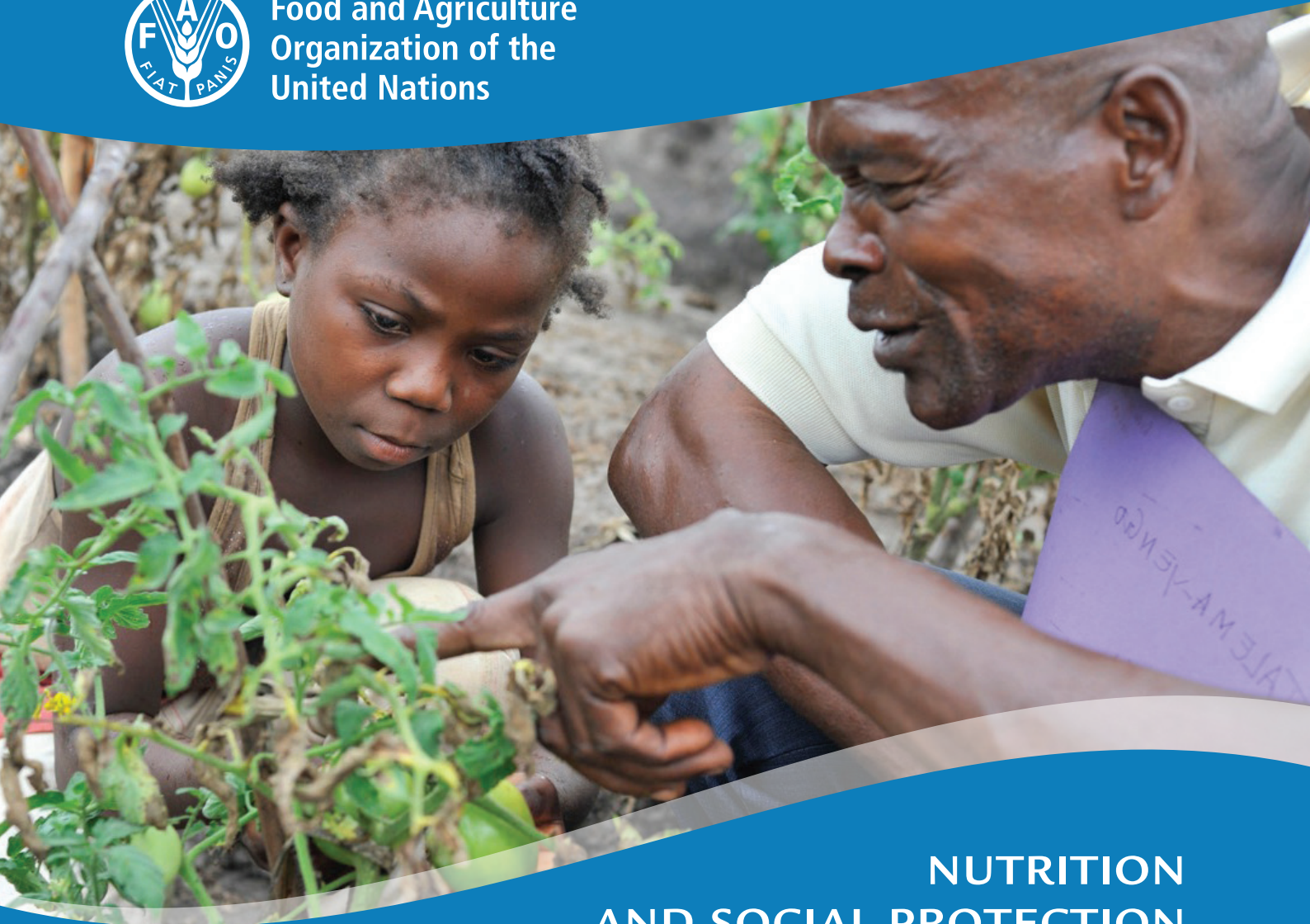




Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



NUTRITION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection policies and programmes hold immense potential for improving the nutrition situation of vulnerable populations. To ensure that these policies holistically combat malnutrition, a nutrition-sensitive approach needs to be employed in their design and implementation.

