ETHIOPIA'S PRODUCTIVE SAFETY NET PROGRAM: POWER, POLITICS AND PRACTICE

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Abstract: With one third of the population living in poverty and millions experiencing chronic food insecurity, the government of Ethiopia faces difficult and complex challenges. One of the most robust and effective social protection efforts is the Productive Safety Net Program, which has served more than seven million people since 2005. This article explores the role of power and politics and posits that the maintenance of political control explains why components of the program are not implemented as planned. We focus upon everyday mundane aspects of life in rural communities wherein governmental programs entrench political control while making progress towards stated objectives. Copyright © 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The government of Ethiopia (GoE) has made significant progress is reducing poverty. In 1995, it was estimated that 46% of the population lived in poverty, and by 2010, it had been reduced to 30%—during the same period, the population had grown from 57 to 88 million and is currently estimated to have risen to 97 million (World Bank, 2016). Key to this success has been rapid economic growth. Annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth has been between 8.6 and 13.6% from 2004 until the present, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world (World Bank, 2016). One of the largest and most effective programs developed by the government to support people living in rural areas—who constitute over 80% of the population—is the Productive Safety Net Program (hereafter 'Safety Net').

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The Ethiopian Safety Net began in 2005 and operates in rural areas of Ethiopia, supporting food insecure households to ensure that their basic needs are met. The program aims to enable households to overcome vulnerabilities without eroding their assets and over time supporting household to build their assets. Ethiopia's Safety Net program is the second largest in Africa (after South Africa) and is one of the largest safety net programs in the world. In 2015, more than seven million people had been supported by it, a figure that is expected to expand in the coming years, potentially reaching ten million people. The Safety Net is largely implemented by the GoE and is supported a range of development partners.[1] In 2015, the Safety Net underwent a transformation into its fourth manifestation. The emphasis in this article is upon the relevant features of the Safety Net for when the data was collected (June and July 2015). Ethiopia's Safety Net has been widely studied and is found to have positively impacted food insecure households in diverse ways (IFPRI, 2013; Katane, 2013). Some studies indicate that the impact is modest when compared with progress made in comparable, non-client households[2]; however, even the most critical assessment points to significant positive change (Berhane *et al.*, 2014; Berhane, Hoddinott and Kumar, 2014; Gilligan, Hoddinott and Taffesse, 2009).

The Safety Net has three key components: the (1) direct support program; (2) public works program; and (3) temporary program. Eligible households with able-bodied adults are enrolled into the public works program, whose work is geared towards enhancing infrastructure, protecting the environment and enriching community-based resources, such as Farmer Training Centres and schools. Public works activities occur for 6 months of each year, during which clients receive a salary based upon their household size. Public works clients are expected to graduate from the program when they gain sufficient assets (the selection and graduation processes are explained in further detail in the succeeding sections). Those who are unable to work, because of disability, illness, age or otherwise, are enrolled in the direct support program. For the first 10 years of the Safety Net, direct support transfers were aligned with the 6 months of the public works program; however in the newest manifestation of the Safety Net, starting in 2015/2016, direct support clients will receive payments for 12 months of the year. Temporary clients are pregnant or lactating mothers or guardians caring for a malnourished child, who are enrolled in the public works program, and are temporarily shifted into the direct support program.

The development of the Safety Net in Ethiopia is one of many emerging social protection programs in Africa. As outlined by Nino-Zarazua *et al.* (2012), the Ethiopian Safety Net has developed within a broader development programming shift in Africa, which also includes the Orphans and Vulnerable Children Program in Kenya, the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty in Ghana, the Mchinji Social Transfer Scheme in Malawi and a host of emerging projects in Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia. Unlike programs in Southern Africa, the newest manifestations are supported by donor governments and international institutions, suggesting that host governments may be responding to donor shifts and have less of a vested interest in social protection in and of itself. Programming of this nature must also be viewed in light of the broader

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[1]Including (alphabetically): Danish International Development Assistance, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development of Canada, European Commission, Irish Aid, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, UK Department for International Development, United Nations Children's Fund, United States Agency for International Development, World Bank and the World Food Program.
[2]We use the term 'client' instead of 'beneficiary' as this is terminology used by the Productive Safety Net Program.

practice of politics (de Waal, 2015). These factors have implications for understanding the implementation of social protection activities, as well as for donors, which are discussed in the succeeding sections.

