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The role of social protection in the fight against hunger and poverty

Summary and key messages

The implications of global initiatives on social protection systems

Policies that promote economic growth are central to poverty reduction and the fight against hunger. However, social protection measures are equally vital in reducing vulnerability and protecting the poor. They can help achieve three goals: 1) Equity and poverty reduction; 2) Strengthening the resilience of households and societies; and 3) Generating access to economic opportunities, especially when linked with labour market programmes. According to the World Bank's *Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report*, today, almost 700 million people live in extreme poverty, meaning they live on less than $2.15 per day, and 3.5 billion people (or 44% of the global population) live on less than $6.85 per day. Poverty rates in low-income countries are higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Global hunger is almost back to the 2005 level, with more than 733 million people estimated to be undernourished in 2023. No region is on track to achieve zero hunger by 2030. The ILO's *World Social Protection Report* states that more than half (52.4%) of the global population are covered by at least one social protection benefit. This is a 10 percentage point increase from 2015, showing that that national and global efforts to extend coverage, including the USP2030 initiative, are paying off. However, the pace of coverage is too slow and uneven. In low-income countries the increase has been of only 2 percentage points (from 7.7% to 9.7%) and the coverage rate in the 20 most vulnerable countries to climate change is less than 10%.

Social protection is a moral obligation that can have many spillover effects on health, education, well-being, etc. Social protection is crucial to improve employability and productivity. Three factors in particular stand in the way of achieving universal social protection: Shrinking fiscal space to invest in social protection; weak institutional capacity and lack of political coalitions. More needs to be done. The World Bank dedicates close to USD 12 billion of its financing for social protection to low-income countries, with the objective to get an additional 500 million people covered by social protection schemes by 2030, with at least half of them women.

To ensure a minimum social protection floor, countries would need to invest an additional 3.3% of GDP annually. To support this endeavour, the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions (GA) was launched. The GA supports countries in their low-carbon transition and digital transition by cushioning adverse social effects of these transformation and supporting workers to transition between jobs. The GA will therefore work with ministries of social protection as well as other ministries (labour, finance, agriculture, etc.) to protect people through these multiple transformations.

The Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, launched by the Group of 20 (G20) in November 2024 under Brazil's Presidency has been joined by 82 countries, along with many more institutional partners and organisations. Not all policies promoted in the Alliance are related to social protection, but social protection is at the heart of most policies in the fight against hunger and poverty. The Alliance has three main objectives: 1) Put poverty and hunger high again on the international agenda, notably in the context of rising food prices; 2) Concentrate the conversation on concrete policies and programmes adapted to the local context; 3) Help countries find the means to implement certain operations or programmes from the policy basket. The Alliance will play the role of a neutral broker in a very fragmented social protection landscape. It is not about doing the work for countries but about creating the conditions so that countries can do the work.

The mandate of the three Rome-based UN organisations is crucial in the context of rising food insecurity around the world. France fully supports integrated social protection mechanisms such as cash transfers and nutrition programmes. These tools can fulfil people's needs while reinforcing resilience. France supports USP2030, the GA but also the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty. In this regard, France took some concrete commitments on school feeding, improving mothers and infants' nutrition, and support to smallholder farmers and family farming. In particular, the Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4G) to be held in March 2025 in France, will address the root causes of global malnutrition and look at a wide range of different angles, including education, food systems, gender inequalities, climate change, conflicts, etc. The objective of the N4G is to mobilise financing and concrete commitments to fight against malnutrition form a large range of actors. School meals is a very concrete example of how social protection systems can help improve nutrition. Together with Brazil and Finland, France co-chairs the Global School Meals Coalition, promoting improved and more nutritious diets. School meals are crucial because it allows to improve the education and health of children, but also promotes gender equality (through girls receiving food at school but also through women producing most of the food distributed), the development of the local economy and supports local producers.

Spain shows a strong commitment to the GA where it contributed €10 million in 2023 and €1 million in 2024. Focus areas include social inclusion of marginalized groups and transformative action where high-impact social protection initiatives are prioritised. In terms of co-ordination between international institutions, Spain advocates for reducing operational costs to below 7%. Spain supports the G20 Global Alliance with €750,000 allocated to the FAO Trust Fund for the Smallholder and Family Farming Sprint initiative, rural women's entrepreneurship, and sustainable food systems through policies like the Food Chain Law and School Meals Program. Spain recognizes that social protection is a key driver in reducing inequality, enhancing resilience to crises, and ensuring a dignified life for all.

Session 1: Addressing child poverty, hunger and malnutrition: evidence from building synergies and convergence across nutrition and social protection

Today, 333 million children live in extreme poverty, struggling to survive on less than USD 2.15 a day. In fact, children are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as adults. Furthermore, child poverty reduction has slowed significantly in all countries since 2020, while only one in four children benefit from some form of social protection coverage. Nearly 1 billion children worldwide live in multidimensional poverty, deprived in at least one dimension such as education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation, or water. Globally, an estimated 340 million children under five are undernourished, while over 135 million children aged six to ten are overweight and obese. Significant progress in addressing global child nutrition has been made in the last two decades. Since 2000, the prevalence of child stunting has fallen by a third (55 million children). However, UNICEF's latest Child Nutrition Report reveals that one in four children under the age of 5 (181 million children worldwide) live in severe food poverty. This means they consume two or fewer of the minimum five food groups needed for growth and development.

