Overview

Gender equality is widely accepted as an essential component of effective development, and in the past two decades it has progressively taken center stage in the international development community. As the third Millennium Development Goal, several programs were set up to improve education and economic opportunities for women and girls with the aim of achieving gender equality, as well as reducing poverty overall.

The goal of leveling the playing field and eliminating gender disparities is a work in progress. Social Safety Net (SSN) programs aimed at reducing poverty through cash and in-kind transfers and public works (PW) are not specifically designed to address gender equality, but they may offer great opportunities to respond to women's needs.

The main goal of SSN interventions is to reduce current and future poverty by increasing household income and consumption and improving children's health and education. However, SSNs also impact many other outcomes—employment, fertility, domestic violence, access to resources—and those impacts are typically gender-specific. This systematic review analyzes the available impact evaluation evidence on the effect of SSNs on gender-related results such as increasing women's bargaining power and decision-making, improving education outcomes of boys and girls, and promoting maternal and child health. The review also analyzes gender integration in the World Bank's portfolio of SSN interventions.

Males and females have different roles, responsibilities, constraints, and access to resources, and their options, needs, and response to incentives will be different. Although the impacts of specific SSN interventions found in individual studies are difficult to generalize, the body of impact evaluation literature shows discernible and consistent patterns in the mechanisms that underlie the response of males and females to SSNs.

The evidence also shows that SSN interventions can increase women's bargaining power by providing more resources to the household and to women in particular. SSNs can potentially strengthen women's decision making, but their impact on empowerment is less clear.

SSN projects supported by the World Bank would benefit from incorporating the impact of gender differences into their design, but they rarely do. Most project documents include limited discussion of intrahousehold dynamics and the gender-relevant context of the supported intervention. Women are generally targeted as a vulnerable group or in an instrumental way, without discussing the costs that the intervention may impose on them. Gender is often missing from monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks, except for tracking female beneficiaries. The findings of this report identify opportunities to strengthen the integration of gender into projects.

Social Safety Nets Distinct Gender Outcomes Depend on Gender-Specific Drivers

SSN interventions can impact a range of outcomes. The explicit goal of SSNs is to reduce current and future poverty; income, consumption, and poverty status (typically measured at the household level) are the main outcomes that SSNs aim to positively impact. Other outcomes analyzed and measured by impact evaluations are education, health, and employment, but fertility, domestic violence, and access to resources are analyzed and measured less frequently. When these outcomes were measured and disaggregated by gender, they confirmed that males and females respond differently to SSNs and benefit from SSNs in different ways.

Social Safety Net (SSN) interventions analyzed in this report were conditional cash transfers; unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) including income support; noncontributory pensions—a specific form of UCTs; in-kind (food) transfers; and public work programs. Vouchers and subsidies, which also are in the World Bank definition of SSNs, are not covered here.

The analysis of SSNs and gender was based on 145 impact evaluations (IEs) and 112 World Bank-supported investment projects. The IEs in 128 individual studies were selected based on the following: a narrow definition of “impact evaluation” (a quantitative evaluation adopting an experimental or quasi-experimental design and relying on a credible control group); analyzed a relevant SSN intervention; reported gender-disaggregated or gender-specific results (for example, access to prenatal care); and are of rigorous quality. The projects all include a relevant SSN and were approved during fiscal year 2003–13, whether or not they covered gender. Development policy lending operations approved during the same period (101) were also analyzed, but information on gender in development policy loans was extremely limited.
SSN interventions have gender-specific drivers that influence gender outcomes. Individual impact evaluations can only partially document the precise channels, mechanisms, and circumstances that account for the outcomes observed. However, impact evaluation evidence as a whole can be interpreted in light of the theoretical literature to provide a clear indication of elements that work in gender-specific ways to drive the impacts of SSNs.

Drivers of gender outcomes are the factors that influence behavioral change and decision making and determine the impact of SSNs. Drivers include, for example, the opportunity cost of children's time and the expected future earnings as adults that contribute to determining the investments parents make in their children's education; the costs and benefits to men and women taking up employment or program responsibilities; and the ability of the transfer recipient to control the transfer and make consumption, investment, and production decisions. The ability to control and use the resources made available by SSN interventions, and the costs and benefits of subsequent behavioral responses are driven by opportunities and constraints specific to males and females. Opportunities and constraints facing males and females are often distinct and determine how SSN transfers can be used and controlled. And they are influenced by social norms, practices, and regulations.

