



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

BRICS countries

Investing in partnerships and cooperation for
nutrition-sensitive social protection





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The Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), held jointly by FAO and WHO in Rome in November 2014, called on governments and policy makers to address nutrition issues through interventions on various fronts. Social protection was identified as a critical means to improve nutrition outcomes.

Member States endorsed the outcome documents of ICN2, the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and Framework for Action. The latter urged the integration of nutrition objectives into social protection and humanitarian assistance programmes to tackle hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition in a holistic manner.

The BRICS (Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa) played a key role in mobilizing political will and cooperation for nutrition during ICN2. Since, they have led the way in the follow-up to its commitments.

Building on ICN2, the Russian Federation and World Bank organized the Global Forum on Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection, in

Moscow in 2015, which gathered policy-makers, researchers and experts engaged in nutrition and social protection sectors from 27 countries. At the Forum, FAO facilitated a session with the BRICS to reinforce the co-benefits of linking nutrition and social protection strategies, but more importantly emphasize the need for stronger political commitment and partnerships to ensure a positive change in the lives of nutritionally vulnerable groups.

GROWING INFLUENCE AND ENHANCED COOPERATION

BRICS countries have taken leadership in recent global policy dialogues on economic, social and environmental issues. They are home to 3.1 billion people, representing 42% of the world population.

Taken together, BRICS have achieved the Millennium Development Goal of halving the prevalence of undernourishment by 2015.

Building on their experience in reducing hunger, the BRICS countries have initiated mechanisms of South-South cooperation, supporting other developing countries in the design and implementation of social protection programmes.

Challenges remain, as there are still a large number of people in BRICS countries who are undernourished.

SUMMARY OF NUTRITION-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

BRICS countries have shown firm commitment to social protection as a means to provide assistance to vulnerable populations. The social protection programmes in BRICS countries are set up through government-led institutional structures and are domestically financed. The design of the programmes varies and are specific to each context. The programmes have been instrumental in reducing hunger and malnutrition.

■ Brazil

In 2003, President Lula put the eradication of hunger goal on top of his political agenda. It marked the start of the *Zero Hunger Strategy* and paved the way for a broad *National System for Food and Nutrition Security Policies*. The System comprises of two dozen ministries and civil society organizations at the national, state and municipal levels. The participating sectors and areas of intervention include social protection, health, nutrition, education, agriculture, rural development, environment, labour, human rights and gender.

As part of the *Fome Zero* strategy, social protection policies were enhanced. The Right to Food, along with other social rights, was enshrined in the Constitution.

The government under President Dilma reiterated the commitment to end hunger and poverty and enhanced efforts towards achievement of these goals with the launch of *Brazil without Poverty Programme*. The Programme complements the *National System for Food and Nutrition Security* and includes additional measures to enhance nutrition outcomes and promote productive activities and income opportunities for the extreme poor.

At the same time, Brazil stepped up efforts to share its experience and has expanded South-South cooperation through technical assistance provided to other Latin and Central American and African countries.

Brazil's main social protection programmes with linkages to nutrition include:

- *Conditional Cash Transfer Programme - Bolsa Família*
- *Food Purchase Programme (Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos, PAA)*
- *School Feeding Programme (PNAE)*
- *Food and nutrition education and distribution of micronutrients and vitamins through public health services*
- *Brazil's related South-South cooperation programmes:*
 - *Purchase for Africa for Africans (PAA Africa)*
 - *Strengthening School Feeding Programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean*

■ Russian Federation

Nutrition and food quality have always been a priority of the policy agenda in the Russian Federation, backed by a strong legislative framework. In 1998, the *Concept of the State Policy in the Field of Healthy Nutrition* at federal and regional levels was established. In 2014, the concept of *Domestic Food Aid* was established. The concept comprises “a system of state assistance to population in the form of direct supplies of foodstuffs to relevant individuals or by providing them with monetary aid for the purchase of food in order to improve nutrition and ensure a balanced diet based on rational rates of food consumption”.

The Russian Federation is an emerging donor in the areas of agriculture and food security. Countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are major beneficiaries. Russia’s development cooperation in these areas focuses on social and cultural rights, especially related to food, nutrition, education, and social protection. The *Eurasian Center for Food Security* engages Russian institutions in the provisioning of technical support to developing countries and regions.

Russia’s main social protection programmes with linkages to nutrition include:

- *The School Feeding Programme*



■ India

In 2010, the Indian Government launched the *National Rural Livelihoods Mission*, the largest integrated rural poverty reduction programme in the world, with its goal of reaching nearly 100 million rural households. Among other things, the Mission supports village organizations with integrated farming practices helping them to reach food security through local production. The Mission also gives poor households the voice to demand services such as early childhood education, pensions and other safety nets, including programmes on maternal, infant and young child feeding and nutrition.

