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Occasional Paper N° 25



Social Protection and the World Food Programme

Rachel Sabates-Wheeler and Stephen Devereux
Institute of Development Studies



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Foreword

Social protection is an increasingly popular strategy for governments to reduce extreme poverty, hunger and inequality. Virtually every country in the world has at least one social safety net or social protection scheme in place. Yet, four billion people in this world – in particular the poorest – are not covered by any form of social protection.

As a global leader in fighting hunger and malnutrition worldwide, often in very difficult contexts, the World Food Programme (WFP) is increasingly called upon by governments to help implement or strengthen their social protection systems. WFP has been implementing various safety nets for many years, but the growing demand to support national systems creates opportunities of a different type and scale. As WFP embraces an approach of working through and strengthening national systems, WFP can truly aspire to help countries make measurable contributions to the Zero Hunger goal (SDG2) as well as the reduction of poverty and the expansion of social protection floors.

The commissioning of a think piece that examines the relationship between food security, nutrition and social protection was a first step in defining WFP's potential contribution to national social protection systems. This paper provides some insights into WFP's added value in the social protection arena and can help inform global, regional and country-level planning of technical support.

Sarah Laughton
Chief of the Safety Nets and
Social Protection Unit

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Every effort has been made to accurately incorporate and reflect the responses of stakeholders. However, all inferences from these responses as well as the opinions and recommendations expressed in this paper remain those of the authors.



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Rationale for WFP Engagement in Social Protection

Over the last ten to fifteen years social protection has become widely recognized as a powerful tool for alleviating shocks, mitigating risks and promoting conditions conducive to household level resilience and wider economic growth. Moreover, there is a direct connection between food security and social protection. Food insecurity describes an inability to secure subsistence needs, while the mandate of social protection is to ensure that subsistence needs are met by public means whenever private means are inadequate. This implies that the World Food Programme (WFP), because of its mandate to protect and ensure food security through publicly funded interventions, should work closely with governments and other agencies that are engaged with social protection policies and programmes.

Safety nets (a core part of social protection) in a number of countries have evolved from fragmented stand-alone interventions into integrated programmes, becoming coordinated mechanisms for providing regular and predictable transfers to targeted populations over the long term. Many countries are also making progress toward articulating national social protection strategies, or have well-developed social protection systems in place. In fact, social protection is increasingly being seen an essential part of a country's poverty reduction and economic growth strategy. This trend in the rise and form of social protection, as well as substantial amassing evidence about its impacts, has led to the explicit incorporation of social protection into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) – included explicitly in SDG1, but also very much central to the achievement of many others, in particular the goal of Zero Hunger as embodied in SDG2.

Despite the rise of social protection, a huge, global unmet need for it remains: from an estimated 800 million people who are

hungry, only a small fraction are covered by national social safety net or social protection programmes. Of these, WFP is only able to directly serve a fraction. Due to the scale of the problem as well as the need for sustainable, long-term solutions to hunger and poverty, for WFP to make a measurable impact on SDG2 it will need to embrace a facilitating/contributory function and partnering role (primarily with governments but also with other agencies). WFP expects increasingly to assist governments in the development and implementation of national social protection systems, building on its expertise in short- and long-term safety nets and management of in-kind and cash-based transfers while maintaining its capacity for operational response.

WFP's new strategic plan (2017-2021) orients the organization completely around supporting country efforts to achieve Zero Hunger and sustainable development, and commits WFP to working to "strengthen countries' capacities to provide social protection measures that protect access to adequate, nutritious and safe food for all". In engaging in social protection, WFP's overall purpose is to support national and local capacity to ensure that all people at all times have access to the food needed for an active and healthy life. This is directly related to the achievement of SDG2: "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture". Practically speaking, this new orientation is achieved by facilitating independently led national zero hunger Strategic Reviews that inform 5-year Country Strategic Plans (CSPs) that are tailored to local contexts. CSPs offer an opportunity to use WFP's capabilities in a more strategic way and with a perspective that looks beyond direct assistance at longer-term strategic engagement around policy, technical support to system building and direct support through knowledge transfer. This is a relevant perspective and

contribution also in humanitarian contexts, where social protection can help to bridge humanitarian and development responses.

The purpose of this paper is to guide corporate decision-making in the area of social protection. In particular, the first part of the paper establishes a justification for the critical role that WFP can play by laying out how social protection is able to reduce hunger and food insecurity. This paper is intended to situate

WFP's contribution to social protection within the global social protection agenda and also to demonstrate the conceptual, empirical and practical linkages between food security and nutrition and social protection. The latter part of the paper offers concrete and pragmatic recommendations for how WFP can strengthen its support to national and global partners in order to deliver hunger results through social protection interventions and policy influence.

