



Risk-informed
Early Action
Partnership



**Early action and the
climate crisis: could
social protection be a
game changer?**

KEY MESSAGES

- A changing risk landscape, exacerbated by climate change and COVID-19, is setting us behind on poverty targets, and narrowing the window of opportunity for action
- Crises are increasingly multidimensional, severe and frequent, with many countries experiencing multiple overlapping crises, both recurrent and protracted, with climate change deepening and driving new and unexpected risks.
- Current disaster response, adaptation, and mitigation measures to address climate vulnerability and risk are insufficient and the existing international humanitarian institutional architecture is already overstretched
- There is a strong imperative for decisive collaborative action and good reasons for social protection to play a larger role.
- increased attention to how an integrated approach to early action and social protection can present a game-changer in how we address the risks faced by climate vulnerable populations, supporting REAP's goal to make 1 billion people safer from disaster by 2025

Now is the time to invest in social protection to ensure those most affected by climate change can strengthen their resilience capacity and avoid the worst impacts of disasters. At COP26, REAP and FCDO are calling for decisive action on social protection in early action.

In order to achieve this, stakeholders must

- **EMBRACE SOCIAL PROTECTION** - Embrace social protection as key to achieving climate policy objectives and enabling early action at scale.
- **STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS** - Invest in social protection systems strengthening and expand coverage as part of the development of early action infrastructure in advance of shocks.
- **COORDINATE ACROSS SECTORS** - Strengthen coordination across sectors, actors, experts and agencies working on climate change, social protection, Disaster Risk Management, humanitarian and gender equality, to ensure effective and joined up action at the global and national levels
- **BUILD OPERATIONAL LINKAGES** - Build operational linkages between social protection systems, disaster preparedness and early action, and embed these in planning, SOPs, MoUs etc, to ensure systems can respond effectively and quickly to diverse needs and impacts particularly on vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- **PUSH FINANCING 'OUT OF THE BOX'** - Exploit climate financing and link disaster financing to social protection systems and programmes, to strengthen and expand systems and ensure assistance reaches those hardest hit by climate crisis, including vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- **WORK IN PARTNERSHIP** - Support partnerships with civil society and local actors in early action and social protection, to help reach and empower those most in need
- **PUT GENDER AND INCLUSION AT THE CENTRE** - Ensure a focus on gender equality and social inclusion in efforts to build early action into social protection, including strengthening the gender responsiveness and disability inclusiveness of social protection systems, and involving gender and inclusion actors in partnership and coordination efforts. Failing to do so will risk exacerbating existing inequalities for those who are most climate vulnerable
- **INVEST IN DATA AND EVIDENCE** - Invest in data and data systems, including ensuring data is disaggregated.

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The Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) brings together an unprecedented range of stakeholders across the climate, humanitarian and development communities with the aim of making 1 Billion People Safer from disaster by 2025. The REAP Secretariat is hosted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and comprises a small team of professional staff. The UK Government is funding this interim Secretariat up until UNFCCC COP26.

Introduction

A changing risk landscape, exacerbated by climate change and COVID-19, is setting us behind on poverty targets, and narrowing the window of opportunity for action...

Crises are increasingly multidimensional, severe and frequent, with many countries experiencing multiple overlapping crises, both recurrent and protracted, with climate change deepening and driving new and unexpected risks. Climate change has been described as the ultimate threat-multiplier, accelerating risks of poverty, food insecurity, disease, conflict, migration and forced displacement – often hitting the poorest hardest. As the OECD has noted, “strategies that do not take into account the systemic and linked nature of...climate fragility risks will fail and may exacerbate the risk they set out to address.”

The humanitarian system is facing unprecedented levels of need as a result of COVID-19, conflict and climate change, increasingly outstripping funding. IFRC predicts that by 2050 200 million people every year - twice as many as today - could need international humanitarian aid as a result of a combination of climate-related disasters and the socioeconomic impacts of climate change.¹

Current disaster response, adaptation, and mitigation measures to address climate vulnerability and risk are insufficient and the existing international humanitarian institutional architecture is already overstretched. Estimates suggest that climate change could drive 130 million into poverty by 2030², and therefore we need systems that can respond at scale targeting those hardest hit by disasters.³

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated lives and economies all over the world, making it more challenging to find resources to invest in planning and preparedness. It has also demonstrated how risks compound one another and why forward planning, risk analysis and preparedness are imperative. The unprecedented increases in global poverty in 2020/2021 as a result of COVID-19 exemplify the multidimensional impacts that a global and complex risk can create.

