

Position Paper:

Addressing climate risks through social protection



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Cover photo:
Nearly 2,000 residents of Peru’s central coastal town of Huarney queue to receive Peruvian Red Cross humanitarian aid after what were described as the worst floods and landslides in decades that were linked to El Niño. With Bolivia and Ecuador, Peru is one of three South American nations where the Climate Centre has provided technical guidance on integrating the management of climate risk into social protection programmes, with a focus on early warning and action. © Fernando Gandarillas/IFRC

Introduction

It is now evident that climate change is creating new risks and exacerbating existing ones, increasing poverty and compounding vulnerabilities. Recent literature reveals that social protection can play a role in improving the ability of individuals and communities to address the socio-economic impacts of climate events in the short and long term (Costella et al., 2023; Bagolle et al., 2023; Sengupta & Dahlet, 2023; Tenzing, 2019). Social protection tools, such as cash transfer programmes and public works programmes, can prevent households from falling into or further into poverty due to the impacts of climate change and can encourage the development of climate-resilient livelihoods.

Integrating climate considerations into social protection programmes has other notable benefits, including progress towards sustainable development objectives such as reducing poverty (SDG 1), promoting food security (SDG 2), enhancing education (SDG 4) and promoting gender equality (SDG 5) (IPCC, 2022).

The Climate Centre's vision for social protection is for it to be progressively incorporated into programming by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement ("the Movement") across timescales, helping the most vulnerable become resilient in the face of climate risks and related impacts.

Objective, audience and purpose of the document

This position paper seeks to consolidate the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre's understanding of social protection; present our vision for social protection; provide examples of our ongoing work in the sector; highlight our added value to partners; and establish social protection as a thematic priority for climate change, disaster risk management, humanitarian, development and other relevant sectors.

This paper builds on a strong and iterative consultation process within and external to the Climate Centre team. It is meant to function as a guide on the objectives, vision and capacities envisioned for social protection in addressing the range of climate-related risks seen as crucial to be managed by the Red Cross Red Crescent. The intended audience includes National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the IFRC, the ICRC, external partners, national governments, donor agencies, academic institutions, as well as Climate Centre staff who are keen to understand what the Climate Centre hopes to achieve in social protection and how.

This document will be reviewed periodically by the Climate Centre's social protection team to ensure consistency and relevance. It will also guide the Climate Centre's work on the social protection agenda until 2030. As such, it will serve as a road map, offering direction to the IFRC, the Climate Centre and other partners. Concurrently, we will continue to monitor and review the assumptions in this position paper as the Climate Centre's social protection work continues to evolve.

This document has been prepared in line with the Climate Centre Strategy 2021–2025, emphasizing our shared understanding of the important role that social protection plays and will continue to play in reducing the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events on vulnerable people. More specifically, as the Climate Centre seeks to harness scientific knowledge and influence research agendas to inform policy and advance practical solutions, we aim to demonstrate how social protection is a practical solution to enhance preparedness, provide protection during disasters and increase capacity to adapt to disaster impacts.

1. What is social protection?

Social protection is defined as a “set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle” (ILO, 2017).

Traditionally, social protection aims to reduce poverty, deprivation and vulnerability, and help people cope with various lifecycle risks that occur during different life stages such as childhood, youth or old age. These programmes may include:

- **Social assistance:** Cash transfers, cash-for-work programmes and temporary employment programmes, and school feeding programmes.
- **Social insurance:** Pensions, health and unemployment insurance.
- **Labour market interventions:** Job market integration, job benefits, labour standards, training and skills building.
- **Social services:** Social care, nutrition, and disability services.

We define social protection as policies and programmes that seek to reduce poverty and vulnerability associated with a range of risks, including climate risks. Such policies and programmes make use of climate information across timescales to design, adapt or modify their system components in ways that prepare and protect vulnerable populations from climate risks in the short term, while building capacity and resilience in the long term. The role of social protection can be categorized into the following four functions (Loewe & Schüring, 2019):

- **Protective:** Works to alleviate poverty for individuals living below the national poverty line (i.e. cash transfers to reduce the costs of consumption).
- **Preventive:** Prevents poverty by supporting individuals manage lifecycle risks to reduce the poverty gap (i.e. interventions to manage lifecycle risks such as old age and unemployment programmes).
- **Promotive:** Reduces the vulnerability of individuals by stabilizing income streams to become more resilient and increase future income potential (i.e. employment training programmes).
- **Transformative:** Removes barriers for social inequality and inclusion (i.e. enhancing employment rights to empower vulnerable groups such as people living with disabilities).

