



Adaptive Social Protection

A persistent illusion or the way forward for climate adaptation and social inclusion?

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The concept of adaptive social protection has evolved over the past two decades, and examples of practice point to significant potential for accelerating the interconnection between social protection mechanisms and climate-smart practices and adaptation. However, there is a lack of evidence on how actual practices can and should change, and on resilience outcomes.

This policy brief is based on a study undertaken by the CGIAR FOCUS Climate Security team of the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT within the CGIAR initiative on Gender Equality (HER+), comprising of a global review of recent progress in concepts, policies and practices, and three deep dives into social protection landscapes and programmes in India, Jordan and the Sahel region.



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KEY FINDINGS AND MESSAGES

- ▶ Social protection programmes can link with climate change adaptation in one of the following ways:
 - Integrating climate risk information in the design of social protection instruments, informing targeting and area-based approaches;
 - Including climate resilience as an explicit outcome for complementary programmes to cash transfers, such as knowledge and technology transfer, asset creation and insuring capital and assets against climate risks;
 - Making climate resilience a concrete objective of social protection instruments, creating environmental assets and resilient infrastructure as public works and food- or cash-for-work programmes.
- ▶ Despite a growing body of literature on the potential for linking social protection and climate change adaptation, conclusive evidence of enhanced outcomes for climate resilience, gender equity and social inclusion remains elusive. Organisational reports and anecdotal evidence point to promising results, but authoritative assessments or evaluations of mid- to long-term outcomes are lacking, and the tools to undertake such assessments are limited.
- ▶ Where resilience outcomes are reported, these mostly refer to the resilience capacities of individuals or households, rather than to the resilience of environmental assets or land, water and food systems, and very few explicitly consider resilience against the negative impacts of long-term climate change.
- ▶ Most programmes by international actors could be described as humanitarian assistance rather than social protection and focus on shock response without seeking structural transformation towards gender equality and economic redistribution. In such contexts the potential for social protection to act as a bridge between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding is not fulfilled.
- ▶ Several basic challenges question the feasibility of ambitious adaptive social protection programmes, including the current inadequate scale and nature of social protection systems and instruments, particularly in low-income countries. In severely resource-constrained contexts, services for the poor can result in poor service.
- ▶ Little information is available on how linking social inclusion and climate resilience objectives results in actual changes in agricultural and community practices. In some cases, changes may be required in targeting or scaling of actions rather than in the nature of the action itself.
- ▶ At the policy level, some progress has been made, but there are still many fragmented SP programmes and schemes that do not represent a coherent national system backed up by policy, budgets and infrastructure.
- ▶ A few examples point to significant potential for co-benefits for women's rights and gender equality, social inclusion and enhanced climate resilience. In contexts as diverse as the Sahel region, Jordan and India, a range of social protection programmes target vulnerable populations in conjunction with investments in land restoration, livelihood diversification and integrated water management.

- In the Sahel region, humanitarian responses are employed in a repetitive manner to cope with shocks that recur regularly and already increase in frequency and intensity. In face of significant infrastructure and human resource constraints, building a critical mass of social protection instruments and increasing coverage needs to be complemented with efforts to make existing programmes climate sensitive.
 - In Jordan, for social protection programmes to play a meaningful role in contributing to climate adaptation, coverage must increase. This can be achieved by expanded enrolment in the Social Security Corporation through formalization and contribution-support, including for those working in climate-vulnerable sectors.
 - In India, the national public works scheme has been used as a shock response against climate disasters and vulnerability for rural households but in order to contribute to long term climate resilience it must focus on leveraging climate risk information to strengthen inclusive asset planning, particularly for natural resource management. The emphasis should also be expanded from asset creation to maintenance, ownership and use to promote skill development and income generation through value chains.
- ▶ Across the globe, the use of climate risk information in the design of programmes and targeting of vulnerable populations could be enhanced, particularly through combining climate vulnerability assessments, the use of mapping tools, such as GIS, and data on socio-economic vulnerability, livelihoods and agroecological zones.
 - ▶ The productive elements of social protection, e.g. cash for work and climate-smart agricultural technologies, training and inputs – particularly focusing on women and marginalised groups – are another obvious entry point. The design processes for social protection schemes therefore need to include agronomists, land use specialists and climate adaptation experts, otherwise interventions will remain flawed.
 - ▶ Governance and policy coherence are critical, as is the case with all multidimensional programmes and cross-cutting issues. In principle, there needs to be close collaboration and shared ownership between different ministries and departments, such as agriculture, social inclusion and employment, and civil defence, but in practice this is hard to achieve.
 - ▶ Even where climate resilience is not an explicit focus for social protection schemes, however, positive outcomes for adaptation can be found. Perhaps more importantly, these examples showcase that rather than designing new programmes and entirely novel approaches, what is needed may be a recognition that certain actions can generate more co-benefits for climate resilience than others, and to identify what the no-regrets options are for long-term adaptation to climate change.
 - ▶ Expanding the currently low coverage of social protection in climate vulnerable countries, with a particular focus on women and children, will require significant additional resources, including from domestic budgets, bilateral aid budgets, multilateral and regional banks, and climate funds such as the Green Climate Fund and a future Fund for Loss and Damage under the UNFCCC.



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The premise: connecting social protection and climate adaptation action generates a resilience dividend

Social inequality, persistent poverty, and the impacts of climate change across the globe combine to drive crises and undermine the progress of the sustainable development agenda (IPCC2022; United Nations2023). The negative impacts of climate change are disproportionately felt in low and middle-income countries that also have limited resources and mechanisms in place for social protection (Hallegatte et al. 2016; UNISDR 2011). Thus, climate impacts affect already under-resourced systems for poverty reduction, as well as generating new risks that are not covered by existing programmes (Aleksandrova and Costella 2021). This policy brief is based on an ongoing review of existing and nascent practice in social protection that seeks to address climate risks. Examples of social protection programmes and instruments were identified and studied for how they may address existing and new risks by generating, by design or unintendedly, climate adaptation benefits and thus a climate resilience dividend that goes beyond immediate social protection targets. CGIAR decided to undertake this study based on its unique expertise in food systems, land and water management, which it applies to processes and practices that promote equality and social inclusion as well long-term climate security.

For the study, two aspects were of primary interest: first, which types of social protection mechanisms may support climate resilience of vulnerable populations while also promoting longer-term equality and social inclusion.¹ Second, how adaptation action and social innovations can be bundled to accelerate climate adaptation of land, water and food systems and long-term climate security.² Solid evidence on these questions would provide the basis for promoting more successful integration of existing and new social protection interventions with climate smart agriculture, land use and water management practices.