As a result of the pandemic, we are now further behind on key poverty targets than just a year ago, so the window of opportunity to reduce poverty and the associated vulnerability to rising climate risks has narrowed. Social protection can be a critical policy instrument for addressing these concerns.

...there is however a stronger imperative for decisive collaborative action and good reasons for social protection to play a larger role.

While the facts and figures laid out above are stark and worsening, there are also windows of opportunity that must be seized by all actors across the current silos of the Climate, Humanitarian and Development sectors. The momentum created by COP26 create a unique opportunity- and imperative- to take decisive collaborative action.

First, we have unprecedented access to forecast and risk analysis information that can help us foresee crises - research by the Start Network suggests at least half of all humanitarian crises are foreseeable and more than 20% are highly predictable.

¹ IFRC (2019) The Cost of Doing Nothing: THE HUMANITARIAN PRICE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND HOW IT CAN BE AVOIDED. Geneva: IFRC. <https://oldmedia.ifrc.org/ifrc/the-cost-of-doing-nothing/>

² Hallegatte, S., Bangalore, M., Bonzanigo, L., Fay, M., Narloch, U., Rozenberg, J., & Vogt-Schilb, A. (2014). Climate change and poverty—an analytical framework. The World Bank.

³ <https://www.undp.org/blog/climate-change-and-rise-poverty>

Second, evidence and practice around people-centred early warning and early action are increasing and showing promise. Similarly, evidence has also been consolidated on social protection's core protective function – building resilience to future shocks. There is strong evidence that cash transfers increase access and use of health and education services, improve nutrition, help people save and invest – all factors associated with greater resilience to shocks and stresses.

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the critical role of government led social protection in mitigating the impacts of shocks and responding to crises. 222 countries have implemented social protection measures in response, investing over USD 800 billion.⁴ The lessons learned from this experience are critical for future action. Even before COVID, there was good evidence that social protection supports people to cope better when shocks happen, boosting household food security during droughts and reducing the adoption of negative coping strategies such as engagement in casual labour and spending savings.^{5,6,7}

In this note, we make the case that increased attention to how an integrated approach to early action and social protection can present a game-changer in how we address the risks faced by climate vulnerable populations.

Scope of this Note

This note explores how social protection can support the Risk Informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) agenda of **'making one billion people safer from climate related disasters'**.

It stresses the:

- Value of social protection in building resilience against shocks
- Largely unexplored potential of integrating social protection and early action approaches to protect the world's most climate vulnerable people
- A critical need to put inclusion at the heart of these issues, particularly concerning underlying vulnerabilities that present barriers to accessing assistance, including but not limited to gender, age, disability and migration status.

The note therefore makes the case for increasingly integrated early action and social protection approaches to address increasingly complex and risky contexts. It explores both existing and potential areas of coherence and collaboration between the two. This note is not technical guidance nor a definitive statement on the current state of play on either early action or social protection – and does not shy away from challenges, barriers and explicit caveats.

Finally, the note serves as the first step towards developing a Call to Action to build stronger links between social protection, humanitarian and climate sectors, including ensuring that gender equality and social inclusion are central to this and encompassing governmental, intergovernmental and CSO voices and interests. It will call on actors not only to increase investment in integrated social protection and early action programmes but even to consider how existing investments and actions may be made more efficient and effective when better and more effectively and efficiently considered from an integrated lens. Of course investment, while critical, is not the only essential part of the puzzle. In this paper, we begin to outline the systemic and programmatic factors to consider in bringing together these

⁴ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33635>

⁵ Bastagli, F., Hagen-Zanker, J., Harman, L., Barca, V., Sturge, G., & Schmidt, T. (2016). Cash transfers: What does the evidence say? A rigorous review of programme impact and of the role of design and implementation features. London: ODI. <https://odi.org/en/publications/cash-transfers-what-does-the-evidence-say-a-rigorous-review-of-impacts-and-the-role-of-design-and-implementation-features/>

⁶ Slater, R. and Ulrichs, M. (2017) How does social protection build resilience? BRACED Policy Brief. London: ODI. <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/11305.pdf>

⁷ Wouterse, F. (2018) [The role of cash transfers in building household resilience](#) | IFPRI : International Food Policy Research Institute

two areas to ensure that some of the world's most climate vulnerable people are safer from disaster by 2025.

