

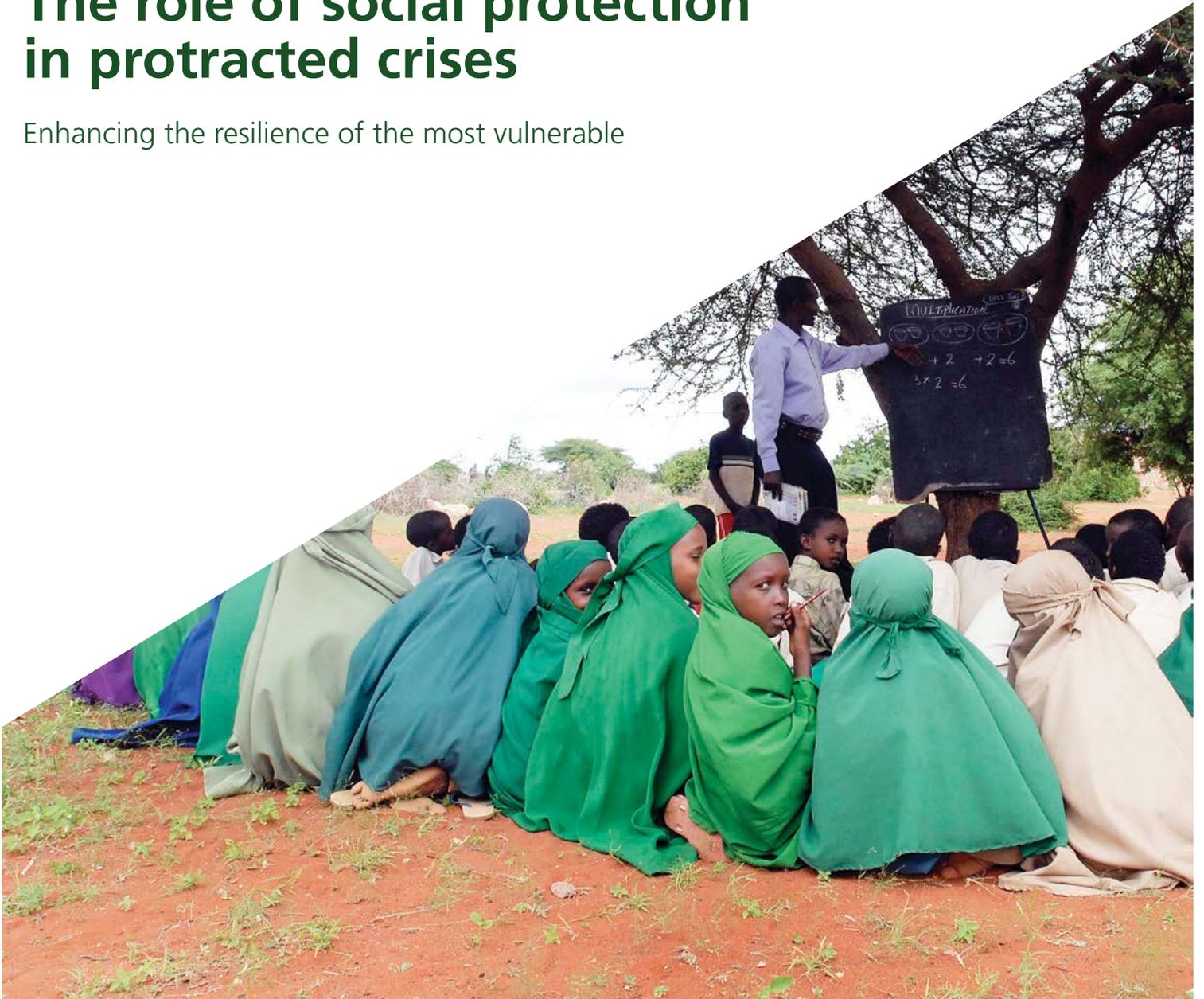


Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

## GUIDANCE NOTE

# The role of social protection in protracted crises

Enhancing the resilience of the most vulnerable



Cover photo: ©FAO/Ami Vitale

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This guidance note is part of a series on improving food security and nutrition in protracted crises. Drawing on FAO technical experience, the guidance notes series supports implementation of the Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (CFS-FFA), endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in October 2015.



## KEY MESSAGES



- ▶ In protracted crises, the **poorest face the greatest risk** of being left behind.
- ▶ Social protection is recognized as a **strategic approach to reduce poverty and enhance resilience** and is a **key principle** within the CFS-FFA.
- ▶ FAO recognizes social protection's role in **prevention**: minimizing negative coping strategies, while **strengthening resilience capacity** at national, subnational and community levels; **response**: mitigating the negative impacts of crises; and **promotion**: **facilitating investments in innovative solutions for sustainable livelihoods**.
- ▶ Shock-responsive and risk-informed social protection systems are a key tool to **increase the resilience before a shock hits** and during the initial phase in a situation of protracted crisis and provide an efficient and flexible way to respond to a disaster.
- ▶ The **"CASH+"** approach illustrates FAO added value in providing a flexible combination of cash transfers and agricultural productive interventions.
- ▶ Greater **clarity** is needed in terms of operationalizing **scalable and shock-responsive social protection systems**, to define **roles, responsibilities and methods**.
- ▶ One key challenge ahead in the implementation of shock-responsive systems is **enhancing the capacity of national and community structures** to respond to protracted crises. It is important to work to enhance **the commitment of the key actors, building structures to withstand predictable and recurrent shocks within fragile states and protracted crises**, and integrate these within the framework of multi-stakeholder resilience programming.





