

Social protection for food security

A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) to the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

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CFS, Rome, 15 October 2012

Terms of Reference: Social Protection



The CFS requested the HLPE to work on Social Protection, specifically, on ways to lessen vulnerability through social and productive safety net programs and policies with respect to food and nutritional security, taking into consideration differing conditions across countries and regions.

The study should include a review of the impact of existing policies for the improvement of living conditions and resilience of vulnerable populations, especially small scale rural producers, urban and rural poor, women and children.

What is “social protection for food security”?

Social protection is a range of policy instruments that address poverty and vulnerability, through:

social assistance (e.g. cash transfers or food aid),

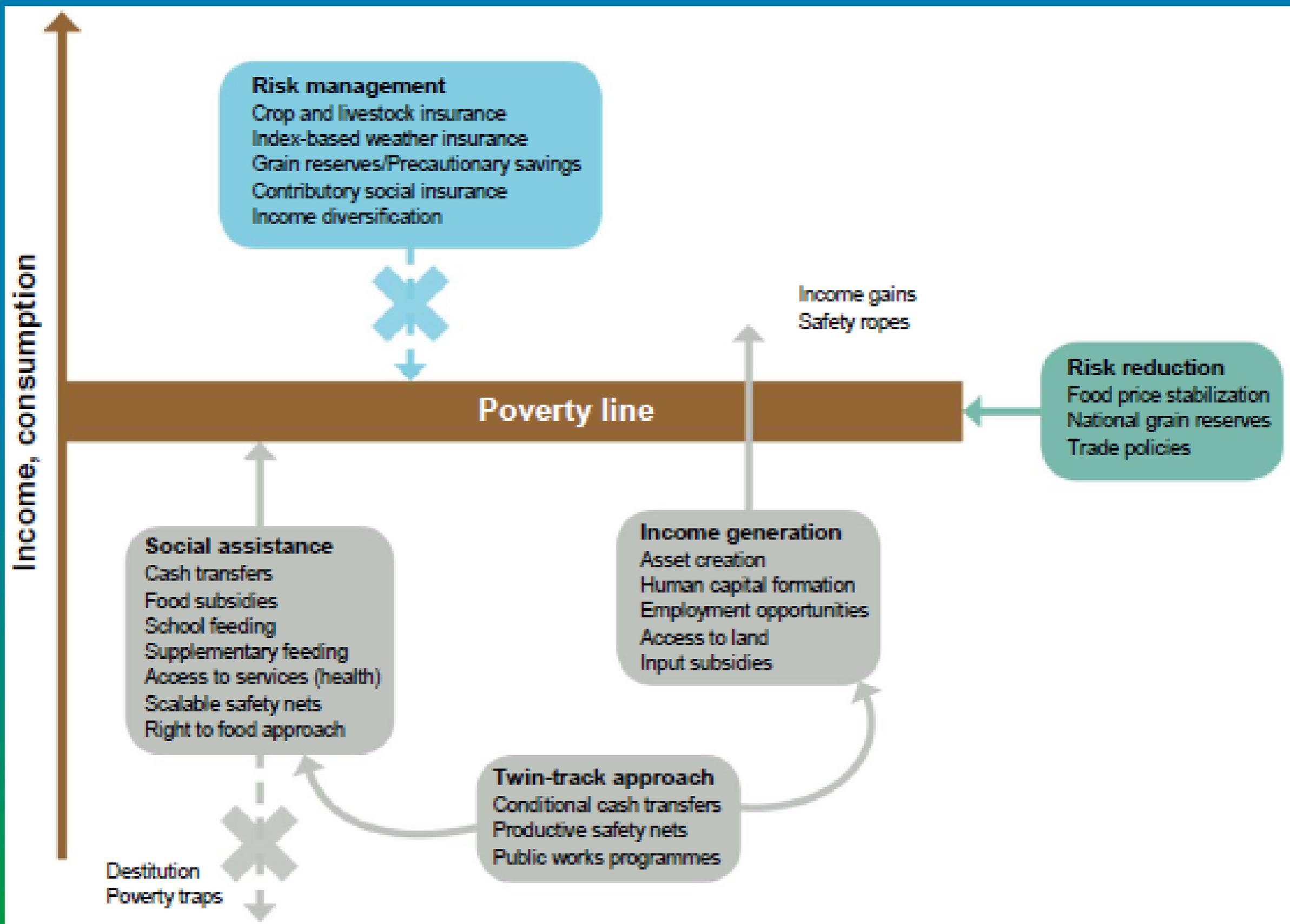
social insurance (e.g. unemployment benefits, pensions),

