

**CHALLENGES OF PRODUCTIVE SAFETY NET PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AT LOCAL LEVEL: THE CASE OF KUYU WOREDA, NORTH SHEWA ZONE, OROMIA REGION, THIOPIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study assesses the challenges faced in the implementation of Productive Safety Net Programs (PSNP) at woreda (district) level. Household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews are the major sources of data. Study results indicate that poor geographical, administrative, and community targeting are evident. The process of targeting the poor is froth with nepotism, corruption as demonstrated by high inclusion ratio of non-poor households in the program. Other challenges which negatively affect the program include weak institutional linkages and lack of active community participation in the decision making process.*

## INTRODUCTION

Food insecurity resulting from recurrent droughts, low input and output of subsistence agriculture, and widespread poverty are some of the major challenges facing developing countries, especially in Africa, south of the Sahara. In response to this threat, productive safety net programs (PSNPs) have been instituted to alleviate food insecurity. PSNPs are formal programs meant to benefit individuals and households who are chronically food insecure, unable to work, or experience temporary decline in purchasing power by providing them with income or a substitute for income. Such programs include cash and in-kind transfer programs, subsidies, and labor-intensive public works (Samuel, 2006; Coates & Rogers, 2002; Subbarao, Boneerjee, Braithwaite, Carvalho, Ezemenari, and Thompson, 1997).

Ethiopia experiences both chronic and temporal food insecurity problems. According to the Department for International Development (DFID) (2006), more than eight million people are chronically food insecure. To alleviate this problem, in 2004, the Government designed the PSNP as a medium term solution to the food insecurity problem. The program's other objectives include the protection of household assets depletion and community assets building. Public Works (PW) and Direct Support (DS) are the mechanisms used to transfer cash/food resource to the chronically food insecure people (MoARD, 2004).

PSNP was planned to reach more than eight million chronically food insecure people within the years 2005 to 2010. According to the program, five million people in about 263 *woredas* (district level administration) of Ethiopia's eight of the nine regions were targeted in the year 2005. The mechanisms used for targeting eligible households included geographical, administrative, and community targeting approaches. The mode of payment was food and/or cash (Samuel, 2006; MoARD, 2004).

While some studies have been carried out on the food security situation in Ethiopia (Solomon & Yeraswork, 1985; Sharp, 1997), most of these have been done at national level. There seems to be a dearth of studies that deal with challenges facing PSNP at *woreda* level (Gebremdhin & Swinton, 2000; Clay, Daniel & Debebe, 1999), a gap that this study attempts to fill.

Thus, this study utilizes the case study approach to assess the challenges of PSNP implementation in Kuyu *Woreda*, North Shewa Zone, Oromia Region, Ethiopia. Kuyu is selected for study mainly because it is one of the first *woredas* selected in 2005 for PSNP implementation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, three of the twenty *kebeles* (villages) in Kuyu *woreda* implementing PSNP were randomly selected for study. The selected *kebeles* had a total of 434 beneficiary households - 391 were engaged in public works (PW) while 43 received direct support (DS). A sample of 265 households was drawn from both DS and PW components proportionally using systematic random sampling technique. Of these, 236 were selected from the PW participants while 29 were drawn from DS participants.

Both primary and secondary data were collected for the study during the period February to June, 2007. The main primary data collection methods employed included use of both structured and unstructured questionnaires, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and field observations. The questionnaires contained questions on socio-economic characteristics of the PSNP beneficiary households, targeting process, transfers, public works related issues, and community participation in PSNP.

Three focus groups: women, non-beneficiaries, and other public work participants were formed in each of the three sample *kebeles*. Information obtained through this method complemented that collected through the beneficiaries' survey. Key informant interviews were also held with members of Food Security Task Forces (FSTFs), Development Agents (DAs), and community leaders at *woreda*, *kebele* (village), and community levels to get in-depth information on challenges and opportunities of PSNP implementation at *kebele* and *woreda* levels. In addition, checklists were prepared to provide a framework within which the researchers facilitated discussions to explore in-depth perception of the participants in the program.