# Social protection in the context of increasing humanitarian needs

## Leave no one behind

The humanitarian system is currently at a critical turning point. No longer an exception, crises have become the norm across regions and are characterized by increasing complexity and recurrence. As indicated by the 2010 *FAO/WFP State of World Food Insecurity Report: Addressing food insecurity in protracted crises*, we are experiencing a strong tendency towards protracted crises with a combination of multiple risks and vulnerabilities: violence, poverty, forced displacement, natural disasters and poor governance. Moreover, despite the increase in the volume of humanitarian funding, there continue to be important shortfalls in meeting humanitarian appeals.

In line with the central theme of Agenda 2030, 'Leave no one behind', FAO recognizes that it is precisely in the context of protracted crises that we face the risk of leaving the most vulnerable behind. Despite improvements in terms of rural poverty, the recurrence and impacts of man-made and natural disasters pose a severe threat to the advances made by economic and social development.

In response, FAO is committed to a holistic and comprehensive vision of resilience: focusing on prevention, strengthening of economic and productive capacities at household and community level, and the promotion of innovative sustainable solutions and livelihoods in the context of rural transformation. In recent years, FAO has been working towards a strengthened approach to resilience building and poverty reduction; recognizing that:

1. the poor and politically marginalized are disproportionately affected by crises. The 2015 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report highlighted that in 2013, 93 percent of the people living in extreme poverty were living in politically fragile or environmental vulnerable contexts (or both); and
2. limited assets and/or non-existent protection mechanisms can lead vulnerable households and communities to resort to negative coping mechanisms that contribute to increasing vulnerability to risks and crises.

The World Humanitarian Summit highlighted the urgent need to change the approach to addressing increasing humanitarian needs and to work towards innovative solutions. The heightened political momentum and visibility around social protection in development agendas, as well as the recognition of the role of cash-based interventions in humanitarian and fragile contexts have provided a critical opportunity to explore the extent to which national social protection systems are able to contribute to such a change in approach.

Flexible, shock-responsive and risk-informed social protection systems can:

1. enhance coherence between humanitarian action and development programming;
2. progressively absorb humanitarian caseloads, particularly in protracted contexts; and
3. contribute to strengthening the capacity of households and communities to effectively prevent, withstand and counteract vulnerability and risks.

## Social protection in the CFS Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (CFS-FFA)

This guidance note will review the opportunities as well as the challenges in maximizing the role of social protection systems in protracted crises, review FAO added value and contribution to this on-going discussion and propose key elements to consider as we move forward.

This note contributes to the implementation of the Framework For Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (CFS-FFA) endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security, in particular the principles below.

Social protection in the CFS-FFA	
Is a core objective of CFS-FFA principles	<p><b>Principle 1:</b> Meet immediate humanitarian needs and build resilient livelihoods</p> <p><b>Principle 2:</b> Focus on nutritional needs</p> <p><b>Principle 4:</b> Protect those affected by or at risk from protracted crises</p>
Also contributes to CFS-FFA principles	<p><b>Principle 5:</b> Empower women and girls, promote gender equality and encourage gender sensitivity</p> <p><b>Principle 9:</b> Contribute to peacebuilding through food security and nutrition</p> <p><b>Principle 10:</b> Manage natural resources sustainably and reduce disaster risks</p>

### KEY FACTS

According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015, some 93 percent of people living in extreme poverty are in countries that are either politically fragile, environmentally vulnerable, or both.



# Why social protection systems matter

## Social protection to strengthen resilience

Building risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection systems has been recognized as a critical strategy in strengthening resilience: in other words, enhancing the capacity of poor households to cope with, respond to and withstand natural and manmade crises.

This typology of social protection system is particularly attuned to fragile states and protracted crises where a significant portion of a population is facing a heightened risk of death, disease, and breakdown of their livelihoods.

As a direct result of inflated food insecurity and livelihood disruption, those countries that are in the midst of protracted crises will usually receive a high proportion of humanitarian versus development assistance. Indeed, in these contexts, risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection systems have the potential to play a crucial role in bridging livelihood protection with longer-term development strategies. In fact, in contexts of protracted crisis, it is crucial to tackle the root causes of vulnerability, promoting measures to guarantee relief from and avert deprivation, while at the same time focusing on enhancing real incomes and capabilities, addressing social equity and exclusion, promoting social cohesion and contributing to a sustainable management of natural resources. Flexible, regular, predictable and scalable social protection systems are able to allow a dynamic and adaptable response to fluid crises as they evolve. Within this approach, the risks are not considered as outliers: rather, threats and crises form the basis on which monitoring indicators are defined and action plans developed.

