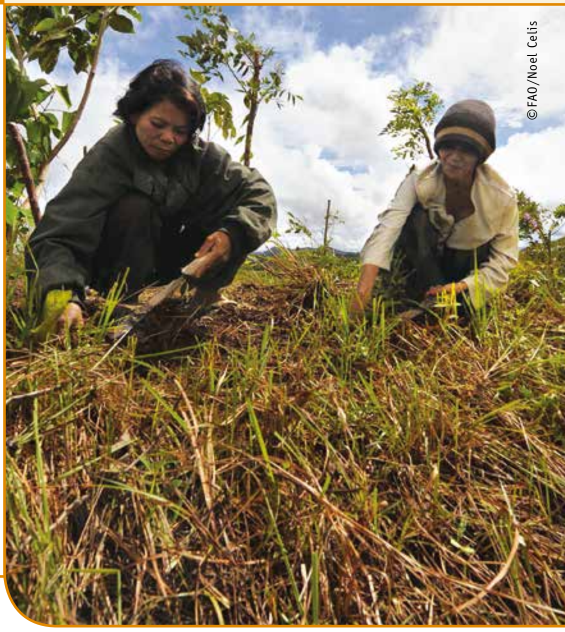
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

from PROTECTION to PRODUCTION

RESEARCH BRIEF

The impacts of combining agricultural and social protection interventions

What do we know and what else do we need to know?



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INTRODUCTION

There is increasing interest in combining agricultural and social protection interventions to help small family farmers fight poverty and hunger. Agricultural interventions address constraints limiting access to natural resources, productive inputs, financial and advisory services and markets. They include extension services, tenure reform, natural resource management, subsidized credit, investment grants, access to improved seeds and fertilizer subsidies. Social protection provides assets to smallholder farmers through cash transfers and public works programmes; this allows them to invest more time and resources in agriculture, increase their participation in social networks and better manage risks. Yet despite the clear intersection between the two types of interventions, it is only recently that some countries have started to experiment with combining or coordinating them.

THE REVIEW

A recent literature review analysed a number of impact evaluations on interactions between agricultural and social protection interventions. The review focused on outcomes related to hunger, malnutrition and poverty and the factors contributing to their achievement. The main purpose of the review was to gather evidence of effective joint agricultural and social protection interventions in order to inform future policy and programme design.

The literature on the impacts of integrated agricultural and social protection interventions is thin, partly because such interventions are relatively rare. While agricultural and social protection programmes have similar goals, they tend to have somewhat different target populations. Agricultural interventions tend to focus on commercial farmers while social protection programmes focus on more vulnerable subsistence farmers. The literature search uncovered 37 impact evaluations from Asia, Africa and Latin America and dating back to 2009 (50 percent of the assessments were carried out in 2015 or 2016).

The review looked at three types of joint interventions: sustainable livelihoods programmes, which include both agricultural and social protection elements; complementary programmes, which attempt to coordinate interventions from the two sectors to some degree; and overlapping programmes, which overlap by chance – rather than as result of an effort to achieve complementarities – in terms of location or target population.

THE RESULTS

The impact evaluations show that joint agricultural and social protection interventions have positive impacts on income, consumption and expenditure that go beyond that of an individual intervention. All three types of programmes stimulated more profitable and decent employment, including self-employment, and the diversification of economic activities in agriculture as well as prompting a shift to non-farm businesses. There were positive impacts on savings and access to formal credit, unsurprising since mandatory or incentivized savings are key components of many interventions. The programmes prompted investments in productive assets and increases in access to land and its use. Programmes that fostered self-help groups and associations increased interactions between beneficiaries and their social networks, reducing social exclusion and increasing access to public services and community support. Programme participants had more stable and profitable sources of income and greater food security.

Not all of the impacts of the joint interventions were definitively positive. There is mixed evidence on the extent to which investments in productive assets translate to higher production and business revenue. Investments in productive assets and financial inclusion were much larger or restricted to better-off beneficiaries. Whether such programmes lead to long-term productivity and income gains remains unclear as does their impact on the engagement of children in work activities. More research is needed on the effects of scaling-up the programmes and the trade-offs between wage labour and self-employment. Importantly, most of the evaluations failed to assess whether the effects of combining agricultural and social protection interventions are greater than the sum of the parts.

CONCLUSIONS

With the exception of Peru, none of the 18 countries cited in the impact evaluations experienced all three types of interventions so it is difficult to conclude what works best in a particular context. There appear to be regional preferences for specific programme types. In Asia, for example, sustainable livelihoods programmes were most prevalent, whereas Latin America favoured complementary programmes with a focus on conditional cash transfers and productive inclusion. Africa implemented a more balanced mix of programme types. With this in mind, determining whether to combine, align or integrate agricultural and social protection programmes requires a clear understanding of policies and programme preferences in target countries.

The review identified a number of knowledge gaps. There are gaps in the analysis of household-level outcomes. This calls for evaluation design that enables the impact of the different components of combined interventions to be better understood and for programme design that allows a better investigation of spillover effects. Evaluations of combined interventions tend not to look at their impact on the community and local markets, neglecting an important dimension of programme impact. Finally, there is limited knowledge about the impact of programmes that join food-based social protection interventions with programmes that purchase goods from family farmers.

REFERENCE

Veras Soares, F., Knowles, M., Daidone, S. & Tirivayi, N. 2016. *Combined effects and synergies between agricultural and social protection interventions: What is the evidence so far?* Rome, FAO.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit: www.fao.org/social-protection/en **or write to:** social-protection@fao.org

FAO, together with its partners, is generating evidence on the impacts of social protection on poverty reduction, food security, nutrition and resilience and is using this to provide related policy, programming and capacity development support to governments and other actors. Countries include Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

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