls may be an extension of normative labor practices prevailing in the rest of the economy. When appropriate training is warranted, it must be made part of EGP initiatives. A good example in this regard comes from Peru, where the rural Roads Maintenance program (2003–06) increased female participation from 3.5 to 24 percent by setting a female participation quota of 10 percent in microenterprises, combined with a gender training program. Improved participation in decision-making roles in 284 microenterprises was directly linked to targeted training. The program also found that women could undertake all maintenance activities and had better performance than men in activities like surface presentation, forestry, signalization, and control of tasks.<sup>20</sup>

Skill-enhancing services can be often leveraged from within local and national government processes and budgetary allocations already in place. From the very beginning, EPWP in South Africa introduced a skill-upgrading component, allocating one day per week for this purpose, resulting in proper accreditation and certification by local authorities. Fourth, equal pay for comparable work must be safeguarded. By setting identical wage “floors” for men and women, EGPs can effectively set the precedent to address the gender

earnings gap. NREGA, for example, has introduced stipulations requiring women to be paid equal wages. Women received the identical amount as men, 85 rupees per day as compared to 47 to 58 rupees they would have received in unskilled agricultural and other casual labor as women.<sup>21</sup>

Transformation through work for pay is a complex process. Direct involvement of women workers themselves is important regarding their work assignment choices and direct receipt of remuneration through biofeedback cards, instead of being handled by other “supervisory” household members (fathers, husbands, and mothers-in-law). As a result, their “positioning” shifts: in their own eyes, in their families, and in the community.

### 3.3.4. Ensuring Selected Projects to Reduce Women’s Unpaid Work

Awareness of gender-differentiated priorities can provide guidance and insights in choosing socially useful projects. Social infrastructure projects that bridge backlogs in social service delivery benefits community life but also narrows gender-based inequalities in unpaid work. Physical infrastructure projects can be leveraged with the aim to contribute to reduction in unpaid work. We start with some examples of the latter and then discuss experiences that allow for enlarged PW options that encompass direct service delivery.

Physical infrastructure improve women’s lives by reducing drudgery and their time-taxing burdens in performing tasks related to sanitation, water and firewood collection, daily maintenance of living quarters, accessing free goods from public lands, cooking, etc., such as:

- Construction of more durable housing (Argentina) and ecological latrines (South Africa)
- Construction of small bridges, feeder roads, and paving of internal roads (India)
- Construction of water-harvesting structures and improving traditional structures (India)
- Regeneration of common lands, plantation, and reforestation (Ethiopia)
- Organizing the collection and distribution of water and firewood (India)
- Construction of public-use ovens for meal preparation (Argentina)
- Waste land development; watershed development (Ethiopia and India)

Social infrastructure is an integral part of social inclusion and human development, and it must be developed in conjunction with physical infrastructure. This requires job creation in both sectors. In this regard, there are plenty of “hidden vacancies” waiting to be filled.<sup>22</sup>

The hidden vacancies can be identified in early childhood development, after-school programs, home-based care, and assistance to the elderly the disabled, and turned into paying jobs for a cadre of EGP workers. The complementarity of bridging gaps in physical and social infrastructure becomes transparent with a simple example. Encouraging educational attainment requires a suitable physical space for schooling. Yet, school attendance will fail if girls are required to help their families in taking care of the chronically ill at home, as is often the case in households with people living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular.

South Africa’s Social Sector projects, which are a part of the overall EPWP, provide a distinct example of gender awareness: Early Childhood Development and Community and Home Based Care were identified since the program’s inception as appropriate fields for job creation. In its current phase, phase two, the “Community Work Program” stands as an extension of Social Sector’s phase one, but adds immense value in that it takes a comprehensive community-needs approach. Last, but not least, the argument for social sector EGP works can also be made from an efficiency standpoint. Impacts of a large-scale EGP reach the entire economy through multiplicative linkages. The positive “multiplier” reverberations generate growth in employment, output, and ultimately in tax revenues at the province, state, and national levels. Antonopoulos et al. (2010)<sup>23</sup> show that the impacts on new job creation, new income, and the pro-poor distribution of that income, are stronger when investments are allocated in social services projects than in physical infrastructure. EGP *social care* projects also promote gender equality through social co-sharing of care work responsibilities.

## Concluding Remarks

Many countries have already embarked on the path the Social Protection Platform initiative envisions: a progressive and gradual expansion of domestic systems with the aim to provide coverage for all. In adopting a gender-equitable perspective, there are important country experiences and South-South cooperation can provide a platform for learning and custom-tailoring diverse instruments according to domestic needs. Most SP initiatives so far do not have clearly stated objectives that address gender risks nor are they focused on transforming gender inequality relations. Yet, there are powerful exceptions and lessons learned from country level SP initiatives both in terms of variety of instruments and design elements that provide very useful insights.

