

MODULE 16:

MAKING CSA WORK FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE: THE ROLE OF SAFETY NETS

Overview

This module addresses how safety nets can support the transition to climate-smart agriculture (CSA) in the context of vulnerability and food insecurity. The focus is on adaptation, resilience and productivity elements of CSA, while potential mitigation co-benefits will only be outlined briefly. The module begins with a short overview of different types of social protection and safety nets. It then outlines the potential links between safety nets and CSA, illustrated with several case studies. The module concludes with some institutional and design issues to be considered in the establishment of safety nets.

Key messages

- Growing climate-related risks result in greater protection needs for the most vulnerable from shocks and stresses.
- The poorest and most food insecure households and communities are risk averse and face significant barriers to adopting livelihood strategies that would allow them to enhance their food and nutrition security in the face of increased climate risks.
- Resource transfers provided through safety nets ensure access to food and protect lives, livelihoods and potential development gains in CSA.
- At the same time, resource transfers can enable poor and food insecure people and communities to invest in disaster risk reduction measures that contribute to resilience building and adaptation, and in many cases support efforts to enhance productivity.

Contents

Overview	449
Key messages	449
16.1 Introduction	453
16.2 Social protection and safety nets – a conceptual overview	453
Social protection	453
Safety nets	454
16.3 Key functions of safety nets in relation to CSA	454
Protecting lives, livelihoods and potential gains in CSA	455
Enabling poor and food insecure communities to invest in CSA	456
Mitigation co-benefits	459
16.4 Challenges and lessons learned	459
Towards integrated approaches focused prevention and resilience	460
Matching predictability with flexibility	460
Targeting: reaching the “most vulnerable” versus community-wide action	461
Community ownership and sustainability	461
The need for context-specific approaches	461
Scale, timeframes, continuity and impact	462
Transfer selection, timing, incentives and disincentives	462
16.5 Conclusions	463
Notes	464
Acronyms	465
References	466
Additional Resources	468

List of Figures

Figure 16.1 The Different Elements of Social Protection	453
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List of Boxes

Box 16.1 Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Nets Programme	457
Box 16.2 R4 – Scaling up good practice through partnership and innovation	458
Box 16.3 Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy (SAFE)	459

16.1 Introduction

One of the main challenges for the transition to CSA is to make it work for the most vulnerable communities. As highlighted in Module 12 on local institutions, “evidence shows that households that are the least food secure are those that are least likely to take up new CSA practices” (Kristjanson *et al.*, 2012). There are many reasons for this: where communities are faced with food insecurity, climate change adds to an already highly complex set of interrelated risks, often perpetuating cycles of poverty, food insecurity, vulnerability, unsustainable production systems and overexploitation of natural resources.

The transition to resilient, adaptive and productive livelihood strategies, as envisaged by the concept of CSA, is an important element of the response to the food security and climate change challenge. But for CSA to be effective and implemented at the required scale, it must be inclusive. That means it must be an accessible option also for the poorest and the most food insecure, and linked to efforts that ensure their access to food and nutrition. For this, CSA must be context-specific and part of a broader approach to build resilience and empower marginalized communities to take up opportunities – such as CSA – that could lift them out of hunger and poverty.

This module will look closer into how social protection, and in particular safety nets, can support the transition to CSA in the context of vulnerability and food insecurity. The focus will be on adaptation, resilience and productivity elements of CSA, while potential mitigation co-benefits will only be outlined briefly. The module begins with a short overview of different types of social protection and safety nets. It will then outline the potential links between social protection and CSA, illustrated with several case studies. The module will conclude with some institutional and design issues to be considered in the establishment of safety nets.

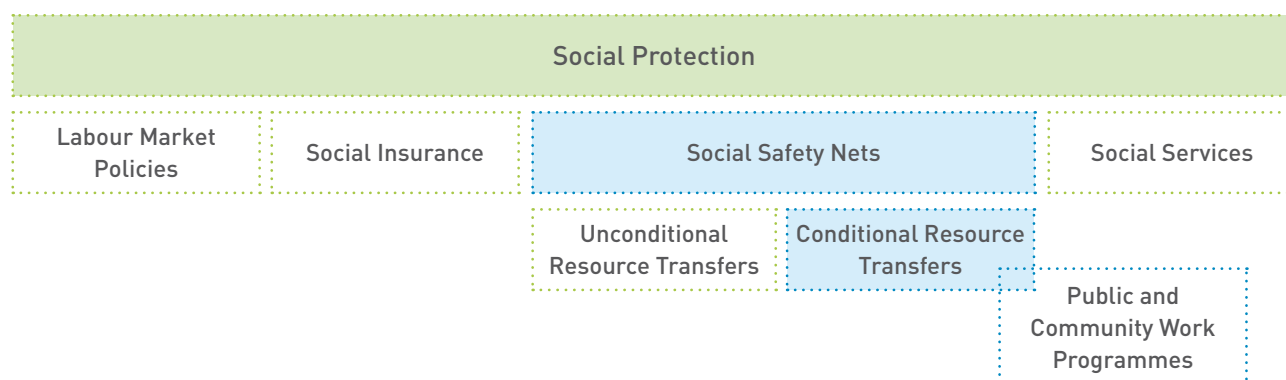
16.2 Social protection and safety nets – a conceptual overview

Social protection

The recent Committee of World Food Security High Level Panel of Experts (CFS HLPE) Report on Social Protection used the following definition of social protection: “Social protection describes all initiatives that: (1) provide income (cash) or consumption (food) transfers to the poor; (2) protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks; and (3) enhance the social status and rights of the excluded and marginalised” (HLPE, 2012a).

