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WFP Social Protection & Resilience Policy Brief

Maximizing impact: the intersection of social protection and resilience

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This Policy Brief was written for the World Food Programme by Stephen Devereux (Centre for Social Protection at the UK Institute of Development Studies), Ana Solórzano and Christine Wright (World Food Programme).

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Introduction

Social protection and resilience are two parallel, complementary strands of the development agenda, and both have roles to play in the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Since social protection and resilience both strengthen the capacity of individuals, households, communities and systems to manage shocks, they bridge humanitarian and developmental programming. Both have potential to improve human wellbeing, but social protection is a set of programming instruments while resilience is an intermediate outcome. For WFP, integrated resilience programming is central in the journey towards that outcome. Resilience is one among many objectives that social protection aims to achieve, while social protection is one set of instruments that can be drawn on to strengthen resilience.

Within WFP, it is useful to clarify the conceptual linkages between social protection and resilience, and at the programming level there is growing demand from WFP Country Offices – and other development agencies such as FAO and the World Bank – to link social protection and resilience programming. This paper aims to contribute mainly to the conceptual objective, and thereby to demonstrate how WFP, given its extensive engagement with both social protection and resilience – building on learning from WFP’s integrated resilience programming, for instance in Malawi and the Sahel, but also from wider non-WFP experience – can position itself better in this space, where governments and agencies are looking for innovative ideas and partners.

WFP’s Resilience Policy of 2015, which will be updated in 2024, acknowledges the strong operational linkages between resilience and social protection: “WFP’s expertise related to resilience-building includes vulnerability analysis and mapping, community-based programming and support to social protection systems” (WFP 2015: 10). Similarly, WFP’s Social Protection Strategy of 2021 highlights the potential of social protection to build resilience: “we will pursue actions that strengthen the contribution of social protection to building people’s resilience to shocks and stressors, both idiosyncratic and covariate” (WFP 2021a: 28). At the conceptual level, the 2023 evaluation of WFP’s Resilience Policy notes that: “There are clear conceptual links between social protection and safety nets and resilience building in WFP’s policy and planning work” (WFP 2023a: vi).

This Brief asks four questions: what is resilience; what is social protection and how does it build resilience; what can social protection learn from resilience; and how can the convergence or synergies between social protection programming and resilience outcomes be maximised?

Q1. What is resilience?

Resilience is challenging to define, to measure, to build, and to test. Resilience must be understood in terms of **who** (whose resilience) and **what** (resilience against what)? Resilience can be applied either to people (individuals, households, and communities (IHC)), or to systems (ecosystems, food systems, organisations). Here is a ‘people-centred’ definition:

“The ability of countries, communities and households to manage change by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses without compromising their long-term prospects.”

(DfID 2016, ‘What is Resilience?’)

Even within ‘people-centred’ approaches, most forms of social protection focus on the individual or household level, while approaches to resilience are considered to be multilevel, with the entry point typically being through the community. This does not necessarily put the two concepts in opposition to each other, but there may be programmatic tensions or non-alignments between them, in terms of objectives, targeting, and types of interventions supported. On the positive side, there clearly are complementarities and synergies that should be identified and maximised.

Here is a ‘system-centred’ definition, from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):

“The ability of a system and its component parts to anticipate, absorb, accommodate or recover from the effects of a hazardous event in a timely and efficient manner, including through ensuring the preservation, restoration or improvement of its essential basic structures and functions”

(IPCC 2012)

The entry point for modelling resilience is completely different, depending on which definition is preferred. Are we aiming to build resilient **people**, resilient **systems**, or both? Programme design and decision making require contextualisation. Failure to differentiate between these two conceptual approaches to resilience, to understand the interlinkages between them, or to apply them in the appropriate contexts, has sometimes caused confusion and “missed opportunities”.¹

The definition favoured in this Briefing Paper, and by WFP’s Policy on Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition (WFP 2015), comes from the multi-agency Resilience Measurement Technical Working Group of the Food Security Information Network (FSIN). It implicitly addresses the resilience of both ‘people’ and ‘systems’, by referring to “adverse development consequences”:

“the capacity to ensure that shocks and stressors do not have long-lasting adverse development consequences.”

WFP’s definition of ‘resilient food systems’ explicitly highlights the links between people and systems:

“Resilient food systems have the capacity to provide enough, safe, and affordable food and healthy diets to all – even in the face of structural vulnerabilities, shocks and stressors.”