What is Early Action?

Early action – investment in protective or preventative actions before a hazard becomes a disaster – saves lives and livelihoods, protects development and resilience gains, and saves money. Evidence shows that acting ahead of a disaster enables humanitarian assistance that is faster, cheaper, and more dignified.⁸

OCHA notes that in 2017 and 2018, the global economic cost of weather-related disasters was an estimated \$653 billion. The Global Commission on Adaptation found that Early Warning Systems save lives and assets at least ten times their cost. Just 24 hours' warning of a coming storm or heatwave can cut the ensuing damage by 30 per cent. Spending USD800 million on such systems in developing countries would avoid losses of USD 3–16 billion per year.⁹

There is some variance across sectors in defining Early Action and related concepts¹⁰. For example, there has been considerable debate in the early stages of rolling out the first early action pilots as to what is early action, how, if and when it is distinct from early response and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and how it is defined and understood outside of a strictly humanitarian lens. **However, actors are now agreed on the following defining parameters:**

Early Action

1. Is predicated on a forecast or credible, collaborative risk analysis
2. Occurs before the impact of a hazard
3. Is intended to prevent or mitigate the impact of a hazard

What is REAP and what role does it play in this space?

The Risk Informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) was established at the UN Climate Action Summit (UNCAS) in 2019 by a coalition of organisations and countries that have been pioneering risk and forecast based early action.

Aiming to make 1 billion people safer from disaster by 2025, the Partnership was launched with four ambitious targets which will drive a systemic shift towards acting earlier to reduce the impacts of disasters (Figure 1). The targets highlight the importance of national planning, financing and delivery mechanisms to support early action, as well as investment in warning systems that focus on reaching the most vulnerable, turning the 'last mile' into the 'first mile'. While the Partnership and its targets focus on climate-related hazards, ongoing responses to COVID-19 highlight the interconnectedness of risks and how the need for early action and the benefits of the partnership are wider in scope.

⁸ <https://www.early-action-reap.org/evidence-base-anticipatory-action>

⁹ REAP Strategic Vision: <https://www.early-action-reap.org/reap-strategic-vision>

¹⁰ REAP Glossary of Early Action forthcoming in Spring 2021. It is accepted that the term Anticipatory Action refers to early action undertaken by humanitarian actors while Early Action refers to the approach as used across sectoral silos of Climate, Development and Humanitarian.

Figure 1: REAP Targets



Target 1
50 countries have revised and integrated their crisis/disaster risk management and climate adaptation laws, policies and/or plans to ensure that they **reduce climate change impacts** and exposure on people and the environment

Target 2
1 billion more people are covered by financing and delivery mechanisms connected to **effective early action plans**, ensuring they can act ahead of predicted disasters and crises.



Target 3
\$500 million invested in early warning system infrastructure and institutions to target early action in **'last/first mile'** communities, building on existing initiatives.

Target 4
1 billion more people are covered by new or improved early warning systems, including heatwave early warning, connected to longer-term risk management systems, and supported by effective risk communication and public stakeholder dialogue to prompt informed action.



Source: Risk Early Action Partnership

REAP's ambitious agenda is rooted in a commitment to solutions and approaches that are people-centred; led and managed by those who are most at risk of climate-related crises. The Partnership recognizes that efforts that do not consider chronic inequalities, including gender inequality, will deepen existing vulnerabilities and encourage new forms of exclusion. REAP creates a space in which partners and aligned organizations will use the ambitious targets to mobilise commitments and inspire action.

What is Social Protection?

