



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

WFP's support to strengthening the national social protection system in Haiti

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Acronyms

AAP	Anticipatory Action Plan
ASPIRE	Adaptive Social Protection for Increased Resilience project
ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMPEL	Implementer-Led Evaluation and Learning Associate Award
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
KII	Key Informant Interview
MAST	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, Haiti (Ministère des Affaires Sociales et du Travail)
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finances, Haiti (Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSPPP	National Social Protection and Promotion Policy
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PROMES	Support Programme for Social Promotion and Protection
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SCR	Drafting Sub-Commission
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIMAST	Information System of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
TSPS	National Sectoral Table on Social Protection
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme



1. Introduction

This case study reviews the role of the World Food Programme (WFP) in supporting social protection in Haiti over the last decade. It assesses how WFP has supported the building blocks of Haiti's national social protection system, focusing on the development of a national social protection policy, the expansion of the social registry, the implementation of a safety net, the institutionalisation process for social protection and linking shock-responsive social protection to anticipatory action. The case study is a light-touch exercise, undertaken through a rapid literature review and interviews with WFP staff and other key stakeholders.

2. Context

Country Context

Haiti is the lowest-income country in the Americas and ranks 163 (out of 191) in the Human Development Report 2021/2022 (UNDP, 2022). Of the total population of 11.4 million people (51 percent women), 33 percent are under the age of 15, while people over the age of 65 make up only 5 percent; and 55.3 percent live in urban areas (WFP, 2020c). The country has one of the highest levels of chronic food insecurity in the world, with more than half of its total population chronically food insecure (including 19,000 classified in Catastrophe as per the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, Phase 5) (IPC, 2023) and 22 percent of children chronically malnourished.¹ The underlying drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition are manifold: extreme poverty, frequent climate shocks and environmental disasters due to the country's geographical location, economic shocks, conflict/insecurity and infectious diseases, combined with structural issues such as poor water and sanitation infrastructure, inadequate access to services (e.g. healthcare) and suboptimal infant and young child feeding practices (WFP, 2022d). Thus, issues around food availability, access and stability have been linked to insufficient agricultural production,

overdependence on poor-quality expensive food imports, and reduced access to and availability of nutritious and fresh foods, resulting in the double burden of malnutrition where undernutrition along with overweight and obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases coexist (Rasul et al., 2022; key informant interview (KII)).

As well as the high levels of poverty, food insecurity and poor infrastructure, Haiti's geographical location makes it particularly vulnerable to climate disasters (WFP, 2020c). Indeed, the impact of natural shocks and hazards is exacerbated in rural areas, where agricultural livelihoods have underperformed due to land degradation, inappropriate agricultural and energy practices, under-investments and weather-related shocks such as hurricanes and droughts (WFP, 2021c). The inability to sustain decent livelihoods in the agriculture sector is causing young men and women to migrate to increasingly congested urban zones or abroad, leading to urban expansion and a reduction in the workforce in certain rural areas (WFP, 2021c; KII). The evidence shows that there is unequal income distribution across individuals and households in Haiti; in particular, gender inequality in the country is very high and is associated with socially

¹ The credibility of statistics relating to food insecurity and malnutrition varies, including on the magnitude of the issue, trends and potential contradictions (key informant interview).

constructed and reinforced gender roles that determine access to resources. This shapes the ways in which women, men, girls and boys are affected by climate change, and their ability to cope with it (WFP, 2019c).

In addition to previous decades of environmental destruction, Haiti has experienced recurrent episodes of political instability, which have hindered the country's socioeconomic development. More recently, a number of compounding related crises dealt Haiti a systemic blow, which caused WFP operations in the country to be halted, leaving millions without sufficient food, having a deteriorating impact on livelihoods, increasing levels of displacement and exacerbating people's vulnerabilities (WFP, 2021c). The litany of crises included political turmoil, civil unrest (as a reaction to increased fuel and food prices and corruption), sustained gang activity and crime with increasing violence, the Covid-19 pandemic, and continued climatic and environmental shocks. These affected national and subnational economic activity, health and education, and resulted in social, security and economic disruption that

has brought further deterioration to Haiti's precarious humanitarian situation, as well as limiting the country's access to food and humanitarian assistance (WFP, 2020c).

Social protection context

Recent efforts involving the Government have contributed, however, to the development of an essential element of a social protection system: a national social protection policy (WFP, 2022b). In 2020, the National Social Protection and Promotion Policy (NSPPP) was adopted, which aimed to reduce the system fragmentation and at the same time define a strategic framework for the national social protection initiatives considering the local context and challenges. There is much work ongoing to operationalize the NSPPP. This policy has been supported by the expansion of the vulnerability database, the Information System of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (SIMAST), a foundational tool



for social protection planning and implementation, including for emergency response, in which 700,000² Haitians are registered, according to the data in the WFP Annual Report of 2022 (WFP, 2022b). SIMAST was built in the face of a lack of comprehensive household data to adequately inform social protection actions (WFP, 2020c; World Bank, 2021).³ Further, the flagship national social protection programme Adaptive Social Protection for Increased Resilience (ASPIRE) project, co-implemented by Haiti's Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MAST) and WFP through a World Bank grant, now delivers cash transfers to vulnerable households with pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people living with disabilities, in the Grand'Anse department, covering more than 20,000 households (WFP, 2022b). Moreover, as part of this and other social protection initiatives, there is an ongoing process of 'institutionalization' promoted by WFP, which aims to hand over social protection-related processes to the Government once its capacities are sufficiently strengthened (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, WFP Haiti has developed an Anticipatory Action (AA) programme to mitigate the impact of floods and cyclones by enhancing early warning systems, national weather forecasting, and government capacity for disaster preparedness and response since 2015. Leveraging advancements in social protection, including the national social registry, WFP integrated AA into Haiti's disaster management system, moving away from parallel workstreams (WFP, 2024). WFP has taken a key role in developing these five elements³, titled "WFP activities", we provide more detail of their development and expansion process.