Through these four functions, social protection can work to improve well-being and enhance the capacity of households in managing risks, as well as encourage household resilience through investments, sustainable income streams and productive assets. We also acknowledge that different terms such as adaptive, shock-responsive, climate-responsive, climate-smart, etc. are being used to define approaches to social protection. The Climate Centre's approach includes all such initiatives that aim to reduce climate risks and related impacts for vulnerable groups through the use of social protection with the long-term vision of transforming socio-economic vulnerabilities, and promoting equity and inclusion.

- **Climate information can be hydrometeorological forecasts, climate change projections, risk analysis and hazard impact data, as well as community-based vulnerability assessments and community weather observations.**
- **System components which use climate information may include elements of design (transfer values, conditionalities) or implementation (payment modes, verification processes).**
- **Scale-ups can occur before, during, or after a shock.**
- **Preparedness can be enhanced by improving the absorptive and adaptive capacity of householders individuals through schemes that are effective, timely, appropriate and reliable.**
- **Resilience can be built over time by enhancing opportunities for just social transitions through productive investments (e.g. buying agricultural tools, seeds and livestock) and asset generation.**

Cash transfers, cash-for-work programmes and school feeding programmes, are also part of the standard portfolio of activities in emergency response, including for hydrometeorological disasters like floods or droughts. Climate change and climate-related events have disproportionate impacts on vulnerable groups, necessitating integrated responses from national governments and the humanitarian community. Furthermore, social services are related to many of the basic services provided by humanitarians, such as the work of Red Cross and Red Crescent health units. However, the difference between social protection and disaster response is crucial.

2. What is the Climate Centre's vision for the social protection agenda?

Up to 2024, the Climate Centre's social protection team worked in 35 countries¹ exploring and establishing the role of social protection in addressing climate risks. By 2030, we aim to reach more countries and provide more support to develop social protection policies and programmes that take climate risks into account. Such programmes will help the most vulnerable households and communities anticipate, absorb and adapt to the impacts of climate shocks and changes in climate, as part of a country-led system supported by national and international partners.

We envisage that National Societies will play a critical role in the design, implementation and maintenance of such systems, including aligning other humanitarian efforts with country-led social protection systems.

Here we present a list of strategic visions and objectives for the coming years that the Climate Centre's social protection team will help partners achieve:

- **Social protection systems are included in nationally managed disaster preparedness and response systems** and serve as a vehicle for delivering support in case of emergencies, reaching the most vulnerable more effectively.
- **National social protection programmes use climate science and information to anticipate, prepare for and respond to climate shocks**, through better linkages with climate information, early warning early action systems, and anticipatory action while ensuring business continuity and continuing to deliver routine social protection support during and after disasters.

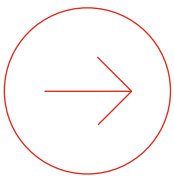
¹ Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Ethiopia, Niger, Colombia, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, Philippines, South Sudan, Uganda, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Dominican Republic, Afghanistan, Ghana, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, Palau, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, and Marshal Islands.

- **Core social protection systems and their components are strengthened** to be able to deal with uncertainties and unforeseen risks expected in a changing climate.
- **Objectives of social protection policies and programmes expand beyond poverty reduction and focus on building resilience of people vulnerable to climate risks and climate change.** They focus on interventions that promote adaptation, livelihood improvements, natural resource management, and reduce gender-based vulnerabilities.
- **National climate policies and strategies** such as Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and other climate documents **acknowledge and include social protection as a tool for climate risk management.**
- **Social protection, disaster and climate risk management and humanitarian actors,** including the Movement, **work in closer partnership.** All actors work collaboratively to strengthen systems for long-term resilience building, response delivery, early action, risk reduction and adaptation in a context-specific manner.
- **A coherent financing framework supported by appropriate sources of domestic and international financing,** enabling effective anticipatory action and response taken using social protection systems, that is sustainable over the long term.
- **The IFRC's global climate resilience platform raises adequate global funds** and engages in community-based climate action, particularly through safety nets and shock-responsive social protection.
- **The evidence base for the role of social protection in building climate resilience** is strengthened through programmes incorporating rigorous monitoring and evaluation, and disseminating practical insights on challenges, successes and opportunities.