Through a literature review, expert interviews, and three regional “deep dives” we sought to answer the question of what the potential long-term benefits are of aligning social protection and climate resilience objectives, and how existing and fragmented examples may be scaled. In addition, the study focused on better understanding whether and how practices on the ground are changing, if climate risks are considered in the design of social protection programmes, and whether adaptation measures are built into the support provided through existing schemes.

Adaptive social protection: evolution of a term and concept

Over the past years, an increasing number of policy dialogues, research programmes and publications were dedicated to the links between social protection and climate change adaptation (Sengupta and Dahlet 2023; Costella et al., 2021; Aleksandrova 2021; Johnson et al. 2013; Kuriakose et al. 2013; Solórzano and Cárdenes 2019). They all build on the premise that social protection contributes to individual and social resilience, and that climate change adaptation must work for the most vulnerable and enhance social inclusion.

¹ See CGIAR's HER+ initiative: <https://cgspace.cgiar.org/handle/10568/127612>

² See CGIAR's CSA work (<https://ccafs.cgiar.org/climate-smart-agriculture>) & Climate Security Focus (<https://climatesecurity.cgiar.org>).

It is thought that creating synergies across these domains will accelerate action and enhance outcomes. At the policy level, integrating climate action and social protection objectives offers a strategic entry point for synergies across national programmes and budgets. Integrating social protection in national climate adaptation and mitigation plans enables authorities to allocate resources more efficiently and also report more coherently against regional and international policy commitments (Sengupta and Dahlet 2023).

To date, several terms have been proposed to describe climate-sensitive social protection schemes, including “adaptive”, “transformative”, “climate-responsive” and “shock-responsive” social protection. These terms have been used interchangeably at times and whilst they are nuanced, there are important differences between them (Tenzing 2020). These differences relate to the main social, economic and, ultimately, moral logic that underlies the concepts as well as different timescales.

Whereas the concepts of “shock-responsive” or “climate-responsive” are oriented towards addressing immediate risks and approach social protection from a coping or growth-oriented perspective, the terms “transformative” or even “adaptive” point to a rights-based approach, concerned with longer term structural changes to address the underlying causes of risk. Further, whilst the former terms see the role of social protection as helping people cope with what are perceived to be external shocks, the latter – at least in principle – seek to transform the shock drivers inherent in social and economic systems, i.e. the root causes of social exclusion and of vulnerability to climate change (Fedele et al., 2019). Despite these distinctions, distinguishing between labels, objectives, and functions can still be difficult since actors adopt the terms to different effects.

Unpacking the conceptual differences should, however, not distract from what they have in common in terms of objectives.³ All of the concepts seek to move beyond or complement existing social protection systems with deliberate efforts to improve the prevention of and preparedness and response to external shocks, in particular natural hazards and climate risks.

Adaptive social protection has also been promoted as a potential connector between social protection, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Tenzing (2020) visualises the overlaps in objectives for vulnerability reduction while a framework by Béné et al. (2012) aligns social protection against resilience objectives. In such framings, social protection can, in principle, contribute to disaster preparedness and prevention through the provision of social insurance and risk diversification programmes, support effective response to disasters through social assistance or public works programmes, and promote longer term adaptive capacity through livelihood diversification and support (Ulrichs et al. 2019, Aleksandrova, 2020). The two key components of enhanced resilience from such assistance are thus individual or household resilience capacity in the face of any type of economic shock on the one hand

³ Similar differences in concept, priority setting and logic can be observed in the field of climate change adaptation, with different perspectives dominating from coping with climate change, to incremental adaptation to transformative adaptation. Also, absorptive, anticipatory and adaptive capacity have been identified as distinct outcomes of climate change adaptation and this “3A framework” corresponds to some extent to the “3P+T” framework of social protection. It should be noted that transformative adaptation is not usually considered in national or global policy and only few examples exist of transformative adaptation in practice (Fedele et al., 2019).

as well as environmental resilience in the form of resilient environmental infrastructure and assets such as small dams, water reservoirs and irrigation systems, soil protection etc. on the other.

The different concepts all seek to expand the original poverty reduction objectives and safety net purpose of social protection to enable effective response to extreme events and shocks. The infrastructure of existing social protection programmes could be expanded towards “shock-responsive” social protection in order to address sudden-onset disasters, and to account for emerging climate risks through “climate-smart” or “climate-sensitive” social protection. Additionally, such expansion could address compound risks over longer time periods (adaptive social protection) and tackle the structural causes of vulnerability (transformative adaptation and social protection). But has practice changed along with this evolution in thinking?

Today, most international humanitarian and development actors use a similar definition of social protection that centres around shock response. It is conceived of as a set of policies and programmes that address poverty and exclusion, and that seek to reduce economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities to shocks (Mumtaz 2022; ILO 2021). Social protection interventions range from child and family benefits to health insurance, unemployment support and labour policies, old-age benefits and survivors support, maternity protection, and disability benefits.

In high income countries, social protection instruments are usually part of a national system and policies that define social protection floors through a set of basic social security guarantees (ILO 2021). In most low and many middle-income countries however, such national systems do not exist or are weak, and social protection is provided by multiple actors as distinct, separate and even disparate programmes and projects, mostly in the form of social assistance (Johnson et al., 2013). This is with the exception of some notable cases like India, Brazil, South Africa and Ethiopia, but also – more recently – Mauritania, which can mobilise public resources to support the right to socialised benefits (Johnson et al., 2013).

Beyond the concept: towards understanding realities on the ground

However, there is limited evidence on how far social protection can build longer-term resilience to climate change rather than simply buffer shocks arising from existing climate variability (Davies et al. 2008; Wood 2011; Kuriakose et al., 2013). Also, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and social protection are still mostly implemented in isolation from one another (Aleksandrova, 2020).

It has been suggested that though social protection measures can improve livelihood opportunities, it is unlikely to lead to climate change adaptation without complementary programming and sufficiently generous benefits (Costella et al. 2021). This is supported in Tenzing (2020), which acknowledges how on its own, social protection is not enough and must be complemented with other adaptation measures. For social protection programmes to support long-term climate adaptation objectives, they must be aligned or incorporated as part of national strategies, such as national adaptation plans to combat climate change.

Our research has confirmed what more recent literature tells us, i.e., that “the transformative objectives of the original ASP concept are increasingly forgotten. Little is said about its potential for empowering recipients and re-dressing structural inequalities that are the social root causes of vulnerability to climate change” (Tenzing 2020). Maybe we must ask how realistic it is to have ambitious goals for global social protection coverage that goes beyond immediate protection objectives, particularly considering existing resource constraints in low- and middle-income countries. Today, only 46.9 per cent of the global population are covered by one or more social protection benefits and in Africa, less than 17.4 per cent of the population in Africa is covered (Aleksandrova et al., 2023).

