

A photograph of three young girls of African descent looking at a yellow card held by the girl on the right. The card has the text 'Bolsa Familia' on it. They are outdoors with green foliage in the background.

# Safety nets and women's empowerment

Improving outcomes for women, girls, and everyone else

# Gender awareness is key to effective and equitable SP and SSN interventions

- Merely targeting girls and women is not sufficient
- Poverty, vulnerability, and shocks are experienced differently by men and women, mhh/fhh.
- Differences in behavior and preferences, intra-household relations, and social norms all key to the impact of transfers programs.
- Women and men differ in their control over assets, labor force participation, earnings, and other factors key to the design of efficient and equitable SSN schemes.

**→ Should SSN be targeted to women, designed differently for women, or merely be aware of gender differences?**

# Gender-smart SSN can boost women's socioeconomic empowerment

- Increased income and assets necessary, but may not be sufficient, for greater empowerment.
- Other components of SSN programs, such as banking, ID cards, childcare, also promote women's empowerment.
- Impacts include early marriage and pregnancy, fertility decisions, welfare of vulnerable children and youth, early childhood development, nutrition, girls' school enrollment and retention.
- Conflicting impact on domestic violence.

# Why might safety nets have an impact on women's empowerment? (What's the "theory of change?")

- Increased and more stable income reduces domestic stress.
- The range of decisions under women's control (their "sphere") expands.
- Women gain power and independence in decision-making.
- Women gain more power to leave a relationship (and the cost to men of family dissolution increases).
- Women gain access to external resources and services.
- Social norms change as women gain income and independence.

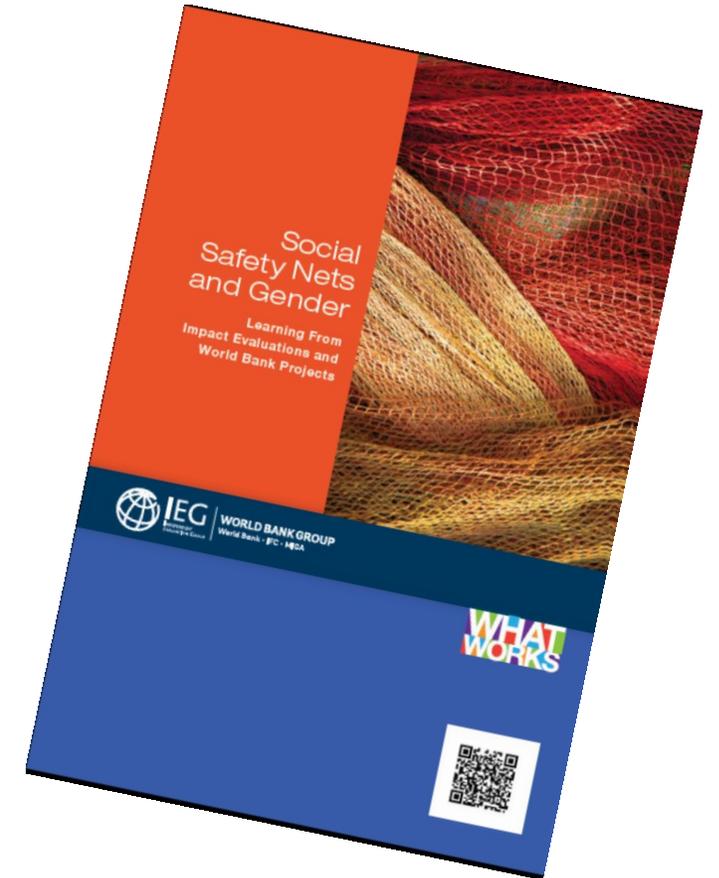
# Why might gender-sensitive safety nets be more effective for all?

- They allow women to expand incomes (direct and indirect) for themselves and their families.
- Higher and more stable income to invest in children (eg lower school dropouts).
- They enable changes in consumption patterns and greater investments in children.
- They help to grow local economies through demand-side stimulus and increased labor market activity.