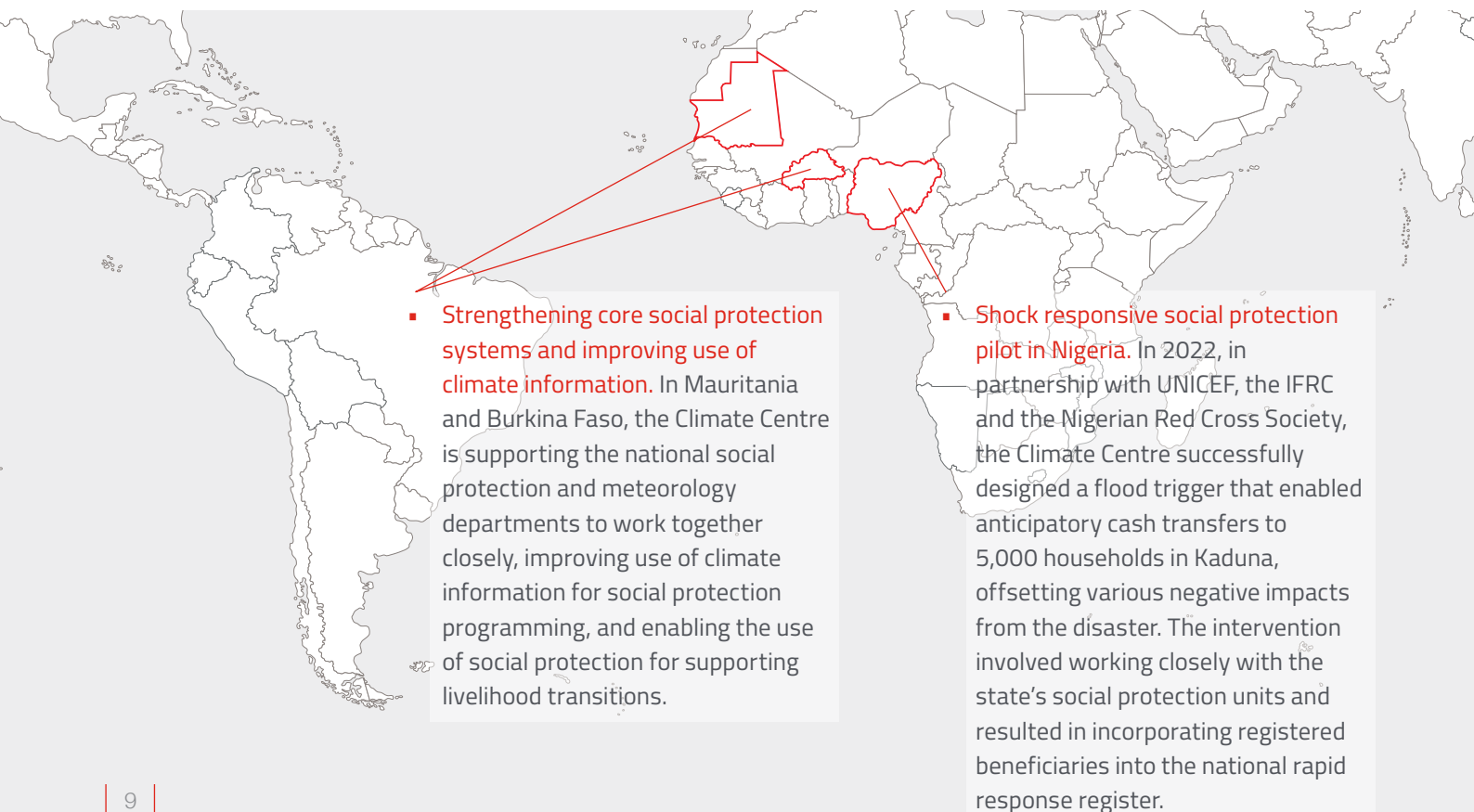
3. What has the Climate Centre done thus far to promote the social protection agenda?

We help connect climate science, policy and practice to social protection systems across countries to help the poor and most vulnerable people deal with changing climate shocks and stresses. Currently, we provide technical and implementation support to a broad range of partners, especially National Societies that are often involved in supporting government social protection interventions.

