In Ethiopia, as in many other African countries, there is a pressing need to improve household food security. An emerging consensus suggests that this is most easily accomplished through two development strategies with two complementary dimensions: investments that facilitate income generation and asset accumulation (infrastructure development, improved technologies for agriculture, etc.), and interventions that protect the poorest from hunger, prevent asset depletion and provide a platform on which the growth interventions can take place. Given limited resources for the latter, there needs to be an allocation mechanism. But in a country like Ethiopia—where poverty is widespread and income distribution relatively equal—how does targeting work when “everyone is poor”? 

We consider this issue in the context of Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), a federal government program, implemented almost entirely through government systems with harmonized donor support. The objective of the PSNP is to assure food consumption and prevent asset depletion for rural food-insecure households in a way that stimulates markets, improves access to services and natural resources, and rehabilitates and enhances the natural environment (FSCD 2007).

Food aid targeting in Ethiopia has a long history of relying on community-based targeting systems which have been seen as effective. The PSNP adopted this system while further refining the targeting criteria to capture chronic food insecurity—defined as a three months food gap or more and receiving food aid for three consecutive years. The PSNP uses a mix of geographic and community-based targeting to identify chronically food-insecure households in chronically food-insecure woredas. After determining PSNP eligibility based on these criteria, households are assigned to public works or direct support: eligible households with able-bodied adults receive transfers for their participation in public works projects, while those households that cannot provide labor or other means of support receive unconditional transfers. Most beneficiary households participate in public works (90% of all PSNP transfers); a much smaller proportion receives direct support. In 2008, the program operated in the 290 most food-insecure of the approximately 670 woredas in rural Ethiopia.

Evaluating the PSNP targeting performance
To evaluate the targeting system of the PSNP, we use quantitative survey data collected in 2008 at the household and locality level in the four major regions covered by the PSNP: Tigray, Amhara, Oromiya, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People’s Region (SNNPR).

Targeting as perceived by local officials knowing the PSNP operation. The results show that there is an emphasis on using poverty as a leading eligibility criterion for the targeting of public work beneficiaries. However, household food insecurity is not often reported as an explicit targeting criterion for public works. The approach to targeting for direct support differed, with high priority given to households with limited labor endowments. Survey respondents did not once list food insecurity as a criterion. Some regional variations are found.

Targeting as perceived by household respondents. Table 1 shows households’ understanding of how the PSNP public works components were targeted. The majority of households identified poverty as a criterion for public works. Households do not generally perceive that religious affiliation, ethnicity, or personal connections affect the likelihood of selection into public works; the one exception being Oromiya. The perception that a quota system exists is found in all regions and especially in Tigray. Being affected by drought is also seen as a common criterion for selection.

Selection into public works, analyzed characteristics. Generally, the targeting principles laid out in the Project Implementation Manual (PIM) are being followed, but with some regional variation. As household wealth increases, the likelihood of participation declines, as it does for households with older heads, female heads, and households with high dependency ratios. More adult members in the household, experiencing a drought shock, and being born in the village all increase the likelihood of selection for public works. The use of these characteristics as means of targeting households does not change meaningfully over time.

Selection into direct support, analyzed characteristics. The targeting principles laid out in the PIM for direct support are being followed. Infirmity and absence of labor power seem the factors driving selection as households with older heads, older

The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is targeted towards households that are both food-insecure and poor. Overall the targeting principles laid out in the Project Implementation Manual are being followed, but with some regional variation. Over time, community understanding of targeting criteria improved across most of the PSNP regions. From an international perspective, the PSNP is well-targeted. The need for continuous capacity building and the level of follow-up and monitoring from higher level implementers have important implications for how well communities can target resources to the poorest.
men, and fewer younger men are more likely to receive these payments. A female headed household is also more likely to be a direct support recipient. Characteristics related to poverty play a much smaller role in determining selection.

Table 1—Criteria used to select public works participants as perceived by households in 2008, by region (percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion used as reported by households</th>
<th>Tigray</th>
<th>Amhara</th>
<th>Oromia</th>
<th>SNNPR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who are seen to be poor</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with small or no landholding</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household composition</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old or disabled people</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious or ethnic groups</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family or friends of project staff or</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>village leadership</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The targeting of the PSNP from an international perspective

We used a method developed by Coady, Grosh and Hoddinott (2004) to investigate how good the PSNP criteria are functioning by international standards. In addition to the food security survey data we applied data from the Household Income and Consumption Expenditure Survey (HICES 2004/05) and the Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS 2004).

PSNP has superior targeting in comparison to any of the African safety net programs reported in Coady, Grosh, and Hoddinott (2004). However, there is some regional variation. Targeting is, by international standards, considerably above average in Tigray and Oromiya, slightly below average but still progressive in Amhara, and poor in SNNPR. In addition, we find that targeting of direct support is poor when based on per capita consumption. Nevertheless targeting is in fact done based on household consumption—without adjusting for size—and based on this, targeting is excellent.

Improving transparency and accountability

We examined which factors are correlated with positive targeting outcomes. This is particularly important because the PSNP introduced a number of reforms to promote community participation in the targeting process to improve transparency and accountability.

Just below 70 percent of households report that they were well-informed about how the PSNP worked. Fewer (47 percent) perceived the selection process as fair and only a third had the opportunity to comment on the selection process.

Generally, Tigray and SNNPR had the strongest process indicators and Oromiya the poorest.

Composition and activities of the Community Food Security Task Forces (CFSTF) affect process indicators. The presence of elderly and women in the CFSTF improves targeting performance; but greater numbers of development agents on the CFSTF is associated with poorer process indicators. When CFSTF are run well, the likelihood that the selection process is perceived to be fair is higher. When selection processes are amended so as to favor non-poor households (for example, when local leaders indicate that it is acceptable to hire some skilled labor to undertake public works tasks), perception of fairness is lower. Interestingly, when this occurs, there is less likelihood that households can comment on the selection of beneficiaries.

Conclusion

The PSNP is targeted towards households that are both food-insecure and poor in terms of total household resources. Public works projects targeted the poor for participation, rather than food-insecure households, but as poverty is highly correlated with food insecurity, food-insecure households were targeted as well. The program targeted direct support towards households with limited labor endowments, rather than targeting based on poverty. Over time, community understanding of targeting criteria improved across most of the PSNP regions. There is regional variation in targeting—unsurprising as the PIM allows for community-based norms to be used—but overall the PIM guidelines were followed. There is little evidence of elite capture throughout the regions where the PSNP is being operated. Differences in how the CFSTF are run matter for targeting performance. In cases where selection processes are amended to include non-poor households, targeting performance is weakened.

From an international perspective, the PSNP is well-targeted. Based on the Coady-Grosh-Hoddinott indices calculated for this sample, targeting is progressive in general. Moreover, the PSNP is better targeted than any of the African safety net programs reported in Coady, Grosh, and Hoddinott (2004).

The improvement in targeting outcomes since the start of the PSNP suggests that program size has important implications for how well communities can target resources to the poorest, as well as the need for continuous capacity building and follow-up and monitoring from higher level implementers.

References


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