Impact evaluations of specific interventions tended to focus only on a few selected outcomes. For example, most impact evaluations of conditional cash transfers (CCTs) assessed the intervention's impact on education and health (partly because the conditions attached to the transfer relate to these two variables). Impact evaluations of PWs have looked mostly at the impact of these programs on employment and wages. These are the most obvious and immediate outcomes to assess. But other outcomes such as that of PWs on children's or other household members' welfare also warrant analysis.

**Education and Child Labor**

SSNs provide resources that can support more investments in children's education; CCTs also include a condition on school enrollment and attendance that makes education less costly by decreasing the relative value of children's time spent working. Therefore, whether children engage in paid, unpaid, or domestic work is relevant to determining the impact of SSNs on education. Patterns of child labor are typically gender-specific. Boys tend to work in paid employment more often than girls, and girls are generally more involved in domestic work than boys. Paid employment and domestic work may have different opportunity costs, but domestic work tends to be more compatible with schooling. So girls are more likely than boys to combine the two and "pay" for their increased school attendance with leisure. Investments in children's education also depend on expectations about future earnings as adults, which are also heavily determined by gender. Women often face discrimination in employment and wages and can expect shorter working lives because of marriage and motherhood, so girls' expected lifetime earnings tend to be lower.

The impact of SSNs—CCTs and unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) in particular—also depends on enrollment and attendance rates at baseline. In many Latin American countries, primary school enrollment rates are already high for both boys and girls (especially in urban areas) and consequently the impacts of CCTs on education were found to be small. By contrast, impacts were higher for secondary education, although not consistently higher for girls or boys across countries. In Mexico, where Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación (PROGRESA, now called Oportunidades), a CCT program, pays a higher transfer to girls in secondary education, the impacts for girls were higher, but no study could determine if this was due to the higher transfer. In several cases, the gender group with lower education at baseline experienced the largest gains. Surprisingly, a notable number of impact evaluations did not report gender-disaggregated baseline values.

**Employment**

Public works programs aim to provide temporary employment and to increase the employability of beneficiaries—that is, to facilitate their transition to more stable employment. These programs can create interesting employment opportunities for women who may otherwise be outside the labor market. Many PWs include female quotas to ensure female participation; they may also include provisions for childcare, women-friendly working conditions, and employment close to home—features that greatly facilitate women's participation in PWs.

Impact evaluations of the Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), for example, or the Plan de Jefes in Argentina showed that women are effectively taking up PW jobs. However, their transition out of the program into more permanent employment is not guaranteed and may be more difficult than for men. This is
The majority of impact evaluations (IEs) with gender-relevant findings provides estimates of the impacts of Social Safety Nets on education, health (including anthropometric measures), and employment. Most IEs are of conditional and unconditional cash transfers (CCTs and UCTs). IEs analyze outcomes that tend to be intervention specific.

**Access to Resources**

SSN interventions can support investments in productive assets, even if they are not designed for this purpose and rarely include explicit investment incentives. Women and female heads of the household were found to invest more in livestock and agricultural tools as much as or more than men. This finding may seem surprising. Women’s higher propensity to spend cash transfers in children’s education, health, and nutrition may have suggested that giving the transfer to the woman (instead of the man) to maximize future poverty reduction could have traded off current poverty reduction if men are more likely than women to invest in productive activities. However, this was not found to be the case.

In Bolivia, Malawi, and Mexico women were found to invest in productive assets such as animals, seeds, and agricultural tools. The types of livestock or agricultural investments preferred by women and men often differed.

**Anthropometric Measures**

SSNs aim to improve food consumption and children’s nutritional status. Impact evaluations showed that CCTs had positive impacts on children’s growth (as measured by standard anthropometric measures), and this is the one area where specific gender differences were generally not found. One exception, however, was the Old Age pension in South Africa. Girls living with female recipients had better height-for-age and weight-for-height measures than girls living with non-beneficiaries, but no impact was found for boys. Otherwise, gender-disaggregated indicators tended to be nonsignificant. The reason may be that sample sizes were not large enough to detect significant gender differences. Or, it may be that other characteristics such as age are generally more relevant in explaining who benefits from the intervention, and gender may not be as important.