Madagascar is one of the countries in the world most affected by child malnutrition. Nearly 2 million children under the age of 5 (47 percent) suffer from stunting, mainly in rural areas. Investment in social protection remains low and is largely funded through official development assistance (ODA). However, social protection is high on the political agenda and Madagascar is now piloting a unified social registry to support better delivery of social assistance to the poor. The Safety and Resilience Nets programme combines cash transfers to promote primary school enrolment and human development with activities to improve local productivity, preserve the environment and help communities cope with natural disasters, health crises and economic shocks.

In Jamaica, poverty is highest among children, and poverty and food poverty are more prevalent in rural areas. Significant progress has been made by developing synergies between social protection programmes and food systems. In particular, linkages have been established between the ongoing conditional cash transfer (Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education - PATH) and school feeding programmes to increase the protection of the most vulnerable children. Strong multi-agency collaboration (e.g. regional health authorities, national social protection committee and national poverty committee) is essential to build the synergy and convergence needed to achieve child nutrition goals.

In Sri Lanka, the nutrition programme (Thriposha) to combat malnutrition in children under five and pregnant and lactating mothers, initially supported by donors, later became a fully-fledged government programme managed by the Ministry of Health and fully funded by the government. The programme is well integrated with preventive health services, which include immunisation, growth monitoring and promotion, antenatal care, health and nutrition education, family planning and various other preventive maternal and child health services.

In Ethiopia, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is a multi-faceted social protection programme that aims to reduce extreme poverty and strengthen the resilience of vulnerable rural households. Implemented in 489 districts and benefiting about 8 million people, the PSNP provides cash and food transfers, implements shock-responsive safety nets, engages beneficiaries in public works activities, promotes livelihood diversification, and facilitates access to essential social services, including health and nutrition. The programme has demonstrated positive impacts on food security and nutrition, reducing food gaps at the household level and improving dietary diversity among children. However, the PSNP faces challenges due to prolonged drought and conflict, as well as rising inflation, which require additional resources from the government and development partners. The PSNP is an example of how a large-scale social protection programme can effectively address nutritional issues, particularly for vulnerable populations in rural areas.

Ensuring secure and sustainable resources is critical to the long-term success of social protection. In Madagascar, a market-based solution to malnutrition involves the creation of a social enterprise, Nutri'zaza, which works with local businesses to produce and distribute affordable, nutritious food. Rather than relying on free distribution programmes, the aim is to create a sustainable model that empowers parents to make informed choices about their children's diets. The company sources products from local companies and ensures quality through independent institutions such as the Institut Pasteur in Madagascar. It uses a multifaceted distribution strategy that includes direct sales through women in low-income neighbourhoods, partnerships with retail outlets and supplying institutions such as NGOs and nutritional rehabilitation centres. This initiative, which still requires some international investment, has resulted in over 105 million meals sold, created 250 jobs and generated tax revenue for the Malagasy government.

Social protection initiatives can effectively address child poverty, hunger and malnutrition if they are designed through mutually reinforcing policies that create synergies across multiple dimensions, including preventive measures such as the development of local food systems that support the availability and affordability of nutritious food.

Session 2. Reaching the poor and food insecure: lessons from social registries

Knowing who the poor and food insecure are and where to find them is indispensable for social protection programmes to reach them. Social protection systems in most countries offer a combination of different social protection schemes and programmes covering different social risks or covering specific risks for different parts of the population. Social registries can be important to facilitate a more effective and efficient co-ordination and implementation of these programmes and potentially other government benefits and services. At the core, a social registry is a management information system that collects information about individuals and households to determine their eligibility for various benefits and services. Social registries differ across countries both in name and in nature that stems from their histories and from their policy orientation. Some gather data through census surveys, others though on-demand registration, many through a mix of both. Some aim to keep records of all residents, others only of poor households. Some serve only a single or a few programmes, while others are used by dozens of social programmes to register and assess the eligibility of beneficiaries.
Social registries typically include information not only on beneficiaries but also on other vulnerable households, they can and have been used to extend benefits in times of crisis, as recently in the case of the COVID-19 epidemic. Some countries, conversely, gathered data through emergency programmes implemented during the COVID crisis through self-registration in ways that have led to a transformation of their social information systems. Social registries are tools at the service of social policy, that should be designed to achieve agreed policy objectives and fit well with the institutional settings in which they have been created.