The overarching question, therefore, becomes: should focus remain on increasing coverage and quality of basic social protection first or is there an opportunity in current constraints, for accelerating action and improving outcomes by making climate resilience an explicit objective of social protection?

The practice: social inclusion and climate resilience by design?

In general, we can distinguish between programmes and national systems that have a deliberate focus on climate resilience objectives and those where certain activities are in fact supporting the adaptation of lands and people to climate change, even if not by design. Those examples where climate risk is explicitly built into the design or re-design, usually show one or a mix of the following:

- ▶ a deliberate use of climate information to inform the choice of location, the trigger for transfers, and the targeting of climate vulnerable groups,
- ▶ tailored asset provision and capacity support to enhance climate resilience of (mainly) rural populations, and
- ▶ setting priorities and targets for outcomes of public works programmes with clear climate resilience and adaptation objectives in mind.

Other programmes that do not have a specific focus on climate resilience and where climate change may not be referred to even, can still, however, contribute to climate change adaptation. This is particularly the case where schemes support already tried and tested investments in climate-smart agriculture, or where horizontal as well as vertical coverage increases so significantly as to also cover climate vulnerable populations, including, for example, those working in climate vulnerable sectors such as agriculture.

For this study, we reviewed examples from across the globe, several of which are striving for climate change adaptation outcomes by design and others that have achieved some of these outcomes without explicit intention. Where programmes had an explicit climate focus, they were either pre-emptive or reactive shock-response interventions where payouts and in-kind support meant to buffer an extreme loss event, or featured climate-smart of “green” public works, such as soil and water conservation, reforestation, or agroforestry.

Some proponents of adaptive social protection advocate for a more explicit consideration of climate risks in new and existing programmes (Johnson and Walker 2022). Creating synergies by design seems like a logical step towards both accelerating impact and navigating resource-constrained environments and making the most of available financial and human resources.

At the same time, existing social protection practices may already be sufficiently addressing climate risks in certain areas and may only need to be brought to scale. In a recent review of social cash transfer programmes, Sengupta and Costella found that while most of them were not designed with climate change adaptation as a key outcome, they tended to produce “unintended positive contributions to climate resilience capacities” (Sengupta and Costella 2023).

Climate resilience by design

A few examples of social protection programmes with strong climate resilience rationale and goals exist. Some of these have been more extensively studied than others. For example, **Ethiopia’s** national social protection programme (PNSP) is a much-cited conditional transfer programme with explicit climate resilience objectives built into its design.⁴ The PNSP has a dual climate focus: on the one hand, its scalable safety net has a climate shock-responsive component, using climate information to identify approaching climate shocks (with a focus on drought) to inform timing, targets and scale of cash payments, and thereby support effective humanitarian assistance and pre-emptive action (CMF 2023). Climate information can either determine that cash payments to existing participants in the scheme are increased or that new ones are identified. On the other hand, the PNSP also uses public works to invest in soil and water conservation infrastructure, such as terracing, embankments and reforestation.

Whilst the design of the PNSP has been showcased as good practice, there are to date no authoritative updates on the level of implementation, on how trigger indicators are applied, or on the level of overall impact on the target population. Further, impact evaluations conducted during previous evaluations produced inconclusive results, for example showing that drought impacts increased the food insecurity of social protection recipients more than those of non-participating households that did not experience the drought. This raises the possibility that interventions were not effective (enough) (CMF 2023).

Another example that has received increasing attention is **India’s** Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS – also called MNREGA as it is based on the eponymous policy/ act). Not only is it the largest public-works based social protection programme in the world, but it is also rights-based with each rural household entitled to 100 days of guaranteed wage employment annually. Moreover, although MNREGS was not specifically designed as a climate resilience programme, its investments into infrastructure for natural resource management and agriculture are directly contributing to climate action (Jatav and Nair 2022, Fischer 2019).

⁴ <https://socialprotection.org/system/files/SPEC-Infographics-ETHIOPIA.pdf>

Deep Dive 1



Photo ICARDA

Social Protection as a stepping stone towards transformative climate resilience:

THE CASE OF INDIA'S MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (MGNREGA)

Climate related risks are seen as significant threats to rural communities that rely on climate sensitive livelihoods (Adam, 2015). Considering that this accounts for over two thirds of India's population, rural livelihood policies have evolved to become more climate sensitive to respond (Godfrey-Wood & Flower, 2018). India's public works social protection program, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and its associated scheme by the same name are key examples of this (Murthy et al., 2022). MGNREGA is the largest social protection program in the world and can therefore offer useful lessons in how large-scale national schemes can be adapted to enhance climate resilience.

It began as a rural development poverty alleviation program in 2005 that provided rural households an annual 100 days of unskilled manual work at minimum wage (Godfrey-Wood & Flower, 2018). The right based nature of the scheme means it is an entitlement for all adults in rural areas but special measures are taken to involve Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women and other marginalised communities. This social targeting initiative works in tandem with the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) – another social protection program that

links women Self-help groups to MGNREGA works (de Hoop et al., 2022). The original aim of MGNREGA has remained, but integral to its evolution towards climate resilience objectives are two separate projects led by International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in collaboration with the Indian Ministry of Rural of Development.

An analysis of MGNREGA policy, IIED and GIZ projects, and interviews with project staff reveal that the program has undergone updates to its design, coverage and provisions in attempts to contribute to climate resilience for rural communities. There are four main pathways that while promising for climate resilience, face challenges when being translated on the ground.

1. Guaranteed Wages as a shock response:

Wages support the coping capacity of households by providing supplementary income. In times of drought, households are entitled to an additional 50 days of work. Common challenges include low wage rates and delays in payment. For droughts, delays in the declaration process further limit the potential resilience benefits for households. To strengthen the ability of wages to protect against shocks, interviews suggest streamlining drought declaration processes to be more anticipatory to make payments before shocks strike and expanding the 50 extra day entitlement to include other climate hazards, seasonal fluctuations and pandemics.

2. Public and Private Infrastructure

Under MGNREGA, there are four categories of permissible works: natural resource management (NRM), community or individual assets, common infrastructure and rural infrastructure. More long-term climate resilience and adaptation benefits can be seen in the NRM category through water and soil conservation, disaster proofing, and land development. Geographical Information System (GIS) and CRISP-M, an app-based tool by IIED have been used to support NRM planning for staff and communities. For asset and infrastructure categories, access to agriculture, aquaculture, rural sanitation and connectivity related works have the potential to support households in livelihood diversification, increase incomes and adapt and absorb to emerging risks (Kuriakose et al., 2013). Implementation challenges can interrupt these benefits, however. Lack of climate smart planning and issues over monitoring, maintenance and ownership mean assets are not always used productively.

