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Organization of the
United Nations

ADVANCING SOCIAL PROTECTION IN RURAL AFRICA

A compendium of impactful case studies



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UGANDA. At Palabek refugee settlement in Lamwo district, an FAO Farmer Field School group celebrates their harvest.

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Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we present this publication, a selection of illustrative case studies of the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) approaches in social protection across Africa. The publication aims to provide an insightful overview of FAO's work in social protection across the region, to highlight best practices, foster knowledge exchange, stimulate dialogue, and encourage the replication of successful models.

Africa is facing a food crisis of unprecedented proportions, and the challenges of food insecurity, poverty and climate change intersect most acutely in rural areas. In this context, social protection plays an essential role for furthering and accelerating progress around food security and nutrition, poverty reduction and resilience building. Social protection is also transformative, enhancing economic and productive capacities – not least of the poorest and most marginalized. FAO's efforts in Africa derive from this potential. By integrating social protection with agricultural and rural development, we aim to address these challenges holistically, ensuring that vulnerable populations are not only shielded from the immediate impacts of adversity, but are also equipped with the tools and opportunities they need to build sustainable and resilient livelihoods.

Through the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031, FAO is committed to supporting countries across Africa to expand the coverage, adequacy, and comprehensiveness of social protection systems for rural populations, to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by delivering better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no-one behind.

We extend our gratitude to the governments, partners and communities with whom we have collaborated. Your insights, commitment and active participation have been indispensable in shaping effective and responsive social protection strategies. We also recognize the indispensable role of our donors and supporters, whose continued trust and investment in our work makes all this possible.

The case studies documented in this publication, including successes achieved and lessons learned, are a collective reminder of what we can accomplish when we work together towards a common goal. They serve as both a reflection of what has been achieved, and inspiration for future policy and programming.

Abebe Haile-Gabriel,
FAO Assistant Director-General and
Regional Representative for Africa
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CBFs	community-based facilitators
CBOs	community-based organizations
CPF	Country Programming Framework
EAC	East African Community
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFS	Farmer Field Schools
FSP	Food Security Pack
G20	Group of 20
GAPs	good agricultural practices
GDP	gross domestic product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GCF	Green Climate Fund
HGSF	Home-Grown School Feeding
ICP	intensive crop production
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
ISP	input subsidy program
JFFLS	Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
LIAMIS	Lesotho Integrated Agriculture Management Information
MAFS	System Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
MCDSS	Ministry of Community Development and Social Services
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
PoU	Prevalence of Undernourishment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOFA	State of Food and Agriculture
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
VSLAs	Village Savings and Loans Associations
WFP	World Food Programme
ZIRP	Zimbabwe Idai Recovery Programme

INTRODUCTION



The number of people living in extreme poverty rose for the first time in a generation with the onset of COVID-19; the number of people living in extreme poverty (living below USD 2.15 per day) increased by 70 million, bringing the total to over 701 million people (World Bank, 2023a). Worryingly, the poorest populations were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with their income losses twice as high as those of the richest. Further, it is projected that if current gender trends persist, roughly 340 million females could be living in extreme poverty by 2030 (UN Women and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2023).

Based on Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates, global hunger measured by the prevalence of undernourishment remained relatively unchanged from 2021 to 2022, but is still far above pre-pandemic levels. The economic recovery from the pandemic observed in 2021 slowed in 2022. Rising prices of food, agricultural inputs and energy, magnified by the impact of the war in Ukraine, undermined the recovery of employment and incomes for the most vulnerable, hindering efforts to fight hunger. The gender gap in food insecurity at the global level also widened in 2020 and 2021 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as women were more affected by job and income losses, and bore a larger responsibility for additional unpaid caregiving duties – with women living in rural areas most likely to be food insecure.

For 2022, the food insecurity gap between men and women appears to have narrowed at the global level, but in Africa the gap increased marginally for moderate or severe food insecurity, and remained about the same for severe food insecurity. And overall, hunger is on the rise in all subregions of Africa. About 868 million people were moderately or severely food-insecure on the continent, and more than one third of them were severely food-insecure (FAO, African Union Commission (AUC), ECA and WFP, 2023). At the same time, only 17.4 percent of the population in Africa is covered by at least one social protection benefit (ILO, 2021). Owing to great efforts to extend old-age protection, 27.1 per cent of Africa's older population now receive a pension. However, significant social protection coverage gaps remain across the region with respect to informal rural workers, children, mothers with newborns, unemployed workers, persons with disabilities, and vulnerable population groups (Ibid).

Against this backdrop, there is an urgent need to expand the coverage and adequacy of social protection, to end poverty and achieve Zero Hunger.

Social protection represents a way to address vulnerability and offers people a pathway to resilience and greater economic opportunity. It includes a diverse set of policies and programmes that seek to protect people – especially the poor and marginalized – from poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. These include, for example, cash transfers and in-kind assistance (including food and agricultural inputs), social insurance, cash-for-work programmes, school feeding schemes, agricultural input subsidies, old-age pensions, active labour market policies, and job-training.

This report aims to provide an illustrative and insightful overview of the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) work in social protection across Africa.¹

It showcases a range of innovative and impactful projects that have contributed to enhancing the livelihoods and resilience of vulnerable populations. The report explores how FAO's initiatives have effectively integrated social protection with agriculture and rural development, addressing challenges such as food insecurity, poverty and climate change. Its intent is to foster knowledge sharing, stimulate dialogue and encourage the replication of successful models in different countries and contexts.

¹ The case studies in this publication have not been selected with the aim of generalization, or because they are representative of all the work that FAO does in social protection in Africa. Rather, they provide an illustrative overview of different approaches that FAO has undertaken in the region.

WHAT IS SOCIAL PROTECTION?





Social protection comprises a set of policies and programmes that address economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities to food insecurity and poverty by protecting and promoting livelihoods.

FAO, 2017

As defined by the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B),² “Social protection is a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing and protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, throughout their life cycle placing a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. This means ensuring adequate protection for all who need it, including children; people of working

age in case of maternity, sickness, work injury or for those without jobs; persons with disability and older persons. This protection can be provided through social insurance, tax-funded social benefits, social assistance services, public works programs and other schemes guaranteeing basic income security and access to essential services” (SPIAC-B, 2020).

Social protection is recognized as a fundamental human right and is essential for both social and economic well-being. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, specifically in Article 22 and 25, asserts the right of every individual to social security and a decent living standard. These principles are further echoed in the International Labour Standards, notably in the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Social Security Convention of 1952 (No. 102) and the Social protection floors recommendation of 2012 (No. 202).

Social protection is integral to accomplishing numerous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially No Poverty (SDG 1), Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), and Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11). Social protection also plays a vital role in promoting political stability and social unity, as well as mitigating the impacts of economic downturns and large-scale shocks. Importantly, social protection is

a key driver for human capital development, productivity and inclusive economic growth, ensuring social justice, and driving transformative changes in the labour sector and agrifood systems.

Most of the global poor live in rural areas, and they are often also food insecure, with limited or no access to social protection. Insufficient access to social protection significantly limits their capacities to ensure their own food security, to build sustainable livelihoods and to contribute to local and national economic growth (FAO, 2017). FAO is committed to expanding the coverage of social protection systems to the most vulnerable, in line with the 2030 Agenda’s commitment to expand the reach of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all by 2030, and as per the USP2030³ vision. In its support to Member States, FAO adopts a comprehensive view of the potential of social protection, encompassing all four of its functions. Social protection can, in particular, play a **protective** role in providing means

2 The Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board is a light, lean and agile inter-agency coordination mechanism - composed of representatives of international organizations and bilateral institutions - to enhance global coordination and advocacy on social protection issues and to coordinate international cooperation in country demand-driven actions.

3 The Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection (USP2030) is a worldwide alliance which brings together governments, international and regional organisations, social partners and civil society organisations, in a shared commitment towards ensuring social protection for all.

to access food and mitigate the impact of shocks. It can play a **preventive** role in averting deeper deprivation by strengthening resilience against shocks, preventing loss of incomes and assets, and supporting the accumulation of resources to sustain livelihoods. Social protection can play a **promotive** function by directly supporting investments in human resources (such as nutrition, health, education and skills development) and by reducing liquidity constraints and income insecurity to induce investments in farm and non-farm activities. Lastly, social protection can have a **transformative** function in the lives of the poor, by shifting power relations within households, enhancing gender equality, and strengthening the capabilities and capacities of those living in poverty to empower themselves.

SOCIAL PROTECTION AND AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Agrifood systems – the networks that produce and transform food, and ensure consumers can access it – are essential to human survival, and to building a world free from hunger and malnutrition, where food and agriculture contribute to improving the living standards of all in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner. At the same time, agrifood systems are unbalanced, and the prevalence of chronic hunger around the world suggests that food systems are not meeting the

needs of large sections of society. As they currently stand, agrifood systems can entrench injustice, and generate a large share of harmful emissions.

FAO seeks to support the 2030 Agenda through the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable, agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind (FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031).

To achieve this ambition, social protection has emerged as a set of instrumental interventions to make agrifood systems decisively the solution rather than the problem, and to starve out those parts of them that feed on inequality and environmental degradation.

Social protection programmes generate positive impacts on a range of outcomes associated with rural and food system transformation processes. These include improvements in



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asset ownership, input use, labour allocations, livelihood diversification, and incomes (Correa, Daidone, Davis and Sitko, 2023). Social protection programmes can mitigate the impact of rising energy prices on households, particularly for the poor and vulnerable, while also playing an important role in preventing long-term poverty and social exclusion that threaten inclusive growth and sustainable development. Mechanisms such as cash transfers, social insurance, and food assistance programs can provide a safety net for vulnerable populations who are the most affected by crisis situations, helping to ensure their immediate access to food, increase the production and availability of food, and ultimately stabilize food systems. Beyond food security, social protection interventions can also address the immediate, underlying, and basic causes of malnutrition, including by addressing fundamental social inequities, which is necessary for building the resilience of the individuals and households that are the most vulnerable to shocks and stresses. Social protection policies that encourage and support sustainable farming practices also help to reduce the environmental footprint of agriculture, while ensuring food security and the continued productivity of these systems. Social protection is vital in aiding the transformation of agrifood systems into structures that are not only more sustainable and resilient, but also equitable, inclusive, and in making sure no one is left behind.

OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN AFRICA

African countries have demonstrated strong commitment at the highest level to combat poverty in all its forms through social protection measures, while aiming to reach adequacy of coverage and benefits across an array of instruments. However, effective coverage across Africa remains low, with only 17.4 percent of the total population covered by at least one social protection benefit. Further, only 7.3 percent of the working-age population is legally covered by comprehensive social security systems that include the full range of benefits, from child and family benefits to old-age pensions. Women are lagging behind significantly in terms of coverage, at barely 3.9 percent compared to 10.8 percent for men. Moreover, only 13.9 percent of Africa's labour force is affiliated with contributory social security institutions, where coverage also tends to be broader for men than women (ILO, 2021).

Addressing the coverage gap in Africa is associated with various challenges at different levels of the social protection systems, ranging from policies and legal frameworks, governance and institutionalization, to administration gaps. These are amplified further by multiple disparities in vulnerabilities and coverage between urban and rural areas. Limited fiscal space and inadequate

IMPORTANT REGIONAL DECLARATIONS AND FRAMEWORKS



The AU Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Citizens to Social Protection was adopted in February 2022. The Protocol reaffirms social protection as a right for everyone, over their entire life cycle, and includes all components of social protection, as well as a range of essential basic services, such as housing, nutrition, and access to water. The Protocol represents a key achievement for extending social protection to rural workers, as it will be a binding instrument mandating governments to prioritise investment in and expansion of social protection systems, in line with international labour standards. These include allocating sufficient national resources for this end.



The ECOWAS Regional Social Protection Framework and Operational Plan for West Africa was adopted on 24 November 2023 by the Ministers in charge of Social Protection, with support from FAO, and is now being forwarded to the ECOWAS Council of Ministers for adoption. The Framework is a key milestone for Member States and partners to intensify efforts and investments around social protection in the region. The mission of the Framework is to promote the implementation of robust social protection systems and its key principles and guidelines among Member States across the ECOWAS region.



The Yaoundé Tripartite Declaration was adopted in 2012 by 47 African states and highlights the urgent need to implement a Social Protection Floor for all Africans. The declaration underlined the importance of extending social security coverage, especially to those without any, recognizing its significance for workers' well-being, productivity, and overall economic development. The African Union Commission's Ouagadougou + 10 Declaration and Plan of Action, adopted in January 2015, further identified "Social Protection and Productivity for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth" as one of its key priority policy areas. Within this framework, two notable instruments were adopted: the Programme on Upgrading the Informal Economy and the Social Protection Plan for the Informal Economy and Rural Workers (SPIREWORK).



The Addis Ababa Declaration on Transforming Africa through Decent Work for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, set continent-wide policy priorities that included extending social protection by establishing national Social Protection Floors based on the Social Protection Floors Recommendation of 2012. The AU's Agenda 2063, also adopted in 2015, is a strategic framework outlining the socioeconomic transformation of Africa over the next 50 years. It targets ensuring affordable social security and protection for all, with specific objectives under its First Ten Year Implementation Plan, such as providing at least 20 percent of the informal and rural population with access to social security by 2023.

domestic revenues hinder universality of social protection benefits amidst dynamic political economies, with average expenditure standing at less than 4 percent of GDP in Africa. The relative financing gap is particularly high in Sub-Saharan Africa, where public expenditure on social protection (excluding healthcare) stands at just 2.1 percent of GDP (ILO, 2021).

Strengthening social protection systems in Africa calls for multi-pronged approaches, leveraging multiple stakeholders to ensure adequacy of coverage and benefits, while guaranteeing comprehensiveness of benefits across the rural-urban divide. This calls for enhanced efforts in streamlining delivery systems, governance and institutional frameworks, while strengthening relevant skills and capacities. Exploring the linkages of social protection to agri-food systems and climate adaptation, will further strengthen rural communities' adaptive capacities, contributing to agrifood systems transformation. Moreover, increasing public expenditure on social protection and addressing inequities affecting rural and informal agrifood system workers, women, migrants, refugees, and other vulnerable groups will augment the impacts of social protection schemes, particularly for rural populations.

FAO'S WORK ON SOCIAL PROTECTION IN AFRICA

FAO is committed to supporting Governments in enhancing their national social protection systems, including policies, programmes, and administrative structures, to bolster social protection, particularly for rural populations. This commitment is guided by a multifaceted approach that places social protection as a central element in inclusive agrifood systems transformation.

To achieve this, FAO has organized its social protection work around five thematic areas. These are crucial for improving national social protection systems, paving the way for innovative and sustainable solutions to address poverty, vulnerability, food insecurity and malnutrition. The five thematic areas are shown below (Box 2).

BOX 2

FIVE THEMATIC AREAS



Increasing coverage and performance of social protection



Nutrition sensitive social protection and food crises



Shock responsive social protection and resilience

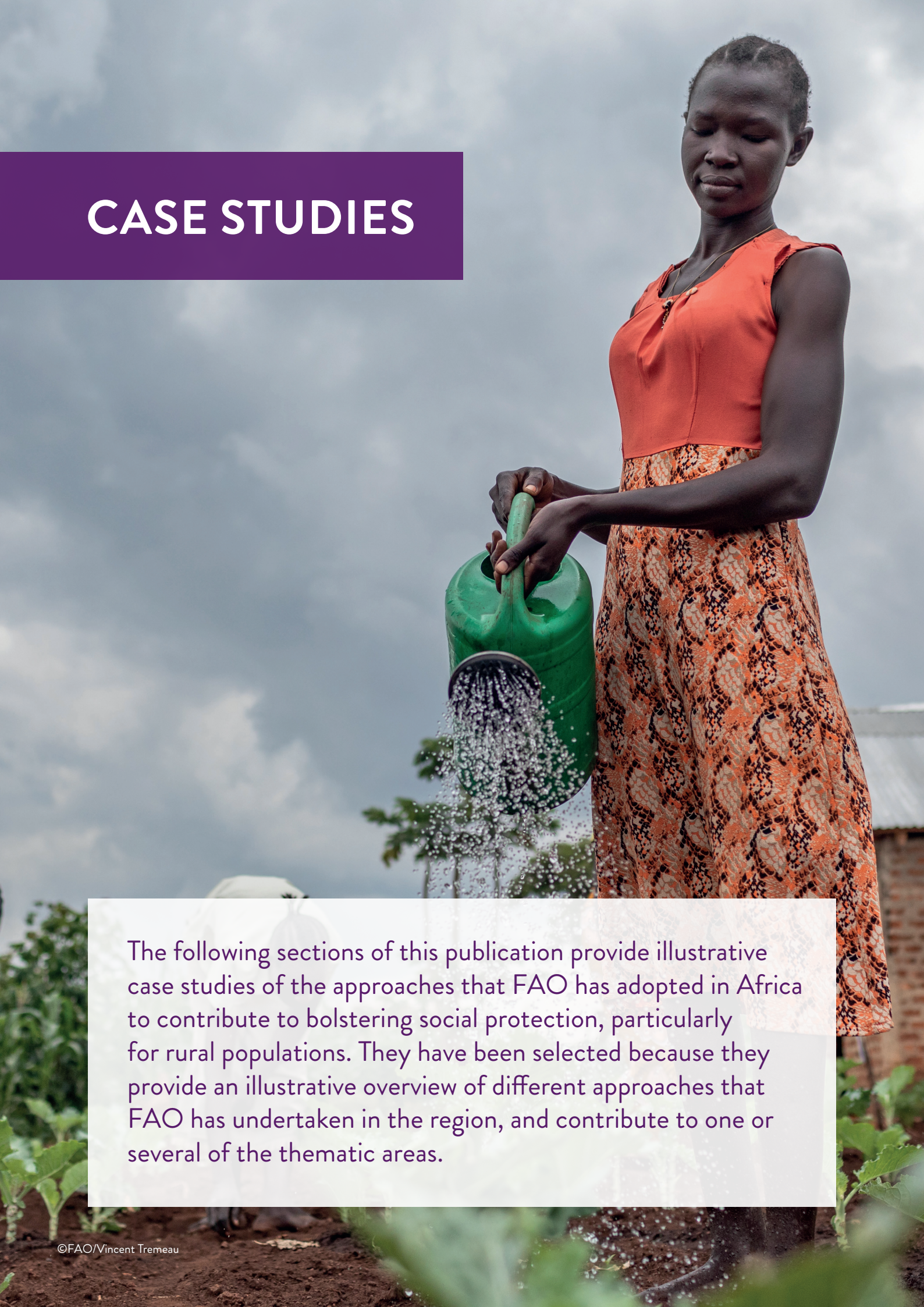


Social protection, climate action and economic inclusion



Gender responsive and inclusive social protection

CASE STUDIES

A woman with dark skin, wearing an orange sleeveless top and a long, patterned skirt, is watering a young plant in a garden. She is holding a green watering can and pouring water from its spout. The background shows a cloudy sky and other plants in the garden.

The following sections of this publication provide illustrative case studies of the approaches that FAO has adopted in Africa to contribute to bolstering social protection, particularly for rural populations. They have been selected because they provide an illustrative overview of different approaches that FAO has undertaken in the region, and contribute to one or several of the thematic areas.

Enhancing coverage and performance of social protection for rural populations in Zambia, through linking the food security pack with extension services



PROJECT SYMBOL
FMM/GLO/166/MUL



DURATION
2022 – 2023



PROJECT TITLE
Building Back Better and Greener,
Integrated Approaches for an Inclusive and
Green COVID-19 Recovery in Rural Spaces



BUDGET
USD 250 000

CONTEXT

Poverty is on the rise in Zambia. At the national level, the incidence of poverty was estimated at 60 percent in 2022 compared to 54.4 percent in 2015. Notably, poverty is more pronounced in rural areas (78.8 percent of the rural population) than in urban areas (31.9 percent of the urban population). Some 65.1 percent of the rural population were in extreme poverty and not able to meet the cost of the basic food basket (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2023). Over the years 2020 – 2022, the average prevalence of undernourishment stood at 29.8 percent, and the prevalence of stunting among children under five years of age stood at 31.4 percent. Moderate or severe food insecurity rose from 51.2 percent over the years 2014 – 2016 to 73.1 percent over the years 2020 – 2022 (FAO, AUC, ECA and WFP. 2023).