Beside safety nets, there are three other main types of social protection: labour market policies; social insurance, such as health insurance; and social services (e.g. access to social services for education, health, nutrition and agriculture). Figure 16.1 provides an overview of different elements of social protection, including safety nets, which will be covered in more detail in the next paragraph.

Figure 16.1
The Different Elements of Social Protection



Safety nets

Safety nets are a sub-set of social protection. They can be defined as formal or informal non-contributory resource transfers (cash, food or vouchers) provided to people vulnerable to or living in poverty, malnutrition and other forms of deprivation. They can be provided publicly and privately and require no payment from beneficiaries (WFP, 2012a). However, they can be conditional, i.e. recipients must commit to undertaking certain actions, such as sending their children to school or fulfilling certain work norms in public work programmes in order to receive these transfers. Unconditional transfers, in turn, provide people in need with direct support, without reciprocal activities – such as general food distribution.

Public works programmes – also referred to as “productive safety nets” or food-/ cash-for-work programmes¹ – are a sub-category of conditional resource transfers. These can range from simple, labour-intensive activities such as maintenance of feeder roads, to more sophisticated, higher-quality asset creation programmes, such as those linked to natural resource management (Grosh, 2008). As will be discussed further below, the latter are of particular relevance in the context of CSA.

The terms “safety nets”, “social transfers” and “social assistance” all refer to non-contributory resource transfers. However, there is some ambiguity and discomfort with the term “safety net.” This is because of, for example, difficulties in translating the term into national languages, or the possibly disturbing image of catching people as they fall (WFP, 2012a). Safety nets are both viewed as an instrument to protect people from becoming poor as a result of a shock, as well as a tool to reduce poverty and spur pro-poor economic growth among those who have already fallen into destitution (Devereux, 2009). In the 1990’s, a definition had been proposed that captures well the dual function of safety nets – both of which are important, as will be discussed further on:

“Safety nets are programs which protect a person or household against two adverse outcomes in welfare: chronic incapacity to work and earn (chronic poverty); and a decline in this capacity from a marginal situation that provides minimal livelihood for survival with few reserves (transient poverty)”

Devereux, 2009

16.3 Key functions of safety nets in relation to CSA

Safety nets are likely to become increasingly important in the context of climate change (FAO, 2011). As indicated above, there are two main reasons for this: first, mounting climate-related risks result in greater protection needs from shocks and stresses. Second, especially the poorest and most food insecure households and communities, who are unable to access food and other resources to meet basic needs, evidently face significant barriers to adopting more resilient and productive livelihood strategies that would allow them to enhance their food and nutrition security in the face of climate change in a sustainable manner (which includes reduced greenhouse gas emissions). Providing resource transfers through safety nets is increasingly recognized as a potential means to help the poor overcome these barriers (FAO, 2012).

In line with this, the key functions of safety nets in relation to CSA can be summarized as

- Ensuring access to food and protecting lives, livelihoods and potential gains in development – and CSA – from climate-related and other shocks; and
- Enabling poor and food insecure communities to invest in measures that build resilience, support adaptation, enhance productivity and ensure long-term access to food.

The subsequent sections will look more closely at the ways in which safety nets can support an inclusive transition to CSA. In this context it is important to note that usually interventions involving safety nets deliver

¹ WFP has shifted away from using the term “food-for-work” towards “food-assistance-for-assets”, but for the sake of simplicity this paper will use the term food-for-work.

multiple benefits for the communities involved. Hence the outcomes listed below should not be understood as mutually exclusive, but in fact closely linked to and often enforcing each other.

Protecting lives, livelihoods and potential gains in CSA

Vulnerability to climate change and other risks can increase over time, and potential gains on the path towards more resilient, productive and sustainable livelihoods can be at risk if households face repeated shocks that steadily erode their assets and with that their resilience to future shocks. Resource transfers can play a role in preventing this from happening by providing cash, vouchers, food or other resources during periods of crisis and during the cyclical 'hungry season' (WFP, 2011a). Resource transfers, conditional and unconditional, have in fact been an important and well-performing part of the response to major natural disasters in the past (Heltberg *et al.*, 2010).

For example, in Kenya, more than 450 000 people received cash or vouchers for participating in the World Food Programme (WFP)-supported food-assistance-for-assets (FFA) programmes in response to drought in 2012. As a result, nearly 10 000 hectares of land were cultivated with both physical soil and water conservation measures and biological stabilization or agro-forestry techniques (WFP, 2012b). During the period from 2006 to 2010, these FFA programmes had contributed to conserve nearly 38 500 hectares of land, restore 343 irrigation systems, repair 194 kilometres of feeder roads and produce 170 000 tree seedlings (WFP, 2011b). Government, non-governmental organization (NGO) partners and communities were trained on effective rain-water harvesting, such as soil and water conservation techniques, through a special arrangement with the World Agroforestry Centre. The resource transfers provided participation by the communities to the FFA programmes, preventing a further erosion of livelihood assets during the crisis, while the assets created with the support of resource transfers were an investment in future resilience (WFP, 2012b).