As for the secondary data, quarterly PSNP reports of Kuyu *woreda* and sample *kebeles*, PSNP Implementation Manual and PSNP monitoring, and evaluation guidelines formed the key sources of this data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### *(a) Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents*

The survey results indicate that the households vary in their socio-economic characteristics. Sixty-eight percent are male-headed, while the remaining 32% are female-headed. The majority of them (95%) are in the productive age group range (15 to 64) while household heads over 65 years account for only five percent. Although the average family size is five, about 30% have seven or

more household members indicating that their household sizes are indeed large, which has an implication in terms of feeding them.

As for marital status, 72% are married. The unmarried ones are mostly those who are living with their aged and/or disabled family members. Regarding educational levels, survey results indicate a low level of education for the *woreda*, with 49% having never been to school and only two percent having gone above grade eight. This again has a negative bearing on their ability to articulate ways of improving their livelihoods.

(b) *Assets ownership*

Assets ownership, and to a certain extent their quality, are used as an indicator of wealth of a person/household. In this study, asset ownership status of the households was manifested through their domestic assets including housing, livestock ownership, and farmland. Survey results indicate that the majority (97%) have their own houses of different types. However, most of these houses are of poor quality with walls made of mud and wood. Only three percent of the households reported not having a house of their own and stay with relatives.

Ownership of other domestic assets, such as tables, chairs, and radios is also very low and most of them are of low price. None of the respondents reported owning a television, bicycle, or any other major domestic asset (Table 1). This indicates that the community is poor, as its domestic assets are limited and their estimated values relatively low.

**Table 1: Domestic Assets of Sample Households**

Type of Asset	Quantity										EAP		
	1		2		3		4		5		Total		
	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	
Bed	161	60.8	3	0.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	164	61.9	15.0
Chair	32	12.1	10	3.8	6	2.3	11	4.2	6	2.3	65	24.5	7.0
Table	25	9.4	2	0.75	-	-	-	-	-	-	27	10.2	20.0
Radio	47	17.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47	17.7	75.0
TV	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bicycle	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Household Survey, 2007

\*EAP refers to Estimated Average Price, Fr – Frequency, 1US\$ = 9.49 birr as at end of September, 2007

The study further reveals that the households in Kuyu *woreda* keep livestock which include cattle, sheep, and goats but ownership of such assets is also generally low (Table 2).

**Table 2: Livestock Ownership Status of Sample Households**

No.	1		2		3		4		5		6		Total		EAP
	Fr	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	
Oxen	110	41.5	28	10.8	41	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	142	53.6	1500
Bull	34	12.8	6	2.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40	15.1	913
Cow	88	33.2	7	2.6	3	1.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	98	37.0	1092
Calf	72	27.2	4	1.5	4	1.5	1	0.4	-	-	-	-	77	29.1	651
Sheep	21	7.9	9	3.3	1	0.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	64	24.2	150
Goat	21	7.9	6	2.3	6	2.3	1	0.4	2	0.8	1	0.4	47	17.7	125

Source: Household survey, 2007

About 54% of the households own oxen while 30% have cows. The low level of ownership of such assets is further manifested by the fact that of the 142 households who have oxen, 110 of them only have one ox. Similarly, of the 98 who have cows, 88 own only one cow per household. The average estimated price of ox in the *woreda* is 1500.00 birr while that of a milk cow is 1092.00 birr. As for ownership of other livestock, 30%, 3%, and 18% indicate that they have calf, sheep, and goat respectively indicating the extremely low level of ownership of the assets. The total estimated asset value of sample households ranges from 15 birr (for households with only one bed) to 21, 651.00 birr (for households with both major livestock and some domestic assets). This, in a way, indicates the high magnitude of poverty of the respondents and the *woreda* as a whole.

As for ownership of farmland, the survey results indicate that of the 265 households, 24% are landless; 35% have less than 0.5 hectare; 58% have 0.5 to 2.5 hectares, while six percent have farm sizes above 2.5 hectares, of which only four had the maximum farm size of four hectares (Table 3).

