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Occasional Paper N° 26



# Social protection and climate change

WFP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean's vision  
to advance climate change adaptation through social protection



November 2019

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to advance climate change adaptation through social protection**

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# Foreword

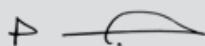
The impact of climate change in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) will be considerable. This is due to the region's economic dependence on agriculture and the low adaptive capacity of its population in the face of multiple regional climate risks such as sea level rise, glacial melt and extreme weather and disease outbreaks. This vulnerability is exacerbated by recent socio-economic trends including high inequality, population growth and accelerating urbanization.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out to promote efforts by national governments to build the resilience and adaptive capacity of the poor and those in vulnerable situations as well as promoting integration of climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning. It also points toward the creation of social protection systems that allow all people to enjoy basic standards of living.

Climate change adaptation needs to be framed in terms of social justice. This requires improved understanding how social protection can support the adaptation to climate change of the most vulnerable and poor households and achieve poverty reduction.

It is in this context that the World Food Programme (WFP) has developed this think-piece in collaboration with Oxford Policy Management (OPM). Its objective of providing a better understanding of how social protection can support climate change adaptation of poor and vulnerable households. The paper not only reviews the different theoretical frameworks that analyse the linkages between social protection and climate change, but also identifies several entry points and design considerations for specific social protection instruments to enhance climate change adaptation. It also provides a description of some of the climate-related activities that could be linked to social protection programming.

We hope that this paper and the concepts, principles and instruments it presents can help inform country-level planning of technical assistance within countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region and beyond. We also hope that this study contributes to global debates and enhanced understanding of linkages between social protection and climate change adaptation.



**Miguel Barreto**

**WFP Regional Director for Latin America  
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Panama, November 2019



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# Executive Summary

Knowledge on how social protection can both increase resilience to climate change of the most vulnerable and achieve poverty reduction is key to pursuing policies that frame adaptation in terms of social justice.

A few frameworks have been developed to understand what risk-informed social protection looks like and to explore how to link it with disaster risk management and climate change resilience approaches.

This think piece sets out a vision of how social protection can support households to face climate change and shows how climate change presents distinctive challenges to social protection programming, often differing from those of other disasters and shocks

Our starting point is that given the uncertainty around climate change, social protection represents a key form of low regrets investment, one which balances supporting poverty alleviation and simultaneously addressing vulnerability to climate change.

The rationale of this vision is that social protection should improve or support households' adaptation to climate change. This entails:

- I. **Recognising climate change uncertainty.**
- II. **Prioritising food security and nutrition considerations.**
- III. **Supporting households' long-term adaptation strategies.**
- IV. **Avoiding maladaptation.**
- V. **Understanding trade-offs.**
- VI. **Defining resilience objectives.**
- VII. **Improving the environment.**
- VIII. **Adjusting programmes to context.**
- IX. **Acknowledging even small contributions.**
- X. **Working across disciplines.**

Linkages with key climate change activities that can foster adaptation are presented.

- **Climate change projections and models.** Given how the specific effects of climate change are difficult to predict, social protection practitioners must learn to plan for uncertainty. Climate models can assess current and future climate variability, enabling a better understanding of vulnerability assessments, including effects on food security and malnutrition. These assessments can then help to inform different social protection options and ensure these are viable in a variety of possible scenarios and avoid maladaptation.
- Especially for predictable crises, **early warning systems (EWS)** can help to build resilience by responding to crises before they occur. Early action systems are

designed to trigger anticipatory action prior to an emergency to mitigate impacts and increase resilience to shocks. Using and linking EWS with existing social protection schemes can enhance their impact in protecting livelihoods of at-risk populations. Thus, they may mitigate anticipated shock impacts.

- If properly linked with national social protection systems, **Forecast-based Financing** has the potential to not only help smooth climate-related shocks, avoiding set-backs in development, but also to enable poor and vulnerable people to manage climate risks more effectively and in a proactive manner. This includes connecting the social protection system with predictable finance that allows it to become more self-sustaining over time.
- **Climate risk insurance** could play an important protection and promotion role for poor households exposed to climate risk. In combination with robust social protection, climate risk insurance can protect people from different types of shocks and levels of vulnerability. The security afforded by insurance could enable people to take smarter risks and boost their productivity, building pathways to prosperity.
- As a complement to these activities, **Social Behavioural Change and Communication interventions (SBCC)** can be linked to social protection programmes with the purpose of supporting behavioural change towards adaptation, considering the different enabling factors and barriers to climate change adaptation. These actions aim at addressing some of the values, preferences and social norms that influence a behaviour, including maladaptation.

A crucial element for this pillar is ensuring **coordination and collaboration** among climate change, disaster risk management and social protection. Ensuring complementarity of systems, instead of overloading or duplicating, can be a first step. A strong information system that collects information and data on production, productivity and challenges will also support coordination.

Some experiences in standalone social protection provision provide a good entry point from which to support climate change adaptation and resilience. Differential design and implementation features that can help to explicitly enhance adaptation to climate change in standard social protection programmes are explored. It should be stressed that new climate change adaptation programmes should be tailored to the country or regional context:

- **Social transfers** can include both cash and in-kind transfers. The literature has identified these type

of programmes as meriting more research and development of potential to enhance resilience. They can be effective tools to support people's access to food, resulting in higher consumption of better-quality food, including climate change. Cash transfers can support the anticipation of risk, which enhances adaptive capacities of households. Cash can be accumulated as savings and as a self-insurance mechanism which can then be drawn upon and liquidated at times of crisis. Social transfers require several design considerations such as predictability, flexibility, value and duration if they are to sustainably foster adaptive capacity.