In Pakistan, where many households lost both productive and non-productive assets as well as their income in the floods of 2010, FAO's emergency and rehabilitation response programme included a large cash-for-work component. The cash-for-work intervention was undertaken in three provinces where the floods had ruined thousands of irrigation channels filling them with debris and silt. The intervention sought to repair and de-silt on-farm irrigation channels and restore and improve water availability for crop production. In total, the cash-for-work component of the response programme directly benefited 69 931 households who repaired 1 065 irrigation channels, recovering 114 655 hectares of irrigated land (FAO, 2012). The provision of cash to affected communities was found to be very relevant to their needs at a time when other sources of income had been lost and households needed cash to procure food and livelihood assets. Furthermore, in many cases, the cash provided through the intervention has been invested in livelihood assets (physical and human) that will provide continuing benefits. In addition, the long-term effect of the water channel repairs is the impact on future crop yields (FAO, 2012).

As these examples illustrate, resource transfers can prevent seasonal malnutrition among vulnerable populations, reduce debt and increase savings and productive investment, even in areas that are subject to recurrent crises (FAO, 2012). They provide poor households with an alternative from having to revert to so-called "negative coping strategies" that leave them more vulnerable. These include selling their productive assets—such as farm tools or livestock—to buy food, taking children out of school (which has irreversible impairments to their long-term socio-economic potential and resilience) or over-exploiting lands and forests (WFP, 2011a).²

In other words, safety nets play a critical role in protecting human, social, physical, financial and natural capital, which are the foundations of resilient and productive livelihoods (HLPE, 2012b; PHI *et al.*, 2011; Davis, 2011; WFP, 2011a; see also Module 15 on disaster risk reduction). This is both relevant for protecting the poorest and the most food insecure people and communities from falling into destitution, and for protecting those who are better off and already moving towards more resilience, productivity and sustainability from falling (back) into poverty. In this regard, safety nets could also protect potential gains and achievements in CSA.

² This points to the potential mitigation co-benefits that safety nets can generate, which will be addressed further on.

Enabling poor and food insecure communities to invest in CSA

Agriculture is inherently risky, and may be even more so in the future with more extreme climate events. For poor farmers, adopting new technologies and production strategies may be beyond their tolerance for risk, given that failure may be catastrophic (FAO *et al.*, 2012). It also often requires a certain investment, which – even if minimal – may be beyond their capacity. Kristjanson *et al.* (2012) found a strong negative relationship between household food security and innovation – in the sense that there is a correlation between the lack of innovation in farming practices and the number of food deficit months. Many poor households are simply unable to save sufficiently to invest in high-return strategies (Prowse and Scott, 2008).

This applies also to many climate-smart production strategies. As the HLPE Report on Climate Change and Food Security stresses, financial capital for investment in adaptation as well as human and social capital to implement adaptation are major obstacles for poor farmers (HLPE, 2012b). Many innovations that could make them more resilient, for example weather-index based insurance, are therefore difficult to access by those in greatest need. If market failures in credit, insurance and other areas are not addressed, households will be limited in their ability to adapt to climate change – or manage any other risk (Davis, 2011).

Safety nets offer significant potential to meet these challenges, which is often underestimated, as they continue to be predominantly viewed as a last resort “when adaptation fails” (HLPE, 2012b) – certainly also because of misleading connotations with the term “safety net”. However, there is increasing recognition of the contribution of safety nets to building resilience, reducing risks and enhancing adaptive capacity among vulnerable communities.³ As Kristjanson *et al.* (2012) point out, some kinds of safety nets targeted at poor or vulnerable households, such as transfers of cash, vouchers, food, or other goods, may be needed before these households will be able to make any changes to their farming practices that will result in their being better adapted to changing circumstances.

Various empirical studies and impact evaluations have indeed shown that safety nets can spur economic growth among poor communities, which relates to the productivity element of CSA.⁴ The role of social protection and safety nets in making growth inclusive has placed them firmly in the discussions on sustainable development and on an “inclusive green economy” (see also Module 13 on policies). By providing a basic level of consumption below which people know they cannot fall, and by boosting a household’s asset base, resource transfers can allow poor farmers to invest further in education, health, skills development and productive assets. Predictable resource transfers can also precipitate savings and encourage prudent risk taking, technology adoption and entry into high-return strategies (Davis, 2011; Prowse and Scott, 2008). All of these are not only prerequisites for productive and sustainable livelihoods, but also critical elements of adaptive capacity and resilience (UN TT SDCC, 2011).

