



# Social protection for the poor and vulnerable

## A foundation for reducing hunger and malnutrition

### Key message

**Social protection is crucial for accelerating hunger reduction.** First, it can protect the most vulnerable, who do not benefit from economic growth. Second, social protection, properly structured, can contribute directly to more rapid economic growth through human resource development and strengthened ability of the poor, especially smallholders, to manage risks and adopt improved technologies with higher productivity.

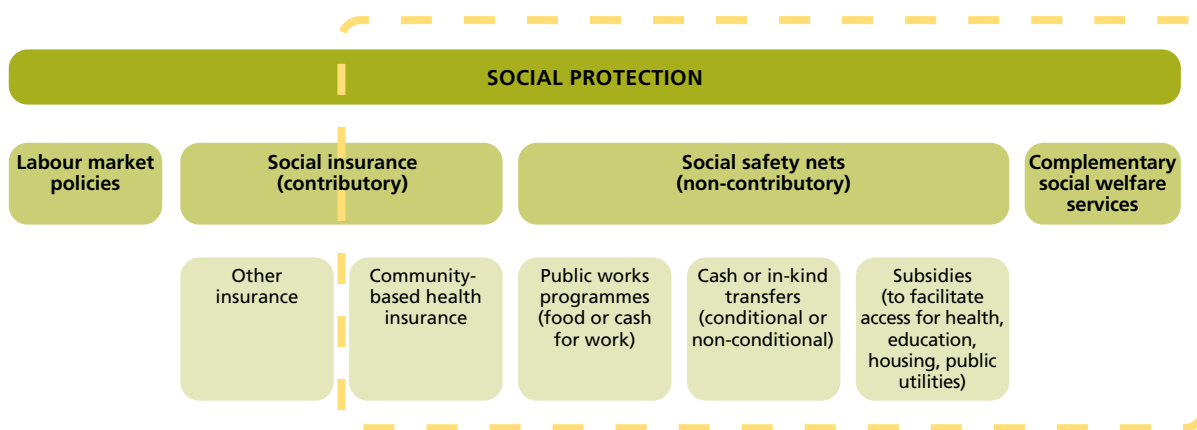
**E**quitable and strong economic growth based on growth of the agricultural and rural economy of low-income countries goes a long way in enhancing access to food and improving nutrition of the very poor. However, some of the changes made possible through economic growth take time to bear fruit and the neediest population groups often cannot take immediate advantage of the opportunities it generates. Therefore, reducing hunger requires specific attention to both short- and longer-term

interventions, often referred to as the “twin-track approach”.<sup>54</sup> Social protection instruments can establish a bridge between the two tracks,<sup>55</sup> because they play a crucial role in ensuring that economic growth contributes to reducing hunger and malnutrition as rapidly as possible. Social protection contributes in two distinct ways. First, it can help countries to reduce undernourishment more rapidly than would otherwise occur. Second, if properly structured, it can contribute directly to more rapid economic growth. It is helpful to conceptually distinguish these two contributions; however, any given policy or programme can make contributions in both of these areas simultaneously.

A wide range of policies and instruments fall within the remit of a social protection system (Figure 18). Safety nets, or social assistance/transfers normally targeted at the poor and not requiring a financial contribution from the beneficiaries, are only one component of social protection. In addition, social protection includes aspects of labour market policies and insurance options, such as contributory pensions and health insurance, as well as aspects of sectoral policies for education, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS and agriculture.<sup>56</sup>

FIGURE 18

Royal Government of Cambodia’s National Social Protection Strategy



Note: The dashed rectangle in the diagram indicates those social protection measures that are targeted towards the poor.  
Source: Cambodian Council of Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD). 2011. *National Social Protection Strategy for the Poor and Vulnerable (2011–2015)*.



## Safety nets to improve food security and nutrition

Safety nets aimed at the poor and smallholder farmers have traditionally been non-contributory, requiring no financial contributions by the beneficiaries. There is a broad spectrum of such instruments, including transfers (conditional or non-conditional, cash or in-kind), subsidies and public works. However, an increasing number of governments are using contributory micro-insurance schemes in health and/or agriculture for the poor. The recent national social protection strategy developed by the Cambodian Government prioritizes provision of safety nets for the poor and vulnerable, but also includes community-based health insurance requiring financial contributions by the poor, as one part of social protection (Figure 18).