In past years, the Climate Centre has we have been able to accomplish key outcomes in the following areas.



Practical action and innovation: Tools and approaches including hypothesis testing, feasibility studies, and operational pilots have been carried out in eight countries – including Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Nepal – to explore potential pathways for climate-risk management to be integrated into social protection programmes, with a focus on early warning and forecast-based action. Some examples of our engagement in this area include:





▪ **Cash transfers for poverty reduction and preservation of environmental assets in the Colombian Amazon.**

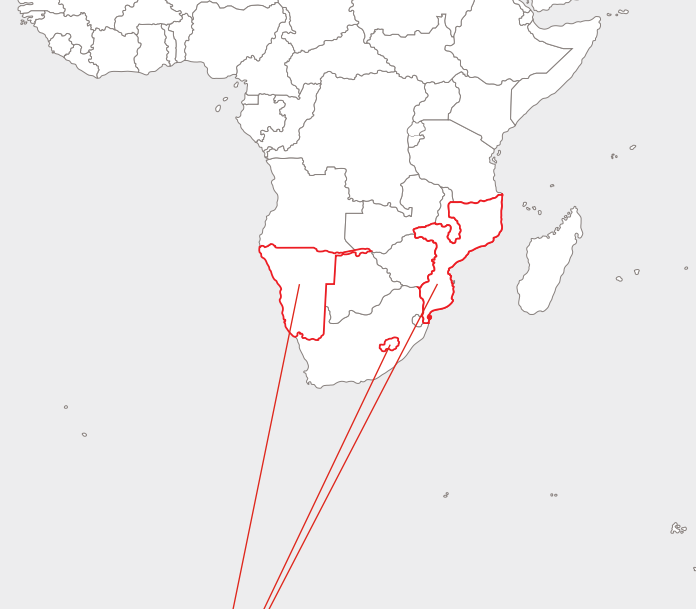
In partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), this project developed an effective cash transfer model with the dual objective of poverty reduction and the preservation of environmental assets like forests and land resources. A pilot of this model is currently being taken forward by IADB and the government.

▪ **Including climate vulnerability in the social protection bill in Sierra Leone.** In partnership with Tetra Tech in a World Bank-funded project, we have contributed to the drafting of the social protection bill, which recognises climate risk reduction as a priority for social protection. The Climate Centre has also developed a national contingency plan for floods and landslides in collaboration with social protection and disaster risk management ministries and agencies in the country. We've also developed a harmonised early action protocol with the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society.

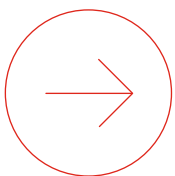
▪ **Forecast-based action and shock responsive social protection in Nepal.** We provided analytical and technical support to test and operationalise ways to make the social security allowance in Nepal more shock-responsive through a flood and cold-wave forecast-based financing (FbF) mechanism. Building on existing research on the links between social protection and disaster risk management, and on the experience of COVID-19, the Climate Centre is conducting several pieces of analysis on overall preparedness of the social protection system, as well as on understanding differential vulnerability to different hazards.



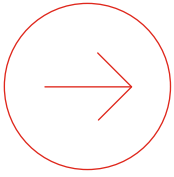
- **Anticipatory action in the Andes.** This research project explored the feasibility of addressing disaster risk needs by taking anticipatory action through existing social protection schemes, especially for riverine floods and associated challenges in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. We delivered a brief to serve as a guiding tool for advocacy on opportunities for leveraging existing national systems to build and improve the overall resilience of populations to flood impacts.



- **Southern Africa drought forecast-based financing and social protection.** This programme focuses on setting up FbF programmes for drought in three southern African countries: Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia. The social protection team provided technical guidance on a specific scoping study focusing on social protection to explore the integration of forecasts and climate risk-management into the social protection system in Lesotho and Mozambique. The team also led the technical analysis on the establishment of triggers, risks and selection of early actions.