**Table 3: Farm Size of Sample Households**

Farm Size (ha)	Frequency	Percent
Less than 0.5	72	<b>35.3</b>
0.5 -2.5	119	<b>58.3</b>
Over 2.5	13	<b>6.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	204*	<b>100.0</b>
Farmland Rented in		
0.05-0.50	43	<b>56.6</b>
0.50-1.00	27	<b>35.5</b>
1.00-2.00	6	<b>7.9</b>
<b>Total</b>	76	<b>100.0</b>
Farmland Rented out		
0.01-0.50	21	<b>84</b>
0.50-1.00	3	<b>12</b>
1.00-2.50	1	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Household Survey, 2007

\*61 households (23.8% of the 265) do not have farmland

The survey also shows that the average farm size in the study area is about one hectare. The figure is not far off from other regions of Ethiopia. For example, North Shewa Zone has an average of about two hectares and the Oromia Region has about one and a half hectares per household (CSA, 2006). To supplement their small holdings, 76 households have rented in farmland, but the units rented are generally very small with 92% of them being less than half a hectare. On the other hand, 20 households rented out farmland of different sizes, but generally involve very small pieces of land as well (Table 3).

Since farmland is small, subsistence agricultural activities are carried out on a small scale (Table 4). The major crops grown by households include *teff*, sorghum, and wheat. Survey results indicate that 77%, 20%, and 47% of the surveyed households grow *teff*, wheat, and sorghum, respectively.

**Table 4: Annual Crop Production in 2006 (in Quintal)**

Quantity in Quintal	<i>Teff</i>		Wheat		Sorghum		Other	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
0.25-1.00	75	36.6	26	52.0	27	21.6	14	35.9
1.00-2.00	78	38.0	12	24.0	43	34.4	9	23.1
2.00-3.00	14	6.8	6	12.0	14	11.2	14	35.9
3.00-8.00	38	18.6	6	12.0	41	32.8	2	5.1
Total	205	100	50	100	125	100	39	100

Source:  
Household  
Survey,  
2007  
  
The  
amount

nt produced by these farm households is largely consumed. This is mainly because of the small quantities produced, which in most cases cannot last until the next harvesting season. The study also reveals that about 15% of the households cultivate cash crops, such as oil seeds, but only reap small quantities which are sold for cash, but the amount got is generally insignificant.

Off farm activities often supplement income from agricultural activities in rural areas. Key informants reveal that able bodied persons often migrate to nearby towns to work mostly as daily laborers. Others sell cow dung, firewood, pottery, and crotchety in the nearby towns. The earnings from such activities are low averaging about 400 birr per annum.

(c) *PSNP targeting*

The Program Implementation Manual (PIM) describes how to identify eligible groups (i.e. chronic food insecure households) (MoARD, 2004). Mechanisms used for targeting eligible households include geographical, administrative, and community targeting approaches. According to Barret & Clay (2001), geographical targeting is when programs are targeted spatially by state, district, municipality, or community in the expectation that these areas are relatively homogenous according to wealth, income, or other indicators of vulnerability. However, this approach restricts participants administratively and often entails substantial leakage to the non-needy within the target sub-population. Administrative targeting mechanism applies a specific set of criteria for qualified household selection. It requires documentation of household incomes and assets. This mechanism can be relatively accurate in higher income settings when selecting the most vulnerable households. In low-income settings, it is infeasible and often open to leakage. Community targeting allows

individuals who feel they should qualify to put themselves forward to participate in the safety nets. The final selection decision rests with a committee made up of community members. However, difficulties often arise in having an appropriate representation in the committee (Humphrey, 1998). The three definitions are used in this study.