**Transfers** can be delivered directly as cash or in-kind, or increasingly as a hybrid of cash and in-kind transfers (see Box 6). Cash transfer programmes provide people with money, while vouchers include the provision of coupons to purchase a fixed quantity of food (commodity-based vouchers) or food for a fixed monetary value (value-based vouchers) and can be electronic or paper-based. Vouchers can also be used to target agricultural input support, such as vouchers for improved seeds, fertilizer, or access to services, more effectively.

Food and cash distributions can be conditional or unconditional. Conditional transfers are frequently based on beneficiaries complying with certain conditions, such as

### BOX 6

#### Designing transfers to promote women's social and economic empowerment

A substantial and growing body of evidence has shown that increasing resources in the hands of women (rather than men) has a positive impact on family welfare, in particular children's health (child survival and nutrition rates) and education.<sup>1</sup>

- Evidence from Sri Lanka shows that household food consumption is more diversified when women have more control of household income.<sup>2</sup>
- In Brazil, the Bolsa Familia programme increased the labour participation of women by 16 percent between beneficiary and non-beneficiary households.<sup>3</sup> Cash transfers that put money directly in the hands of women have also increased women's status within the household (Brazil's Bolsa Familia<sup>4</sup>) and promoted their self-esteem and economic empowerment (Mexico's Progresa/Oportunidades programme<sup>5</sup>).
- The Social Cash Transfer Scheme in Malawi also reduced women and children's risk-coping activities such as engaging in transactional sex<sup>6</sup> or in hazardous child labour.
- Programmes conditional on child school attendance have also been shown to increase girls' school attendance in Nicaragua<sup>7</sup> and an evaluation of India's Mid-Day Meals Programme found that girls in the programme were 30 percent more likely to complete primary school.<sup>8</sup>

The type of food transferred can also make a difference in terms of relative impact on different household members. Evidence from an IFPRI study in Bangladesh showed that women's dietary energy intake increased relatively more when a less preferred staple (atta flour) was distributed, while men's dietary energy intake increased relatively more when the more preferred staple (rice) was distributed.<sup>9</sup>

In order to increase women's control over transfers, it may make sense in some circumstances to distribute transfers in the form of food, because in many societies food is seen as the domain of women. Women are therefore more likely to have control over the use of transfers of food, and of cash-like instruments tied to food.<sup>10</sup> Making transfers conditional on activities in women's domain, such as taking children to health clinics, can also ensure that a cash transfer is given to women as opposed to the household head (who is generally male). However, it is important that programmes take into consideration the time demands placed on women, because evidence shows that time constraints can affect nutritional outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

Sources: Please see notes on page 61.

attending health clinics, enrolment and attendance at school, or receiving nutrition education, thus implementing the twin-track approach of both short- and long-term objectives. Such conditional transfers include school-feeding (school meals, snacks such as high-energy biscuits and/or take-home rations that can be provided in the form of either food or cash) as well as health-based conditional cash or in-kind transfers (see Box 7). In a recent study, the authors argued that while school feeding programmes can influence the education outcomes of schoolchildren and, to a lesser degree, augment nutrition for families of beneficiaries, they are best viewed as transfer programmes that can provide both a social safety net and human capital investments.<sup>57</sup> The value transfer in school-feeding enhances the ability of households, including farmers, to cope with shocks and manage risks. Through greater levels of education it can lead to higher productivity and improved gender outcomes.<sup>58</sup>

Unconditional transfers include general food distribution, supplemental and emergency feeding and cash transfer programmes, usually targeted at vulnerable groups, but without requiring the recipients to undertake certain actions. Supplemental and emergency feeding targets pregnant and lactating women or children under two years of age within the “1 000 day” window of opportunity. Programmes may be preventive or palliative, determining whether it serves an insurance or assistance function.

