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LIVES

Regional Bureau for Western Africa (RBD) 1st Social Protection Newsletter

World Food Programme in Western Africa has been supporting governments in their efforts to build nationally led social protection systems across the region, focusing on their ability to help people manage risks and shocks, all the while contributing to food security and improved nutrition.

The present newsletter provides a few highlights into this work, without providing a comprehensive view. Each newsletter will focus on a few topics and activities.

December, 2021

RESPONDING TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC THROUGH SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN THE SAHEL (AUGUST 2020 – JANUARY 2022)

A Joint Project between UNICEF and WFP

With funds from BMZ/KfW, WFP together with UNICEF has been supporting the governments in **Mali, Mauritania and Niger** to respond to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and strengthen national social protection systems. The outcomes of this 18 months project are shaped around three main priorities: delivery assistance; system strengthening; and knowledge, evidence and learning. The project provides immediate cash assistance to 1.8 million people through a **twin-track approach** - channelling support of the project through government social protection programmes to deliver essential support (track 1) and where national capacities are not (yet) reaching, cash transfers are delivered directly, but as much as possible aligned with national social protection response plans, such as aligned method of selecting beneficiaries and aligned transfer amounts (track 2). Through this project, WFP has delivered cash transfers to more than **120,000 households (863,108 individuals)** across the project countries. According to the results from post-distribution monitoring (PDM) exercises, **91 percent** of the surveyed beneficiaries in Niger acknowledged that the **cash transfers had positive effects in responding to their immediate shocks**, while in Mauritania, **food consumption has significantly improved** among **87 percent** of surveyed beneficiary households between 2020 and 2021. In addition, WFP provided blanket supplementary feeding to **6,860 children** and **5,281 women** and in collaboration with UNICEF, provided social behaviour change communication messaging on nutrition to **14,600 households**, while **35,868 households** were reached with COVID-19 prevention messaging by both agencies.

863,108
PEOPLE

Reached with cash
assistance through
WFP

The project has equally supported the strengthening of the **national social protection systems to become more nutrition- and child-sensitive** as well as **responsive to shocks** resulting in the formulation of harmonised guidelines and tools. Specific topics that have been addressed so far are the transfer values, the expansion of national social registries and approaches to improve targeting of beneficiaries for semi-urban localities,, review of social protection policies including elaboration of action plans on costing and resource mobilisation, the integration

of social protection in related sectoral frameworks such as emergency preparedness and planning, training of national actors, and activating and/or co-leading national Cash Working Groups.

Meanwhile, the joint project has launched a **regional study focused on social registries and targeting** across the region. The study aims to better understand the institutional set-up, targeting and ability of national social registries to capture overlapping vulnerabilities, particularly the overlap of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition. It zooms into and will assess the use of social registries as a tool for targeting. Moreover, evidence generated at the country and regional levels have stimulated technical dialogues, including exchanges between project country teams and other countries, to facilitate replication of best practices across the region

[What have we learnt so far?](#)

- Establishing national agreements before a shock happens - concerning when shock-**responsive programmes** should be triggered, how the targeting of beneficiaries should take place and what the delivery modalities will be - is crucial to allow for swift and coordinated delivery of shock-responsive programmes.
- **Strengthening** national social protection systems, which includes all levels from policy, to programme design, planning and financing, implementation and M&E is a **medium- to long-term process** and requires a joint vision and coordinated actions by multiple actors at national level.
- A strong infrastructure of the national social protection system, e.g. strong coordination mechanisms and flexibility of social assistance programmes to scale-up and scale-down, are key to rapidly roll-out an emergency programme through the social protection system.
- A **twin-track approach** can be a relevant and suitable programming approach in emergency contexts, particularly those with relatively weak national social protection systems.
- **Utilisation of the social registry** for shock-response is relevant, provided that data in registries is reliable and updated and that the targeting methodology has been developed through consensus between humanitarian and development actors.

LEVERAGING ON ADVOCACY FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION

The new **Social Protection Advocacy and Communications Strategy** will contribute to strengthening national capacities to improve social protection systems through consistent activities that build public and political buy-in and influence meaningful policy change. This is also in line with WFP's Strategy for Support to Social Protection which recognizes evidence-based advocacy as a key component of its 12 building blocks.



To reach our vision, there are three distinct, yet intertwined pathways focused on entry point interventions that are expected to generate high social protection returns in the medium- to long-term (as seen in the figure above). With this newly launched strategy, we aim to increase the overall impact of our work with governments and partners to establish and strengthen the building blocks of the social protections systems so that social protection programmes are better able to help people manage risks and shocks, all the while contributing to food security and improved nutrition. The strategy is equally accompanied by an operational action plan with concrete activities, identified needed resources and timeline, to achieve our vision.