# Lessons from WB Social Safety Nets and Gender IEG review of 257 programs (2014)

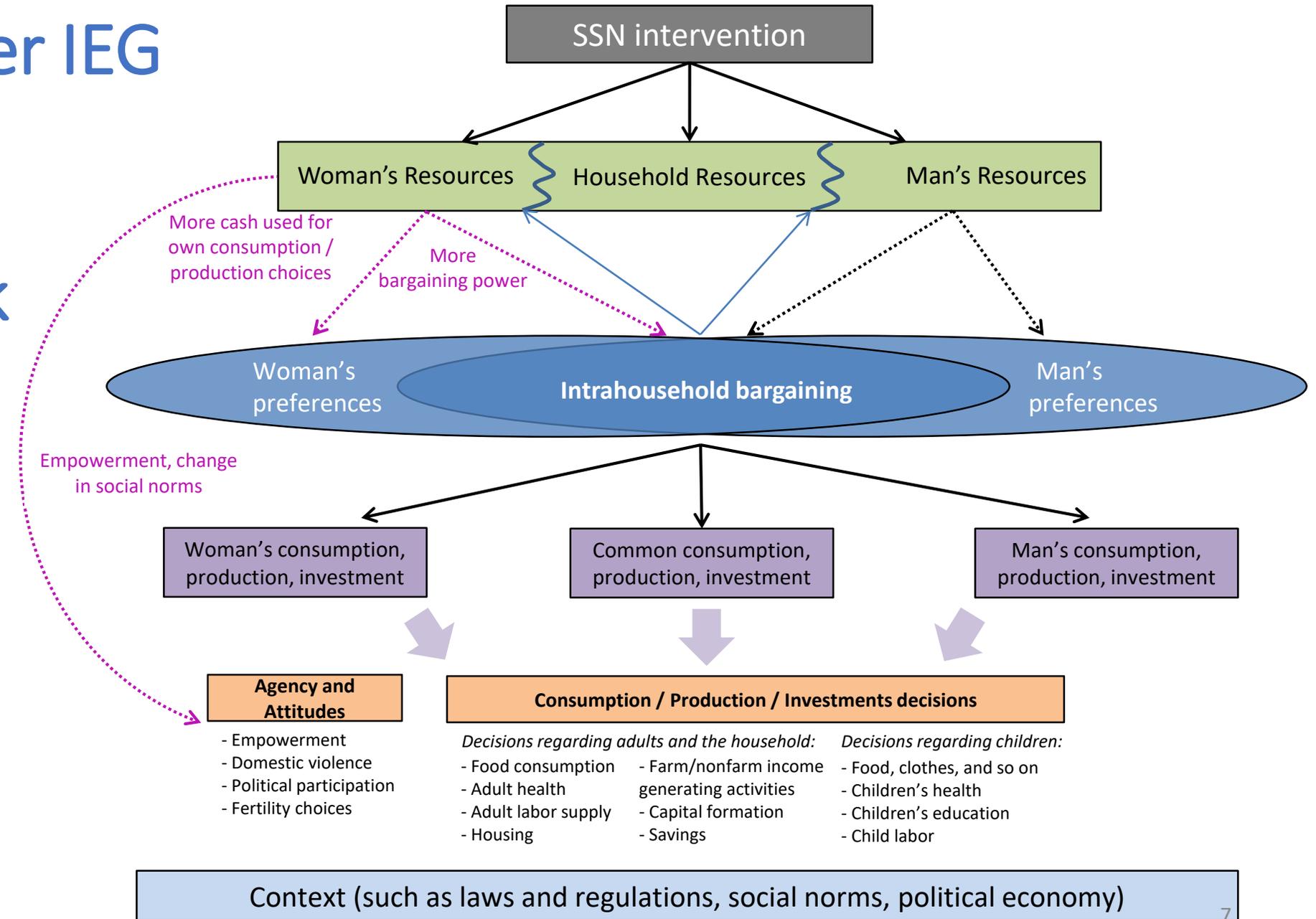
## Do SSN interventions achieve results for men and women, boys and girls?

- Is gender equality an objective? In what context, with what assumptions?
- What are the different impacts of SSN programs on men and women, boys and girls, households?
- Are there trade-offs with the objective of reducing poverty?
- What are the costs and benefits of addressing gender-specific outcomes?



Elena Bardasi and team, IEG WBG

# SSN-Gender IEG report – analytical framework



# SSN-Gender IEG report – findings

- Increasing evidence on gender-specific impacts from evaluations.
- Importance of unintended outcomes.
- Many more SSNs than there is evidence – most programs do not report outcomes.
- Most reports focus on compliance and take-up (ie outputs) than on outcomes.
- Limited reporting of sex-disaggregated indicators.
- Limited evidence of impacts over the long run.
- Limited evidence of gender-sensitivity in many WB-supported SSN projects.

# SSN-Gender IEG report – findings

- Transfers to women yield increased investments in children.
- Reduction in domestic violence (although with significant heterogeneity).
- No impact on the ability of women to decide on contraception.
- Positive impact of CCTs on antenatal visits and supervised births.
- Little evidence on political participation and voting behavior.
- Women (and fhh) invest in livestock and agricultural tools as much as or more than men.
- Public works can bring women into the labor market, but are no guarantee of continued employment.

**→ The impacts of safety net programs are not gender-neutral, but there are no consistent gender patterns.**

# ODI Review (2017) of 165 cash transfer programs

- Positive impact on women and girls, especially in education and employment.
  - Can decrease child labour for both girls and boys, though larger reductions are seen for boys.
  - Heterogeneous impacts on time allocation, eg women sometimes increase time spent on domestic work.
  - Female-headed household recipients may make more productive investments than male-headed households.
  - May increase women's decision-making power and choices, eg on marriage and fertility, and may reduce gender-based violence.
- The impact of cash transfers is not determined by the sex of the recipient alone.**

# RAND meta-evaluation (2012) of 15 cash transfer evaluations

- The gender of the transfer recipient affects the outcomes of some programs.
  - Targeting transfers to women can improve investments of children's health and education.
  - Outcomes may be dependent on the type of programme offered.
- Increasing female control of transfers does not by itself guarantee positive outcomes.**

# Essential questions for the design of gender-smart safety net programs

- What are the key vulnerabilities and constraints your program is trying to alleviate?
- How are these vulnerabilities and constraints experienced by men and women, boys and girls?
- What are the underlying drivers of these vulnerabilities (poverty, social norms, etc)?
- Are these vulnerabilities addressed in development strategies? In social protection strategies? In existing programming?
- Do adequate data exist to understand constraints and program impacts?

# Checklist – what to remember in the design of gender-smart SSN programs

1. Get the **analysis** right – understand the issues facing **all** beneficiaries.
2. Agree on clear and relevant **objectives** with appropriate entry-points.
3. Build **implementation capacity** nationally and locally.
4. Be aware of **political economy** constraints and interests.
5. Look for **win-win** delivery mechanisms.
6. Pursue **transformative linkages** between core interventions and broader opportunities for women/girls.
7. Engage with **men and boys** and the wider community.
8. Develop **strategic indicators** and measure gender-specific outcomes.
9. Ensure meaningful **engagement and feedback** with women and girls at all stages of the program: diagnosis, design, delivery, and evaluation.

## Final questions for you:

- Should SSN be targeted to women, designed differently for women, or merely be aware of gender differences?
- Is an income transfer sufficient to improve outcomes for women and girls?
- Does the sex of the recipient by itself determine the impact of cash transfers?