3. Strengthened Institutions

Interviews describe MGNREGA as a 'bottom up, people-centred' program but evaluations find that participation in meetings is low. Logistical barriers like long distances and not being informed of meetings as well as more socio-cultural reasons such as women being too busy with other responsibilities, feeling unwelcome and uncomfortable speaking up in mixed company are contributing factors. Low engagement is also seen for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Enhancing climate resilience and social inclusion go hand in hand. Projects emphasise the importance of climate knowledge to shape agency and power towards the transformative resilience of traditionally marginalised groups - particularly through their strengthened participation in Gram Sabhas.

4. Skill Development

MGNREGA offers some opportunities to workers gain technical, entrepreneurship and livelihood skills. They operate under various programs, which can in some cases give workers opportunities to become paid staff. Entrepreneurship skills offer opportunities to diversify livelihoods away from climate sensitive sectors and promote local value chains for more sustainable sources of income. However, challenges exist in uptake of new skills and ensuring technical capacities to carry out trainings.

KEY MESSAGES:

- **A more comprehensive use of climate risk information systems can prove useful in leveraging MGNREGA for rural climate resilience.** It can support anticipatory resilience during shocks and improve asset planning to capitalise on resources for more systematised and inclusive rural development.
- **Climate resilience benefits from MGNREGA are most effective when bundled across the scheme's interventions.** Households should be able to combine the individual benefits of MGNREGA. Convergence with other rural resilience programs also offers crucial opportunities to enhance transformative climate resilience.
- **As a public works program, more attention should be paid to the assets once built.** Determining how they are maintained and who is responsible – particularly when constructed on public land – is key to ensuring the sustainability and use of the assets.
- **Skill development is a key pathway towards long term resilience,** especially when it is centred on entrepreneurship skills that support livelihood diversification. It allows households to use MGNREGA to go beyond poverty alleviation to promote living incomes.



Photo R.Campbell / Alliance Bioversity-CIAT

Several international humanitarian and development organisations are investing significantly in social assistance programmes across the globe, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In recent years some of these have been redesigned to address the negative impacts of climate change on target populations. Most, however, could be best described as humanitarian assistance, rather than social protection. For example, the **WFP's Food Assistance for Assets** conditional transfer programme has an explicit climate focus. The programme has a stated objective of enhancing long-term resilience to the negative impacts of climate change and provide a buffer in times of climate crises through a combination of cash, vouchers and food transfers, investments into water catchments, management of soil and sedimentation, overflow dams, and irrigation schemes through public works.⁵ WFP documentation suggest that it seems to have succeeded in increasing income for the poorest households, providing fodder to pastoralists at times of drought and supporting women's groups on the one hand, while also building longer-term resilience of the ecosystem by reclaiming degraded pastures and replenishing water tables on the other, thereby reducing the risk of future crop failure.

In Southern Africa, the *FFA's* planned resilience objectives included increased agricultural potential through the clearing of land, the development of irrigation infrastructure (canals, ponds and wells), building of embankments to mitigate flood risks, distribution of seeds and fertilisers, planting of trees, and improving access to markets.⁶ Whether these objectives have been achieved and translated into more robust climate resilience is not documented. Further, there seems to be limited evidence of longer-term social impacts in terms of social inclusion, gender equality, and equitable access to resources.

In the **Sahel** region, several countries have invested in national social protection schemes over the past years, complemented by, or in some cases wholly supported by, international humanitarian agencies' programmes. Since 2014, the *Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme (SASPP)* has sought to strengthen existing and support the development of new national social protection policies and schemes across Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. Despite its name, the SASPP's original logic and priorities for investment were based on World Bank's focus on "shock-responsive" social protection rather than long-term adaptation and transformation (see Deep Dive 2).

⁵ <https://www.wfp.org/food-assistance-for-assets>

⁶ https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000140300/download/?_ga=2.121939211.1206659.1687512226-258843502.1683791535

Deep Dive 2



Photo O. Girard / CIFOR

Reactive assistance or proactive protection? Social protection and climate resilience in the Sahel region

The Sahel region already experiences several negative impacts of climate change, with increasing temperatures and extreme weather events predicted to accelerate at a greater rate than the global average. Most of the region's countries rank as highly vulnerable and least prepared to face climate change risks. In addition, insecurity worsened over the past years, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and the region, has not seen stability for more than a decade now, resulting in large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons in most countries. Rising global food prices and weak national governance systems have further exacerbated the existing vulnerability of many, particularly rural, communities.

The Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme (SASPP) is a World Bank-led multi-donor trust fund initiative, set up in 2014, that supports six countries in the Sahel – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal - in building adaptive social protection systems to help vulnerable households cope with shocks and adapt to the impacts of climate change.⁷ Activities are implemented in partnership with international agencies, most notably the WFP and UNICEF, and are complemented by regional analysis and knowledge exchanges. The SASPP supports the establishment and expansion of social registries, shock-responsive cash transfers and productive inclusion programmes, but the focus, design, scale and delivery mechanisms vary in each of the six countries.

⁷ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programmes/sahel-adaptive-social-protection-programme-trust-fund>

Much of the current effort is centred around support to strengthening national systems, as for example in Mauritania and Senegal, and until recently, in Niger. The SASPP must navigate a complex political and security landscape however, with several of the countries experiencing active conflict and all hosting displaced communities (both IDPs and refugees). In addition to climate extremes and environmental degradation, the high levels of human mobility in the region, present challenges for social protection programmes and systems. As a result, the current phase of the programme (2020-2025) seeks to significantly enhance the climate-sensitivity of existing social protection programmes as build their capacity to deliver services in conflict regions.

At the time of writing, an impact evaluation of the programme's cash transfers in drought contexts was underway and results not yet accessible, but interviews with staff from different institutions already point to a few challenges.⁸ Not least is the challenge of limited incentives for national governments to make significant changes to existing programmes. This is particularly pronounced in the context of limited resources for existing programmes and a relatively functioning humanitarian system in place, reducing the urgency for national governments to create shock-responsive mechanisms.

However, several countries have made considerable inroads, at least with regard to social assistance in times of crises. Niger, Mauritania and Senegal have developed forms of shock-responsive cash transfer systems, however, only Niger had built in an explicit early action component. However, even in Niger, where climate risk information and early warning are built into the design of the social protection programme, evidence of increased climate resilience is lacking and instead, the hope is that “early cash is better than just cash”.⁹ Mauritania and Senegal are providing cash transfers during the lean season, i.e., not before but during and after a drought or other shock.

The question of coverage is one that all countries in the Sahel region grapple with and which interview partners across governments, international organisations and in the donor community prioritised. In the Sahel region, some actors engaged in social protection programming are wary of having to include more success indicators and additional targets into already stretched social protection programmes. However, the productive elements of social protection, which provide livelihood opportunities and invest in individual and community asset creation are seen as an opportunity for enhanced climate sensitivity in existing programmes.

