



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

RURAL SOCIAL PROTECTION 101

The what and how of rural development and resilience





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RURAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

How it helps rural households break the cycle of poverty and build sustainable and productive livelihoods

~ WHO ARE RURAL PEOPLE? ~

Only **45%** of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social benefit

55% – 4 billion people – are left unprotected

Nearly **50%** of the world's population lives in rural areas

Coverage is often limited in rural areas



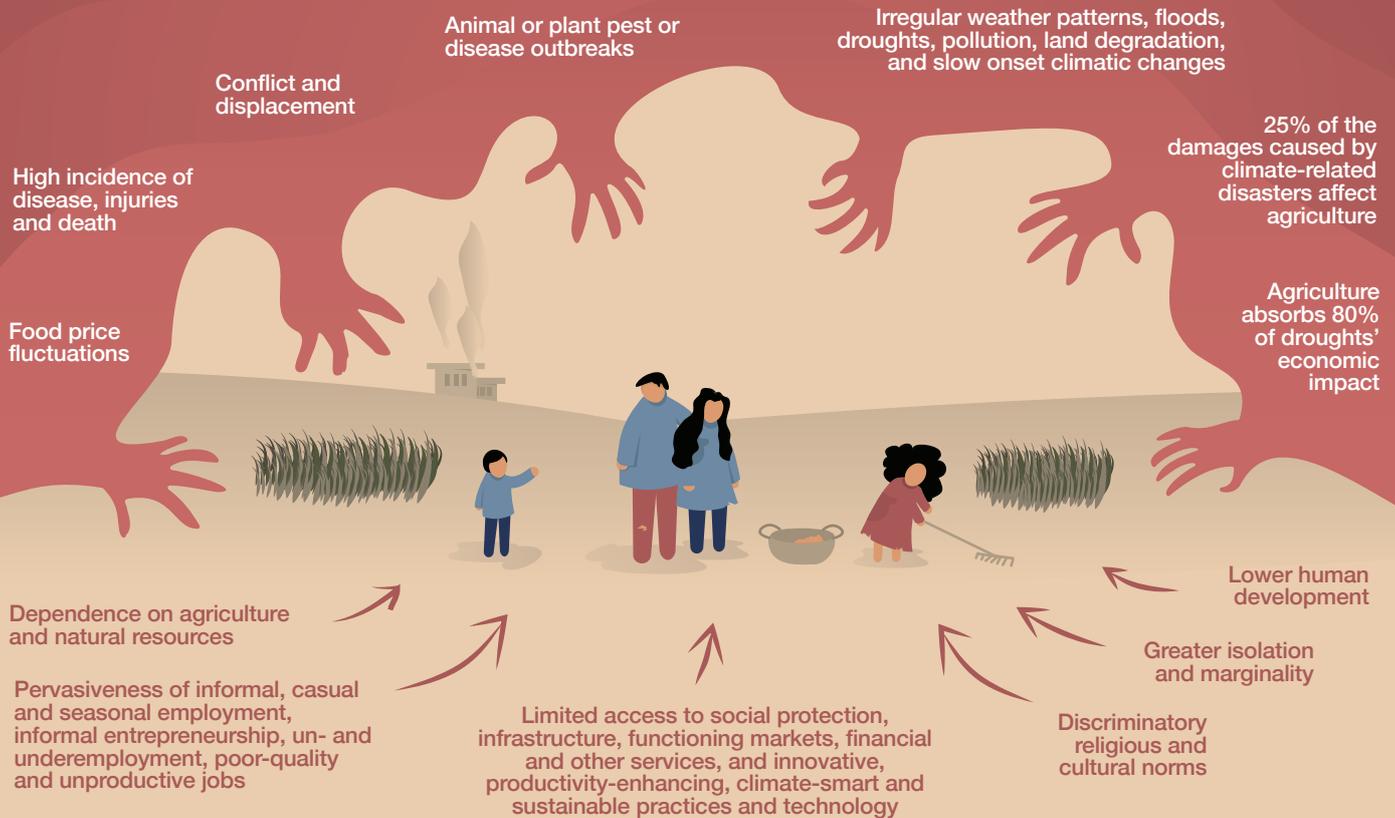
79% of the extreme poor are concentrated in rural areas

Most rural communities rely on agriculture as main source of income

3/4 of chronically undernourished children live in rural areas

Most of the working poor are employed in agriculture and work in rural areas

RURAL AREAS ARE USUALLY HIGHLY EXPOSED TO ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RISKS AND THREATS



RURAL AREAS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE OFTEN CHARACTERIZED BY STRUCTURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO RURAL HOUSEHOLDS' VULNERABILITY TO RISKS AND THREATS

NOTWITHSTANDING THE MANY RISKS AND THREATS, THE AGRICULTURE* SECTOR OFFERS THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO MOVE PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY. HOWEVER, INVESTMENTS IN PRODUCTIVITY AND INCLUSIVITY ARE REQUIRED TO TAP INTO IT

Rural social protection allows rural households to protect their livelihoods by providing them with a minimum level of income and liquidity for immediate needs and basic livelihood activity – also during times of crisis.

