

# CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING THE PRODUCTIVE SAFETY NET PROGRAMME (PSNP)

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## *Abstract*

*Ethiopia is one of the most food insecure countries in the world. It suffers from both chronic and acute food insecurity. These two modes of food insecurity require different strategies and interventions. In 2003 the Government of Ethiopia announced that there are 5.6 million people that are chronically food insecure (currently standing at 8.2 million) and launched the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) through which the needs of these people are to be addressed.*

*Since its launch the programme has been facing several challenges. For the purpose of this paper five major challenges are identified and discussed. First, conceptually, it has been difficult to get a common understanding on concepts like “safety net” and “graduation”. Second, the most serious challenge is targeting of beneficiaries. Despite the development of safety net targeting guidelines and capacity building efforts, many of the problems of emergency food aid targeting continue to haunt the programme. A related challenge is the inability to distinguish between acute and chronic food insecurity at grassroots level. Third, the fact that a single wage rate is applied nationally is also a major challenge for implementers. Although the advantages of cash over food are well established, woreda finance offices lack the capacity to manage unprecedented amount of cash flowing into the woreda. Fourth, the government has declared that PSNP alone cannot bring about graduation. It needs to be linked to other food security programmes. Ensuring this linkage has been challenging at grassroots level. Fifth, the broader issue of scaling up safety net to universal social protection will continue to be a challenge for the government.*

*Each of these challenges requires different strategies. Improvements in capacity building efforts, better targeted training provision, documentation and dissemination of regional experiences and lessons learned in implementing the PSNP are a few of the ideas discussed in this paper to inform future programming.*

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## Acronyms

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AIDS	Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CFSTF	Community Food Security Taskforce
CRS	Catholic Relief Society
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DPPA	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency
EBSN	Employment Based Safety Net
EEA	Ethiopian Economic Association
EGS	Employment Generation Scheme
FFW/CFW	Food for Work/Cash for Work
FSCB	Food Security Coordination Bureau
HIV	Human Immunity Deficiency Virus
IC	Information Centre
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KFSTF	Kebele Food Security Taskforce
MoARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
NGO	Non-government Organisation
ORSA	Office of Rehabilitation and Social Services
PIM	[PSNP] Programme Implementation Manual
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
REST	Relief Society of Tigray
RRT	Rapid Response Team
SC-UK	Save the Children UK
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region
TOR	Terms of Reference
TOT	Training of Trainers
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund

## 1. Introduction

This paper identifies and discusses challenges of implementing Productive Safety Net Programme based on first year experience. The opinions for the paper were compiled during a series of training conducted between August and September 2005. The participants were regional and woreda food security officers from SNNPR, Oromia and Tigray. As shown in **Table 1**, 306 participants were expected but 223 (72.8%) attended. There were few women participants due to their low representation in regional and woreda food security offices.

During the training, issues that affected the implementation of PSNP in each region were brainstormed in groups and discussed in plenary. A training technique known as “dotmocracy” was used to prioritise issues. The essence of this technique is that the brainstormed issues are posted on the wall and each participant places a dot next to an issue (or set of issues) that he or she considers critical to the success of the PSNP. The dots are tallied and the respective issues ranked accordingly.

**Table 1: Sources of data<sup>1</sup>**

Region	No. of PSNP woredas	Location of training	Date	Number of participants				
				Male	Female	Total	Expected <sup>2</sup>	% of expected
ToT <sup>3</sup>	-	Addis Ababa	Aug 2005	10	1	11	12	91.7
SNNPR	50	Awassa	5-7 Sept. 05	135	8	143	171	83.6
Oromia	51	Nazareth	14-16 Sept. 05	28	0	28	90	31.1
Tigray	30	Axum	19-21 Sept. 05	52	0	52 <sup>4</sup>	45	115.5
Total	103			225	9	234	318	73.6

<sup>1</sup> Tigray and Oromia Round 1 only.

<sup>2</sup> Three participants were expected from each chronically food insecure woreda. SNNPR completed the training in two parallel sessions. The rest of the regions conducted the training in different times.

<sup>3</sup> Although PSNP was not implemented at the time, Dire Dawa and Harari were also present at the ToT.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to woreda experts, there were participants from REST and Office of Rehabilitation and Social Affairs (ORSA).