Furthermore, during the last couple of decades, Haiti has developed several national policies and development plans (see Annex 1 for more detail on these policies) to guide its development

and resilience. However, most of this progress is quite recent, and, for a long time, the social protection system in Haiti has been weak and fragmented (for both state and non-state actors), characterized by ambition that is not matched by financial resources or implementation capacity, a lack of oversight across initiatives, and a lack of transparency in the identification of and payment to beneficiaries (Greeley, 2019; WFP, 2021c; KII). Overall, social protection mechanisms have mainly focused on cash transfers, and social protection services are underprovided, as programmes are characterized by limited coverage, are often ad hoc and short term in nature, cover small geographical areas or are narrowly defined, and are scattered across numerous institutions (Beazley, 2017; KII).⁴

In contrast to other countries in the region, where humanitarian aid plays a less prominent role, Haiti's social protection system is not only largely funded but also partially implemented by humanitarian agencies and development partners (Beazley, 2017), traditionally prioritizing emergencies (KII). Influenced by external donors, some progress in the social protection sphere has been achieved since the 1990s, including the extension and diversification of social protection mechanisms, with social promotion policies in education, health, food security, housing and livelihoods (Lamaute-Brisson, 2013; Simanowitz and Greeley, 2017).

Most government-financed programmes have historically been either discontinued or inactive (WFP, 2022b). The role of the state as a provider or protector to the people, its technical and material capacity and expertise to provide assistance (humanitarian or social protection) is yet to be fully developed (KII). Further, within the humanitarian community there is a limited push for institutional capacity strengthening, which often gets deprioritized over many competing priorities. (KII).⁵

² SIMAST is unmatched, as it is the only comprehensive social registry in the country.

³ SIMAST could never be transferred to MAST due to the inadequacy of the MAST office to house the registry, due to security and connectivity issues; therefore it has been housed at the WFP offices (World Bank 2021).

⁴ Examples of these include the ASPIRE, Support Programme for Social Promotion and Protection (PROMES) and SAN (Sécurité Alimentaire Nutritionnelle) programmes, all donor-funded and implemented by different institutions (Haiti 2020; SUN Movement 2019; World Bank 2021; KII).

⁵ Indeed, this key informant reported that Haiti is in a state of chronic emergency, with 'sticking plasters' commonly used, without any relevant structural or strategic approaches to institutional capacity strengthening to ensure that work is sustainable. This flags a disconnect between national development needs and funding that prioritizes humanitarian short-term assistance.

As shock-responsive social protection relies on there being a social protection system of relative strength in place to begin with (Winder Rossi et al., 2017), in Haiti, scale-ups have been largely funded by humanitarian agencies and donors. There are no contingency funds for the expansion of government social protection schemes. The absence of a payment system for the delivery of cash support is one of the main barriers for rapid and multi-sectoral assistance during emergencies (Beazley, 2017). This is why, according to the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan, one of the country's priorities is to enhance the complementarity between humanitarian and development actions (Harvey and Mohamed, 2022; OCHA, 2021).

While poverty is widely recognized to be multidimensional, most donors take an approach that focuses on one issue only, and more complex approaches that connect mechanisms have seldom been pursued. Donors' strategic differences at an international level have been reflected in country-specific strategies that guide these institutions' work in Haiti. In addition, there are differences in the pursuit of alliances and, in effect, in the patronage given by international agencies to local government institutions (Simanowitz and Greeley, 2017). For example, the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provided financial and technical support to Haiti's Economic and Social Assistance Fund through *Kore Fanmi*. *Kore Fanmi* was a programme that seeks to harmonize and improve the provision of basic services to poor and vulnerable families, with a view to moving away from a national fragmented and unequal system to one of systematic coverage focusing on the rights and needs of families. On the other hand, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and WFP supported MAST through *Kore Lavi* which was a social safety net for food and nutrition security that prioritizes consumption of locally grown quality products (Simanowitz and Greeley, 2017).

In terms of institutional arrangements, MAST is the key national stakeholder when it comes to social protection programming, recognized as the umbrella institution for the implementation of social protection and social assistance programmes in Haiti. Civil servants from the Government of Haiti were engaged to provide technical assistance to design and implement national policies and programmes (KII). Key informants also reported that MAST's legitimacy is currently evidenced by the allocation of the largest ministerial budget for the financial year 2023 (KII).

The absence of comprehensive household data in Haiti has been a considerable challenge in informing development and social assistance programmes. The recognition of the need to avoid competition has led to some organizations, such as WFP and the World Bank, to develop the beginnings of a national social registry (Simanowitz and Greeley, 2017). Indeed, throughout the last decade, SIMAST has been used to inform the design of social protection programmes in a data-scarce context (the last census was in 2003) (Beazley, 2017). The registry was originally developed as a beneficiary registry to support the *Kore Lavi* cash transfer programme in 2013, which used a poverty targeting tool – the Haiti Deprivation and Vulnerability Index – to channel resources to the extreme poor. Supported by various stakeholders, MAST rapidly expanded the coverage of SIMAST, currently holding vulnerability data on 35 percent of the Haitian population. The objective is for it to continue to expand and become a tool for social protection planning and implementation, including in emergency response (Beazley, 2017; World Bank, 2021). However, the Haiti Deprivation and Vulnerability Index targeting methodology was not designed for emergency response and would have limitations if used for that purpose (Beazley, 2017).

3. WFP's objectives and role

In the last ten years, WFP has built on its dual mandate of saving and changing lives and positioned itself within social protection in Haiti as a key stakeholder (KII). WFP Haiti country office's priority is to support the Haitian Government in developing sustainable solutions to hunger and malnutrition to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) on 'Zero Hunger' (WFP, 2022d). WFP aims to do that by leveraging its strong operational capacity in humanitarian and development activities, and its technical and policy-level partnerships with core ministries (WFP, 2019c). Instead of implying that the country office can or should do everything, its mandate allows it to offer a unique contribution across different levels of the social protection system, guided by national

needs and priorities identified in consultation with government and partners and set out in the country strategic plan.