A limiting factor is still, however, that social protection systems are not usually designed with agronomists, so their complementary livelihoods support programmes may be flawed. Adding to this the need to include climate (risk) information, it becomes clear that the design process and who is involved may need to change significantly. At the same time, however, several respondents cautioned against redesigning relatively successful programmes, flagging that sometimes all that is required is to adapt terminology and sometimes a distinct set of activities only, rather than redesigning whole systems.

⁸ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099229012092222564/pdf/IDU055efdc240225304104099a904a9a997b0789.pdf>

⁹ Key informant interview, October 2023.

A further challenge is that in some countries the social protection agenda may be mainly donor-driven. Some national agencies and governments may prefer to respond to shocks through humanitarian assistance, rather than build out national welfare systems and develop fully shock-responsive social transfer programmes. As such, national leadership and the necessary institutional environment are currently lacking in several of the region's countries.

This is not the case in Mauritania, however, where the government has spent years investing in a national system, including relevant policies, budgets, institutions and programmes. As a result, Mauritania has a social protection system that is relatively advanced, compared to that of some of its neighbours in the Sahel region. The government department in charge, the Agency for National Solidarity and the Fight Against Exclusion, TAAZOUR,¹⁰ oversees several country-wide programmes, which include quarterly cash transfers to vulnerable households coupled with complementary support through the Tekavoul as well as its shock-responsive sister programme Elmanoua, which targets additional households during the lean seasons. The national social registry is well established, covering the whole country, and provides the basis for targeting of all social programmes across ministries of health, education and others. In its future iterations, it holds the potential to become a key tool for coordination of humanitarian and development programmes of non-governmental and international actors.

Key messages:

- **Climate risk information can be used more deliberately and systematically in the design and targeting of social protection instruments.** Meteorological observation data, seasonal forecasts, land use data and climate change scenarios, combined with community level vulnerability assessments, all contribute to improved targeting priority setting.
- **Nationally owned and regularly updated social registries can play a key role in improved coordination** of national, local and international actors across the humanitarian, peacebuilding and development spectrum.
- In the face of data constraints and limited resources to update datasets frequently, **new modular data structures could be used to build “dynamic social registries”**, which could be updated more frequently than current household census and survey systems allow. In these, climate-relevant data could be an optional module to be employed in particularly climate-sensitive regions.
- There is limited evidence to date on the impact of social protection and climate change adaptation on conflict, fragility and social cohesion in the Sahel region. **A better understanding of social inclusion and peacebuilding outcomes is required.**
- In addition, the **tools for assessing the impact of adaptive social protection programmes** on the resilience capacities of individuals and households, as well as on food, land and water systems **need to be further developed.** Institutions such as CGIAR have a key role to play in this context.

¹⁰ La Délégation Générale à la Solidarité Nationale et à la Lutte Contre l'Exclusion (TAAZOUR).

Other examples exist where income generation activities in rural areas are merged with explicit climate change adaptation as well as social inclusion objectives by targeting those households that would otherwise be eligible for “classic” social protection. The *PRIORIZE* initiative in Mabote district, **Mozambique**, was a pilot programme led by local authorities which focuses on female-headed households eligible for social protection, providing assets, infrastructure, and training in climate-adaptive income-generating activities.¹¹ The initiative is very explicit about its climate resilience objectives and applied a poverty lens to local climate adaptation planning. Thus, it provides an entry point for addressing the climate vulnerability of people eligible for social protection and for aligning climate resilience and social development goals.

A transformative dimension of this initiative has been its governance system, with Mabote district’s authorities introducing more participative planning, connecting layers of government, and taking greater responsibility for decision-making and financing at district level. Other districts are claimed to have integrated the PCLA approach into their local adaptation plans based on the early success of *PRIORIZE*, but long-term sustainability of these approaches would probably require stronger government capacity as the initiative is reported to be still reliant on the support of NGOs and donor financing.

In **Rwanda**, the national *Exiting Poverty in Rwanda* (EPR) programme is explicitly framed as a social protection programme that seeks to build resilience to climate and other shocks. This is reflected in its targeting of regions most affected by climate risks, and complemented by the provision of cash payouts that are based on information on destruction of assets and savings, and its climate-sensitive or “green” public works component (CMF 2023). The programme’s intention is “to build an infrastructure that deals with climate variability today while developing a base to deal with future climate through iterations of climate integration into programming.” However, as in other cases there is only limited documentation available on whether and how this intention is implemented across the programme (Ibid).

Unintended climate resilience outcomes

Even where climate resilience is not an explicit focus for social protection schemes, however, positive outcomes for adaptation can be found. Maybe more importantly, these examples showcase that rather than designing new programmes and entirely novel approaches, what may be needed is the recognition that certain actions can generate more co-benefits for climate resilience than others, and to identify what the no-regrets options are for long-term adaptation to climate change rather than focus social protection solely on buffering recurring crises. The concepts of transformative social protection as well as of climate-smart agriculture both carry this vision in them, but to date, they do not seem to be reflected in practice. At least not at the scale that would be desirable.

Kenya’s Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) is significant in scale and relatively mature. It is one of four cash transfer programmes in the Government of Kenya’s *National Safety Net Programme* (NSNP), and is financially supported by the United Kingdom. The HSNP provides

¹¹ <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2021-02/17771IIED.pdf>

regular unconditional cash transfer to the poorest and chronically food insecure in Turkana, Marsabit, Mandera, and Wajir Counties, reaching around 100,000 households, or approximately 600,000 people. During phase 2 of the programme (2012-2018), this was coupled with a shock responsive operation, enabling the programme to scale up to 270,000 households during periods of drought (FCDO, 2023). These additional households receive one-off payments during these periods, and this innovation remains in place today. The programme is currently in phase 3 (2018-2024), focussing on building the capacity of the Government of Kenya to manage the programme and to transfer full ownership to the government, while supporting the most vulnerable households and expanding during times of drought.

Across Africa, the **FAO's Cash+** initiatives combine unconditional cash transfers targeted at poor households with in-kind support in the form of productive assets and inputs, technical training and extension services (FAO 2017). Whilst it does not state an explicit claim to addressing climate risk, its overarching goal is to enhance the economic impacts of cash transfers beyond their buffering role in emergency situations, and to contribute to long-term food security, asset ownership and economic empowerment.

Programme documentation of the *Cash+* initiatives do not elaborate specifically on climate resilience activities, but feature training and extension packages that include climate-smart agriculture practices. In Lesotho, for example, *Cash+* activities include the promotion of vegetable gardens, combining seed inputs, training and nutritional information for improved diets, and diversified income streams. *Cash+* also has a specific focus on women in several of its focus countries. As a result, FAO states that in Mali 99 per cent of the recipients of the cash programme support were women.