We focus upon the roles of power and politics in the implementation of the Safety Net, in a particular time and within specific places, to enable a more nuanced discussion about how they interact with the practice of development. Throughout this work, we contrast the plan (the Program Implementation Manual, referred to as the 'Manual') of the program with its practice and explore why divergences may be occurring and what it means for participants in the program. Divergence between planned activity and practice is commonplace in development activity; however, these tend to be adjustments to implementation as opposed to entirely new modalities. The differences we highlight are not minor. For example, planned participatory activities are not implemented, appeals committees and processes never started, and graduation from the program is not done by the established criteria. We hypothesize that if the divergences between plan and practice consistently exclude any and all participatory activities, they ought not be considered as random components of poor implementation. Nor are they simply failed processes. Rather, these are means through which the Safety Net is being utilized to maintain and enhance political control in rural communities, while also working to reduce rural poverty. We use qualitative approaches in seven case studies to determine if power and politics provide an explanatory narrative for these divergences.

Not all aspects of the Safety Net were implemented in the areas of study, and thus, the lessons learned should not be generalized to the program in totality or to all regions in the country where the Safety Net operates. This article is not an evaluation of the impact of the Safety Net; thus, the changes that have taken place within the Safety Net overtime are not the primary focus. Rather, we focus on the research question of what the role of power and politics can be in the implementation of social protection programming and aim to facilitate critical discourse of the potential impact when donor-funded projects are implemented by governmental organizations. Rather than outcomes, results or impact, we assess the implementation processes at the local level, using a qualitative case study approach.

2   CONTEXTUALIZING POWER

Abusive political power is typically envisioned as coercion and force. The expression of political power and control in these forms are, however, costly and in most cases cannot be sustained. Gramsci (1971) suggested that power and control need not be brute force, but ideological. Ideological power, as explored by Foucault (1977), need not be hidden. Power can be expressed in mundane, day-to-day activities and practices. Foucault (1979) proposed the concept of governmentality as a means to explore how power is asserted and control is exercised; the "ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power…" (1979, p. 20). In other words, governmentality provides a lens through which the practices of the government can be understood as means to shape the action of citizens to align with its objectives. The acts of governing can therefore be understood as expressing power and establishing control.

In the practice of international development, whereby international organizations, governments and non-governmental organizations work with national governments to

deliver services and goods, there has been limited consideration of the ways in which power and control are strengthened (or alternatively, challenged) by it. Research by Carothers and de Gramont (2013) have made significant progress, and some governments have made strides to address the inherent political nature of international development and humanitarian action, such as the United Kingdom's Department of International Development Drivers of Change methodology and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's Power Analysis. In the anthropological realm, the way in which international development projects have been co-opted for political purposes have been documented by Scott (1985), Ferguson (1990) and Li (2007). Writing about the Horn of Africa, de Waal suggests that power is the central driving force behind political action; "reducing human beings to mere instruments and commodities, mutating public goods into private ones, and co-opting good intentions to achieve malign outcomes. We see politicians manipulating commendable policy goals such as state-building and peacekeeping as mechanisms to accumulate power and money" (2015, p. 4). Writing about rural development in Ethiopia, Chinigo (2013, p. 54) argues that "the political consequences of reforms are every bit as important to understand as their development efficacy."

In seeking to analyze the practice of politics and the way in which international development and humanitarian activities are shaped for political purposes, we are not questioning the value, importance and impact that social protection activities have. At the same time, we believe that donors involved in projects such as the Safety Net need to be more cognizant of other outcomes, such as the co-opting and moulding of programming for political purposes. Poverty can be reduced, while participation in democratic process is curtailed; food security of the community may be strengthened, while those who question political authority are punished by exclusion from such programs; child nutrition may improve, while burdens on vulnerable members of society are intensified. The divergences between the plan and practice in the implementation of the Safety Net might simply be viewed as faulty processes that can be fixed. In the instances explored in this article, it is clear that specific aspects of the program were not being communicated to lower levels of government and in a few cases known but explicitly ignored. Our analysis explores why these divergences occur employing a lens of governmentality to analyze how power is made visible by these divergence and how the everyday expression of that power enhances political control.

Had the Safety Net been a sole initiative of the GoE itself, the use of the program as a means to express power and exert control would be problematic. However, when a governmental program like the Safety Net is funded and supported by a host of international organizations, governments and non-governmental organizations, they are directly involved in the practice of governing. Thus, further problematizing this practice as a host of actors are facilitating such action. It appears, however, that these actors have not taken political contexts and consequences into account. For example, the donors played a significant role in creating and revising the Safety Net Manual, which is well organized and planned in a very detailed manner. The 2014 version spans some 344 pages (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014a). However, the Manual is largely written as if communities exist within ahistorical, apolitical and *tabula rasa* environments. For example, the Manual outlines a process for lodging appeals, but it does not assess if there is an environment wherein permission to voice complaints exists or if community members feel confident to voice them without fear of repercussions. In the seven communities in southern Ethiopia, we found neither to be the case. Political elite, defined here as a small group

of individuals who hold the most powerful political positions, have had held such positions long before the arrival of the Safety Net and did not feel it necessary to create the committee to hear appeals. One community chairman told us that community members "had no right to complain" and doing so "was not an option." Alternatively, community members feared that lodging a complaint would result in the loss of support via social protection programs, including but not limited to the Safety Net. One woman we encountered was adamant; she was removed from the program because she supported the opposition political party, a complaint she took to three levels of government, each of which accused her of engaging in anti-government activity and denied her request to re-join the program. Importantly, the fear of repercussions for voicing complaints was widespread. Force was not required on a day-to-day basis; power existed as a threat in the collective consciousness of the community, reinforced by the mundane, day-to-day acts of governing.