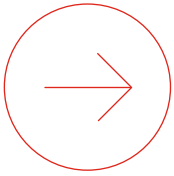


Advancing policy and investments: In addition to the rapid growth of the social protection theme within the Climate Centre (the social protection portfolio in 2024 stands at 300,000 euros per year), the social protection team has developed unmatched technical expertise on social protection within the Movement. We have integrated social protection messaging into global development strategies for Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other financing entities. We also promoted social protection policies as effective, context-specific climate risk management solutions. This has helped to garner interest in their use and enabled resource mobilisation. At the global level since 2020, we have been coordinating the the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030) Working Group on Social Protection and Climate Change and the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), bringing together more than 200 experts and enthusiasts from relevant sectors, governments and academia. It focuses on policy advocacy for positioning social protection as a climate risk management tool.



Increasing understanding through research: Over the last three years, we have written or led at least 17 publications documenting key opportunities for linking social protection and climate risk management, enabling increased action and collaboration within and across sectors. These include:

- **Policy coherence between social protection and climate action:** Initial findings from global studies and projects. This document examines the integration of social protection into climate policy as a valuable climate risk management tool to align common goals and recognize climate risks in national documents.
- **Integrating seasonal climate forecasts into adaptive social protection in the Sahel:** This report outlines the lessons learned from linking climate forecasts to early warning systems for adaptive social protection and reiterates that forecasts have the potential to improve the lead time of interventions to address climate-related disasters.
- **Synergies in social protection and WASH:** What should National Societies know? This brief investigates the connections between WASH and social protection to identify how activities by National Societies can combine the shared objectives of both sectors.
- **Climate change, intersecting disasters and social protection: How the COVID-19 experience can prepare us for the future:** This working paper considers COVID-19 alongside concurrent climate-related disasters to explore the use of novel social protection tools, programmes and systems in international responses to the pandemic and provides recommendations to design better social protection tools for future intersecting disasters.
- **Social protection as an enabler in scaling up forecast-based financing using impact-based forecasting:** This document takes stock of the linkages between FbF and impact-based forecasting and provides insights on how social protection can facilitate the scaling up of FbF.
- **Social protection's role in loss and damage:** This briefing paper has been drafted to help increase understanding of the role of social protection in loss and damage, for the Technical Expert Group on Comprehensive Risk Management, under the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, and inform the work plan of the executive committee of the WIM.
- **Climate funds and social protection:** What is the progress to date? This report reviews the role of climate finance in social protection and provides an overview of the types of social protection-related projects funded by adaptive and multi-focus funding.



Mobilizing networks: The Climate Centre has initiated and helped sustain two collaborative platforms and working groups that bring together global, national and local humanitarian and development actors, including the Movement and its partners. These include:

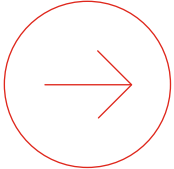
- **An informal working group on social protection and climate**, specific to the Movement that provides a platform for sharing experience and acts as an opportunity to share and build a common understanding of how the IFRC, ICRC, and National Societies are engaging with social protection, with a focus on climate risks.
- **The USP2030/SPIAC-B**. This serves as a space for knowledge-building and sharing, as well as a platform for global and interdisciplinary collaboration.

In the next few years, we will seek to amplify our efforts and successes in these areas, while also pursuing opportunities for greater engagement with national government partners, academia and the private sector.



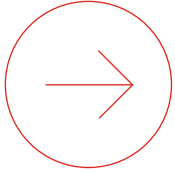
4. How do we support partners in furthering the social protection agenda?

As the technical resource centre for the Movement, we can help improve efforts in advocacy and delivery of social protection schemes to manage climate risks.



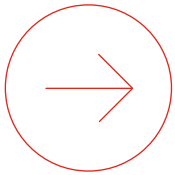
Supporting concrete action and innovation: Building on the Climate Centre's diverse technical expertise on climate policy, science and programming and its linkages with both the humanitarian and development sectors, we are well-placed to support initiatives like these:

- **Design and implementation of climate risk informed policies and programmes** through analysis and assessments of social protection systems, stakeholder mapping of relevant actors, analysis of sectoral challenges and capacities, and technical support in co-designing programmatic solutions.
- **Feasibility studies, testing, application and scale-up of climate risk management innovations**, such as anticipatory action within or linked to social protection programmes.
- **Technical improvements to existing social protection system components for improved early action and disaster response**, such as the pre-listing of beneficiaries for targeting, improving registries and designing appropriate transfer levels.
- **Training National Societies, national agencies and other institutions** as necessary on the above.
- **Providing technical support through the application of climate science** to other social protection actors and researchers.
- **Applying lessons learned from the development and scaling of anticipatory action** to the social protection sector.