With regard to geographical targeting, the lack of reliable socio-economic data, indicating effective crop, livelihood, and socio-economic assessment of each *kebele*, is cited by the *woreda* Food Security Coordinator (FSCO) as a major challenge faced when identifying *kebeles* with affected households. As a result, the tendency has been to include all *kebeles* into the program resulting in poor geographical targeting in the *woreda* as a whole. This creates the challenge of achieving the graduation of intended households to food secure status.

On administrative and community targeting, the targeting process involves allocating quotas to *kebeles* by the *woreda*, and the *kebele* assembly votes for poorest of the poor. The list drawn by the *kebele* assembly is submitted to *kebele* cabinet (councilors) for vetting before being presented to the *woreda* Food Security Task Force (FSTF). The *woreda* cabinet then refines the beneficiary list before it is submitted to the Regional Bureau (MoARD, 2004).

However, during group discussions, it was revealed that the process is froth with nepotism and corruption. Voting for kin, relatives, and households of the same tribe is prevalent at the *kebele* level. Regarding households' perception on the major criteria of targeting, 53% of the respondents indicate that generally the poorest are targeted; 25% attribute it to political orientation of the household heads; 15% to family size; 5% to farm size; and the rest to the aged and disabled (Table 5). Thus, while the poorest are targeted, it is evident that other factors compromise targeting the real poor. This calls for community education on the essence of the program in their communities.

**Table 5: Households' Perception on the Major Criteria of Targeting**

Criteria	Frequency	Percent
Poorest	141	53.2
Political Attitude	65	24.5
Farm Size	14	15.0
Family Size	40	5.3
Aged and Disabled	5	2.0
Total	265	100

Source: Household Survey, 2007

As to whether the targeting process is fair or not, 65% of the respondents report that the process is unfair, while the rest say it is fair. During non-beneficiary group discussions, it was highlighted that the program includes the non-chronic food insecure (nearest and dearest) of the *kebele* food security task force (KFSTF) households and that no attempt is being made by the authorities to weed out these from the program since the irregularities surfaced during the second year of the program implementation.

In order to determine the inclusion ratio (i.e. the proportion of non-poor to those who are poor in the program) local wealth ranking method is used. The latter involves the assessment of the value of household assets and the farm size, which are then used to classify beneficiary households into *rich*, *medium*, and *poor* wealth categories. In the study area, a farmer is considered *rich* locally if s/he has two or more oxen, two or more cows, and farmland of 2.5 hectares or more; *medium* with one to two oxen, one to two cows, and between 0.5 and 2.5 hectares of farmland; *poor* with less than half hectare of farmland, one or no ox, and zero to one cow. Thus, the ranking system takes into consideration the price of livestock as well as domestic assets together with farm size.

According to this wealth classification, the survey results indicate that of the 265 households, 60% fall under poor wealth status and the rest fall into the medium and rich categories. This implies that PSNP resources are leaked to about 39% of the surveyed households. Thus, for every 100 beneficiary households, there were about 39 non-poor households participating in the program. The findings are corroborated by evidence from the non-beneficiary focus group discussion participants who express concern at the high level of non-poor households participating in the program at the expense of the real chronic food insecure households. This, therefore, calls for a thorough socio-

economic assessment of all participating households with the aim of flushing out non-deserving households. The assessment should also be extended to non-participating beneficiaries so that those left out before can now be included in the program.

Political pressure on targeting is also observed in the study. The inception, as well as the launch of PSNP in Ethiopia, coincided with the national legislative election campaigns of 2005. The situation made it possible to use PSNP as a tool for election campaigns by both the ruling and opposition parties (Sharp, Brown & Amdissa, 2006). This study finds that 25% of the surveyed households report that their inclusion is due to political support. Information obtained from women focus group discussions also reveals the presence of some political influence in the selection of the program beneficiaries during the first year (2005) targeting process.

The survey further reveals that the PSNP is froth with formidable challenges ranging from non-inclusion of poor people to giving less consideration to eligible female headed households (Table 6).