(WFP 2022a: 4)

¹ “...development and humanitarian actors have often addressed these dual goals [reducing poverty and building resilience] with little coordination, resulting in an inefficient use of the resources allocated to poor countries and missed opportunities to produce larger intervention impacts” (Schnitzer 2019: 75).



Q2. What is social protection and how can it contribute to resilience?

Social protection refers to the “policies and programmes aimed at preventing, and protecting people against, poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life [with] a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups” (SPIAC-B 2019). WFP’s interpretation of that definition, as explained in the ‘WFP Strategy for Support to Social Protection’ (2021), is that: the poverty that social protection can tackle may be multidimensional, encompassing also deprivations in meeting food and other essential needs; the vulnerabilities can be related to e.g., climate or economic shocks as well as individual life-cycle events; and that combating social exclusion implies combating inequalities.² WFP’s vision is that “By 2030 people will have substantially increased access to national social protection systems that safeguard and foster

their ability to meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs, and to manage the risks and shocks they face”.

Social protection has the potential to help build resilience through its two main branches, **social assistance** and **social insurance**, as well as through the existence of effective **social protection systems**:

- a. by increasing individual or household stocks of ‘capitals’ or assets (social assistance)
- b. by putting mechanisms in place that protect against shocks (social insurance or safety nets)
- c. by strengthening support systems that individuals and households can call on when needed (social protection systems).

² See WFP’s Strategy for Support to Social Protection for details: [here](#).

Increasing individual or household stocks of capitals or assets (social assistance)

Social protection interventions can contribute to building the resilience of people (individuals, households, communities). This reflects social protection's individualised approach: identifying deficits (e.g. income poverty) at the individual or household level, and delivering targeted solutions such as cash transfers for low-income or vulnerable people. Social assistance interventions typically target economically inactive vulnerable groups, such as children, older persons and persons with severe disability, rather than working adults who are often targeted by resilience-building programmes.

The five capitals of the **sustainable livelihoods approach** (Scoones, 1998) offer a useful organising framework for understanding the vulnerabilities that compromise resilience, and identifying where interventions should focus to strengthen resilience. Households have five categories of assets – financial, human, natural, physical, and social – and higher levels of each asset category are expected to strengthen resilience. Different forms of social protection have the potential to build multiple asset

categories, though not all at the same time or with the same intensity – it depends on each programme's objectives and effectiveness. Regular, predictable cash transfers add to the recipient's **financial capital**. Cash transfers that target women can empower them and build their **social capital**. School-based programmes build the **human capital** of children. Public works programmes can protect **natural assets** (e.g. watershed management) and build **physical assets** (e.g. infrastructure such as roads) (see Figure 1a below).

Public works can have both individual social protection and collective resilience-building functions, depending on their overall objectives, who is targeted, how many people are employed, and how much they are paid. The contribution of public works to resilience depends on the type of public works performed, and the nature and quality of the assets created. To reach the desired outcome, contexts, the overall design logical approach, asset quality and community participation, as well as targeting criteria are important elements to consider, along with integration, scale, and capacity strengthening to reach meaningful and long-term results and impact.



WFP engages in the creation or rehabilitation of community or household assets through 'Food Assistance for Assets' (FFA) programmes. These programmes help meet the immediate food needs of food insecure people whilst building assets helping them strengthen their livelihoods, reduce the risks from natural hazards, and make them and their communities more resilient to shocks. WFP's food assistance is generally not provided for public works programmes (PWP), and there are several fundamental differences between the two. First, many PWP are typically pre-selected government or partner (e.g. World Bank, UNDP, ILO) projects which offer time-bound employment to vulnerable households who may or may not benefit from the assets created through the work. For FFA, it is critical that the beneficiaries participating in the programme derive direct benefits and have a sense of ownership over the assets they have created through their labour. Additionally, if participation in PWP implies providing employment status to the workers, from an objective and legal perspective WFP cannot do this as it cannot guarantee the benefits (health insurance, medical coverage, pensions, unemployment benefits, etc.) that formal employment requires.

WFP FFA case studies can provide several insights and lessons to strengthen the design and implementation of public work programmes or similar schemes. In specific circumstances – e.g., a government request backed up by World Bank or other partners' funding, WFP may be asked to support or complement the design and implementation of PWP. To this effect, as shown in other contexts (e.g. Ethiopia), WFP can influence the characterisation and planning of PWP to qualify them as community assets – as well as being clear on what type of community or group's assets should be selected as part of PWP, and not compromise the fundamentals that guide the overall WFP livelihood assets approach based on evaluations recommendations and commitments – i.e. to 1) systematically use community-based participatory planning for assets creation, 2) generate useful, owned by

community members, and durable assets, 3) leverage assets creation/FFA to restore or rebuild the livelihood assets base of the most vulnerable communities and of the ecosystems that sustain them, and 4) use assets creation to empower women and the most vulnerable.