Support for poor rural households through employment schemes, other income generation interventions and better nutrition delivery are also extensively implemented in India. *School meals and school nutrition* as part of social protection programming has promoted girls education and participation in society. *Food fortification* is also another area where the region is fairly advanced;

this provides the much needed micronutrients to a larger population through different outlets e.g. supermarkets, community health centers, clinics etc. India also maintains extensive *public food distribution systems* with a goal of smoothing consumption (i.e., managing scarcity) and reducing volatility in food and essential prices.

India's main rural development and social protection programmes with linkages to nutrition include:

- *Subsidized Public Food Distribution Systems (PDS)*
- *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*
- *National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)*
- *Child Grant for Girls*
- *School Feeding Programme*

■ **China**

China's focus on agricultural productivity growth and diversification has helped lift hundreds of millions out of poverty and hunger. China has also emerged as a major development partner providing other developing countries with support to infrastructure development, agricultural investments, and technological transfers. It has become an important donor to programmes for agriculture development and food security.

Food fortification programmes to combat micronutrient deficiencies and school feeding programmes are widely accessible to vulnerable populations in China.

China's main rural development and social protection programmes with linkages to nutrition include:

- *School Feeding Programme*
- *Food Fortification Programmes*

■ **South Africa**

South Africa has a number of social grants schemes that aim to protect the poor from extreme conditions. The policies and programmes such as the *National Integrated Nutrition Programme*, and the *school feeding programme* seek to address challenges of malnutrition in a holistic way, involving several sectors and local communities. South Africa explicitly recognizes the rights to food and social protection.

South Africa's *National Development Plan 2030* accords a central role to social protection in addressing the critical challenges of eradicating poverty and reducing inequality. A role is assigned to social protection to contribute to ensuring that no one slips below a minimum standard of living, as well as a more transformative and developmental role of moving towards a more inclusive growth path and to ensure more inclusive development outcomes.

South Africa's main rural development and social protection programmes with linkages to nutrition include:

- *Child Support Grant*
- *School Feeding Programme (NPSP)*

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN ENHANCING THE NUTRITION-SENSITIVITY OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES

Social protection continues to gain momentum. Many countries are expanding the coverage of their social protection systems and have increased related budgets. There is also increased recognition of the need to align social protection with other key interventions to maximize its potential impacts on food security and nutrition, as well as poverty reduction.¹

BRICS countries' experience in the development of nutrition sensitive social protection interventions is critical, particularly for countries that are progressively moving towards a systems and multi-sectoral approach to social protection and nutrition.

Yet, the BRICS countries still face numerous challenges in integrating nutrition and social protection and could benefit from exchange of experiences of dealing with these amongst themselves. More in general, there is a need for further exploration and systematic identification of the experiences and lessons-learned of social protection systems on nutrition outcomes.

It is also important to analyze the institutional and governance mechanisms that must be in place in order to ensure successful implementation and positive nutrition outcomes.

¹ FAO, IFAD and WFP. 2015. Achieving Zero Hunger: the critical role of investments in social protection and agriculture ROME, FAO

Lastly, there could be gains in enhancing collaboration and linking the international cooperation schemes of BRICS countries to create complementarities and synergies.

FAO'S WORK ON NUTRITION-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

FAO acknowledges the necessity of a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach in integrating nutrition and social protection.

It sees social protection as one of the instruments in the fight against rural poverty and in enhancing food security and nutrition. Poverty and malnutrition have multiple causes, which cannot be addressed by a single sector or stakeholder. Protecting the vulnerable populations from poverty and exclusion and improving nutrition therefore requires a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach.



Through the new *Strategic Framework*, which includes ending malnutrition and rural poverty as *strategic objectives*, FAO aims to *strengthen government capacities* in designing, implementing and monitoring social protection systems that benefit rural households and those dependent on rural livelihoods, while establishing key linkages with food security and nutrition.

FAO's expertise on supporting the development of sound policies in the agricultural sector is now further enhanced by aligning rural development approaches with strategies that strengthen poor households' capacity to better manage risk and increase access to resources and critical services.

FAO also generates *knowledge and evidence* on the impact of national social protection programmes on nutrition outcomes, as well as on linkages and synergies between nutrition and social protection within the wider context of agricultural and rural development. It also works with partners in developing normative and standard setting instruments.

Furthermore, strong emphasis is placed on *facilitating partnerships, outreach and advocacy* among and within countries in the area of social protection and the links with food security and nutrition, agricultural and rural development.

■ Further Resources and Information:

This summary note is based on the FAO paper on “Experience of BRICS countries in the development of nutrition-sensitive social protection programmes” (www.fao.org/3/a-i6073e.pdf).

FAO. 2015. The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA). Social Protection and Agriculture: Breaking the Cycle of Rural Poverty (www.fao.org/3/a-i4910e.pdf).

For more information, please contact:

Ahmed Raza (ahmed.raza@fao.org) and Natalia Winder Rossi (Natalia.winderrossi@fao.org).