Against this backdrop, the Government of Zambia, with support from FAO, is prioritizing the scaling up of the Food Security Pack (FSP), to address food insecurity, malnutrition and the economic hardships faced by vulnerable rural households.

The FSP is an agricultural social protection package that provides a diverse basket of improved seed varieties, fertilizers and other technologies to “vulnerable but viable” households who have access to land and can work.

FSP beneficiaries are expected to be weaned off after two successful farming seasons when they achieve self-sustaining levels of food production to enhance food security, nutrition and income at household level.

As shown by a recent FAO microsimulation that assesses the distributional impacts of agricultural policies in Zambia, the FSP is effective for reducing rural poverty and inequality (Gasior, K., Navarro, S., Pirttilä, J., Kangasniemi, M., 2022). However, a major challenge is linking beneficiaries with appropriate agriculture extension support. Zambia has a very high farmer to extension officer ratio, which forces extension officers to prioritize extension support for larger and more resource-endowed producers (FAO, 2022c). As such, FSP beneficiaries often lack the appropriate information for using the FSP input package in effective and sustainable ways, thus preventing a transition to higher agricultural production and exit from poverty. Further, many FSP beneficiaries use traditional farming technologies and have little to no knowledge of the use of appropriate farming techniques.





⇒ FAO INTERVENTION

FAO supported the development of the Food Security Pack Management Information System (FSPMIS), to enhance delivery and targeting of the FSP, including expanding coverage to informal rural workers in the food and agro-value chains. FAO partnered with the Government of Zambia to enhance coordination and capacities of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) to deliver social protection to rural populations as well as livelihoods packages that support economic inclusion. Additional capacity-building initiatives included training on how the FSP can achieve greater positive impacts on food security and nutrition (FSN)⁴ and analyses of the gender responsiveness of the FSP, including its delivery mechanism to strengthen its contributions towards reducing gender inequalities.

In advancing the linkages of social protection to rural populations, FAO is also working with the MoA and MCDSS at national, provincial, and district levels to expand extension services to FSP beneficiaries in rural communities. The project incorporates the transfer of agricultural technologies (FSP) to equip beneficiary rural households in Zambia with the resources they need for the upcoming agricultural season, thereby allowing them to allocate their resources more effectively to manage risks and financial constraints. Additionally, it integrates extension advice through farmer field schools (FFS), designed to disseminate knowledge on the sustainable use of the transferred inputs by promoting conservation agricultural practices. The articulation of extension advice on the input package aims to enhance food security and farm productivity, contributing to inclusive rural transformation (Correa and Sitko, 2024).

⁴ The Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment Tool on Food Security and Nutrition (ISPA-FSN) provides a framework of analysis to assess how social protection programs can achieve a greater positive impact on food security and nutrition (FSN) at country level. During December 2023, a team of FAO nutrition and social protection experts conducted a training on its implementation, tailored to the Zambian context and the FSP. Participants included the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS), academia, civil society and the private sector. Over the following months, the ISPA-FSN tool will be implemented in Zambia, to improve results of social protection for FSN.



ACHIEVEMENTS

- The extension service sub-project involved 3,600 FSP beneficiaries in Katete, Sinda and Chipangali Districts. To allow precise monitoring and evaluation of impacts (employing a combination of experimental and quasi-experimental designs), 1,837 individuals received the additional extension programme (FSP+) and the rest received FSP inputs.⁵
- Under the FSP+, local extension providers were trained to deliver support through farmer field schools, where FSP-beneficiaries were put into groups of about 30 members comprised of men, women and youths to facilitate knowledge exchange and learning on livelihoods at household level.
- Notably, while the larger impact evaluation is yet to be finalized, preliminary results of FAO's project monitoring show that the beneficiaries were able to replicate the lessons learnt in their individual fields, resulting in significant improvements in crop yields. FSP+ beneficiaries were also better able to sell part of their produce and used the income to meet other household needs.
- Analysis of the project baseline data also provides preliminary evidence that the programme increased household resilience and enhanced household welfare in the face of adverse climate conditions (Correa and Sitko, 2024).



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⁵ This design allows the calculation of the following types of impacts at the project level relative to outcomes and outputs of interest: 1. The differential impact of the FSP programme on livelihoods of beneficiaries (FSP vs. control). 2. The differential impact of additional extensions services vs only receiving the FSP programme (FSP+ vs. FSP).



KEY LESSONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Through the sub-project, local extension providers were trained to deliver support to vulnerable and marginalized individuals in the communities. The project targets women, men and youth farmers that do not have access to extension support but are receiving FSP inputs from the government. Notably, by grouping the farmers into farmer field schools, the beneficiaries of the FSP have learned how to efficiently grow the different crops that they receive from the government.

The benefits of the FAO intervention can be seen through increased crop yields, improved livelihoods, and knowledge gain in crop production, providing a strong case for scaling up the FSP+ model.

An important challenge that Zambia faces is that the farmer extension ratio is currently 1 000 farmers to one extension officer. However, the FSP+ approach has brought farmers together and enhanced their capacity to grow specific crops of their choosing, from land preparation to post-harvest. Hence, the project has also increased the number of rural crop-specific skilled farmers, that are now able to share knowledge at a peer-to-peer level, reducing the farmer to extension officer ratio. As such, a larger number of FSP beneficiaries now receive appropriate information for using the FSP input package in the most effective and sustainable manner.

Finally, the FAO project has played an important role in promoting coordination between the implementing ministries. To further enhance coordination, to achieve larger impacts on poverty, food security and nutrition, it will be important to further strengthen system integration and institutional coherence between the MCDSS and MoA at national, provincial

The project has also increased the number of rural crop-specific skilled farmers, that are now able to share knowledge at a peer-to-peer level, reducing the farmer to extension officer ratio.

and district levels. For example, Zambia currently utilizes the Integrated Agriculture Management Information System (ZIAMIS) and all Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) operations have been seamlessly integrated through the system. But there are gaps in the processes, and in the integration of social protection FSP operations. To close these gaps, FAO commissioned an assessment (implemented by Development Pathways), which was validated by the MoA and MCDSS in January 2024. The assessment and consultations with the Government of Zambia indicated, among other things, the need to optimize system performance of ZIAMIS and improve data integration and interoperability with the social protection system. Hence, while Zambia has made remarkable progress in social protection, there are specific recommendations and next steps tailored to the country that would enhance operational efficiency and ensure that the social protection system works better for the rural poor and agrifood system workers.

Finally, the FAO project has played an important role in promoting coordination between the implementing ministries.



Increasing the capacities of social protection delivery mechanisms in Lesotho, through the establishment of a farmer registry and harnessing linkages with social protection



PROJECT SYMBOL

TCP/LES/3701



DURATION

2019 – 2021



PROJECT TITLE

Establishment of a Lesotho National Farmer Registry and Electronic Voucher Management System



BUDGET

USD 400 000

CONTEXT

In Lesotho, a predominantly rural country, the agricultural sector faces a variety of challenges, including climate volatility, soil erosion and inadequate investment. These issues have led to reduced agricultural productivity, with the country only able to produce 30 percent of its annual cereal needs in good years. Consequently, Lesotho is heavily dependent on food imports, which exacerbates the vulnerability of poor households to climate shocks. The severity of the situation was highlighted during the historic drought in 2015-2016 affecting around 680 000 people. Meanwhile, only 9.2 percent of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit (ILO, 2021). With an estimated 57 percent of the population living in poverty, 65.8 percent of the population relying on agriculture for their livelihood, and a third of children under five being stunted due to malnutrition, the Government of Lesotho has recognized agriculture and social protection as key sectors for national development. However, despite efforts and resources directed at enhancing agricultural production and social protection coverage, programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) that could contribute significantly towards social protection have not met their full potential. For example, the Input Subsidy Program (ISP), which provides seeds and fertilizer to farmers at half the retail price, disproportionately benefits well-off farmers and inadvertently excludes the

most vulnerable farmers due to the nature of its delivery processes and gaps in the targeting mechanism. The Ministry of Social Development has established a robust mechanism for targeting vulnerable segments of the population, which is anchored in the National Information System of Social Assistance. But to date, the ISP under the MAFS has neither utilized this system, nor developed and rolled out a similar one, to improve targeting and better reach vulnerable farming communities. To increase agricultural productivity, strengthen agrifood value chains, and enhance social protection coverage and delivery, there is hence a need for better harmonization and coordination, a common targeting framework, and improved monitoring and evaluation capabilities. These measures would aid in ensuring timely, efficient and effective delivery of social protection interventions, and better support the smallholder farmers who are central to the country's food security and economic stability.

FAO INTERVENTION

FAO has supported the Government of Lesotho to implement a pilot project aimed at enhancing coordination between and among sectors to improve agricultural productivity, social protection delivery and incomes for small-scale food producers. Notably, FAO together with the Government of Lesotho piloted an e-voucher system, to deliver social protection input subsidies directly to farmers through mobile phones. The e-voucher system is a digital platform-based solution that sends out electronic vouchers via SMS to farmers' mobile phones notifying them of their entitlements. Beneficiaries are also requested to visit agro-dealers in specified locations and receive agricultural inputs of their choice. At the agro-dealers, the farmers present their national identification number, SMS and voucher number for verification. When the details match, the agro-dealer sends out a confirmation voucher code to the farmer's mobile phone to ascertain the farmer's eligibility. Upon receiving the confirmation, the agro-dealer proceeds to give the farmer the identified inputs.