There is overwhelming agreement that SP policy is critical in addressing both “life-cycle risks” and “livelihood risks”, and that gradually more comprehensive systems are going to be introduced across the world. The issue is how to arrive at a proper combination of instruments that achieve the goal from a gender equality perspective. A useful approach begins with the recognition that gender-informed SP interventions have the potential to nurture *transformative processes* that can contribute to women’s empowerment objectives

Life-cycle risks for children, and girls in particular, must address their nutritional, educational, and health risks, and for that a variety of instruments are available with *Conditional Cash Transfers* delivering strong outcomes. The challenge of CCTs from a gender perspective is that in many instances it is presumed to be an intervention that addresses not only children’s needs but also women’s needs—simply because the cash stipend is received by mothers. Design issues of CCTs must address this concern.

For older age women, undoubtedly old age social pensions are the appropriate vehicle especially when accompanied by in-kind free access to health care benefits. When they care for orphaned children, early childhood development services, free access to medical care, and social pension cash-transfers are necessary instruments that avert extreme hardship and deprivations.

For working-age women, a basic life-cycle risk they face is in the realm of securing a livelihood, which is compounded by reproductive responsibilities. Women in poverty work long hours and contribute to the well-being of their families and communities but often face multiple inequalities; part of the work they perform is “invisible” as it is unpaid and presumed to be their duty. This should not be an excuse for social policy “misreading” of women: their social role as *producers* must be fully recognized as their predominant identifier. If motherhood is to be celebrated, early childhood development centers, childcare, and other interventions that enable women to be equal partners within and beyond the bounds of their homes must be considered as a part of inclusive growth strategies and Social Protection for all agendas.

Responding to income insecurity risks and vulnerability, *Employment Guarantee Programs* have emerged as an instrument that can expand livelihood options. For women, it can serve many purposes. It can provide *protection* in that it transfers income; it can *promote* livelihood options in that they are hired as workers; and it can be *transformative* in that it validates their role as contributing to family income through *earned wages* while receiving equal wages for equal work. The challenge for EGPs is to ensure that unpaid work burdens of participating women are reduced. If EGP design ignores the differentiated social roles and responsibilities of men, women, and children in household production activities, they are certain to put pressure on children’s time or result in “triple” days for women in poverty. There is evidence that a combination of the two is taking place already and this, if left unattended, would be of grave concern.

- <sup>1</sup> Naila Kabeer, *Mainstreaming Gender in Social Protection for the Informal Economy* (Commonwealth Secretariat: London, 2008a); Armando Barrientos and David Hulme, “Social Protection for the Poor and Poorest in Developing Countries: Reflections on a Quiet Revolution”, *The University of Manchester Brooks World Poverty Institute*, BWPI Working Paper 30 (2008). <http://www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk/resources/Working-Papers/bwpi-wp-3008.pdf>; Rebecca Holmes and Nicola Jones, “Rethinking social protection using a gender lens.” *Overseas Development Institute, London* (2010). <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/5099.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup>Rania Antonopoulos, “The Current Economic and Financial Crisis: A Gender Perspective”, *Levy Economics Institute of Bard College*, Working Paper 562 (2009).; Rania Antonopoulos and Kim Kijong, “Public Job-creation Programs: The Economic Benefits of Investing in Social Care—Case Studies in South Africa and the United States”, *Levy Economics Institute of Bard College*, Working Paper 671 (2011).
- <sup>3</sup>Martin Ravallion, “Bailing Out the World’s Poorest.” *Challenge* 52, no. 2 (2009): 55–80; Rolph van der Hoeven, “Introduction: Employment, Inequality and Globalization: A continuous concern.” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 11, no. 1 (2010): 1–9.
- <sup>4</sup> “Globally, the theoretical coverage of existing statutory contributory pension schemes should amount to nearly 40 per cent of the working-age population (and 50 percent of the economically active population). In practice, however, the effective coverage amounts to no more than 25 percent of working-age men and women,” according to ILO (2010).
- <sup>5</sup>Ugo Gentilini and Steven Were Omamo, “Unveiling Social Safety Nets.” *World Food Programme*, Occasional Paper No. 20 (2009).
- <sup>6</sup> Sarah Cook and Naila Kabeer. “Socio-economic security over the life course: A global review of social protection” *Institute of Development Studies, the University of Sussex* (2009). <http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3830>
- <sup>7</sup>International Labor Organisation (ILO), “Can low-income countries afford basic social security?” *Social Security Policy Briefings*, Paper No. 3. (2008).
- <sup>8</sup> Kabeer, *Mainstreaming Gender in* (2008a); Maxine Molyneux, “Change and Continuity in Social Protection in Latin America: Mothers at the Service of the State?” *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development*, Geneva, 2007.; Maxine Molyneux, “Conditional Cash Transfers: A ‘Pathway to Women’s Empowerment’?” *Institute of Development Studies, Brighton* (2009). [http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/Pathways\\_Brief\\_5.pdf](http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/Pathways_Brief_5.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup>Stephen Devereux and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler, “Transformative Social Protection” *Institute of Development Studies, Brighton* (2004). [www.ids.ac.uk/download.cfm?file=wp232.pdf](http://www.ids.ac.uk/download.cfm?file=wp232.pdf)
- <sup>10</sup>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), “The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–2011: Women in Agriculture” (2011). <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e00.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> In that, we draw inspiration from the life-cycle framework developed by Kabeer, *Mainstreaming Gender in* (2008a); Naila Kabeer, “Social Protection in South Asia: A Review” *Center for Social Protection, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton* (2009).
- <sup>12</sup> A comprehensive listings can be found in Armando Barrientos, Miguel Niño-Zarazúa, and Mathilde Maitrot “Social Assistance in Developing Countries Database (Version 5.0)” *Chronic Poverty Research Centre, Manchester*, (2010). [http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication\\_files/social-assistance-database-version-5.pdf](http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication_files/social-assistance-database-version-5.pdf)
- <sup>13</sup> Some of the studies in the debates are: Maxine Molyneux, “Change and Continuity in Social Protection in Latin America: Mothers at the Service of the State?” *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development*, Geneva (2007).; Maxine Molyneux, “Conditional Cash Transfers: A ‘Pathway to Women’s Empowerment’?” *Institute of Development Studies, Brighton*, (2009). [http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/Pathways\\_Brief\\_5.pdf](http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/Pathways_Brief_5.pdf); Francesca Bastagli, “From Social Safety Net To Social Policy?: The Role of Conditional Cash Transfers in Welfare State Development in Latin America” *The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) Working Papers*, 30 (2009). <http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/IPCWorkingPaper60.pdf>; Jane Jenson, “Lost in Translation: The Social Investment Perspective and Gender Equality.” *Social Politics* 16, no. 4 (2009): 446–483; Clarissa Gondim Teixeira, “A Heterogeneity Analysis of the Bolsa Familia Program Effect on Men and Women’s Work Supply” *International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, Brasilia*, (2010). <http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/IPCWorkingPaper61.pdf>; Sirojuddin Arif, Muhammad Syukri, Widjajanti Isdijoso, Meuthia Rosfadhila, and Bambang Soelaksono, “Are conditions pro-women? A case study of a conditional cash transfer in Indonesia” *Institute of Development Studies, Brighton*, CSP Research

