

Post-2015 and SDGs



Nourishing people, Nurturing the planet

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Highlights

- Social protection provides direct income support, with an immediate impact on food security and poverty reduction.
- Social protection supports farmers and other rural households in overcoming financial constraints and better managing risks, with positive impacts on food production and farm-level investment in agriculture.
- Social protection tends to stimulate the local economy, with positive effects on agricultural production, rural employment and poverty reduction.
- Social protection can promote sustainable food systems, natural resource management and resilient livelihoods.
- Social protection enhances the development of human capital with long-term beneficial impacts on livelihoods.

Social protection

Overview

Access to adequate social protection remains a privilege. Today, half of the world population are excluded, with only 27 percent enjoying sufficient social protection. Traditional social security policies are a fundamental component of social protection, but the much higher degree of labour market informality in most developing countries, especially in the countryside, limits the potential coverage of contributory schemes in reaching the most vulnerable.

Most of the food insecure, undernourished, shock-prone and otherwise vulnerable populations lack social protection coverage. Only a small fraction of the 805 million people considered undernourished in the world have access to some form of social protection, including safety net programmes. Most of them live in rural areas and depend on agriculture. Rural women and youth, as well as migrants, tend to be over-represented among the poor and those lacking access to basic social services. Already disadvantaged in terms of employment opportunities and access to productive resources, they are particularly vulnerable.

Without access to instruments for risk-mitigation or risk-sharing, poor rural families are more likely to sell off their assets, shift to less risky, but lower yielding crops, or take their children out of school to work, which is likely to weaken future livelihood prospects.

Social protection has proven to be effective in reducing poverty and hunger, building resilience while promoting more inclusive and sustainable growth. Universal access to health care, education and income supplements for the needy fosters healthier, more productive and more equitable societies.

With the necessary political will, social protection is financially affordable for all countries – high, middle and low-income – albeit with different levels of provisioning. Social transfer programmes that combine income support with better access to social services, particularly health and education, have greatly reduced malnutrition and enhanced income-generating capabilities. Last, but not least, social protection can transform societies by helping to empower previously marginalized groups.

Key challenges

The main challenge for governments is to extend social protection to the most deprived and vulnerable people, especially in rural areas and the urban informal sector. Despite successful expansion of social protection programmes in a number of developing countries, basic social protection coverage remains a major challenge for others. Where social protection systems have been expanded successfully, this has come at relatively low cost. For instance, the cost of Brazil's successful *Bolsa Familia* programme amounts to less than one per cent of national income.

A further challenge is to overcome often fragmented delivery of social protection in isolation of other economic and social policies. Social protection is no panacea and its lasting developmental impact tends to be greater when aligned with broader developmental policies. To achieve such alignment, the potential synergies between social protection measures and development outcomes need to be carefully assessed. While the impact may vary in each context, in poor rural areas enhanced social protection has been found to:

- Help households to overcome dietary energy undernourishment by improving their access to food with particularly strong positive impacts from cash and in-kind transfer programmes on the nutritional well-being of children and women in poor households;
- Support farmers and other rural households in overcoming liquidity constraints and better manage risks with positive impacts on food production and farm level investment in agriculture;
- Leverage sizeable gains in access to health and education services, as measured by increases in school enrolment (particularly for girls), reduction in child labour and use of health services;
- Stimulate local economic development, for instance through the spending effects of cash transfers

with positive feedbacks on agricultural production, employment and rural poverty reduction;

- Promote sustainable food systems and natural resource management: for instance, when social protection consists of public works programmes for land conservation and the building of terraces, improving water resource management and water harvesting, and afforestation/reforestation targeted at poor households.

What needs to be done?

Social protection interventions are an essential element of both aspects of FAO's "twin-track" approach to reducing hunger and poverty. Both short- and long-term interventions are required. Social protection can establish a bridge between the two tracks. First, it helps households to overcome undernourishment by providing them with direct access to food or means to buy food. Second, it can increase agricultural productivity growth, improve livelihoods and nutrition, and promote social inclusion.

There is a clear need to forge links and promote greater policy coherence and synergies between social protection, food security, agricultural development and rural poverty reduction. To achieve their desired developmental impact, social policies will need to go hand-in-hand with agricultural and rural development policies. It is also crucial that different sectors of the government work together to deliver social protection successfully.

The Social Protection Floor approach provides a coherent and consistent policy framework which addresses multidimensional vulnerabilities in an integrated and interconnected way. National Social Protection Floors can combine basic income security guarantees with effective access to essential social services. This would enhance linkages and potential synergies across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.