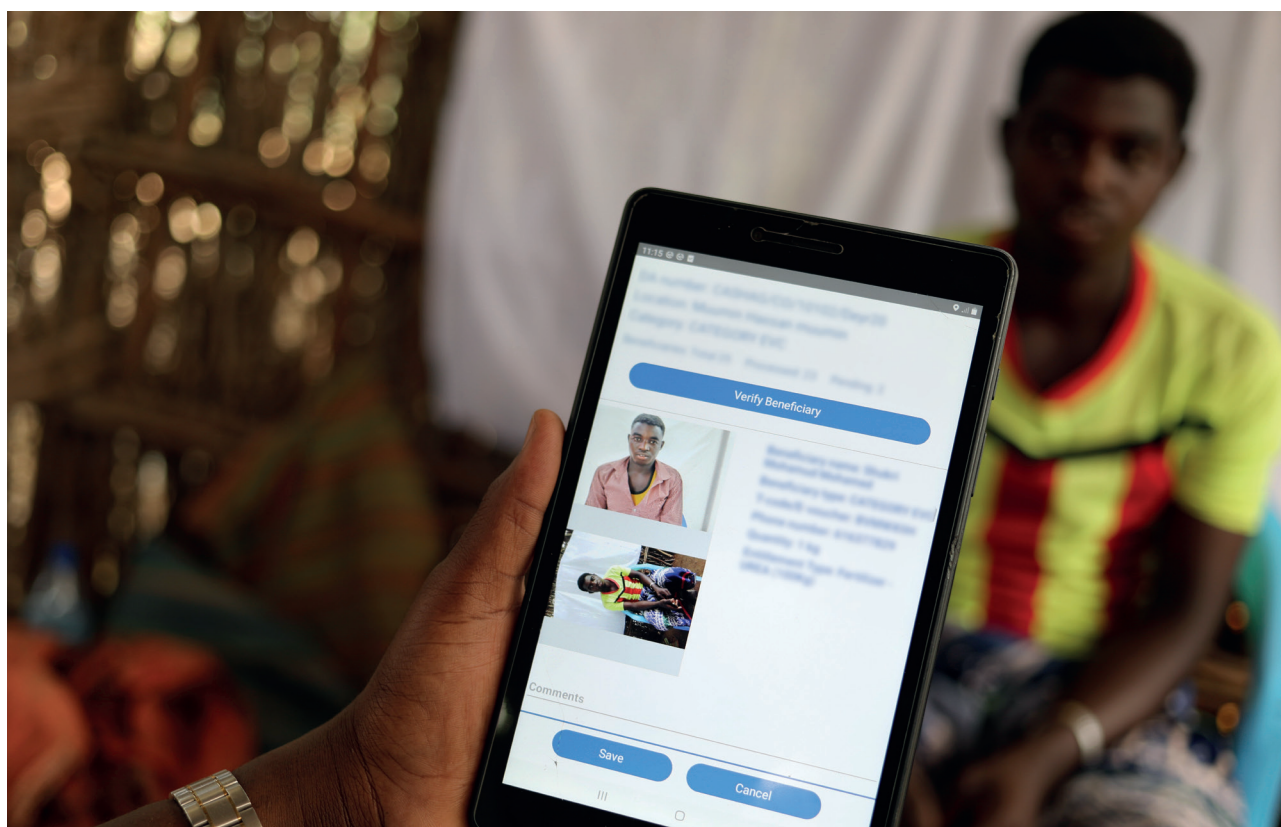
FAO together with the Government of Lesotho piloted an e-voucher system, to deliver social protection input subsidies directly to farmers through mobile phones.

Further, under the Lesotho Integrated Agriculture Management Information System (LIAMIS), FAO supported the development of the Farmers Registry, to serve as a central repository for all data on farmers, including data on various farming activities, ownership of productive assets, livestock, agricultural projects, and the poverty status of the farmers.



ACHIEVEMENTS

- Through the pilot, the e-voucher reached over 3 000 farmer households, improving the timely access and affordability of seeds and fertilizers, and thereby improving food security and nutrition. The e-voucher system was efficient and ensured timely delivery, while saving resources in mobilizing farmers.
- Moreover, over 11 000 farmers were registered in the Farmers Registry in the two pilot districts. Qualified agro-dealers were also included in the registry, including the MAFS list of agro-dealers who participate in the Input Subsidy Program (ISP), which establishes a direct link between the farmers and agro-dealers.
- The pilot demonstrated an effective approach for accurately categorising farmers according to their level of vulnerability and needs, which is critical for improving targeting of the Input ISP among other agriculture-focused social protection interventions. The collection of gender-disaggregated data and analyses also allowed MAFS to better understand the underlying drivers of poverty and exclusion, specifically to improve targeting and enrolment of women. Finally, categorizing farmers and determining their vulnerability levels allows for the harmonization of agriculture and social protection programmes in Lesotho and also at a broader level, supporting the development and delivery of tailored and differentiated initiatives for vulnerable small-scale food producers in rural areas.



KEY LESSONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

In recent years, the social protection sector in Lesotho has made great strides in strengthening registries and information systems, to expand and improve the delivery of benefits and services to the populations it seeks to serve. At the same time, efforts have been made to strategically strengthen digital technologies, data and digitally-enabled business models to transform the agrifood system. Yet, the two sectors remain fragmented, hampering progressive impacts on poverty reduction, food insecurity and malnutrition.

The FAO pilot project aimed to contribute to enhancing the coherence between the agricultural and social protection sectors in Lesotho, leveraging the extensive progress made in the development of information systems that support the design, delivery, coordination and monitoring of policies and programmes across the sectors. Linking agriculture and social protection information systems is necessary to inform and understand rural poverty

and vulnerability. For example, analysing data on various farming activities, ownership of productive assets, livestock and agricultural projects with data on poverty and vulnerability status could substantially improve the targeting of both social protection and agriculture programmes.

The pilot project generated important lessons around strategic engagement and sharing of data and information across social protection information systems and farmer registries (and other broader information systems). However, to tangibly enhance outcomes for each sector, scaling the pilot is key. In this regard, expanded data collection and system integration is essential for national coverage, with potential for additional funding from external stakeholders. Ultimately, opportunities to advance these approaches exist by building on the experiences of Lesotho and other countries across the continent – and also offering opportunities for South–South learning and exchange.

Cultivating nutrition and opportunity: Enhancing the home-grown school feeding initiative in Eswatini



PROJECT SYMBOL

TCP/SWA/3704



DURATION

2020 – 2021



PROJECT TITLE

Improving food and nutrition security through strengthening the home-grown school feeding (HGSF) programme in Eswatini



BUDGET

USD 274 000

CONTEXT

Eswatini faces challenges including poor food production and a heavy dependence on food imports. Concerningly, the prevalence of undernutrition rose from 9.6 percent over the years 2004 – 2006 to 11.6 percent in 2020 – 2022. As of 2022, 21.6 percent of children under the age of five were stunted (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023). The Government of Eswatini strives to address hunger and malnutrition in a holistic manner and identified the country's schools as important entry-points for enhancing food security and nutrition through school feeding programmes. With well-balanced, fresh meals at school, every child can get the right nutrition at the right age and learn to make food choices that set them up for a healthy life, while facilitating a market for small-scale farmers.

The Government of Eswatini has developed an education policy as well as a national framework for food security in schools. The national framework is based on a multi-pronged approach that includes providing school meals, encouraging school gardening and community participation in school meals programmes, as well as nutrition education. In line with this strategy, the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSF) was piloted by the Ministry of Education (MoET), the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), FAO and WFP. The aim was to integrate the school meals system with local agricultural initiatives to improve the nutrition of school children and spur the local food value chains.

The primary objective of HGSF programmes is to increase enrolment, attendance and retention rates by attracting children to school.

Reduced hunger also leads to better concentration and can enhance learning outcomes. Further, school meals can enhance the nutrition status of children, especially when school meal baskets are balanced and composed of local fresh foodstuffs. Further, the availability of fresh vegetables is enhanced through nutrition-sensitive school gardens. By linking school meals with local food suppliers (in particular smallholder farmers), HGSF programmes can create market opportunities for local farmers and reduce poverty. Finally, an increase in production and sale at the local level can generate spillover effects, creating jobs across the supply chain, and multiplier effects on the local economy (Bhalla, G. 2023).



⇒⇒⇒ FAO INTERVENTION

The project took a comprehensive approach, focusing not only on immediate food relief, but also on building a sustainable system for food security and nutrition.

This included integrating school meals with local agricultural production to provide immediate nutrition to students, supporting local smallholder farmers, and ensuring that the programme is delivered in a nutrition-sensitive manner. Agricultural education focusing on sustainable and efficient food production techniques was emphasized, along with the active involvement of local communities. The initiative also aimed to build resilience against price spikes due to

heavy dependence on food imports and establish a comprehensive food security infrastructure within educational institutions.

FAO provided farmers with the technical support they required to enhance their agricultural production to participate in the HGSP programme. Further, FAO built the capacity of school head teachers and MoA officers on the technical procedures and orientation aspects related to HGSP. In addition, inputs were provided to the farmers as well as equipment, and they received training on the use of the agriculture market information system (AMIS) which links farmers to the market. Finally, the project developed the capacity of farmers to store agricultural produce and reduce food waste and production loss.



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ACHIEVEMENTS

The project was piloted in all four regions of the country across 50 schools. Key achievements included:

- Improved nutrition status of school-going children through consumption of nutritious foods. In total, the pilot supplied one nutritious meal a day to 24,900 boys and girls during the school terms.
- Provision of technical assistance to local smallholder farmers enabling them to produce crops that met the specific nutritional needs and quantities required for the HGSF programme. This also boosted their productivity and ensured a reliable and consistent supply of fresh produce for the school feeding scheme. Training in Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and market-oriented production, as well as enhancing storage facilities to mitigate post-harvest losses, further strengthened the capacity of the local agricultural sector. This not only improved farmers' individual production capacities, but also had a ripple effect on the overall agricultural productivity in the region.
- An efficient and sustainable system for procuring directly from local smallholder farmers was adopted. This guaranteed that school meals were fresh and nutritious, fortified the local food supply chain, reduced logistical challenges, and enhanced the local economy by providing a stable market for farmers' produce.
- Establishment of a task force dedicated to providing continuous technical support and monitoring. The task force, chaired by the Ministry of Education, brought together different stakeholders to provide technical support for the expansion of the project.
- Lastly, beyond the direct impacts on beneficiaries, the programme contributed to broader socioeconomic benefits. Involving local farmers and integrating their produce into the school feeding scheme had multiplier effects on the local economy, creating job opportunities and improving livelihoods.



KEY LESSONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The programme demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating social protection, agricultural development, and nutrition education in a holistic approach to enhance the school environment, improve children's nutrition, and promote inclusive value chains. The empowerment of local stakeholders, particularly smallholder farmers, and the involvement of local communities in planning and implementation, was key to the project's success. Linking schools to local food production also maximized benefits for smallholder farmers.