According to a recent meta-analysis of impact evaluations, public works programmes can have significant impact in terms of temporary employment creation and increases in participant’s current incomes (Kimmis *et al.*, 2009). In addition, public works programmes that guarantee employment when needed, effectively provide insurance. Agriculture-related public works activities, such as hillside terracing or soil and water conservation, can improve farm yields and generate sustainable benefits for household food security. They can also create community assets and infrastructure critical for adaptation. Studies of the long-term impacts of natural resources management activities undertaken through food-for-work projects (in particular those that included terracing, agro-forestry and water capture and spreading) have found significant impacts in terms of increased crop yields as well as increases in vegetation diversity and cover. Furthermore, women benefited from the improved supply of water, fuel-wood, and other tree products (Reij *et al.*, 2009). In many cases, such as with Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), supported by WFP and others, public works programmes have strengthened household resilience against recurrent drought-induced food insecurity (see Box 13.9 in Module 13 and Box 16.1 on PSNP below). There are, however, a number of challenges related to promoting sustainable natural resource management through public works programmes, as will be discussed in the section on challenges and lessons learned.

³ See, for example, The World Bank and IDS 2011 and Béné, 2012.

⁴ See, for example, Barrientos, 2012 and Alderman & Hoddinott, 2009.

Box 16.1

Ethiopia's Productive Safety Nets Programme

In Ethiopia, land degradation is a major cause of the chronic food insecurity widely experienced by the country's largely rural population. In addition, Ethiopia is ranked the ninth most susceptible country in the world to natural disasters and weather-related shocks, with climate change likely to exacerbate this situation (Tongul and Hobson, 2013).

In 2005, the government of Ethiopia, with the support of WFP and other partners, introduced a new way of supporting vulnerable and chronically food insecure households, replacing continual appeals for emergency food aid and ad hoc responses with a more predictable safety net (Tongul and Hobson, 2013). The Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP) is a social transfer programme in which beneficiaries receive both cash and food support. The PSNP covers several thousand watersheds in 319 chronically food insecure woredas (districts) in six regions as well as two urban administrative areas.

With an annual budget of approximately US\$ 450 million, the programme targets around 7.8 million people in a normal year (and that rose to around 11.6 million during the regional drought of 2011). It is the largest social protection program in Sub-Saharan Africa outside of South Africa and has reached around 12 percent of the population in Ethiopia (Cooper *et al.*, 2012). The PSNP delivers 46 000 public works 'projects' every year. The public works are aimed at restoring local environments degraded by years of overuse and poor management, including, for example, the establishment of area enclosures, woodlots, construction of hillside terraces, shallow wells and ponds and stream diversion for irrigation, in accordance with the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development procedures on Community-Based Participatory Watershed Development (Berhane *et al.*, 2011), as well as building social infrastructure such as education and health facilities for the local community. In addition, the PSNP provides the poorest and most vulnerable households, who are unable to contribute to public works due to labour constraints, with regular, predictable support through cash transfers (Tongul and Hobson, 2013). As such, the PSNP provides a planned systematic approach in addressing chronic and seasonal hunger in Ethiopia (Berhane *et al.*, 2011; Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, 2010; Cooper *et al.*, 2012).

The PSNP is complemented by the Household Asset Building Programme (HABP), which seeks to improve household's income generating and asset holding abilities. While the PSNP is designed to protect existing assets and ensure a basic level of food consumption, the HABP is designed to assist households in increasing incomes generated from agricultural activities and to build up assets so that they will be able to 'graduate' off PSNP (Berhane *et al.*, 2011). A household has graduated from PSNP when it is deemed to have moved from being dependent on assistance to a 'food sufficient' situation without the need of external support (Berhane *et al.*, 2011).

A recent impact assessment showed that PSNP public works:

- reduced sediment in streams by 40-53 percent in areas closed to grazing and cultivation;
- increased woody biomass and forage production three to four-fold;
- increased water availability and quality;
- increased ground water recharge and improved downstream base flow of streams;
- lessened damage from seasonal floods (by soaking up rain water in areas closed to grazing and cultivation);
- enhanced down-stream crop production through soil and water conservation interventions;
- stored carbon (estimates from just two of several thousand watersheds calculated over a million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent had been sequestered);
- increased biodiversity;
- increased social cohesion by improving livelihoods; and
- improved access to social services (for example 3 900 schools and 450 health posts have been constructed or refurbished) (Tongul and Hobson, 2013).

More specifically, Berhane *et al.* (2011) found that in 2010, 70 percent of PSNP households in the survey perceived their overall economic condition as better or the same compared to the previous year, an increase from 41 percent in 2008. The survey also found that from 2004 to 2010, the level of assets had increased and distress sales had declined, regardless of beneficiary type. Participation in PSNP was found to raise the likelihood of using fertilizer by 19.5 percentage points. Other studies showed that households with access to both PSNP and complementary packages of agricultural support were more likely to borrow for productive purposes, use improved agricultural technologies, and operate their own non-farm business activities (FAO *et al.*, 2012).

From a CSA perspective, Cooper *et al.* (2012) conclude that PSNP has helped a very large number of Ethiopians cope better with climate-induced risks, although challenges in the implementation of PSNP remain. Some of these are addressed in the section on challenges and lessons learned.

Safety nets can also serve as a platform for enhancing access to innovative risk management tools, such as weather-index based insurance.⁵ For example, “insurance for work” can be used not only to expand access to insurance, but can be added to existing labour-based safety nets to protect beneficiaries and reduce costs for governments and donors from the disruptions caused by climate disasters. This is the objective of the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative launched by WFP and Oxfam America (see Box 16.2 on R4 below).