Contributing to the attainment of SDGs 2 and 17 (Partnerships for the goals), the country strategic plan is aligned with the updated national policy and strategy for food sovereignty, food security and nutrition, the national strategic development plan and the United Nations development assistance framework (WFP, 2019c). Developed through extensive consultations with the Government, partners, civil society and donors, the Country Strategic Plan 2019–2023 consolidated and accelerated several strategic shifts initiated in recent years (WFP, 2021c).⁶ One of these key changes is about reflecting

⁶ The country strategic plan for 2019-2023 was designed to contribute to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through seven strategic outcomes (SOs). **SDG 2:** SO1 focuses on food and cash assistance to households affected by shocks and preparedness for emergencies. SO2 aims to provide nutrition-sensitive safety nets for vulnerable populations. SO3 focuses on supporting smallholder farmers and their communities to improve their livelihoods and local production. SO5 aims to build the resilience of rural communities through Food Assistance for Assets programmes. **SDG 17:** SO5 is focused on strengthening the capacity of national and local institutions to address food insecurity and malnutrition by 2030. SO6 and SO7 ensure the provision of services to the Government, as well as humanitarian and development partners for on-demand specialized needs throughout the year and emergency common services in times of crisis.



the increased emphasis on technical assistance in the United Nations development assistance framework. This will involve consolidating WFP's contribution to upstream policy, operational and system-level capacity strengthening in order to facilitate the future handover of WFP activities to national stakeholders and to ensure the long-term sustainability of national relief and development programmes (WFP, 2019c).

The WFP country office has worked across the three levels of the national social protection system (Programme features; Knowledge and learning; System architecture), covering a number of building blocks (WFP, 2021f). Based on WFP's knowledge and experience of working at the operational level on the national safety net, the organization became a key stakeholder, contributing to work at the analytical and also

strategic levels of the national social protection system. Indeed, WFP in Haiti currently has key roles working on the building blocks of the system, primarily **Policy and legislation** and **Platforms and infrastructure**, as well as **Governance, capacity and coordination** and **Design of programme parameters**.⁷ WFP's support for the development of a national social protection policy that includes different social protection programmes, its continued support to help in the transition of an existing beneficiary database to a national social registry, its work on institutionalization and capacity strengthening to enable the Government to take over social protection activities, in addition to its engagement in the design and implementation of the new social safety net, and linking shock-responsive social protection to anticipatory action all illustrate these key roles in the building blocks (WFP, 2021g).

⁷ However, it has contributed to many others, such as Advocacy (for the national social protection policy); Assessments and analysis (of different programmes / safety nets); Registration and enrolment (of eligible people into the information system), etc.



4. Activities and results

In this section, we highlight a number of key contributions that the WFP country office has made to the national social protection system in Haiti in recent years. First, the development of the National Social Protection and Promotion Policy (NSPPP), which aimed to minimize system fragmentation as well as provide a strategic direction for future social protection programmes. Second, the current Adaptive Social Protection for Increased Resilience (ASPIRE) project, the flagship national safety net implemented by MAST and WFP. Third, WFP's contribution to the development and expansion of the social registry for social protection planning and implementation, the Information System of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (SIMAST). Fourth, the work WFP is doing on government capacity building and institutionalization of social protection activities for handing over relevant processes. Finally, linking the shock-responsive social protection system to anticipatory action programmes. All of these activities were selected because they had been highlighted in KIIs and relevant internal and external documents (such as country strategic plan, annual reports) and all entail key actions associated with several building blocks of a national social protection system, as identified in WFP's social protection strategy (WFP, 2021g).

National Social Protection and Promotion Policy

In 2016, MAST⁸ and the Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation relaunched the National Sectoral Table on Social Protection (TSPS), building on recommendations of the 'social re-foundation' pillar of the Strategic Plan for the Development of Haiti. The TSPS had the

key objective of realizing a new National Social Protection and Promotion Policy (NSPPP) for Haiti, an instrument that defines a strategic framework for necessary interventions to address the multiple socioeconomic challenges in the country. The development and adoption of a national social protection policy aimed to address the protracted food insecurity and inequalities, the fragmentation of social protection in the country which had been relying on emergency assistance over the years, the current lack of policy in place, and the need to improve related governance and social protection mechanisms (KII).

After a year of mobilization, the TSPS convened a Drafting Sub-Commission (SCR) specifically tasked with developing the NSPPP, which included multiple government entities, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector, unions and civil society (WFP, 2020b). The SCR was convened by MAST with the key objective of realizing the NSPPP, as well as assisting in putting in place the national governance structure⁹ for social protection in the country (WFP, 2021f). WFP became the technical lead, which facilitated the drafting process and sensitization in the SCR, thus developing its experience in leading policy discussions in a fragile context. WFP also staffed the Secretariat established to assist the SCR in key committees on targeting and cash transfer working groups (WFP, 2021a).

With technical assistance from WFP, and after three years of preparation, in June 2020 the NSPPP was officially adopted by presidential decree, contributing to the **Policy** building block. This policy built on multiple but patchy social protection initiatives that had been implemented during the period since 2013 (such as Kore Lavi from 2013 to 2019), as well as WFP's initial technical support to the Government's

⁸ For details of the social protection activities of MAST, see République d'Haïti 2020: Figure 3.

⁹ For details on the institutional architecture of NSPPP, see République d'Haïti 2020: Figure 5.

vulnerability database. The NSPPP is an effort to consolidate programmes into a coherent institutional system with expanded coverage (WFP, 2021f).