By combining key processes across multiple social policy interventions, social registries offer potential gains in terms of cost-efficiency and effectiveness of programmes and help avoid programme fragmentation and overlaps. They can also offer single entry points for potential beneficiaries easing access to social services and programmes. Because of the central role they play in the delivery of social benefits, failings of social information systems can undermine the realisation of the potential benefits they offer. What data is gathered, how it is gathered, updated and maintained and how it is used to target various programmes is critical to reap those benefits and avoid compounding exclusion errors or ultimately cost ineffective processes. Issues to consider therefore when designing social registries include: Coverage (in terms of population) and the scope (in terms of data collected and its uses) both currently and in terms of the objective; Targeting methods and how to make data accurate and relevant to ensure targeting errors are minimised; Financial cost and sustainability of the social information system; and Data privacy and security.

Indonesia aims for universal coverage through its social registry system. Previously, only 40-60% of the population, primarily those considered poor, were included in various registries. One of the significant challenges faced was the absence of a regular data updating mechanism and the collection of limited information. To address this, Indonesia introduced Regsosek, a comprehensive social registry that now covers 94% of the population. Unlike earlier registries, Regsosek not only assesses welfare but also includes well-being and vulnerability indicators, allowing for the support of multiple social protection programs.

To ensure targeting accuracy and relevance of information, Indonesia has adopted the "One Data Initiative," which integrates data from various programs. The National Statistics Office oversees the accuracy and consistency of this information. From a financial perspective, maintaining the registry is expensive, but it represents a relatively small share of overall social protection costs. Indonesia argues that the cost is justified by improved data quality, which significantly increases the cost-effectiveness of poverty-targeted programs. Without the social registry, inclusion errors could be as high as 60%, but with the registry, these errors are substantially reduced. To address data privacy and security, Indonesia employs a secure system with multiple layers of protection. Only authorized personnel with credentials have access to the data. This approach not only protects sensitive information but also strengthens the government's capacity for data security and privacy management.

Brazil's social registry has its origins in the Bolsa Família program but has since expanded to serve over 40 different social protection programs. The registry focuses primarily on low-income families, incorporating data related to health and education. The integration of health data allows for targeted health coverage for vulnerable families, and the registry is closely linked to other ministries, for example, with the Ministry of Education. Brazil faces unique targeting challenges due to its large informal sector (as in other developing countries) and the need to reach specific, hard-to-reach groups, such as those living in remote areas of the Amazon. To address this, the registry employs targeted approaches to identify beneficiaries in these remote regions. Beneficiaries can also request data adjustments if they can provide evidence of their eligibility. From a financial standpoint, the registry has high operational costs due to the need for inter-ministerial coordination and continuous data updates. Research is ongoing to fully understand and reduce these costs. Regarding privacy and security, Brazil puts a high priority on citizen data protection. A dedicated secretariat oversees compliance with the legal frameworks governing data use and security. All data collection and sharing are designed to benefit citizens while adhering to strict privacy rules.

Senegal's unique social registry (Registre national unique, RNU) covers 30% of the total population and is used by sectors such as education, health, and agriculture. Data collection is done using a single, unified questionnaire that captures economic status, well-being, and other factors. This information allows the registry to support various programmes working on food security initiatives. For targeting, Senegal employs a mix of geographic targeting, community targeting, and scoring methods. Community targeting relies on local surveys, which may be conducted at the village level or in larger geographic clusters. Quotas are used to determine allocations, and distribution stops once resources are exhausted. Senegal seeks to make its registry interoperable and inclusive so that it can be connected with other national databases. Financially, Senegal's social registry relies heavily on external partners, such as the World Bank, as domestic funds are often insufficient. The costs of data collection and updating are included within the social protection budget. It costs approximately 4 to 5 million euros to update the registry every four years. Despite financial constraints, the database is considered indispensable for effective programme delivery. Data privacy and security are governed by strict legal frameworks. Senegal requires the informed consent of individuals before collecting their data, and it adheres to rules on the protection of personal data. These measures aim to ensure transparency, accountability, and privacy for all registered individuals.

Jordan's social registry is linked to its farm registration system, which is especially relevant for the agricultural sector. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the vulnerability of the agricultural sector and highlighted the need for better data on farmers and farm households. The farm registry aims to support the Ministry of Agriculture with household information and enable better targeting for support measures directed at vulnerable farmers. However, the registry is still under development and faces challenges related to intergovernmental co-ordination. There is a recognized need for local government involvement to ensure that targeting approaches are feasible and context-specific. Data privacy and security are also priorities for Jordan, especially in light of its unique context as a host to over 2 million refugees. Regular data updates are seen as crucial for maintaining an accurate and inclusive social registry that reflects the changing demographics and vulnerabilities within the population.

Discussants emphasized the need for simplicity in social registry design. Act Church of Sweden recommended that these systems could remain directly linked to civil registries, focusing on individuals rather than households. This approach minimizes complexity, ensures cost-effectiveness, and reduces the temptation to overburden registries with excessive data, thereby keeping maintenance requirements low. From a universal social protection perspective, reliance on poverty-targeted approaches using proxy means tests creates exclusion errors. Moving towards categorical targeting would align more naturally with civil registries. By leveraging basic demographic and geographic data, categorical targeting could address broader social protection objectives without requiring complex eligibility assessments.