**Prenatal Care, Institutional Delivery, and Skilled Birth Attendance**

Conditions attached to CCTs aim to change the practices mothers adopt during pregnancy, at delivery, and during the post-partum period, driven primarily by the goal of improving children’s health and early childhood development. These practices also contribute to protect women’s health and reduce maternal mortality at delivery by monitoring potential risk pregnancies, providing women with relevant information during pregnancy, and providing professional attendance and better practices at delivery.

CCTs were found to be generally effective in increasing the likelihood of having more prenatal visits and giving birth in an institutional facility. In Mexico, women receiving PROGRESA/Oportunidades were much more likely to deliver in a health facility or to have physicians or nurses attend a delivery; in Brazil, women receiving Bolsa Familia were more likely to have any prenatal check-up. UCTs, by contrast, were found to be ineffective. It is unclear whether the effectiveness of CCTs is driven by the conditionality or other design features such as the provision of information sessions, which may also empower women to demand better health care. In India, for example, the Janani Suraksha Yojana program—providing conditional cash assistance in combination with an expansion of maternal health coverage—had positive and significant impacts on antenatal care check-ups, skilled birth attendance, and institutional delivery.

**Social Safety Net Interventions Can Increase Women’s Bargaining Power**

Many SSN interventions target the woman because she is more likely to spend resources to benefit her children—such as food, education, and health. Impact evaluations of CCTs and UCTs confirmed that this is generally the case and, as a consequence, giving the transfer to women strengthens the impact of the program on future poverty reduction through higher investments in children.

SSNs providing resources to women, therefore, can increase women’s bargaining power within the household. The finding that women receiving the transfer...
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spend more on children implies that the transfer allows a woman to make different choices than another recipient would have otherwise made—choices that are plausibly closer to her preferences. This shows that the household does not operate as a single unit; instead, men and women negotiate consumption, production, and investment decisions. According to this model, a higher control of resources determines a higher bargaining power of that partner.

In Latin America, where all CCTs are paid to the woman, several impact evaluations showed that women receiving the transfer make decisions that are more pro-children. However, all impact evaluations of Latin American CCTs use an indirect approach to derive this result, which often does not allow disentangling other simultaneous effects (better information, the effect of the conditionality, and so on).

More recent impact evaluations of CCTs and UCTs implemented in Sub-Saharan Africa compared the results of alternative designs in which the transfer is given to the woman or the man. In Burkina Faso and Morocco it was found that conditionality, not gender, was crucial to changing the household’s choices regarding children’s health and education. These evaluations show that although it is wrong to assume that households act as a unit, it is equally wrong to assume that households never do.

Men and women receiving pension income can make different decisions, as shown by evidence from South Africa. In households where the beneficiary was a woman, young girls had better health outcomes than young girls living in non-beneficiary households, but there was no significant difference for boys. The presence of a male pensioner in the household, however, did not affect children’s health outcomes in any significant way. In this case, both the sex of the recipient and the sex of the household member benefiting from the transfer made a difference. The impact of pensions, however, is harder to interpret because it is mediated by a complex system of intrahousehold dynamics driven by living arrangements and sharing of resources across multiple generations.

Many studies interpret the observed increase in women’s bargaining power determined by SSN transfers as an increase in women’s empowerment. While bargaining models of the households provide a logical framework that speaks about (relative) power, women’s empowerment is a broader concept—hard to define, and not easily confined to a theoretical model of the household.

Impact evaluations do not define women’s empowerment but often equate it with increased bargaining power as manifested by an increased spending ability. This is reductive; the definitions of women’s empowerment put forward in the literature tend to agree that empowerment is a multidimensional concept that cannot be exclusively captured by economic indicators and requires a more holistic approach.

Women beneficiaries of SSNs did not show substantial impacts on household decision making based on self-reported indicators of their role in making a number of household decisions regarding expenditures, employment, children’s health and education, use of contraception, and so on. The impact evaluations that looked at multiple indicators to capture a more comprehensive concept of empowerment showed nuanced and sometimes conflicting results, with positive effects on some indicators and no impact on others. For example, four SSN interventions in Bangladesh (two transfers and two PWs interventions) had little or no impact on the woman’s participation in expenditure decisions regarding food, housing, education, health care, and clothing. But they had a positive impact on the probability of her taking loans from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), controlling the money needed to buy food and personal items, and moving more freely in the community. These studies looking at multiple indicators of empowerment confirm that empowerment is a complex and elusive notion.