Social protection interventions can impact positively on some capitals but negatively on others. If cash transfers create resentment towards beneficiaries from excluded neighbours, this can undermine **social capital** at the community level. More broadly, top-down targeted interventions that either reinforce or create new patterns of inclusion and exclusion could enhance the resilience of selected households but undermine 'aggregate resilience' by weakening social cohesion at the community level. Among pastoralists in Kenya, for instance, Scoones and Mohamed (2023) argue that "instead of the deluge of external interventions, ways must be found to build resilience from below, drawing on local practices and networks" (emphasis added). For this reason, WFP has introduced participatory planning throughout its FFA and livelihoods asset creation programmes.

Increasing stocks of assets can build pre-emptive capacity to withstand shocks. For example, a household with substantial savings is better placed to maintain its access to food during food price spikes than a household with zero savings. But resilience is also tested by shocks. Investing in stocks of assets is not enough, for several reasons. First, social protection programmes that support livelihoods are mainly individualised, but shocks and hazards often operate at the collective (community or system) level, as discussed below. Second, building household assets does not address other important aspects of building resilience against hazards, such as prevention, risk mitigation and emergency preparedness, through to disaster response, recovery and reconstruction at local and national levels.

Third, assets can be destroyed instantly by

a sudden-onset shock (e.g. flood), eroded by a slow-onset shock (e.g. chronic illness that requires costly treatment), or threatened by chronic or recurrent stressors (e.g. seasonality in agriculture-dependent livelihoods). Also, some assets are more resilient than others. Physical and financial assets are more vulnerable to erosion or loss following an exogenous shock than is human capital. The imperative to sell assets following a shock or during the annual hungry season – ‘distress sales’ of assets being a ‘coping strategy’ that compromises household viability – can keep people locked in ‘poverty traps’ or ‘asset traps’ (Barrett and Carter 2012).

Sustainable graduation³, understood as a state where livelihoods have been fundamentally transformed, in contrast with ‘administrative’ graduation (which usually signals an income or asset threshold established by programmes at which a beneficiary is no longer eligible), requires building household assets to a level where they are resilient against mild or moderate shocks, and can transform their livelihoods from a vicious cycle of disaccumulation to a dynamic cycle of income growth and asset accumulation (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux 2013). But sustainable graduation also requires a multi-sectoral approach, with investments by various actors in several social dimensions including social services and food systems, as well as sound macro-economic performance and robust institutions. These investments are beyond the scope of social protection or WFP’s resilience programmatic work, but they contribute at different levels to the process of sustainable graduation.

Social protection has proven its ability to increase the stock of a person’s or household’s financial, human, natural and physical capital, and even to some extent their social capital. However, most impact evaluations, including randomised control trials (RCTs), measure changes in beneficiary circumstances from baseline (pre-intervention) to endline (termination of benefits) in comparison

to a control group. This methodology has been criticised for capturing mainly programme effects rather than programme impacts and for ignoring the dynamic context within which communities and programmes operate, since the sustainability of gains made is not tested post-intervention, and it is impossible to fully isolate the recipient and control groups from other factors that may influence outcomes but are not measured. One exception is an independent evaluation of BRAC’s ‘graduation model’ programme in Bangladesh (Bandiera et al. 2013), which found that gains in assets and incomes had been retained or improved by a majority of programme participants, two years after programme support ended. But this indicator of **sustainability** is not a sufficient indicator of **resilience**, since the households surveyed did not experience a significant covariate shock during the evaluation period. Graduation programmes have also been criticised for leaving participants with no support post-exit, which is antithetical to resilience. Moreover, when these programmes do not take into consideration the community dynamics and the overall local context into the design and implementation, such as local solidarity and reciprocity, but also local power dynamics, these programmes risk enhancing existing local inequalities.