3   METHODOLOGY

We did not set out to analyze the impact of the Safety Net. Rather, we wanted to gain a detailed understanding of how the Safety Net was being implemented and to explore the political context within which that took place. Because of the diversity of socio-political, ethnic, historical and religious contexts found throughout Ethiopia, we began this research project fully cognizant that our study would not be generalizable to other places or projects. However, in providing a detailed study of particular places based upon a specific project, we wanted to analyze the practice of governmentality within the context of development aid. Our qualitative research methods focused on conducting detailed interviews with clients and former clients of the Safety Net, as well as relevant governmental staff. Interviews of this nature were conducted in seven different communities, located within three administrative districts in southern Ethiopia from two regional states.[3]

Discussing politics in Ethiopia can be challenging. The imprisonment of journalists and opposition party members are examples of this (HRW, 2015; Mengesha, 2016). The purposeful selection of seven communities was based upon our past connectivity with and established trust therein. In our experience, community members often know the 'correct' answer (i.e. what they are expected to say), which they readily provide to fly-in fly-out researchers, resulting in an apolitical and distorted version of information that avoids controversial statements that may result in negative repercussions. For example, one elderly gentleman that we interviewed explained that there were no foreseeable benefits for him to tell us the real situation; he was confident that he only stood to lose the services he was currently being provided by speaking negatively about the service providers. As a result, he said, he keeps quiet. The fears he expressed are supported by the findings of our research: Many people were 'graduated' from the Safety Net because they 'asked too many questions' or criticized the governmental workers. Having established trust within these communities enabled our qualitative approach to gain insight that might not otherwise be shared.

In each community, we began by interviewing the governmental staff: community leaders, development agents, community health workers and school staff. Typically, one

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[3]In order to avoid Ethiopia-specific jargon, we have used 'community instead of *Kebele* and 'District' instead of *Woreda*.

person would speak on behalf of the group they represented, resulting in four interviews with each community-based government entity. We also conducted interviews with the district staff responsible to oversee the Safety Net in the communities; these took place in group meetings with two to six staff members present. In addition to these, forty-six key informant interviews were conducted with clients in the direct support program, the public works program, graduates of the public works program and a very limited number of temporary clients. The semi-structured interviews with current and former clients were conducted anonymously, voluntarily and were audio recorded. The selection of households followed an informal randomization process, whereby the researchers walked in random directions and, in distinct areas, began asking households if they were current or former clients of the Safety Net. While we recognize the limitations of this approach, it is worth including that these interviews were conducted independently and were not arranged or informed by government or Safety Net staff. In instances wherein a local government actor was keen to direct our selection, we split into two groups, enabling the other to proceed undirected.

Qualitative research and case studies have the potential to draw undue attention to specific areas, rather than to the broader issues being illuminated. In order to avoid burdening the communities that graciously worked with us, we have removed all identifying information of the locations, in addition to assuring anonymity of individuals. We believe that the latter, in this case, requires the former. For this reason, statistics are presented as percentages and without data tables. That being said, the data collection was done with the knowledge and support of the district and community governments in all seven communities. Without presenting a burdening amount of detail, we have attempted to note instances wherein community members expressed experiences that diverged from the government presentation and explore why these divergences might have occurred. We recognize that there is an inherent bias towards selecting the more egregious instances of divergence and under-representing alignment of plan and practice. As stated at the outset, however, our primary research question is explored within the divergences, justifying the focus upon them.

The issues that were raised by governmental staff and community members were numerous, many of which have not been included in this work. The focus of this article is primarily upon the experiences of clients of the Safety Net, upon common concerns and key discrepancies. Because of the nature of our community-level research, a large number of components outlined in the Manual are beyond the scope of this study. For example, the governmental approval process, annual budgeting, financial reporting and a long list of activities that occur beyond the community-level are not explored in this research, and as a result, we cannot say with confidence that they are, or are not, implemented as outlined in the Manual. Berhane *et al.* (2013) suggest that at least some of the financial components not included in this study are also not implemented according to the Manual, such as the upstream budget review process. Berhane *et al.* (2013) present a process and impact evaluation of the nationwide program and do not focus on the causes of divergence primarily. This article provides insight into why such divergences might exist.