Box 16.2

R4 – Scaling up good practice through partnership and innovation

In 2010, WFP and Oxfam America partnered to scale up an innovative approach to strengthen poor farmers’ resilience to climate-related shocks. The Rural Resilience Initiative (R4) combines improved resource management (risk reduction), insurance (risk transfer), microcredit (prudent risk taking), and savings (risk reserves). The initiative builds upon the Horn of Africa Risk Transfer for Adaptation (HARITA) programme, which was successfully implemented in Ethiopia’s Tigray region by Oxfam America with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and Swiss Re.

R4 allows poor, food insecure households who already benefit from food-for-asset or public works schemes such as PSNP to pay for insurance with their labour. Through “insurance-for-work” poor farmers work on small-scale, community-identified public projects in return for insurance coverage. Farmers with more cash can also purchase this insurance outright.

The insurance reduces uncertainty from climate variability and allows the poorest and most vulnerable farmers to make investments that increase their productivity. In case of a drought, farmers receive automatic insurance pay-outs if rainfall drops below a predetermined threshold. With the insurance pay-out, the farmers do not have to sell off livestock, tools or other productive assets to survive and will be able to afford the seeds and inputs necessary to plant in the following season.

R4 is now targeting nearly 19 000 households in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. The initiative reached a major milestone in 2012 when more than 12 000 drought-affected households received an insurance pay-out of over US\$ 320 000. This is the first time that a weather index insurance programme in Ethiopia has delivered pay-outs at such a large scale directly to small farmers. In addition, farmers received the funds when they needed them the most, thanks to an early warning system based on advanced satellite technology that calculates when the crops begin to suffer and triggers the pay-outs.

The R4 Initiative demonstrated that safety nets can provide an effective and cost-efficient platform to make insurance accessible to the chronically poor. The initiative represents a new kind of partnership, bringing together public and private sector actors in a strategic large-scale initiative to innovate and develop better tools to help the most vulnerable people build resilient livelihoods. It also constitutes a first step towards developing a sustainable insurance market for poor people, an essential factor in ensuring farmers’ livelihoods and food security over the long term. In 2012, R4 began expanding to Senegal where it expects to reach 18 000 farmers by 2015. In 2013, R4 is further scaling up in Ethiopia and is expected to be piloted to two additional countries by 2015.

Source: WFP and OXFAM AMERICA, 2012

Another area where safety nets can make a significant contribution is in fostering human and social capital, which set the stage for and maximize the impact of adaptation interventions (UN TT SDCC, 2011). Investments in early childhood nutrition can spur economic growth, as these investments have long-term effects on cognitive skills and productivity.⁶ Safety nets can also provide a platform for introducing specific CSA-related activities – for example capacity development on skills and adaptation practices and technologies to be applied in homestead vegetable production or agro-forestry – and for targeting these activities towards the poorest and most vulnerable, who are often women. The Government of Bangladesh’s Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme, for example, provides monthly wheat flour rations and entrepreneurship training to the poorest, most marginalised women in Bangladesh. Roughly 10 million women and their families have benefited from the VGD programme since it was launched three decades ago. Participating women attend regular training sessions where they discuss social issues and learn about their rights. They also

⁵ See also Balzer and Hess, 2010.

⁶ For example, analysis by the Boston Consulting Group showed productivity gains of up to US\$ 1 782 for every US\$ 146 invested in Kenya’s school feeding programmes (WFP and Boston Consulting Group, 2009).

participate in a savings plan and are encouraged to start their own businesses, mainly in vegetable production or in animal rearing (WFP, 2006). In Sudan, as part of a project to promote fuel-efficient stoves (see section 16.3.2.1), over 200 000 women took part in food-for-training on making fuel-efficient stoves and briquettes, compost and bio pesticides using locally available resources, and setting up community nurseries and woodlots (WFP, 2013).

Mitigation co-benefits

Food and nutrition security being their main objective, safety nets will never have mitigation as their primary intention. Still, those safety net programmes that entail a component of asset creation or rehabilitation can also provide significant mitigation co-benefits, as Box 16.2 about Darfur illustrates.

Box 16.3

Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy (SAFE)

Women in North Darfur traditionally collect dead trees or branches for cooking, but with the onset of the war – and the resulting displacement and environmental degradation – the supply is limited. Women have to venture into disputed territory, risking harassment and rape, in the daily or weekly business of collecting firewood. As environmental degradation progresses, women are increasingly forced to travel longer distances to collect grass and wood while confronting greater risk of attack. At the same time, the cost of firewood has become prohibitive with the continued conflict – and households are purchasing it at the expense of other needs, including selling food rations. Interviews with women revealed that they can spend a full day's wage on firewood alone. Often children are also required to bring firewood to school to help communities with the burden of cooking school meals. Firewood consumption has also become a major contributor to rapid deforestation. Darfur is already vulnerable to climatic changes and poor in environmental resources; stripping the land jeopardizes the resumption of agriculture and livestock practices that were common prior to the war.