Protecting vulnerable people against shocks (safety nets and social insurance)

A second category of social protection (after social assistance) is social insurance, which can provide protection against certain hazards. For example, unemployment insurance provides partial income replacement following a loss of employment. During COVID-19 lockdowns, formally employed individuals who could access unemployment insurance were more resilient than self-employed and informally employed workers who had no such insurance. Other financial products include Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLAs), cooperatives pools,

³ ‘Graduation’ is a common term in development programming, but WFP is encouraging ‘measured progression’ instead, recognising the challenges of defining and measuring graduation.

credit linked insurance, for example. When weather shocks compromise natural capital (crops and livestock), farmers' financial capital (and household food security) can be protected by weather-indexed crop insurance or index-based livestock insurance (IBLI). Livelihoods and physical assets can also be protected by on-demand 'employment guarantee schemes'⁴, that maintain or build community infrastructure during the annual hungry season or following a shock.

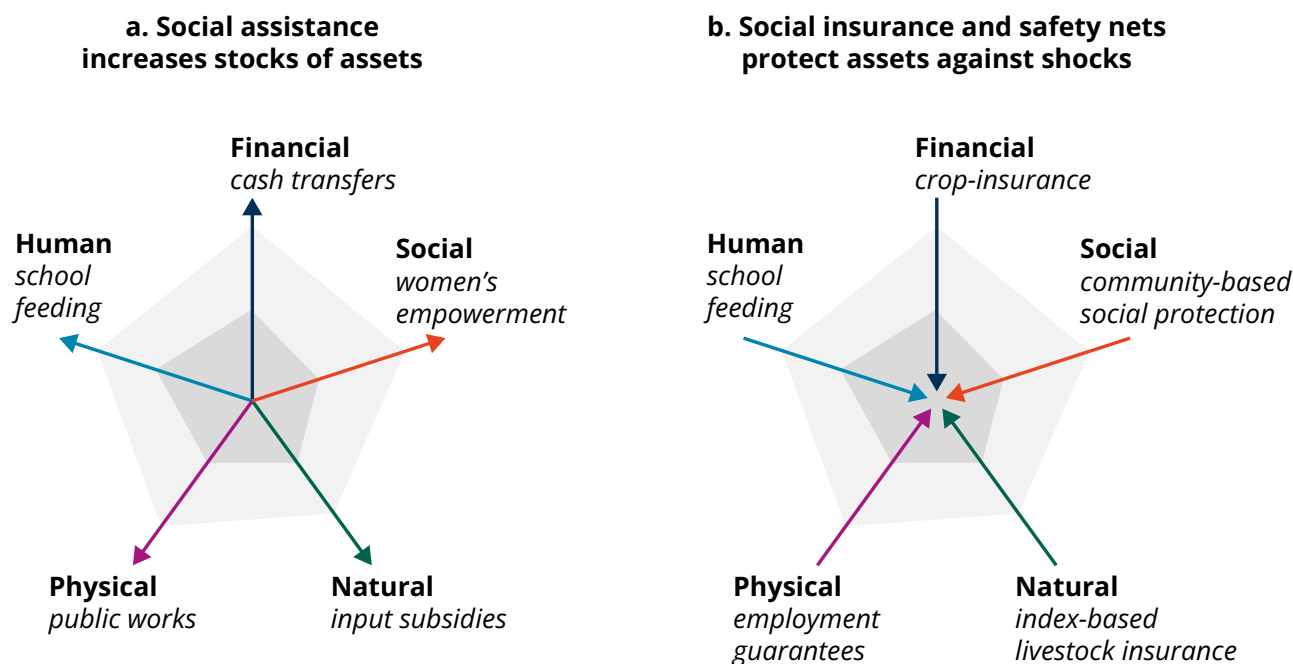
Social assistance instruments and safety nets can also perform this 'preventive' function. For instance, 'school feeding at home', a modality used extensively during COVID-19 lockdowns, can protect the education and nutrition status of children. Safety nets and insurance payouts can also be used to protect other assets – e.g. to keep children in school during a drought (protecting human capital), or to prevent maladaptive

'distress sales' of productive assets (protecting stocks of natural capital).

Community-based social protection that draws on local social capital can also play an important role, but these mechanisms and practices tend to be neglected by formal social protection systems.

Social insurance and safety nets build resilience to the extent that it protects assets or capitals against shocks that could decimate the individual or household's asset base, leaving them in an unviable situation, facing destitution. However, mechanisms that aim to minimise shock-related losses can be criticised for their limited ambition to return people to their pre-shock state of vulnerability – i.e., providing absorptive rather than transformative capacity (Szyp 2023). Resilience is strengthened by addressing the drivers of vulnerability, not just the symptoms.

Figure 1: How social protection contributes to resilience of individuals, households, and communities by protecting and increasing livelihood assets



⁴ These social protection programmes provide a guarantee of employment to those able to work when the labour market does not provide for it, usually with accredited training.