4   FINDINGS

Within the seven communities, the direct support and public works programs were in operation. The temporary program was operational in modified forms, which is explored in greater detail below. In most of the communities, individuals had limited

knowledge about the existence of a contingency fund, and almost no one accessed it during the 10 years of the Safety Net operation. As a result, the contingency fund is not detailed in this work; however, its absence raises questions for researchers assessing higher levels of the Safety Net administration, specifically regarding why information about, and access to, the contingency fund was so limited at the community level. The livelihood component of the Safety Net was not operational in any of the seven communities, and it is therefore not analyzed. Clients themselves had very little information about the Safety Net and the Manual, and therefore, their experiences are emphasized here, as opposed to their contrasting what happened and what should have happened based on the Manual or their rights as clients in the Safety Net. We have taken those experiences and contrasted them with the Manual. The political contextualization of the program came directly from interviewees, including governmental staff. We have taken the liberty of shaping these conversations within the academic discourse around power and governmentality.

4.1   Selection and Graduation

One of the core principles of the Safety Net is fair and transparent client selection. In all of the communities, current clients and graduates voiced concern regarding the lack of transparency and clarity about client selection and graduation. This concern is common throughout Ethiopia for both clients and community-based governmental workers, particularly why and how graduation occurs (Berhane *et al.*, 2013). Some interviewees expressed concern that the selection process, described in the Manual as 'community-based targeting', was unfair, and that in reality there was no community involvement, which the Manual outlines as the 'participatory approach'. In all of the seven communities, individual local leaders and governmental staff selected the clients without community involvement or participation. This process, community members felt, resulted in bias, with family members and friends of local leaders gaining preference of entry and holding longer terms within the public works program. Once selected, client lists were not, as the Manual outlines, verified through public meetings nor were the client lists posted in public locations. While the selection of friends and family members is problematic, it was not pervasive, and what was far more problematic was who, within the community wherein more than half met the selection criteria, was selected. According to current and former clients, this decision was often linked to political affiliation. Known opposition party supporters would be excluded, just as Scott (1985), Ferguson (1990) and Li (2007) had identified in Southeast Asia and Southern Africa. The laudable social protection program is being implemented in a way that eliminates political opposition, stifles participation and entrenches power of the existing elite.

As mentioned in the preceding texts, the available survey data suggests that the Safety Net is well targeted and has a positive impact (Coll-Black *et al.*, 2012). The community-based experiences of personal bias and political patronage we encountered can be reconciled with these findings in that the survey data does not provide details on the comparative wealth status of all members of society or how certain members were selected instead of others when their comparative wealth ranking was similar. At the national level, specific criteria are not outlined because of the diversity of livelihood practices and agroecological settings. However, at the local level, a degree of specificity is required in order for the wealth ranking exercises to be applied in a fair and transparent fashion. At the district level, however, the direction was vague (refer to Image 1), resulting in an inconsistent selection. In addition,
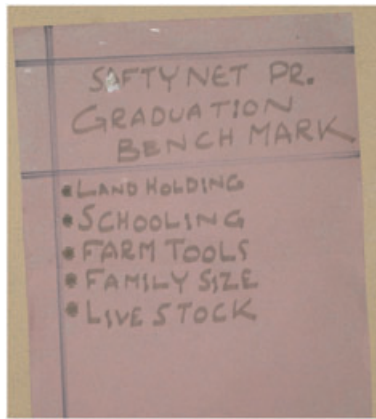
Image 1.   District-level criteria for Safety Net graduation

even if criteria were specified, none of the governmental staff responsible for the Safety Net program in the communities had community-wide wealth ranking data to make that selection. Thus, selection relied upon the decision of the community chairman and the staff responsible for the Safety Net. These findings align with those of Chinigo (2013), who found that the community-level processes of the decentralized land administration in Ethiopia effectively strengthen and extended political power.

The Manual offers a vague criterion for graduation that "households achieve food sufficiency in the absence of external support." This is problematic because of the reliance farmers have upon seasonal yields and rain-fed agriculture as well as significant fluctuations of rainfall (Cochrane and Gecho, 2016), resulting in food security varying accordingly. In a good year, a household may appear to have achieved food sufficiency, and be graduated, however in a year with too much, too little, too late or irregular rainfall households that previously had food sufficiency may become food insecure. In multiple interviewees, graduates explained that they had graduated 1 to 5 years ago, but their situation had since returned to the difficult situation that made them eligible for the program in the first place. Moreover, consistently, every single interviewee stated that once graduated, there was no way to re-enter the Safety Net. Graduation, however, may not only be the result of newly built assets. High rates of graduation support the government's Growth and Transformation Plan targets. One interviewee, who was graduated from the program, explained

> "The graduates are selected without clarity and without criteria. They do not visit our homes. They do not see what assets we have. They do not see the change. They simply say 'you are graduated'."