**Table 6: Major Problems Prevailing in the Process of Households Targeting**

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Non-poor inclusion	68	25.7
Exclusion of the neediest	51	19.3
Corruption	52	19.6
Lack of community participation	37	13.9
Less consideration of aged and disabled	44	16.6
Less consideration of female headed households	13	4.9
Total	265	100.0

Source: Household Survey, 2007

When the survey respondents were asked to rank the major challenges of the targeting process, results show that the non-participation of non-chronic food insecure is ranked as first. Others that follow are corruption, exclusion of the poorest (due to quota system), and lack of community participation, in that order. The inability to give priority to the aged, disabled, and female headed households are not rated high indicating that the inclusion of non-chronic food insecure and corruption are burning issues in the communities. Program officials should thus hold regular project review meetings with the communities where such issues can be addressed. The communities should be given the opportunity to come up with their own home grown solutions to

nip the problems in the bud. This again emphasizes the need to involve communities throughout the project cycle.

*(d) Appeals on targeting process*

In theory, the program implementation manual (PIM) asserts that individuals, households, and groups have the right to appeal against targeting decisions. The *kebele* cabinets and the *woreda* food security task forces (WFSTFs) are the first and second tier of appeal, respectively. The former is responsible for hearing any complaints, claims, or appeals on the beneficiary selection process and for taking appropriate corrective measures in consultation with the WFSTFs (MoARD, 2004). Ideally, appeals should be resolved at the *kebele* level, and reviews and responses to an appeal should be done within two days at *kebele* level and three days at *woreda* level. The community, *kebele*, and *woreda* FSTFs have the right to appeal to the higher administrative level. In case of inadequate resources to cover the targeted beneficiaries, a contingency fund, which is equal to five percent of the base program costs, exists largely to respond to such appeals (MoARD, 2004; FSCB, 2004).

The study results reveal that there is a lack of strong institutionalized mechanism for appeals. Non-beneficiaries (i.e. those excluded from the program) usually individually appeal to *kebele* and *woredas* for inclusion in the program, but such appeals take long to be processed. In fact, *kebeles* are blamed for referring every appeal to the *woreda* rather than dealing with the case and taking corrective measures at that level. During focus group discussions, non-beneficiaries complained against *kebele* cabinets and the *woreda* FSCO for delays in reviewing their cases.

Barriers to appeals are found to centre on the lack of awareness on the part of appellants (individuals) on modalities of raising grievances, the restrictive quota system, and the low rate of taking corrective actions by *kebele* cabinets and *woreda* FSCO. Focus group discussions recommend strong corrective measures to be taken at community, *kebele*, and *woreda* levels to make the appeal mechanism efficient and responsive.

*(e) Financial payments*

PSNP is a government owned program co-financed by both donors and the Ethiopian government. Every registered individual in the family is entitled to 180 birr annually, be it in the DS or PW component of the program. In Kuyu *woreda*, cash is the mode of transfer. On what mode of transfer

participants prefer, 89% of the households indicate that they prefer the transfer to be in kind/food, while the rest are satisfied with cash payment. During participant group discussions, it was raised that the amount of cash transfer (six birr/day/person) is too little and cannot support the consumption level of the households. Other concerns raised include the late payment of the 180 birr, which in most cases is transferred after a year and for that matter, is not paid in full in some cases. It is also noted that the location at which payments are made – *woreda* town – is often too far from some *kebeles* and participants are made to stay up to two days waiting to be paid the transfer. In such cases, affected participants have to spend extra money for food, transportation, and accommodation, hence their suggestion that they be paid at their work places.

Further, concern raised is that the fragmented nature of the payments prohibits them from making bulk purchases of food crops during relatively better grain marketing days. They noted that the timing of payments does not take into consideration the grain marketing periods of the localities. Mostly, it is during September or October that transfers are made when little grain is available on the market. Whatever grain is available then is in most cases too expensive for them as this period coincides with the “hungry season” – a period of chronic food shortage. Thus, it can be concluded that the payment periods are not demand driven as they give little attention to the period of households’ food shortage period, an issue that should be addressed by the *Woreda* Cabinet.