Advancing policy content and investments. We are focused on continuing to raise the visibility of social protection as a tool to be used against climate risks, enabling dialogue between policy-makers and practitioners from different relevant sectors. We seek to encourage more resources and investment in activities that link climate risk management and social protection through specific activities such as:

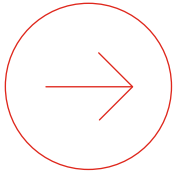
- **Convening and brokering dialogues among global, national and local level stakeholders** to promote social protection's role in climate adaptation, mitigation, just transition and loss and damage, and in disaster risk management.
- **Engaging audiences through innovative and experiential approaches** to encourage cross-sectoral dialogue.
- **Supporting mobilization of resources (technical and financial) towards new investments** that improve the use of climate risk management tools in social protection, including loss and damage and climate finance more broadly.
- **Ensuring that the funding and investment opportunities we manage take full advantage** of promoting relevant links between social protection and climate risk management.



Increasing understanding and communicating research.

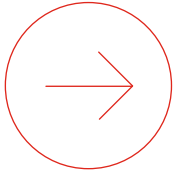
To make knowledge accessible to all stakeholders our activities will focus on producing, consolidating, synthesizing and disseminating information on how best to link social protection with climate risk management and resilience policies and practice. We will focus both on creating and disseminating basic highlights and messages that can feed into policy discussions, as well as more technical and evidential information coming out of research and operational projects. Specific activities would include:

- **Producing and disseminating knowledge and learning on social protection basics** geared towards humanitarian, disaster risk management, climate-conflict nexus, and climate change adaptation sectors (including participatory and experiential learning tools and games).
- **Generating and circulating knowledge for academic and informed audiences** (especially in the field of social protection), supporting: research on climate information; vulnerability, risk, exposure and hazard analyses; the elements of more effective disaster anticipation, response and financing.
- **Consolidating and sharing evidence** on the use of social protection approaches for addressing climate risks.
- **Supporting capacity building of social protection practitioners** through interactive approaches and technical guidance.



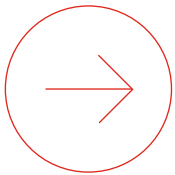
Mobilizing networks and partnerships. We will focus on mobilizing the Movement around social protection, potentially as part of the Climate Action Journey being initiated by the IFRC for National Societies, identifying champions, promoting key messages and supporting capacity building. Beyond the Movement, we will rely on existing and new partnerships with academia, multilateral and bilateral agencies and donors, and civil society, to take these messages forward. These collaborative efforts may include:

- **Academia.** Exploring collaborations with academic institutions in project countries through co-authorship, evidence generation, and joint projects which can help integrate interdisciplinary perspectives and peer review and strengthen relationships between National Societies and academic institutions.
- **Networks of government.** Working with such networks may provide channels for policy advocacy, collaboration and resource mobilization. For National Societies, this may further legitimise their role as auxiliary organisations to public authorities. Moreover, greater engagement in larger consortia partnerships will enable us to reach new regions and collaborate with new partners on the social protection agenda.
- **Private sector.** Exploring new partnerships with private sector organisations engaged in social protection and risk financing, can complement the Climate Centre's social protection current efforts, especially at the global level, and contribute to the technological innovation and processes.
- **Within the Movement.** Exploring and identifying partners interested in engaging in the social protection agenda, by involving them in policy dialogues and processes. Furthermore, our work on social protection could be introduced to the ICRC and to the IFRC Reference Centres specialising in psychosocial support, disaster preparedness, livelihoods and more.
- **International and national non-governmental organizations.** Providing direct support to various partners including National Societies, in implementing national social protection programmes by undertaking activities that include; rapid pre-listing of beneficiaries; verification; delivering cash transfers; developing joint messages; creating evidence from case studies and pilots; participating jointly in policy influencing activities and events; and collaborating with different working groups to foster further evidence building and information sharing.