The paper is divided into 4 sections. **Section 1** is the introductory part. **Section 2** provides the rationale and objectives of the PSNP. **Section 3** identifies and discusses key challenges of implementing PSNP during its first year of implementation. **Section 4** describes efforts made by government and non-government organisations to address some, if not all, of the challenges. The final section concludes the paper and puts forward recommendations for future programming.

## 2. Rationale and Objectives of the PSNP

### 2.1. Rationale of the PSNP

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, with an estimated 73.8 million citizens (World Development Report, 2005). It is a multi-ethnic country with diverse geographic and climatic conditions, rich traditions and a complex history. However, as Devereux, et al. (2005) put it Ethiopia is perhaps best known outside Africa as the location of some of the worst famines in the continent's history; a contemporary symbol of African poverty and the failure of development.

Emergency response has been the principal instrument to address acute food shortages caused by drought and famine. However, gradually the acute food shortages have developed into chronic food insecurity that should be addressed by different approaches and strategies.

It was in recognition of this fact that in 2003, the Government of Ethiopia launched the Coalition for Food Security in which a distinction was made between chronic and acute food insecure populations. Initial estimates of the chronically food insecure population was about 5.6 million rural people which presently (2006) stands at 8.2 million. A new programme called Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) was designed to address the needs of the chronically food insecure whereas the acute food insecure population continued to receive emergency assistance in time of drought.

### 2.2. Objectives of the PSNP

The broad objective of this programme as stated in the Programme Implementation Manual (MoARD, 2004) is to provide resource transfers (cash or food) to the

chronically food insecure population in a way that prevents asset depletion at household level and creates asset at community level. More specifically, the programme is designed to address immediate human needs while simultaneously: supporting the rural transformation process.

preventing long term consequences of short-term consumption shortages  
encouraging households to engage in production and investment increasing household purchasing power thereby promoting market development

### 2.3. Basic Components of the PSNP

The PSNP has two major components and by definition two types of beneficiaries: public works and direct support. The former provides employment opportunity to able bodied members of the community. They build community asset before receiving the transfer. The latter group is composed of labour poor households who cannot contribute to community asset building. Examples include older persons, persons with disabilities, children, pregnant and lactating women.<sup>1</sup>

## 3. Challenges of Implementing the PSNP

### 3.1. Conceptual challenges<sup>2</sup>

There are several misunderstandings about PSNP among grassroots implementers. In the three regions where safety net targeting training was conducted, woreda experts identified lack of awareness at woreda and community levels as a challenge that seriously affected the implementation of the PSNP. They also acknowledged that even among the experts, concepts like “safety net” and “graduation” are least understood. The absence of equivalent terminology for “safety net” in local languages means that it has been difficult to explain it in such a way that it captures local circumstances. For example, the title “Safety Net Targeting Guideline” is translated in the three major languages as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> There are specific time intervals in the PIM during which pregnant and lactating women are entitled to direct support.

<sup>2</sup> Prior to the introduction of PSNP, there was a protracted debate on the differences and similarities between Employment Generating Schemes (EGS), Food/Cash For Work (FFW/CFW), and Employment Based Safety Net (EBSN). This paper does not engage in this debate.

Amharic	የሴፍቲ ኔት ተጠቃሚዎች ልዩታ መመሪያ
Oromiffa	Qajeelfama Filannoo Fayyadamtoota Seefti Neetti
Tigrigna	መምርሒ ኣመራረባ ተጠቀምቲ ሴፍቲ ኔት

Given the rich linguistic diversity, expressions and proverbs Ethiopia is blessed with, it is safe to assume that there will be one that could serve as equivalent to the real essence of safety net. This requires efforts from language experts.

Graduation is another concept that caused havoc in safety net targeting. Community and woreda implementers were under pressure to select households with higher probability of graduating from the safety net. This meant selecting better-off households and excluding the poorest of the poor – the very people the programme was designed to benefit. Grassroots implementers often asked:

- The poorest of the poor can't graduate. What shall we do?
- Direct support beneficiaries can't graduate. For how long do we support them?

In the context of safety net, 'graduation' is the process of "withdrawing the safety net" when it is judged that the household does not need it any longer. This begs another question. How to determine if a household does not need the safety net any longer? In the absence of accurate and reliable baseline data, it is not surprising that grassroots implementers are having difficulty determining when a household is deemed to have graduated.