(f) *Community Participation in Public Works*

In the program, chronic food insecure households with able bodied adults are eligible to participate in the public works. Public works projects are undertaken in the construction of check dams, bunds, water ways, roads, ponds, and wells. Beneficiaries are expected to contribute tools and their labor.

From field observations and information obtained from DAs in the study areas, a large proportion of the public works involve the construction of bunds and water-ways. Prior to 2007, PW were done in different villages within *kebeles*. For instance, during 2005 and 2006, irrespective of the ecological zone difference, participants undertook PW near their homes. However, since the beginning of 2007, the thrust has changed to critical watershed areas identified in each *kebele*. All participants of the PW component work together on such projects regardless of how far they are from the participants’ homes. This creates dissatisfaction among participants who stay far away from the projects. One key informant revealed that in their area, two groups withdrew from the program

because PSNP projects sites are too far away from their homes. This, therefore, calls for the need for the DAs to listen to the concerns of the community and take corrective measures.

Regarding the selection of PW sites, in principle, it is the local people under the auspices of the DAs and experts who identify problem areas and select the sites. However, survey results indicate that in the study areas, the communities are not involved in both problem identification and site selection. About 82% of the respondents report that the DAs, *woreda* experts, and *kebele* cabinets decide on what is to be done and where it must be done. Only 18% report having been present when the projects site selections were made. This clearly indicates that community participation is weak in project identification and planning in the study areas.

During the participant focus group discussions, it was also noted that problem identification and site selection is not demand driven. For example, it was highlighted that the major problem in the *woreda* is the shortage of potable water and yet this issue was never considered in the program by the authorities. Instead, focus was given to bund construction and check dam construction, which are not priority areas for the community. Thus, it is evident that there is a mismatch between the people's needs and the implementing agencies' due to lack of community participation in the decision making process.

Focus group discussions also revealed that the workmanship displayed on the construction of bunds and check dams is good in most cases. However, it was felt that there is need to accommodate indigenous knowledge systems in such constructions so as to minimize maintenance costs. Also, non-beneficiary involvement in implementation of soil and water conservation construction projects where such infrastructure is located in their areas was emphasized so that they can acquire knowledge on how to maintain such structures in case of destruction by elements.

During the field survey, some damaged bunds that had been constructed in 2006 were observed. One key informant revealed that once PW participants construct the bunds, it is up to the owner of the farm or the whole community to maintain the assets. It then becomes obvious that if the users do not have the capacity to maintain such assets, then it is a waste of resources to build such structures in the first place. Thus, the issue of the sustainability of projects is crucial and should be taken into consideration when planning such community assets under PSNP.

**Table 7: Perception of Households on the Challenges of Participation on Major Decision Making Process of PSNP Implementation**

Challenges	frequency	Percentage
Done by DAs & Cabinets	141	53.2
Lack of information & appropriate contact	90	33.8
Lack of request and/or pressure	14	5.5
Lack of time	12	4.5
Aged and Disabled	8	3.0
Total	265	100.0

Source: Household Survey, 2007

The survey respondents were asked to indicate the challenges contributing to lack of community participation in the decision making process of PSNP. Their prioritization is shown in Table 7. According to the survey, the majority of the households (53%) feel that the major challenges inhibiting them from participation in the decision making process on PSNP implementation are due to the imposing attitude of DAs and Cabinets; 34% highlight lack of information and appropriate contacts; 6% lack of request and/or pressure; 4% lack of time; and 3% highlight that some of the participants are aged and disabled. This, in a way, indicates that the communities are not satisfied with the way the program is being run in their areas. Both the *Woreda* Cabinet and the DAs should ensure that communities are involved in all stages of planning.

*(g) Gender and child labor issues*

The Project Implementation Manual (PIM) recommends that due attention be given to the nature of work that women are assigned to in PSNP projects, i.e. the tasks assigned to them should not be high energy demanding. Key informants reveal that gender aspects recommended by PIM are not being implemented in the projects. In the project areas, male and female PSNP participants are assigned similar tasks which in some cases demand a lot of stamina. Women focus group discussions also revealed that no special consideration is given to women regarding the nature of work that they are assigned to do in the program.