### INFO BOX 1. Social protection definition, functions and instruments

Within the Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), social protection refers to a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion throughout their lifecycles, with a particular emphasis towards vulnerable groups. Social protection can be provided:

- in cash, in kind, or with a combination of cash and in-kind assistance (CASH+), through non-contributory schemes, providing universal, categorical or poverty-targeted benefits such as social assistance;
- within contributory schemes, such as social insurance; and
- through labour market protection, that promotes human capital, access to jobs and productive assets.

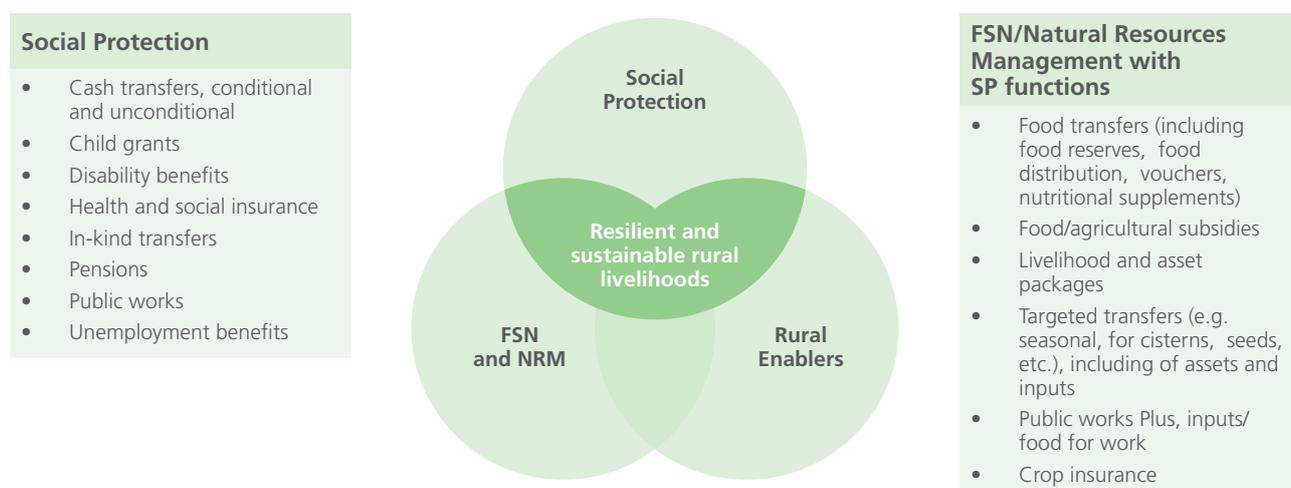
In terms of FAO engagement and support for countries, social protection comprises a set of policies and programmes that addresses economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities to food insecurity and poverty by protecting and promoting livelihoods.

In its support to Member States, FAO adopts a comprehensive outlook on the potential of social protection, encompassing four functions. As described by the 2015 State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA): “Social protection can play a protective role in providing means (cash or in-kind) to access food and mitigate the impact of shocks. It can have a preventive function in averting deeper deprivation by strengthening resilience against shocks (and stresses) and preventing loss of incomes and assets. It can support the accumulation of resources to sustain livelihoods (e.g. through asset transfers and public works). Social protection can also play a promotive function by directly supporting investments in human resources (nutrition, health, education and skills development) and by reducing liquidity constraints and income insecurity to induce investments in farm and non-farm activities. It can also have a transformative function in the lives of the poor through reorienting their focus beyond day-to-day survival towards investments in the future, by shifting power relations within households (as social protection can empower women) and by strengthening the capabilities and capacities of those living in poverty to empower themselves.”



Burundi - Kiyonza. Vouchers at an Input Trade Fair, one of the FAO preferred methods to stimulate local food production. ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano.

The figure below provides examples of instruments that have a social protection function in rural settings. The use and function of these instruments will vary from country to country, depending on the institutional context, including the responsibilities of different line ministries, the country's development agenda and priorities, and the level of support the country receives from development partners.



Linking FSN, Agriculture and SP	Using Rural Enablers for SP	Integrated Social Protection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting local food production and consumption simultaneously by linking agricultural interventions for sustainable management of natural resources with local food procurement for school feeding programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing and supporting rural organizations, including women's associations and producer organizations, to provide access to social protection, e.g. risk-sharing schemes, such as livestock or crop insurance (e.g. weather index-based).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing social protection interventions that reinforce sustainable productive capacities through training and access to financial services and resources with a focus on women's groups, linked to social safety nets to support social inclusion of the vulnerable.</li> </ul>

Three key factors support this approach:

1. solid evidence of the impact of social protection instruments, including cash transfers;
2. political momentum and visibility around social protection and the current expansion of nationally-owned social protection programmes, including in low-income and fragile settings; and
3. important innovations in the design and implementation of cash-based and other social protection interventions.