Report 03 (2011).

<sup>14</sup>Rania Antonopoulos, “The Unpaid Care Work- Paid Work Connection”, *International Labor Office, Policy Integration and Statistics Department, Geneva*, Working Paper no. 86 (2008); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), “*Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty: Status, trends and gaps*” (2010)

<sup>15</sup>Rania Antonopoulos and Ajit Zacharias, “Why Time Deficits Matter: Policy Implications for Poverty Eradication Strategies: Research Project on Mexico, Argentina, and Chile” *Levy Economics Institute of Bard College* (2011) *Forthcoming*

<sup>16</sup>FAO, *Gender Dimensions*.

<sup>17</sup> Some of the countries with social pension and the size of beneficiaries are: Botswana, Cape Verde, Lesotho, Timor-Leste, Nepal (2.4 million), Brazil, Philippines (2 million), South Africa (1.9 million), and India (15 million). The targeted input subsidy programs are in Bangladesh (BRAC) and Malawi (Starter Pack program). Some of the food and service provision programs are in Malawi (Food and Cash Transfer project), Cambodia (Priority Action Program). India, Ethiopia and South Africa have implemented large-scale employment guarantee programs with training components.

<sup>18</sup>Rania Antonopoulos, “Employment Guarantee Policies: A Gender Perspective” *UNDP Poverty Reduction and Gender Equality Series Policy Brief*, No. 2 (2010).

<sup>19</sup>Stephen Devereux and Colette Solomon, “Employment Creation Programs: The International Experience.” *International Labor Office, Economic and Labor Market Analysis Department, Geneva* (2006).  
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<sup>20</sup>María, T Gutiérrez, *Relaciones de Género en un Proyecto de Infraestructura Vial: Medidas afirmativas en pro de la inclusión de la mujer en el espacio laboral (PUCP, PROVIAS RURAL MTC, Perú, 2005)*

<sup>21</sup>Nandini Nayak and Reetika Khera. “Women workers and perceptions of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India.” *School of Oriental and African Studies Working Papers*, (2009).  
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<sup>22</sup>Rania Antonopoulos, “The Right to a Job, the Right Types of Employment” *Levy Economics Institute*, Working Paper 516 (2007).

<sup>23</sup>Rania Antonopoulos, Kijong Kim, Thomas Masterson, and Ajit Zacharias. “Investing in Care: A Strategy for Effective and Equitable Job Creation.” *Levy Economics Institute of Bard College*, Working Paper 610 (2010).

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