

07.2. Link Early Actions to Social Protection

Summary ↓

Note that this chapter has not been updated yet in the latest revision process in 2024!

What is social protection and how is it relevant to the work of the RCM and other humanitarian organizations on FbF?

Scaling up and embedding the FbF approach into national risk management structures is important for its sustainability and effectiveness. Taking anticipatory action depends on the capacity of the system to pre- identify potential impacts and people that will need support, to effectively implement actions in the short window of time between a forecast and the occurrence of the hazard.

With increasing climate related risks, climate-sensitive social protection (SP) approaches are becoming relevant as they can help protect people from the impacts of climate shocks and stressors, protecting their assets and livelihoods. This note provides a synthesis of the main opportunities and challenges in linking FbF with SP and offers guidance on how to National Societies and other humanitarian partners can support this integration.

Social protection is a broad term to describe national and sub-national programmes and policies that aim to tackle poverty, inequality and vulnerability by helping people manage short and long- term risks. Social protection policies and programmes are part of a national system intending to reduce poverty, deprivation and vulnerability by helping people manage various risks. This system includes:

- Social assistance or safety nets: cash transfers, cash-for-work programmes and temporary employment programmes, school feeding programmes
- Social insurance: pensions; health, unemployment or disaster insurance
- Labour market interventions: job market integration, job benefits, labour standards

- Social services: social care, nutrition services, disability services

In this note, we are only going to primarily consider one type of social protection, namely social assistance, whose instruments overlap the most with those used by humanitarians. Activities like cash transfers, cash-for-work and school feeding programmes are part of the usual activities in emergency response, and now also of the FbF approach. However, social services, social insurance and others might also be relevant. In a social protection system, the focus however, is on a national system, with multi-year funding (eventually by domestic funds) to manage both short and long term risks in a predictable and financially sustainable manner. Social protection transfers are usually provided as predictable, long-term support to households at risk of falling into poverty. This kind of support can be delivered through different means such as direct cash, vouchers, digital payments, or mobile money.

Some social transfers such as school feeding are delivered in-kind.

Shock-responsive and climate sensitive social protection approaches include flexible, scalable programs that quickly reach those affected by a shock. For instance, a program that delivers cash transfers after a shock can help vulnerable households avoid negative coping-strategies.



Shock-responsive and climate sensitive social protection

After a shock, social protection benefits help people absorb the impacts by providing direct support to affected populations, and preventing some of their negative consequences. For example, Mexico’s conditional cash transfer programme, Progresa, allowed poor families affected by a drought to keep their children in school.

Social protection can also provide benefits that help people prevent and/or mitigate the impacts of disasters before they happen, by taking early action and by improving incomes and livelihoods. For instance, after the 2011 drought in Kenya, overall poverty increased by 5%; but Hunger Safety Net Programme beneficiaries that were receiving regular transfers in advance were shielded from it, because

the regular payments had helped them build a buffer.

For more, see the “7 things to know about managing climate risk through social protection”

Opportunities: Why linking FbF and SP?

By integrating an FbF approach with social protection systems, we can harness synergies for taking early action before disaster impacts materialize; playing a critical role in reducing disaster impacts, building resilience and protecting development gains

Linking forecast-based action with social protection programming aims to make better use of existing systems to protect people before disasters, especially by supporting some key features:

Scale

Social protection often relies on large scale, long-term, nationally-owned systems. These systems reach significant sectors of the population: in 2015, more than 1.9 billion people in 136 low- and middle-income countries were on beneficiary rolls of social safety net programs (World Bank 2015),

Systems

In recent years, governments and donors have made significant investments in setting up social protection systems that increase coordination, building supporting structures (staff, tools, resources) as well as systems for targeting and registration of beneficiaries, delivery of benefits and management of information. These systems could be used not only during emergencies but before they happen to reach already existing beneficiaries with early action, and/or for identifying and enrolling new beneficiaries.

Vulnerable populations

Social assistance programmes aim to provide support to those identified as poor and/or vulnerable, which are sometimes most at risk from climate related shocks. In most cases it is likely that the population that is part of social protection services are more impacted by hazards, given their exposure and vulnerability.

Speed

Shock-responsive social protection programmes should be able to rapidly scale up during a crisis and back once the crisis is over. A forecast-based action mechanism would be a key piece of such a system, helping establish objective indicators and agreed plans of action as well as ring-fenced financing to enable anticipatory action.

What can the Integration of FbF and SP look like?

Although there are only a few experiences with shock-responsive SP linked to forecast-based financing, some have conceptualized possible models under which such integration could occur based on existing experiences with FbF approaches. In a conceptual article (Costella et al. 2017) possible options (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) are described.

In Fig 1, anticipatory action through SP is part of a national system of FbF.

In Fig. 2, and FbF mechanism is included under an existing SP program. Which could be particularly relevant for social protection programmes that already have a scalable system.

Figure 1: Social Protection linked to a system-wide FbF mechanism

Figure 2: FbF Mechanis integrated into a Social Protection Structure or Programme

Potential Challenges

How to go about it?

To take this agenda forward, relevant sectors, such as social protection practitioners, disaster risk managers, climate and social science scientists should converge to discuss the elements listed below. It is important that feasibility studies consider this option, and that the following elements are taken into account both at the scoping and design stages, as well as when scaling up FbF mechanisms:

Step 1: Understand the context

First, it will be important to understand the existing social protection policy

and program context in order to understand entry points. For instance, new social protection policy frameworks might offer an opportunity to align government agencies and mandates at the highest level to allow for future implementation of joint approaches. A new social assistance program could also offer an opportunity to pilot or test an FbF approach.

Step 2: In-depth technical analysis

As part of the design of an FbF system, it is important to understand how hazards relate to impacts on people's lives and livelihoods. When linking with SP mechanisms, it will be key to analyze how climate vulnerabilities and exposure overlap with existing social protection mechanisms.

Step 3: Advocate linkages between FbF and SP programs & systems

When SP programs already exist and there is a common interest in making them scalable through an FbF approach, it will be important to understand how the geographic scope and target groups overlap, as well as the specific actions that can be taken through such program. Capacity and resources are key. As part of the FbF feasibility study and advocacy strategy, it is essential to identify who is doing what and where in terms of SP (past, present and future plans)

Even if SP programs might not be ready to link with FbF mechanisms, there might be opportunities to integrate or collaborate through the use of joint systems, especially population or beneficiary registries and identification systems. It is important to understand what data is available, how it relates to climate-related vulnerabilities, how frequently it is updated, etc.

Step 4: Prioritize dialogue and understanding

It is key to incentivize dialogue and understanding across sectors, and set up a process that aims to converge objectives for anticipatory action at policy and program level.

Step 5: Start simple, build commitment

Depending on the local situation, an FbF system could be introduced in phases, first targeting the most predictable hazards with relatively simple and affordable early actions, and then expanding to more complex actions or less predictable events. It will be important that donors and governments commit to fund this and design the outcome assessments of their social protection investments to look at whether early actions have been taken and what difference they have made.

Toolbox

IFRC AA and FbF guidance

Social Protection (by RCCC)

Mapping Social Protection in Future-Climate Scenarios (by RCCC)

Social Protection in a Changing Climate (by RCCC)