social inclusion (e.g. legislation on the human right to food).

Food insecurity is the inability to secure an adequate diet today and the risk of being unable to do so in the future.

“**Social protection for food security**” means – in this report – using social protection instruments, programmes and systems to promote the human right to adequate food for all.

What is social protection?



Rights to food and social protection

This report is grounded on the fact that access to food and to social protection are universal human rights, recognised by most states.

“The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement”.

“The right to social security includes the right to equal enjoyment of adequate protection from social risks and contingencies. ... social security should be treated as a social good, and not primarily as a mere instrument of economic or financial policy.”

(UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

Social protection instruments (1)

Agricultural input subsidies

- + Generally positive impacts on agricultural production.
- + Raises farmers' incomes and reduces rural poverty.
- + Promotes household and national food security.
- + Can benefit women farmers (low access to commercial inputs).
- Generalised input subsidies are expensive and inefficient.
- Targeted input subsidies have high leakages to well-off farmers.
- Input subsidies have negative impacts on trade and markets.
- Input subsidies are politically difficult to modify or abolish.

Public works programmes

- + Public works target the poor – in fact, they are self-targeting.
- + Effective against shocks (e.g. floods and droughts), enabling consumption smoothing by food insecure households.
- + Can create useful infrastructure (e.g. rural roads and irrigation)
- Work requirement reduces nutritional value of food or cash.
- Heavy labour excludes women and labour-constrained poor.
- Assets created often don't benefit the poor, are low quality, and deteriorate if not maintained after the project ends.