This technical brief identifies how the main social protection instruments can address the causes of malnutrition, and proposes guiding principles to make these instruments nutrition-sensitive.

SOCIAL PROTECTION CAN ADDRESS IMMEDIATE, UNDERLYING AND
BASIC CAUSES OF MALNUTRITION

NUTRITION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION: THE COMMON GROUND

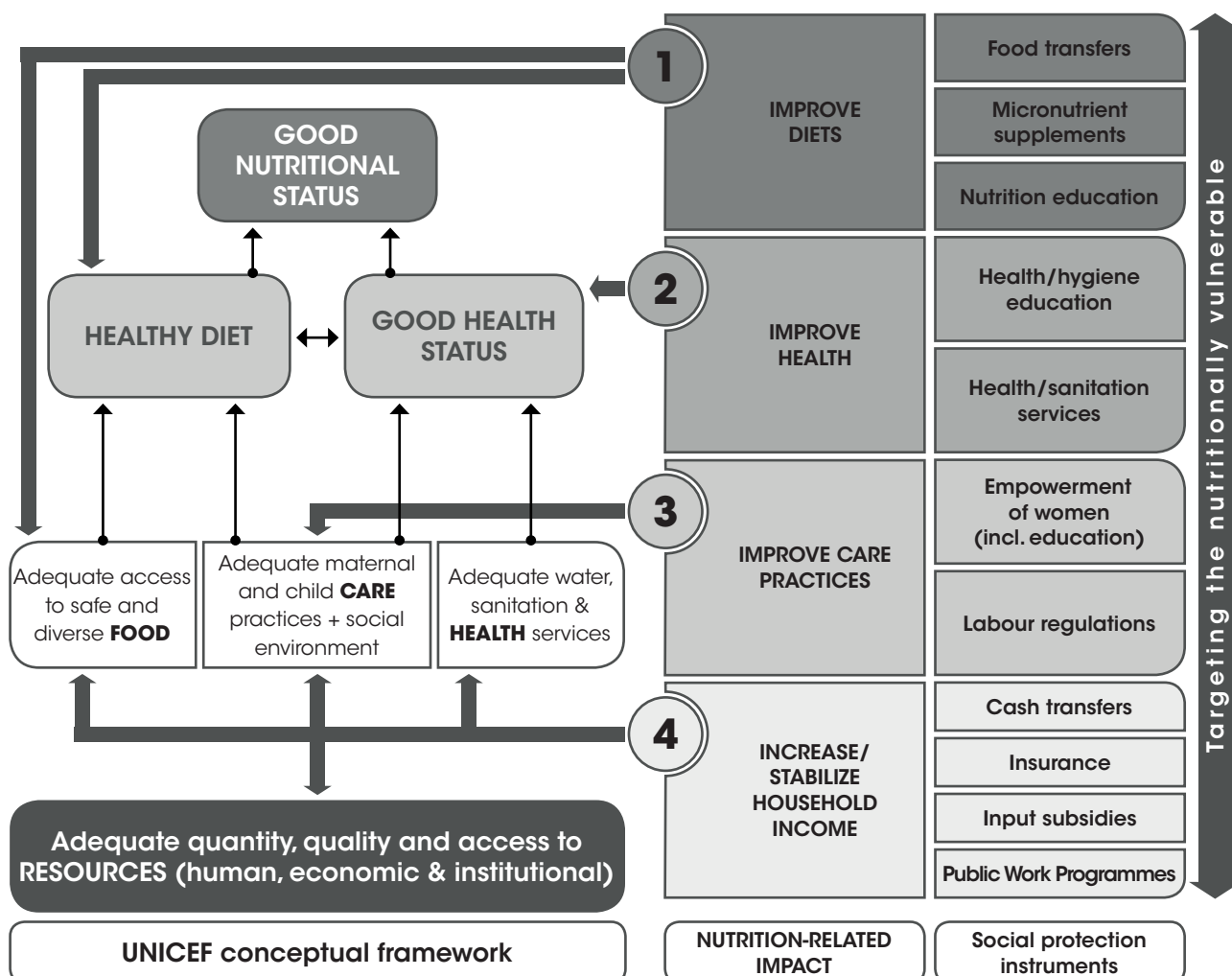
Nutrition and social protection are linked by their relevance for building resilience and linking emergency and development approaches.