Building on the rights-based approach to social protection (Piron, 2004), WFP is expanding its areas of expertise – traditionally food security and nutrition – towards a broader concept of vulnerability and essential needs (Rosa and Strøbech, 2020), as reflected in the NSPPP. In terms of policy content, the NSPPP uses its strategic axes to focus on vulnerabilities throughout the life cycle – including childhood; work, employment and employability; health, old age and disability; and shock-responsive social protection (see Annex 2 for more details on the axes) – and its cross-cutting aspects include gender, resilience and social vulnerabilities (République d’Haïti, 2020). Given the intersectoral nature of social protection, the policy is multisectoral to protect citizens against major risks in all stages of the life cycle. National and regional consultations have also taken into account the experiences and voices of a broad range of stakeholders across the country (WFP, 2020b).

In addition to facilitating the policy development process, the capacity of the members of the SCR was built through training in social protection and promotion (WFP, 2020b). In collaboration with MAST, the country office rolled out regular coordination meetings for the TSPS to enhance key technical stakeholders’ capacity to develop and implement the NSPPP, as well as to promote institutional memory (WFP, 2021d). WFP was active in creating a coalition of stakeholders¹⁰ to be involved in capacity building and in advocacy for the NSPPP with government departments and donors (WFP, 2021f; 2021a). WFP’s role also showcased a model of advocacy for Haiti’s social agenda in the face of donors and international financial institutions, as well as collaboration with them in order to allocate resources for the social protection policy and its implementation (KII).

Related activities

In recent years, building on the promulgation of the NSPPP, WFP has been involved in exercises aimed at the operationalization, implementation and institutionalization of the policy.

ASPIRE PROGRAMME

The Adaptive Social Protection for Increased Resilience (ASPIRE) project (World Bank, 2021), a social assistance programme made possible by the development of the NSPPP and implemented from 2021 to 2027, aims at establishing a shock-responsive social safety net enabling the most vulnerable households in Grand’Anse to access basic social services. This programme, designed by MAST and WFP, is a first step in the implementation of the policy, and is in the process of expanding its beneficiary caseload, having enrolled 23,000 eligible beneficiary households and targeting people with disabilities and pregnant and breastfeeding women based on demographic criteria, using the multidimensional poverty index of the social registry (KII). This programme received USD 75 million in funding from the World Bank and is being implemented by MAST, as the lead, and WFP, which also works on capacity strengthening (WFP, 2021f; 2021d; 2022d; KII). WFP is able to support MAST to design and operationalize the ASPIRE programme while strengthening its ability to progressively implement it independently (WFP, 2021a). ASPIRE uses a ‘cash plus’ approach to improve households’ resilience to shocks through unconditional and unrestricted cash transfers and accompanying measures (WFP, 2021d; 2021c). This programme is contributing to the **Programme parameters design** building block.

¹⁰ Including the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, USAID, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the World Health Organization/PAHO, International Labour Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank and UN Women (Vallas and Restrepo 2020).

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Building on the institutional capacity-strengthening component of the 2013 Kore Lavi programme delivered by WFP, the WFP Social Protection Unit continued to integrate this work into activities going forward. WFP has worked to contribute to improvements in the national social protection system that go beyond operational activities, and include actions that further strategy, architecture and capacity development. Indeed, starting with an established focus on supporting the Haiti Government's safety net activities, the country office has expanded its work by contributing to the strengthening of the national social protection system's operational capacity and effectiveness to deliver its mandate, reduce its fragmentation and improve its shock-readiness and responsiveness. So far, it has done so through its work on institutionalization of social protection programmes and the capacity building of the Government. The country office has a specific Social Protection Unit dedicated to promoting the transfer of social protection programmes to state institutions, creating the legitimacy and capacities for them to take over, at the local, department and central levels, all of which specifically contribute to the **Capacity** building block, mentioned in WFP's Strategy for Social Protection, among others (KII).

For instance, as part of the design of ASPIRE, there is a handover to the Government planned after three years of implementation. This requires, among other things, capacity building, training and coaching of civil servants (KII).¹¹ Every six months, gaps and progress across programmatic, administrative and political national capacities for this handover (compared against a baseline) are assessed through a diagnostic tool developed by WFP in consultation with MAST. The process aims to be similar to an 'auto-evaluation' by government staff, to gauge

their own level of institutionalization across the three pillars, and assign/validate a grade between 0 and 5. These assessments are followed by a report, with recommendations for improving institutionalization (including any training needs, for instance), and an institutionalization plan that includes corrective actions (KII). WFP is also building an MIS to manage the ASPIRE programme.

SIMAST SOCIAL REGISTRY

In terms of supporting the reduction of system fragmentation and promoting inclusivity, WFP continues to provide support for the transition of the beneficiary database to a national social registry. WFP is currently in the process of increasing the coverage of the registry, while ensuring that it is complete, dynamic, and interconnected (WFP Internal Report 2024). The social protection system architecture (the **Infrastructure** building block) has been strengthened with WFP's technical assistance by expanding the coverage of the Information System of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (SIMAST), which currently covers around 35 percent of the population, or 700,000 households (KII; WFP, 2022b).¹² This social registry is a foundational tool for social protection planning and implementation (République d'Haïti 2020).

SIMAST was initially designed as part of the Kore Lavi programme,¹³ and has the following objectives: (i) collect and analyse information on vulnerable households using the Haiti Deprivation and Vulnerability Index (a multidimensional poverty index); (ii) facilitate the creation of a single registry of beneficiaries and centralize data management; (iii) improve social coverage; and (iv) strengthen coordination mechanisms (République d'Haïti 2020). It has functionalities for producing analyses and reports from integrated data (geographical areas, households and

¹¹ This institutionalization work is focused on ASPIRE but also on other social protection-related activities. Indeed, WFP also strengthened its work on the Governance, capacity and coordination building block by collaborating with the National School Feeding Administration to initiate the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) exercise, aiming to assess the Government's readiness to implement school feeding programmes (WFP, 2021d).