2 Review of Evidence for Social Protection as a Path to SDG2 Results

2.1. Social Protection, Food Security and the SDGs

There are multiple approaches to thinking about social protection. Rights-based models emphasize the legally-mandated human right that every person has to social security and protection, while justice-based approaches appeal to an ethical view that all people, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, should have access to social protection. Others view social protection as instruments for dealing with risks and shocks, which might or might not be grounded on ethical or legal bases, and might sometimes be necessary for facilitating economic growth more generally. Whatever approach is taken, there is agreement on the core functions of 'protection' and 'prevention', and less agreement on some additionally proposed functions – 'promotive' and 'transformative'. 'Protection' usually refers to safety nets and social assistance, while 'prevention' describes social insurance mechanisms such as contributory social security schemes for employed workers. Social protection can also support livelihood 'promotion' and poverty reduction. Finally, social protection policies can be 'transformative' if they address the structural determinants of poverty and hunger.

WFP endorses the 'transformative social protection' framework (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004), with protect, prevent, promote and transform as social protection's functions or objectives. WFP's definition of social protection is "a broad set of arrangements and instruments designed to protect members of society from shocks and stresses over the lifecycle. It includes social assistance for the poor, social insurance for the vulnerable, labour market regulations and social justice for the marginalised" (WFP 2014a, p. 4). Any programme that is temporary, unpredictable, or that does not build or support government safety net systems cannot be described as social protection (WFP 2014a, p. 9).

In the context of the 2030 Agenda and given WFP's mandate to support countries to achieve the vision of a zero hunger world, the need to integrate social protection into the organization's core business becomes obvious. This is because there is a proven relationship between certain types of social protection provision and food security results. While the implementation of 'nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures' is an explicit sub-goal of SDG1, many of the pathways and elements to achieving this are borne through SDG2 and other related goals.¹ For instance,

1. Four of the five targets under goal 1 (all except 1.3) have an explicit direct or indirect connection with food security:
 - 1.1. By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.
 - 1.2. By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.
 - 1.4. By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.
 - 1.5. By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.

many current, nationally-owned social protection systems and programmes in low-income countries contain the explicit objectives of reducing chronic poverty and food insecurity (often measured using child stunting as a key indicator). The design and delivery of appropriate social protection measures in these contexts must involve multiple sectors, frequently working on nutrition, agriculture, disasters, markets and food security. Once the various components of a social protection system are made explicit (such as building a beneficiary registration system, data requirements for targeting, payment systems, delivery mechanisms, appeals procedures, monitoring and evaluation), then it is clear that WFP has much to contribute through its mandate on SDG2, to ensure that the SDG1 goals are met. Furthermore, once we recognize that poverty can be measured across a range of indicators, not simply income and assets, then hunger, food insecurity and vulnerabilities to other negative outcomes are important contributors to the overall SDGs.

Moreover, social protection is a pathway to achieve SDG2 results directly. This is because the causes of food insecurity can be counteracted by social protection provision (as explained below). Over the last 10 years a large body of evidence has been built up establishing a range of positive, and causal, impacts from various social protection interventions on a range of livelihood and poverty outcomes. Below we review this evidence, as it relates to food security and nutrition.

2.2. How can Social Protection enhance Food Security and Nutrition?

measures typically combine short-term income transfers with investments in longer-term human capital (e.g. school meals) or physical capital (e.g. labour-intensive public works) and access to economic opportunities, including financial services, livelihood diversification and access to markets. Finally, 'transformative' measures can overcome structural barriers to employment (such as discrimination against minority groups, through anti-discrimination campaigns or 'affirmative action' legislation) and thereby raise the incomes and access to food of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Some interventions can achieve more than one of these four functions. For example, by protecting households against selected risks (e.g. drought), crop insurance has the potential to unlock investment in agricultural production, which will result in higher productivity and incomes.

It is important for social protection to consider food security and nutrition explicitly in its design and targeting, because social protection is usually designed as an anti-poverty measure, and food insecurity is related to, but not the same as, poverty or income insecurity. For example, the choice of social protection instrument (e.g. cash or food transfers) must be informed by an assessment of how local markets and local producers will respond to injections of either cash or food, and the impacts of social transfers on child nutrition often vary depending on whether mothers or fathers are targeted as recipients. Higher incomes do not always translate into improved food security and nutrition.

There is, of course, a clear relationship between SDG1, which refers to poverty "in all its forms",

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