

Productive Safety Net Programme and Children's Time Use between Work and Schooling in Ethiopia

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The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia started in 2005, replacing an emergency-based public work programme known as the Employment Generation Scheme (EGS). The PSNP is designed to reduce the vulnerability of poor people to drought. It has two components – the Public Work Programme (PWP), where households are paid for their labour, and the Direct Support Programme (DSP), where labour-poor vulnerable households receive cash/food and education support without having to supply any labour. In promoting labour-intensive activities, the PWP may augment aggregate economic development, but it could be detrimental to child well-being. In order to ensure that while working to improve development, children's rights are protected, it is necessary to understand the relationship between protection programmes such as the PSNP and children's time use.

Methodology

Households' participation in the PWP may affect the time children spend working, on schooling and study. An EGS may reduce or increase child work (and the time children spend on schooling and study) depending on households' preference for goods and schooling given their budget constraints; the opportunity cost of children and other household members' time; and the substitutability of adult labour by child labour or vice versa. One possible way to measure the impact of safety nets on child welfare is to compare child welfare outcomes between those households which participate in the PWP and those which do not. This paper uses Young Lives survey data from Ethiopia for the older cohort of children, who were aged 12 years at the time of the survey in 2006. The outcome variables used are hours spent on various activities (paid and unpaid work outside home, child care and household chores, schooling and studying at home) in a typical day and the highest grade completed by the children. Other information used in the analysis is on economic shocks, households' involvement and household income from the PWP and DSP.

Findings

On the basis of propensity score matching techniques, the study finds that

- Although the PWP increased the amount of time both girls and boys spent on paid work, it reduced the amount of time girls spent on child care and household chores. The net effect is that children's total hours spent on work are reduced. The PWP also increased the time girls spent on studying.
- In terms of child welfare outcomes, the effect of the PWP is better than that of its predecessor, the EGS. The earlier scheme did not reduce the amount of time boys and girls spent on childcare and household chores: it reduced boys' time spent on schooling.
- The DSP was found to reduce child work in paid and unpaid activities and in increasing grades completed by boys in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, boys' hours of unpaid work outside home and girls' hours of childcare and household chores declined. In urban areas, girls' hours of paid work and boys' hours of paid and unpaid work declined significantly. The grade boys completed in urban areas increased by half a year.
- The PSNP has been instrumental in improving child well-being by reducing time spent on working, childcare and household chores and increasing girls' time spent studying. However, the PWP is not effective enough to reduce children's involvement in paid work or to increase the highest grade completed and time children spent on studying at home. Since the programme started only 12 months prior to survey, it is too early to capture the full impact of the programme.

Policy implications

Programmes have to be designed so that they are compatible with household behaviour in order to reduce the negative effects of the PWP on children. Support from the PWP could be made conditional on school attendance. The design of the PSNP must ensure that there are no impacts for women/men and girls/boys. Children instead of households should be targeted by, for example, changing part of the PWP into a school feeding programme. Further, increasing the payment for public work may discourage children from engaging in paid and unpaid work. Finally, households unable to provide adult labour should receive direct support.

