

## INTRA-HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS AND THE DESIGN OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS: THE CASE OF POLYGAMOUS HOUSEHOLDS IN NORTH BURKINA FASO

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### KEY MESSAGES

- **Intra-household dynamics influence how individuals use social protection program assistance.**
- **Who to target?** Participant selection should depend on program objectives (such as reducing childhood malnutrition, improving food security, increasing human capital investment, or encouraging income diversification and productive activities). In the Sahel, there is a high degree of gender segregation of resources and responsibilities, which has important implications for the design of social protection programs in this region.
- **How much, how often?** Gender-differentiated control over different types and sources of income should be considered when determining the size and frequency of cash transfers.
- **What accompanying measures?** To reach their objectives, cash transfer programs are often complemented by additional services. Social protection programs designed to increase profitability of income generating activities should evaluate how the level of pooling or individualization of income within a household will affect the success of accompanying interventions implemented at the community, household, or individual level.

A recent overview of World Bank social safety net programs and gender highlighted the need for greater consideration of intra-household dynamics in the design of social protection programs (Bardasi 2014)<sup>1</sup>. During program design, decisions have to be made about who to target, how much and how often to give cash transfers, and what measures should accompany cash transfers. These decisions become even more complex in the context of polygamous households.

### GENDER INNOVATION LAB

The Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) conducts impact evaluations of development interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to generate evidence on how to close the gender gap in earnings, productivity, assets and agency. The GIL team is currently working on over 50 impact evaluations in 21 countries with the aim of building an evidence base with lessons for the region.

The impact objective of GIL is increasing take-up of effective policies by governments, development organizations and the private sector in order to address the underlying causes of gender inequality in Africa, particularly in terms of women's economic and social empowerment. The lab aims to do this by producing and delivering a new body of evidence and developing a compelling narrative, geared towards policymakers, on what works and what does not work in promoting gender equality.

<sup>1</sup> IEG World Bank Group. 2014. *Social Safety Nets and Gender*

## SO WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

To develop recommendations about how to maximize project impact, The World Bank's Africa Region Gender Innovation Lab partnered with the Burkina Faso Adaptive Social Protection program<sup>2</sup> to conduct a preliminary study in North Burkina Faso examining gender roles and responsibilities within the household.

## HERE'S WHAT WE DID

The study took place in six villages within two provinces targeted by the Burkin-Naong-Sa Ya cash transfer program—Yatenga and Zondoma—chosen because they have relatively high rates of polygamous households. All study villages are populated predominantly by people from the Mossi ethnic group, with a minority of Fulani residents.

In total, the research team conducted 50 individual in-depth interviews and 12 focus group discussions. All focus group and interview participants were members of polygamous households that occasionally or frequently experience food shortages. One focus group discussion with women and one with men was conducted in each study village. Depending on the size of the village, four to eight households were chosen for participation in in-depth interviews (total of 34 households). From each household, one wife was randomly selected to be interviewed and in half of the households, the husband was also interviewed separately. The study sample is small and is not representative of households in this region, so it cannot be used to estimate the distribution or prevalence of different household resource management practices. Instead, the qualitative data capture details regarding the expectations of individuals in study households for resource and risk sharing.

## HERE'S WHAT WE FOUND

The data indicate a high degree of similarity across polygamous households in terms of household management practices and expectations for resource and risk sharing. The level of uniformity in responses was striking, if perhaps unsurprising given that most respondents share Mossi customs and live in similar socio-economic conditions. Nonetheless, there are important exceptions to the common patterns of household management.

**Both production and consumption of the staple crops are pooled and are managed by the (male) household head.** Household agricultural land belongs to the household head. He decides what to cultivate, and in Mossi households all household members are expected to contribute labor to agricultural production. In minority Fulani households, women do not usually participate in agricultural activities. The household head centrally manages the stock; he decides how much to sell and he apportions the amount to be consumed. He is also responsible for procuring agricultural inputs, if any are to be used. In many households, each wife has a small garden plot that she manages on her own. Each wife maintains an individual stock of sauce ingredients, some of which come from her garden and some that she purchases using her own income or with assistance from her husband when necessary. Wives usually take turns cooking for all household members.