¹² The 2021 WFP Annual Report (WFP, 2022b) states that 500,000 households have been registered, and key informants report that current coverage is 28 percent.

¹³ This programme was in effect a necessary precursor to set the stage for work on the social protection policy document (IMPEL 2020).

individuals), and for importing databases and geo-referencing information on household living conditions. These features and the procedures for data sharing facilitate the use of the system by a growing number of humanitarian and development actors, both state and non-state (République d’Haïti 2020). Even though SIMAST is the main institutional information system used by multiple organizations, other national institutions or ministries have their information sources on recipients. However, the databases are not linked and there is no interoperability between the systems (KII).

LINKING SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION WITH ANTICIPATORY ACTION

Since 2015, WFP Haiti has been developing an Anticipatory Action (AA) programme to reduce the impact of floods and cyclones. This has involved strengthening early warning systems, improving national weather forecasting and

monitoring capabilities, and building government capacity for anticipatory action, disaster preparedness and response.

In 2022, WFP expanded its AA activities from geographically focused pilot projects to more integrated and sustainable programmes with country-wide outreach, adapting to increasingly complex socio-economic challenges, security issues, and the COVID-19 pandemic (WFP, 2024). Building on the social protection related advancements, including the gradual strengthening of the national social registry, WFP has been supporting the integration of the AA and social protection systems vis-a-vis the national disaster management system and moving away from the previous distinct and parallel workstreams approach. In 2023, WFP supported the MAST and the Civil Protection to design an Operational Manual detailing the processes to expand Social Protection after a shock (climatic or economic) occurs. The manual sets up a Response Committee that oversees the







main decisions regarding SRSP in Haiti. Currently, WFP is a key member of the Committee, conveying meetings and making proposals regarding the key aspects of SRSP (WFP, 2024).

Two of the notable achievements in this area are the addition of AA in the SRSP operational manual and the simulation on SRSP, with a component related to AA. In November 2023, WFP, in collaboration with the Government, activated its AA plan for the first time in anticipation of heavy rains, protecting the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable people from potential flooding.

Through this collaboration, early warning messages were successfully disseminated to over 500,000 people in five Departments and anticipatory cash provided to 18,700 individuals in the Grand'Anse region. This was accomplished through the ASPIRE social protection programme and by leveraging the national social registry (WFP, 2024).

The table below summarizes WFP Haiti's contribution social protection in Haiti with regards to the specific building blocks

Table 1: WFP Haiti's Contributions to the Building Blocks; Source: Author's own based on (WFP, 2021g)

Building blocks of Haiti's social protection system		WFP Haiti's Activities
SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE	 <p>Policy and Legislation</p>	<p>2016: Relaunch of the National Sectoral Table on Social Protection (TSPS) by MAST and The Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation.</p> <p>2017: A Drafting Sub-Commission (SCR) was convened by the TSPS to develop the NSPPP.</p> <p>2020: The NSPPP was officially adopted by presidential decree.</p> <p>2023: Writing and adoption of the first Operation Manual for Shock-responsive Social Protection.</p>
	 <p>Platforms and infrastructure</p>	<p>2015: Initiation of the development of the AA programme and technical assistance to expand the coverage of the social registry, SIMAST.</p> <p>2022: WFP expanded its AA activities from pilot projects to more integrated and sustainable programmes.</p> <p>2023: AA plan was activated for the first time by WFP, in collaboration with the government.</p> <p>2023-2024: Support the design of the government's MIS for social protection programmes.</p>
	 <p>Governance, capacity and coordination</p>	<p>2013-onwards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued capacity strengthening activities through the Social Protection Unit, promoting the transfer of social protection programmes to state institutions, creating the legitimacy and capacities for them to take over, at the local, department and central levels. Capacity building, training, and coaching of civil servants and diagnostic tool and assessment reports were developed to increase the capacity of the staff to successfully handover the ASPIRE programme.
PROGRAMME FEATURES	 <p>Design of programme parameters</p>	<p>2021-2027: The ASPIRE project came into existence as a result of efforts to implement the NSPPP. The project is aimed at establishing a shock-responsive social safety net enabling the most vulnerable households in Grand'Anse to access basic social services.</p> <p>2023-Several other safety nets initiatives are implemented by WFP in Haiti, adapted from the model developed by the ASPIRE project.</p>

Key successes

WFP's recent work in Haiti has contributed to a key national strategy document being published and adopted, with buy-in, trust and ownership by the Government and other key stakeholders in the social protection sphere, promoting Haitian empowerment and inclusivity throughout the process (WFP, 2020b; KII). This has built on previous work at the operational level on the Kore Lavi safety net, which enabled the organization to successfully expand its areas of work covering multiple building blocks at different levels of the national social protection system. Indeed, the MAST point of contact in the policy elaboration process, Mr Pierre Ricot Odney, became the Minister in 2022 (KII). Haiti has reinforced its commitment to social protection as articulated in the NSPPP and devoted USD 27.6 million in 2022 to support the implementation of the national policy for social protection and promotion across a number of themes (including essential healthcare packages, cash transfers to alleviate poverty, education, employment and reintegration, social care services, institutional reforms) (UN Security Council, 2022; WFP, 2022b). This policy has resulted in the increased legitimacy of MAST within the Government, evidenced by the allocation of the largest budget to this ministry for the 2023 fiscal year (IMF, 2023; KII), particularly interesting in the context of the protracted crisis seen in Haiti (KII).

Working towards the achievement of SDG 17 for increased coordination and capacity strengthening of key stakeholders in the social protection arena, WFP Haiti country office participated in 141 multi-stakeholder partnerships, including with government entities, donors, United Nations agencies, local and international NGOs, and the private sector, for common services and coordination platforms,

where WFP played a leading or coordinating role. It also carried out multiple capacity-building activities in social protection at the national, regional and local levels, resulting in the creation of a social protection community of practice across Haitian institutions, which aims to enable the government to mobilize SCR members to support the policy implementation stage (WFP, 2019a; 2020b; 2021c).

