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SUMMARY OF THE ONLINE DISCUSSION

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www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/social-protection-nutrition

Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection Programs Around the World – What's being done and to what effect?



About this online discussion

This document summarizes the online discussion *Nutrition-sensitive social protection programmes around the world. What's being done and to what effect?* held on FAO's Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) from 26 August to 13 September 2015 and organized in collaboration with [SecureNutrition](#). The online discussion complemented the Global Forum on Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection Programs which took place in Moscow on 10–11 September.

Over the three weeks of discussion, 25 contributions were shared by participants from 15 countries.

The topic introduction and questions proposed as well as all contributions received are available on the discussion page:

www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/social-protection-nutrition

Experiences with programmes implemented at the country level

Globally, the number and complexity of social protection programmes is growing. These programmes provide support to vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups. They also can help to address the root causes of malnutrition.

Most participants in the online discussion acknowledged the positive role that social protection can play in improving nutrition, and brought up examples from their countries that are aiming at and, in a few cases, have already achieved positive impacts on the nutrition status of beneficiary populations.

In India, the **Integrated Child Development Scheme** and the **Mid-day meal scheme**, the largest school feeding programme in the world, have both shown good methods for dealing with nutrition delivery. [*Shewli Kumar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India*]

Recently, India's National Dairy Development Board announced a **Gift Milk Programme**, an initiative to provide "a glass of milk to every child" to address nutrition among children across India by using the country's vast network of cooperatives. [*Alka Awasthi, consultant, India*]

The **Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Programme** provides a combination of predictable food and cash transfers based on season and need. This programme contributed to improvements on major nutrition indicators, reducing the prevalence of stunting, wasting and underweight in children under 5 years. [*Mebit Kebede Jhpiego, Ethiopia*]

Ghana's **Partnership for Child Development** promotes the delivery of school feeding rations that provide 30 percent RDA of energy and key micronutrients, such as iron, through locally produced, diverse foods. [*Meena Fernandez, Imperial College London, United Kingdom*]

An initiative implemented in Northern Afghanistan by the Ministry of Agriculture since 2010 is the **Backyard Poultry Development for increased assets, income and nutrition**. The aim is to reduce vulnerability and improve the livelihoods, incomes, food security and nutritional status of 5 000 poor and vulnerable rural households. A field study showed that the average body weight of children belonging to beneficiary households was higher than that of non-beneficiaries. [*Mohammad Jafar Emal, IFAD/RMLS/MAIL, Afghanistan*]

In addition to these programmes, other social protection initiatives are currently being evaluated, such as the **SNACK** (Santé Nutritionnelle à Assise Communautaire) and **Jigiséméjiri** in Mali, and the Pilot cash transfer project in Kara and Savanes regions, North Togo. [*Mathilde Savy, IRD, France*]

Ensuring that social protection programmes are nutrition sensitive adds specific challenges to the more general ones that social protection programmes routinely encounter, such as funding, sustainability, monitoring and evaluation, etc.

Participants mentioned that nutrition-sensitive social protection programmes require:

- Identification of the **right set of indicators** for monitoring the impact of the programmes on nutrition. If, for instance, dietary diversity is used as an indicator, this may not be able to measure diet improvement, as beneficiary households could differentiate their food practices towards food items that may not necessarily improve their nutrition intake (e.g. towards higher consumption of meat or shifting to processed food). [*Jane Sherman, FAO, Italy; Florence Egal, consultant, Italy*]
- Involvement of **health authorities** in monitoring nutrition outcomes coming from social protection. The impression is that, in many contexts, ministries and health care providers are more focused on acute situations. [*Manuel Moya, IPA, Spain*]
- The availability of **nutrition awareness and information** at the grassroots level, e.g. among community health care providers. This doesn't seem to be the case in many contexts, and community health care providers may let problems of undernutrition and overweight go unnoticed. [*Manuel Moya, IPA, Spain*]

- **Robust decision-support tools** which help in selecting beneficiaries and collecting food and nutrition security indicators to ensure positive impact of the programmes on the nutrition status of beneficiaries. [*Theogene Dusingizimana, Kigali Institute of Science and Technology, Rwanda*]

Nutrition-sensitive aspects

Besides the positive role all social protection programmes have in increasing resources for food and health care (which are linked to nutrition), the impact on the immediate determinants of child nutrition is not always clear, and remains to be identified and evaluated further.

For instance, a recent study on social cash transfers found mixed evidence with respect to whether these programmes positively impacted nutrition outcomes among children, which suggests that cash transfers alone are probably not enough. [*Ellen Muehlhoff, FAO, Italy*]

At the same time, an evaluation being carried out on five different combinations of transfers provided to ultra-poor women with small children in Bangladesh found that the greatest impact came from cash transfers when combined with nutrition education: this combination caused a significant decrease in the proportion of children suffering from stunting in the beneficiary households. [*Lalita Bhattacharjee, FAO, Italy*]

Nutrition education appears to be fundamental to linking social protection and improved nutrition: participants voiced the concern that if the education and awareness-raising component is missing, the risk is that existing inadequate dietary profiles and patterns of household expenditure will simply be enhanced by the social transfers.

An example is the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (SNAP) in the USA, which had to introduce a nutrition education component to achieve nutrition improvements in the target population. [*Jane Sherman, FAO, Italy*]

Resources on linkages between nutrition and social protection

The discussion and the contributions shared show that we are just beginning to build a shared understanding of what we mean by nutrition-sensitive social protection and what works to improve nutrition outcomes.

However, it is also evident from the comments, publications, and resources shared that interest and knowledge is growing.

In particular a growing body of research and evidence exists, which was put forward by both participants and the facilitators:

- Save the Children. 2015. *Malnutrition in Bangladesh: Maximizing Social Protection for Those Who are Most Vulnerable* ([http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Malnutrition in Bangladesh.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Malnutrition%20in%20Bangladesh.pdf)).
- World Bank. 2013. *Improving Nutrition through Multisectoral Approaches – Social Protection* (<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/01/17211210/improving-nutrition-through-multisectoral-approaches>).
- HLPE, 2012. Social protection for food security. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome 2012 (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-me422e.pdf>).
- Alderman, H. 2015. *Nutrition and Social Protection*. Background paper for the Global Forum on Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection Programs (http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/sites/default/files/files/119_Social_Protection_Nutrition_GlobalForum_BackgroundPaper.pdf).
- SecureNutrition. 2015. Case study briefs and presentations from the Global Forum on Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection Programs held in Moscow, September 2015 (<https://www.securenutritionplatform.org/Pages/AboutSeminar.aspx?CID=37>).
- FAO. 2015. *Nutrition and Social Protection*. Rome (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4819e.pdf>).
- De Groot, R., Palermo, T., Handa, S., Ragno, L.P. & Peterman, A. 2015. *Cash Transfers and Child Nutrition: What we know and what we need to know*. Innocenti Working Paper No. 2015-07. Florence, Italy, UNICEF Office of Research (<http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/782>).

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