Strengthening social protection systems is a critical strategy in alleviating poverty. Evidence from Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates clear impacts in terms of food security, nutrition and human capital development. Social protection has also enhanced the economic and productive capacity of even the poorest and most marginalized communities. However, beyond poverty alleviation, the combination of social and economic impacts contributes to strengthening resilience. Access to predictable, sizable and regular social protection benefits can, in the short-term, protect poor households from the impacts of shocks, including erosion of productive assets and minimizing negative coping practices; while helping to build capacity over time, smoothing consumption and allowing for investments. Moreover, social protection programmes can enhance financial and human capacity to invest in adaptation and effective natural resource management, as outlined by the 2012 High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) Report on Climate Change and Food Security.

## Visibility on a global scale

Social protection is recognized as a strategic approach to poverty reduction by target 1.3 of Sustainable Development Goal 1. This global political recognition has been also reflected in a series of regional commitments including the African Union Social Development Strategy, as well as the 2014 Malabo Declaration.

At country level, in the last 10 years, there has been a significant increase in the number of social protection programmes, mainly implemented through cash transfers across regions, and in many of these contexts, the progressive move from donor-funded pilots to nationally owned and financed social protection programmes.

From a humanitarian perspective, the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers reinforced the strategic importance of leveraging cash from emergency programmes for long-term development and social protection systems. Similarly, the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), including the Secretary General's report, recognize the potential role social protection can play in at least 3 of the core co-responsibilities described in the report: (i) 'leave no one behind'; (ii) 'changing people's lives – from delivering aid to ending need'; and (iii) 'financing'.



Malawi - Mchinji District. Members of the Social Cash Transfer team checking the identification details of 72 year old Social Cash Transfer beneficiary. ©FAO/Amos Gumulira.

## INFO BOX 2. FAO commitments at the World Humanitarian Summit

FAO main focus for the WHS, and its commitments as an Organization to the Agenda for Humanity, largely fall under Core Responsibilities three, four and five. Core Responsibility 3 in particular, builds on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, to prioritize the most vulnerable groups, including those in situations of chronic poverty, conflict, disaster, vulnerability and risk – the WHS provided an opportunity to test that resolve, particularly in the context of recent and ongoing massive population displacements – with a critical role for social protection systems. In this regard FAO commits to:

- Scaling up its work on the role of social protection in fragile contexts, as well as engagement in social protection work, through operational research on CASH+, and livelihoods work in over 15 countries by 2017.
- Building and strengthening strategic partnerships with national and sub-national governments, local actors and UN partners to enhance their capacity to effectively address prevention and response to crises, including through shock-responsive social protection systems.

Moreover, FAO has defined key messages to take forward on the role of social protection and the bridging between development intervention and humanitarian sector in the WHS discussions:

- Investments in protecting, saving and rebuilding livelihoods are critical in fragile, conflict-affected and post-conflict settings and contribute to saving lives while creating conditions for longer-term resilience building, including through rehabilitation of agriculture, expansion of social assistance such as cash-based interventions, and empowering the most vulnerable groups such as women and youth (Core Responsibility 1);
- Investing in agricultural livelihoods is a key step towards ensuring peace and stability. The role of food security in conflict mitigation and prevention through the reduction of vulnerability, the strengthening of social protection interventions, and the generation of income and employment, community dialogue and social cohesion cannot be underestimated. There is no peace without food security and no food security without peace (Core Responsibility 1);
- Support governments and partners in designing, building and refining social protection programmes so that they are shock-responsive and able to reach those affected by crises. (Core Responsibility 3);
- Support governments and national actors in ensuring the inclusion of chronic caseloads of affected populations into social protection programmes. (Core Responsibility 3);
- Integrate social protection, risk reduction, and livelihoods support alongside acute humanitarian response when required (Core Responsibility 4); and
- Undertake multiyear planning and programming to support resilience building programmes in protracted crises and greater alignment across humanitarian, development, peace and human rights actors (Core Responsibility 5).

FAO shares and supports the statement of the SPIAC-B for the WHS: “Humanitarian interventions can be used as a window of opportunity to trigger investments in the development of ‘nascent’ safety nets or social assistance structures. The longer-term aim is to progressively move chronic humanitarian caseloads into social protection systems where possible. To make this a reality, Governments, development and humanitarian actors need to work together to: invest in the development of ‘nascent’ safety nets or social assistance delivery mechanisms, while further strengthening and developing technical and analytical capacity at national and sub-national levels”.



Malawi - Mchinji District. One of the beneficiaries of the Social Cash Transfer Programme, selling tomatoes to a farmer at Mchinji Town market. ©FAO/Amos Gumulira.

### KEY FACTS

Based on FAO experience in evaluating cash transfer programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, the value of the transfer as a share of consumption among the target population is the key parameter of interest in terms of ensuring programme impacts. For a cash transfer programme to be effective, the crucial threshold appears to be around 20 percent of average household income.



# Social protection for food security and nutrition

Social protection is a critical strategy in the fight against hunger and malnutrition, as it can address all four dimensions of food security and nutrition: access; availability; stability; and utilization/nutrition. Poverty is the main root cause of food insecurity and the double burden of malnutrition – the coexistence of under- and over-nutrition in the same population across the life cycle. Poverty, hunger and malnutrition also share the same structural drivers. Indeed Agenda 2030 has identified social protection as instrumental in poverty reduction (sustainable development goal 1), as it can address underlying causes and vulnerabilities at the same time, as well as for ending hunger (sustainable development goal 2) given its direct link with food security and nutrition.

