

The Impact of Public Works Programme on Child Labor and Schooling: A Case of Malawi

ESNART PHIRI

This thesis examines the impact of the Public Works Programme under the Malawi Social Action Fund on child labor which is measured by the total number of hours worked in the past week and child schooling measured in terms of current school attendance. Domestic work, limited in most studies is also included in the study. The programme has been implemented since the 1990s to reduce poverty and address issues of child labor and education through its effects on some causes of child labor (poverty and income shocks). Using Integrated Household Survey data of 2010 and 2016, the study evaluates the impact of the programme on child labor and schooling outcomes through household participation. Using a fixed effects model, the empirical results suggest that MASAF PWPs increases the total number of hours that children in PWP participating households spend on any work by 1.2 hours for the 11 to 17 year age group and around 1 hour for the 5 to 10 age group. The effect is positive for the domestic work as it reduces the number of hours children spent in the past day for all child age groups but only significant for the 5 to 10 years old group. It is also observed that both older and younger children in PWP beneficiary households are 7 percentage points more likely to be involved in child labor than children in non-participating households. On the other hand, children in treatment group are less likely to be involved in domestic work by 5 percentage points than those in the control group. The results are insignificant for the child schooling outcomes but with a negative direction for the 11 to 17 year group and positive direction for the 5 to 10 year age group. These results suggest that MASAF PWP may induce school absenteeism and increase work in other activities of the household such as agriculture as a substitution effect for the older children. The findings suggests that there is need to improve in terms of approach of the PWP in Malawi to reduce these negative effects on children. The programme is short term or temporary in nature but with improvements in the targeting criteria, time duration of participation and amount of cash among others these effects can be reversed and have a meaningful desired impact. The study is limited in that it does not have baseline data to perform a proper impact evaluation and was unable to identify a good time variant instrument variable.