The few impact evaluations of SSNs that focused on domestic violence as a specific manifestation of (dis)empowerment generally found that women receiving SSN transfers were less likely to be victims of domestic violence. Three examples illustrate this. In Peru, it was found that the Juntos CCT program significantly decreased the prevalence of physical and emotional violence. In Colombia, the World Food Programme’s Food, Cash, and Voucher program found a decrease in controlling behaviors and physical and sexual violence. In Ecuador, the Bono de Desarrollo Humano program significantly decreased the likelihood of controlling behaviors, but only for more educated women. None of these impact evaluations, however, could determine unequivocally that this result was due to the woman’s increased empowerment rather than a decrease in household stress because of improved financial conditions.

Other impact evaluations measuring individual outcomes often associated with women’s empowerment, such as...
access to productive resources and employment, often found positive impacts, but these outcomes also are not equivalent to female empowerment. Regarding access to resources, SSNs are not explicitly designed to support productive investments. Other types of programs, such as asset transfers programs, can more directly and effectively support income-generating activities, with larger positive impacts on women's ability to invest and produce, and increases in women's autonomy and self-esteem. Female employment has typically been interpreted as a route to women's economic empowerment because it can enhance female economic independence. Whether employment is automatically equivalent to higher female empowerment is debatable, though. Employment can exacerbate women's time constraints and impose stressful trade-offs among work, household responsibilities, and leisure time.

Finally, empowerment is a process that requires time, so observed changes in the short run are not very meaningful, and impact evaluations tend to measure only impacts in the short term. All impact evaluations analyzing some measure of decision making were conducted after one or two years of exposure to the intervention. It is reasonable to expect that for empowerment to be permanently affected, a longer “treatment” is required. If empowerment is a process and not just an outcome, it requires time for social norms and perceptions to change. Also, the program may need to be permanent, or permanent enough for women to be confident that they can rely on it.

Most Impact Evaluations are of Conditional Cash Transfers—World Bank Portfolio Is Mostly Public Works

The overwhelming majority of impact evaluations reviewed for this report is of CCT interventions. One reason might be that CCTs are easier to evaluate using experimental design compared with other SSN interventions such as PWs or NCPs. Strong political interest made CCTs extremely popular in the past decade and might also be driving this pattern. However, a sizable number of World Bank SSN projects support PWs interventions (75 projects out of 112 during fiscal year [FY] 2003–13), but impact evaluation evidence on PWs is much more limited and mostly comes from two or three specific interventions. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only the Ethiopian PSNP generated a few impact evaluations, yet it is mostly Sub-Saharan Africa where most World Bank PWs projects are implemented. Most of these projects are short term and have characteristics that are different from projects for which there is more evaluation evidence, such as the PSNP and India’s NREGS.

Impact evaluations also tend to look at a broader set of outcomes than the projects in the SSN portfolio. Both impact evaluations and the Bank’s projects measure outcomes related to health, education, and employment, but World Bank projects do not commonly disaggregate these outcomes by gender. While a number of impact evaluations measure the impact of SSNs on female bargaining power, no single World Bank project aims to measure women's control and use of the transfer. World Bank SSN projects mostly measure indicators of take-up and coverage, essentially to assess compliance.

SSN projects are generally more concerned about tracking compliance; hence they focus more on recipients than on beneficiaries. Even when they aim to capture gender-relevant impacts of World Bank SSN interventions, project monitoring frameworks tend to refer only to the percentage of women receiving the transfers who are identified as female beneficiaries reached by the program. As a result, World Bank SSN projects may provide an indication of female participation in SSN projects, but their information on beneficiaries (male or female) is much more limited.

World Bank Social Safety Net Projects Poorly Incorporate Gender

SSNs typically have gender-differentiated impacts. To capture these, projects should incorporate gender more explicitly at the design stage. This means identifying the intrahousehold dynamics triggered by the intervention, assessing the expected results against the gender-specific elements explaining those mechanisms, and collecting the necessary information to measure them. This is crucial even when SSN interventions do not aim to impact gender equality or to affect males and females differently. The empirical evidence shows that they almost inevitably will. Therefore, projects should expect unintended consequences. This is even more crucial to understanding potential trade-offs or exploiting synergies between what is typically the main goal of SSNs—reducing current and future poverty—and impacting women's bargaining power and reducing gender inequalities.