Social protection is “... a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing and protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life cycle, placing a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups”. It supports people to cope with lifecycle circumstances (e.g. childhood, disability, old age) and shocks (e.g. health, employment, climate, financial, natural disasters, and conflict).¹¹

Adaptive and Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP)

These two concepts are defined differently by different actors. What ultimately matters are common areas of focus:

- Ensuring routine social protection is risk-informed vis-à-vis shocks that affect a large proportion of the population simultaneously (covariate shocks) so that programmes and systems can cope with changes in context and demand before, during and after any given shock – and especially for shocks that are broadly recurrent, predictable and/or protracted.
- Strengthening synergies between social protection, disaster risk management, humanitarian and climate change adaptation sectors.

See [TRANSFORM \(2020\)](#) and [Bowen et al \(2020\)](#)

It encompasses a wide range of instruments, with varying objectives and financing mechanisms (e.g. ‘non-contributory’ versus ‘contributory’) that can be classified broadly as ‘social assistance’, ‘social insurance’, ‘social care’ and ‘labour market policies’¹². This paper is mainly concerned with the first two:

- **Social assistance** – non-contributory transfers to poor and vulnerable people often structured around the different life-cycle stages (e.g. child grants or social pensions).
- **Social insurance** – contributory schemes to protect against risks such as unemployment, maternity, sickness, and old age, as well as crop and livestock loss. These are intrinsically designed as ‘automatic stabilisers’ to protect people from specific shocks and have wide coverage in high income countries.

In discussing social protection within the context of climate and early action, it is important to consider the following critical points:

- **Routine social protection can reduce humanitarian needs by meeting essential needs in "normal" circumstances** so that when a crisis hits, people are starting from a better place than they would have without it. It is thus ‘anticipatory’ in the sense that it protects those who are poor and vulnerable throughout their lifecycle. Routine social protection can also be made more relevant to covariate shocks and climate change, via minor ‘design tweaks’ to routine programming.
- **Social protection systems can be designed to play a role in disaster response**, flexing and/or scaling in coordination with other government and non-government actors mandated to respond to shocks.

¹¹ SPIAC-B (2019) Collaborating for policy coherence and development impact. [Collaborating for policy coherence and development impact | socialprotection.org](#)

¹² See Carter et al., 2019 (page 13) for more information on the different types of social protection.

The Potential of Early Action and Social Protection as Complementary Approaches

There is increasing recognition of the role of social protection in responding to climate change in a myriad of ways including reducing poverty and vulnerability, building resilience and protecting people from the immediate impacts of disasters. In addition, social protection has the potential to support climate change adaptation at a broader scale by helping to reduce disaster risk and enhance both adaptive and response capacity.

The social protection response to the COVID-19 crisis is of historic proportions and has demonstrated the sector's potential to respond to covariate shocks. On one hand, social insurance and labour market measures (e.g. unemployment benefits and wage subsidies) played a critical role where these existed, reminding us of their fundamental 'stabilising' function. On the other, although much of the social assistance expansion via new or existing programmes have been temporary rather than sustained, the crisis has accelerated innovations in programme design, utilising recent digital and financial infrastructure developments to scale crisis response in ways not previously feasible.^{13,14,15}

This experience presents us with valuable learning in how social protection can be mobilised in the face of imminent and inevitable climate shocks – and it is here that there is strong alignment with the early action agenda. Both early action and social protection actors aim to create scenarios where pre crisis actions minimise the post crisis caseload while also enabling the most timely, effective and efficient response possible. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how quickly innovative approaches to social protection can be taken to scale while the burgeoning body of evidence on early action being developed by the government, international organizations and civil society actors makes an increasingly strong case for the embedding of early action across DRM, CCA and development approaches.

If considered together, integrated early action and social protection approaches have the potential to be a game-changer, especially for climate vulnerable countries, and would play a significant role in achieving REAP's Targets, particularly Target 2, in a systemic, sustainable and highly impactful way.

How? The relationship goes both ways.

On one hand, well designed and 'risk-informed' social protection programmes can better take shocks into account and adapt to be ready to deal with them. This may include simple design adjustments to routine functioning (e.g. expanding routine coverage in shock-affected areas, or enhancing resilience-building and climate-mitigation measures), as well as preparations to accommodate expansions of adequacy and coverage in the face of

¹³ Gentilini, U. et al. 2021. "Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures". May 14, 2021 update. [Online](#).