Another interviewee, who himself was not content with being graduated from the Safety Net, felt that the number of graduates are determined at higher levels of government, and the local administrators and community-based staff decide who has relatively improved their situation in order to graduate the provided quota. The data appears to support this claim, as there are consistent percentages of graduates within diverse communities (refer to Chart 1). In 2008/2009, three communities in one district each graduated 18% of public works clients, and in 2009/2010, the percent of graduates in these communities was 19, 20 and 21%. It is possible, yet highly unlikely, that asset building in these three communities was occurring at very similar rates. However, it is far more likely that the Safety Net was
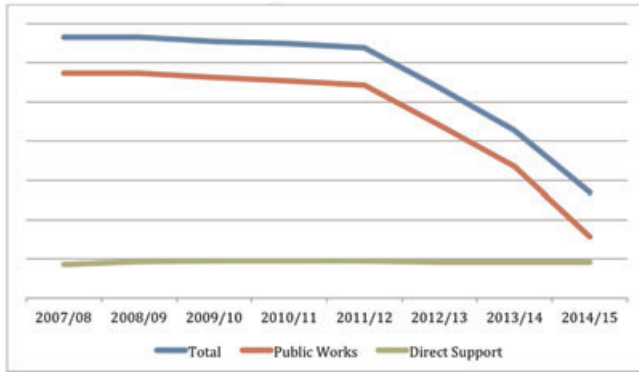
Chart 1.   Number of Safety Net clients[4]

graduating based upon predetermined quotas. Graduation by quotas and after set periods of time 'confirm' that the program is successful and ensure that the Growth and Transformation Plan targets are met.

The Manual explicitly states: "They [clients] will not be excluded from the PSNP through the annual recertification exercise if they are better off but do not meet the criteria for graduation." Because the criteria were subjective and no household data existed to support decision making, many clients were graduated based upon the community-level governmental staffs' knowledge about relative status, rather than having met or passed the 'graduation threshold'. One community chairman said he knew that "some [clients] are correct" in complaining about graduation based upon relative status and quotas, but "the District government says do it anyway" and they have no alternative options.

In one community, the entire public works clientele was 'graduated' in a single year and then replaced by others. The local government worker explained that "they are expected to graduate in 5 years", and therefore, everyone was graduated after 5 years and new clients were brought into the program. We encountered cases of graduation for political reasons, more precisely, graduation for not supporting the political elite. Berhane *et al.* (2013) also found that some clients felt that they were graduated for political reasons, others based upon quotas and others based on the duration they were enrolled. Our findings suggest that all these experiences are correct. Governmental staff running the Safety Net at the community level informed us that they use quotas; others said they graduated after 5-year enrolment, while clients explained their graduation was motivated by politics or other personal motives. The different reasons for graduation exist, and the causes differ. In some instances, political patronage, in others political punishment, and in yet others for broader political objectives of meeting expected regional and national targets. Although apparently contradictory, these implementation divergences can be understood in viewing the program as being modified in different ways, at different times, by multiple levels of government for different political purposes.

4.2   Lodging an Appeal

The Safety Net designers anticipated that selection and graduation issues might arise and created an appeal system to ensure transparency and accountability. The Manual outlines

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[4]Data provided by a District Agricultural Office.

an 'effective appeal mechanism' that would provide a means for transparent and fair adjudication of complaints. The grievance mechanism, according to the Manual, is run by an Appeals Committee at the community and district levels of the government. However, not a single current or former client was aware of the programmatic 'safeguard', the grievance redress mechanism. Several community members rebuffed the idea, stating that clients had no option or right to complain. A few governmental staff stated that the committee was formed, as outlined in the Manual, but that it had not met, met irregularly, and none had heard an official complaint. Multiple graduates we interviewed stated that they had taken their own initiative and asked their community leaders and local government for an explanation of why they were graduated from the program. The most common response was a lack of response at all, while in some cases, it was explained that the community had a limited amount of funding and tried to convey the challenges they faced in administering the Safety Net. One interviewee stated: "No question can be raised" once they have been selected for graduation.