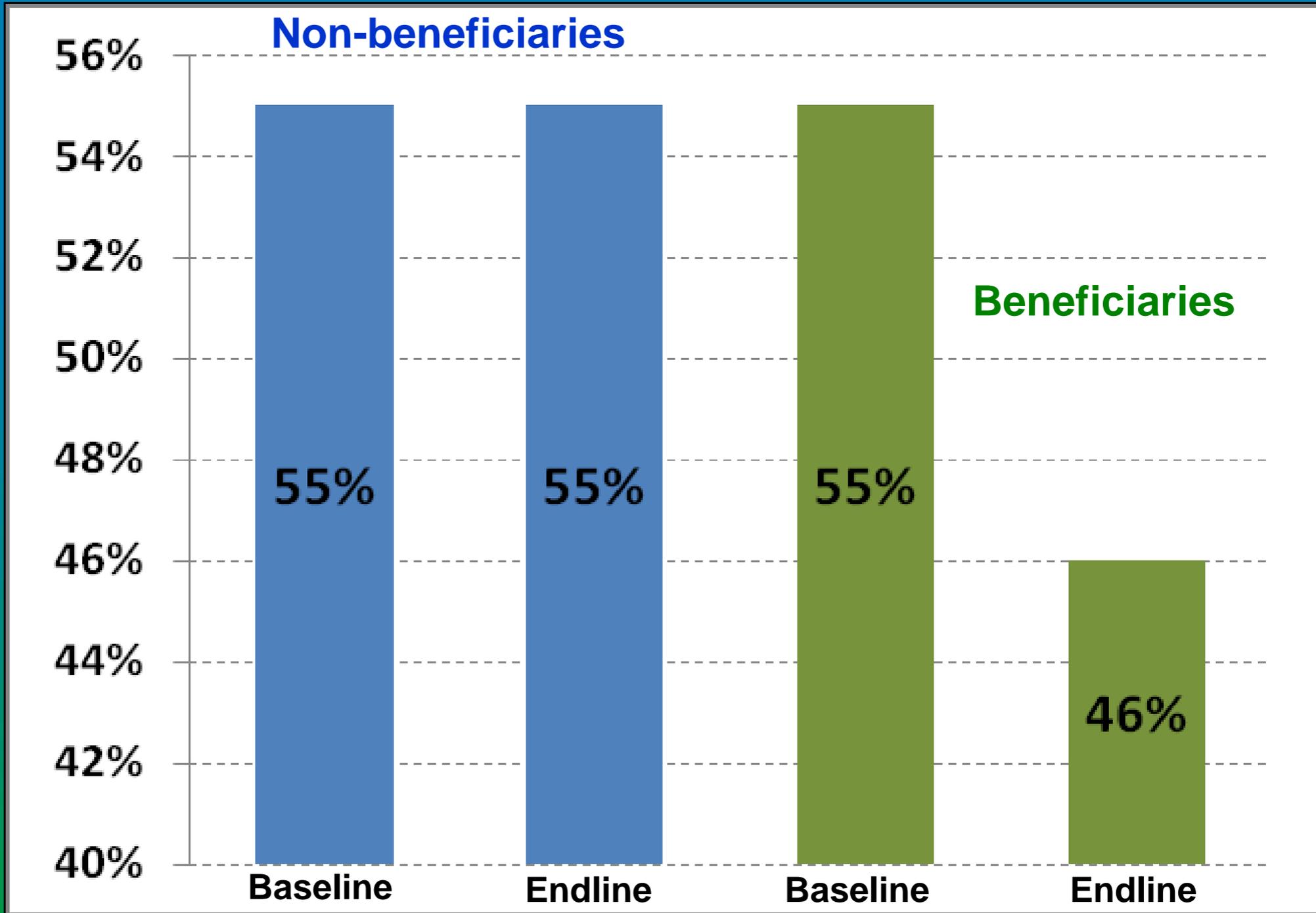
Problems with public works can be addressed by good design, implementation and monitoring – e.g. “decent work” principles.

Social protection instruments (3)



Unconditional cash transfers

Child stunting and cash transfers in Malawi



From instruments to systems

- Almost all social protection instruments are controversial.
- Selecting instruments should follow a food security analysis and a needs assessment.
- No single instrument is enough – a suite of interventions is needed to address all food insecurity needs.
- Many criticisms of social protection programmes reflect bad design or implementation – so they can be improved.
- Accountability mechanisms are crucial for ensuring effective implementation – a “social contract” between governments and residents – e.g. complaints procedure, social audits.

Social protection systems

Brazil:

- Adequate food is a right in the Constitution; “Organic Law for Food and Nutrition Security” (2006) is implemented through programmes like “*Bolsa Familia*” (conditional cash transfer) and National School Meal Programme.

India:

- Rights-based approach (National Food Security Bill; National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) – MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of work at minimum wage to all rural households, on demand – shift from “food-for-work” to the “right to work”.

South Africa:

- 7 social grants (e.g. Child Support, Older Persons Grant), underpinned by legislation – civil society mobilised to extend grants and ensure full access. Positive impacts on nutrition.

Recommendations to Policy-Makers

1. Every country should put in place a social protection system that contributes to the right to adequate food for all.
2. Social protection systems should follow a 'twin-track' strategy – provide short-term assistance + support long-term livelihoods.
3. Social protection must address vulnerability to poverty and hunger – e.g. by scaling up rapidly when required.
4. Social protection for food security should be underpinned by the human rights to food and social protection, for example, with a “framework law”, and with accountability mechanisms.
5. Social protection for food security should support agricultural livelihoods directly, because a large proportion of the world's food insecure people earn their living from agriculture.

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June 2012

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