Over the past decades, the World Bank has invested in a range of “shock responsive” social protection programmes, which include disaster and climate risk in the framing, but did not, until recently, focus on climate resilience as a key outcome. An example is the *Shock Responsive Safety Net for Human Capital Project (SNHCP)* implemented by WFP in **Somalia**, also known as *Baxnaano*, combining unconditional cash transfers based on nutrition indicators with institutional capacity strengthening to improve delivery systems monitoring and evaluations, and knowledge management (CMF 2023). While the SNHCP is supposed to be able to respond to crises in a pre-emptive and flexible manner, there are no agreed set of triggers or systems in place to decide when, where, and how to expand delivery.

During a recent locust crisis, expansion was horizontal, temporarily adding new recipients to the scheme, as well as vertical, increasing the amount of the cash transfer, with further top-ups in subsequent years to those considered most at risk to suffer impacts from drought. The decisions for the scale and nature of the expansions were made by the *SNHCP* project team rather than the government. Whilst the team included WFP and government staff as well as key donors, the decisions were neither based on national policy, targets and priorities, nor on pre-agreed indicators of thresholds based on independent climate risk assessments.

Several lesser-known examples exist, such as **Malawi's Social Action Fund (MASAF)**.¹² It provides social assistance in the form of public works programmes, coupled with knowledge transfer of climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies. Assessments have shown that integrating a more explicit focus on climate resilience in the *MASAF* has the potential to go beyond immediate social protection objectives (Ignaciuk et al., 2021). The promotion of climate-smart agriculture and environmental protection included in the *MASAF* activities resulted in a transfer of knowledge and skills to farmers' own fields and agricultural practices. As a result, households that participated in *MASAF* programmes were more likely to successfully adopt climate-smart practices than those households that were not exposed to them through the public works schemes. However, a full and independent evaluation, once again, does not exist.

In other cases, recommendations to integrate climate change considerations into social protection schemes have been made years ago. More than 10 years ago, reviews of the *Productive Social Safety Net Programme (PSSN)* in **Tanzania**, a national cash transfer and public works programme that supports rural households, suggested the addition of climate vulnerability information in addition to poverty indicators in order to improve targeting (Davies 2012). Indeed, this recommendation, amongst others, has been made for improving social protection programmes in the Hashemite Kingdom of **Jordan** (see Deep Dive 3).

Jordan is a particularly interesting case study due to the patchwork nature of social protection programming in the country, consisting of a diverse array of programmes, actors, and delivery modalities, and shaped by Jordan's demography and the severe climatic challenges it faces. Jordan is exposed to many negative impacts of climate variability and change, notably water scarcity, rising temperatures, and landslides, as well as flooding and desertification linked with high evapotranspiration rates.¹³ Further, Jordan has experienced an influx of refugees from neighbouring states, namely Syria, Iraq, and Palestine, in response to regional conflict and turmoil.

¹² <https://www.nlgfc.gov.mw/index.php/business/masaf>

¹³ <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/jordan>

Deep Dive 3



D.Isied / Straight Light Consultants

Barriers to developing social protection programmes with adaptation considerations: The case of Jordan

It is widely recognized that, as climate impacts become more widespread and intense, social protection programmes could play a key role in tackling climate vulnerabilities (Tenzing, 2020; Ulrichs, Slater & Costella, 2019). Indeed, at present there is momentum within Jordan to change the narrative around social protection by moving from welfare and cash handouts to supporting longer term economic empowerment and self-reliance, as evidenced by various governmental and royal speeches and the ongoing design of the next National Social Protection Strategy. Indeed, the most prominent social protection agency is the National Aid Fund (NAF) – a non-contributory scheme to which only Jordanian citizens are eligible and that provides in-kind and cash assistance to nearly 220,000 households living below the poverty line or with disabilities (ILO, 2022). To support this shift, greater awareness is needed on the adaptive potential of social protection. Currently, approaching either the social protection afforded to Jordanians, or the humanitarian assistance programmes provided to refugees in the country, as an adaptation strategy is not mainstreamed, and at present adaptation considerations are largely detached from design and delivery.

Further, from the point of view of research participants in the two Jordanian case study communities Azraq and North Shuna, there is insufficient co-development with local communities, and programmes are short term and siloed. This theme of disconnection extends to the bodies that deliver the social protection programmes, with a lack of coordination and overlapping agendas between programmes and bodies. Experts see the perhaps most need in

the large segment of the Jordanian population not enrolled in any social protection programme be because of ineligibility (for example work in the informal sector) or financial constraints limiting the perceived value of contributory schemes. This is compounded by issues enrolling in the Social Security Corporation (SSC), which provides social insurance to all formal workers regardless of gender, migrant status, and nationality. The problems and key messages also largely apply to humanitarian assistance programmes provided by international organizations to refugees in Jordan, which additionally face issues around short funding cycles and donor expectations.

Finally, it should be noted that this challenge to increase both coverage and efficacy of social protection programmes in contributing to climate adaptation is occurring in the context of a limited fiscal space and falling foreign assistance to Jordan, as well as the political framework that regulates access to social protection.

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Expand coverage of the SCC through formalization and contribution-support, particularly for those working in climate-vulnerable sectors.** For social protection programmes to play a meaningful role in contributing to climate adaptation, coverage must increase. It was routinely suggested that the coverage of the SSC could improve by the formalization of workers (informal employment is 46.1 per cent of total employment in the country), particularly in the agricultural sector. Further suggestions include supporting with the necessary contributions to render the scheme more attractive for workers with irregular incomes.
- **Integrate GIS and climate vulnerability assessments into programme design to improve targeting.** Targeting and design of programmes could be improved through integrating climate vulnerability measures and assessments into eligibility calculations and expanding the use of GIS maps. For example, these maps could overlay socio-economic vulnerability, climate risks, livelihoods, and agro-ecological zones (AEZs).
- **Developing this capacity requires greater coordination between bodies responsible for programme delivery.** The capacity to integrate these measures should be supported through greater coordination between different ministries and organizations responsible for programme delivery, reflected in data sharing, improved interoperability between government databases, and registries. This would also encourage economies of scale.
- **Gender considerations must be incorporated into programme design, including cash transfers delivered on the basis of households, in recognition of the gendered impacts of climate change.** In recognition of both the role of women, and the gendered impacts of climate change, gender considerations must be prioritized to ensure programmes are inclusive, with improved targeting, systems monitoring, and evaluation. This is also important to improve the efficacy of household, rather than individual-based cash assistance programmes such as the NAF, under which women, based on social norms and structures, face extra barriers to access.