Social registries can mean very different things across countries, but one thing in common is their function as a gateway to a range of different programmes. The more social registries are designed to support many programmes, the more they are co-ordinated with different ministries and institutions, the better. This helps improve data quality and usefulness. Social registries should be thought of as data infrastructure for the social sector and beyond. As a social infrastructure, registries should be 'targeting-agnostic'. Social registries can be used for poverty-targeting but should not be limited to it. They can be used to register informal workers, or the near poor, but also to cover specific life-cycle risks. Another important aspect is ensuring a dialogue with users and implementation stakeholders, to prevent that social registries are developed as mere repositories of exhaustive data but focus efforts on collecting relevant data. Data typically used for categorical targeting have a longer shelf-life and needs less updating than highly volatile socio-economic information.

A key takeaway is the importance of knowing where countries stand in their policies towards universal social protection and thinking carefully about the design of the information system that needs to be built to support these policies. There is potential for social registries to improve cost-effectiveness and efficiency of anti-poverty programme, and food security and nutrition interventions, but a number of challenges such as ensuring that the data is accurate and up-to-date need to be addressed. Interoperability with other sources, such as administrative data or civil registration, is another critical element as registries evolve to become or be close to universal. The role of local governments in extending and delivering social protection is also an important aspect as well as the coordination with non-state actors.

Session 3. Enhancing food security: social protection for smallholder farmers

Globally, some 600 million smallholder farmers – those working on two hectares of land or less – are estimated to produce about 30% of the food supply. Most of them have no or little social protection. They face increasing shocks from climate change and in case of climate shock no people in rural areas will be covered by social protection. It will be crucial to increase diversification to increase productivity and to provide adequate social assistance. Evidence consistently demonstrates that social protection effectively reduces poverty, underscoring the urgent need to expand its coverage to rural areas. However, significant gaps remain, as 80% of the poorest rural households in low-income countries still lack access to any form of social protection. Closing these gaps is essential to improving livelihoods and fostering resilience in these vulnerable populations.

In Rwanda, smallholder farmers play an important role in the country's economy and agricultural productivity. Yet, they face livelihood challenges from increasing shocks linked to climate change, lack of social protection and exposure to life cycle risks, and limited access to financial services. Rwanda's social protection system combines in-kind (cow, fertilisers and seeds) and cash transfers, and public works programmes. Public works programmes provide jobs and help build climate-resilient infrastructures in rural areas to prevent natural disasters and landslides. The 'Shock Responsive Cash Transfers' are provided immediately after a shock to protect productive assets of smallholder farmers. Rwanda has also put in place early warning systems to help smallholder farmers prepare for and limit losses from climate-related shocks. A flagship in-kind social assistance programme in Rwanda is Girinka, which gives one cow to one family. The cow is considered as beneficial for many purposes, including for income generation, nutrition and crop yields. Twigire Muhinzi is Rwanda's national extension programme built on the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) approach, to increase the yields of crop production and empower smallholder farmers by providing trainings and guidance through FFS facilitators. Rwanda has also been promoting insurance schemes for extreme weather events, pests, diseases, and natural disasters through public-private partnerships, community-based insurance, as well as through the provision of financial literacy training to smallholder farmers. For the informal sector, Rwanda has a package of supports including non-contributory social pensions, child/disability/maternity benefits to protect informal workers from lifecycle risks.

In Paraguay, the PROEZA (Poverty, Reforestation, Energy, and Climate Adaptation) project integrates social protection in environmental sustainability objectives. Financed by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the project targets eight provinces, primarily in the eastern region, with interventions in 70 municipalities which face significant ecological and socio-economic challenges. PROEZA has three components: 1) "Planting for the Future" focuses on reforestation and mitigating environmental degradation. To date, the project has planted over one million trees, creating significant carbon sinks and restoring degraded landscapes. 2) "Sustainable Landscapes and Markets" emphasizes sustainable use of natural resources while promoting market access for smallholders and indigenous communities through credit mechanisms. 3) "Institutional Strengthening" focuses on building capacity within institutions to integrate social protection programs with environmental priorities effectively. The project prioritizes inclusivity, with indigenous peoples who comprise 20% of beneficiaries. A dedicated Indigenous Peoples Coordinating Body, established in 2018, ensures their perspectives are integrated throughout the project's design and implementation. Additionally, a gender commission works to address gender-specific challenges, enhancing the project’s inclusiveness. Despite its successes, PROEZA faces challenges including improving inter-agency coordination. Ensuring indigenous peoples’ perspectives are integrated from inception through implementation is essential for long-term success. Financing sustainability also remains a pressing concern. While GCF funding has been critical, diversifying funding sources will be necessary to secure the project’s longevity. Monitoring and evaluation efforts, carried out consistently in collaboration with local organizations, are crucial to enhancing the resilience of communities against climate-related shocks.