**Subsidies** that affect prices paid by the poor can also act as indirect safety nets by augmenting household purchasing power through the sale of certain foods and agricultural inputs at lower prices. They are widely used in Bangladesh, India and throughout the Near East. Subsidies can be generalized (universal) or targeted and are often advocated as a way to protect the poor. Universal subsidies available to all are the easiest to administer and obtain the most political support. Critics argue, however, that universal subsidies are

### BOX 7

#### Are cash transfers enough to improve nutrition?

Whether or not cash transfers can achieve nutritional objectives is a much debated topic. For example, research on Indonesia has found that the income elasticity of some key micronutrients (e.g., iron, calcium, vitamin B<sub>1</sub>) was significantly higher during the 1997–98 crisis than in a normal year.<sup>1</sup> When staple food price shocks hit poor households, they will protect staple food consumption but are unable to protect dietary diversity, resulting in adverse effects on nutritional status.<sup>2</sup> Population groups most affected are those with the highest nutrient requirements, including young children, pregnant and lactating women and the chronically ill. As a result, marked increases in child wasting and child anaemia are often found to be the first consequences of food crises. Under such conditions, a simple cash transfer during a price spike (or income shock) may be enough to protect the consumption of some, but not all, essential micronutrients.

But the debate goes beyond the appropriateness of cash transfers during episodes of high food prices. In contexts where production, access and utilization are poor, concerns have been raised regarding whether or not cash transfers can have a positive impact on nutrition, as consumption of some key nutrients seems to be not particularly responsive to income.<sup>3</sup> Under these conditions, specific nutritional supplementation programmes are likely to be needed. Cash transfers are also unlikely to be appropriate to prevent growth failure for children under the age of two, when a highly nutrient-dense diet is required but may not be available in the local market.

Findings from the Productive Safety Nets Programme in Ethiopia on the impacts of food and cash transfers during a period of high food prices indicate that food transfers or “cash plus food” packages are superior to un-indexed cash transfers when it comes to self-reported food security.<sup>4</sup> The authors conclude that any social protection programme that aims to enhance or protect household food security must introduce mechanisms that buffer social transfers against shocks such as high food prices. Thus, during a price spike, commodity-based vouchers may be more appropriate than cash vouchers.

A further study, on the impact of a cash and food transfer pilot in post-tsunami Sri Lanka, found that cash-receiving households were more likely than food-receiving households to spend some of their resources on improving the diversity of their diets by buying more expensive cereals and greater amounts of meat, dairy products and processed foods.<sup>5</sup> The increased diversity in consumption was achieved at the expense of reduced consumption of the two basic staples – rice and wheat. These effects mainly occur among the poorest beneficiary households. However, work in progress in Niger, comparing food and cash transfers, shows that the majority of households prefer food, and that food-receiving households tend to have more diverse diets and less damaging coping strategies.

Sources: Please see notes on page 61.

generally regressive in that the benefit of the subsidy disproportionately reaches the rich rather than the poor (because the rich consume more than the poor in total), and that they are extremely expensive and crowd out spending on public goods that are essential for long-term economic growth. In 2008, for example, Egypt introduced additional bread subsidies with an annual cost of US\$2.5 billion.

Sometimes an attempt is made to design subsidies that are, in principle, open to all but are implicitly targeted to the poor because they are for goods consumed preferentially by the poor.<sup>59</sup> For example, the Tunisian Government has subsidized smaller cartons of milk that are typically bought by poorer households.<sup>60</sup> Subsidies that are implicitly targeted are similar to transfers, which were discussed earlier, but such subsidies can result in very high leakages to the non-poor. Depending on the product subsidized, it can also result in very low value transfers to the poor, and always requires the poor to have sufficient resources to buy the product in question.

### ■ Targeting and modalities are important

According to newly released World Bank data, safety nets are insufficient or non-existent in many developing countries. At least 60 percent of people in developing countries – and nearly 80 percent in the world's poorest countries – lack effective safety net coverage.<sup>61</sup> Recently, in the face of rising human-rights-based approaches to social protection, the universalist agenda has gained a strong voice advocating minimum levels of social protection for all.<sup>62</sup>

Scarcity of resources and the need to maximize cost-effectiveness, however, has meant that targeted safety nets within social protection remain relevant because the majority of financing of safety net programmes comes from international aid including official development assistance, grants and loans. The ability to raise revenue through domestic taxation is often limited, and when such sources do exist they are frequently diverted to other priority areas. According to one study, the return on investment in social protection cannot justify by itself a greater claim for limited

#### BOX 8

### Fighting malnutrition in urban areas: the pioneering food security system of Belo Horizonte

Belo Horizonte is the third-largest city in Brazil, with a population of about 2.5 million. In the early 1990s, about 38 percent of its inhabitants lived below the poverty line and close to 20 percent of children under the age of three suffered from malnutrition. The magnitude of this problem prompted the development of a multifaceted structural response by the government that successfully transformed the human right to foods that are adequate in both quantity and quality into reality.