**Tables 2 - 4** present the ranking of challenging issues by training participants in the three regions. **Table 5** is the summary. It allows for comparison across regions (that is, which issue is more in one region than in the other).

**Table 2: Issues affecting safety net implementation - SNNPR**

Critical issues	Total (n=143)	Rank
Lack of awareness by food security taskforces	107	1
Lack of baseline data against which graduating households could be compared.	98	2
Lack of awareness at Kebele leadership (the Cabinet) level	90	3
KFSTF and CFSTF requiring financial incentive for targeting work	64	4
Deep rooted traditional values	21	5

## Challenges of Implementing the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)

**Table 3: Issues affecting safety net implementation: SNNPR - Oromia**

Critical issues	Total (n=28)	Rank
Absence of clear and standard guidance	21	1
Lack of awareness of Kebele leadership (i.e. Cabinet) and Community	20	2
Untimeliness of payment; wage level not reflecting local market situation	20	2
Lack of coordination and integration of development work at woreda level	20	2
Unreliable DPPA data use	15	5
Unnecessary interference from local leadership	9	6

**Table 4: Issues affecting safety net implementation - Tigray**

Critical issues	Total score (n=46)	Rank
Lack of awareness at Kebele/Kushet level	42	1
80/20 ratio for work on own field and public works not workable	32	2
The relationship between package and safety net not clear	27	3
Safety net undermining work done to overcome dependency	26	4
DPPA data unreliable	15	5

**Table 5: Summary of critical issues**

Critical issues	SNNPR (n=143)	Oromia (n=28)	Tigray (n=46)
	Rank	Rank	Rank
Lack of awareness at Kebele leadership (the Cabinet) and Community levels	1	2	1
Absence of baseline data/Unreliability of DPPA data	2	5	5
KFSTF and CFSTF requiring financial incentive	3	-	-
Deep rooted traditional values	4	-	-
Unnecessary interference from local leadership	-	6	-
Absence of clear and standard guidance	-	1	-
Untimeliness of payment; wages not reflecting local market situation	-	2	-
Lack of coordination and integration of development work at woreda level	-	2	-
The relationship between package and safety net not clear	-	-	3
Safety net undermining work done to mitigate dependency	-	-	4
The proposed 80/20 division between own field and public works, respectively, not workable	-	-	2

Source: Tables 2-4 above.

### 3.2. Targeting Challenges

The Safety Net Targeting Guideline (FSCB/MoARD, 2005) defines targeting as “a process of identifying eligible households to benefit from a given resource transfer (cash or food) and making sure they get it. In relation to the PSNP, it is a process by which chronically food insecure households are selected to participate in public works or receive direct support and making sure they get it”.

A key factor in this process is the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries. The targeting guideline provides two levels of indicative criteria for beneficiary selection – basic criteria and refining criteria (see **Table 6**).<sup>1</sup> One of the basic criteria is for a household to have received 3 consecutive years of food aid between 1994-2004. This criterion is meant to distinguish between chronic and acute food insecurity. Woreda training participants have questioned the reliability of food distribution list as an instrument of drawing the line between chronic and acute food insecurity. The government is right in trying to draw the line between the two but additional indicators of chronic food insecurity should be used. Policy makers should tap into data on household food economy and other livelihoods studies and combine it with the Government’s threshold of food distribution to improve targeting.

**Table 6: Targeting Criteria**

Basic criteria	Refining criteria
Households should be:	
◆ members of the community for 3 years	◆ Status of household assets (land holding, quality of land, food stock, etc)
◆ chronically food insecure households (i.e. received food aid for 3 consecutive years)	◆ Income from non-agricultural activities and alternative employment
◆ facing sudden shock (severe loss of assets)	◆ Support or remittance from relatives of community
◆ without family support and other means of social protection and support	

Source: Safety Net Targeting Guidelines, FSCB/MoARD, August 2005

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<sup>1</sup> An important departure from the emergency targeting criteria is that asset (livestock in particular) is not used as the basic criterion. Since the main objective of PSNP is to protect asset, to use asset as a criterion would be self-defeating.