The fact that MAST adopted the policy, which was then adopted also by the Government, was key for opening doors to different donors (KII). Indeed, WFP has continued to advocate for key funding initiatives for strategy operationalization by government, donors and international financial institutions. These include activities to institutionalize social protection at the local level,¹⁴ such as through the ASPIRE social safety net, currently covering over 23,000 eligible households, handing over key social protection governance tools, such as TSPS in the context of the Support Programme for Social Promotion and Protection (PROMES),¹⁵ to the central government, emergency cash transfers during Covid-19, action plan development¹⁶, and SIMAST strengthening (WFP, 2021f).

As per its recent annual reports, most of WFP's interventions are integrated into broader social safety net programmes, contributing to government ownership and long-term food security and sovereignty (WFP, 2018a; 2019b; 2020a; 2021c). This echoes the need to improve integration and synergies between the different strategic axes in the NSPPP (childhood, work, employment and employability, health, old age and disability, and shock-responsive social protection).¹⁷

With WFP's support SIMAST is currently covering 25 percent of the population (WFP, 2021f). Additionally, activating the AA plan strengthened the link between Haiti's social protection and

¹⁴ Other projects are being implemented, which aim to operationalize the strategy (ILO 2023).

¹⁵ This project is funded by the Swiss Embassy in Haiti, and its objective is to reduce poverty and social inequality in the country (iciHaiti 2020). It has two components: the operational one implemented by Fonkoze and the capacity-strengthening one by WFP (Schlaefli 2021).

¹⁶ WFP has been supporting the Government, in consultation with ministries and agencies, to develop the social protection Action Plan to operationalize to the new policy through the generation of financial feasibility analyses of different programmes. The Action Plan has been drafted, and is to be submitted soon to the Minister for validation and implementation (KII).

¹⁷ As per a number of programme evaluations assessing, for example, awareness-raising activities on hygiene practices across schools, provision of water-purifying kits to schools, provision of nutritious foods to school-going children and deworming tablets (WFP, 2019a; 2021b; 2022a).

disaster management systems. The WFP Haiti Country Office staff reported that the Shock-Responsive Social Protection Committee, co-chaired by WFP and the Government, was crucial for success. Furthermore, according to the internal AA pilot Post Distribution Monitoring report, 84 percent of the AA beneficiaries said they have understood that they have received the cash to prepare for the storm and 97 percent of them report to have also used it for the storm.

Key difficulties

Although WFP has contributed to much of the progress in social protection in Haiti, the organization has recently encountered certain challenges in its ability to support the country. Many of these difficulties relate to the different axes in the NSPPP, and their potential interactions. For instance, structural factors inherent to contexts of protracted crises have implications for WFP operations (e.g. natural shocks that undermine agricultural production, political crises that interrupt policy development discussions) (KII). Also, issues concerning both childhood and health, such as challenges in sensitizing handwashing for school-going children during the pandemic, impede impact (WFP, 2021b; 2022c). Studies also highlight the lack of interaction and synergies between platforms, such as interoperability with information systems of other ministries (KII; Beazley, 2017). Further, key stakeholders flag challenges in developing the 'social promotion' part of the policy to help the most vulnerable households have better opportunities to increase their incomes (KII). Other issues include: capacity gaps in the country office (e.g. in logistics and commodity management; expected controls related to Cash Based Transfers (CBT) operations), outdated standard operating procedures, continued challenges to digitalize the delivery processes (e.g. SCOPE), and limited control over processes delegated to cooperating partners (WFP, 2022c).

Another key issue raised is about making 'vulnerability' a more central criterion in WFP

operations and decisions, such as through gender-based vulnerability. In fact, a study from Oxford Policy Management reported that 'aspects of structural vulnerability captured by SIMAST and those of a shock-induced vulnerability, such as food insecurity, differ greatly' (Beazley, 2017). A study, commissioned by WFP Haiti in 2022, highlighted the increased difficulty faced by women to access financial products, due to the economic and social biases they suffer (Succar, Louis, 2022). In response, WFP tailored its actions to suit by directing social transfers to women's e-money accounts. Women account for two-thirds of transfer recipients in Haiti and also form the community structures with Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA).

Although some components are more advanced in their institutionalization, a key difficulty is the limited capacity by MAST to take over (institutionalize) certain elements of the social protection system, such as the ASPIRE programme (KII). Further, receptiveness to the institutionalization and capacity-building process varies across technocrat government staff, which sometimes adds to the tension between the Programme Management Unit of the ministry (national consultants paid by the World Bank with a different salary grid) and civil servants.

Haiti's complex challenges stemming from extreme poverty, food insecurity and environmental vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by recurrent political instability and crises. While the country's social protection system has historically been weak and disjointed, recent efforts, including the development of the National Social Protection and Promotion Policy and the ASPIRE programme, in collaboration with WFP and other stakeholders, have shown promise in enhancing the nation's resilience and addressing the multifaceted issues it faces. By fostering partnerships, strengthening institutional capacity, and promoting the adoption of comprehensive social protection measures, Haiti is taking steps towards a more inclusive and secure future.

5. Lessons Learned

Enabling factors

CULTURE OF COLLABORATION AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The team-culture, aiming to achieve the shared goal of improving the lives of Haiti's poorest and with the ability to shape the policy in some way, significantly helped in the development process of the NSPPP (WFP, 2020b; 2021e; KII). A key focus was on greater collaboration with donors, international financial institutions and the Government to facilitate policy development and its funding for implementation (KII; WFP, 2021f; 2021a).

