



**Global
Forum**
on Food Security
and Nutrition

Social Protection for Food Security: setting the track for the High Level Panel of Experts

Summary of discussion no. 72
From 16 August to 9 September 2011



Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition

About the Document

This document summarizes the results of an online discussion held on the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition <http://km.fao.org/fsn>

Please refer to the complete proceedings document which can be found online at:
http://typo3.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/Social_Protection/PROCEEDINGS_HLPE_Social_Protection.doc

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I. Background

The Steering Committee of the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) opened an online consultation on Social Protection for Food Security, following the HLPE mandate to conduct a study on the same topic in order to inform the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Forum members were invited to comment on the proposed scope of the study, which includes definition of vulnerable populations, discussion on how and why existing social safety nets are useful and recommendations for the design of specific kinds of programs (to read the proposed scope of the HLPE study, please visit the discussion webpage: <http://km.fao.org/fsn/discussions/social-protection/en/>)

The online consultation took place from the 16 August to 9 September 2011 and attracted 39 contributions from 22 countries.

The following summary is aimed at providing readers with a general overview of the consultation, including the list of all references shared.

For a complete record, please refer to the proceedings document http://typo3.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/Social_Protection/PROCEEDINGS_HLPE_Social_Protection.doc, in which the full contributions are included.

II. Issues raised

Definitions

Participants pointed out at the need for the HLPE study to provide a definition of social protection; there are different interpretations of what constitutes social protection and a multiplicity of terminology around what can be identified as social protection. It is from a clear definition that the study can base its approach.

A variety of positions emerged concerning the role that social protection programs should play within the framework of the fight against hunger and in protecting people against livelihood downturns.

On the one hand, well designed social protection interventions encourage development and human growth and therefore should be looked as a central element of multi-component programmes to end hunger as quickly as possible. In this perspective, investments in social protection can be seen as viable high-return ones. Common arguments that are put forward against social protection programmes do not hold up.

Other participants focused on the need of a blend of interventions, on the time span of social protection measures and on the need for social protection programmes to adopt an empowering approach, which really facilitates people's in finding new opportunities and employment. If these aspects are duly considered, social protection measures can prove to be very useful.

Identifying vulnerable populations and what is necessary to become less vulnerable

The identification of vulnerable population needs to be context-specific and nationally-owned, and so do social protection policies.

Vulnerability is multidimensional and its causes constantly evolving, with new challenges and shocks that have to be considered and that pose emerging threats to people's livelihoods, such as climate change and food prices volatility.

It was also proposed that the HLPE study should address the delicate issue of "what" needs to be measured to select countries, regions, populations eligible for social protection and what indicators could be used to keep track of progress under social protection programmes.

Participants discussed other factors that contribute to decreasing vulnerability, such as education, whose role has proved useful in strengthening the capacity of vulnerable people to achieve food security, and common property resources. Access to land, for instance, often makes the difference between destitution and survival of people and communities.

How and why existing social safety net programmes are useful

Lessons were drawn from existing social protection programs and participants experiences:

- **Role of informal social protection systems**

Many participants stressed the importance of "do-it-yourself safety nets" or "third world informal social protection"; such systems need to be supported and officially recognised as they are increasing their importance with the negative trends of the world economy and frequent price shocks.

The set up of public social protection should not undermine such informal systems.

- **Political dialogue**

The aspect of political dialogue regarding the current state of social protection and how society might be inclined to introduce or support social protection systems is very important as it influences the long term sustainability of the programme.

Example: in Kenya political dialogue on whether the country should implement a cash transfer program started in 2002, lasted 3 years and was followed by a pilot test. In 2011 cash transfer programmes in Kenya cover around 90% of the country.

- **Nutrition**

Nutrition is an area where social protection programmes had limited success in the past and that should get more attention.

Example: children in households covered by Red Solidaria program In El Salvador had increased stunting levels during the 2008 food crisis but negligible effects on weight.

- **Food price volatility**

Lessons learnt in the context of high food prices and food price volatility should be considered and incorporated in the study.

- **Gender**

A careful consideration of gender roles in the design of the social protection programme has impacts on its success.

Example: Brazil Zero Hunger programme demonstrated that channelling most transfers through women in the recipient families, grants are used more responsibly and the status of women in the household and the community is also enhanced.

- **Different options for different conditions**

Different options and beneficiaries' preferences, as well as specific social and political conditions, including corruption, should be considered when choosing the type of intervention.

Example: in India a systems of direct transfer or subsidy is replacing traditional public distribution systems that were found to be subject to leakages and corruption.

- **Targeted programmes**

There are various programmes targeted at specific population groups that have been successful.

Example: programmes for providing children and teenagers under the age of 18 with corn and a fixed quantity of milk, subsidized by the state, has been successfully working in Romania for 8 years, as well as the programme for providing fully subsidized milk for infants.

Recommendations for the design and implementation of specific kinds of programmes relevant in specific conditions

Participants provided recommendations for the design and implementation of social protection programmes:

- **Good governance**

Lack of good governance is one of the major barriers in accessing food or any kind of services from social protection programmes even in a context where government or others social protection programmes are sufficiently available. Therefore the HLPE should address this issue, including administrative and managerial capacities that can undermine efficiency and coordination of roles of national and local governments.

- **Rights based approach**

Adopting a right-based approach was felt of fundamental importance to social protection by many participants. The HLPE study should scrutinize legal aspects of social protection, including the procedural and fairness dimensions that arise from recognition and implementation of human rights.

Social protection can be a means of ensuring basic human rights for all.

- **Ownership of programmes**

Governments have a central and strong role to play for the success of social protection programmes and for allocating the necessary funds.

At the same time local communities should ensure the supply and distribution of these products and, in many cases, help from the international community in setting up these programmes is vital as until now cost has prevented many developing countries from implementing them.

A warning that developing countries should not follow the same path of OECD countries was raised: many developed countries have been increasingly delegating social protection and social welfare measures and programmes to charity and private welfare, causing growing numbers of desperate and vulnerable people.

- **Actors to involve**

Participation of the beneficiaries in the design of social protection programmes was felt important. Some stressed that equity and better coordination of the programmes can be promoted by participatory and bottom up approaches that incorporate representatives of the poor and of the farmers. But there is also a need to empower the beneficiaries, as many vulnerable people do not benefit due to many factors, including lack of voice to articulate their needs.

- **Focus on gender roles**

Gender roles should be addressed within social protection: on the one hand it has to be kept in mind that men have strong influence on the adoption of certain practices, as well as family structures. On the other hand gender roles are changing in societies and men are increasingly involved in managing and preparing food for family.

Generally speaking, there is a definite need to locate all discourses on food security through a gender lens and to address community specific needs.

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