### 3.3. The Challenge of Cash (wage rates, timely disbursement and woreda capacity)

Wage rates are important indicators of labour supply and demand. Wage rates are also transfers and therefore should buy the food basket for the recipient. It is common knowledge that food baskets vary from region to region and even within a woreda. Therefore, the cash required to buy the food should reflect this variation. The Government's Birr 6.00 per day per person does not consider regional differences.

The advantage of cash over food and vice versa has been the subject of debate for a long time. One of the presumed advantages is that the management of cash is easier than food. Food requires significantly more logistical support than cash. However, cash is a very sensitive commodity. It requires careful handling and security measures should be put in place before and during disbursement. Most woreda towns do not have banks so transporting cash to woreda towns and PAs is a real headache for grassroots implementers. The amount of paperwork that follows cash distribution also puts considerable pressure on woreda finance office, which often lacks the human, material and space capacity for a 'normal' financial management such as payroll preparation and monthly salary payment.

### 3.4. The Challenge of Programme Linkages

The PIM clearly states that PSNP by itself could not lead to 'graduation'. Safety net beneficiaries, the able-bodied public work participants in particular, should be linked to government and non-government food security programmes in order to build the assets and earn the income that lead to graduation. Woreda experts see this as one of the challenges. Since safety net beneficiaries are the poorest of the poor, they find it difficult to take credit for investment. They are not confident of paying back the loan. They are also risk averse.

Although programme linkage is a real challenge, it is doable. Linkages with food security programme that meet the interests and capacities of safety net beneficiaries is the only way these households could build household/personal assets – an essential requirement for 'graduation'. The government's recent policy direction that food security programmes should primarily target safety net beneficiaries to facilitate

speedy graduation is welcome but should be carefully monitored for side effects such as giving credit in one hand and taking it back from safety net cash transfers.

### 3.5. The Challenge of Scaling up Safety Net to a Universal Social Protection

Ethiopia has a long tradition of social protection in the manner of providing pension to government affiliated individuals that include the civil servant, the Military and the Police. The programme components are almost as prescribed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and immediate dependents (spouse and children) could inherit the scheme in full or in part. However, despite its age, the programme has failed to expand and include the private sector including farmers. The introduction of PSNP has given a lease of life to advocators of universal social protection.

Social protection consists of a range of measures that aim to:

- ✓ Protect people against shocks that could push them (deeper) into poverty
- ✓ Make poor people less vulnerable to these shocks
- ✓ Protect against extreme poverty and its effects on well-being
- ✓ Protect well-being at vulnerable periods in the life cycle (including early childhood)

Social protection measures can be very broad, such as investment in accessible, good quality health care and education services, or preventing macro-economic shocks, or specifically such as nutritional supplements for particular vulnerable groups or legislation to prevent the dispossession of widows and orphan. All are an important part of overall poverty reduction strategies. Examples of social protection interventions include: pensions, allowances/child benefits, health/education fee waivers, school feeding programmes, health insurance, food for work, and cash for work. *Safety nets* relate to measures that are designed to mitigate the negative impacts of shocks on poor people whereas *social assistance* is a regular, predictable transfer to poor households that can be used as a safety net<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Review of Social Protection Programmes in Eastern and Southern Africa: Cash transfers component. Stage 2 Country Case studies – Methodology Manual

Universal social protection is not received among the training participants because of the government's concern about "dependency"<sup>1</sup>. This is a challenge for both the grassroots implementers and the Government. It must be recognised that providing universal primary education, primary health care and others are part and parcel of social protection. Therefore, the government needs to consolidate these efforts to implement universal social protection. Social protection is not synonymous with unproductive expenditure. It can be made productive by making it conditional. For example, a recipient of social protection could receive the transfers on condition that she/he sends her children or grand children (probably orphans) to school; makes sure they are fed and get medical care. This requires the Government to move away from the notion that all social transfers are unproductive and lead to dependency. Experience from other countries (including African countries) indicates that transfers could be used in a 'productive' way for human development (Save the Children/UNICEF, 2005).