## FAO added value

FAO has extensive experience in emergency responses: protecting livelihoods and supporting food security and nutrition using a variety of instruments:

- To date, FAO has implemented interventions with a cash transfer (CT)/voucher component in 42 countries, reaching around 2.5 million households.
- In 2012, FAO established a policy for the Organization's use of specific CT modalities to address hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity.
- This was followed in 2013 by two sets of guidelines: (i) Guidelines for Public Works (cash-, voucher- and food-for-work); and (ii) Guidelines for Input Trade Fairs and Voucher Schemes that provide practical guidance for designing and implementing selected cash transfer and voucher modalities.
- FAO supports the findings, recommendations and commitments of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals and the "Grand Bargain" on Humanitarian Cash Transfers, particularly around expanding the use of cash-based approaches and multiyear funding to ensure greater flexibility, predictability and continuity in humanitarian response.

Moreover, FAO is (i) a source of technical knowledge on social protection and its linkages with agricultural sector, food security and nutrition and resilience building; (ii) a strategic stakeholder in food security analysis, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and livestock value chains and rural development; (iii) providing

experience in global, regional and country data collection and monitoring for disaster preparedness, (iv) providing a specific (rural development) perspective around saving livelihoods within the humanitarian response and making livelihoods more resilient along the whole disaster management cycle.

Furthermore, FAO has contributed to the global agenda on social protection, specifically by building the economic case for social protection and highlighting its role in generating economic and productive impacts even among the poorest and marginalized sectors of the population. (see FAO in action - Box 1).

### **FAO in action - BOX 1. FAO Contribution to Building the Economic Case for Social Protection: From Protection to Production (PtoP)**

FAO, in partnership with UNICEF, national research institutions and the national governments of seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa, has led the generation of evidence on the economic and productive impact of national cash transfer programmes in the region. The development of rigorous impact assessments was carried out in close coordination with government counterparts and embedded in national policy processes and platforms. This contributed to strengthening the case for social protection as an investment, not just a cost, while addressing public misperceptions around dependency and labour disincentives. It provided a solid base, showing how cash transfer can help poor and marginalized families to build assets, empower themselves and generate economically productive activities.

Evidence coming from country-level impact assessments and learning agendas has contributed to increasing the understanding among policy makers of social protection as an effective measure to combat hunger, reduce poverty and foster rural development. It has also contributed to concrete policy and operational changes: adjusting the transfer size; strengthening community structures; improving targeting and thus access, and also by linking complementary activities. Building the economic case for social protection is FAO concrete contribution to country-level policy discussions and actions around expanding coverage of social protection, developing social protection systems, (Sustainable Development Goal Target 1.3), and allocating domestic investment for expansion in countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho and Zambia.

This evidence has also shown that despite the important impact of social protection, accelerating the progress of poverty reduction requires a comprehensive package of interventions. Indeed, as highlighted by the 2015 State of Food and Agriculture report (SOFA), as well as by the Framework for analysis and action and the diagnostic tool to Strengthening coherence between agriculture and social protection to combat poverty and hunger in Africa, the alignment and effective coordination between social protection interventions and FAO technical expertise in agriculture development are likely to be more effective in helping poor households to move sustainably out of poverty. Moreover, FAO has a specific niche in resilience measurement (see FAO in action - Box 2), based on a multi-sector approach, including social protection, access to social services and livelihood support.

## FAO in action - BOX 2. FAO Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA)

In order to better understand the root causes of vulnerabilities and drivers of resilience in rural areas, FAO developed the Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA). The tool aims to help decision-makers improve the design of policies, investments and programmes to strengthen resilience at household and community levels. RIMA has been used in the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan and South Sudan), the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal), Lesotho and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

RIMA includes social protection as one of the key factors that contribute to resilience, and it is thus included in the analysis framework. For more information about RIMA please see the Guidance Note "Information and analysis in Protracted crises" in the same series.

FAO is well positioned to promote a systems and integrated approach to social protection, linking the latter with the promotion of rural livelihoods in the context of the broader multi-sectorial effort. This value added and expertise needs to be applied in both development and fragile, risk-prone and protracted contexts.



Kenya - Kyuso. A beneficiary of FAO voucher-for-work project in drought-prone eastern Kenya. ©FAO/Thomas Hug.

## Creating flexible and shock responsive social protection systems

Although there is a growing consensus around the need to build regular, predictable, flexible and shock-responsive social protection systems and programmes, in order to integrate humanitarian and development interventions, there is still a need to strengthen the operational and evidence base:

1. in contexts with existing social protection programmes: what are the mechanisms and adjustments needed so they can effectively and rapidly respond in the event of a crisis?
2. in fragile states and protracted crisis contexts where no social protection programmes are in place: what structures used for the delivery of emergency programmes (cash, vouchers, cash for work programmes in emergencies) can be adapted to develop nascent structures able to respond in the context of predictable and recurrent risks?