The inner ring of this first cobweb diagram represents stocks of IHC assets pre-intervention, while the outer ring represents asset stocks post-intervention. These stocks can be measured for **'static adequacy'** against thresholds (income-based poverty lines), but not for **'dynamic adequacy'** against future shocks. In other words, asset-holdings can be used to measure poverty levels (a static outcome), but not resilience capacity (a dynamic outcome).

The second cobweb diagram represents losses that IHC could incur following a livelihood shock (i.e. contraction in assets due to low resilience), while the outer ring represents how these assets could be protected by social protection interventions such as insurance (pre-emptive resilience-strengthening mechanisms). Social insurance schemes strengthen resilience by **guaranteeing** that adverse shocks will trigger compensatory payouts.

Strengthening the systems that support programme delivery

In fragile contexts, a well-functioning social protection system can be an effective mechanism that contributes to building 'resilience', especially as it evolves from temporary humanitarian assistance to regular social protection provision, if it reliably delivers adequate assistance to people who need it, when they need it. Insurance mechanisms that pay out when shocks strike can be key components of any social protection system that aims to strengthen resilience. A household will be considerably more resilient if it has guaranteed access to safety nets or insurance against the full range of contingencies identified by the ILO's Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention of 1952, such as unemployment, illness, injury at work, maternity, and retirement; furthermore, a household will be considerably more resilient to idiosyncratic shocks. On the other hand, the Minimum Standards contingencies are mostly linked to each individual's relationship to the

labour market. Payouts are not triggered by hazards or their impacts, but by injuries at work, loss of employment, retirement, and so on. Resilience must be built against a broader range of shocks. This also requires constant application of context risk analysis in order to avoid doing harm in fragile and conflict settings that top-down policies might avoid considering, and that inadvertently can contribute to undermining and disrupting local support mechanisms, embedding marginalisation and exclusion, among other risks.

Social security systems are not well attuned to the impacts of hazards (including from climate change, or health shocks). This is because they derive from a European conception of the welfare state that provide social assistance or social insurance to individuals affected by **idiosyncratic** risks and shocks, but in many countries in the Global South social protection emerged as a response to **covariate** shocks such as structural adjustment programmes, recurrent famines, the Asian financial crisis, HIV and AIDS. Building resilience in such contexts requires risk management and risk reduction measures, not only residual or reactive social safety nets (Devereux and Solórzano 2016; Dijkman and van Leeuwen 2020).

COVID-19, for instance, triggered a range of new instruments to support affected workers, building on but distinct from existing social security arrangements.⁵ Despite ongoing innovations that enhance the convergence between social protection (for idiosyncratic shocks) and humanitarian programming (for covariate hazards) – such as the harmonisation of cash and food responses in Ethiopia (ICFRP 2019) – the entry points are entirely different.

COVID-19 tested the resilience and shock-responsive capacity of social protection systems in countries across the world, and prompted an assessment of and investment in strengthening these systems. The International Social Security

⁵ Examples from high-, middle-, and low-income countries: Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (UK); Temporary Employee/Employer Relief Scheme (South Africa); and Urban Cash Transfers Top-up (Ethiopia).

Association (ISSA) produced guidelines on how to build more resilient social security systems and services pre-emptively, to improve their response capacity against future shocks (Brodersohn 2023).

Frameworks have been developed to explore how to include a climate, humanitarian and/or disaster risk management lens into social protection that encompasses systematic measures to reduce vulnerability and build resilience, in the context of covariate shocks. These frameworks include 'adaptive social protection' (Davies, et al. 2009; World Bank 2020), 'climate-responsive social protection' (Kuriakose, et al. 2013), and 'shock-responsive social protection' (O'Brien, et al. 2018), among others. These frameworks have in common an attempt to understand the opportunities to build more risk-informed systems and programmes and ultimately contribute to resilience against shocks and stressors for poor and vulnerable people. Agencies including WFP and the World Bank are supporting many governments to do this.

However, the development of this agenda should not be at the expense of strengthening **routine** social protection provision. In many contexts, like those faced with recurrent predictable shocks, improving the **coverage, adequacy, quality, responsiveness, and comprehensiveness** of regular social protection programmes can in itself help to reduce vulnerability and enhance long-term resilience. The risk of investing resources in short-term or temporary programmes as separate, stand-alone instruments is if this diverts resources away from equipping regular social protection systems with **in-built** shock-responsive and adaptive capacity (WFP 2022a).