Rural social protection also prevents negative impacts on livelihoods before, during and after shocks and crises, by increasing the resilience of households, and preventing loss of income and assets.

Finally, rural social protection promotes rural livelihoods by providing access to opportunities - technology, markets and investments.

Ultimately, rural social protection allows the rural population to manage the risks that are inherent in agricultural livelihoods to adopt more productive, sustainable and climate-smart technologies, diversify and increase their incomes, and to gradually build human and productive assets.

Households no longer need to make difficult choices between consumption (eating, education, health) and production investments (land, inputs, labour). Social protection is a key enabler and promoter of economic inclusion - it moves people permanently out of poverty, and brings about a real, sustainable rural transformation.



HOW THE SITUATION CAN IMPROVE FOR RURAL HOUSEHOLDS THANKS TO RURAL SOCIAL PROTECTION



The term "agriculture" in this work refers to crops, fisheries, forestry, livestock, and other agricultural and natural resources sectors, as well as to related interventions and policies concerning food security and nutrition, natural resource management, climate-risk management and resilient livelihoods.

RURAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection in the context of FAO's mandate



Rural social protection means policies and programmes that protect and promote rural livelihoods, thereby reducing the vulnerabilities experienced by rural dwellers throughout their lives.

Rural areas are distinctive in terms of barriers to accessing social protection, exposure to risks, structural vulnerabilities and livelihood opportunities. Special expertise is required to ensure that social protection systems are accessible in rural areas and that they comprehensively address the needs of rural people.

Social protection alone has had positive impacts on rural households and economies. However, impacts on rural poverty, food security and nutrition, sustainable natural resource management, climate risk management, resilience-building and rural

development can be maximized when the synergies between social, agricultural and rural development interventions are operationalized. Rural social protection thus ensures that social protection systems respond in an integrated manner to the risks, vulnerabilities and opportunities that rural populations encounter.

It also upgrades social protection systems to shock-responsive systems so that they can be used for channeling livelihood support before, during and after shocks and crises. This solidifies impacts and reduces costs and the need for recurrent and continued humanitarian assistance.

FAO helps governments set up context-specific and scalable social protection systems that integrate social protection with agriculture and rural development.

GOVERNMENTS FACE COMMON CHALLENGES

- Characteristics of rural areas - seasonal and informal labour markets, remoteness, and low contributory capacity - hinder their ability to provide social protection effectively.
- Governments execute through distinct line ministries, each with their own stakeholders, concepts and ways of operating. This hampers cross-sectoral cooperation and reduces the effectiveness of sectoral policies and programmes. For example, agricultural investments in technologies and markets are often not accessible to the poor and most vulnerable, whereas social investments tend to fail to exploit their productive potential.
- Governments encounter capacity constraints when designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating technically, institutionally and financially sustainable systems.
- Increasingly complex risks and crises - with soaring costs of emergency interventions - press governments to adopt better interventions and measures.
- Misperceptions about social protection hold governments back and prevent the full adoption of effective instruments.

FAO SUPPORT IS ADAPTED TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT, INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP, AND MATURITY OF ANY GIVEN COUNTRY'S SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

- Expansion of coverage: In countries with a social protection system of limited coverage, the priority is to extend effective social protection to rural areas.
- Productive inclusion: In stable countries with existing social protection systems, the priority is to increase policy, programme and operational coherence between social protection and agriculture.
- Risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection: In stable, but risk-prone, fragile or protracted crises situations, the priority is to set up risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection systems.

FAO SUPPORTS GOVERNMENTS IN THESE AREAS BY PROVIDING POLICY AND TECHNICAL ADVICE; GENERATING EVIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE; FACILITATING POLICY DIALOGUE, COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS, AND LEADING EMERGENCY OPERATIONS USING RURAL SOCIAL PROTECTION TOOLS

Analytical support

- Analysing the multiple risks and vulnerabilities that trap rural people in poverty and inequality, food insecurity and malnutrition, and economic exclusion;
- analysing the opportunities to improve rural livelihoods be it based on crops/livestock/fisheries/forestry, on-farm/off-farm work, or food systems and value chains, and considering territory and seasonality;
- assessing pathways towards economic inclusion at territorial level;
- assessing legal, financial, and administrative barriers for rural people to social protection;
- identifying inconsistencies, overlaps and opportunities for integration between social, agricultural* and rural development policies and programmes.