Based on the experience of FAO and its partners, certain key elements must be considered in an effort to develop and/or strengthen shock-responsive programmes:

- **Targeting:** targeting of social protection interventions tends to be based on economic (wealth and income)-related criteria. In order to be able to respond to the varied risks faced by vulnerable households, targeting should adopt a multidimensional approach (including environmental and conflict-related risks).
- **Strengthening capacity at local and community level:** Strengthening local capacity – including sub-national delivery mechanisms, as well as community-level structures that can support the effective identification of vulnerable populations, optimizing linkages and coordination, messaging and household support, treatment of grievances, and creating opportunities to build on informal community redistribution mechanisms.
- **Multiple objectives:** Public works can be designed in such a way as to contribute to increased household income, while at the same time engaging communities in climate-smart agriculture and generation of ‘green jobs’ in areas such as waste management, reforestation and soil erosion prevention. Combining access to social protection key financial services, such as credit and weather insurance, and Climate Smart Agriculture practices, is a feasible strategy to mitigate the impacts of climate variability.
- **Common or coordinated systems:** The use of smart cards, mobile money, digital registration systems, and advanced technical capacity at local government level, are enabling actors to reach economies of scale by working together and investing in systematic solutions where possible and appropriate. These provide new and innovative opportunities to design and implement a coordinated response and explore the potential of using common platforms for assessment and delivery.
- **Role of the private sector:** FAO has engaged in strategic partnerships with private sector actors, to taking advantage of innovative solutions (e-payments) to effectively deliver assistance to vulnerable populations, particularly in emergency settings.
- **Unconditional transfers:** Particularly in protracted crises and emergency settings, FAO recognizes the role of unconditional cash transfers and supports the findings, recommendations and committees of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) principals and the “Grand Bargain” on Humanitarian Cash Transfers, around expanding the use of cash-based approaches and multiyear funding.
- **Trigger events:** It is vital that early warning systems are designed to trigger action prior to an emergency to reduce the negative impact. These systems should trigger contingency and sector awareness plans and response mechanisms within each social protection management and information systems (MIS) should be scaled up in order to meet emergency needs.

### FAO in action - BOX 3. Somalia: Capacity to implement cash for work programmes in the context of crises

In the late summer of 2011, FAO significantly scaled up its existing cash for work (CFW) interventions in the Central and Southern regions of Somalia in response to the famine that had struck the Horn of Africa. Since then, FAO has continued to support thousands of families with a range of activities, most of which are designed to improve the resilience of vulnerable communities rather than merely offer short-term support for food security. In the absence of a functioning government, FAO provided basic services (e.g. livestock vaccinations) along with an ambitious programme to build and rehabilitate rural infrastructures (e.g. water catchments, irrigation canals) through CFW activities. These rural assets were chosen for their potential to increase the resilience of farmers and pastoralists to natural shocks. The programmes were implemented despite the challenges caused by the presence of Al-Shabaab and local militias that hamper access.

This experience shows the capacity of FAO to effectively implement, deliver, and progressively scale up this type of programme, and manage the operational mechanisms, including data management and monitoring. Looking ahead, FAO is planning to identify which elements of its ongoing CFW intervention could be valuably used in a future national social protection system.



Kenya - Mutwaathi. A beneficiary of an FAO voucher-for-work project receiving their voucher. ©FAO/Thomas Hug.

FAO position paper on *Social Protection for Resilience building* published in 2016 presented a framework for FAO action, based on a typology of social protection contexts. Table 1 (in Annex) shows the role FAO can play either in strengthening existing systems and/or building on emergency structures to develop nascent social assistance structures. This simplified table does not attempt to reflect on all multiple complexities, but serves as a starting point for discussions at country level. One cross-cutting theme is the need to recognize the importance of building structures that reflect the multi-dimensional risks in a given context and the available capacity at local level and reduce the need for ad hoc responses every time a crisis strikes.

The role of FAO should vary according to the context:

- Where a Social Protection system is already in place, FAO should prioritize upstream policy work and knowledge dissemination as the preferred support mechanism in order to maximize the coverage of social protection, including the use of threat- and shock-related indicators when targeting and providing benefits. Furthermore, FAO should promote linkages between social protection and rural livelihoods. In this case, minimal resources should go to field interventions, unless there is a strong reason to pilot or test a specific and innovative measure.
- In fragile states and in the context of protracted crises where the provision of social protection by the national state is absent, deficient or mostly donor-led, FAO should engage in providing emergency and livelihood support in crisis situations. Critical emphasis should be given to creating an enabling environment, which should then form part of the policy process designed to set up, in the medium- to long term, a reliable and predictable Social Protection system. In this regard, impact evaluation of the social protection systems implemented by different actors will be of crucial importance in order to inform the decision making process.

The provision of social protection should not be considered as a stand-alone initiative, and the involvement of national governments should be a priority in order to ensure the sustainability of the intervention. Apart from the social protection system in place, FAO interventions will vary according to the: (i) types of threats and crises; (ii) specificities of the territory; (iii) types of livelihood; and (iv) coordination with donors and governments.