- **School-feeding programmes.** These increase access to and consumption of quality food for students and free up resources that can improve food security for their families. This contributes to reduced drop-out rates and improves adult job prospects by increasing children's human capital. The schools provide local farmers with a predictable outlet for their products, leading to a stable income, more investments and higher productivity. The programme can also create access to predictable markets and livelihood opportunities for small holders in the same communities. Many of those benefits also have influence on the adaptive capacity of rural populations. School feeding can provide a platform for delivering other services and reaching schoolchildren, promoting knowledge and innovations, and strengthening capacities of households and communities whilst advancing successful outcomes for climate change adaptation.
- **Asset-creation programmes,** (through livestock investments)<sup>1</sup> seek to improve food security and boost income of the poorest. When it comes to climate change there have to be trade-offs. As an example, livestock production has a high carbon 'hoofprint', specifically methane produced by animals. Recent studies have proposed different options for improving livestock feeding, as a means of boosting production of meat and milk whilst simultaneously reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. It has become evident that grasses have climate-friendly qualities, preventing soil erosion and storing more carbon in their deeper root structure, thus impeding the release of nitrous oxide, a potent GHG, from soils.

- **Public-works programmes,** have potential to enhance the adaptive capacity of households through creation of assets that could increase resilience to future shocks, either by enabling livelihood diversification and adaptation or by better protecting from the shock itself. In order to succeed, public works programmes need to ensure a coherent theory of change, aligned with climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction and identify where community assets can have longer-term impact on livelihoods. The programmes should be regular rather than being just temporary or once-off. Moreover, the transfer size, targeting, scalability, quality of assets, consideration of local context and the synergies with other interventions will also influence the potential impact on resilience.

- **Integrated programmes, including cash plus programmes** could support adaptation through promotion of income-generating activities and livelihood diversification. These can develop resilience in the face of threats, promoting opportunities and strategies to deal with future risks. Transforming productive livelihoods, along with protecting and adapting to changing climate conditions as opposed to merely reinforcing coping mechanisms, is key. These activities can support adaptive capacity because they provide sustainable economic opportunities in the face of environmental change. These programmes should also provide a means towards stronger livelihoods. This does not mean that people should exit traditional livelihoods which are considered climate-sensitive. There is evidence that these livelihoods also strengthen household resilience. That said, the potential gains of spreading risk through diversification need to be weighed in relation to the opportunity costs of divesting from high-return activities.

WFP can then engage in the provision of technical assistance and policy support, as well as facilitate dialogue among different institutions and partners to support more climate adaptive social protection programmes. Given that this is an emerging area, a priority is to raise awareness. Informal workshops, field visits, and regional South-South tours and dialogue are likely also to be useful. The focus is to increase knowledge about social protection through dissemination of good practice and learning from specific examples.

1. Not to be confused with Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) programmes. In this study, asset accumulation programmes are understood as programmes implemented by national governments and that focus on livestock investments.



# 1 Introduction

**Among the most significant impacts of climate change is the potential increase of food insecurity and malnutrition.** Findings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicate that climate change could increase the risk of hunger and malnutrition by up to 20 percent by 2050. Changing climate patterns could result in crop and livestock failure and therefore affect calorie consumption, diet quantity and diet diversity. Climate-related shocks impact dietary diversity and reduce overall food consumption with overall long-term detrimental effects including stunting. Climate change could exacerbate health problems through changing disease patterns, as well as inadequate care practices due to livelihood pressures on mothers. Similarly, droughts can result in loss of certain types of nutritious food and impact malnutrition rates (WFP 2014). Moreover, pressure of diseases and pests is forecast to increase,<sup>2</sup> along with a reduction in the availability of water for food production and other uses in the semi-arid zones and tropical Andes (ECLAC 2016).

Severe weather events, such as storms and hurricanes in Central America and the Caribbean, are also set to rise in frequency. During the 2000s there were 39 hurricanes in Central America and the Caribbean basin, compared to 15 during the 1980s and just nine during the 1990s.

LAC will also experience further sea-level rises, which are reported to have varied from two to seven 7 mm/year between 1950 and 2008. Under a low emissions scenario this will likely be in the range of 26-55cm by the last two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and 45-82 cm in a high-emissions scenario. This will add to the risk of significant damage from storm surges associated with these tropical storms (IPCC 2013; ODI 2014) and will especially impact small island states in the

**Climate change is expected to accentuate pre-existing vulnerabilities and inequalities.** Many population groups, in particular indigenous groups and people of African descent, are socially excluded and have limited political influence, fewer capabilities and opportunities for participating in decision and policy making and are thus less able to leverage government support to adapt to climate change (Moser and Ekstrom 2010). This also applies to people with disabilities, women, children, older people, indigenous group, and others marginalised due to their identity (Chaplin *et al.* 2019).

**The rural poor in general are at risk of being those most affected by climate change due to the combination of social and climatic factors that exacerbate their vulnerability.** In 2010, the rural poverty rate was twice as high as that of urban areas. In terms of extreme poverty, it was four times as high (IFAD 2013). The occurrence of climate shocks and stresses, such as unseasonal droughts, changing and delayed or lengthened seasons, hurricanes or floods, negatively affects rural livelihoods and assets, in turn reducing wellbeing. Their reliance on small-scale, rain-fed agriculture, natural resources, traditional knowledge systems and culture and their poor access to infrastructure and technology make the rural poor highly vulnerable to climate change (Reyer *et al.* 2015).

**Climate change adaptation raises critical issues of social justice since the people who will suffer the most from the negative impacts of climate change are also those who have tended to contribute the least to greenhouse gas emissions.** "At stake are issues of fairness in the responses to a large global externality; the need to protect past and future gains from development; and potentially serious global repercussions of failing to address climate change

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