**A child's father and mother both contribute to meeting schooling and medical care needs.** Study participants all expressed a common expectation that the household head or father pays for all medical expenses. Similarly, there is an expectation that the father pays for all of his children's education expenses, but a child's mother will contribute for her own children's education when she can and when the father is unable to cover all costs. The sale of a portion of the household's agricultural

<sup>2</sup> The Burkina Faso Adaptive Social Program is supported by the Department for International Development (DFID)

products and the sale of livestock is the primary source of money for these expenses. Study respondents expressed a high degree of intra-household solidarity to meet medical needs. There was less evidence of resource sharing for education expenses. While nearly all study participants said that men are responsible to pay for health and education, in practice, women in many poor households have contributed at some point to meeting those needs.

**There is individualized control over income and assets in polygamous households.** Within study households, the husband and all wives each maintain individual control over their own income. There is no expectation of transparency or pooling of income. The household head maintains control of the income from the sale of staple crops. Assets, such as pots, personal items, and small livestock are individually owned by wives. Wives control the income generated from their small gardens, from the sale of their small livestock, and from petty commerce. Women use their income to cover personal needs for themselves and their children, and for social obligations such as marriages, baptisms, and funerals. Transfers or gifts from outside the household are not always expected to be shared, unless they are in the form of food. Both men and women tend to save mostly in the form of livestock.

**Some households deviate from these common patterns and have less centralized management practices.** First, when the household head is either absent or sick, and is no longer able to manage the household stock, wives often begin operating relatively independently. Second, women in a household who are not married to the household head and whose spouse is absent (e.g. a woman who lives with her husband's brother because her husband has migrated or died), may not receive the same treatment as other women in the household. Finally, on occasion, disharmony between wives can dampen levels of cooperation. In many of those households the production and consumption of the staple crop is not a joint activity.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS

We identified a few suggestions for how to think about the potential influence of intra-household dynamics on the effects of cash transfer programs in the region.

- Because different household members have responsibility for different types of household needs and expenditures, a program's desired outcomes should influence the selection of the program recipient.
- The most effective targeting of a cash transfer meant to reduce food insecurity is uncertain and may depend on the primary cause of malnourishment. Addressing food insecurity due to a lack of dietary diversity will need to address the knowledge and resource shortages of





women who are responsible for preparing the sauce. Cash transfers to women will not necessarily address food insecurity due to an insufficient supply of the staple crop, which is the responsibility of the household head.

- Whether cash transfers to the mother or to the father are more likely to have positive impacts on children's access to school and healthcare may depend on the household's circumstances at the time (times of stability versus hardship) and the competing demands faced by the transfer recipient. In polygamous households, it is likely that a mother will prioritize the use of a cash transfer for her own children.
- In North Burkina Faso, program design should consider individual-level household assistance for income generation since adults in polygamous households tend to operate independent income generating activities and that husband and wife collaboration for income generating activities would be highly unusual.
- Cash transfer programs should consider accompanying interventions that help recipients accumulate and protect their savings.
- Gender dynamics should be considered when determining the size and frequency of cash transfers. It is possible that women's level of control over the cash will depend on the size of the transfers. On the other hand, given limited options for accumulating savings, it may be easier for women to invest a larger transfer than to progressively accumulate and save more frequent small transfers.
- Women have limited influence over important decisions within their households. When selecting recipients, consider the value of potentially improving women's bargaining power by increasing their contribution to household resources.

## NEXT STEPS

The conclusions above are meant to illustrate important links between intra-household dynamics and the design of cash transfer programs. As a preliminary study, this research did not capture the actual effects of cash transfers. It is important to remember that money received from the government in the form of a regular cash transfer may be treated differently than income from other sources. Additional research is planned that will measure differences in the use of cash transfers depending on the social protection program design.

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