¹⁴ Lowe, et al, 2021;

¹⁵ Beazley, R., Marzi, M., Steller, R. (2021) 'Drivers of Timely and Large-Scale Cash Responses to COVID19: what does the data say?', Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert Advice Service (SPACE), DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom: <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/space-drivers-timely-and-large-scale-cash-responses-covid-19-what-does-data>

increased demand.¹⁶ Further, well designed social protection systems can, in the appropriate circumstances and with prior planning, make their delivery mechanisms available as a 'vehicle' for responses of other actors – including government (e.g. DRM) or international early action and emergency response, provided this doesn't overload them. Strengthening of core social protection systems lies at the heart of this.

On the other, for early action actors and investors, building on existing social protection systems has the potential to provide timelier, more sustainable and more appropriate assistance than a late humanitarian response – or indeed any humanitarian response at all. Economic analysis looking at the cost effectiveness of social assistance transfers as opposed to the ongoing humanitarian response in protracted crisis, found that billions could be saved by investing in routine social protection, and filling remaining humanitarian gaps using humanitarian systems and funds.¹⁷

In the face of a changing climate, bringing increased risk and uncertainty, coupled with fiscal constraints as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need for more cost-effective, efficient, sustainable and inclusive ways to manage climate risks.

Climate change is a significant driver of increasing poverty and vulnerability and increasing humanitarian needs outstripping funding and overstretching both national and international humanitarian systems. Addressing this requires a substantial scale up of risk-informed approaches across all sectors, not just humanitarian response and development action. Successful pilots need to be taken to scale, existing systems must be strengthened, supported and adapted as necessary. The actions we take in response to climate hazards must not only be more time and cost efficient but better targeted, more reliable and appropriate. Governments must be supported to embed risk-informed early action and social protection interventions systematically and at scale, embedded in National Disaster Risk Management, Climate Change and Social Welfare legislation, frameworks and policies.

Barriers

Many barriers require explicit addressing for social protection to play a bigger role in the management of increasing climate risks and early action.

First, low coverage and financing of routine social protection. Under-provision of social protection is significant, and investment is still low compared to the need. 4.1 billion people (53% of the global population) lack access to *any* social protection, with significant variation between regions and different groups. For example, in Africa only 17.4% of people are covered, only 12.6% of children, and only 9.3% of persons with severe disabilities.¹⁸ Investments in building systems for social protection, early warning and early action in the last decade have not been sufficient to enable them to manage large shocks.

Second, lack of political will. Competing political and budgetary priorities exist at both the national and subnational level, exacerbated by a lack of incentives and complex interrelated disincentives such as acting under uncertainty with limited resources.

Third, a lack of explicit links between social protection policies and programmes and national climate change strategies and /plans – leading to the insufficient strategic integration of climate risk management. Where this is done, the focus has been on the provision of social protection to assist selected populations in the aftermath of individual

¹⁶ See Barca et al., 2020. Preparing For Future Shocks: Priority Actions For Social Protection Practitioners In The Wake Of COVID-19. FCDO & GiZ: <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/space-preparing-future-shocks-priority-actions-social-protection-practitioners>

¹⁷ Cabot-Venton, C. (2018) *ECONOMICS OF RESILIENCE TO DROUGHT IN ETHIOPIA, KENYA AND SOMALIA*, USAID Centre for Resilience.

¹⁸ ILO (2021) World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social protection at the crossroads – in pursuit of a better future International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. [wcms_817572.pdf \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/dca/-/publications/wcms_817572.pdf)

shocks, rather than consideration of social protection's key role in contributing to adaptation and enhancing long-term socio-economic or ecological resilience at scale, including, for instance, broader responses to slow-onset events such as sea-level rise.¹⁹ There is a lot more that can be done and has been done in selected countries and programmes, but not systematically.²⁰