The combination of multiple benefits through a centralized programming approach is a key strength of HGSF programmes that translates into high cost-effectiveness and benefit-cost ratios (FAO and WFP, 2018). This is especially true when programmes are integrated into the national social protection systems, education curriculums and comprehensive agricultural and nutritional education.

Improving and sustaining food security in rural Somalia through the transitional cash and livelihoods programme



PROJECT SYMBOL

OSRO/SOM/106/USA AND
OSRO/SOM/908/USA



DURATION

2019 – 2022



PROJECT TITLE

Improved Food Security and Livelihood
Recovery in Somalia



BUDGET

USD 3.2 MILLION

CONTEXT

Somalia is ranked first in the Fragile States Index (Fragile State Index, 2023). An estimated 48.7 percent of the population are undernourished (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023), 79.5 percent are either moderately or severely food insecure (FAO, AUC, ECA and WFP. 2023), 71 percent live below the poverty line (World Bank, 2019) and gender inequality as well as maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world (OCHA, 2021). The country's economic vulnerability is compounded by its proneness to recurrent natural and climate-related shocks. In 2023, Somalia emerged from the longest drought in its history that led the country to the brink of famine and displaced 1.2 million people. Some 4.3 million people are expected to face Acute Food Insecurity (IPC 3 or worse) early this year (FSNAU Post-Gu technical release), driven by the lingering impacts of the prolonged drought (2021-2022), the adverse impact of El Niño flooding and other contributing factors that will continue to exacerbate needs. The humanitarian needs across the country, combined with the low levels of resilience to climate-induced and idiosyncratic shocks, call for continued investments in risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection systems in Somalia.

Humanitarian assistance is the principal form of international aid to Somalia. While it has provided essential life-saving resources to affected populations, the short-term nature of interventions predisposes the communities

FAO recognizes the Government's focus on building social protection systems that not only save lives, but integrate multi-layered interventions, to address the needs of Somalia's most vulnerable.

to recurrent vulnerability and deprivation in the event of subsequent shocks post-emergency response. However, in the recent past there has been a gradual shift in the dispensation around linking humanitarian assistance to social protection instruments in Somalia. FAO recognizes the Government's focus on building social protection systems that not only save lives, but integrate multi-layered interventions, to address the needs of Somalia's most vulnerable. Enhancing state capacities to meet these needs will strengthen the social contract with the citizenry, while providing an opportunity for vulnerable households to contribute to their own socioeconomic development.



⇒⇒ FAO INTERVENTION

With funding from the United States through its Agency for International Development (USAID), FAO implemented the Transitional Cash and Livelihood Programme (TCLP). The main objective of the project was to break the recurrent cycle of households falling back into acute food insecurity by transitioning humanitarian caseloads to development-focused interventions, thereby facilitating a nexus between humanitarian and development assistance. The intervention targeted beneficiaries of previous

emergency programmes across three main livelihoods.⁶ Households received unconditional monthly cash assistance; livelihood inputs determined through consultations with beneficiary communities; training to form Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), empowering beneficiaries to engage in economic activities and enabling the diversification of livelihoods; and nutrition education and sensitization.



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Members of a Village Savings and Loan Association meet to collect weekly savings and disbursed loans in Laanqiciye village, Somalia.

6 The project was piloted across four regions of Somalia – Awdal, Bay, Nugal and Sool.



ACHIEVEMENTS

- Through the provision of Transitional Cash and Livelihood Support, FAO supported vulnerable households previously assisted with humanitarian cash assistance to transition into productive livelihoods, cushioning them from food insecurity while curtailing the drivers of malnutrition. Specifically, households facing acute humanitarian needs that had previously received humanitarian assistance were identified based on a vulnerability criterion that included demographic considerations and other measures of vulnerability. The model layered 24 months of cash transfers to 2,140 beneficiaries (at USD 35 per month) with livelihood inputs of beneficiaries' choice coupled with extensive skills training on sustainable, climate-smart livelihood practices.
- In addition, FAO facilitated the training of nutrition champions on nutrition education, who further cascaded the sensitization to the beneficiaries in each of the respective districts.
- 72 Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) (comprised of 1,669 members, over 60 percent of whom are women) were formed, with the objective to foster a culture of saving and investing in income-generating activities, to enable households to achieve financial self-reliance. Participation of women was emphasized, women were prioritized as the main recipients of the cash transfers and productive inputs, and supported to take up leadership positions in the VSLA groups.
- The End-Line Impact Assessment Report (FAO, 2022b) shows that households sustained the gains realized post-programme implementation. Beneficiaries also saved the cash they received and used the loans to purchase household goods and productive assets, invest in income-generating activities, and to meet basic family needs, including payments of medical care and school fees. Notably, at end-line, 54 percent of the beneficiary households relied on more than one income source, while income diversity⁷ among non-beneficiaries stood at 38 percent. Further, there was a rise in household income levels by an average of USD 13 (from USD 639 at baseline to USD 652 at endline) with the largest improvement recorded among female-headed households.
- The evaluation further utilized the Resilience Index Measurement Analysis (RIMA II)⁸ approach developed by FAO, to construct the Resilience Capacity Index (RCI) which measures a household's capacity to withstand stresses and shocks. Beneficiaries' households recorded a significant positive RCI change from 38.5 to 50.7 (32 percent increase).
- Finally, The Transitional Cash and Livelihood Intervention supported the conceptualization and design of a Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) scheme in line with national blueprints and social protection policy priorities.

7 I.e., gainful engagement from more than one income-generating activity

8 The Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA) methodology uses four resilience determinants: Productive Assets / Income, Social Safety Nets, Access to Basic Services, and Adaptive Capacity. It applies an econometric approach to data analysis by estimating the Resilience Capacity Index, ranging from 0 – 100. The higher the RCI, the higher the resilience capacity at the household level and vice-versa.



KEY LESSONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The Federal Government of Somalia, through the support of development partners, has invested effort and resources to pave the way for addressing the chronic needs of the most vulnerable populations through a government-owned social protection system. The 2019 Social Protection Policy (SPP) facilitated the creation of non-contributory social assistance instruments and infrastructure to cushion the most vulnerable households from falling below the poverty line, while transitioning humanitarian and 'at risk' households to regular and predictable social protection programmes. The MoLSA especially seeks to leverage the national social safety net, the Baxnaano programme, to expand the available set of social protection instruments.

A Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) programme would enable a multi-sectoral approach under the umbrella of social protection to address chronic food insecurity, low levels of resilience and adaptive capacity of Somali households, representing a key building block for a sustainable pathway out of poverty and an inclusive rural transformation.

This could be achieved by layering productive components into other existing or upcoming social protection schemes. For example, as demonstrated through the FAO TCLP-pilot, leveraging transitional cash and livelihood support, village savings groups and strengthening agro-value chains provides a

Leveraging transitional cash and livelihood support, village savings groups and strengthening agro-value chains provides a cost-effective approach to drive socioeconomic empowerment through a bottom-up approach.

cost-effective approach to drive socioeconomic empowerment through a bottom-up approach, reducing household reliance on humanitarian aid through livelihood diversification. The approach also had multiplier effects on the local economy, through increased production and increased capacities to engage in economic activities.

The approach enhanced crop diversification, which enabled farming households to spread production risks over a broader range of crops, reducing the financial risks associated with shocks.

The FAO pilot generated important lessons on leveraging social protection for nexus programming in the context of agriculture and food emergencies in terms of preparedness, anticipation, response and recovery. For example, the end-line evaluation provided robust evidence that beneficiaries were significantly better able to smooth consumption patterns and sustain their adaptive capacities. The approach enhanced crop diversification, which enabled farming households to spread production risks over a broader range of crops, reducing the financial risks associated with shocks. And more broadly, a key learning for future policy and programming is that humanitarian interventions can be used to develop pathways for developmental/productive interventions, by using social protection approaches.



Strengthening shock-responsive and early warning systems in Karamoja region, Uganda



PROJECT SYMBOL
UNJP/UGA/061/EC



DURATION
2020 – 2024



PROJECT TITLE
Strengthening shock responsive systems
in Karamoja



BUDGET
USD 3 540 000

CONTEXT

In 2021, Uganda was ranked 173 (out of 185) in the ND-GAIN Country Index (which summarizes a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges in combination with its readiness to improve resilience), meaning that Uganda is very vulnerable, yet unprepared, to address climate change effects. There are also significant variations in readiness within the country. For example, Karamoja is one of the poorest regions of Uganda and is especially vulnerable to the impacts of multiple shocks and stresses which have a detrimental impact on an already vulnerable population, within a context of protracted crisis. These include droughts, floods and various pests and diseases. Desert locust swarms also continue to pose a significant risk to food security and agriculture-based livelihoods, and the desert locust invasion in 2020 was described as the worst in 25 years (FAO, 2021) – Karamoja was the worst hit of all the vulnerable regions. An FAO-led assessment of the impacts of the invasive pest in 2020 revealed that 56 percent of households ate only one meal a day, and in a bad season the proportion of households would increase to 88 percent; 36 percent of households were employing emergency coping strategies (sale of house or land, begging and engaging in illegal income generating activities) and 183 000 people were considered severely food insecure (FAO, 2021f).

The Government of Uganda has put in place a number of policies and measures to address these risks as evidenced in the National Social Protection Policy (NSSP), the National Food and Nutrition Policy (FNP), the National Disaster Preparedness and Management Policy (NDPMP) and the National Climate Policy (NCP). However, specific

challenges persist, such as a lack of shock-responsive social protection elements in the NSPP; weak structures for co-production and sharing of accurate, timely, reliable and actionable early warning information; limited capacities at local levels to use Early Warning information for planning and decision-making; fragmented coordination and governance mechanisms to guide the process from early warning trigger to anticipatory action and early social protection response; and limited capacity to manage the impacts of increased seasonal variability at local level (FAO, 2020b).

Desert locust swarms also continue to pose a significant risk to food security and agriculture-based livelihoods, and the desert locust invasion in 2020 was described as the worst in 25 years.