Pakistan has developed a comprehensive social protection system to combat poverty, improve rural livelihoods, and build resilience to climate change. The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is a central component of this system, which has been running for over two decades. It primarily targets the ultra-poor and very poor, particularly women, providing cash transfers and facilitating other initiatives such as skills development, asset transfer, and business formalization. The programme’s objective is to help vulnerable populations graduate out of poverty in a sustainable manner, improving their food security, nutritional status, and resilience to shocks such as climate change. Rural support programs provide livestock, farming resources, and training to women-headed households, boosting agricultural productivity and market access. Efforts also extend to informal workers, offering health insurance, financial literacy, and microfinance opportunities. Cash transfers, which are primarily directed to women, are a critical part of this approach. By targeting women as the primary household decision-makers, these transfers help improve household well-being and create a direct impact on food security and education. In addition to cash transfers, the government has implemented targeted support programs in rural areas to improve agricultural productivity and increase farmers’ access to markets. For example, in regions with low agricultural productivity, the government provides livestock such as buffaloes and cows to women-headed households. This initiative is aimed at fostering small-scale, collective farming activities by creating clusters of similar households, thereby strengthening their economic capacity. The programme also includes other forms of support such as access to seed, fertilizers, and training for smallholder farmers. Pakistan’s social protection initiatives extend to informal workers, who make up a large portion of the rural workforce. Pilot programmes aim to extend social insurance to these workers, providing access to medical insurance, financial literacy, and microfinance opportunities. Educational programs targeting children and women are also part of this broader strategy, linking education with economic opportunities and supporting efforts to break the cycle of poverty across generations.

Digital innovations play an increasingly important role in enhancing the efficiency and transparency of cash transfer programs. Digital payment mechanisms allow for faster and more reliable delivery of funds to beneficiaries, improving access and accountability. These innovations, combined with the broader network of social support, are helping to empower vulnerable populations and improve livelihoods across the country. Pakistan's approach to social protection also incorporates resilience to climate change. In the wake of the devastating floods of 2022, the government intensified efforts to integrate climate resilience into its poverty alleviation programs. A key part of this response is policy co-ordination, with the aim of bringing together various stakeholders to address the economic impacts of climate shocks and to find meaningful, long-term solutions for rural communities.

Discussions included the need to adopt a comprehensive vision of social protection. The We Social Movement (WSM)'s work is rooted in the Decent Work Agenda, which comprises four interconnected pillars: employment creation, social protection, labour rights, and social dialogue, with gender and environmental sustainability as cross-cutting themes. This inclusive approach ensures vulnerable groups such as smallholder farmers, rural workers, and informal economy workers have access to basic services, income security, and greater opportunities. One of the key aspects of WSM is building resilience among vulnerable populations through collective organization and empowerment. In Burkina Faso there has been great efforts to assist informal workers in transitioning to the formal economy through the collaboration of the state, local governments and social movements. In Mali, smallholder farmers involved in onion processing have significantly improved their incomes by creating value-added products like sliced and dried onions. This initiative not only enhances food security but also strengthens local co-operation between the informal sector and government authorities, demonstrating how local and central coordination can drive economic resilience. The lack of social security coverage, inadequate financing, and limited coordination between central and local authorities remain big challenges. Climate change further exacerbates these vulnerabilities, necessitating innovative solutions such as agricultural insurance schemes to mitigate climate shocks.

Effective implementation requires collaboration among diverse agencies, bringing together expertise in areas such as the environment, climate change, gender equality, and child welfare. Inter-agency coordination ensures that programmes address the multifaceted needs of rural communities. Targeting programmes towards vulnerable groups, such as Paraguay's PROEZA for women and indigenous communities and Pakistan for women in rural areas can address the root causes of economic disempowerment. Finally, ensuring that funding for social protection comes from diverse sources, including contributory mechanisms like social insurance and innovative avenues such as climate finance, will ensure the programme's sustainability.

Inter-agency coordination is crucial for achieving these goals. Collaboration among UN agencies, governments, and finance providers can help address complex rural challenges and enhance programme outcomes. Social protection programmes must also leverage platforms like the Global Accelerator and the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, which provide opportunities for experience-sharing, partnerships, and collective advocacy for more robust systems. Despite the new hype around climate finance, only a small fraction considers social protection. This calls for the need to strategically shift how climate funds are allocated. Social protection programmes must be included in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to secure access to these funds and ensure that they address both poverty reduction and climate resilience.

Social protection should be seen not merely as a safety net but as a springboard for economic inclusion and climate action. It plays a vital role in stabilizing incomes and providing a socio-economic shield against shocks while creating opportunities for long-term growth. Indeed, a critical aspect in supporting smallholder farmers to reduce poverty and improve food security lies in striking the right balance between protective and productive investments. Combining the two creates more sustainable outcomes for farmers, especially those with limited access to value chains. Social protection systems, when complemented by agricultural programmes, can significantly enhance the resilience and productivity of smallholder farmers. Graduation projects serve as a prime example of this synergy, for example, programmes in Pakistan show the importance of going beyond cash transfers by addressing skill gaps, providing empowerment opportunities, and offering tailored support to increase impact. These integrated approaches help poor households transition toward economic stability by creating pathways for long-term development rather than merely addressing immediate needs.