- **Reduce dependency on unconditional cash transfer by promoting skills training in line with climate resiliency and the demands of the labour market.** Rather, individuals should be trained, for example through cash for work programmes, in livelihoods that are at once appropriate for the demands of the labour market, and resilient to climate impacts.
- **Local communities must be involved throughout the enactment of a programme’s Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework, from design to evaluation, to improve the programme’s contextual suitability and efficacy, and to understand longer-term consequences.** This is an extension of the earlier recommendation of greater coordination, both horizontally, and vertically between ministries, organizations, and local communities. Greater involvement is crucial to ensure contextual suitability of programmes, avoid maladaptation, and promote longevity of programme benefits (for example a sense of ownership will encourage the maintenance of infrastructure). Involvement throughout MEL frameworks will enable the improved design of existing or future programmes and will allow practitioners to assess the longer-term impacts of a programme.
- **Top-level drive to incorporate climate change considerations into social protection programmes should be supported by advocacy and research, and resulting recommendation aided by policy evaluation to encourage uptake.** Top-level direction in promoting social protection’s role in adaptation is necessary and ideally supported through advocacy, research involving a multitude of stakeholders from local communities to decision-makers, and buttressed by the publication of resultant literature, including policy briefs and peer-reviewed work. To encourage incorporation into national strategies, any recommendations and their implications for policy and programme design require in-depth analysis, such as using the Pragmatic Enlightened Model (PEM) (Edenhofer & Kowarsch, 2015). This exploration of the various overlaps, trade-offs, and consequences of different approaches to social protection could boost an assessment’s policy relevance, thus increase uptake and incorporation of recommendations into national strategies.



Photo: G.Meddings / Alliance Bioversity-CIAT

Lessons and outlook: where next for adaptive social protection?

Whilst most of the existing reviews as well the examples we studied show that there is potential in linking social protection and climate-smart agriculture and adaptation, existing evidence does not confirm concrete outcomes. Moreover, the necessary policy coherence between social protection and rural development sectors has not been achieved at scale. Certain programmatic components may contribute to coherence but are also dependant on aligned institutional frameworks and funding streams, which are only being developed or exist in few cases. Thus, lessons from past studies and our research show that we need to rethink social protection and climate adaptation across institutional frameworks, reconsider targeting and coverage, adapt programme design to meet new challenges of transboundary risk, and identify new funding modalities (Costella et al. 2023).

Most studies and our interview partners noted the limited scale of existing programmes and recommended expansion of coverage to new risks and geographic areas. They also suggest adapting transfer levels, the amounts and types of payouts based on available climate risk assessments and overall recommend the inclusion of climate information the design of payout modalities. For this, however, closer exchange between the different communities of expertise on climate adaptation and social protection will be required. As it currently stands, shared understanding between the two is limited. Further, many reviews highlight the importance of using climate services and communications to enhance early warning systems, thereby linking the protection of individuals and households to community preparedness (Shafee and Zapata 2023, Costella et al. 2023).

Our study highlighted the immense challenges that are associated with some of these recommendations as well as new insights. Five key lessons for programme and policy emerge, ranging from the question of **scale and financing**; the **use of climate information** in design and targeting and the **bundling of support** to at risk communities; to the **transformative limits of public works** programmes; the limited evidence available of impact; and urgently needed vertical, horizontal, and policy coherence.

Scale and financing: new money or new synergies?

Existing social protection coverage varies immensely across regions and countries. In low and lower-middle income countries, coverage is patchy and there are significant financing gaps across all types of social protection, from health insurance to old age pensions (Duran-Valverde et al., 2020). Across all the contexts we reviewed and in the overwhelming majority of those studied by others, the scale of social protection systems today means they are not adequately set up to respond to climate challenges (Aleksandrova 2019; Aleksandrova & Costella 2021, Costella et al., 2021).

Most cash transfers barely cover basic consumption costs of vulnerable households and are too small to contribute to asset generation and savings. For example, the SNHCP in Somalia

provides USD 20 per household per month, which even in a low-income country like Somalia and considering favourable exchange rates, does not amount to more than a small buffer, complementing other income or livelihoods. In Niger, social protection investments were reported to be 70 million over 8 years from 2011-2019, for a programme aiming to reach 140,000 individuals. Even without deducting the probably substantial costs required to run the programme, including project staff, infrastructure and equipment, i.e., even if all of this money were transferred to vulnerable people, this would amount to only USD 500 per person over the course of these eight years – or just USD 5 per month. At the same time, World Bank project documentation states that the objective of the programme is “to establish and support an effective and adaptive safety net system that will increase access of poor and vulnerable people to cash transfer and cash for work programmes” – hardly achievable under such circumstances.¹⁴

With such low coverage and small payouts, social protection schemes can neither provide similar levels of social welfare as their counterparts in high-income countries nor can they claim to significantly transform the lives of individuals and build the resilience of communities. Further, public works programmes that invest in natural resources and infrastructure do contribute directly to resilience, but rarely do so at the scale that helps regions to adapt to future impacts of climate change.

Directly linked to the inadequate scale of social protection systems today is the inadequate level of financing for social protection. National and international budgets for social protection as well as for climate change adaptation remain too low and it has been estimated that closing the financing gap would require mobilizing 1.2 trillion USD, or 3.2 per cent of the annual GDP of low- and middle-income countries (Yeates et al. 2023).

Such estimates highlight the need to obtain additional, new resources that can be used to build effective social protection systems and floors, especially in low-income countries (Durán-Valverde et al. 2020). Proposals to set up a Global Fund for social protection have been made, but this would require political and financial commitment from countries that may not be realistic at this point in time (Ibid.). Therefore, using existing financing wisely and creating synergies is increasingly seen as a necessary step (Aleksandrova 2021). More recently, this includes calls for making support to stronger, climate-sensitive national social protection systems eligible to financing from climate funds, including UNFCCC funds such as the future Fund for Loss and Damage (Aleksandrova et al. 2023).

Explore ways in which climate funds, including UNFCCC funds, can support stronger, climate-sensitive national social protection systems. While priority areas for investment should be context-specific and based on an analysis of both climate risks and social protection systems capacity, potentially important areas for investment might include developing policies and strategies that help refine climate vulnerability considerations in social protection, strengthening institutional capacity and social protection system development, developing

¹⁴<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/340221528904785765/pdf/Disclosable-Restructuring-Paper-Niger-Safety-Net-Project-P123399.pdf>

innovative climate-sensitive social protection programmes, increasing the availability of climate services for social protection, and exploring sources of sustainable financing of long term systems.

Climate risk information and bundling of support: what is missing?