*We perform the same tasks as our male participants. Their presence is somewhat good because they back us while facing activities that need high energy. The reason is that we come here from different work burdens in the home and outside like cooking, water fetching, and other social commitments (Woman participant of the focus group in Dirre Hacho Kebele)*

Another aspect is that maternal leave is not offered in the project areas, although DAs said women have the right to such leave. Women focus group discussions expressed ignorance of such entitlements though Government Proclamation No. 377/2003, in its Article 88 sub article three, part six, points out that maternal leave is allowed for 90 days (60 day prenatal period and 30 days postnatal period) (FDRE, 2004). The discussions further revealed that women, at times provide a replacement during such periods. In cases where such replacements are not available, they are forced to report for duty within two weeks of the postnatal period. However, during women focus group discussions, no woman was reported having been punished for being off the public work activities for prolonged periods due to child birth. This issue is of major concern not only to women, but to all concerned with human rights. Women have a right for maternity leave and the program should abide by the Federal Regulations. These are some of the issues that should be raised at the regular project review meetings.

Regarding child labor, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution (1995) Article 36, 1(d) stipulates that “*Every child has the right not to be subject to exploitative practices, neither to be required nor permitted to perform work which may be hazardous or harmful to his or her education or elsewhere.*” On this issue, the PSNP implementation manual merely states that able bodied adults can work on the public work activities but is silent on age limits. During the field survey, about 23 children of less than 15 years of age were found working on public work activities in two of the project sites. Members of PW focus group discussion as well as the DAs confirmed that some households send children to represent them on the projects. When asked why they participated in the PW, the children cited various social problems: labor shortage in the household, maternity leave, problems related to health of participant family member, absence of participating family member due to different personal problems: ‘*I am living with aged grand families and I am working not only here but also on other agricultural activities too*’. ~ Child in PW participant in Halelu Chari Kebele.

What this may indicate is the prevalence of child labor, especially from labor deficient families. However, it is difficult to conclude whether child labor exploitation is prevalent in the *woreda* or not. However, the above citation is a good example of poor targeting as such a family should not be participating in PW but should be included under the DS component as the eligible household members are aged.

(g) *Institutional arrangements*

The implementation manual of PSNP provides a framework for institutional arrangements from federal to community level and assigns roles to each institution (MoARD, 2004). For the purpose of the study, emphasis was given to the *woreda* level institutions and *woreda* sector bureaus, such as those of finance, education, health, water resource, transport, and communication. These institutions have already been established in the *woreda* by the respective line ministries.

(i) *Woreda level institutions*

The *woreda* cabinet is the highest decision making body in the *woreda*, and is responsible for the approval of PSNP beneficiaries' lists, planned activities, and budgets. It works together with the *woreda* food security coordination office (FSCO) to vet beneficiary lists before these are submitted to the region for final approval.

The study reveals that the *woreda* cabinet has been negatively affected by high cabinet turn-over. The head of the *woreda* FSCO revealed that since the beginning of PSNP in 2005, the *woreda* cabinets have been changed three times due to reorganization programs taking place. This creates problems of lack of continuity in the execution of duties not only in PSNP, but in the *woreda* as a whole. The frequent changes also affect the timely revision and approval of PSNP annual plans and their execution. While these changes are at times necessary to revamp *woreda* administration, efforts should be made to ensure that such moves do not negatively impinge on development projects.

(ii) *Woreda Sector Bureaus*

The sector bureaus (including finance office, education, water supply and sanitation, and health) play important roles in supporting *kebeles* technically in PSNP planning and implementation of development activities in the project areas. They are given authority to prepare their own plans and sector budgets on safety nets, which are integrated into the PSNP overall budget. However in practice, this is not what is happening. The PSNP accountant revealed that the responsible *woreda* personnel in charge of producing *woreda* plans has not been adequately trained on PSNP's Integrated District Level Planning, except for a mere short orientation course on the program. As a result, the development plans of the *woreda* are haphazardly produced.

