



Global Forum
on Food Security
and Nutrition

in West Africa



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How can social protection contribute to food security and nutrition in West Africa

Discussion No. 1 from 16 October to 6 November 2013

Welcome to the first Food Security and Nutrition Forum discussion dedicated to West Africa.

West Africa and more specifically the Sahel region, faces increasingly frequent food crisis which affect a growing number of areas and people. It is established fact that promoting broad-based economic growth is essential for development in general. However the benefits of such growth do not necessarily reach the poorest segment of society and therefore direct interventions are needed to target the socially and economically deprived groups. As highlighted by FAO's State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012, social protection has a role to play in reducing hunger and increase economic growth. In this context, creating and strengthening social protection systems is considered as a way forward for governments and their partners in development to contribute to food security and nutrition.

Social protection has many definitions and may take many forms. A generally agreed definition for social protection is the support provided in the form of income or benefits to the poor, vulnerable and socially excluded in society with the aim of enhancing capacity to protect themselves against social and economic shocks and risks.

It is believed that when the right policies and targeting is done, social protection mechanisms, including safety nets, can protect the most disadvantaged and reduce social, economic and cultural inequalities which increase their resilience regarding food security and nutrition. However, in implementation of social protection for the under-privileged in society, West African governments face considerable demands that force them to focus on immediate solutions to poverty because of the large number of poor and vulnerable people in the various countries in the region.

Social protection has been given increased attention in Africa, with interventions taking many forms ranging from cash transfers, child allowances, food aid, subsidies to goods purchased (including agricultural inputs) to health and unemployment insurances.

Social protection may be seen as primarily a national issue but the (sub)-regional institutions have important roles to play in defining a direction and in monitoring progress towards agreed social protection targets. The (sub)-regional levels may also have the needed capacity to support

with national policy-making processes and for harmonization. Regional initiatives such as the African Union's Social Policy Framework (2008), recognizes a minimum social package, and the ECOWAS Hunger Free Initiative includes strategies to combine social protection and agriculture. With increase in population and drift in urbanization, coupled with high levels of poverty and faster economic growth in most African countries, demands for social protection are likely to rise.

Some countries in Africa, such as Malawi, Ethiopia, and South Africa demonstrated the positive impact of social protection schemes on food security and nutrition. In West Africa, there are pilot initiatives in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, Togo (among others). Lessons learnt on coverage, sustainability, institutionalization and impacts may be drawn from these initiatives.

We invite you to take part in this discussion and share your experience and knowledge on this topic. Below are some guiding questions. Feel free to answer one or more of these.

1. What is your understanding of social protection? How these programmes can address West African countries' needs?
2. What social protection programmes or interventions are taking place in your country? What are the challenges – weaknesses and limitations of these interventions? How do you think they could be addressed? Please give concrete recommendations to address them. Any success story in addressing these challenges?
3. How social protection initiatives should be implemented so that they increase agricultural production and productivity, and improve food security and nutrition?
4. What are the roles for government, civil society organizations, private sector, academics and other development partners? Suggest ways to ensure better governance for fostering linkages between social protection, food security and nutrition and agriculture.

If you want to know more, please find a list of resources on the webpage.

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