FAO INTERVENTION

A project to strengthen the Government of Uganda's capacity to reduce, anticipate and rapidly respond to the effects of shocks and sustain climate-resilient rural development

FAO (funded by the EU and in collaboration with the Department of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Management of the Office of the Prime Minister and WFP) implemented a project to strengthen the Government of Uganda's capacity to reduce, anticipate and rapidly respond to the effects of shocks and sustain climate-resilient rural development.

Social protection, early warning and anticipatory action efforts converged around a common intention to mitigate the impacts of shocks and stresses on vulnerable people in Karamoja region. The project established a multi-hazard early warning system in all nine Karamoja districts, and local government officers received training and technical support to collect, analyse and disseminate early warning information. This also enables social protection programmes to utilize forecasts and early warning information to improve the delivery of assistance to individuals, households and communities, to mitigate the impacts of covariate shocks. Additionally, the project built linkages to FAO's Farmer Field Schools (FFS) to ensure increased production, skills and higher incomes post-implementation of social assistance (in line with the NSSP).



ACHIEVEMENTS

- Through the project, FAO supported government to establish and operate a Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) that includes, drought, flooding, crop and animal pests and diseases. Further, FAO conducted trainings and technical workshops with Extension Officers and Parish Chiefs on collecting early warning and impact information, and conducted trainings for national and local government partners on early warning information analysis/interpretation, plant clinics, livestock pests, disease hazards, livestock emergency guidelines and standards (LEGS) and other topics.
- MHEW bulletins were produced and disseminated, ensuring that the communities and other stakeholders received early warning and anticipatory action messages to act on. For example, the bulletins informed various government (social protection and emergency) interventions and the communities utilized the early warning messages to plan their activities. The dissemination strategy utilized different modalities, including through district extension workers who disseminated early warning advice through Farmer Field Schools (FFS), enhancing the reach of early warning information at the community level.
- FAO in partnership with MAAIF implemented plant clinics in Karamoja subregion, to promote the delivery of plant health advice to farmers and facilitate the monitoring of pest and disease prevalence, and the reporting of new pests and diseases. This supported both the provision and uptake of early warning information, as well as the formulation and implementation of anticipatory action for both extension workers and farmers.



KEY LESSONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The Government of Uganda (GoU) is committed to ensuring that all its citizens have enough nutritious food, and through the NSSP and national social protection programmes demonstrated their strong commitment to reach the most vulnerable. However, there has been a need to shift from a reactive approach to a forward-looking one. For this purpose, the GoU, FAO, WFP and the EU partnered to mainstream Early Warning and Anticipatory Action within key policies, processes and institutions, including disaster risk management and social protection. FAO leveraged its expertise on early warning information, climate forecasting and anticipatory action, while WFP leveraged its expertise on safety nets and emergency response capacity, to bring out their comparative strengths and maximize the benefit to communities at risk of shocks.

FAO leveraged its expertise on early warning information, climate forecasting and anticipatory action

By fostering linkages between anticipatory action and social protection, more sustainable solutions can be developed, thereby reducing the need for ad hoc or parallel humanitarian programming. For instance, Multi-Hazard Early Warning System bulletins can be integrated into social protection systems to support anticipatory action approaches, thereby facilitating programme expansion and/or adaptation.



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Boosting livelihoods resilience and empowering rural communities to be advocates of social protection in Kenya and Malawi



PROJECT SYMBOL
FMM/GLO/163/MUL



DURATION
2022 – 2023



PROJECT TITLE
Boosting Livelihoods Resilience, Response and Recovery from COVID-19 challenges in Southern and East Africa



BUDGET
USD 700 000

CONTEXT

Both Kenya and Malawi grapple with the challenges of entrenched and persistent rural poverty. The Kenya Integrated Budget and Household Survey (KIBHS) indicates that the poverty rate in rural areas decreased from 52 percent in 2005/2006 to 40 percent in 2015, but poverty rates in rural areas remain higher than the national average. In Malawi, about 58 percent of rural households are poor (World Bank, 2023) and the prevalence of under-five stunting stands at 34 percent (Malawi National Statistical Office, 2020). Measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 disrupted markets for agricultural inputs and outputs, reducing mobility and undermining employment and income opportunities in the rural on-farm and off-farm sectors. This had a negative effect on the livelihoods, incomes, food-security and nutrition for the rural poor. In June 2020, 80 percent of rural households in Malawi reported having experienced a decline in income since the start of the pandemic. In Kenya, 68 percent of smallholder farmers reported that they had to reduce consumption due to decreasing incomes.

Compounded by the effects of COVID-19, climate change and climate variability has emerged as a serious threat in both countries, disrupting agricultural production, food security, farm incomes and water resources. Notably, climate change is disproportionately impacting those living in poverty, not least small-scale farmers, pastoralists and fisheries-dependent communities, who are also among those that are least able to adapt to the changing climate (FAO, 2021b).

Climate change and climate variability has emerged as a serious threat in both countries, disrupting agricultural production, food security, farm incomes and water resources.

Against this backdrop, social protection plays a key role in mitigating the risk of climate change for rural populations. Social protection can reduce vulnerability and reliance on negative coping strategies in the event of climate shocks, provide a stepping stone towards climate-resilient livelihoods and supports inclusive disaster preparedness and responses. As such, expanding social protection coverage to small-scale farmers, pastoralists and fisher folk is necessary for achieving an inclusive rural transformation; ensuring that no one is left behind; maximizing the economic and social benefits for these communities; and guaranteeing environmental sustainability. However, Kenya and Malawi do not have specific social protection programmes that target the unique needs of farmer and fishing communities. More broadly, social protection delivery in rural areas (across Africa) has faced challenges due to the relatively limited coverage of services and weaker institutional

structures. In this context, rural community-based organisations become essential for the implementation of rights-based social protection and advocating for the expansion of coverage. Further, by combining social protection interventions with increased access to social, economic and early warning services, interventions can better empower poor small-scale family farmers and fisher folk to thrive economically in the context of a changing climate.

Rural community-based organisations become essential for the implementation of rights-based social protection and advocating for the expansion of coverage.

FAO INTERVENTION

FAO implemented a project based on community engagement, to expand coverage and pave the way to more inclusive and participatory social protection processes and decision-making.

With funding from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, FAO implemented a project based on community engagement, to expand coverage and pave the way to more inclusive and participatory social protection processes and decision-making. The project was implemented in close partnership with the responsible Ministries and Directorates and embedded in the Government's national social protection systems,⁹ and has supported communities to understand and access their right to social protection. Further, rural community-based organizations (CBOs) were supported to engage with central and sub-national government agencies on issues related to expanding access to adequate social protection and complementary services (social and productive/market-oriented services and early warning information) to rural farmer and fishing communities impacted by climate change.¹⁰

- 9 FAO collaborated closely with different government actors. Especially, FAO Malawi implemented the project in partnership with the Department of Fisheries within the Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change through a Letter of Agreement, and with the Department of Poverty Reduction and Social Protection under the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. FAO Kenya implemented the project in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection's National Social Protection Secretariat, and worked with line Directorates including Fisheries, Livestock Production, Social Services, Environment and Forestry and the National Drought Management Authority. FAO Kenya also implemented the sub-programme in partnership with Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse Kenya (Vsf-Suisse - Kenya) through a Letter of Agreement.
- 10 In Kenya, the counties of Busia and Isiolo were selected for implementation as residents mainly derive their livelihood from crop farming, fishing and livestock rearing which could be leveraged and offered entrepreneurial opportunities for women and youth in various agri-value chains; in Malawi, the districts of Karonga, Nkhata Bay, Salima and Mangochi were selected because they are key lakeshore districts accounting for the largest community in the fisheries sub-sector.



ACHIEVEMENTS

The sub-programme directly reached over 20 000 beneficiaries and raised awareness of 146 community organizations on available social protection programmes and associated entitlements, registration procedures and referral mechanisms. The organisations were also trained to engage in policy dialogue and social accountability action on social protection. To cite a few notable achievements:

- In November 2022 in Malawi, a participatory and demand-driven social protection needs and capacity assessment of vulnerable groups was conducted, which revealed a number of barriers that hinder fisher-folks from accessing social protection. The communities especially emphasised lack of sensitization of community leaders and CBOs on the social protection programmes, poor coordination among the actors involved with implementing the programmes and lack of transparency in the selection process of the targeted households. The assessment also revealed important opportunities, and the fishing communities called for public awareness and training on social protection.
- Following the assessment conducted in Malawi, FAO organized a country-level learning event (moderated in local languages) on social protection, which increased the community members' awareness of their rights in regard to social protection, the available social protection programmes and associated entitlements, registration procedures and referral mechanisms. The event was attended by representatives from 37 CBOs and government representatives responsible for the implementation of social protection and provided a venue for discussion between the duty-bearers and rights-holders.
- Next to providing training and capacity-building on social protection, the project had a strong focus on working with cooperatives and rural communities to improve the productivity and profitability of households in agriculture, livestock management and fisheries in a sustainable climate-smart manner: notably conservation agriculture, climate-smart agriculture and sustainable aquaculture. For instance, in Kenya the project has involved building capacity in six separate value chains.¹¹ The project trained 45 community facilitators as Trainer of Trainers (TOTs), and these subsequently trained members of 100 CBOs from these value chains on climate-smart agriculture, early warning systems, and social protection, among other subjects. In Malawi, the sub-programme strengthened communities' financial linkages with financial service providers (FSPs) by conducting dialogue sessions, which involved the participation of 746 (167 male, 579 female) members of 51 VSLAs in the four target districts.¹² In these interactive sessions, FSPs representatives had the opportunity to share information regarding the products they offer to community groups, including VSLA members, and the respective requirements for accessing credit. These community-based approaches provide effective support to community members to enhance and diversify livelihoods in the context of climate change, while simultaneously helping them to understand their rights and access social protection.

11 Beekeeping, fish farming, gums and resins, tree planting, poultry keeping and black soldier fly farming.

12 Karonga, Nkatha Bay, Mangochi and Salima.



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Consultations with Tisunge Village Savings and Loans Group in Nkhata Bay, Malawi, on existing social protection programs, entitlements and registration procedures.



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Community capacity-building sessions on social protection organized in Isiolo, Kenya, with the Tonyoutu Women Group.