During policy design, an entire phase was devoted to the realization of a diagnostic for each strategic axis of the NSPPP – in which all SCR members participated. This joint process increased the feeling of ownership by participants of the policy content. Members of the SCR represented a broad array of stakeholders from the Government, private sector and civil society, who formed multiple thematic groups to focus their contribution where it was more relevant. The Secretariat, led by WFP, devised a plan for the process, with milestones, deliverables and detailed attention to logistics. Senior members with expertise in social protection and experience in policy formulation added depth to the group. Both national and international staff members were part of the team, making it a robust document accepted by the Haitians and the international counterparts (WFP, 2020b).

STAFF CONTINUITY

WFP was consistently present and engaged on safety nets development and techno-analytical capacity building at the national level (e.g. Kore Lavi, where WFP was leading the government capacity-strengthening component) (WFP, 2021f; 2021a; KII). Despite the trend of high turnover in both WFP and the Government of Haiti, WFP

advocated for continuity and permanence in its own staff and in those of its counterparts. The low turnover rate was proven to be beneficial for establishing fruitful relationships, strengthen capacities and generate institutional memory (KIIs).

SUPPORTING A NATIONALLY OWNED SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

WFP provided a high-profile team of experts as a key resource for government to develop policy to encourage government capacity building (Rosa and Strøbech, 2020). MAST's Director of Planning being the prominent civil servant taking responsibility for the policy and being actively involved conferred credibility on the process and promoted participation by other government counterparts (WFP, 2020b).

WFP national staff, with their elaborate and context-specific knowledge, has been heavily engaged in the development of the NSPPP. The engagement created greater ownership of the policy as the consensus was that the policy content truly reflected the Haitian context and needs, and that it had been formulated mainly by Haitians. This is an essential aspect to ensure that the policy remains relevant beyond political events (WFP, 2020b).

To promote a sustainable and positive approach to its institutionalization work, WFP has a team mobilized for capacity strengthening. This includes national staff to help mitigate the unbalanced power dynamics embedded in the use of diagnostic tools to assess MAST's progress and more generally in the concept of 'institutionalization'. Co-production of knowledge, supported by WFP's analysis of the Government's capacity needs and gaps, enabled a sense of ownership, and a debate on norms and values contributing to the transformative element of social protection (Rosa and Strøbech, 2020).

Challenges

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

An environment characterised by high levels of poverty and food insecurity, exposure to shocks and disasters, as well as the lack of a social protection system in place to protect those most vulnerable to shocks contributed to pursuing the policy formulation (KII; WFP 2020b).

Initially a broad ownership of the policy at the ministerial level and the political environment were uncertain. Thus, the chosen approach was to keep the policy at the technical level until the policy was ready for approval (KII). As episodes of insecurity occurred across the country, the SCR remained flexible in the organisation of its meetings. A constant rhythm of work by the SCR throughout the drafting process enabled momentum of working together at set dates and made it more difficult for external events to derail the process (WFP 2020b).

Despite the challenges related to reduced field presence and speed for response, WFP has aimed to work remotely in an agile way to mitigate the impact, through a digitalisation of processes to minimise access issues, such as working with financial service providers in country to pay beneficiaries remotely (KII).

POWER DYNAMICS

Although a key aim in WFP's dual mandate is to promote sustainability and state ownership, a key informant highlighted that power dynamics (e.g., idea of international development assistance) are embedded in the 'institutionalisation' concept and WFP team. Thus, the point was made that conducting frequent diagnostics exercises to gauge government capacities can be a sensitive and political exercise to perform, as this is not always understood or accepted, and requires humility, awareness and diplomacy, as well as good interpersonal skills from WFP staff (KII).

This also relates to potential tensions that may have arisen when designing the Kore Lavi programme and consortium. The question remains if there was a more appropriate organisation (outside the Kore Lavi consortium) that would have been a more natural fit to lead on NSPPP development guidance, and whether this had been considered when first identifying the consortium partners (IMPEL 2020). Despite the questions, the consensus among the staff remains that WFP was/is in an optimum position to lead the policy work in Haiti.

NATIONAL AND LOCAL CAPACITIES

Coordination both within WFP and between ministries is perceived as challenging. There is reported limited coordination between national ministries, mainly focusing on information sharing, overlooking potential synergies and harmonisation between their policies and a limited practical approach to social protection as intersectoral (KII). Other challenges reported include the lack of interoperability between databases of ministries, and the nascent digitalisation of the registration and payment systems to programme beneficiaries (KII).¹⁹

The policy was ambitious in nature, and its implementation has already encountered some challenges. Through training (WFP 2020b)²⁰, sensitisation, SOPs and Action Plans, WFP has worked on developing the government counterpart's capacity and skills for policy writing to promote national ownership (KII). However, in terms of policy operationalisation, although the aim was to handover the ASPIRE programme after three years of implementation (in 2024), that seems to be unlikely (KII).

Despite real progress, the current low maturity of the social protection system, along with financial and human resourcing limitations, constrains the government's ability to absorb all the most vulnerable and food insecure caseload into its social programmes. In terms of financial capacity, mechanisms such as local purchases are

progressing as they benefit both school children and local producers, including women. Other innovative solutions, such as through satellite imagery, self-registration, survey by phone, can be examined in order to reduce costs (KII).²¹ Other financial mechanisms used by development actors should also be examined, such as the experience of other Caribbean countries which can provide examples of initiatives for generating learning and economic opportunities (WFP 2019a).

While the expansion of the SIMAST is a major advance, it is still not covering the bulk of the population living in poverty, and the fragmentation of information nationally does not allow the government to have an overview of benefits and services to better coordinate and regulate actions related to social protection and promotion. This limited administrative information capacity is observed through the existence of multiple, inadequate and patchy systems used by different actors (République d'Haïti 2020). For instance, the targeting methodology used by Kore Lavi in regular activities, the Haiti Deprivation and Vulnerability Index (HDVI), was not designed for emergency response and would have limitations if used for that purpose (Beazley 2017).