Lesotho - Thaba Tseka. Two men wait for the start of the Community Day, which will bring a range of government, NGO, and business services to a rural area that does not have quick, easy or inexpensive access to such services. ©FAO/Rodger Bosch.

#### FAO in action - BOX 4. CASH+ Productive transfers to strengthen resilience to shocks

The “CASH+ / Productive transfers” integrated approach aims at boosting the livelihoods and productive capacities of vulnerable households through the provision of a flexible combination of cash transfers with productive activities, inputs, and assets and/or technical training and extension services. The cash transfer component addresses basic household needs and protects assets from depletion and losses while the productive asset (or technical training and extension services) transfers help kick-start a virtuous cycle of income generation, leading to economic empowerment, which is key to increasing asset ownership, food security and dietary diversity.

Targeted vulnerable households are supported with an integrated package of:

1. productive assets (such as poultry, seeds, small ruminants, etc.);
2. cash transfers (the amount and frequency of which are to be defined according to each specific context); and
3. technical training and extension services (on climate-resilient practices, nutrition and income-generating activities). A nutrition-sensitive approach is also promoted through selection of nutrient-rich and short reproduction cycle varieties and species, in addition to dedicated support to women.

The approach has recently been implemented in Burkina Faso, Lesotho, Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Somalia. Available evidence shows that the approach significantly improves households’ incomes, assets, productivity potential, and dietary diversity and food security, while reducing families’ need to resort to negative coping strategies.

Impact assessments conducted in Burkina Faso one and two years after the end of the transfers show a quicker and more cost-effective livelihood recovery for households compared with either traditional cash transfers or agricultural input distributions. Over the period, the households’ use of negative coping strategies was reduced by 72 percent. Many very poor households doubled the value of the support they received in just one year and sometimes tripled it in two years, reflected by an increase in income (on average by 50 percent) and in the value of assets possessed (by around 80 percent).

Increases in incomes directly contributed to improvements in diet diversity with more proteins and lipids consumed in the two-year period. This translated into a 30 percent increase of households having an adequate diet.

This approach is a tool for quick recovery that can be complemented by other FAO interventions such as land access facilitation, support for agricultural production and processing, income-generating activities, micro-finance, access to credit, etc., to strengthen its impact.

FAO also supports ownership of the “Social protection+ / Productive transfers” approach by governments through multisectoral policy and operational dialogue, bringing together social protection and agriculture/livestock line ministries.

FAO work in Somalia, Lesotho, the Sahel and West African Countries (see boxes) shows how the Organization also adds value at country level, through its capacity to deliver in difficult contexts. However, questions remain as to:

1. how best to replicate and scale-up these interventions;
2. how they can provide a more comprehensive package for resilience building in the event of a crisis; and
3. how to build trigger mechanisms in social protection, particularly in those countries where donors (or governments) are starting to design and implement national cash transfer programmes.



Niger - Tera. Women preparing the field for the next rainy season by escaving half-moon dams to save water.  
©FAO/Giulio Napolitano.

### KEY FACTS

According to the World Social Protection Report 2014/2015, more than 70 percent of the world population lacks proper social protection, mostly living in rural areas.



# Challenges facing social protection systems in protracted crises

Despite the clear opportunities, there are also significant political, financing and programmatic challenges in strengthening social protection systems in protracted crises.

- **State-led social protection systems:** Social protection in development contexts is deliberately state-centric. It views building state capacity to deliver social protection as critical to ensuring sustainability and accountability, and as an integral part of supporting a social contract between a state and its citizens. In humanitarian interventions, by contrast, engagement with governments has at times been limited. Within humanitarian action there are tensions between this tendency and commitments to respecting the primary responsibility of states to assist and protect their citizens. At the core of the challenge is the question of how to strengthen capacities at national and subnational level and how to relate to state authorities in effectively responding to crisis. The challenge is not simply a technocratic process of bringing together humanitarian and development instruments but often involves reconciling fundamental differences in terms of principles and approach.
- **Weak information quality and access:** Fragile and conflict-affected regions are also difficult places in which to operate. Data availability is poor, staff turnover is higher, access is often constrained and insecurity makes monitoring and accountability challenging. Merely reaching the populations most in need with any sort of assistance is expensive and dangerous. Whilst the ultimate objectives of social protection may well remain the same, achieving them is therefore a long-term prospect in protracted crises.
- **Immediate response vs. building capacity:** As expediency takes precedence in addressing emergency needs in the wake of disasters, systems must be built while demands for lifesaving assistance are being met. This can raise issues of effective coordination, cooperation, and coherence among stakeholders as well as country ownership, participation, stakeholder buy-in, and accountability, all of which are fundamental to social protection.



FAO can build on its best practices, shifting instruments and approaches to focus also on the contribution of livelihoods in humanitarian contexts, and emphasizing partnership and institution building. However, for the latter to happen, it is imperative that sustainability be built into programme design.