KEY LESSONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The project illustrates a comprehensive, cost-effective, approach for enhancing rights-based social protection and livelihoods for vulnerable pastoralists, livestock breeders and fisher folks in areas of Kenya and Malawi affected by climate change, by leveraging the role that rural community-based organizations play in advocating for access to social protection. Inclusive community-based approaches can better ensure that programmes are adapted to the specific needs of the households that they intend to reach and that the households are aware of their rights and entitlements. In Kenya and Malawi, CBOs were able to participate in planning and decision-making right from the start, which among other things helped to better adapt the interventions to the seasonality of agricultural livelihoods and the impacts of COVID-19; and trainings and information sessions on social protection increased rightsholders understanding of their rights to social protection, available programs

Inclusive community-based approaches can better ensure that programmes are adapted to the specific needs of the households that they intend to reach

and the administrative processes. Combining social protection interventions with increased access to early warning information and sustainable livelihoods further increased the impact on reducing rural poverty and climate change adaptation. This is critical for laying the basis for more inclusive economic development and resilience-building pathways.

Promoting resilient livelihoods and the economic potential of the rural poor and vulnerable in Ethiopia



PROJECT SYMBOL

GCP/ETH/102/EC



DURATION

2018 – 2021



PROJECT TITLE

Support the Government of Ethiopia to enhance food security information, national social protection and disaster risk management systems.



BUDGET

USD 4 400 000

CONTEXT

Ethiopia's vulnerability to climate change has been a reality for decades and the country has a long-standing history of large-scale food insecurity. Whilst the two-year conflict in northern Ethiopia has ended, security challenges exist in some parts of the country. Ethiopia continues to face a humanitarian crisis attributable to climate shocks, disease outbreaks, conflict and insecurity, aggravated by economic and financial challenges. Notably, the 2024 Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) requires more than USD three billion to target over 15 million people, including four million IDPs (OCHA, 2024).

To support the most vulnerable, while simultaneously reducing the risks related to climate-related disasters, the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) launched the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in 2005. The aim was to mitigate extreme effects of severe drought by providing regular support to households experiencing chronic food insecurity, leaving the humanitarian response to address the needs of a smaller number of people with acute needs as and when required (Government of Ethiopia, 2020). Since then, PSNP has progressed through different phases, evolving from a more irregular relief response to becoming a social protection system, and is now in its fifth phase (PSNP5).

The PSNP has significantly contributed towards addressing extreme negative effects of severe drought, alongside other efforts. FAO's impact evaluations have revealed that PSNP beneficiaries are less likely to be food insecure and

Ethiopia continues to face a humanitarian crisis attributable to climate shocks, disease outbreaks, conflict and insecurity, aggravated by economic and financial challenges.

experience harvest losses in the aftermath of droughts, and the beneficial effects of the programme spill over to community peers (Scognamillo, Mastrorillo and Ignaciuk, 2022). However, specific gaps reduced the ability of the programme to adequately impact on resilience. For example, the revision of the livelihood packages was too small to facilitate asset creation and hence resilience building. In some cases, the livelihood support lacked the necessary extension, advisory services, and access to adequate finance (FAO, 2023a).





FAO INTERVENTION

FAO (with funding from the EU) implemented a project to contribute towards timely and accurate evidence-based decision-making, to enhance cost-effective, resilient and sustainable food security and nutrition solutions for vulnerable households living in pastoral and agropastoral areas in Ethiopia. The project strengthened the PSNP integrated livelihood productive transfers by supporting evidence-based graduation, and effective market linkages, to enhance economic inclusion of PSNP beneficiaries.

A key focus of the project was also to enhance the programme's shock-responsive capacity by assessing the PSNP contingency response process, and the response packages, to support the design of an improved shock-responsive model and specific cash+ packages. FAO supported the Government to design a comprehensive shock-responsive framework, a scale-up plan and capacity-building in selected regions.



ACHIEVEMENTS

- As part of the strategy to pilot an improved climate and shock-responsive social protection system in selected Woredas, the project implemented cash transfers to PSNP and non-PSNP beneficiaries using the PSNP delivery system for targeting and determining the cash value. Further, a cash+ package was tailored to specifically support poor and vulnerable households affected by desert locust, drought and COVID-19. A total of 3,200 households affected by the desert locust invasion and drought in the Somali and Oromia regions received the cash transfers, and Post Distribution Monitoring and the Endline Evaluation showed that they were better able to smooth their food consumption and avoid distress coping mechanisms. The cash also enabled savings and investments.
- To facilitate stronger linkages and impacts on livelihoods enhancement, FAO conducted a Livelihood Effectiveness Assessment¹³ that provided evidence and recommendations for developing a new livelihood transfer approach. The assessment also recommended an increase in transfer value from USD 200 to USD 300 in the form of a livelihoods grant to PSNP beneficiaries. The Government accepted these proposals, resulting in 2,800 households in Somali and Oromia receiving a package of USD 300, livelihood trainings, business development support, follow-up, and mentoring, which allowed the recipients to engage in businesses such as small ruminants' farming, and keeping dairy cows for consuming/selling milk to nearby towns, and donkeys for transportation services and petty trade between their villages and nearby towns. Significant improvements were also documented relating to households' food and nutrition security, and in building livelihoods that are more resilient.

13 The study's objectives were to identify the drivers of livelihood improvement at the household level, better understand the relevance and adequacy of the livelihood services, examine possible livelihood packages and partnership and provide recommendations and strategic options to maximize the contribution of the livelihoods component to graduation/exit



KEY LESSONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

PSNP is the government's flagship social protection programme that has successfully managed to mitigate negative impacts of climate change, reduce poverty, save lives, and prevent people from falling deeper into poverty. However, it has been less successful in building resilient livelihoods and ensuring the sustainability of adaptive capacities through household asset and livestock accumulation. For this reason, FAO supported the implementation of complementary livelihood activities, and generated evidence to inform how social protection policies and programmes can enhance economic inclusion and respond to the effects of climate change.

FAO has continued to partner with the Government of Ethiopia to make the social protection system more climate-smart and shock-responsive, while enhancing the linkages with livelihoods. Through funding from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), FAO is currently implementing a project to support the foundation of a transformative resilience-building approach, by implementing inclusive livelihood and business models through productive social protection, SMEs business upgrading, and adopting relevant technologies and best practices to enhance productivity and the quality of end products. The intervention is selects PSNP5 livelihood Woredas and beneficiaries, and follows the PSNP5 Livelihood pathways.



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Making social protection systems more inclusive and expanding coverage to informal agrifood systems workers in Côte d'Ivoire



PROJECT SYMBOL

TCP/RAF/3703



DURATION

2019 – 2021



PROJECT TITLE

AU Support: Social Protection, School Feeding and Rural Youth Employment



BUDGET

USD 148 000¹⁴

CONTEXT

Côte d'Ivoire has been one of the fastest-growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa, with real GDP per capita growth averaging 5.5 percent between 2015 and 2019, leading to a decline in poverty from 44 percent in 2015 to 39.5 percent in 2019. However, as a result of COVID-19 about half a million people were pushed back into poverty, driven by job losses and lower incomes for informal sector workers. Inequality is also high, limiting an inclusive recovery from the pandemic, and regional disparities are significant. Most notably, while poverty is declining in urban areas (where it stands at 24.7 percent), poverty remains high (around 55 percent) in rural areas (World Bank, 2022a). Women and other vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, informal workers and refugees are particularly affected.

The Social Protection sector in Côte d'Ivoire has seen substantial developments in recent years, and the Government's vision is enshrined in its National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS 2016–2020). Public health coverage has also seen large improvements, from 44 percent of the population covered in 2012 to 69 percent in 2019, and the Universal Health Coverage (Couverture Maladie Universelle - CMU) has been made compulsory. The objective of the CMU is to guarantee that everyone

residing in Côte d'Ivoire has access to quality health services and healthcare at lower costs (Perin et al., 2022). Yet, as of 2021, total expenditure on social protection excluding health stood at just 1.2 percent (ILO, 2021) and only 6 percent of households were covered by social insurance institutions (ILO, 2021a). Informal sector workers especially lack social protection. A lack of legal entitlements to social protection due to the informal nature of their work, and limited and irregular resources, make it difficult for these workers to contribute to social protection schemes on a regular basis (FAO, 2019b). As agrifood system workers and rural women account for a considerable proportion of jobs in the informal sector, there is a need for targeted efforts to expand coverage among these groups. In fact, 94 percent of working women in Côte d'Ivoire are employed in the informal sector, mainly in the rural economy (Pettinotti and Calabrese, 2023).

¹⁴ The overall project consisted of three components with a grand total budget of USD 450 000, of which the social protection component stood for approximately USD 148 000.



FAO INTERVENTION

FAO in collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Côte d'Ivoire Ministry of Employment and Social Protection (MEPS), implemented a country-level pilot on engaging cooperatives and rural workers' organizations to improve delivery and access to social protection.

FAO supported the MEPS and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) to organize a national consultation to examine ways to enhance social protection delivery for the rural poor and marginalized groups, resulting in the development of a government action plan to work through cooperatives to enable the effective expansion of social protection. Further, FAO conducted studies on the role of cooperatives and rural workers' organizations in improving and expanding social

FAO piloted a variety of activities to address the identified gaps, providing practical demonstrations and lessons for dialogue and exchanges at regional level.

protection coverage in Côte d'Ivoire, and how governments and cooperatives can operationalize this support. Finally, FAO piloted a variety of activities to address the identified gaps, providing practical demonstrations and lessons for dialogue and exchanges at regional level.



ACHIEVEMENTS

- Through the pilot, intensive training was provided to 137 persons, including cooperative leaders and members, enhancing their capabilities in cooperative management, social protection, and universal health coverage.
- Cooperatives, including women's groups, received direct support, improving their operational efficacy and setting a precedent for further cooperative involvement in social protection.
- By bringing on board the Bureau de Vente des Producteurs (BVP), the BVP could collect Universal Health Coverage (CMU) fees and social protection contributions on behalf of its members. This innovation expanded coverage of contributory social protection programmes to members of BVP's 150 organizations, constituting a significant number of informal rural workers who were previously not covered by social protection.
- The pilot project demonstrated an effective approach for advancing social protection for rural informal workers and making the social protection system more inclusive, also promoting gender-sensitive and responsive social protection systems as the majority of women in Côte d'Ivoire are employed in the informal rural economy.