Fourth, limited attention to inclusion (including but not limited to gender and disability), and limited attention to social protection as a human right. Women and girls and people with disabilities face a triple disadvantage when it comes to early action through social protection. They are disproportionately impacted by disasters, whilst being less likely to have access to social protection. In addition, women and girls and people with disabilities are often excluded from disaster planning and response mechanisms. As women are more likely to be in vulnerable and informal forms of employment, they are less likely to have access to social protection. Globally the proportion of women above retirement age receiving a pension is on average 10.6 percentage points lower than men as of 2018, only 27.8 per cent of people with severe disabilities worldwide receive a disability benefit and only 9 per cent of social protection measures announced in response to COVID-19 specifically referred to people with disabilities.^{21,22,23}

Fifth, climate risks are not yet significantly quantified and integrated into social protection programming. Lack of climate analysis can affect decisions on who is covered by social protection benefits, including in response to shocks. Social protection information systems often fail to integrate climate risk information, such as linkages with early warning systems and forecast-based triggers which would enable faster shock-response.

Sixth, in the early warning, early action and disaster risk finance narrative there is still limited attention to the importance of approaches such as social protection, with greater focus given to information and financing mechanisms. There is also limited recognition by DRM actors of the multiple functions and value of social protection beyond serving as a delivery mechanism for disaster finance.

Enablers and opportunities

In the introduction this document mentioned 'slivers of hope' and 'windows of opportunity' – here we briefly list enablers for these to be reaped.

First, coordination across different sectors, including disaster risk management, humanitarian and social protection, at different levels – from the national to the international. Good coordination is essential for effective early action, however strong coordination between actors is challenging due to the multiple sectors, actors, mandates and viewpoints involved. Factors influencing successful coordination include strong leadership;

¹⁹ Aleksandrova and Costella, 2021 Reaching the poorest and most vulnerable: addressing loss and damage through social protection. [Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability Volume 50](#), June 2021, Pages 121-128

²⁰ Costella, C., McCord, A., van Aalst, M., Holmes, R., Ammoun, J., Barca, V. (2021) ' [Social protection and climate change: scaling up ambition](#)', Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert Advice Service (SPACE), DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom

²¹ ILO and UNPRPD. 2021. Social Protection Measures for Persons with Disabilities and their Families in Response to COVID 19 crisis: an Updated Overview of Trends. ILO, Geneva. [Online](#).

²² Alfes, L., Holmes, R., McCrum, C., Quarterman, L. (2021). Gender and Social Protection in the COVID-19 Economic Recovery: Opportunities and Challenges. Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert Advice Service (SPACE). DAI UK. [Online](#).

²³ du Bray 2018; Kristjanson et al. 2017; Sammie et al., 2020; Quidumbing et al 2017, cited in Nesbitt-Ahmed, Z (forthcoming) Gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection: A game changer for climate action? UNICEF Innocenti Research Policy Brief 2021.

an ability to compromise; preparedness planning; dedicated and sustained resources and political will.^{24,25}

Second, the strength of the ‘building blocks’ of social protection systems, represented in Figure 2. The stronger the core systems, the easier and more effective it is to build on these – a lesson which the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reinforced: countries with stronger systems and capacity were better able to act early and/or respond, flexing and scaling in different ways.²⁶ At the ‘policy level’, this includes embedding in policy, strategy and legislation, core financing mechanisms, effective approaches to governance and coordination, as well as functional and technical capacities. At the ‘programme level’ the capacity to design programmes in an evidence-informed way, so that they can support those in need, when in need, with an amount of support that addresses needs. At ‘implementation level’, it is about the nuts and bolts of delivery, from outreach and registration through to enrolment, payment systems and accountability mechanisms.

Figure 2: The social protection ‘solar’ system



Third, data and information systems that cut across the social protection, humanitarian and disaster risk management sectors. On one side, early action through social protection functions best when there is good quality risk analysis and well-established

²⁴ Costella et al., 2021

²⁵ Smith, G. (2021) ‘Overcoming barriers to coordinating across social protection and humanitarian assistance – building on promising practices’, Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert Advice Service (SPACE), DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom

²⁶ Beazley, R., Marzi, M., Steller, R. (2021) ‘Drivers of Timely and Large-Scale Cash Responses to COVID19: what does the data say?’, Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert Advice Service (SPACE), DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom

early warning triggers linked to comprehensive vulnerability data. However, climate risk data is not well integrated into social protection systems (Costella et al., 2021). On the other, social protection data can be incredibly useful in early action, for example providing household and individual level data; socio-economic data; geo-referenced or geographically-disaggregated data; and data that can help “capture shock vulnerability in advance of a shock”.²⁷ However, how useful this is depends on various factors. These include the completeness of data and information, its relevance to the type of disaster and location affected, and how accurate, current and accessible the data is, as well as data protection concerns.²⁸

Fourth, the availability of adequate financing, at the right time, linked to effective early action plans and delivery mechanisms. Financing is influenced by factors such as political will, domestic fiscal space and available donor funding. Low-income countries spend only 1.1% of their GDP on social protection, compared with 16.4% spent by high-income countries: addressing the financing gap of routine social protection will be critical going forwards.²⁹ Moreover, there are increasing efforts to think ‘out of the box’ in terms of financing channels, including the use of climate financing for social protection and developing risk financing instruments that can support social protection scale-ups.³⁰

Fifth, efforts to plan and prepare – including via standard operating procedures and pre-emptive cross-sectoral Memorandums of Understanding. Experience from social protection programmes has shown that even those with shock responsive mechanisms in place still take time to respond, given the need to plan, coordinate and prepare for action.^{31,32} Risk informed early action approaches would be able to offer additional lead times to enable more timely action, enabling benefits to reach people in need more predictably and reliably.

Overall, efforts to strengthen the shock-responsiveness of social protection systems and programmes have recently increased – and can be built on. Beyond the COVID-19 experience, several LMICs have been making important progress adapting their social protection systems and programmes to respond to several kinds of shocks - including in Kenya, Ethiopia, Senegal and Malawi. Countries such as Mali and Sudan are linking disaster risk financing policies to national social protection systems under regional insurance schemes such as African Risk Capacity (ARC).³³ There is increasing recognition of the importance of delivering cash in anticipation of a disaster rather than in its aftermath, with pilots demonstrating positive results, such as in Bangladesh.³⁴ Moreover, while in many LMICs the most common form of social protection is non-contributory social assistance, there is increased attention to the need for expanded social insurance, which by its very nature is shock responsive – including innovative crop, livestock or disaster insurance.

An important caveat

It may not always be appropriate or feasible to implement early action through social protection and there is a risk of overwhelming nascent or weak systems. For example,

²⁷ Barca, V. & Beazley, R. (2019). Building on government systems for shock preparedness and response: the role of social assistance data and information systems

²⁸ Ibid;

²⁹ ILO, 2021

³⁰ Longhurst, D., Evans, S., Connolly, D., Lung, F., McCord, A., Allan, S., Plichta, (2021) 'What are future financing options for shock responsive social protection? A technical primer', Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert Advice Service (SPACE), DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom.

³¹ Barca & Beazley, 2019

³² Hobson, M. and Campbell, L. (2012) 'How Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is responding to the current humanitarian crisis in the Horn.' Humanitarian Exchange Magazine (53).

<http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-53/how-ethiopias-productive-safety-netprogramme-psnp-is-responding-to-the-current-humanitarian-crisis-in-the-horn>

³³ Väänänen, E., Nett, K., Costella, C. & J. Mendler de Suarez (2019) Linking climate risk insurance with shock-responsive social protection. InsuResilience. https://www.insuresilience.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/insuresilience_policybrief_1-2019_190312_web.pdf

³⁴ See: Pople, A., Hill, R. V., Dercon, S., and Brunckhorst, B. (2021) 'Anticipatory Cash Transfers in Climate Disaster Response', Working paper 6, Centre for Disaster Protection, London.

although delivery of early action through social protection systems offers opportunities for a timelier response, this is not a given – particularly if data on new beneficiaries vulnerable to climate shocks is not available.^{35,36} While using existing systems may enable a timelier response for those in (reach of) those systems, it may also aggravate exclusion errors, depending on the blind spots of the existing system. In fragile and conflict affected contexts, without a functioning or legitimate state or where the state is an active party in the conflict, the use of national social protection systems may not be appropriate.³⁷ Factors that influence whether social protection is the mechanism of choice include how best to meet rising needs, how to ensure adequate coverage and in a timely manner, the maturity of the system and whether actions have been planned in advance.³⁸

Recommendations

Now is the time to invest in social protection to ensure those most affected by climate change can strengthen their resilience capacity and avoid the worst impacts of disasters. At COP26, REAP and FCDO are calling for decisive action on social protection in early action.