To improve coverage and effectiveness, the use of social registries and agricultural databases could be further leveraged. By "piggybacking" on the list of cash transfer beneficiaries and other social programme database, agricultural projects can overcome barriers to participation, particularly among the poorest households. This targeted approach not only ensures inclusivity but also enhances the overall impact of agricultural initiatives. The integration of social protection systems and agricultural programmes also highlights the concept of “shrinking the need.” By reducing the risks faced by smallholder farmers through tools like micro-insurance and anticipatory measures, these programmes lower poverty levels and lessen the burden on social protection systems. In fragile contexts, this co-ordination becomes even more crucial, as cohesive programming across sectors strengthens national systems and ensures resources are used efficiently.

Key takeaways are 1) the importance of a universal system to make sure that everyone is included; 2) collective organization and empowerment help build resilience among vulnerable populations; 3) ensuring the right balance between social protection and productive investment which will allow diversification of production; 4) inter-agency and inter-ministerial collaboration for policy coherence are crucial to support rural areas, especially in light of increasing risks caused by climate issues. Countries like Rwanda, Pakistan, and Paraguay demonstrate that intentional, co-ordinated approaches between ministries and sectors can create a virtuous cycle, reducing fragmentation, increasing relevance, and ultimately driving sustainable development outcomes for smallholder farmers.

Session 4. Facing environmental shocks: the role of social protection in supporting adaptation and mitigation measures

The OECD defines fragility as the balance between exposure to risks and the resilience available to mitigate those risks. Contexts affected by high to extreme fragility are home to one quarter of the world’s population but three quarters of those living in extreme poverty. Intensifying extreme weather events in recent years, including droughts and floods, exacerbate the vulnerabilities of the poorest. Moreover, climate shocks often overlap with other risks such as increased violence, or declining resilience, such as weak institutions. The combination of these factors frequently aggravates food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition. In this context, social protection can play a crucial role in mitigating the effects of natural disasters as well as compounded crises, both in the short term by channelling emergency relief, and in the long-term by strengthening resilience against future shocks.

The social protection system put in place in Mauritania allows to reinforce the resilience of the poor and vulnerable households and helps them prepare for environmental shocks and deal with the post-shock effects. Cash transfers are the first assistance provided through existing safety net programmes of the government. Cash transfers are considered easier and more effective than food assistance. In 2022, Mauritania faced the most severe drought in 12 years. A ‘harmonized framework’ was put in place, which consists of an annual meeting held between November of year N to March of year N+1 where several surveys such as household expenditure or SMART are studied to determine the most vulnerable areas, phases, and households. A special technical committee ensures a co-ordinated response. Members of the committee include the General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight Against Exclusion (TAAZOUR), the Commission on Food Security (CSA), social registries of both TAAZOUR and the emergency assistance, as well as UN organisations like WFP, international NGOs, and donors like AFD and WB. The food basket price, payments and eligible beneficiaries are determined by this committee. Beneficiaries are determined using vulnerability criteria from the social registry of TAAZOUR. There is also a platform which allows the accessibility and the traceability of the monetary transfer and speed up the cash transfers through electronic payments.

Grenada is a small island developing State and like other Caribbean countries it is prone to risks from hurricanes and environmental disasters. The island faces high exposure to natural hazards and challenges with limited land resources and waste disposal. Grenada, located in the hurricane belt of the Caribbean, is exposed to considerable macroeconomic vulnerabilities, for example after hurricane Ivan and Emily in 2004 and 2005. Grenada purchased insurance with the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) in 2004. CCRIF is the world's first regional fund utilised in parametric insurance, giving member governments the unique opportunity to purchase earthquake, hurricane and excess rainfall catastrophic coverage at the lowest possible prices. Following the passage of Beryl on 1 July 2024, Grenada received payout of USD 44 million from CCRIF, exactly 14 days after. This was the largest payout in history. In addition, the electricity company received USD 9.3 million and the water company received US 2.2 million, totaling USD 55.5 million. The Cabinet approved that 10.4% of the payout from CCRIF would be used for social protection, with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) helping to guide the process. WFP provided one-off payments to the most vulnerable persons. These cash transfers were used to provide food and basic amenities following the passage of the hurricane. WFP worked with the ministry of social development to set up the Beryl Relief Income Support Programme (BRISP). BRISP provided support to persons who lost their income following the passage of Beryl. An assessment of the most damaged zones was made to determine those households most affected and prevent them from resorting to negative coping mechanisms like skipping meals or removing children from school. Persons with disabilities, lactating mothers, mentally ill and older population were given priority. The programme runs for six months. The benefits received are tailored to the composition of the households, taking into account the socio-economic situation of the households prior to Beryl, the employment status, and dependency ratio. Some challenges experienced included inter-agency collaboration, migration of displaced people and initial slow response in reaching vulnerable people. As Grenada has no migration policy, public provision such as housing for migrants was difficult.

Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) managed by the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) was initially funded by NGOs as a social protection programme to support people continuously affected by drought. The programme was taken over by the government 15 years ago and continues to provide cash transfers to the most vulnerable households. NDMA manages the early warning system to monitor droughts and floods in the whole country. A database is maintained annually. For example, 200,000 people are continuously affected by drought and floods. They live in high risk areas and need consumption support so that they can overcome the crises and participate productively and socially to the economy. Through the early warning system, NDMA is able to monitor the drought level in the country. When there is no drought, the most vulnerable populations, mostly those living in Northern Kenya, continue to receive cash transfers. During a 'mild drought', HSNP gets ready to give a scale-up and the vegetation conditions are monitored closely. If vegetation falls below 20% of historical condition, the scale-up cash transfer kicks in to cover 50% of households in the affected communities, including those not receiving regular cash transfers. Regular beneficiaries also receive a top-up. If vegetation falls below 50%, it is considered an emergency situation, the target beneficiary is increased to 75%, leaving 15% who are working or receiving income from other sources. Remote sensing data is used to monitor the vegetation conditions which is less prone to errors. The early warning system runs every month and every 5th of the month the country is alerted on the drought status through a Bulletin. The month where drought is declared, a scale-up can be made. The flood warning system however needs to be further developed. Targeting mechanisms also needs to be further refined, using data analytics, geographic information and community feedback. Digital platforms to streamline targeting is needed.

The World Bank finds evidence that investing in adaptive social protection system can yield positive results. By investing in poor people's livelihoods, we can help them diversify income and promote savings; improve access to markets before hazardous events hit; and build a system to respond to shocks. The first principle of adaptive social protection is to consider a range of programmes, from productive inclusion to active labour market programmes and insurance schemes to respond to changes in people's livelihood status. The second principle is the need to invest in those delivery systems in advance. Purposeful investments by governments to ensure that a basic safety net is in place is important but making sure that the additional investment in programme design, early warning systems like in Kenya, and digital technologies can be harnessed by government well in advance. Targeting systems should be in place via the social registry, like in Mauritania, ensuring active outreach and strong interoperability across government data systems. Robust government electronic payment systems are also needed, like in Grenada, so that governments can move resources quickly to people. Strong agreements and redress mechanisms, monitoring systems like in Kenya, are needed to make sure that people are able to give their feedback on how the response performed. Systems-building efforts are needed to ensure that rapid responses can be made to the right people. Leadership and coordination across ministries and development agencies are important to ensure a common vision and achieve rapid scalability, not only for extreme events but also regular events. The World Bank is increasing contingency funding that can be accessed with relative ease for those small regular events so that other types of financial instruments can be drawn upon for the more extreme events.

The role of social protection should be understood as a continuum. We need the right mix of interventions before and after an event occur, therefore we should emphasize the importance of having regular social protection. Areas that are most affected by climate shocks are often where the poorest and most vulnerable live. We need to be reactive when events occur, but also ensure that there is regular preventive measures. Those most affected by shocks are those with lowest social protection coverage. Robust and flexible delivery systems are critical. Social registries can help provide quick response, but they must be fit for purpose. WFP supports governments in ensuring that social registries are up-to-date, and relevant. Financing for social protection must also be continuum. When we think about innovative financing or climate financing, we need to start breaking silos. The role of social protection in climate actions is undeniable and resources need to be made available to governments so that they can scale up at the right time. The role of social protection as both preventive and shock-responsive must be promoted.

There is no better preparation than having existing social protection systems that cover as many people as possible. The social protection floor is a great concept because it provides this income security along the life course and allows to better respond to shocks and life cycle risks. To the extent possible domestic revenue mobilization could and should be the number one way for social protection financing. The role of the international community must be considered withing the changing global context. At the EU, development aid is increasingly geared towards infrastructure investment as part of the Global Gateway. Within this shift, how can social protection maintain a crucial role as an enabler for sustainable infrastructure projects? Private sector financing is increasingly sought to fill the gap but climate risks are difficult to insure. There are certain areas where private sector will not be able to support. International financing institutions like the EU, the World Bank and others must therefore maintain its role as development financer to support initiatives like CCRIF and the Global Shield Financing Facility and continue to help countries strengthen DRM and public finance management.

CLOSING REMARKS

Despite being high in the political agenda, social protection in remains largely financed through ODA in many developing countries. In Madagascar we saw the importance of developing and linking to local food systems to ensure the availability and affordability of nutrient-rich foods for children. In Jamaica linkages between the on-going conditional cash transfer and school feeding programmes increased level of protection among the most vulnerable children. In Sri Lanka, food programmes, initially supported by donors, became rapidly full fledge government programmes, highlighting the centrality of poverty reduction in public policy. In Ethiopia, combining cash transfer and productive investments in livelihoods assured the sustainability of household food consumption.

