

Child poverty in Vietnam and the response from social protection

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Abstract

Despite a rapid increase in economic growth accompanied by the rise of living standards over the last two decades in Vietnam, there is still a considerable proportion of the population that lives in poor and vulnerable conditions. The country employs a broad range of social protection programs that tend to be regressive in impact rather than supportive of the poor. Within the debate on pro-poor impacts of social policies, child poverty is currently a hidden element of overall poverty and under-prioritized. Findings in this study indicate that children are affected differently by poverty and social policy than the overall population and therefore deserve a special focus. The paper evaluates the social protection scheme in Vietnam in terms of child poverty, comparing the analysis to overall poverty. One of such social protection programs, the National Target Program for Poverty Reduction (NTPPR) is considered in more detail, looking at targeting efficiency and into factors contributing to in- or exclusion from the program. We use the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS) 2006 to identify and quantify poverty and child poverty in monetary as well as multidimensional terms, consider the link between poverty and welfare receipt and evaluate coverage and inputs of the program in relation to both the incidence and depth of poverty. Findings indicate that monetary and multidimensional poverty measures capture different groups of children, having important implications for targeting practices. Furthermore, the NTPPR program suffers considerable in- and exclusion errors, calling for the need to revise or rethink the existing scheme.

Keywords: social protection; child poverty; targeting; Vietnam