

SE20: Connecting Social Protection, Food, and Health Systems for Greater Impact on Poverty, Food Security, and Nutrition – Opportunities and Challenges

Organized by: WFP, FAO, UNICEF

Summary of the side event

The CFS52 emphasized the need to integrate social protection, food security, and health systems to address poverty, malnutrition, and food insecurity, especially in fragile countries. The side event, Connecting Social Protection, Food, and Health Systems for Greater Impact on Poverty, Food Security, and Nutrition, co-organized by WFP, FAO, and UNICEF, gathered experts and policymakers from countries including Timor-Leste, Pakistan, Mexico, and Brazil.

Dr. Saskia de Pee (WFP), Ms. Chloe Angood (UNICEF), and Prof. Nicholas Nisbett (IDS) opened the session by advocating for evidence-based policymaking, emphasizing how assessing the cost and affordability of nutritious diets informs social protection strategies. They introduced the Mind the Gap publication, which showcases how diet affordability metrics can guide nutrition-sensitive social protection programs, particularly for vulnerable populations like children and pregnant women.

Government representatives stressed the need for social protection programs that are both flexible and adaptive, particularly in fragile contexts facing crises such as economic downturns or natural disasters. The capacity to expand these programs during emergencies is essential to safeguard vulnerable populations, as poverty, malnutrition, and climate risks often intersect in these settings. Tailored solutions based on specific challenges were central to the discussions, with country representatives sharing their strategies to address hunger and poverty.

Timor-Leste's Vice-Prime Minister, Mariano Assanami Sabino Lopes, described the expansion of the Bolsa da Mãe program to include health and education services, as well as fresh food vouchers and cash-plus initiatives. This integrated approach aims to improve nutrition and food security, especially for low-income households. However, reaching remote areas remains challenging, and further

integration across social protection, agriculture, and health systems is needed.

Dr. Naveed Akbar, Director General of Pakistan's Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), shared insights on the program's focus on maternal and child health through conditional cash transfers, health checkups, and immunizations for pregnant women and children under two. This approach has shown positive outcomes, particularly in raising vaccination rates and increasing prenatal care awareness, helping reduce stunting and malnutrition in Pakistan.

Mexico's Director General of Health Promotion, Dr. Ruy López Ridaura, addressed the "Triple Burden of Malnutrition" challenge (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and obesity) through a multisectoral approach that integrates social protection, food, and health systems. Measures like front-of-pack food labeling and locally sourced school meals enhance food security, boost local economies, and reduce the consumption of ultra-processed foods.

In a video message, Timor-Leste President José Ramos-Horta emphasized social protection's critical role in global food security, advocating for coordinated action to address systemic inequalities in food systems. Renato Godinho, representing Brazil's Special Advisory for International Affairs, presented the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, an initiative aimed at supporting the implementation of targeted actions to address various forms of malnutrition and poverty, tailored to the unique circumstances and requirements of each member country.

The session concluded with a consensus that connecting social protection, food, and health systems is vital to achieving sustainable food security. Global cooperation, shared learning, and innovation are crucial as countries navigate these interconnected challenges. Strengthened frameworks that support convergence across sectors will be essential to reduce poverty, enhance nutrition, and improve resilience, ensuring no one is left behind in the global effort to combat hunger and malnutrition.