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Rehabilitating Communal Assets in Rural Ethiopia – Governance Challenges and the Role of Women

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Abstract

The rehabilitation of degraded watersheds in Ethiopia is an important approach to strengthen communities and their asset base, which in turn can increase resilience against climate shocks such as droughts and floods. Group-based approaches are typically used for watershed rehabilitation, especially on communal land. To ensure women's participation and access to assets is one important aspect in many of those initiatives, which include large-scale programs such as the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) and the Sustainable Land Management Program (SLMP). Most of the research has focused on the impact of those programs on outcome parameters such as poverty. Some governance aspects have been addressed, but comprehensive research on the diverse governance challenges that arise in the implementation of such programs is rather scarce.

Comparing different watershed rehabilitation projects, this paper analyses the effectiveness of different implementation mechanisms to address such governance challenges. The paper is based on data collected through the “Process Net-Map” method, a participatory mapping tool that makes it possible to learn from beneficiaries and implementers on the ground about potential governance challenges. Process Net-Map allows the researchers to understand the different steps of the implementation process, identify the actors involved, assess their level of influence on the outcome, and identify the “entry points” for governance problems.

The main implementation challenges lie in the level of community involvement and hence sustainability of the assets created, ensuring quality and timeliness in the procurement of material, avoiding leakage of funds and elite capture. Specific challenges arise regarding women's role in the programs, including enhancing female participation in decision-making bodies and ensuring their access to and profit from the communal assets created. Female participation in public works was studied as another sensitive topic, as projects need to balance women's double-burden of participating in public works and their high daily workload. The study assesses the strengths and weaknesses of different project implementation mechanisms to deal with these challenges and derives policy implications that aim to increase the efficiency and gender-sensitivity of programs that use group-based approaches to achieve watershed rehabilitation.

Keywords: Assets, ethiopia, gender, governance challenges, group-based approaches, watershed rehabilitation