WFP is using practical measures to address these problems not just for internally displaced people (IDP) living in camps, but also for the host communities who live on fragile lands that are affected by the processes of desertification. These are vital tools for conflict prevention and peace building. With the "Safe Access to Firewood and alternative Energy (SAFE)" initiative, WFP has adapted its emergency programme to respond to the evolving needs of displaced and other vulnerable people. Targeting both IDP and host communities, WFP has supported the establishment of 34 SAFE training centres in four rural communities and three major IDP camps. To implement the programme, WFP has built the capacity of 73 Women's Interest Groups and 16 Farmers' Interest Groups to manage training centres, monitor SAFE activities, and continue developing the community centres. As a result, close to 200 000 women were trained on adult literacy, vocational training, environmental conservation and in making fuel-efficient stoves and briquettes.

Thanks to SAFE, women have reported reducing firewood collection trips (86 percent reported less or no harassment as they replaced firewood with briquettes). They report saving time to invest in childcare and productive activities, and saving money from using briquettes instead of purchasing cooking fuel (an average of one US\$ saved per day). They are also selling fuel-efficient stoves and briquettes in the market, generating an additional income of US\$ 30 per month. The mitigation benefits occur from a reduction of fuel wood, as well as from the improvement of soil properties of the marginal lands in the area through reforestation and sustainable land management. Thirty-four tree nurseries have been established with a capacity of 500 000 plantlets per annum. Newly transplanted seedlings that are maintained by the communities under community forestry have covered 678 hectares of land so far. The trees cultivated are a) income generating species like Acacia (gum Arabic) and Jatropha (bio fuel); b) forestry trees for sustainable firewood supply; and c) nutritional value and fruit trees like moringa, lemon and oranges. In addition, five Agri Business Centres have been set up where beneficiaries learn how to make compost and bio pesticides using locally available resources, and applying good agricultural practices (WFP, 2013; see more details on energy-smart food in Module 5 and climate-smart forestry in Module 9).

16.4 Challenges and lessons learned

There are a number of challenges as well as important design and implementation issues that need to be considered in the development of safety nets and in using resource transfers as an incentive to encourage CSA practices.

Towards integrated approaches focused prevention and resilience

Safety nets are emerging as a platform for breaking the cycle of recurrent emergencies, which are increasing in view of climate change. This is based on evidence that large shares of vulnerable and food insecure populations would need long-term assistance, not only in response to shocks and disaster events. Their needs are therefore largely 'predictable', and a corresponding predictable level of support is required to address their food and nutrition needs with meaningful investments at the household and community levels before disasters occur, rather than with ex-post emergency assistance.

Important support that well designed safety nets can provide in this regard is through the enhancement of productive capacities, and the creation and rehabilitation of household and community assets. Often it is less the severity of shocks that determine the long-term outcome of crisis, than the ability of households to avoid falling beneath critical asset-holding levels (Prowse and Scott, 2008). In this respect, resource transfers provided through safety nets can be used as effective "enablers" for communities to build or enhance livelihood assets and capacities in a forward-looking manner, thus avoiding poor farmers falling into situations of increasing impoverishment and deprivation after recurring shocks, as well as avoiding the adoption of negative risk management, coping and adaptation strategies (Prowse and Scott, 2008).

There has been an increasing focus on pursuing a systems-based approach, as opposed to the ad hoc, project-based, short-term approach that dominated in the past. This is based on an understanding that more systematic and predictable risk-management tools with a focus on enhancing long-term resilience are likely to contribute to a sustainable graduation out of poverty. The systems approach is relevant not only in development contexts but also in emergency and early recovery contexts where shocks can be recurrent (e.g. Ethiopia, the Sahel, Yemen) or one-off. It is a way to move beyond a purely relief-focused approach towards multi-year safety net programmes such as the PSNP in Ethiopia whereby chronically food-insecure households receive support for up to five years, and the Hunger Safety Net Programme in Kenya (FAO *et al.*, 2012).

Matching predictability with flexibility

To be effective enablers of poor farmers' risk management strategies and capacities, safety nets must be both predictable and flexible enough to be scaled-up rapidly in times of a crisis, or reduced once a crisis is over. This is particularly relevant as climate-related shocks become more frequent and difficult to predict.

There are a number of efforts under way to make safety nets more responsive to climate-related shocks and hence more effective in preventing negative coping strategies, and more sustainable by ensuring flexibility. For example, the PSNP offers a vehicle for delivering timely livelihood protection to the chronically food insecure. However, the programme had difficulties in responding flexibly to weather related shocks, and emergency responses were often too slow to prevent the affected people from having to sell crucial assets such as livestock and equipment; many poor households that can sustain a livelihood during normal times are then at risk of slipping into chronic food insecurity. Resulting household asset depletion as well as increased levels of destitution in this segment of the population threaten the sustainability of PSNP.

In response to the above, in a second phase of PSNP, starting in 2008, the Government of Ethiopia, in collaboration with WFP and the World Bank, developed a risk management framework for PSNP. The Livelihoods, Early Assessment and Protection (LEAP) project aimed to facilitate predictable disbursement of resources for less predictable problems, in effect allowing the immediate scale-up of PSNP activities in response to localized, intermediate or severe extreme weather events. The concept is to coordinate a pool of contingent resources that can be readily and appropriately allocated through the PSNP in the event many more households become food insecure or existing beneficiaries require additional months of assistance following weather shocks. In case of a severe drought or flood, an early warning system based on a weather index can trigger additional financial resources for the PSNP from a contingency fund in the initial stages of the drought or flood – up to four months sooner than traditional crisis aid (see Balzer and Hess, 2010; see also Modules 13 on policies and 15 on disaster risk reduction).