Social protection has also been criticised for offering top-down individualised solutions to systemic or structural challenges. No amount of assets will insulate a household against hunger

and starvation if the food system fails, leaving them physically unable to access food from any source at any price.⁶ People are embedded in structures, institutions and systems, and if these are vulnerable to shocks, then even well-resourced individuals will be vulnerable. Social protection should draw from local (collective) resilience-building practices, complemented by disaster risk management planning and investments.

Resilience is more closely aligned with vulnerability to shocks than with poverty, and social protection aims to reduce vulnerability (ex ante), as well as to alleviate poverty (ex post). But vulnerability is more difficult to define, to measure, and to monitor over time than income or asset poverty, which is relatively straightforward to define, measure and monitor, but inadequate as an indicator of resilience.

Social protection can have bigger impacts on resilience if it links people to social services (education, health) and livelihood opportunities (e.g. agriculture, graduation programmes) – sometimes called 'cash-plus' approaches (Roelen et al. 2017), amongst others. But these social services and livelihood sectors also need to be strengthened and made resilient to shocks, taking into consideration the context where they operate so that they support local livelihoods and autonomous practices that might be enhancing resilience. Investing in social protection without investment in essential services and livelihood opportunities adapted to context will not maximise the potential impact on resilience. Likewise, where relevant and according to context, integrating and layering social protection with climate services and disaster risk management/ disaster risk reduction activities such as climate data and projections, early warning systems, anticipatory action and forecast-based financing can also contribute to resilience outcomes (Solórzano and Cárdenes 2019).

⁶ This happened during the Netherlands famine of 1944, when a military blockade isolated part of the country, cutting off food supplies and causing starvation deaths of 10,000–22,000 Dutch citizens.

Q3. How can resilience and food systems thinking inform social protection, and vice-versa?

Building resilience against food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition requires strengthening food systems. While social protection generally boosts the **demand** for food, a resilient food system delivers a reliable **supply** of food, adequate to meet demand at all times, even when stressed (WFP 2022a).

When applied to food systems, resilience can be disaggregated into three supply-side components – food production, food processing, and food markets. In Malawi, WFP’s Integrated Approach to Livelihoods and Resilience Building includes boosting crop production with climate-smart agriculture, reducing post-harvest losses through improved storage, and enhancing farmers’ access to markets (WFP 2021b). Interventions that straddle social protection and other sectors can strengthen food production (e.g. home-grown school feeding, that stimulate agriculture and education), or food markets (e.g. fresh food vouchers, that stimulate both the demand and supply of nutritious vegetables and fruits in local markets).

An example of social protection working to build the resilience of food systems and livelihoods at the same time comes from Brazil, where the government mandated a closed season of 4 months/year, to protect over-exploited fish species. Anyone caught fishing protected species in the closed season was fined or had their fishing gear confiscated. As a result, thousands of fishers became seasonally unemployed during the closed season. The Ministry of Labour and Employment introduced ‘Seguro Defeso’ (“closed season insurance”) – as a targeted unemployment benefit scheme, with fishers receiving an ‘unemployment benefit’ equal to the

official minimum wage during the closed season. This case study illustrates how interventions to protect environmental resources can be mitigated by social protection interventions that protect people whose livelihoods and food security depend on exploiting these resources (FAO and IPC-IG 2022).

The Ukraine crisis highlighted the risk for many countries of depending on imported cereals, in a global food system that is vulnerable to geopolitical shocks. As a general principle, whether households or communities or countries depend on locally produced food or imported food trades off one set of risks against another, so an optimal approach is one that spreads risks through diversification. Having access to global food markets builds resilience against domestic food production shocks, while a strong local agricultural sector buffers domestic food consumption against disruptions in global food systems.

COVID-19 also tested the resilience of food systems, which generally proved able to withstand the shock of lockdowns and restrictions on mobility, partly because the food system was declared to be an ‘essential sector’ in most countries. Workers in the food sector were exempted from these restrictions, and this decision was a major factor in protecting the resilience of food systems during lockdowns. Government policies are key determinants in strengthening or undermining the resilience of systems.

WFP Country Offices implementing food systems and integrated resilience programmes work with communities to build their resilience against

natural and human-made shocks and stressors that threaten livelihoods and food security. This approach focuses on addressing the causes of vulnerability, for instance by ensuring that communities have the knowledge, tools and resources needed to mitigate the effects of recurrent droughts, land degradation and natural resource loss, and climate change.

In Malawi, resilience-building has four pillars: asset creation, reducing food waste, climate services (weather forecasts, agro-advisories), and risk management (Village Saving and Loans, crop insurance) (WFP 2021b).