To achieve this, stakeholders must:

- **EMBRACE SOCIAL PROTECTION - Embrace social protection as key to achieving climate policy objectives and enabling early action at scale.** Building strong social protection systems that are linked to early action plans and financing, integrate climate vulnerability into their design, and that explicitly engage local actors in design and implementation, can strengthen people's resilience and enable cost effective disaster response that supports truly inclusive approaches, ensuring the most vulnerable are not left behind.
- **STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS - Invest in social protection systems strengthening and expanding coverage as part of the development of early action infrastructure in advance of shocks.** Where appropriate, this could include specific tweaks to social protection design to a) better build resilience pre-crisis, risk-informing routine delivery; b) enable greater interaction with early action, working towards more systematisation and scale of early action and response. Without attention to system strengthening, there is a risk of overwhelming weak systems and failing to be effective. Without attention to coverage across a range of social protection instruments covering different risks (e.g. across social assistance, social insurance and labour market policies), the toolbox for action will be limited.
- **COORDINATE ACROSS SECTORS - Strengthen coordination across sectors, actors, experts and agencies** working on climate change, social protection, Disaster Risk Management, humanitarian and gender equality, to ensure effective and joined up action at the global and national levels. Good practice in coordination includes understanding political economy and the diverse perspectives of the actors involved – but also mutual embedding in policy, strategy and legislation.
- **BUILD OPERATIONAL LINKAGES - Build operational linkages between social protection systems, disaster preparedness and early action, and embed these in planning, SOPs, MoUs etc,** to ensure systems can respond effectively and quickly to diverse needs and impacts particularly on vulnerable and marginalised groups. To do

³⁵ O'Brien, C., Scott, Z., Smith, G., Barca V., Kardan, A., Holmes, R., Watson, C. and Congrave, J. (2018), 'Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems research: Synthesis report', Oxford Policy Management, Oxford, UK.

³⁶ O'Brien, C. (2020), '10 things you wish you'd always known about shock-responsive social protection', World Food Programme.

³⁷ Smith, G. & Bowen, T. (undated) 'Adaptive social protection: the delivery chain and shock response'. Washington DC: World Bank.

³⁸ O'Brien et al., 2018

this, sectors need to coordinate action across all of the ‘nuts and bolts’ along the delivery chain, from the data on climate risks and impacts, early warning and targeting (ideally disaggregated by sex, age, disability etc.), to payments/delivery, case management and M&E, among others.

- **PUSH FINANCING ‘OUT OF THE BOX’ - Exploit climate financing and link disaster financing to social protection systems and programmes** beyond more traditional financing solutions to strengthen and expand systems and ensure assistance reaches those hardest hit by the climate crisis, including vulnerable and marginalised groups. It is important that not only is financing available, but that it is explicitly linked to existing systems and local capacity to deliver.
- **WORK IN PARTNERSHIP - Support partnerships with civil society and local actors in early action and social protection**, to help reach and empower those most in need. For example in building accountability and inclusion, delivering to the last mile where both government and international systems are unable to deliver. This support must include financing their engagement in all stages of early action and social protection programming from design to delivery and beyond
- **PUT GENDER AND INCLUSION AT THE CENTRE - Ensure a focus on gender equality and social inclusion in efforts to build early action into social protection, including strengthening the gender responsiveness and disability inclusiveness of social protection systems**, and involving gender and inclusion actors in partnership and coordination efforts. Failing to do so will risk exacerbating existing inequalities for those who are most climate vulnerable (See also the InsuResilience [Global Partnership Declaration on Gender](#), which sets out an action plan to promote gender equality in climate disaster risk finance and insurance, setting out an action plan to promote gender equality in climate financing).
- **INVEST IN DATA AND EVIDENCE - Invest in data and data systems, including ensuring data is disaggregated**. There is also a need for more evidence on, and monitoring of, early action and social protection.