The limited number of community-based governmental staff and their lengthy duration within those positions duplicates responsibilities, such as serving in the committee that selects clients as well as the theoretical ones that handle appeals. The overlapping of responsibility reduces the effectiveness and usefulness of the grievance mechanism and contributes to the entrenchment and concentration of power and control. One elderly man, referring indirectly to the negative consequences of speaking freely, stated: "If we touch such things, we may see change ourselves, so there is no need to comment or search about it." As Scott (1985) highlighted, elite-run systems of this nature, and the punishments of opposing or challenging the ruling elite are often recognized both by those who benefit from such arrangements as well as those who are neglected or harmed as a result. The disincentive of speaking freely within such contexts reduces the likelihood that the political nature of the Safety Net operation would be disclosed to surveyors, whose role is limited to collecting data and do not have the ability to enact or enforce change.

Questions were not raised to higher levels of government because of fear of repercussions, that the higher levels of government would support local decisions regardless and that anyone who complains might be labelled as being an anti-government agent. One woman explained that when she took her complaint to the district and regional offices, the local government staff listed her as acting against the government so that her case would be viewed as a political act, rather than an appeal. As with selection and graduation, the ability to lodge a complaint would enable and encourage community members to challenge local authority. Empowerment of some necessitates the loss of power of others (Harris and Weiner, 1998; Roy, 2010). One community chairman gave us an overview of how the appeal process operates, which largely aligned with the process detailed in the Manual. Having peaked our interest, we had a long discussion about the appeal process and in doing so learned that in 10 years, there had not been one appeal. The chairman bluntly stated, after having explained to purpose the appeal mechanism, that appeals are "not an option" for Safety Net clients.

A national evaluation of the Safety Net indicates that the experiences in these communities are common and that the appeals mechanisms are generally ineffective (Berhane *et al.*, 2013). A government-funded audit of the appeals mechanism in 2014 suggested that Appeals Committees exist but do not function well (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014b). The cited reasons include partial participation of members, limited capacity, no standardized appeal process or management system, lack of monitoring and follow-up, no fixed meetings, overlapping responsibilities of members, lack of record keeping, on-

the-spot solutions of appeals, lack of posting appeal results and "quota based PSNP clients graduation causing early graduation without accumulating required asset [sic]" (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014b, p. vii). This government report noted that this was an *improvement* compared with past audits of the appeals mechanism. When the broader context is taken into account, it is apparent that the reasons the Manual is not implemented for selection and graduation is also the reason appeals committees only exist on paper.

4.3   Participation

According to the Manual, the selection of clients, the graduation of clients and the appeals made by community members are processes embedded with the community, are to involve community members and must be open to all community members. Client selection is supposed to be determined as separate groups within the community, which independently draft lists of who ought to be Safety Net clients, are compiled, compared and discussed before developing the final list. Notices and lists are to be posted a week in advance of public meetings, for discussion of the content. In practice, however, none of these activities take place and there is no participation of community members at all. Instead, community leaders selected the clients, who informed the governmental staff who implemented the program.

The absence of participation is not limited to intake and graduation. The lack of participation is consistently absent throughout all aspects of the Safety Net wherein it is outlined to take place, despite its strong emphasis in the Manual. For example, what activities the public works program engages in are supposed decided by community members; the Manual states: "Ensure that women – including women in male-headed households – participate in public works planning and that their voices are heard" (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014a, p. 43). In practice, public works clients are grouped by the responsible government staff, each having a leader who directs them to repair roads, plant crops in school fields or in the Farmer Training Centres and clean government compounds. These group leaders receive direction from governmental staff. Community members and Safety Net clients have no opportunity to participate in these decision-making processes. The lack of participatory process was also identified in the national study of the program (Berhane *et al.*, 2013), suggesting that these are systematic traits, not regionally specific concerns. As it relates to governmentality, the act of governing and shaping citizens, the divergences between plan and practice are consistent: Any process that encourages citizen engagement and enhances citizen decision-making power, which takes power and control from the political elite, is excluded.

4.4   Work Commitment

According to the Manual, "no able-bodied adult household member is expected to work more than fifteen days per month." The per person working cap was established to prevent overburdening clients. According to the Manual, clients are required to work 5 days per household person, meaning that if a household had only two persons, they would only be required to work 10 days in the month to receive their transfer. However, the cap on working days per person was not implemented in any of the seven communities.

In practice, each public works client in the Safety Net was responsible to work 6 days per week for 6 months of the year. The client was allowed to replace himself/herself for a day or series of days but must work 6 days per week regardless of household size. For example, if the client is a male head of household, he may send his spouse or child as a replacement (typically children can be sent after age 15, before which they are unable to work and are not accepted as replacements). In order to manage the requirements of agricultural activities, in households where a husband and wife were present, the workload would often be shared so that the male could complete the labour-intensive plowing of their land. In the case of female-headed households, where a single female was the only able-bodied labourer, she was still required to work 6 days per week for 6 months, and any work she had to accomplish on her own land would have to be conducted after completing public works activities. This significantly increased the burden on female-headed households and households with fewer able-bodied adults. Women from female-headed households with whom we spoke were heavily burdened with their requirements of managing a household, caring for children, managing agricultural land and working 6 days per week in the public works program. One widowed single mother with three children explained that she is now "doing both roles of the husband and the wife": working in the Safety Net and doing agriculture as well as caring for her children and managing her household. One graduate, despite missing the payments, said the greatest benefit of graduating was "being able to work fulltime on his own land," which emphasizes the burden the Safety Net places upon clients, who are required to work 6 days per week regardless of household size. According to the Manual, the labour cap is supposed to prevent this from happening.