The programme reduced child mortality by 60 percent and substantially influenced Brazil's national Zero Hunger Policy, using only around 2 percent of the city's annual budget. It has received awards from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and from the World Future Council (WFC). The overall system consists of more than 20 highly interconnected programmes that foster and complement one another. The key elements are:

- Central project management by means of a specially created department within the municipality.
- Supporting urban agriculture with community gardens in poor districts and with training workshops to promote successful cultivation.
- Provision of special sales outlets to commercial greengrocers in the most popular markets if they offer at least 25 healthy products at a fixed low price.

- Provision of market stalls to small-scale farmers from the surrounding area, so that they have a chance to sell directly to consumers.
- A nutrition information programme targeted to poorer areas of the city, including free cooking lessons. The programme is coordinated by a team consisting of employees from the departments for health, education, sports, social work and food security.
- Free school meals that supply fresh products with high nutritional value.
- Supply of affordable, healthy and nourishing meals for low-income citizens in so-called Public Restaurants, subsidized by the municipality. Belo Horizonte has five of these, providing 4 million meals a year. As people with average incomes can also eat there, the poor don't have the feeling of being stigmatized.

The food security system of Belo Horizonte could, with some adaptation, become a successful model for other cities around the world. Work will soon be starting to bring this approach to Cape Town, South Africa and other selected African city governments.

*Note:* For more information, see the World Future Council website ([www.worldfuturecouncil.org/3751.html](http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/3751.html)).

public funds as there are more productive forms of government spending.<sup>63</sup> For example, a typical economic internal rate of return for social protection projects is between 8 and 17 percent, while the median rate of return for all sectors is about 25 percent (for all World Bank projects across all sectors for which it was estimated over 2005–07).<sup>64</sup> What makes social protection more desirable than other forms of spending is their strong direct effect on poverty reduction, but these benefits are dependent on effective targeting.

It is widely recognized that the choice of the most appropriate modality depends on a proper assessment of context-specific factors. When choosing the delivery modality within public works programmes or non-contributory direct transfers, decision-makers should take into account a number of factors: the programme objectives (e.g. if there is a specific nutritional objective then specialized food products may be more appropriate than cash); the functioning of markets including the availability of food; the preferences of beneficiaries;<sup>65</sup> the cost-effectiveness of alternative modalities; and gender and the intra-household distribution of transfers.<sup>66</sup>

### ■ Impact of transfers on food security and nutrition

Most evidence on the impacts of social protection programmes in poor and middle income countries comes from conditional cash transfer programmes in Latin America, many of which have been rigorously evaluated.<sup>67</sup> While many of these programmes achieved short-term outcomes in terms of increased household food consumption, the impacts on nutrition, as measured by anthropometric outcomes<sup>68</sup> or reduced prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies, are mixed. Programmes in Mexico and Nicaragua showed improvements in child height, but in Brazil and Honduras hardly any effects on pre-school nutritional status were found. Improvements in iron status were observed in Mexico, but not in the other countries (Honduras and Nicaragua) where this outcome was studied.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the pathways through which these results occurred, and the role of different programming components, are unclear. An open question in this regard is whether it was the transfer itself or the conditionalities that drove the impact.



## Social protection and economic growth

Social protection and economic growth are closely interlinked, and each has effects on the other. Economic growth increases the financial and human resources available to support social protection: for example, developed countries, with higher levels of GDP per capita, usually have more comprehensive social security systems than do developing countries. Safety net programmes within social protection are also a key factor in driving economic growth. They can allow for the acquisition of the human capital (for both children and adults) that leads to increased productivity. They can buffer the poor from economic or climatic shocks, leading to investment in agriculture and greater adoption of improved technologies that increase farm income. In addition, they can contribute to the construction of infrastructure through public works programmes, thus providing public goods that are essential for increases in GDP per capita. Working together, social protection and economic growth provide essential building blocks for eliminating hunger worldwide.

