Non-farm employment for the rural poor and impact on health outcomes in Ghana:

the role of social protection

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***Abstract***

Addressing disturbing poverty and inequality trends in developing countries require innovative ways of providing secured job opportunities for the populace; most importantly during the agricultural off-seasons for the rural poor. This could be achieved through social protection programs, among many other strategies. Active labour market social protection options, as compared to others such as cash transfers facilitate access of the most vulnerable to jobs, while reducing their dependence from public welfare support schemes. To this effect, the Labour Intensive Public Works (LIPW) of the Ghana Social Opportunities Project (GSOP) was initiated in Ghana to provide targeted rural poor households access to local employment and income-earning opportunities during agricultural off-seasons. The program seeks to lessen the burden of unemployment or under-employment in deprived rural communities during the lean agricultural season while creating vital infrastructure for development of both farming and non-farming households. The study designed to evaluate the project assessed the project’s impact on labour force participation and employment for both young men and women, and their implications for welfare in many farming communities of Ghana.

The study used data on 130 community-level sub-projects including manual construction of feeder roads, small earth dugout and tree planting to analyse the effects on broad aspects of rural livelihoods. Quasi-experimental techniques, employing random assignment of sub-projects and application of propensity score matching were the major estimation techniques used.

The results show significant effects on labour force participation and short-term wage earnings for both young men and women. Additionally, there were significant findings on key household issues such as health, savings behaviour, farm investment, and reversal of seasonal migration.

This presentation highlights the mixed results on how the use of social protection to improve the economic security of poor households influences access to health care, food security, and uptake of health insurance in Ghana. The projects had no significant impact on the use of health care facilities but rather increased the use of self-medication. Some arms of the programme led to significant reduction of enrolment into the national health insurance scheme, but other arms in the southern part of the country increased the capacity of beneficiaries to enrol. The findings shed light on design effects and implications for the sustainability of such innovative programs.

**Key words**: rural poverty, off-farm income, social protection, health insurance, access to health care services, gender, Ghana