In the Sahel, the integrated resilience approach has three pillars (WFP 2023b: 2):

- **Anticipate, absorb and protect**
Meeting basic food security and nutrition needs in the face of shocks and stressors: food assistance and linkages to social protection, early warning systems, preparedness and anticipatory actions;
- **Adapt**
Ensuring sustainable livelihoods and better nutrition, health and education outcomes: asset creation and ecosystems rehabilitation, natural resource management, support for smallholder farmers and access to markets, climate adaptation and mitigation, home-grown school feeding, nutrition support packages;
- **Transform**
Strengthening local, national and regional institutional capacities and driving systems change.

Communities participating in WFP's integrated resilience programme in the Sahel have demonstrated increasing resilience against shocks and stressors, as indicated by stable or rising food consumption, improved diets, reduced use of adverse coping mechanisms, falling needs for humanitarian assistance, increased social cohesion, and better protection against natural disasters and climate change. These

positive outcomes are attributed to the creation of assets and social safety nets through the resilience programme, as well as improved access to markets and basic services, and women's empowerment (WFP 2022b).

While this approach has overlaps with social protection, it differs from mainstream social assistance schemes that compensate poor and vulnerable individuals or households for their lack of assets or loss of livelihoods, with food assistance (cash transfers, in-kind transfers, food vouchers). A resilience-building approach tries to build assets to a level where even after a shock, affected households can sustain themselves and retain their productive assets without falling into destitution or depending on humanitarian aid.

This approach has at least four distinct advantages.

- Firstly, resilience programming examines the threats that trigger poverty and food insecurity, and tailors its interventions to address these threats. Resilience addresses the causes, drivers or pathways to poverty and food insecurity, not only the outcomes.
- Secondly, resilience programming has the potential to transform the structural conditions of poverty and food insecurity, for instance by strengthening weak links in food systems. Transformative social protection, that addresses the social causes of vulnerability such as gender-based discrimination or lack of political voice, also has this potential, but political commitment for implementing transformative measures is often more rhetorical than real.
- Thirdly, to the extent that resilience programming is proactive or pre-emptive, it is more cost-effective than reactive humanitarian measures. A study by USAID found that every dollar invested in resilience and early response saves three dollars in emergency relief (cited in WFP 2022a: 1). This applies equally to



social protection that includes preventive and promotive objectives, and to social protection systems with flex-capacity that can expand rapidly during large covariate shocks. Currently, WFP is working in several countries to build anticipatory action, even before a forecasted climate shock occurs.

- Fourthly, because resilience also has a strong focus on the community level, it has potential to influence social outcomes within communities and identity groups, beyond individual families or households. A recent evaluation found that working together on WFP-supported asset creation activities in the Sahel reduced intra-community tensions and promoted social cohesion across different identity groups: between IDPs or refugees and host communities, or crop farmers and livestock herders).⁷ The use of WFP tools such as integrated context analysis (ICA), seasonal livelihood programming (SLP), and community-based participatory planning (CBPP), as well as programme outcomes such as equitable access to scarce land and water resources, contributed to these positive social outcomes (Pul et al. 2023).

On the other hand, in instances where resilience programming focuses only on building and protecting livelihoods and productive assets, this can result in the 'social welfare caseload' that is part of every community (e.g. people with severe disability, or older persons without support) being overlooked. However, integrated

resilience programmes should be inclusive, and all community members should benefit from the assets created, to build social cohesion. It follows that complementary and integrated programming are critical for the delivery of comprehensive support. Resilience building, safety nets, and social assistance interventions complement each other. In 2020-22, WFP and UNICEF jointly implemented the project 'Responding to COVID-19 through Social Protection Systems in the Sahel' as support to the governments of Mali, Mauritania and Niger to respond to the immediate massive needs generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and other shocks through cash transfers and complementary services as well as to strengthen overall national capacities to adapt and build more shock-responsive, nutrition- and child-sensitive social protection systems in the long term (WFP 2023b).

The two intervention categories also have different approaches to gender. While social protection empowers women mainly by transferring cash and resources to them, resilience programmes can engage women directly in productive activities and decision-making forums at community level. However, these gaps narrow with broader approaches that link climate, environment and social protection like PROEZA⁸ in Paraguay or the MGNREGS in India (Kaur et al. 2020), which expand the objectives of social protection and build linkages to other instruments and sectors, and deepen the overlaps with resilience thinking and practice.