At the time of the launch of the PSNP, some saw the use of 'productive' and 'safety net' together as contradictory terms. It was argued that safety net should remain what it is – safety net! However, the "productive" aspect should be perceived more broadly to include participation in social programmes, counselling, and nursing children. Examples of social programmes are:

- ✓ Attendance of literacy classes
- ✓ Attendance of HIV/AIDS and Family Planning awareness raising sessions
- ✓ Serving as community committee members (e.g. elders could be members of community advisory group and demonstrate productive attendance of meetings)
- ✓ Ensuring a child goes to school
- ✓ Ensuring the health of a child, and
- ✓ Managing community child nurseries

There are encouraging signs that some of these measures are being practised in Tigray, one of the safety net regions. While advocating for conditional transfers, it is important to ensure that participation in such programmes is on voluntary basis in

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<sup>1</sup> The existence of the so-called "dependency syndrome" in Ethiopia is debatable. Many argue that it is not likely that the Ethiopian farmer leaves his/her land uncultivated in expectation of food aid or any other assistance, which often arrives too late and too little to guarantee the farmer.

order to avoid putting pressure on direct support beneficiaries that have certain limitations (e.g. persons with disability, chronically ill).

#### 4. Efforts Made to Address the Challenges

The launch of the PSNP has been criticised for hastiness and lack of sufficient preparation. However, efforts have been made to address the challenges both prior to the launching and subsequently. For example, to address the problem of lack of awareness, the PIM has been prepared in one local language (Amharic) and woreda level implementers received training prior to kickoff. These trainings were generally short and conducted in traditional lecture type classes, which meant participants have not adequately internalised the issues to be able to transfer the knowledge to the communities.

With respect to targeting, the most critical challenge, a separate guideline has been prepared and translated into three major local languages (Amharic, Oromiffa and Tigrigna). Regional training of trainers was given and the training cascaded to woreda level with an action plan to disseminate it to community level.

The Food Security Coordination Bureau has also taken two important measures to address some, if not all, of the challenges. First, it set up a Rapid Response Team (RRT) to, as the name suggests, give rapid response to problems arising on the ground. Second, it established an Information Centre (IC) that monitors progress towards 'graduation' on randomly selected woredas. Based on this emerging information and knowledge the bureau should facilitate experience sharing and learning platforms within government and between government and other PSNP partners.

Some non-government organisations have found enough space to support the implementation of the PSNP. In terms of capacity building, CARE-Ethiopia, Save the Children and CRS have supported the translation of the safety net targeting guideline into Oromiffa and CARE which in particular assisted the training effort. Save the Children Canada published a handbook version of the PSNP Implementation Manual for wider dissemination and have begun the preparation of a training toolkit for PSNP. Save the Children UK piloted public works and cash for work in Somali Region to draw lessons prior to the implementation of PSNP in the region.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

*This paper identified and discussed challenges of implementing productive safety net programme based on first year experience. Most of the opinions were gathered during a series of training workshops in three of the four major safety net regions.*

*Woreda safety net implementers perceive lack of awareness at community level as one of the challenges. This indicates that most of the ToTs are limited to region or woreda level, and rarely touched the ground or touched in a haphazard manner. Woreda food security experts should acknowledge that creating community awareness is part and parcel of their responsibilities. Therefore, the necessary conditions should be facilitated for woreda implementers to cascade the training to community levels.*

*For a country with rich linguistic diversity, it is puzzling to see English words dominating policy documents. It is not uncommon to find concepts such as “safety net” and “graduation” in local documents. Therefore, policy makers should work closely with language experts to coin local phrases for key policy concepts.*

*Targeting will remain a key challenge in the foreseeable future. Training and awareness raising are important but not sufficient to solve the problem. It requires a fundamental change in attitude towards resource utilisation not only with respect to safety net but also more generally at all levels – individuals, community, government, and non-government.*

*It has been pointed out that the wage rate determined at top level does not reflect the reality on the ground. The federal government should delegate the responsibility of setting and revising wages according to market conditions to local governments.*

Despite clear statements in Government guidelines that safety net beneficiaries can only ‘graduate’ from safety net by engaging in other food security programmes, until recently the perception has been blurred. However, the government has given a policy direction that food security programmes should primarily target safety net beneficiaries to facilitate speedy graduation. This is welcome but should be carefully monitored for side effects.

*At the launch of the PSNP, 'productive' and 'safety net' together seemed conflicting terms. Productivity should be more broadly defined to include human development and engage direct support beneficiaries in more broadly defined 'productive' activities on a voluntary basis. NGOs, CSO and civil societies and citizens should use the PSNP as a springboard to advocate for universal social protection.*

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