### ■ Building human capital

Some research has been able to investigate the long-term effects of nutritional interventions in early childhood,

including the impact on nutrition outcomes, the pathways through which these occurred and the impact on adult economic productivity (see Box 9 on page 41). Evidence outside Latin America includes a study of the Child Support Grant in South Africa that found beneficiary children to be 3.5 cm taller as adults.<sup>70</sup>

These studies provide evidence of a causal link between undernutrition (as measured by stunting), schooling and adult wages through two main pathways. First, children who were well nourished grew up to be taller and stronger, increasing their ability to earn high wages at manual labour. Second, well-nourished children started school earlier and had fewer absences from school while enrolled, leading to improved cognitive skills and higher wages. The key message is that investments in early childhood nutrition can spur economic growth, as these investments have long-term effects on cognitive skills and productivity. Thus, social protection is about more than just providing welfare payments – it is also about driving economic growth by improving diets and raising levels of nutrition, reducing illness and absenteeism, improving cognitive skills, increasing the returns to education and the ability to do work. These features of social protection programmes are discussed next.

## BOX 9

**Nutritional interventions in the “1 000 day window” in Guatemala**

A study in Guatemala examined the direct effect of a nutrition intervention in early childhood on adult economic productivity. The study is based on data from 1 424 Guatemalan individuals (aged 25–42 years) between 2002 and 2004. They accounted for 60 percent of the 2 392 children (aged 0–7 years) who had been enrolled in a nutrition intervention study during 1969–77. In this initial study, two villages were randomly assigned a nutritious supplement (atole) for all children aged six months to three years and two villages were assigned a less-nutritious one (fresco). The outcome variables estimated in 2002–04 were annual income, hours worked, and average hourly wages from all economic activities.

The results suggest that receiving atole before the age of three years was associated with 46 percent higher hourly wages for men. There was also a tendency for hours worked to be reduced and for annual incomes to be greater for those who received atole, although the effect was not statistically significant (perhaps because of an insufficiently large sample). Ultimately children who did not suffer growth failure in the first three years had more years of schooling, scored higher on adult cognitive tests, were more likely to work in white collar jobs or as skilled labour, were less likely to live in poor households, and, for women, to have had fewer pregnancies, fewer miscarriages, and fewer stillbirths.

*Sources:* Please see notes on page 61.

**Risk, insurance and technology adoption**

Agriculture is inherently risky, and may be even more so in the future with an increasing frequency of extreme climate events. A farmer may do everything right but as a result of the vagaries of nature produce very little. For poor farmers growing familiar crop varieties, taking on new crops or new varieties may be beyond their tolerance for risk, given that failure may be catastrophic. Managing hazards and risks adequately and enabling the poor to adopt higher risk but also higher return strategies is an important dimension of enabling them to adopt better livelihood strategies that lead to an escape from poverty. Provision of good safety net programmes with clearly articulated, transparent and non-discriminatory eligibility mechanisms can facilitate this adoption process by providing a basic level of consumption below which they know they cannot fall.

A simple example may be a household with insecure land tenure living in a drought-prone area. Income profile A (Figure 19) represents a household growing cassava, a food crop that is drought-tolerant with a fairly short maturation period and is locally marketed. Income profile B represents one growing coffee, a long-gestation cash crop that is less drought-tolerant and is exported to world markets. The income from coffee is typically higher but carries greater risks – yield losses due to drought, potentially losing the land before the coffee plants reach maturity, or the harvest occurring at a trough in the international coffee price. Any one of these events (or worse, some combination) will result in the very low troughs in income profile B. The possibility of such troughs means that a household will be discouraged from adopting coffee growing without some protection against the troughs. Such risk aversion, while

understandable, will hinder the escape from hunger for the individual household, as well as slowing agricultural growth that has the potential to provide multiplier effects throughout the economy and promote food security more broadly.

