

Social Protection in a Changing Climate: Making systems adaptive through climate information and early action

Why focus on Social Protection and Climate Change?

Social protection policies and programmes aim to reduce poverty and vulnerability, and are a key part of a long term, country-led strategy to help the most vulnerable manage risks. Programmes include social safety nets such as cash transfers and cash for work programs; social insurance programs such as pensions and unemployment; and other services such as disability, nutrition or employment services.

In a context of increasing climate threats, social protection policies and programmes can help manage the risks of weather and climate extremes in order to reduce potential impacts on the most vulnerable people. This is an important advancement for a significant number of women, men and children whose lives and livelihoods are intrinsically linked to weather and climate.

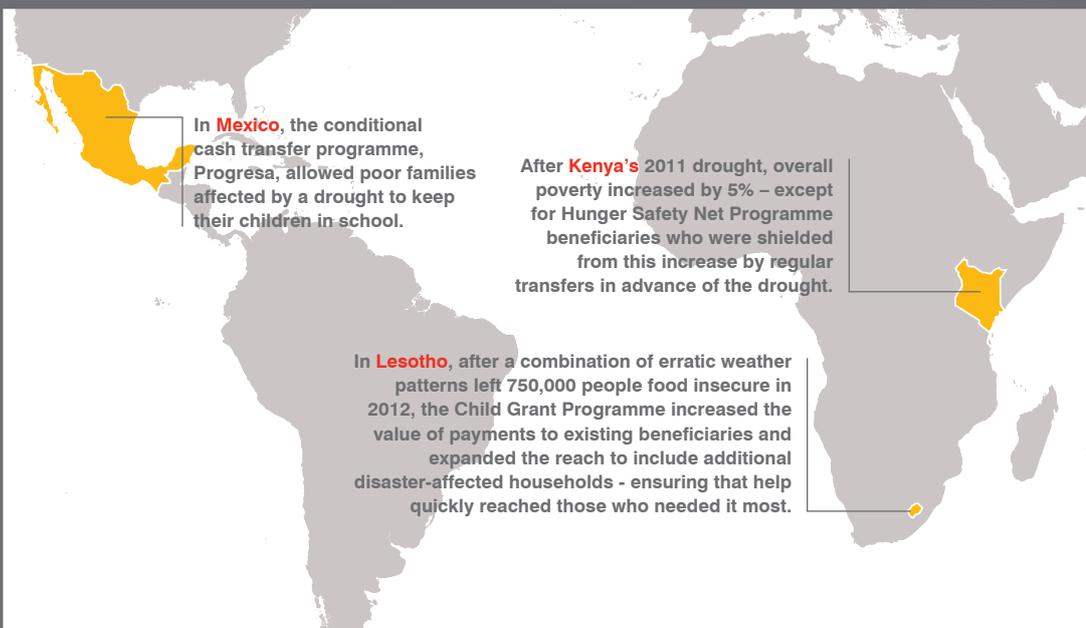
One way in which social protection might help manage climate shocks is through flexible and scalable programmes that reach people affected by a disaster quickly – even before disaster impacts materialize. For instance, through a program that acts early to deliver cash transfers to households vulnerable to shocks. By helping avoid negative coping strategies, this early action might play a critical role in protecting development gains, and help build resilience.

The Climate Centre is supporting efforts to make social protection climate sensitive by drawing on its ongoing experiences in the humanitarian sector with forecast-based financing (FbF) approaches. These approaches use weather forecasts to trigger preparedness and early response actions prior to an emergency. They also focus on the need to embed a suitable financing mechanism to enable timely early action following a forecast.



Photo: Denis Onyodi/URCS

Many governments in low and middle income countries as well as the international community are committed to making social protection systems more adaptive to climate risks. This can support climate resilience by helping households reduce and cope with disaster risks. Social protection programmes that reach the most vulnerable, as early as possible, can help the entire country system deal with emergencies more efficiently.



Why focus on Early Action?

Social protection system can be an important part of a country's disaster management strategy, reaching significant parts of the population before, during and after emergencies.

The faster support reaches people affected by an extreme event, the more resources they will have on hand to be able to reduce negative coping strategies. But support received *before* an extreme event can *prevent* loss of life, assets and livelihoods.

The use of climate, vulnerability and exposure information combined with adequate action, can enhance the ability of a social protection system to take more effective measures before the worst impacts of disasters and crises materialize.

Climate information enables early warning

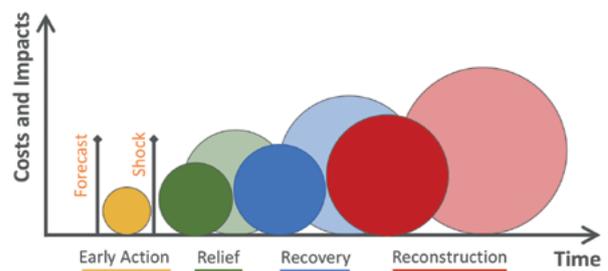
Many climate-related hazards such as storms, floods and droughts can be predicted, often including estimates of their location, intensity, probability and duration. When combined with complementary information such as exposure and vulnerability, it is possible to identify populations at risk of being impacted before a disaster strikes.

Effectively utilizing this type of information can provide early warnings that enable appropriate and timely early action. Additional types of information such as satellite observations, nutrition information and market prices can also trigger action before or after an event.

Adequate planning and financing enables robust early action

Early actions are most likely to occur when agreed to in advance through clear plans tied to committed resources. In particular, this means that adequate funding instruments should be established to ensure that actions are triggered rapidly and objectively, for instance, ring-fenced reserves, contingency funds or credit lines, or some types of insurance. Taking early action through social protection would need to be linked to a country's disaster risk financing strategy.

Channeling early action through social protection can reduce disaster impacts and costs



This chart is representative of the relative costs associated with responding to a shock at various stages of response. Dark colors represent costs with early action in place, while light colors represent costs without.

Using climate and other information effectively would help support households with more adequate actions at different times of need. For instance before a shock happens, actions can be geared to preventing negative coping strategies, such as a cash transfer to help households prepare and to protect their assets. After the shock, support can help households cope and recover.

By preventing some of the negative impacts, early action can reduce the needs arising after a disaster and the costs associated with them. An initial literature review of early action in Bangladesh for example, showed that the provision of cash before a flood could save three times that amount in losses to beneficiaries after the event.

Coordination between humanitarian and social protection programmes can enable more timely support, especially when contingency funding and a clear plan of action are in place before an emergency. This can increase the effectiveness of the overall system and alleviate suffering, speeding up recovery and increasing people's resilience.

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