The accountant further revealed that major challenges faced by the bureaus include the erratic and untimely finance transfers from the region to the *woreda*, the high rate of staff turn-over, shortage of vehicles and security to facilitate the payment of beneficiaries at *kebele* level, and poor record keeping due to lack of automation in the governmental financial management system.

The above issues call for sustained *woreda* and *kebele* staff training programs to ensure that they are equipped with the relevant knowledge to facilitate them to execute their duties efficiently. Both in-house refresher courses and external courses are necessary to achieve this.

#### 4. THE WAY FORWARD

This research, set out to explore the challenges that face PSNP implementation at local (*woreda*) levels. It reveals PSNP implementation faces many challenges that relate to targeting, financial resource transfers, community participation, institutional arrangements, and other related issues. In order to alleviate the problems that face PSNP implementation, the study suggests the following measures as means to overcome the challenges.

##### (a) *Targeting*

Geographical, administrative, and community targeting are the major mechanisms used to identify eligible beneficiaries for PSNP in the *woreda*. While these are important mechanisms for identifying the target groups, results of this study show that the process is poorly done. There is a high inclusion ratio of non-poor households participating in the program at the expense of chronic food insecure households and that the process is froth with corruption and nepotism as is highlighted in nonparticipant group discussions.

To overcome some of these challenges, there is need for a revision of how to practice geographical targeting within the *woreda*. Some criteria should be set out on the targeting guidelines so that PSNP beneficiaries are identified through periodical local needs assessments. Also during the retargeting process, local mechanisms to avoid bias towards relatives must be strengthened. For instance, the problem of voting for the same tribe by the community members must be discouraged, and the essence of good governance should be cultivated right up to the *kebele* level so as to deny the corruptive activities during the retargeting process.

*(b) Financial Transfers*

The study results show that the community prefers transfers to be in kind as opposed to current practice of cash payments. The PSNP authorities have, therefore, to take heed of this genuine request by the communities that they rather are provided with grain than cash. Even regarding the current cash arrangements, there is need to reconsider the amount, mode, and timing of transfer payments. Cash transfer payments should take into account the local grain marketing period. The payment site should also be easily accessible to beneficiaries so as to save on time as well as financial resources in collecting the transfers. The regional government should also make efforts to improve budgetary provisions for transport and equipment so as to smooth the program implementation process.

*(c) Community participation in public works*

While current efforts being made under PSNP, such as bund and check dam construction, are commended, findings of the study further show that community participation is not demand driven as community priorities are not often considered in the program. Thus, there is need to consider and implement communities' prior problem areas first as is the case of portable water provision. In order to facilitate this approach, participatory approaches should be adopted when doing situational analysis and designing strategic plans for the program. The community, rather than DAs and local leaders, must set priority areas of PW projects.

Program sensitization and regular project review meetings should be carried out with beneficiaries, non beneficiaries, and other stakeholders at which among other issues, awareness of the importance of maintenance of community assets is imparted to the community. This exercise can be facilitated by the DAs and other relevant local authorities.

The role of women in the PSNP should be further re-visited with the aim of improving their working conditions. Issues of appropriate tasks that can be delegated to women and maternity leave are human rights issues which should be seen as such. Some of these are already enshrined in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's constitution and hence the PSNP should adhere to them.

*(d) Institutional arrangements*

Regarding institutional arrangements, findings of the study show that the *woreda* institutions are riddled by high human staff turnover, which affects program plans production and their execution.

While this is a national issue still, regional governments should strive to ensure that *woreda* level institutions are well organized and strengthened through capacity building programs. This will enable *woredas* to provide *kebeles* with the necessary technical support in the planning and implementation of community programs and projects. This can be achieved again through regular training programs aimed at improving the performance of both the *kebele* cabinets and *woreda* staff in implementing the PSNP. Such an approach can enhance the sustainability of the PSNP program.

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