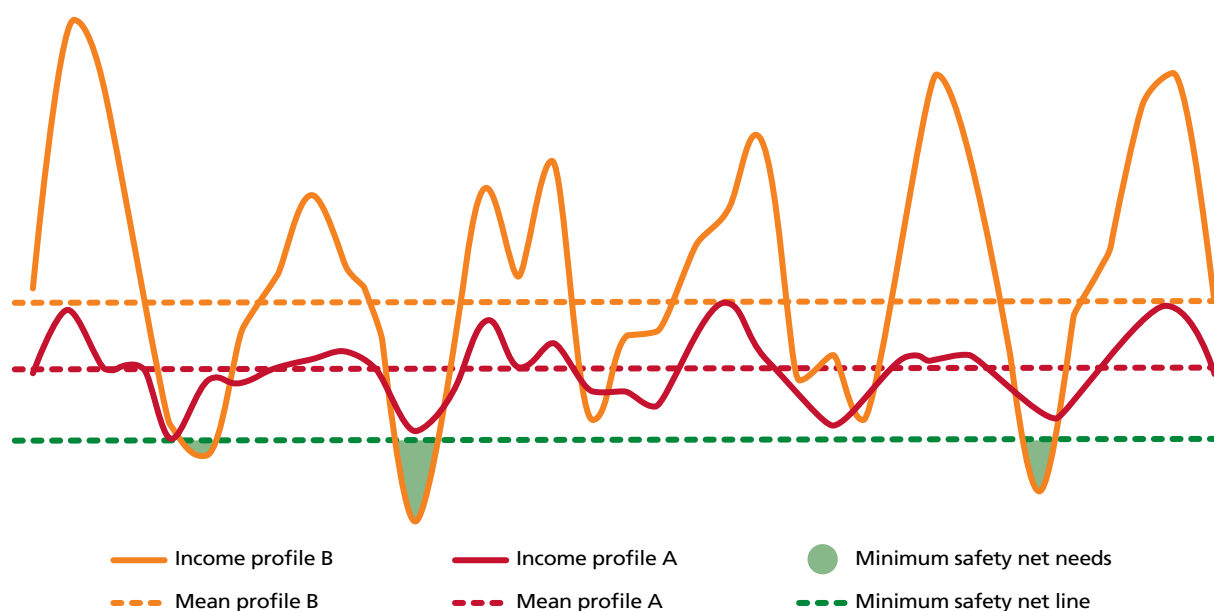
Managing these risks can be done in several ways. First, the probability of shocks occurring can be reduced, thereby reducing the frequency and/or magnitude of the troughs in Figure 19. Examples of risk reduction activities include irrigation schemes; new drought-, salt- or flood-tolerant seed varieties, and vaccination programmes that reduce the risk of disease for livestock farmers. A land registration programme that promotes access by women, and is sensitive to traditional tenure patterns (as opposed to single-right privatization), would reduce the risk of negative shocks for both income profiles.

Second, even if a shock does occur, various types of insurance (typically requiring contributions by the beneficiary) can reduce the impact of the shock, in essence filling the troughs in Figure 19.<sup>71</sup> For example, weather-based index insurance can provide insurance in case of drought, and commodity risk-management instruments (e.g. futures contracts) can provide insurance against short-term price fluctuations, thus reducing the size of the troughs in income profile B.

Thus, insurance that mitigates the impact of weather shocks is a key tool for helping farmers avoid poverty traps and for accelerating the adoption of agricultural technologies. Traditional insurance schemes have proved to be very expensive to operate, however, due to high administrative costs. In response, new forms of insurance are becoming increasingly popular. For example, weather index insurance makes payouts based on measurements of rainfall,

FIGURE 19

## Safety net needs for prudent risk taking



Source: Adapted from L. Brown and U. Gentilini. 2007. On the edge: the role of food-based safety nets in helping vulnerable households manage food insecurity. In B. Guha-Khasnobis, S.S. Acharya and B. Davis. *Food insecurity, vulnerability and human rights failure*. Basingstoke, UK, Palgrave Macmillan and United Nations University-WIDER.

temperature or humidity (crop yield over a large area is another possible index), rather than the actual loss in a particular farmer's field.<sup>72</sup> It is designed to trigger compensation against predefined specific hazards such as droughts or floods.<sup>73</sup> The linking of pay-outs to predetermined thresholds instead of being based on specific micro-level losses reduces administrative costs and removes perverse incentives (moral hazard) whereby farmers could actually prefer that their crops fail. It also reduces the likelihood of adverse selection, whereby the only farmers who pay for insurance are those who have a high probability of crop loss.

