**Gender-sensitive social protection in the Caribbean**

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The fifth webinar in the gender-sensitive social protection series focused on the Caribbean region. Bénédicte Leroy de la Brière’s presentation questioned whether adopting a gender-sensitive approach to social protection enhances the poverty reduction effectiveness of programmes, highlighting the state of knowledge regarding several key areas, such as education and labour market outcomes, as well as current knowledge gaps. Mario Esteban Sousa presented the case of the ‘Eating is First’ (Comer es primero) programme in the Dominican Republic and its gender dimensions in terms of food security.

Bénédicte de la Brière stressed that, in terms of the design of social protection programmes, there seem to be more differences in impact depending on the type of transfer (conditional or unconditional) than on the sex of the transfer recipient. While some programmes have led to a decrease in domestic violence, others have had a positive impact on women’s decision-making power, yet without fundamentally changing the spheres of decision-making. The presenter also highlighted that we need more evidence of the indirect effects that these programmes may generate, such as increased access to identity cards, access to networks, social capital, and financial inclusion through electronic or mobile payments. Furthermore, we know little about the impact of social protection programmes on key gender vulnerabilities such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy. Likewise, more research is needed on the impacts on gender gaps in agricultural and enterprise productivity and on female labour supply and adult employment, including occupational choices.

Targeting women as the main recipient of social cash transfers within the household is not enough to consider a programme gender-sensitive. Therefore, it is important to think of the different dimensions of gender equality, such as endowments, economic opportunities and voice and agency. While first-generation programmes focused solely on access to endowments—especially education and health—more recent programmes are also trying to tackle economic opportunities, mostly at the household level. Moreover, a programme can be made more gender-sensitive by taking women’s time and mobility constraints into consideration, as well as offering specific skills trainings to build resilience against harassment and to better resolve conflicts within the household. However, as de la Brière pointed out, particularly for households that are non-nuclear, little is known about resource-pooling and risk-sharing among different household members. Furthermore, to really change the distribution of responsibilities regarding child care (but also in terms of economic opportunities) for women, she argues that programmes need to engage men and women equally, especially when trying to change social norms. Several emerging innovations seek to address this by offering group education and family development sessions including both mothers and fathers.

Sousa concluded that for any future pilot projects or proposals to change the programme design, it is important to acknowledge two issues to avoid further exacerbating food insecurity, especially in women-headed households. First, given women’s more restricted mobility, community-scale shops are crucial in guaranteeing physical access to food for women. Second, any attempt to alter the programme must recognise the importance of informal debt relationships for women’s food security.

**References:**


Note:

1. This webinar is part of a series on gender-sensitive social protection, a joint initiative between the IPC-IG and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to foster a community of practice to promote gender equality in social protection. It was held on 12 December 2016 and featured presentations from Bénédicte Leroy de la Brière (World Bank Group) and Mario Esteban Sousa (Technical Directorate of Social Policies Coordination, Dominican Republic).