Adopting a multisectoral and multistakeholder approach, which is sensitive to the specific needs and roles of both women and men, is necessary for nutrition and social protection programmes. Finally, both are best addressed through a life-cycle approach, which acknowledges that economic and nutritional vulnerabilities differ through the various phases in life and that malnutrition as well as poverty and social exclusion have a hereditary character, being passed from one generation to the next.

PATHWAYS THROUGH WHICH SOCIAL PROTECTION IMPACTS NUTRITION:


Social protection can positively impact nutrition by [improving dietary quality](#), [increasing income and improving access to health services](#). In addition to the direct links related to the diversity, safety and quantity of food consumed by each individual, social protection can also influence other determinants of nutrition, e.g. practices related to care, sanitation and education or basic causes of malnutrition such as inadequate access to resources.

The figure below lays out the multitude of social protection instruments in relation to their impact on nutrition. It is not an exhaustive illustration as clearly there are numerous other indirect causal linkages which need to be considered when designing nutrition-sensitive social protection programmes.



KEY PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING SOCIAL PROTECTION NUTRITION-SENSITIVE

The following principles should be kept in mind when designing and implementing nutrition-sensitive social protection interventions:

- **Target the nutritionally vulnerable:** targeting strategies can be based on socio-economic or nutritional vulnerability. Focusing on women in reproductive age and children during the first 1 000 days (from pregnancy to their second birthday) is the most efficient way to break the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition and poverty by ensuring the adequate growth and mental development of children.
 - **Incorporate explicit nutrition objectives and indicators:** to enhance the positive impact of social protection interventions on nutrition.
 - **Empower women and make them the recipients of social protection benefits,** which can break the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition. Special focus should be placed on increasing women's access to education, assets and resources, while at the same time considering women's work burden and time constraints. Engaging men when addressing gender issues is also key to strengthen the positive impact of social protection on nutrition.
 - **Promote strategies that enable households to diversify their diets and livelihoods.** Seek to promote access not only to staple foods, but as far as possible to a diversified and safe diet, including micronutrient supplements where appropriate. Furthermore, diversifying livelihoods - and thus sources of food and income such as by introducing small livestock - enables households to improve both their diets and socio-economic status, while reducing their vulnerability to shocks.
 - **Strengthen linkages to health and sanitation services** by incorporating health objectives. Social protection programmes contribute to improved health outcomes by improving access to and/or quality of health and sanitation services and by providing education on health-related issues and hygiene.
 - **Integrate nutrition education and promotion** into social protection interventions, since increasing incomes or food availability at the household level will not automatically translate into improved nutrition outcomes.
 - **Scale up safety nets in times of crises:** the acute and long-term negative effects of shocks can be reduced if social protection systems already in place can be expanded and adapted in a timely manner.
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INVESTING IN NUTRITION-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

Scaling up and sustaining social protection interventions to ensure a long-lasting and positive impact on food security and nutrition requires:

- **Multisectoral approach**; with carefully targeted interventions that reach the most vulnerable, meet their nutritional needs and empower them with both resources and knowledge.
- Linkages with **complementary interventions** within the broader agricultural and rural development agenda to build human capital and holistically address malnutrition.
- **Institutional mechanisms** for coordination within and across relevant sectors – social protection, health, agriculture, education, labour, trade, environment, consumer affairs and planning, among others – at all levels, including **engagement of stakeholders** at the local and community level, to facilitate policy coordination and coherence.
- **Building capacities** among policy-makers and practitioners in various sectors on synergies between social protection and nutrition. Adequate financial and human resources, together with information systems and logistics arrangements, need to be in place to ensure capacity and knowledge development of the technical staff in the field.
- Favourable **political** and **policy environment** for long-term investments and sustainability of nutrition-sensitive social protection policies and programmes.



For more information, please visit:

Technical Paper on Nutrition and Social Protection: www.fao.org/3/a-i4819e.pdf

FAO's work in Social Protection: www.fao.org/social-protection

FAO's work in Nutrition: www.fao.org/nutrition
and www.fao.org/nutrition/policies-programmes