Further, a legal framework for this social registry is currently lacking, which enables other institutions to develop alternative systems that compete. This lack of legal framework is associated with a lack of a formal enrolment, extension and updating strategy, a limited understanding on how the SIMAST helps the policy to be deployed, and how it is going to help respond to shocks. With budget support from the World Bank, a working group in country is focusing on designing a SRSP system

to identify and target beneficiaries after shock, by learning from other countries in the region (KII).

LOCAL PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

Before the policy making exercise, ECLAC organised trainings on social protection and policy making, which aimed to sensitise stakeholders' perception on the need for social protection in Haiti. This also aimed to generate national buy-in and ownership, however, this buy in was not always genuine in practice (KII). Insufficient ownership can also be illustrated when there is insufficient collaboration from the Government to build capacities and expertise for a potential handover. In these cases, the first port of call is to promote interpersonal relationships in order to get people on board (KII).

There is also a challenge in terms of ownership and mainstreaming at WFP's strategic level of the institutionalisation process (i.e., changing lives component: capacity strengthening, and capacity and knowledge transfer), as this is not part of everyone's job description or training. However, as posed by one of the key informants, WFP's mandate is dual, and emergencies will not be over until institutional capacities are stronger, thus the need to work simultaneously on both mandates. As per this interviewee, institutionalisation, also an explicit component in a number of WFP programmes and activities, will only succeed if technical WFP staff are adequately mobilised to enable transferring relevant agency's collective intelligence to the government (KII).

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Annex 1: Social protection-related policies and plans in Haiti

Over the years, a myriad of government institutions have been linked with social protection, mostly under the Ministry of Social Work and Labour (MAST) and the Ministry of Economy and Finances (MEF). The following is a list of some of the recent key policies and plans related to social protection in Haiti (Beazley 2017; IMF 2020; Simanowitz and Greeley 2017; WFP, 2018b; 2020c; 2021b)

- The Strategic Plan for the Development of Haiti, outlined in a 2019 reform, which aims at making Haiti an emerging country by 2030, through territorial, economic, social and institutional rebuilding.
- The National Disaster Risk Management Plan 2019–2030, in line with the Sendai Framework, which aims to improve the knowledge of disaster risk, to strengthen governance, to mobilize financial mechanisms to build resilience, and to improve disaster preparedness.
- The Agricultural Development Policy 2010–2025, which has a long-term vision around key areas on agricultural modernization.
- The Strategic Plan for Nutrition 2013–2018, which has six strategic areas: malnutrition prevention, nutrition support, nutrition in emergencies, nutrition information systems, sector coordination, and applied research and training.
- The National School Feeding Policy and Strategy for 2016, which aims to provide quality school meals, support the production of local food and develop national capacities.
- The Gender Equality Policy 2014–2034, which aims to promote equal rights and fair justice between men and women, gender-sensitive education, access to sexual and reproductive health with respect for the dignity of women, the elimination of all forms of violence towards women and girls, and economic equality and equitable access in employment.
- The National Education Strategy, developed in 2007, which seeks to promote greater equity in early childhood development and care, access to education, greater efficiency of the basic education system, and efficient and effective school management. The Ten-year Education and Training Plan 2018–2028 is to reinforce the education sector at all levels.
- The National Social Assistance Strategy or Ede Pèp, formulated in 2012 and mainly implemented by the government, which consisted of a wide array of programmes ranging from social assistance to social security, capacity development and economic inclusion, and was aimed at protecting vulnerable populations through different initiatives.
- The National Food Sovereignty and Food Security and Nutrition Policy and Strategy, finalized in 2018.

Annex 2: NSPPP strategic axes

The core of the National Social Protection and Promotion Policy (NSPPP) is made up of four strategic axes based on life cycle and vulnerability to shocks, all linked to the SDGs, and developed from the perspective of realizing citizens' rights. The social protection and promotion mechanisms that will be implemented for each of these axes influence each other, so the policy highlights the relevance of maximizing synergies between the axes (République d'Haïti 2020). The axes are as follows:

- Axis 1: Childhood. The well-being of children (under 18 years), as people in the making and holders of rights, is central in itself. The integral development of children from the earliest age (prenatal to 5 years) has positive effects on the cognitive abilities and productivity of young people and adults, which should contribute to breaking the intergenerational reproduction of poverty.
- Axis 2: Work, employment and employability. For young people and adults, the realization of the rights to work, to fair and favourable working conditions of work, to an adequate standard of living, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions of life is crucial for their economic empowerment.

This focus proposes ways to achieve this for people in poverty of working age: people with an employability deficit, those without access to employment due to care work obligations, workers whose employment does not provide a standard of living, and care providers in the domestic sphere and the social care pillar.

- Axis 3: Social protection in health, old age and disability. At all ages, health is an essential dimension of everyone's well-being. The realization of the right to health requires first and foremost universal access to primary healthcare. The realization of the rights of elderly and disabled people to protection against economic dependence and to personal autonomy is also considered.
- Axis 4: Shock-responsive social protection and adaption to shocks. The high vulnerability of the country and its population to climatic, seismic, economic, socio-political, epidemic or other shocks calls for the mobilization of social protection and promotion mechanisms to support the populations affected by the emergency response and recovery programmes, and to integrate into the social protection and promotion system those who were not in the system before the shocks occurred.

Annex 3: Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interview 1, WFP Staff (2023). Interview by Carolina Holland-Szyp conducted online on 19th January 2023. Case Study on WFP's Support to the National Social Protection in Haiti

Key Informant Interview 2, WFP Staff (2023). Interview by Carolina Holland-Szyp conducted online on 23rd January 2023. Case Study on WFP's Support to the National Social Protection in Haiti

Key Informant Interview 3, independent Consultant (2023). Interview by Carolina Holland-Szyp conducted online on 3rd February 2023. Case Study on WFP's Support to the National Social Protection in Haiti.



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Photo pages 14, 27: WFP/Theresa Piorr

Photo page 23: WFP/Gabrielle Menezes