Making the case

- Running impact assessments and costed scenarios to help governments make the case for expansion, integration, and shock-responsive design.

Policy dialogue and coordination

- Facilitating dialogue and joint work between ministries with social and ministries with agricultural* and rural development mandates;
- harmonizing social protection, agricultural* and rural development policies, creating synergies and minimizing inconsistencies and conflicting goals.



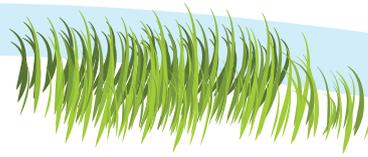
Programme and operational support

- Supporting the selection of design and implementation features to effectively address identified vulnerabilities, risks and opportunities and contribute to multiple objectives (food security and improved nutrition, climate adaptation, resilience to shocks and stresses, sustainable management of eco-systems, pro-poor growth and inclusive rural development) at the same time;
- integrating the livelihoods perspective of different rural groups – pastoralists, farmers, fisherfolk, nomads, etc. - into the design;
- combining social protection with nutrition-sensitive agriculture and nutrition education to improve households' access to food, intra-household distribution and eating habits;
- setting up cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms on all levels, such as steering committees and integrated information managements systems for registry, monitoring and evaluation;
- linking social protection management information systems to climate-related information systems, food crisis analysis and data, and defining triggers for early action response;
- leading emergency operations combining social protection, agricultural* and rural interventions, by complementing cash-based responses with livelihood packages;
- advising on multi-dimensional targeting, adequate frequency, timing and size of benefits, channels and messaging for context-specific and effective programming;
- improving gender-sensitive social protection.



RURAL SOCIAL PROTECTION IS:

- a right;
- a stand-alone SDG target and a potent enabler for other targets across all SDGs, particularly No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Reduced Inequalities and Climate Action;
- not a cost, but an investment with multiple returns for rural households and economies;
- an effective instrument for linking preparedness, relief, rehabilitation and development.



RURAL SOCIAL PROTECTION TOOLS COMPRISE SOCIAL PROTECTION INSTRUMENTS IN THE NARROWER SENSE, BUT ALSO COMPLEMENTARY AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL INTERVENTIONS THAT SUSTAIN AND MAXIMIZE THE IMPACT OF INTERVENTIONS. THESE TOOLS CAN BE CHOSEN FROM - AND COMBINED - IN PROGRAMMES INFORMED BY RISKS, VULNERABILITIES AND LIVELIHOODS

Social protection instruments

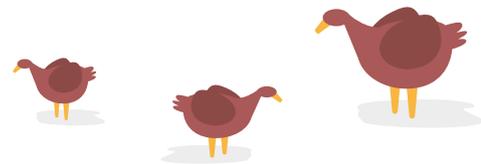
- Social assistance: non-contributory transfers financed through taxes and/or international development aid such as cash or in-kind benefits, cash-for work, and input or food subsidies.
- Labour market interventions: policies and programmes designed to facilitate employment, such as employment guarantee schemes and skills transfer programmes.
- Social insurance: contributory programmes mandated by government to cushion risks associated with life cycle- and livelihoods-related events, such as health insurance, old-age pensions, and agricultural risk insurance.

Agricultural interventions

- Livelihood and asset packages such as seeds, fertilizers, and livestock;
- education, for example on nutrition.
- training, for example in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, climate-smart agriculture, productivity-enhancing and sustainable agricultural practices;

Rural interventions

- Access to agricultural extension services, rural finance, education, infrastructure, health services, land and water, inclusive and participatory rural institutions.



Social protection is - and should be - led by governments. FAO's focus, therefore, is on enabling governments by providing advice and technical know-how, and by helping them integrate social protection approaches in their long-term national strategies and policies. Even in emergency and fragile contexts, FAO-led operations are designed from a forward-looking perspective in an effort to build nascent and government-run systems as quickly as possible.

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RURAL SOCIAL PROTECTION 101

The what and how of rural development and resilience

In an effort to provide a deeper – but time-saving - explanation about social protection and its role as a catalyst of rural transformation, this booklet was designed especially for policy- and decision-makers who, often short on time, have yet to fully discover the many different facets and dimensions of rural social protection and why it is beneficial for overcoming rural poverty.

So, what is rural social protection? How does it work and why is it important? Divided in two distinct parts, the booklet aims to answer these questions and many more from the perspective of the rural poor, as well as from the viewpoint of FAO and its work with governments and other relevant players.

FAO has positioned social protection as a major element in its efforts to reduce rural poverty, respond to climate change, promote resilient livelihoods and achieve Zero Hunger. Social protection spans the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development architecture, from eradicating poverty and reducing income inequality, to increasing social inclusion, promoting gender equality and improving access to health, education and water.

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