Targeting: reaching the “most vulnerable” versus community-wide action

Effective targeting is key for maximizing efficiency and program impact. Using safety nets as targeting platforms for introducing specific CSA-related activities can be a practical measure to help make sure that CSA benefits the poorest and most vulnerable. On the other hand, in some low-income contexts where massive poverty still prevails, it becomes challenging to strike a balance between ensuring benefits reach the most vulnerable populations, and avoiding artificial boundaries between and within almost equally-vulnerable communities.

In practical terms, for example, CSA approaches must be implemented holistically and through broad participatory approaches when aimed at enhancing the resilience of entire watersheds or landscapes where different communities reside, some poorer than others. In fact, this is the same philosophy that guides much of the transformative landscape interventions implemented through safety nets in poor and vulnerable areas, whereby the achievement of collective and communal benefits impose more participatory approaches.

As not all households that share the same land-use unit have the same labour profile and wealth, resource transfers can help enable the poorest households within this unit to work to conserve the land. One study on the impact of food-for-programmes has concluded that the farmers would not have collectively constructed the large-scale improvements without food as an incentive (Reij *et al.*, 2005). At the same time, concomitant self-help contributions of the better off community members are necessary to ensure the involvement of the entire community and achieve the required coverage and scale.

In this regard, participatory planning procedures that recognize both people and ecosystems' requirements are critical to identify viable projects, enhance participation of food insecure households—women headed households in particular—and ensure the involvement of the community across different levels of wealth. This is also critical for ownership and sustainability of interventions that include resource transfers, as the next section highlights.

Community ownership and sustainability

When applied in situations of top-down approaches, limited or insufficient technical standards and support, tenure insecurity and a missing legal framework, incentives in the form of resource transfers are not only ineffective, but also potentially detrimental in terms of ownership building and sustainability.

A basic village or community-level participatory planning approach improves people's participation and increased sense of ownership over assets created or rehabilitated, with a positive impact on management and sustainability. Community level decision-making and targeting may be strengthened, particularly if the most vulnerable (including the young and women), are involved in project selection, design and implementation. The approach can also help identify and promote self-help efforts within the community on needs outside of the intervention scope.

The need for context-specific approaches

Depending on the specific context, safety nets and resource transfers can contribute to resilience, adaptation and other aspects of CSA to various degrees. In low capacity contexts, (e.g. where there is weak governance, instability and conflict) interventions that require significant expertise that is not realistically available should be avoided. Instead, low-tech and low-risk interventions are usually more appropriate. Such interventions do not mean low quality work, but involve less technical inputs and are more in line with specific time commitments that participants can contribute. Examples include drainage and irrigation canals clearing, dike establishment or community emergency preparedness training.

In higher capacity contexts, more sophisticated and integrated approaches can be considered. Sustainable land management, for example, integrates ecological and social approaches through a set of land management principles and interventions encompassing community-based approaches within defined landscape units. Similarly, community-based participatory watershed planning brings people and their livelihoods together with the natural environment by focusing on water catchments as the centre of planning of activities.

These approaches can bring about significant results in resilience building, reversing land degradation, risk reduction and adaptation to climate shocks, but they are not always possible. Of course, applying techniques – such as participatory watershed management approaches – to their full potential requires significant capacities and investments not only from the communities, but also from local institutions and government authorities. Ensuring and sustaining the planning and management effort over a long period of time among both communities and governments is an indispensable factor, especially in poor and degraded environments.

Scale, timeframes, continuity and impact

Social protection and safety nets interventions can deliver different results and outcomes depending on the institutional, programming and funding structures. Well-established national safety nets programmes may offer the necessary social, institutional and operational framework for interventions to have ambitious targets and long-term horizons. Conversely, interventions, programmes and initiatives of shorter durations may inevitably have to set more limited targets and objectives. In practical terms, and to remain on the example of a large-scale community-based watershed management programme, experience shows that in order to succeed and “reach scale”, these interventions normally require longer timeframes and continuity of institutional, technical and political efforts. Other activities of shorter duration may have to operate at a lower level with less ambitious targets.

However, this does not mean that only long-term interventions can generate sustainable results. Much of the current debate about “building resilience” stresses the role that even more limited interventions can play in supporting livelihoods and productive enhancements among poor communities. Therefore, one of the main challenges is to ensure a convergence and continuity of efforts and an alignment of short and more long-term interventions within the parameters set by a broader policy environment targeting poor and food insecure communities. CSA interventions will have to follow the same logic, as disaster risk reduction, adaptation and resilience building activities supported by resource transfers also need to take these aspects into account. Continuity of programmes increases the ability to achieve the required transformational changes.

