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ASSESSMENT OF THE SENSITIVITY OF THE SOCIAL PROTECTION SECTOR IN RWANDA TO CLIMATE- RELATED SHOCKS



PREFACE

The assessment has been conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) on behalf of the Social Protection Sector Working Group in January–February 2020. Its aim is to inform the Government of Rwanda and its development partners on the opportunities for further mainstreaming elements of resilience-building and response to shocks within the social protection sector, with a view to enhancing the sector's effectiveness in accelerating the eradication of extreme poverty. This diagnostic therefore explores climate variability and shocks in Rwanda, and identifies opportunities for risk reduction, absorption and transfer—through social protection (not limited to the Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme, VUP) and other disaster risk management mechanisms.

The review forms Phase 1 of the technical assistance project, 'Adaptive Social Protection in Rwanda's Emergency Management' (ASPIRE), funded by the WFP 2030 Fund. Subsequent phases will comprise a high-level forum and national and district-level consultations to explore and refine these findings. It also forms part of activities under the United Nations Joint Programme on Accelerating Integrated Policy Interventions to Promote Social Protection in Rwanda, implemented by UNICEF, WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The team expresses its warm appreciation to MINALOC, MINEMA and LODA for their generous guidance and facilitation, and especially the taskforce for the study: Justine Gatsinzi (Director of Social Protection at LODA), Philippe Habinshuti (Director of Response and Recovery at MINEMA), Cris Ayebare (adviser to the minister of MINALOC) and Thacien Yankurije (Director of Social Protection at MINALOC). Thanks also to all our other interlocutors in the government as well as development partners in the Social Protection Sector Working Group and private sector partners in Kigali; and to local authorities at district and sector level and their communities, for whose time and insights we are most grateful.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment explores climate variability and shocks in Rwanda and identifies opportunities to enhance risk reduction, absorption and transfer through the social protection sector. Enhancing social protection to mitigate the consequences of climate shocks has become a priority for the Government of Rwanda, as shown in several strategic documents such as the National Strategy for Transformation 2017-2024 and the Social Protection Sector Strategic Plan. Findings are presented from an analysis of weather trends, a literature review and primary research via key informant interviews and focus groups at national, district and sector level conducted in early 2020. Opportunities arising for the overall sector as well as specific programmes are explored.

The social protection ‘policy problem’ in relation to climate-related shocks in Rwanda is unique in two respects: it is mainly about minimising idiosyncratic fluctuations in poverty—households being pushed (or pushed deeper) into poverty, or households losing assets—not about covariate shocks where thousands of people are affected by one event; and the priority is to enhance collaboration between government entities responsible for disaster risk management (DRM) and social protection, rather than to find a way to take over caseloads from international agencies or streamline large donor-funded emergency responses with government social protection systems.

A detailed analysis of nearly 40 years of climate-related data (1981–2019) highlights that exposure to climate-related shocks varies across Rwanda, with shocks being generally very localised. Rainfall tends to vary quite drastically from one year to the next and there has been a strong increasing trend in maximum temperature across the country. The combination of topography and these weather patterns leads to frequent localised floods, landslides and droughts. Western, Southern and Northern provinces are prone to landslides and flooding, while Eastern Province is exposed to drought. Climate related hazards are damaging houses, infrastructure and crops and making households resort to coping strategies that erode their livelihoods, undermining resilience. The cumulative effects are considerable.

Rwanda has a well developed government-led **social protection system** that already goes a long way in addressing weather-related shocks by virtue of efforts to ‘do good social protection’. The assessment considers five dimensions of the overall architecture of the social protection system, with the following findings:

- Policies and their coherence.** There is a strong enabling policy environment with good integration of DRM into social protection policies and clear backing for climate-sensitive and shock responsive social protection. Conversely, in DRM policies, the integration of social protection considerations could be further explored. A further sharpening of the focus of the social protection policy environment on responding to climate related shocks will need to consider trade-offs with other policy objectives. This includes resolving whether the Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) Classic Public Works programme is to be expanded or contracted.
- Institutional arrangements.** The decentralized system of governance facilitates local coordination between social protection, DRM and others. Roles and responsibilities between district disaster management and social protection staff are often shared and there are indications of strong cooperation. Actual staffing capacity varies across districts. This, plus variations in technical and financial resources, necessarily determines the quality of programming for both social protection and DRM activities.
- Financing.** Government spending on social protection has been steadily expanding. An important element of whether a social protection system can be responsive to shocks relates to how it is financed and the scope for allocating additional funds to it. The same need for rapidly accessible funding applies equally to emergency response. The creation of the Disaster Response Fund highlights an understanding of the need for the timely response to shocks to be underpinned by a rapid release of funds. Further attention is warranted as to how it can be operationalised. The government is looking into the possibility of sovereign risk pooling. Besides identifying where funding might come from, an equally important question is how it will be released and subsequently spent. One potential option, for predictable hazards for which reliable forecasting is possible, is for the release of funds to be triggered by weather forecasts (‘forecast-based financing’). Given the enormous climate variability and localised shocks in Rwanda, further research is needed to ascertain whether or not the required level of accuracy is feasible.
- Support systems.** The Ubudehe system of classifying all households according to their socioeconomic status provides a valuable service across the sector. Its use is under review as an enormous number of programmes now rely on its classification for selecting their beneficiaries, resulting in disincentives for households to be reclassified. A shock-affected household may request a reassessment of their Ubudehe status, but this reportedly can take up to a year. Exploring a faster reassessment process may enable faster access to social protection support in the event of a shock. In any case, emergency assistance is currently not linked to Ubudehe or VUP status, which may be appropriate as the households affected by shock may not neatly conform to a specific Ubudehe category and VUP coverage is currently at 4% of the population. In other countries there is increasing international enthusiasm for new large-scale databases to be created to form the basis for selecting beneficiaries in the event of a shock. In Rwanda this may be redundant due to the existence of the Ubudehe database, the highly localized nature of hazards that means that a static database may not be able to tell which those are, and the finding that local authorities are generally in a position to identify the affected households based on their intimate local knowledge and community consultation.
- Monitoring and evaluation.** Strategic interventions and outcomes in the Social Protection Sector Strategic Plan include targets related to both climate-sensitivity and shock-responsiveness. This lays the foundation for effective delivery via annual performance contracts (*imihigo*) for government staff. Three indicators merit further consideration. First is to clarify how the ‘climate-sensitivity’ of the VUP Public Works is measured. Second, an important question remains unresolved as to whether inclusion in a social protection programme is seen as a positive or negative sign of household resilience. Globally, the ability of households to access social protection programmes is seen as a positive contribution to risk absorption. In Rwanda it appears that progress towards resilience is being measured by how much people exit programmes rather than join them. Third, the use of the poverty gap, and not just the poverty headcount, might increase the country’s ability to measure its progress towards poverty reduction. This considers all contributions (including those that help very poor people to become slightly less poor) rather than only those that lift a household entirely over the poverty line.

Specific **social protection programmes** also have potential to make further contributions to risk reduction, absorption and transfer goals.

- For **risk reduction**, there is untapped potential to reduce disaster risk in communities through VUP public works, and specifically activities such as construction and maintenance of drainage systems in flood prone regions or restoring forests in highland slope areas vulnerable to landslides. Public communication through the VUP could support household risk reduction measures.
- For **risk absorption through reduced vulnerability**: the VUP Direct Support scheme already contributes to reducing vulnerability by smoothing household consumption year-round. The level of the transfer further reduces vulnerability by being linked to household size. For VUP Expanded and Classic Public Works beneficiaries the effect is somewhat lower because of the lower transfer value. However, coverage is very limited with just 4% of the population covered by the VUP. This contrasts with the Community Based Health Insurance scheme which reaches 74% of the population. The value of the VUP in building resilience is further enhanced using Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs) which offer financial services. Activities underway to further digitize the VUP payment process should enhance the programme's overall contribution to building resilience.

As for other schemes, the Girinka programme is intended to meet several resilience objectives at once. Design adjustments currently being made should improve its relevance for risk absorption, such as by enabling households to own smaller livestock which will improve the affordability of animal feed compared with owning a cow. Meanwhile the Crop Intensification Programme, which subsidises agricultural inputs, has some aspects which have the potential to improve household income, but others which may increase exposure to climate risks.

- For **risk absorption through disaster response**: The potential of the VUP for shock response is constrained by its coverage and therefore the likely lack of correlation between a household's inclusion in the VUP and its chance of being affected by a shock. The tendency among international actors to look for a single 'flagship' programme that might serve as an entry point for emergency response relies on an assumption that the programme has its own infrastructure or resources that are superior to alternatives. However, the VUP itself draws on the systems already established for the social protection sector as a whole, e.g. a national database (Ubudehe) and payment mechanisms (SACCOs). This use of common systems is a sign of the maturity of the country's integrated social protection systems.

Furthermore, Rwanda has functional emergency response mechanisms that are an existing pillar of the country's social protection system. Anecdotal evidence suggests that community-based targeting led by cell leaders can be efficient at identifying those in need. A more in-depth analysis of the in-kind response to drought and other disasters could help identify good practices and determine the extent to which this system is the most efficient and sustainable option for responding to weather-related shocks. A gap highlighted by this assessment is the provision of psychosocial support for disaster affected people.

- For **risk transfer**, the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) is a newly launched climate risk finance mechanism that is expected to provide predictable funding and support to households affected by climate shocks. There is potential for this to be linked with the VUP Public Works. Community-based health insurance is an important risk transfer mechanism that covers some three-quarters of the population and enables affected people to access health care, transferring some of the financial risk of the shock.

As a follow up to this study, the authors propose a high-level workshop and consultations to review the findings and outline potential areas for subsequent analytical pieces.