The weather risk management facility of IFAD and WFP provides insurance based on levels of rainfall, thereby mitigating the impact of weather-related shocks on poor smallholder farmers and enabling farmers to manage agricultural risks and build resilience. Another example is the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative launched by WFP and Oxfam America (R4 refers to the four risk-management strategies that the initiative integrates). R4 builds on the initial success of a holistic risk management framework developed by Oxfam America and a group of partners including the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) to enable poor farmers to strengthen their food and income security through a combination of improved resource management (risk reduction), microcredit (prudent risk-taking), insurance (risk transfer), and savings (risk reserves). Within this initiative, the Horn of Africa Risk Transfer for Adaptation (HARITA) project allows Ethiopian farmers to pay for crop insurance with their own labour,

through a public works programme. An impact evaluation covering the 2009/10 season found that index insurance had large positive impacts on crop yields.<sup>74</sup> The study found that significantly more farmers who were buying insurance for the second time planned to plant different crops, use more fertilizer and take out loans. The evidence suggests that farmers are learning that insurance is an effective risk-management tool that helps them take prudent risks to intensify production and build their livelihoods.

#### Investing in nutrition-sensitive food and agricultural systems

While ample evidence exists on the impact of conditional cash transfers in improving human capital,<sup>75</sup> fewer studies have looked at the labour supply or productive impacts.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, a wide range of research reports little reduction in adult work (i.e. time allocated to work, or labour supply) due to receipt of conditional cash transfers.<sup>77</sup> In terms of production, despite the scarcity of available information, those studies that do exist report positive impact on potential productive activities, as well as potential conflicts between social objectives and livelihood activities. Two studies on the Mexican PROGRESA programme, for example, found that it led to increased land use, livestock ownership, crop production and agricultural expenditures and a greater likelihood of operating a microenterprise.<sup>78</sup> Yet, another study found that agricultural households benefiting from

PROGRESA were less likely to comply with conditionality due to time conflicts with their livelihood activities.<sup>79</sup>

In sub-Saharan Africa, the Malawi SCT programme was found to lead to increased investment in agricultural assets, including crop implements and livestock, increased satisfaction of household consumption by own production, decreased agricultural wage labour and child work off farm, and increased labour allocation to on farm activities by both adults and children.<sup>80</sup> In Ethiopia, households with access to both the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) as well as complementary packages of agricultural support showed no indication of disincentive effects on labour supply and were more likely to be food-secure, to borrow for productive purposes, use improved agricultural technologies and operate their own non-farm business activities.<sup>81</sup> A follow-up study found that the PSNP has led to a significant improvement in food security status for those who had participated in the programme for five years versus those who had received only one year of benefits.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, households that participated in PSNP as well as the complementary programmes achieved significantly higher grain production and made greater use of fertilizer.

Moreover, cash transfers can be an important complement to a broader rural development agenda. The importance of a pro-poor growth strategy focusing on agriculture, and particularly the need for a new Green Revolution in sub-Saharan Africa, has been widely discussed.<sup>83</sup> Such a strategy would imply a combination of increased access to a diverse package of modern agricultural technologies, including an initial fertilizer subsidy, and

investment in rural infrastructure and agricultural research and extension.<sup>84</sup> Yet, a lack of access to agricultural assets, markets and institutions, and in particular credit, is constraining potential engagement in agriculture.<sup>85</sup> One mechanism to overcome such constraints, especially among poor farmers who are most likely to be credit constrained, is through the provision of cash transfers.<sup>86</sup> Thus, cash transfers can serve not only as a means of social protection but also as a means of promoting farm-level production gains (see Box 10).

### Public works programmes

Public works programmes, sometimes referred to as cash-for-work or food-for-work, are best used as a livelihood protection mechanism and are best implemented with an employment guarantee, for example India's National Employment Guarantee Scheme. A guarantee of employment when needed effectively provides insurance and enables households to undertake more risk in their normal livelihood strategy than they would do in the absence of the programme. Households can then plant higher-risk and higher-yield crops, moving from income profile A to income profile B in Figure 19.<sup>87</sup> For example, results from an evaluation of the PSNP in Ethiopia between 2006 and 2010 showed that participation in the PSNP and the Household Asset Building Programme raised the likelihood of using fertilizer by 19.5 percentage points.<sup>88</sup>

Public works programmes also have the potential to create indirect benefits. Construction of infrastructure such as roads, bridges and irrigation systems can lead to

#### BOX 10

### From Protection to Production

FAO has recently joined forces with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa – the From Protection to Production (PtoP) Project – to study the impact of cash transfer programmes on household economic decision-making and the local economy.<sup>1</sup> The study of the economic and productive impacts is also important for policy. The perception exists among many officials in ministries of finance and the economy that cash transfer programmes are just welfare, charity and/or handouts, and do not have economic impacts.