Information related to climate risks is not considered in the design and delivery of social protections systems in most countries. As a result, there is often a persistent focus on cash transfers that ignore the need for complementary and bundling of support. While some meteorological data may be used to identify priority targets for shock response, this is usually restricted to rainfall data and simple threshold indicators. Most targeting, both geographically as well as demographically, is still done based on commonly used poverty indicators and data related to consumption, nutrition levels and food availability and prices in local markets. Consequently, transfers are seen to increase access to food and allow for the smoothing of consumption during lean seasons. Additional support and layered approaches to enhance broader climate resilience may be ignored. In some countries and regions, seasonal forecasts and early warning systems are used in pilots, but this has not yet permeated whole national systems. Furthermore, in most cases where forecasts are used, this is to better prepare for response rather than deliver early payouts or other transfers.

Systematic integration of risk information would need to include climate science and hazard modelling, but equally assessments of community vulnerability based on local risk assessments that include environmental conditions, data on livelihoods and access to markets, and a range of socio-economic parameters. Humanitarian actors and development agencies in crisis-prone regions regularly undertake assessments that include some of these components, including for example through humanitarian needs assessments, but again, these are usually done to plan for response rather than build long-term resilience, and they rarely make systematic use of climate information. A key limiting factor here is the lack of knowledge of climate change processes and limited access and use of climate risk data within the social protection community of practice.

Climate scientists and experts in food, land and water systems, therefore, can all play a role in filling this gap. By tailoring risk information to the specific local process and requirements of national agencies and local responders, more relevant climate information can inform the design not only of cash transfers, but also of the complementary support provided in the form of productive assets and technology and knowledge transfer. Achieving longer-term risk reduction and climate change adaptation will require such a layering of approaches and bundling of services for at risk communities.

Public works: how risk-informed are they and how transformative can they be?

Many of the social protection programmes we reviewed included a public works component. If public works are climate-smart and contribute to drought or flood mitigation as well as land regeneration, they directly build climate resilience. However, to date most programmes do not

make full use of climate information available and pursue business-as-usual environmental upgrading or green infrastructure works that seem identical to conservation agriculture and agroforestry. The new components built into the MGNREGS present an exception, but their design is yet to be proven successful.

Several respondents in the study indicated that a scale up of public works programmes may be the most direct way to accelerating climate resilience objectives through social protection. In most countries, coverage and amount, quality and sustainability of assets and environmental infrastructure created through such programmes is not at the scale that it can play a critical role in resilience outcomes (Norton et al. 2020, Beierl 2022). Scaling up these efforts could therefore be considered a logical step towards building resilience. However, several considerations caution against the use of public works programmes in social protection as well as in climate change adaptation.

First, and maybe foremost, the programmes must be voluntary rather than tied to cash transfers to be considered social protection today. Unless they guarantee employment to participants, such as in the India case, they do not provide reliable support at scale to vulnerable households. Doing so, i.e., significantly scaling up such instruments is highly cost-intensive and may also become riddled with political difficulties. Keeping large-scale programmes of this nature transparent can also be a challenge.

In addition, the social transformation potential of public works programmes has been questioned repeatedly. From this perspective, if public work programmes are to successfully support climate resilience, they must be developed with significant input from communities through a systematic and consistently supported process of monitoring, learning and evaluation. This improved vertical coherence is seen as key to ensure not only the project's contextual suitability and the avoidance of maladaptation, but transferring a sense of ownership to the local communities will encourage the long-term maintenance of any infrastructure development and enhance its efficacy.

Impact evidence: where is the proof?

Our review has confirmed what several studies have suggested: there is no solid body of evidence on the ability of social protection programmes to reduce climate stress and help vulnerable people and regions to adapt to climate change. Evaluations of how social protection performs in dealing with climate shocks are few and far between and, moreover, their methods are not fully developed (Sengupta and Costella 2023). A few exceptions exist, however, most of which point to potential that is not fully realised (Pople et al. 2021, Premand and Stoeffler 2022, Matata et al. 2022).

For example, evaluations do not always include observation data on climate risk and impacts, and where they do, results of the performance of social protection programmes are mixed. Thus, as an area of expertise it “remains in its infancy” (CMF 2023). Moreover, post-Covid

resuming of nation-wide or local household-level surveys is slow and as a result, much of the literature on the links between social protection and climate adaptation in practice remains exploratory (Ibid).

As this study has shown as have others before, there remain significant knowledge gaps on the real potential of social protection to build long-term resilience to climate change (Aleksandrova 2020). The tools for assessments to fill this knowledge gap need to be developed urgently, including the development of climate-related indicators for impact assessments and of multi-year monitoring and impact evaluation frameworks.

Policy coherence: what type of coherence do we need?

Further, connecting social protection and climate change adaptation would have to take place in at least three spheres of the social protection “solar system” (Barca and Jaramillo Mejia 2023): the policy level, programme design level, and implementation level. However, some of the components within these SP spheres are more relevant than others. For example, at the policy level, climate risks are still not consistently considered in national social protection policy frameworks (Sengupta and Dahlet 2023). More insight into the necessary policy coherence between social protection and rural development sectors will be required as programmatic components may contribute to coherence but are also dependant on aligned institutional frameworks and funding streams.

Recommendations for policy coherence usually propose how social protection needs to adapt, but there are also possibilities to adapt existing climate security and adaptation practices and make them relevant to particular vulnerable groups that may be eligible for social protection. Moreover, the role of social protection in supporting climate change mitigation, and in particular the just transition to net zero carbon emissions economies, needs to be highlighted and its potential utilized (ILO, 2023). Economic transition plans need to address not only climate targets but also economic and social challenges and opportunities, utilizing social protection wherever relevant (McCord and Costella 2023).

Several respondents in our study also highlighted the scale of the climate change problem as one that those work in social protection have not yet fully grasped. There is need for more reflection and active assessments of what climate change is really going to mean for existing social protection mechanisms and systems in the future. Whereas many practitioners and policy makers may assume that marginal changes to current interventions are all that is needed, this may not correspond to reality in face of the most recent climate risk scenarios.

Finally, when we talk about the potential for social protection and climate change adaptation to increase the resilience of communities, we usually mean both, the resilience of people and of the socio-environmental systems they live in. Social protection programmes can target different dimensions of vulnerability, from economic to social to climate-related vulnerability. Therefore, when designing policy processes and aiming for policy coherence between social

protection and climate outcomes, policy makers are aiming for changes in individual and collective adaptive behaviour as well as for specific adaptation actions and investments. In this sense, it may make sense to think less about climate resilience outcomes in terms of physical assets and economic indicators only, but design programmes and policies so that they can generate coherent “adaptive capacity outcomes” (Sengupta and Costella 2023).

Ultimately, adaptive social protection will need to move beyond pre-empting and responding to shocks associated with extreme climate change impacts, to also address new risks and slowly emerging challenges associated with slow-onset events, environmental degradation and changes to planetary health. As it currently stands, for social protection to move beyond shock response and towards supporting sustainable livelihoods and climate change adaptation, it will require a more systematic inclusion of climate data into design and delivery, consistent complementary programming, and larger cash transfers.

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