KEY LESSONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

A variety of social insurance schemes exist in Côte d'Ivoire, including the National Social Insurance Fund (Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance Sociale – CNPS) and the Social Scheme for Independent Workers (Régime Social des Travailleurs Indépendants). The Couverture Maladie Universelle (CMU) is mandatory by law for all citizens. Nonetheless, practical challenges for registering and enrolling rural workers persist, for instance limitations in terms of adjusting the contribution fee in line with informal workers' income, which varies according to the season. To facilitate the registration and inclusion of these workers, the pilot project utilized collective membership systems (mostly producer associations and agricultural cooperatives) to sign collective social protection agreements with social security institutions. These organisations were then able to undertake several tasks, including registering their affiliates and collecting social protection contributions

on behalf of members. Special mechanisms to facilitate the administrative registration of households that lacked some of the documents needed to join the social protection schemes were also set up through the pilot project.

Given the achievements and lessons learned of the FAO-pilot, MEPS has expressed an interest in scaling up the approach to other rural areas across the country. Further, the government of Côte d'Ivoire has set up an inter-ministerial steering committee and a technical committee led by the MEPS to oversee the project and support the expansion of the programme across ministries. The pilot in Côte d'Ivoire provides a blueprint for other countries in Africa for how to make social protection systems more inclusive, gender-sensitive and appropriate for (informal) agrifood systems workers.



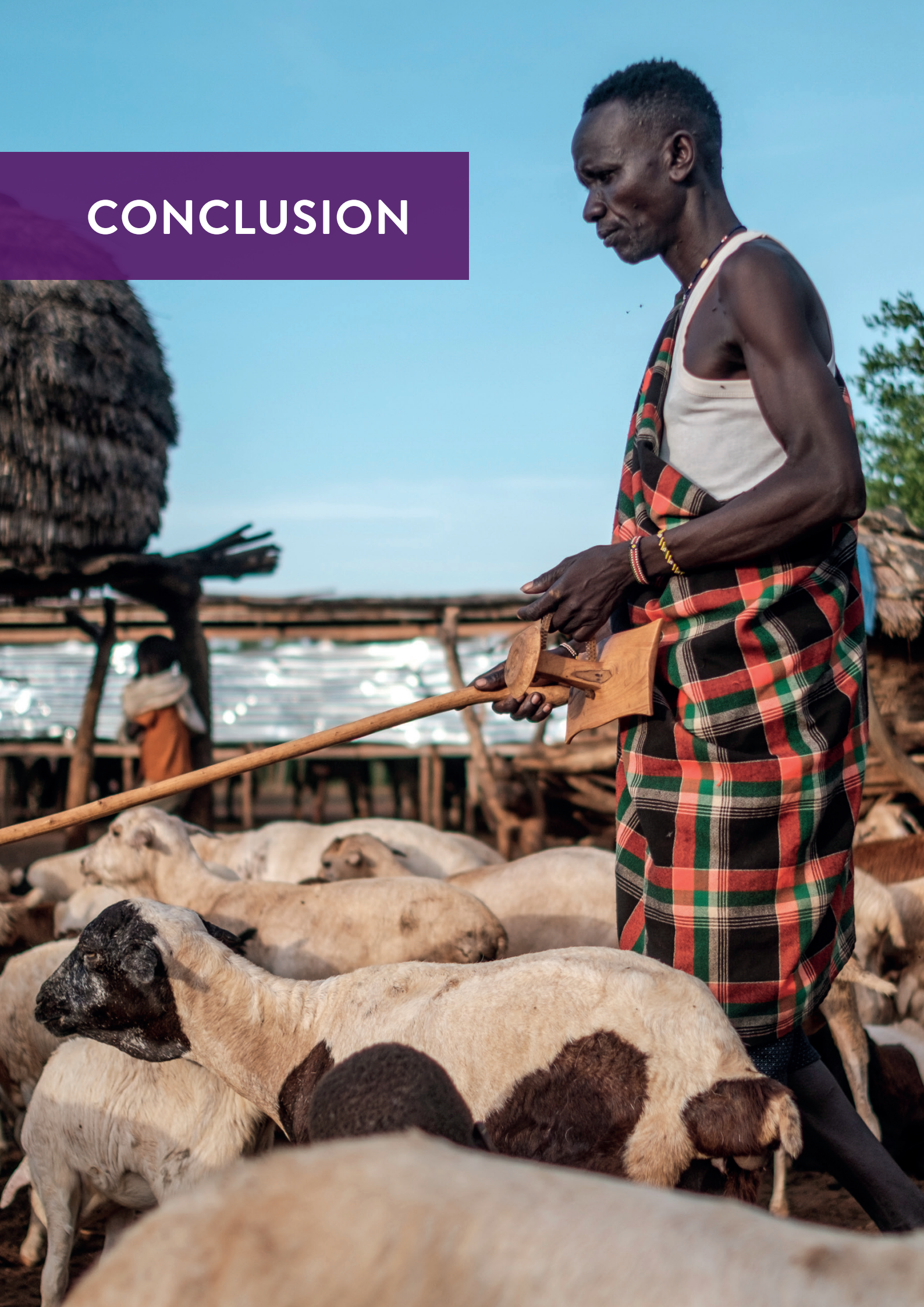
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Cooperative's members enrolment to CMU in Côte d'Ivoire



CONCLUSION



Social protection plays a key role in mitigating and removing risks facing rural populations such as poverty, hunger, malnutrition and exposure to climate change and other shocks. Social protection can also promote social cohesion and gender equality, and is a driver for human capital development, inclusive economic growth and social justice.

FAO's work in social protection in Africa, in close partnership with the national governments, communities and other partners, and centred around the integration of agricultural and rural development, has provided cost-effective and efficient interventions for tackling the intertwined issues of poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, and the impacts of climate change. This report has provided illustrative case studies of these approaches. To summarize a few key take aways:

The critical role of agriculture in the livelihoods of the poor in Africa calls for an integration of social protection with agricultural and rural development, to achieve sustainable agrifood systems transformation.



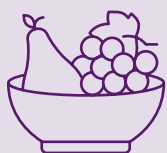
The critical role of agriculture in the livelihoods of the poor in Africa calls for an integration of social protection with agricultural and rural development, to achieve sustainable agrifood systems transformation. For example, to increase the impact of cash transfer programmes (both in the short and medium term), social protection interventions should be linked with complementary approaches and services, such as agricultural inputs and extension services, to promote efficiencies and specialization in on-farm activities, technical support for innovative non-farm activities, and capacity development of value chains, among others. Enhanced knowledge and skills in climate-smart agriculture also enable households to better adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

The impact of climate change and other shocks in Africa have revealed the importance of embedding climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies in social protection systems.



Through investments in anticipatory action, EWS and resilience-building, these systems can be designed to effectively support immediate relief efforts, as well as long-term recovery, while strengthening the adaptive capacities for sustainability. FAO's work has been pivotal during times of crisis, providing critical support to vulnerable populations and contributing to their recovery and long-term resilience-building – including transitioning populations from humanitarian assistance to social protection systems in a nexus approach. In Africa, FAO has also leveraged its expertise on early warning information and climate forecasting for social protection policy and programming. By linking early warning and anticipatory action approaches with flexible social protection systems, communities and governments can better anticipate and respond to climate disasters.

Social protection systems should be anchored in a comprehensive understanding of determinants of good nutrition to promote healthy diets through agrifood systems.



For example, linking agriculture with nutrition-sensitive social protection (for instance through HGSF schemes) can provide an opportunity to simultaneously enhance nutrition and food security, school attendance and learning outcomes, create market opportunities for local farmers, and generate multiplier effects on the local economy. Linking nutrition-sensitive social protection with agriculture also enables the development of inclusive food value chains, which maximize benefits for stakeholders involved in the process and play an important role in strengthening sustainable national food systems.

Community-based organizations play a key role in supporting implementation and advocating for increased coverage and adequacy of social protection schemes among rural populations.



Community-based approaches can substantially enhance beneficiaries' voice in decision-making, ownership, sustainability and ensure that social protection programmes are rights-based and well-suited to the needs of the beneficiaries. Cooperatives and other CBOs are also key actors for extending social protection to agrifood systems workers in rural areas, including through collective membership systems allowing informal rural workers to formalize agreements with social protection institutions in a collective manner.

To maximize the impacts of social protection on rural poverty and inequality, programmes must ensure that women in rural communities are not just beneficiaries but active participants and leaders in the agricultural value chain to optimally contribute to food systems transformation.



Women disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid care and domestic duties, perpetuating gender inequalities. Thus, it is crucial that social protection policies are tailored to address gender-specific challenges, ensuring access to factors of production, basic social services including education, healthcare, as well as equal access to economic opportunities. Further tackling cultural, societal and legal barriers will promote gender equality and parity. Across Africa, FAO prioritizes the inclusion of women as the primary recipient of programme benefits and incorporates gender-specific complementary actions to address the underlying drivers of poverty and exclusion. This includes designing interventions that address livelihood needs of women (knowledge, skills, access to land and productive resources) and their agency to meaningfully contribute to agrifood transformation (decision-making power, position and status in society) positively impacting their social relations and social structures.

Embracing technological advancements can significantly enhance the delivery and effectiveness of social protection.



Innovations in digital payment systems, mobile technology for information dissemination and data-driven approaches for targeting and monitoring can greatly improve the coverage and impact of programmes. FAO has made great strides in strengthening social protection registries and information systems, to expand the delivery of benefits and services to diverse populations. One notable advancement is the development and linkages of farmer registries (as well as registries of those working in sectors such as fisheries and forestry) to social protection systems, enabling the delivery of tailored/differentiated support to small-scale food producers and vulnerable rural populations.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) anticipates that the case studies documented in this report will offer valuable insights into the integration of social protection initiatives with agricultural and rural development strategies. The report aims to guide FAO staff and stakeholders towards more effective approaches in Africa. We hope that these case studies will serve as catalysts for action, motivating stakeholders across the continent to emulate successful models and collaborate towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In conclusion, FAO underscores the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing among stakeholders. By leveraging the insights provided in this report, and building upon successful interventions, let us strive to build resilience through social protection and inclusive agrifood systems that leave no one behind.

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