Innovations and unexplored areas. We are engaged in exploring new topics for research and innovation to guide policies and strategies. A few of the interesting ideas that we are currently exploring and would like to expand into in the future include:

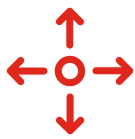
- **Exploring sustainable sources of funding for social protection**, including carbon pricing, energy subsidy reforms, use of climate funds (e.g. the Loss and Damage Fund) and making this information available and accessible to the Low- or Middle-Income Countries (LMIC).
- **Exploring the feasibility of setting up** the universal social protection fund to tackle the disproportionate impacts of climate change focused on the position of donors.
- **Research on the role of informal social protection systems** for climate adaptation and resilience building, with case studies on how communities leverage informal social protection networks during climate shocks.
- **Research and rigorous evaluations to build evidence** on whether and how long-standing social protection schemes around the world have been helping communities adapt and build resilience to climate change.
- **Developing practical tools and guides for social protection actors**, including National Societies, that help them review their social protection policies, programme design, implementation and delivery, and financing – ensuring they are “weather wise”.



Systems research on social protection options for different income groups, such as identifying which mix of schemes should be used by countries interested in making their social protection systems responsive to shocks; on elements of existing social protection systems that worked during the post-Covid 19 recovery period; and on ways social protection programmes improve their system components to prepare for climate emergencies.

5. How is social protection relevant for other thematic areas in the Climate Centre?

Social protection can play a role in achieving the objectives of nearly all the priority themes at the Climate Centre. In the future, we hope to work closely with the other thematic areas to leverage comparative advantages and create synergies.



- 1. Policy:** As the Climate Centre continues to influence local and global climate policy processes, we see a need for an additional focus on policy issues such as the inclusion of social protection in Loss and Damage discussions; strategies for Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans; climate finance and use of climate funds for social protection programmes – acknowledging informal social protection systems, such as social networks – as part of a country’s comprehensive risk management strategy. Another crucial linkage with the policy team is to jointly explore the use of loss and damage funds for social protection.



- 2. Anticipatory Action:** As anticipatory action involves the implementation of pre-emptive measures in anticipation of shocks through the use of early warning systems and contingency planning, social protection mechanisms can prove to be a catalyst for these objectives. Working with the anticipatory action team and incorporating social protection schemes as part of early action protocols in different countries is a clear way forward to enable vulnerable populations to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of disasters.



- 3. Urban:** While social protection programmes have in the past focused primarily on rural areas, urban areas with high concentrations of population and poverty also need effective coverage. This, when exacerbated by climate risks like heatwaves, requires a conversation around improving access of the urban poor to safety nets and social services tailored to urban needs, specifically around access to accommodation (social housing), jobs (labour market policies) and healthcare (universal health care schemes). Social protection schemes in some high-income countries target urban risks from heatwaves (e.g. the UK and France). This is an area where the urban and social protection team could collaborate.



4. Youth: Social protection schemes like a) Social assistance in the form of stipends and scholarships to improve access to education for the youth. b) Social insurance policies to allow young people to address risks from job loss. c) Active labour market policies to help foster skill development and encourage (re-)entry into labour markets. We are keen to work with the recently constituted youth advisory group and explore how to tailor social protection to the needs of young people, particularly with the changing nature of employment in the face of climate risks. The Climate Centre’s youth engagement strategy seeks to amplify young voices in global climate action, bringing in more youth perspectives to our operational work will be key.



5. Health: To address the ongoing and protracted impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals and communities, many countries have scaled up existing social protection systems to increase coverage and created new ones where possible. It can be expected that climate impacts will further trigger health crises, so universal health care and psycho-social support through social services will be paramount. We envisage more work in this area, as reducing the health impacts of climate change – potentially by using Social Protection as a tool to address both poverty-induced social determinants of health and arising income needs to tackle health risks associated with changes in climate (e.g. cash support combined with health risks management training or public works linked to vector control during high-risk periods) – is central to the Movement and the Climate Centre’s long-term ambitions. The Climate Centre’s social protection and health teams would like to work together to design interventions that manage health and income poverty risks associated with a changing climate.



6. Conflict: An increasing number of persons, forcibly displaced by persecution, conflicts or human rights violations, need long-term support and comprehensive protection. This may be beyond the capacity of humanitarian actors working in such crisis areas. Implementing social protection schemes targeted at migrants and displaced persons or using existing social protection systems to reach people affected by conflict is a new and emerging area of work where our team could collaborate closely with the conflict team. Possible schemes are rehabilitation-focused cash transfers or active labour market policies that help migrants and refugees integrate in destination countries.



