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# Does shock-sensitive social protection promote gender equality?

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**SPaN**  
Supporting people through crisis



*Guidance Package on Social Protection across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus*

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## Addressing the issue of gender equality and women/girls' empowerment in shock-sensitive social protection debates - Does shock-sensitive social protection promote gender equality?

Humanitarian emergency support takes place in response to a wide range of crises, such as armed conflicts, seasonal stress, economic crises and health epidemics. The role of social protection in responding to emergencies has grown rapidly over the past few years, but while gender issues are increasingly recognized in everyday social protection, they are largely absent during shocks or crises. Efforts to address gender disparity in shock-sensitive social protection have been missing, leaving a major gap in terms of informing programme design and implementation, with potentially negative effects on outcomes for women and girls.

This is due to several reasons, including evidence and data limitations; the perception that it is too difficult to include gender in the face of other competing emergency priorities, and limited political support or acceptability of promoting equality and women's empowerment.

Increasingly, innovative and adaptive responses to large-scale emergencies, shocks and crises may, however, present an opportunity to increase gender equality – but only if the right foundations have been laid. Social protection targeting women has been relatively well received. Ensuring core social protection design is gender-sensitive and linking beyond the social-protection sector to other programmes of gender equality and empowerment would increase this.

Analysis and evidence-gathering in crisis contexts can be difficult. Moreover, traditionally, the unit of analysis for social protection is the household, and intra-household dynamics are not often considered. When programmes are not informed by adequate analysis at the individual and intra-household level, they are not designed to address gender inequality or empower women. Data and analysis are needed to create effective crisis response policy and programming that is built on sturdy existing social programmes.

Social protection should start from understanding risks to poverty, and risks to shocks from a gender perspective. Social protection programmes often work in clusters, such as shelter, nutrition and water, but gender is not a cluster. There is a need to consider how men and women experience poverty differently.

On a practical level, globally more women than men do not have official identification so programmes that register birth are slowly helping to address this issue. In public works programmes, having a quota for women's participation, childcare facilities and programmes that promote equal wages are all practical positive elements of social-protection design.

Getting social protection right in normal times builds women's and households' resilience. If gender-responsive design is the basis, it is easier to empower women through social protection programmes in a crisis. Crises can represent an opportunity to support positive policy changes, including in the design and implementation of social protection to tackle gender inequality.

### *How can social protection be better leveraged for women's empowerment outcomes?*

In general, we need to think more about humanitarian responses and the intersections with social protection – in particular, if you are 'building back better' to consider this not only in terms of infrastructure, but also in terms of other social and political relations. Integrating gender in social protection is not a 'stop-start' issue but is incremental and iterative.

Consequently, if a humanitarian crisis occurs attention to gender is already there – and is it vital that emergency response maintains the continuity of efforts to support gender equality and empowerment. There is a need for better connectivity between humanitarian clusters – especially because gender is not a cluster but should be mainstreamed throughout. Social protection has done relatively well to support women's basic and practical needs but social protection needs to be bolder in its role of supporting women's empowerment; having this foundation will also support better outcomes for shock-

responsive social protection by building women's (and their households') resilience in the context of crisis. To ensure more transformative and more strategic changes for women, SP actors should look beyond their 'silos' and build a coalition of support and allies with gender actors, both within and across institutions and civil society. There is a need to recognise the context specificity of gender. Social workers play an important role with their nuanced understanding of local circumstances that may require different approaches to similar situations in different places.

## How do we ensure that efforts to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus through social protection promote gender equality and women's and girls' outcomes?

For developing shock-responsive social protection programmes, Nupur Kukrety<sup>1</sup> explained that gender and social protection are a continuum, including in the context of crises, and efforts to include gender concerns in response programming must be consistently maintained and not be one-off or ad-hoc interventions.

Nupur explained that this effort requires the thorough analysis of gendered needs in humanitarian crises using a life-cycle approach as only such an approach can capture the range of risks and needs to be tackled by social protection in humanitarian (and other) contexts. Furthermore, treating the household as a unit in existing needs analyses in crisis

contexts poses a challenge to gender-sensitive response planning. Finally, a lesson learned in humanitarian contexts is that while the increasingly adopted cash transfer approach can be effective in these contexts, they need to be complemented by good quality services, such as health, education and protection services.

## How can gender equality and empowerment be better addressed ex-ante by social protection?

In the absence of crises and shocks, Rebecca Holmes<sup>2</sup> focused on the importance of assessing poverty and vulnerability from a gender perspective. Although female-headed households are often targeted based on their higher representation in poverty (in some contexts), gender-responsive social protection programmes can go beyond this to understand the key gendered dimensions of poverty and vulnerability.