Few World Bank SSN projects discuss the intrahousehold dynamics and the different position of males and
females about the intervention or simply in the specific context. Many CCT projects internalize the findings of a large body of impact evaluation evidence indicating that the transfer delivered to the mother is more likely to be spent to benefit the children, thus enhancing the expected impact of the intervention. This evidence comes mostly from Latin America, though, and its automatic transferability to other contexts is questionable. Some projects use the evidence selectively or plan to gather evidence specific to the country or the region where the intervention is implemented. For example, a UCT project in the Republic of Yemen recognizes that the experience of Central and South America, pointing to the value of involving women as the responsible beneficiaries of cash transfers programs, is not relevant to the context. The project refers instead to the experience in Albania, which showed that in highly patriarchal societies (such as the Republic of Yemen) women’s involvement is best facilitated through the channel of male traditional leaders. Similarly, a CCT in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is testing whether giving the payment to the mother or to another representative designated by the family makes a difference in resource allocation, and whether or not the household head’s position of authority reinforces the program’s impact on school attendance.

Different roles, responsibilities, and constraints might result in different vulnerabilities for females and males. Women and girls are generally identified in projects as more vulnerable, but this is not necessarily correct. Men and boys can experience specific situations of disadvantage—for example, impact evaluations show that in some cases boys have lower outcomes at baseline in education (especially in the Latin America and Caribbean Region). Fifty-three percent of the World Bank SSN projects reviewed explicitly identified women as potential beneficiaries of SSN interventions, but only three World Bank SSN projects included gender considerations for men.

Gender-relevant indicators in World Bank SSN projects aim to monitor intervention take-up (the percentage of female recipients); they much less frequently aim to collect gender-disaggregated impacts of the intervention. One potential reason for this omission might be that if projects do not expect gender effects, they do not plan to measure them.

World Bank SSN projects often do not disaggregate indicators by gender even when it is technically feasible. Though 67 percent of 265 gender-relevant project development objectives (PDO) indicators could have been meaningfully disaggregated by gender (the rest are gender-specific indicators such as maternal pre-natal visits), only 19 percent actually were. This lack of inclusion of gender-relevant indicators to track results is observed even in projects that include an extensive discussion on gender and have incorporated that discussion in project design.

When available, gender-relevant indicators are not consistently reported. About one-third of the 44 projects that incorporate gender in their PDO indicators report results in the project completion documents or in supervision reports. Gender-relevant results are often reported at an anecdotal level. The percentage of female project beneficiaries is often reported as reflecting the demographics of a project area.

Empowering women is not a common goal among World Bank supported SSN operations. Only six SSN projects explicitly aim to address gender inequality or enhance women’s empowerment as an objective. Empowerment is viewed as instrumental, not as an objective in its own right.

Public works often include quotas to support women’s participation in employment. Quotas are an explicit design feature aiming to increase women’s (economic) empowerment. However, projects do not discuss the assumed relationship between employment and empowerment—for example, they do not describe alternative employment or economic activities in absence of PWs, assess the relative desirability of public employment with regard to pay or working conditions, or discuss the

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### Project development objective (PDO) indicators of social safety net (SSN) projects poorly capture gender and, when they do, reporting on gender outcomes is not systematic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projects with planned gender indicators and at least one ISR that...</th>
<th>Number of projects</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Report indicator value in ICR or ISR</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not report indicator value in ICR or ISR</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not mention indicator in ICR or ISR</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IEG calculations based on analysis of World Bank project documents.

Note: ICR = Implementation Completion and Results Report; ISR = Implementation Status and Results Report.

a. Categories are not mutually exclusive as each project can have multiple gender indicators.
b. Percentage of all projects with planned gender indicators and at least one ISR (40 in total).
costs and benefits for women to take up PWs. Often the rationale for defining a specific quota is not discussed in project documents except for cases in which there is experience with women take-up. This is not a drawback of only World Bank projects. In general, there is no rigorous evidence that quotas work to increase women's employability and economic empowerment.