7. Innovative engagement: Different games and meeting techniques developed by the Climate Centre’s innovative engagement team have been used in the past for various social protection trainings and events. We are keen to continue exploring ways to deliver social protection messages and information using innovative formats. Another area of collaboration with the innovative engagement team is using their expertise to create impact and maximise learning in the capacity building workshops we often conduct for social protection actors.

Note: This is not an exhaustive list, and there are opportunities for collaboration across the Movement and other climate action partners.

Annex

Relevance of social protection in the global agenda for climate risk management

Risks that are driven by climate variability may be sudden onset or gradual changes. When impacting households and communities, this may lead to an increase in vulnerability, reinforce poverty and undo developmental gains made over the last decades. Internationally, social protection is increasingly being considered as a tool to address these challenges, contribute to climate risk management, and is currently part of several major global agreements (IPCC, 2022; Costella et al., 2021; ILO, 2018).

Climate risks can manifest as both severe weather – such as flash floods, storms and heatwaves that lead to destruction of shelters and loss of income, assets, lives and livelihoods – as well as gradual transformations such as rising sea levels, depletion of biodiversity and declining agricultural productivity (Costella et al., 2021). Both direct and indirect outcomes include loss of income, livelihood and assets as well as potential displacement (*ibid*). The increasing frequency and severity of these events, combined with the compounding effect of successive shocks and gradual changes, will aggravate negative impacts on social, health and economic elements (*ibid*).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise that social protection is integral to building resilience through SDG Target 1.3: “Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”, while highlighting the need to take urgent climate action in SDG 13 (UNGA, 2015). Furthermore, social protection is also one of four pillars of the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Decent Work Agenda launched in response to the changing nature of work. The ILO speculates that social protection has a two-fold contribution to a just transition towards a green economy and environmental action (ILO, 2018). First, social protection enables climate adaptation through the provision of employment injury and/or sickness benefits, for example if employees were to become sick while working during a climate-hazard such as a heatwave (*ibid*). Second, social protection can offset climate change mitigation strategies such as green policies, which may lead to loss of employment (*ibid*).

In regard to shock response, the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 acknowledged the need to rethink the international aid system to keep pace with increasing humanitarian challenges, calling for country-owned, multi-year, sustainable strategies. It included concrete commitments for scaling up the use of Social Protection instruments such as cash transfers. An increased focus on resilience heralds an important role for Social Protection in strengthening long-term adaptive capacity. The Quito Implementation Plan for the New Urban Agenda for urban sustainability and resilience recognizes social protection as a channel to protect the lives and livelihoods of individuals participating in the urban informal economy.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Paris Agreement emphasize the significance of building resilience, reducing current and preventing future disaster risks through a broad set of measures, especially to support the world’s most vulnerable people. More recently, in the COP 28, social protection was officially referenced in different UNFCCC negotiation streams, with the recognition of being crucial for the just transition work programme, as one of the global goals on adaptation and in the operationalisation document of the new funding arrangements for the loss and damage fund.

International coordination platforms like the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board and the USP 2030 have been formalized in the last few years for national governments, international partners, regional organizations, UN agencies, development banks, CSOs, private sector, academia and research institutions, to come together and share experiences, build coherent policies and implement successful programmes while learning from each other.

Glossary

- **Social protection:** “A set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle” (ILO, 2017).
- **Social protection for climate:** Policies and programmes that make use of climate information in all its system components in order to prepare vulnerable populations and protect them from climate-related risks in the short term, while increasing preparedness levels and building their resilience in the long term.
- **Shock-responsive social protection:** SRSP modifies traditional social protection programmes and systems to adapt to changes in needs that result from large-scale shocks impacting large populations at a time (OPM, 2017). This allows individuals to better manage the immediate impacts of a shock, while also building their capacity to recover in the long term.
- **Adaptive social protection:** This iteration of social protection aims to support individuals’ ability to prepare for, cope with and adapt to shocks caused by climate change and disasters by integrating both disaster risk management and climate change adaptation into social protection (Bowen et al., 2020).
- **Informal social protection:** This refers to a form of social protection provided through social relations (Calder & Tanhchareun, 2014). It is typically financial support provided by family members, friends, and community organisations such as religious institutions.

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