### **INFO BOX 3. Social Protection and forced displacement**

FAO echoes the Secretary General's call for reducing and addressing forced displacement as a critical priority. In this sense, FAO sees the potential for a 'social protection plus' approach, contributing to:

- Prevention of the economic and food insecurity-related causes of displacement.
- Ensuring the portability of benefits.
- Strengthening the economic capacity of host communities, particularly as social services labour and productive opportunities may be strained.
- Providing access to social and economic opportunities for refugees and internally displaced populations, particularly in protracted crises (including camp settings).

For more information about this please see in the same series the Guidance Note "Distress migration and youth in protracted crises".

### **KEY FACTS**

Beyond economic and social impacts, social cash transfers (SCT) also create income spillovers within local economies. FAO studies from seven SCT national programmes in sub-Saharan Africa reveal that each USD transferred to poor families generated an income multiplier for the whole community that ranges from USD 1.27 to 2.52.



# The way forward

Although evidence clearly points to the role played by flexible and risk-informed social protection systems in protected crises, we are still at the initial stages of expansion and operational learning.

Future critical steps include:

- Strengthening the commitment of development and humanitarian actors to bolstering the capacity of national and sub-national governments to scale up: expanding the coverage of their existing social protection programmes, but also adjusting elements of their design and implementation to make sure these are shock-responsive. In this specific context, FAO has a critical role to play in making sure that the livelihood perspective is integrated in these discussions, alongside social and economic criteria, to include environmental, conflict related risks and vulnerabilities that affect families as well as livelihoods.
- In contexts where there are no functioning government structures and donors are addressing emergency needs, building on structures that have proven effective in the delivery of social assistance, so that they can be used in cases of predictable and recurrent shocks. FAO has a role to play in contributing to build the operational evidence base on the effectiveness of such structures.
- Contributing to work under the framework of joint agency and multi-stakeholder resilience programming, and moving towards the scaling-up of multi-sector interventions that aim to address multiple dimensions of resilience (access to services, social protection and livelihood promotion). This will be part of FAO role within the Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B).



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## Internet resources

[www.fao.org/economic/ptop](http://www.fao.org/economic/ptop)

**Table 1:** Types of social protection systems for improving resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises

#	Type of SP services	Description	Potential areas of FAO intervention
1	Shattered or severely weak system	Where there is no formal provision of social protection and/or existing structures (formal and non-formal) have been shattered or severely weakened by crises or conflict.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In coordination with partners, FAO can contribute to the design, implementation and monitoring of emergency response interventions, while at the same time assessing their potential replication or use to develop a nascent social protection programme and/or livelihood support structure.</li></ul>
2	Nascent social assistance system	The initial components of social protection systems are in place, providing short to medium-term support mostly in relation to acute risks, threats or crisis. However, no coherent system has been developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In coordination with partners, FAO can contribute to the assessment of emerging structures, and their potential scale-up and use for the delivery of livelihood support or cash on a more predictable basis.</li><li>• In addition, FAO can support the establishment of robust multi-sector monitoring and information systems to enhance programme targeting in the event of a recurrent crisis.</li><li>• Where (formal or non-formal) structures are available, some level of engagement could be promoted, either in terms of upstream policy discussion, or capacity development, implemented on the ground jointly through government at all levels, as well as the development and dissemination of operational evidence to develop shock-responsive and coordinated systems.</li></ul>
3	State SP system unable to respond to repeated crises	A social protection programme or system exists and is institutionalized within the state structure, yet is rigid and inflexible or overloaded and thus unable to adapt to increasing burden of need in the event of a shock or crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In this situation FAO should work with the national systems to complement what is already provided, supporting the integration of livelihood dimensions to the targeting system and expansion of coverage to rural areas, as well as to enhance the system's capacity to respond effectively to predictable crises.</li><li>• Where possible FAO should work with relevant sections of the state to strengthen delivery capacity at national and sub-national levels.</li></ul>

#	Type of SP services	Description	Potential areas of FAO intervention
4	Limited shock-responsive SP system	A SP programme or system exists that includes committed state involvement (even if donor funded). The system is partially able to respond to predictable shocks and increase coverage of those households affected by the shock and eligible to receive SP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO should prioritize upstream policy work, capacity building and knowledge dissemination, as well as help operationalize linkages between social protection and productive and agricultural development, including the promotion of climate-smart and sustainable practices.</li> <li>• Analysis, early warning and vulnerability analysis should inform trigger mechanisms in the SP system. Underlying vulnerability analysis should inform disaster risk reduction and social protection linkages.</li> <li>• Minimal resources should go to on-the-ground parallel interventions, unless there is a strong case for testing an innovative model or it is necessary to implement on-the-ground but is done jointly through government at all levels.</li> </ul>
5	Highly shock responsive SP system	An ideal scenario where a social protection system is institutionalized within state structures and is prepared to respond nimbly and flexibly to predictable and unpredictable shocks and stresses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO can contribute to strengthening the linkages between social protection and agriculture development, including prioritization of upstream policy work, knowledge and evidence generation, as well as the facilitation of South-South collaboration, so that countries can learn about the experience and operational dynamics of shock-responsive systems.</li> </ul>

Source: FAO and Institute for Development Studies, 2016 (forthcoming).

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