SUPPORTING SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS TO BECOME MORE SHOCK-RESPONSIVE

The West and Central Africa (WCA) region is one of the regions most prone to the adverse effects of climate change globally. These effects which come in form of droughts, flood, bushfires, and windstorms among others, have unsurprisingly aggravated the vulnerabilities within the region to poverty and hunger. Country offices, with support from RBD, and in collaboration with development partners is supporting to build and reinforce the shock-

responsiveness of national social protection systems across the region. In **Burkina Faso**, for instance, WFP supported the government in collaboration with other partners to conduct a simulation workshop (SIMEX) in order to assess the shock responsiveness of the national social protection system and support the strengthening of linkages with emergency response. In **Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania**, country office teams supported the World Bank in piloting their new "**Stress Test**" tool which seeks to assess the level of readiness of social protection systems and cash transfer programs to respond to shocks. We have equally supported studies on forecast-based financing to define drought triggers, and actions to be implemented in the event of an anticipated shock to reduce the impacts of the crisis across the region.

Meanwhile, focused on learning, evidence and monitoring, **WFP-UNICEF-World Bank** at the regional level, prepared joint indicators, to measure the progress of shock-responsive social protection in five countries in the Sahel. The first report will be produced in 2022.

These indicators feed into the annual mapping of the national social protection systems and support strategic decision-making to enhance the strengthening shock-responsiveness of national social protection systems across the Sahel. A series of regional workshops and missions is planned as part of this partnership.

SUPPORTING INTEGRATION BETWEEN SOCIAL PROTECTION AND NUTRITION

Supporting the ability of social protection systems to protect and promote food security and nutrition is one of the strategic priorities for WFP in social protection. Increasingly in the region, we have been supporting national government in enhancing the nutrition sensitivity of their social protection systems. In **Mauritania**, WFP's "**Fill the Nutrient Gap**" (FNG) analysis has proven to be an effective tool in facilitating this process, in terms of identifying ways to make social safety nets more nutrition sensitive and to improve operational linkages between cash and complementary nutrition interventions.

In addition, in countries such as **Mali**, we supported **women to receive a food voucher top up to supplement the national social protection programme, which allows them to purchase nutritious food on the local market** that helps the cognitive and physical development of their children. We also support to review social registries questionnaires, to include questions which capture the nutrition status of households.

RBD is developing a technical brief on nutrition-sensitive social protection with the goal of improving the understanding of nutrition-sensitive social protection and enhancing the essential technical skills to successfully promote nutrition outcomes into social protection programme delivery.

REGISTRIES ZOOM IN

The growing interest for governments across the region to build solid operational systems that facilitate coordination among social protection programmes as well as registration and targeting of vulnerable population has accelerated the roll out of national social registries. WFP country offices and RBD are increasingly being approached by governments and partners to increase their support in this area. In countries such as the **Gambia**, **WFP supported the government to finalise the development of data sharing and protection SOPs for their social registry**. Making the Gambia the first country to be supported by

The Gambia is the first global instance for WFP to support Governments in developing data sharing protocols for the Social Registry.

WFP globally in developing data sharing protocols for the Social Registry. In **Mali**, WFP supported the government to examine the functionality of the social registry as well as supported to survey 100,000 households for potential inclusion into the registry. In **Chad**, leveraging on South-South Triangular Cooperation, WFP is supporting the Government in their strategic discussion concerning their vision and use of their nascent social registry. In **Mauritania**, the country office, in partnership with UNICEF and the World Bank, supported a review of the social registry and strategies for data updating. This trend of support from WFP can be seen in most countries across the region.

HIV-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

Inclusive and accessible social protection systems means that sustainable measures are put in place to ensure that everyone has access to social protection benefits and that these systems are comprehensive enough to address the different drivers of vulnerability for individuals and households. Across the region, the regional bureau teamed up with UNAIDS, ILO and other regional partners to create a technical working group under the UN Regional Team on AIDS, with the aim of supporting country teams and national governments to expand their social protection systems to include people living with HIV (PLHIV), at risk of and affected by HIV. This is in response to a growing awareness of the difficulties faced by PLHIV in accessing social protection benefits that take their specific needs into account. The regional group is currently undertaking a **regional mapping of HIV-sensitive social protection policies and programmes in 12 countries**, which should give an insight to inclusion and coverage gaps for persons living with HIV to social protection services.



In countries such as **Ghana** and **Togo**, RBD supports country-led assessments designed to run a **diagnostic of the HIV sensitivity of existing social protection systems and key barriers** that (may) impede access for people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV to social protection services. These assessments are expected to inform national social protection and HIV/AIDS policies, guide dialogue and support government prioritization of issues concerning HIV social protection systems.

SOUTH-SOUTH TRIANGULAR COOPERATION (SSTC)

WFP and the Government of Chad prepared a South-South Technical Cooperation project to strengthen its social registry. The project intends to enhance the operability of Chad's national Unified Social Registry (USR) and its usage for delivery and scale-up of social assistance programming, particularly in response to COVID-19, conflicts and climate change.