CONTENTS

Preface	i
Acknowledgements	i
Executive Summary	ii
List of tables, figures and boxes	v

PART A: BACKGROUND **1**

1. Introduction
2. Framing the concepts

PART B: CURRENT CONTEXT **6**

3. Climate and shocks in Rwanda
4. Current arrangements for DRM and social protection

PART C: ANALYSIS **11**

5. Improving climate-sensitivity and shock-responsiveness: the social protection system
6. Improving climate-sensitivity and shock-responsiveness: social protection programmes
7. Final remarks

Annex 1: References **37**

LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES AND BOXES

Table 1. Potential contribution of social protection instruments to DRM	3
Table 2. Interventions and outcomes for improved climate-sensitivity and shock-responsiveness of social protection	16
Table 3. Actual and potential contribution of elements of the social protection system to DRM	17
Table 4. Actual and potential contribution of social protection instruments to DRM	23
Figure 1. A layered approach to addressing disaster risk	2
Figure 2. Number of dry spells between 1981/82 and 2018/19, by season	6
Box 1. Disaster risk management vs. social risk management	2
Box 2. Natural hazards and their consequences: a snapshot from one community	7
Box 3. Design parameters of social protection databases, and their relevance for emergency preparedness and response	15
Box 4. A note on the tendency to look to social assistance programmes as a vehicle for channelling emergency response	21
Box 5. Suggested further analytical studies	26

PART A: BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

1.1. Context of the study

The assessment aim is to inform the Government of Rwanda and its development partners on the opportunities for further mainstreaming elements of resilience-building and response to shocks within the social protection sector, with a view to enhancing the sector's effectiveness in accelerating the eradication of extreme poverty. It has been conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) on behalf of the Social Protection Sector Working Group in January–February 2020.

Rwanda has a unique topography and weather patterns. The country is being hit increasingly frequently—and unpredictably—by generally localised climate-related natural hazards, such as heavy rains and unusually long dry spells. These can lead to shocks such as flooding, landslides and poor harvests. In 2018, about 40% of households had experienced a period of difficulty in the preceding 12 months that had affected their food security or assets; of those, about half said the cause was a natural hazard (WFP, 2018). Shocks can result in people buying less food, using up savings, borrowing or selling off assets, among other negative coping strategies (NISR, 2018a).

Managing disaster risk is a cross-cutting concern, to which social protection measures are recognised as making an important contribution. Social protection can lessen the likelihood of such shocks, alleviate their consequences and promote conditions conducive to improving household-level resilience and wider economic growth. Social protection systems protect the most vulnerable from shocks and stresses throughout their lives. They address multiple inter-related issues including poverty, inequality and food insecurity—thus facilitating several Sustainable Development Goals, which contributes to reduce vulnerability. At the same time, synergies between social protection and other aspects of disaster risk management (DRM) are important.

Enhancing social protection to mitigate the consequences of climate shocks has become a priority for the Government of Rwanda, as shown in several strategic documents such as the National Strategy for Transformation 2017-2024 and Social Protection Sector Strategic Plan (see section 4). Investments in social protection more broadly are increasing. Meanwhile a Disaster Response Fund has recently been approved by parliament, and conversations are ongoing as to how it might be operationalised. It is therefore timely, first, to consider how

1.3. Structure of the report

The rest of the report is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the conceptual framework; section 3 explains climate variability in Rwanda and resultant shocks; section 4 highlights current arrangements for disaster risk management (DRM) and social protection; section 5 examines the climate-sensitivity and shock-responsiveness of the overall social protection sector, while section 6 reviews the Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) and other social protection programmes specifically, with a view to identifying entry points for enhancing the relevance of social protection to weather-related shocks. Section 7 concludes with some high-level options for further exploration, and a proposed way forward.

2. Framing the concepts

2.1. Climate-sensitivity and shock-responsiveness: a disaster risk management approach

Disasters, development and poverty are closely interlinked:

Destruction of assets and livelihoods in disasters set back hard-won development gains and worsen poverty, often for extended periods of years. Progress in ending extreme poverty may be reversed in the face of a disaster event and poverty re-entrenched (Integrated Research on Disaster Risk Programme, 2014, p.1)

A hazard may easily trigger a marginally non-poor person or household to lapse into poverty, or a poor one to fall into deeper poverty. While large-scale disasters tend to grab headlines, even small-scale, localised shocks can cumulatively constrain national development, besides causing hardship and suffering to the individuals and households concerned. The imperative to reduce the likelihood of these shocks occurring, and to minimise their consequences, is clear.

Disaster risk depends not just on the severity of the hazard (such as heavy rain or drought), but also on people's exposure and vulnerability to it (Cardona *et al.* 2012). Being 'exposed' to the hazard event means being in the area where it is likely to occur. Being 'vulnerable' to it means being susceptible to being negatively affected when it occurs. A person may be exposed to a hazard but not be vulnerable, if they have the capacity to anticipate, adapt to and/or cope with the event when it happens.

It follows that one can reduce a person's risk by reducing either

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