Implications for the World Bank Portfolio

The World Bank Group’s recent Social Protection and Labor (SPL) strategy for FY2012–22 commits to “work with countries to ensure that programs adequately address the [social protection and labor] needs of both women and men (and girls and boys).” Specifically, the strategy in social assistance programs aims to ensure that women have access to the transfers, given the evidence that “[more] resources controlled by women commonly translate into a larger share of household resources going to family welfare, especially to expenditures on children.” About PWs, the strategy recognizes the importance of incorporating into program designs “social norms about gender-appropriate behavior, as well as gender-specific responsibilities with respect to household and market work.” For old-age pensions programs, the strategy shows the need to recognize women’s higher vulnerability because of longer life expectancy and shorter contribution history to formal pension programs.

The analysis of impact evaluation evidence reviewed in this report identifies opportunities for improving gender integration in the Bank’s portfolio in the spirit of the SPL strategy. Each individual impact evaluation may not be relevant for specific projects because individual results are not automatically transferrable to a different context. However, the body of impact evaluation literature clearly highlights elements that are relevant to understanding and anticipating gender-differentiated effects. The analysis of these elements during project preparation can ensure that projects internalize the potential responses of the household and household members to the intervention.

The potential gender impacts of the intervention can be included more systematically in M&E frameworks. If projects are not explicit about the causal chain and potential impacts, these impacts won’t be measured. Forty percent of SSN investment projects do not address gender. The absence of any gender-disaggregated indicators is a missed opportunity to better understand the impact of the intervention on different types of beneficiaries, notably by gender.

Impact evaluations funded in the context of World Bank SSN projects should aim to systematically assess gender-differentiated impacts. Several World Bank SSN projects, especially in recent years, plan for or refer to future impact evaluations (93 percent of CCTs, 68 percent of PWs and 52 percent of UCTs), but only a few specify which outcomes will be measured. Larger sample sizes are needed to detect significant gender-disaggregated impacts, and this should be considered in planning and budgeting. Some gender-relevant outcomes like empowerment might require a combination of methods to be assessed—in particular the adoption of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Other outcomes, including measures of decision making and empowerment, might require longer terms to materialize, so follow-up surveys need to be planned accordingly.

To foster learning across the institution, issues presented when discussing gender integration into World Bank SSN M&E frameworks can be reported more systematically, rather than anecdotally, in supervision and completion documents. Such analysis could go beyond indicators of compliance with project conditions and include gender-relevant indicators that effectively capture impacts on beneficiaries, not just recipients.

Tracking female beneficiaries of World Bank projects is important but does not go far enough. Impact evaluations showed that the recipients of the transfer or those living in the project area are not necessarily the beneficiaries of the transfer. Different types of women in the same households, for instance, might benefit differently. Also, gender-relevant impacts might be unintended—rather than limited to the recipients or the intended beneficiaries—or might be related to men rather than, as commonly perceived, women. For example, paying the CCT or UCT to the father (or the person the household decides should be the “responsible adult” receiving the transfer) might not be counted toward the percentage of female beneficiaries, but is a highly relevant gender feature.

Should women’s empowerment be an explicit goal of World Bank supported SSNs? The answer is not clear-cut and there is little evidence to provide guidance. CCTs rely on an increase in women’s bargaining power and women’s ability to influence household spending patterns
in a way that is aligned with the projects’ objective as a functional feature. Projects are more concerned about this instrumental role than on women's empowerment as a goal. That said, impact evaluations have shown that SSNs can have positive impacts on women’s empowerment. Whether this should or could be an additional goal of Bank projects requires a clear understanding of (i) the specific dimensions of empowerment impacted by the project; and (ii) the potential trade-offs between the female empowerment goal and the impact on household poverty—ideally the two goals would not undermine and maybe even reinforce each other.

Evidence from impact evaluations shows that the increased ability of the woman to control how the transfer was spent often generates better outcomes for children. This finding is reassuring, but it is limited to a special case. (It also refers only to the increased spending ability of the woman, not her increased empowerment.) Impact evaluations of PWs, for example, did not analyze whether female quotas contribute to enhancing or reducing the general household well-being. This requires a careful assessment of the costs and benefits of all household members under an alternative hypothesis of who takes up public employment. Spillover effects, which were documented in some impact evaluations analyzing the outcomes on siblings and other household members, should be more systematically analyzed to measure the net gains of all potential beneficiaries, which is rarely done in impact evaluations and in Bank projects.

The SPL strategy embraces a systems approach to social protection and promotes moving away from the fragmentation of responses that has often been found in the past. A greater understanding of gender dynamics enhances the ability of this systemic approach to be inclusive and reach all individuals in society, especially the most vulnerable. This review aims to contribute to this approach.