This research project seeks to understand the potential economic development impacts of cash transfers on the rural poor in sub-Saharan Africa. It aims to enhance the understanding of how social protection interventions can contribute to sustainable poverty reduction and economic

growth at the household and community-levels. This will be documented by the production of case studies and cross-country comparisons. The project is using a mixed-method approach, combining econometric, simulation and qualitative methods to understand the impact on household decision-making and local economies, taking advantage of data from ongoing rigorous impact evaluations for the following programmes: the CT-OVC programme in Kenya, the Tigray Social Cash Pilot in Ethiopia, the Malawi Social Cash Transfer programme, the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme in Ghana, the Child Grant Programme in Lesotho, the Zambia Child Grant Programme and the Zimbabwe Social Cash Transfer Programme.

<sup>1</sup> For further information see the PtoP website (available at <http://www.fao.org/economic/ptop/en/>).



**BOX 11**

**Designing public works programmes to benefit women**

Public works programmes that create community infrastructure potentially reduce time burdens for women and girls who collect water and firewood. They also provide employment opportunities for rural women, which may have significant impacts on food security and improvement of nutrition because women's income is more likely to be spent on food and children's goods. Addressing gender inequality and promoting women's capacities through public works programmes requires consideration of decent work, women's care responsibilities and their need to participate on a flexible basis.<sup>1</sup> Integrating family responsibilities with work has been shown to increase female participation, and incorporation of training has been shown to increase female employability when the programme ends.<sup>2</sup> Evidence from disaster recovery projects

reveals that training females for non-traditional female jobs, such as construction, and giving females leadership roles, can improve the long-term effectiveness of such training for women.<sup>3</sup>

While public works programmes can benefit women, attention should be given to the energy costs expended by women in these programmes. In some cases, women can use more energy than they receive from the transfer, depending on the intra-household distribution of the benefits.<sup>4</sup> This happens because the allocation of food within households may not be gender-equitable, with women willingly or unwillingly sacrificing food to benefit other household members.

*Sources:* Please see notes on page 61.

significant second-round employment benefits and multiplier effects on local economies and agricultural productivity. Public works are implemented in both development and recovery settings and, in theory, have the ability to be scaled up quickly (see Box 11).

**■ Systems of social protection**

Given the range of different (but related) objectives for social protection, there has been an increasing focus on pursuing a systems-based approach, as opposed to the ad hoc, project-based, short-term approach that dominated in the past. The World Bank's *Social Protection and Labour Strategy 2012-2022* states that "the main objective of the new strategy ... is to help countries move from fragmented approaches to harmonized systems".<sup>89</sup> It is based on an understanding that more systematic and predictable risk-management tools with a focus on enhancing long-term resilience will lead to sustainable graduation out of poverty.

Systems will not only vary according to the objective, but will also depend on the context – whether countries have high or low capacity and whether they are politically stable or unstable. The systems approach is relevant not only in development contexts but also in emergency and early recovery contexts where shocks can be recurrent (e.g. Ethiopia, the Sahel, Yemen) or one-off. It is a way to move beyond a purely relief-focused approach towards multi-year resilience-building programmes such as the PSNP in Ethiopia whereby chronically food-insecure households receive support for up to five years, and the Hunger Safety Net Programme in Kenya.<sup>90</sup> A systems approach also implies the use of common administrative mechanisms such as unique

beneficiary registration, common identification and targeting methods, common monitoring and evaluation systems, and integrated and synchronized transfer modalities. The two most well known examples are Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* and Mexico's *Progresar-Oportunidades*, but similar programmes are being increasingly used in low-income countries as well.

**■ Conclusion: social protection – immediate help for the neediest and a foundation for reducing hunger and malnutrition in the long run**

Even when the poor benefit from economic growth, these benefits take time to materialize. Thus, in the short-term, social protection supports the most vulnerable so that hunger and undernutrition can be reduced now. But social protection is also a foundation for reducing undernourishment in the long term. First, it improves nutrition for young children – an investment that will pay off in the future with smarter, stronger and healthier adults. Second, it helps to mitigate the impact of risk to promote technology adoption and economic growth. A systems approach is needed to link the various goals in an integrated and cost-effective manner. Through such an approach, undernourishment and malnutrition can be eliminated as quickly as possible.