⁷ Social cohesion can be understood as "the product of interactions and engagements between diverse individuals and groups who see value in collaboration for the achievement of a shared and higher-level goal" (Pul et al. 2023: 3).

⁸ PROEZA provides environmental conditional cash transfers (E-CCT) in exchange for community-based climate-sensitive agroforestry (www.greenclimate.fund/project/fp062).

Q4. How can synergies between social protection and resilience be maximised?

It is important to emphasise that strengthening food systems is not an end in itself, but is a means towards achieving the ultimate goal of food security and nutrition for all. People and human wellbeing are at the heart of any food system. Similarly, extending and strengthening social protection systems is not an end in itself, but is essential for achieving the ultimate goal of ensuring that every person is adequately protected at all times against threats to their livelihoods, food security and nutrition.

Table 1 captures the main argument of this paper – that movements from low to high resilience require investments in **people** (individualised social assistance and social insurance programmes) as well as investments in **systems** (notably, social protection systems, disaster risk reduction, and food systems). The two components work in tandem, and they should be strengthened in parallel, not in isolation.

Table 1. How social protection can contribute to building resilient people and systems

Low resilience >>>	SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMING		Strengthening systems	>>> High resilience
PRE-INTERVENTIONS	SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	SOCIAL INSURANCE	SYSTEMS	POST-INTERVENTIONS
Low assets No social protection Limited, low-quality infrastructure Weak social services Weak food systems Degraded natural environments.	Cash transfers and other interventions such as school meals increase the assets held by individuals, households, and communities	Insurance schemes, financial inclusion and community-based risk-pooling mechanisms offer protection against livelihood shocks. Social safety nets	Social protection systems are well-functioning and comprehensive. National and local disaster risk reduction systems are in place. Food systems are integrated, robust and equitable. Systems are well coordinated	IHC have adequate levels of assets. Social assistance + insurance against shocks are in place. Infrastructure is built or maintained. Social services are good + accessible. Food systems are robust + equitable. Environments are rehabilitated or protected.
	INTEGRATED RESILIENCE PROGRAMMING			
	Asset creation; ecosystems rehabilitation; climate services; risk management; access to markets; natural resource management; early warning systems; anticipatory actions; institutional capacity strengthening; system strengthening.			



Conclusion

The livelihoods approach was selected as a framework for this paper because it highlights the complementary roles of social protection and resilience-building interventions. While both sets of instruments have the potential to protect and promote all five types of capital, they do so in slightly different ways. Social protection schemes protect and promote **financial capital** (most directly, with cash transfers) and **human capital** (through linkages to education, health and nutrition services). Resilience-building programmes in agricultural communities protect and promote **natural capital, physical capital, and social capital**, also **financial capital** (by increasing crop production, reducing post-harvest losses and linking farmers to markets), and **human capital** (by training and capacity-building for self-reliance, which is a major emphasis). Social protection can also safeguard **natural** and **physical** assets, if it prevents the use of damaging coping strategies. This is one example of how the two approaches can work together, if resilience programmes build natural and physical assets that social protection then safeguards.

Comparisons between social protection and resilience programming can also be drawn using the four pillars of food security. While both approaches have potential impacts on all four pillars, social protection that delivers cash or in-kind transfers operates mainly through the **access** to food pillar. Resilience building efforts that boost crop production while reducing vulnerability to climate shocks operate through the **availability** and **stability** pillars, respectively. Alternatively,

drawing on the transformative social protection framework, social assistance provides **protection**, safety nets and insurance aim to prevent destitution following shocks, while investments in asset creation and crop production under resilience programming **promote** livelihoods, and efforts to empower women or marginalised groups **transform** the social and structural conditions of poverty and vulnerability.

These linkages and complementarities between social protection and resilience-building suggest that synergies can be achieved by designing interventions at national or sub-national levels that deliver both sets of desired outcomes. A standard package of interventions will not be appropriate – consider the very different contexts of verdant Malawi versus the arid and semi-arid Sahel. Innovative programming is needed, contextualised and tailored to each country or even to each community. For example, in some contexts anticipatory action such as forecast-based financing might be appropriate, but in agro-pastoralist communities index-based livestock insurance could provide better protection against climate shocks.

Delivering a holistic package that includes **social assistance** to meet immediate basic needs, as well as **insurance** or **safety nets** to protect against shocks, while **strengthening livelihoods** in ways that build **resilience** for individuals, households, and communities, requires a coordinated systems approach, with each component playing its role, jointly and separately.

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World Food Programme

Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70,
00148 Rome, Italy - T +39 06 65131

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