At the same time, however, there are reports that clients work less than the labour cap (e.g. Berhane *et al.*, 2013). One potential way to understand the discrepancy is the different means of data collection: Berhane *et al.* (2013) used focus groups to provide feedback wherein dissent could easily be reported on, whereas we used randomly selected individual interviews and guaranteed anonymity. Another potential explanation is that the region wherein these communities are located has a particularly poor implementation of the Safety Net in comparison with the rest of the country.

In these seven communities, we found the labour caps were not adhered to. In addition to the lack of labour caps, in at least two communities, public workers were required to work additional months of the year to maintain their status in the Safety Net, for which they were unpaid. There are national public works programs that community members 'voluntarily' engage in, which some clients may have confused with the Safety Net. However, a community governmental worker confirmed this that the public works continued beyond the 6 months and explained that the Safety Net must run all year because "there is work that needs to be done, so they must work." Even if it was the case that there was a misunderstanding, and the additional work was not explicitly for the Safety Net, 'voluntary' participation must be understood as occurring in the highly politicized environment within which it takes place, wherein refusal is equated with political opposition, resulting in exclusion from benefits and 'graduation' from existing ones. As politicization of social protection and developmental activities is common (Colson, 1971; Nino-Zarazua *et al.*, 2012), including in Ethiopia (de Waal, 2015), an analogy could be drawn from the rather blunt statement of a political leader in Yemen, who stated that "'people are clever enough to realize' that rejecting the offer to cooperate with the regime usually means being entirely marginalized" (Phillips, 2011, p. 60). While programs are not compulsory, nor are they forced, the Safety

Net has to be viewed within a set of broader governmental processes that shape the behaviour of citizens to align with its objectives while also making progress towards developmental aims.

Because community members were not aware of the working day labour cap, clients were unaware that they were working far more than what the Manual required of them. Similarly, some governmental workers responsible for implementing the program were unaware of these limitations. When staff lack knowledge, it is reflective of high-level priorities (or lack thereof). It is noteworthy that the government is the greatest beneficiary when the working day labour cap is not implemented: Public works programs provide labour for government-run facilities, such as Farmer Training Centres, schools and governmental compounds, as well as public works the local government is responsible for, such as maintaining roads. In this instance, the Safety Net program has been shaped so as to offer the greatest benefit to the government.

4.5   Power Tends to Corrupt...

One of the outcomes of increasingly centralized power wherein citizens have a limited ability to counter the abuse of that power is corruption, which is particularly pronounced in rural and remote areas with limited oversight. While we do not argue that corruption is widespread, in one of the seven communities, there were multiple issues of corruption. Public workers were commanded to farm the land of the community chairman, cut firewood for his household, clean his private properties and build fencing around them. Those that raised a concern, of whom we met several, were graduated, or in the words of the former clients, they would be "kicked out" of the Safety Net. One elderly woman, who was a client of the direct support program, wanted to sell her small piece of land, for which the chairman offered a low price. She opted to sell to a higher bidder, after which she was removed from the Safety Net program. She is alone in her household and cares for a deaf child and has been reduced to begging for food. It is noteworthy to point out that direct support clients are not supposed to graduate at all. Another elderly woman, who used to be in the public works program, was graduated because some people reported to the community chairman that she had relatives working in South Africa who were sending her money. The proof provided was that they saw her eating *teff* (an Ethiopian cereal). She was then graduated from the program without an investigation; "they decided without speaking to me," she explained. In this same community, we were told that those who had a good relationship with the community chairman were enrolled in the Safety Net but were not required to work.

Although the chairman had been removed at the time of our research in 2015, the issues had not been resolved. High levels of resentment continued and opinions of the Safety Net implementation continued to be extremely poor. Those who were graduated, including the two women described in the preceding texts, were not re-entered into the program nor had they received any form of apology for the treatment they received. We do not believe that corruption on this scale is common. However, these experiences highlight the fact the Safety Net may be abused and misused in contexts where administrative power is entrenched and citizen participation is prevented. It also highlights the fact that instances of corruption have not been rectified beyond staffing changes, and the impacts of corruption continue.