The experiences of Indonesia, Brazil, Senegal and Jordan in implementing social registries provided insightful lessons on targeting, the data collection, the financial cost to set up and update the database, the interoperability with other administrative databases. In Indonesia, important efforts were made to improve the social registry which now aims to cover all the population and gather comprehensive information on the well-being of households. In Brazil, the single registry which started with Borsa Familia has since expanded to allow other programmes to access it and cover informal workers. In Senegal, the unified registry which covers 30% of the population, has a strong community-based feedback dimension. The experience from Jordan was also a good example of the usefulness of developing a database for farmers to support their food security.

Policies to protect the incomes and productivity of smallholder farmers are critical in countries where the majority of the labour force work in agriculture. In Rwanda smallholder farmers play an important role in food production, yet they are particularly vulnerable as the vast majority are in the informal economy. Social protection programmes to support them include a comprehensive package of services including public work programmes, support to productive assets, as well as shock-responsive cash transfers and insurance services. Paraguay was also a living example of a country that has developed programmes to address environmental vulnerability, combining social protection measures and support to sustainable production practices. Pakistan’s new social insurance programme is part of efforts to expand comprehensive services offered to smallholder farmers.

In light of intensifying extreme weather events, shock-responsive and adaptative social protection programmes are designed to alleviate the short-term and long-term effects of shocks and build resilience. In the cases of Mauritania and Grenada, we learned that cash transfers were at the heart of the countries’ mechanisms to mitigate the effects of environmental and economic shocks. And through the example of Kenya, we saw that the establishment of a sound environmental monitoring system was at the heart of the delivery of social assistance to people affected by environmental shocks.

Social protection is the number one instrument to fight hunger and poverty. It is not only a safety net, but it is an essential springboard, an enabler of opportunities and social economic shield against shocks. It’s an investment for the future. Economic growth without social protection for the poor and most vulnerable will not lead to inclusive growth and can even accentuate inequalities. Productive investment must go hand in hand with social protection.

Policy design matters. Examples from the countries we heard shows the diversity and context-specificity of programmes, and sometime the necessity to combine multiple programmes to cover for different vulnerabilities.

Scaling up and financing and sharing lessons are essential for expanding coverage of social protection. But we are behind both in coverage and financing. Low-income countries still have less than 10% of the population covered by social protection. The Elements paper for the next International Conference on Financing for Development makes no reference to social protection. More importance must be given to investing and financing social protection.

Convergence towards national system could be the answer. Humanitarian and climate financing is increasing while development finance is decreasing. Social protection must be included deep into the Nationally Determined Contributions. Climate financing must understand that social protection is a key part of adaptation and even for mitigation measures. We need to change humanitarian spending so that it strengthens the national systems to prepare for and prevent the next crisis. The climate community must tackle the structural problems that cause these shocks in the first place.

The Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty launched by the G20 aims to improve co-ordination of financing, knowledge sharing of policy programmes to tackle SDGs 1 and 2, but also to introduce some topics that could change the financing landscape in the future, such as more emphasis on climate justice, domestic resource mobilisation, taxing the super-rich and other climate actions that could accelerate the fight against hunger and poverty. The aim of the Global Alliance is to channel better support to countries and improve alignment on the way we do actions at the national level. 82 countries, the EU and AUC, and 66 international organisations joined the Global Alliance by giving a pledge and political commitment. Members are categorised into three pillars: knowledge, financial and national. The Alliance has a dedicated technical team to support the "Board of Champions". It will bring specific coalition of partners to support countries one by one. The final outcome will be a fully country-owned implementation plan and instrument to accelerate the fight hunger and poverty and leave no one behind.

When designing social protection programmes, we should remember three key dimensions: 1) *Political feasibility*: political will and leadership, coordination, coherence for a strong policy and legal framework; 2) *Technical feasibility*: delivery systems with accountable and transparent administrations; 3) *Financial feasibility*: adequate services to meet the needs of people but also affordable to ensure long-term sustainability. In addition, we must consider the additional risks and shocks in fragile settings, including the environmental crisis and loss of biodiversity.

Experience has shown, that poverty-targeted programmes often are neither politically not technically feasible: Suffering from high exclusion errors and not receiving widespread support from the population. Historically, welfare states have built their social protection systems by first introducing categorical benefits that address certain life-cycle risks. Poverty-targeted schemes then were introduced as the last resort, when people still fell through the cracks despite all these other benefits and services that had been put in place. In addition, we must consider the additional risks and shocks in fragile settings, including the environmental crisis and loss of biodiversity, which are addressed in the latest ILO's World Social Protection report.

The primary objective of this policy dialogue is to provide a platform to share experience and facilitate mutual learning between member countries of the OECD Development Centre and members of the

USP2030 initiative. It is a member-driven public good, guided by its own Steering Committee and facilitated by a Secretariat at the OECD Development Centre in close collaboration with the USP2030 Secretariat.

View the full agenda of the event here. To receive a copy of presentations shared during the event or receive more information about the Policy Dialogue please contact dev.socialcohesion@oecd.org