In December, an online knowledge exchange, was organised as a policy dialogue, to promote to promote government relations, understanding and advocacy on the management and efficiency of social registries. Participants included WFP colleagues from different CO's and RB's, the Chadian Ministry of Economy and Development Planning and their counterparts in Kenya, the Republic of Congo, and Burkina Faso. The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), from Brazil, presented the rich experiences from Brazil's journey in establishing their social registry.

Next steps include (1) a cross-border study visit to Kenya on the establishment of a comprehensive social registry and its utilisation in vulnerability-based targeting for food security and social protection interventions; (2) another exchange session with WFP Centres of Excellence in China

and Brazil to follow up on specific food-sector and food-systems related topics to social protection responses; and (3) a final virtual knowledge exchange session based on the emerging needs and topic. The project runs from November 2021 to February 2022.

BUILD, BUY, BORROW

WFP's global *Strategy for Support to Social Protection* recognises effective workforce planning along the options of 'build, buy and borrow' as one of the crucial elements to guarantee the successful implementation of our work in social protection.

The Regional Bureau undertook an assessment of the existing capacities and technical know-how of social protection teams at both regional and country levels, which led to the preparation of a capacity development plan. The plan includes series of topics and formats to raise awareness on social protection and develop knowledge and skills around WFP key priorities in support to social protection. As part of the plan, a workshop was held with country offices to present and build an understanding of the global social protection as well as to define a RBD action plan on social protection. The workshop allowed for brainstorming on how the strategy can be applied to the ongoing work in the region, what could be our level of ambition to implement it and what do we need to get there.

Another important capacity building activity was a learning session on social registries with country offices, which took place in December. Using **Senegal and Lesotho social registries as case studies**, the session provided RBD and social protection focal points in country offices with a basic understanding of registries as planning and operational tools, so that they can be better positioned to have more informed dialogue around this topic in their countries

where registries are being rolled out and used.

In terms of staffing, the regional bureau is recruiting experts on particular social protection thematics to form an “experts’ facility” for social protection in order to reinforce and tailor thematic support to country offices.

So far, RBD welcomed a new Regional Advisor on Social protection, Ana Ocampo; a consultant on capacity building (now supporting nutrition-sensitive social protection), Catherine Chazaly; an Adaptive Social Protection Manager, Sanne Holtslag; and a Reporting and Knowledge Management Officer, Lucy Goudjo.

HIGHLIGHTS ON SOME WEBINARS AND PAPERS (EXTERNAL)

Webinars

- What works in the delivery of Adaptive Social Protection? Improving G2P Payments for Recipients Co-hosted by the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), this webinar shares global experiences in adaptive social protection delivery whilst stressing on the constraints and opportunities for the adoption of Government-to-person (G2P) digital payment mechanisms.
- Changing the mindset – turning the theory into practice: Incorporating gender-sensitivity into linked humanitarian cash and social protection interventions Although there is an increasingly growing awareness on integrating gender-sensitive approaches in humanitarian cash and social protection responses, there still remain several challenges in putting these approaches to practice. This webinar, set up as a panel discussion, explains these challenges and proposes solutions to overcome them. Hosted by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and World Food Programme (WFP).
- Making public finance management work for social protection, lessons learned from Senegal and Nepal This webinar, organised by International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF, and the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF), shares creative and practical examples on ways to boost and sustain social protection financing within national budget. It highlights evidence from social protection system diagnostics, gap analysis, and fiscal space studies among others.
- Enhancing the impact of social protection programs on food security and nutrition - FAO, in partnership with partners, created the Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment Tool for food security and nutrition (ISPA-FSN Tool) to assist governments in enhancing food security and nutritional outcomes through social protection programming. The webinar presents an overview of the ISPA-FSN Tool, followed by a discussion of the experience and lessons learned from its implementation.
- The big SP e-Vent: You spoke up, we listened - but what should we do next? Sometime in the year, the socialprotection.org platform launched the ‘e-vent’, a forum where social protection actors easily expressed what disturbed and motivated them while implementing social protection interventions at the height of COVID-19 pandemic. Following up to the numerous interesting and engaging discussions shared in the Forum, a global webinar/meeting of social protection experts, donors and governments to collectively reflect and provide outline what can be done better on ground.

Publications

- The Impacts of Cash in a Pandemic: Evidence from cash-based programming in low- and middle-income countries - Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), July 2021.
- Strengthening coherence between social protection and productive interventions in four African countries - Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Universidad de los Andes (University of the Andes), 2021.
- Evaluating the impacts of the FAO's Cash+ Programme in Mali - Dao, T.H., Daidone, S. and Kangasniemi, M, 2021.

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