



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

# Boosting the impact of social protection



ZAMBIA

Beneficiaries of the Social Cash Transfer Programme in Zambia taking part in a community gathering.  
©FAO/Ivan Grifi

With the aim of eradicating poverty and hunger, FAO provides countries with evidence-based policy support to design social protection programmes that are nutrition-sensitive, risk-informed and shock-responsive, and advocates to expand social protection coverage to poor and vulnerable rural people.

FAO, together with its main partner UNICEF, has been generating evidence on the productive impacts of social protection in rural areas and supporting the design of broader rural development strategies that combine social protection programmes and agricultural interventions.

Achieving the goals of eradicating poverty and hunger requires acknowledging the economic potential of the poor, and supporting their participation in the economic growth and the broader processes of rural and structural transformation.

Social protection measures such as cash and in-kind transfers allow the poor to improve their food security, increase their economic potential and help them cope with risks and crises. By providing a minimum income, these measures help remove credit constraints, allowing poor rural people to start businesses and to actively engage and invest in more productive and profitable agricultural activities.

The results of the impact evaluations conducted by FAO, in the context of the Transfer Project, have been embedded into national policy processes. FAO's work has strengthened the case for the programme's scale-up by building the credibility of an emerging sector, addressing public misconceptions linked with cash transfers, while supporting learning around programme design and implementation.



## Bringing out the potential of cash transfers to reduce rural poverty

**The Government of Zambia has recognized social protection as an investment and thus embarked in a scale-up and allocation of more national resource to expand the Social Cash Transfer Programme. This highlights the effectiveness of social protection in reducing rural poverty and food insecurity in the country.**

Started in 2003, the Social Cash Transfer Programme in Zambia aimed to reduce extreme poverty and to prevent its transmission across generations. Results from the impact evaluation carried out by FAO, UNICEF and the American Institutes for Research show that the programme is having positive impacts: increased food security, improved child wellbeing, improved living conditions and increased productivity and ownership of productive assets.

Thanks to cash transfers, some 240 000 families increased the amount of land dedicated to crop production by 36 percent while expenditures on agricultural inputs more than doubled. As more agricultural inputs were used, overall production increased by 36% in 2012, with the

products being mainly sold in local markets. The Social Cash Transfer Programme will reach 700 000 households by the end of 2018.

This evidence contributed to key policy processes in Zambia. By highlighting the impact of cash transfers on human capital and increased production, these findings challenged the perceptions that social protection measures create dependency. It instead demonstrated that beneficiaries are not just passive recipients of aid but that they use the money received to invest and improve their livelihoods. As a result, cash transfer programmes are increasingly recognized as one of the most flexible and effective instruments for addressing the needs of rural populations, in particular those dependent on agriculture.

While government and partners are now engaged in a new larger-scale cash transfer programme, FAO is expanding its research and policy support programme in the country, aiming at strengthening the roles that agricultural and social protection stakeholders play in poverty reduction in rural areas.



## Making the connection between agriculture and social protection

**In Lesotho, FAO has provided more than 56 000 families with vegetable seeds and trainings on home gardening and food preservation to improve their home production. As a result, families can save money on vegetable expenditures and use these resources to purchase maize or other commodities, improving their food security and income.**

This activity is part of the *Linking Food Security to Social Protection Programme* started by FAO in 2013 to improve the food security and nutrition of poor and vulnerable households in Lesotho. The programme strives to boost the productive impact of cash transfers and thereby reduce poverty. FAO is supporting poor households and smallholder farmers by providing home gardening and nutrition-sensitive trainings, including guidelines for adopting healthier diets.

These agricultural interventions complement the Child Grant Programme, launched by the Ministry of Social Development. Poor rural households, who benefit from the national Child Grant Programme, receive cash transfers which are bringing several positive impacts: from increased school enrolment to reduced malnutrition and improved of rural children health.

Together with UNICEF, FAO estimates that the Child Grant Programme has reached more than 30 000 households and over 65 000 children across the country. The programme has helped poor families invest more and improve their productivity and livelihoods. Families can give their children better hope for their future and are able to invest more in schooling and education, they can buy new school shoes and uniforms for their children. Based on these results Lesotho, with the support of FAO, has also developed a national Social Development Policy and a Social Protection Strategy.

FAO's impact evaluations showed that when combined, social protection measures and agriculture interventions have a stronger impact on reducing poverty and hunger in rural areas.

While increasing investments in food production and raising incomes, together the programmes also contribute to strengthening the resilience of poor households to climate change and natural disasters. Due to a major drought, Lesotho is experiencing low agricultural production and higher food prices, spreading food insecurity among poor households. By providing additional income and agricultural skills, the programmes help poor families cope with these shocks and meet their food needs while mitigating the impact of droughts on their livelihoods.

### Contact

Benjamin Davis, Strategic Programme Leader, Reduce Rural Poverty, email: [SPL3@fao.org](mailto:SPL3@fao.org)  
Natalia Winder Rossi, Team Leader, Social Protection, email: [Natalia.WinderRossi@fao.org](mailto:Natalia.WinderRossi@fao.org)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
[www.fao.org/reduce-rural-poverty/en/](http://www.fao.org/reduce-rural-poverty/en/) – [www.fao.org/social-protection/en/](http://www.fao.org/social-protection/en/)