Such gendered dimensions of poverty and vulnerability include, for example, women's limited economic opportunities, the gendered division of care and domestic responsibilities, and women's differential access to various coping strategies including finances such as credit as well as social capital. Gender-specific vulnerabilities and challenges can be addressed through core social protection design features which take into consideration women's differential roles and responsibilities. Examples of such design features include: the provision of quality child care at public works sites, consideration of women's travel time and security risks to collect income transfers or participate in employment programmes; ensuring equal wages. Monitoring programme design to capture

unintended effects such as gender-based violence and intra-household relations is also important. Programme monitoring has shown that women receiving social protection benefits directly report important effects such as control over income, support to their roles within the household, increased confidence, reduced tensions and conflicts, and improved bargaining and decision-making power. It is equally important to note that it is not only the 'cash' or the 'transfers' which support gender equitable outcomes and empowerment, it is also the complementary programmes such as awareness raising, financial inclusion, and supporting women taking up leadership positions which offer the most potential for more transformative and strategic change.



### CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

#### Challenges to integrating gender into shock-sensitive social protection programming in Malawi

Tom Mtenje<sup>1</sup> illustrated some of the challenges faced when seeking to integrate gender into the building of a shock-sensitive social protection system. In Malawi gender equality has not been given adequate attention beyond the relatively high number of women represented in the SP programmes and its focus on addressing their immediate income needs. Consequently, there has been limited attention to gender equality and women's empowerment in the design and implementation of social protection programmes. For example, the level of the transfer, the implications of automatically including cash-transfer beneficiaries into emergency response in 2017, and the appropriateness of work offered under public works programmes.

<sup>1</sup> Policy Specialist in Social Protection, Social Policy and Inclusion, UNICEF New York

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Holmes, Senior Research Fellow in the Social Protection and Social Policy at ODI.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Mtenje, Deputy Team Leader with the GiZ Social Protection Programme in Malawi

## *Is gender equality missing from shock-sensitive social protection debates, policy and planning? If so, why?*



**Nupur** reflected on the difficulty of integrating gender into programming in an emergency context, noting that different contexts of shocks can also provide opportunities for addressing gender inequality and also establishing changes which have long-lasting effects. She highlighted that while humanitarian work emphasises life-saving interventions, a range of opportunities also arise during different phases of response and recovery. Examples cited to illustrate these opportunities included: the creation of childcare facilities at public works sites; the generation of identification requirements which provide women and children official individual recognition for example as in Nepal during the response to the 2015 earthquake whereby a formal requirement was introduced that all children under the age of five received birth registration (and the mothers by default were also documented).



**Tom** reflected on the issue of evidence and data limitations, and emphasized the importance of knowledge and data, Tom noted that “if you can measure it, you can change it”. In the context of Malawi, using sex disaggregated statistics on poverty helped quantify the problem of gender inequality. However, the availability of these statistics focused on women’s access to social protection, rather than strategic issues which weren’t so readily captured with these statistics – e.g. not being able to tackle intra-household dynamics because limited M&E tools to look into this.



**Rebecca** reflected on the issue of limited political support, highlighting that it is generally acceptable to target women based on poverty indicators – but not more transformative changes which tackle structural issues and address power imbalances. There is a disconnect in institutions and across actors around social protection and gender: even though many ministries of women are responsible for social protection, in reality there is limited political power in these ministries, disconnect between gender focal points and social protection, and also a gap where civil society – particularly women’s organisations – should be paying attention to social protection and its role in advancing gender equality and empowerment gains. There are also fluctuating trends in funding programmes to promote gender equality.

### WHAT ELSE NEEDS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT?

- ▶ **Womens’ access to employment opportunities** (e.g. as social workers in the community): there is recognition of the role that women could play here, but, poor levels of educational achievement can challenge such placements. The role of social workers is important in supporting poor households – they need investment and support to do their job well, especially when their jobs are scaled up in response to a crisis.
- ▶ **Engaging men and boys and investing in community groups and gender-aware programming:** this is seen as particularly important, especially when using social protection to foster more transformative and strategic changes – it is important to sensitise men and boys to the programme and ensure their support and buy-in to the programme, as well as involving the community (including men and boys) where the programmes are supporting changes in social norms and attitudes towards women and gender equality.
- ▶ **The possibility of using climate-related funds** for integrating gender into shock-responsive social protection/on leveraging climate-related funds to finance social protection: this hasn’t yet been discussed in the context of Malawi, but should be considered.

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