

Contact: Mark Primoff
845-758-7412
primoff@bard.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD SHOW
PROGRESS BUT MUST MAKE MORE STRIDES TO PROMOTE GENDER
EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT, NEW LEVY STUDY SAYS**

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, N.Y.— Social protection policies have recently emerged as a strategic component in the policy dialogue of developing countries and development agencies, as exemplified by the United Nations Social Protection Floor Initiative. The focus of social protection policies has been undergoing a shift from a restricted one-off “safety net” function—largely to protect the least fortunate from the immediate and devastating effects of manmade or natural calamities, such as natural disasters and economic crises—toward investment in longer-term, integrated, larger-scale interventions that strive to for economic inclusion by promoting people’s ability to secure a livelihood. A new report from the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College argues that more needs to be done to incorporate and promote gender equality in social protection discussions and presents evidence showing that gender-informed social protection systems that position woman as active participants in economic life rather than mere recipients can have a greater impact on economic growth.

“So far, most social protection initiatives still do not have clearly stated objectives that address gender risks, nor are they focused on transforming gender-inequality relations,” writes Levy Institute Senior Scholar Rania Antonopoulos, director of the Levy Institute’s Gender Equality and the Economy program, in her new Public Policy Brief, *From Safety Nets to Economic Empowerment: Is There Space to Promote Gender Equality in the Evolution of Social Protection?* In her brief, which was developed with financial support from the United Nations Development Programme, Antonopoulos highlights the opportunities and challenges for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment within the shifting social protection policy landscape. She pays particular attention to two social protection instruments that that have gained currency over the last decade: conditional cash transfers (CCTs) and employment guarantee programs (EGPs). CCTs, which have emerged as a central social protection intervention in Latin America, offer a cash stipend to primary caretakers if certain conditions are met; often, proof of children’s educational enrollment or regular medical checkups. Antonopoulos takes up some concerns that have been raised with respect to these

-continued-

CCTs; particularly the voiced objection that CCTs position women according to a passive caretaker role, which reinforces gender norms that limit life choices for both mothers and girls. EGPs, meanwhile, attempt to close income gaps through the expansion of paid work opportunities and the security of a job entitlement. Antonopoulos discusses two examples of existing EGPs, in India and South Africa, and focuses on the gender dimensions of EGP program design and implementation. In particular, she notes that EGPs need to avoid reinforcing inequities that prevail in the rest of the economy—by accounting for women’s disproportionate dedication of time to unpaid work, their systematic exclusion from some occupational categories, and the issue of equal pay for comparable work.

Antonopoulos contends that social-sector PWPs and EGPs, such as those that provide early childhood development and home-based care not only provide greater support for gender equality and women’s empowerment by reducing women’s unpaid work burdens, but also also growing evidence that shows them to be more efficient and greater generators of economic growth than those that focus on physical infrastructure. “Research findings derived through models that link PWPs’ effects on the overall economy and individual households show that the impacts on new job creation, new income, and the pro-poor distribution of that income are stronger when investments are allocated in social services projects than in physical infrastructure,” writes Antonopoulos citing a joint study of the Levy Institute and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that estimates the employment impacts of expanding South Africa’s Expanded Public Works Programme Early Childhood Development initiative to cover 50 percent of children in poverty (and home-based community health services covering 20 percent of all patients with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis). The expansion of social care, equivalent to 1 percent of GDP could, she writes, create over 764,000 jobs. As a comparison, the same amount of investment in infrastructure would generate just over 401,000 jobs. Furthermore, 55 percent of the jobs created in social care investment would go to women, whereas only 18 percent of infrastructure jobs reach women.

###

Public Policy Brief No. 128, 2013: *From Safety Nets to Economic Empowerment: Is There Space to Promote Gender Equality in the Evolution of Social Protection?*

To read the full text of this policy paper or to learn more about the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, please visit www.levyinstitute.org/publications/?docid=1815.

(5.6.13)