5   DISCUSSION

We are not the first to raise concerns about bias within the selection and graduation process in the Safety Net (e.g. Berhane *et al.*, 2013; Fisseha, 2014). However, this qualitative assessment of program implementation suggests that the systematic divergences between plan and practice are indications of intentional means of enhancing administrative power and control while maintaining the appearance of accountability and participation for the donor community. Planned activities that require community participation, citizen decision-making and avenues wherein community members can lodge complaints are consistently not implemented. Clients of the program, and community members generally, are unable to engage in these processes because they are not made known, even if these rights and processes are clearly outlined in the Program Implementation Manual. What is shared amidst those practices is that their implementation would empower citizens and disempower political elite. While the program has had a large impact, it has been shaped and co-opted in its implementation such that it maintains and strengthens political power and control. In other instances, the shaping of the program (or the selective lack of implementation) ensures that the government obtains a maximum potential benefit from donor-funded activities. For those well versed in the localized politics of rural Ethiopia, these findings are a continuation of past politicization of social programs; Alex de Waal writes (2015, p. 69) about Ethiopia: "Party members had preferential access to state-allocated benefits, ranging from enrolment in higher education to subsidized fertilizer and small-scale credit. Sometimes they were the only ones who could get these benefits."

Our findings do not suggest that the positive impact found in other studies is incorrect (e.g. Coll-Black *et al.*, 2011) but that processes require evaluation as much as results. Direct beneficiaries must be considered within existing socio-cultural, political, historical, ethnic and religious contexts that significantly influence the way in which programs are implemented. The built-in participatory monitoring and accountability mechanisms were not enacted, thus ensuring that power remained centralized in the elite who held power before the launch of the Safety Net. This article draws attention to how social protection programs can have positive impacts, while at the same time be co-opted to serve political purposes, which entrench elite power and erode citizen participation.

National evaluations, such as Berhane *et al.* (2013), correctly seek to better understand the Safety Net and support it to become more effective. We believe that this qualitative research complements and enhances works such as theirs and challenges donors and practitioners to think more critically about the way programs are co-opted for political purposes. It provides an explanation as to why certain components of the program are not functioning; that divergences are not a random selection of poorly implemented components of the Safety Net that need to addressed, but that divergences are used to benefit the government and strengthen its power and control in rural areas throughout the country. The systematic ways in which power and control is shifted away from community members and into the hands of the ruling elite will not be addressed through improved knowledge. In such cases, the pre-existing role of power and control are embedded within the Safety Net implementation, being much more challenging to address. The Safety Net is only one of multiple instances (Chinigo, 2013; Planel, 2014), whereby programs have been manipulated in this fashion.

We have had the opportunity to speak with individuals that planned and designed the Manual, who assume that the program is implemented according to the Manual. Their assumptions are supported by evaluations showing that selected households are indeed

food insecure. A systematic exclusion of client input by planners and designers in developing the Manual reinforces this assumption. For example, a detailed internal report that provided recommendations for the fourth manifestation of the program was based upon desk research and 45 interviews; however, not a single client was interviewed and the vast majority of interviewees were located in the capital city, despite the fact that the program operates in rural areas and serves rural populations. The result is a lack of critical reflection upon "concepts, principles, methods, behaviours, relationships and mindsets," which Chambers suggests, fosters a state of "mutually-supporting inflexibility" (2012, p. 195). In this case, the neglect of politics, history and power within the settings wherein programs will be implemented. A review of social protection programs in Africa concludes: "To date, donors have not engaged productivey with the politics of social protection in sub-Saharan Africa" (Nino-Zarazua *et al.*, 2012, p. 169). Regarding the politics and power in the Horn of Africa, Alex de Waal argues "very often, external actors fail to see how real politics functions" (2015, p. 13), and these technical advisors believe that failures "could be remedied by advice and resources. This is not the case: these were elements of a successful political strategy" (2015, p. 102). Addressing these challenges requires that donors take politics, power and control into account. If democratic, participatory and inclusive programming are priorities of international organizations, donor governments and non-governmental organizations, it may require finding new modalities for the delivery of programs and services.

While the modalities outlined in the Manual are desirable, it is unrealistic to expect that issues of bias, power, control and politics that exist within community settings to be transformed with the arrival of the Safety Net Manual. This study demonstrates that best practice and idealist programming are not implemented in *tabula rasa* environments and must take into account localized issues of power, control, politics, history and gender. In practice, programs are shaped according to existing structures and relationships and co-opted for political purposes. Even if mechanisms are outlined in detail that could potentially provide checks and balances, it takes much more than a single training to alter the relationships within society and the political structures shaping them. This research challenges development planners to recognize the ways in which their funding and approaches to program design are, at the same time, empowering and disempowering the individuals they seek to support and to better understand the existing roles of politics, power and control in operational environments.

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