The impact of resource transfers on productivity and resilience is of course linked to the objective of the intervention, which should always be informed by the specifics of the context in which it is undertaken. For example, the main objective of large-scale safety nets, such as Ethiopia’s PSNP or Kenya’s Hunger Safety Net Programme that cover millions of food insecure households, is to meet their food needs and to prevent more people from falling into poverty. This is a tremendous challenge in itself, particularly in view of increasing climate related risks. Given the limited capacities, also in terms of funding, there is an obvious trade-off between ensuring basic food security on the one hand, and enhancing productivity and resilience on the other.

Transfer selection, timing, incentives and disincentives

One often discussed programming area centres on transfer selection, or more narrowly the longstanding ‘cash versus food’ debate. It is now widely recognized that the choice of the most appropriate safety net transfers – in cash, food or vouchers – hinges on properly assessed context-specific conditions. These include programme objectives, the spatial and temporal functioning of markets, the availability of implementation capacities and delivery mechanisms, cost-efficiency analysis, and beneficiaries’ preferences (Gentilini, 2007). For example, the use of vouchers or smart cards in Kenya was found to be particularly appropriate for pastoralists, as it did not tie them to one place (WFP, 2012c; see also WFP, 2009).

The timing of resource transfers, particularly in the context of food-for-work activities, is another important issue to be considered. Without careful planning, participation in food-for-work programmes might provide essential food today, but hinder labour investments in future productivity. Conducting food-for-work activities during the agriculture productive season and providing transfers that are above prevailing market rates can divert labour from peoples’ farms. In turn, timing in the non-productive season and at a net level at or below market rates would not pull labour from private production, and gains made could be redirected into private agricultural investment (WFP, 2012d).

Lastly, care should be taken that resource transfer, including insurance, does not discourage or impede autonomous actions adaptation by households. Providing transfers that shift risks to more aggregate levels could cause farmers to be less inclined to change their production techniques and livelihood strategies (FAO, 2011). This can be avoided by “rewarding” change in production techniques, such as sustainable management of natural resource. In the case of the R4 Resilience Initiative already outlined in Box 16.2, for example, poor farmers can obtain insurance if they fulfil certain work norms as part of the PSNP, which are aimed at enhancing resilience and reducing disaster risk.

16.5 Conclusions

Growing climate-related risks result in greater needs for effective social protection systems and services shielding the most vulnerable from shocks and stresses. The poorest and most food insecure households and communities face significant barriers to adopting more resilient and productive livelihood strategies that would allow them to enhance their food and nutrition security in the face of climate change. Specific policies and interventions need to be deployed to ensure that these challenges are turned into opportunities for the most vulnerable.

This module addressed how safety nets can support the transition to CSA in the context of vulnerability and food insecurity. Focusing on the adaptation, resilience and productivity elements of CSA, the module argued that, if properly designed, resource transfers provided through safety nets can protect lives, livelihoods and potential gains in development as well as CSA from climate-related risks. In addition, it was outlined how safety nets can enable poor and food insecure people and communities to invest in productivity, adaptation and resilience building measures.

There is growing recognition of the role of safety nets in enhancing adaptive capacity and building resilience to climate change. Safety nets are emerging as a platform for breaking the cycle of recurrent emergencies, which are increasing in view of climate change. This is based on evidence that large shares of food insecure populations would need long-term assistance, independently of the occurrence of shocks. Some chronic needs are therefore ‘predictable’, and a corresponding predictable level of support is required to address these needs ex-ante, rather than with ex-post emergency assistance. Such a future oriented, anticipatory risk management approach offers important opportunities for cross-fertilizing social protection with adaptation and disaster risk reduction efforts (see also Module 15 on disaster risk reduction).

In addition, safety nets can allow for the acquisition of human capital, the skills and assets that poor farmers need to sustainably escape food insecurity and poverty and become resilient in the long run. A key function of safety nets in this regard is the rehabilitation and creation of livelihood assets, as was demonstrated within the various boxes. Exploiting this potential of resource transfers, however, requires a long-term, forward looking and preventive approach that focuses on strengthening the asset base of vulnerable households. The notion of a threshold, below which households have so few assets that they are forced to adopt negative risk-management and coping strategies, offers a floor level above which pro-poor adaptation measures should seek to lift households (Prowse and Scott, 2008).

The effective use of safety nets as enablers of resilient and sustainable development also requires a shift towards integrated approaches that link resource transfers with resilience building and productivity enhancing agricultural interventions. This calls for a move away from viewing safety nets as being triggered in response to agricultural failure, towards recognizing the positive linkages between agricultural interventions and social protection (Devereux and Guenthe, 2009). In the context of CSA, this implies that safety nets can and should be used more systematically to enhance productivity, resilience and adaptive capacity, and should become an integral part of developing pro-poor CSA strategies.

Notes

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Acronyms

CFS HLPE	Committee of World Food Security High Level Panel of Experts
CSA	climate-smart agriculture
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FFA	food-assistance-for-assets
FFW	food-for-work
HABP	Household Asset Building Programme
HARITA	Horn of Africa Risk Transfer for Adaptation
IDP	internally displaced people
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
LEAP	Livelihoods, Early Assessment and Protection
NGO	non-governmental organization
PHI	Public Health Institute
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
R4	Rural Resilience Initiative
SAFE	Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy
UNSCN	UN Standing Committee on Nutrition
UN TT SDCC	United Nations Task Team on the Social Dimensions of Climate Change
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
WFP	World Food Programme

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