Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

SOCIAL PROTECTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change poses a major threat to reducing poverty, eradicating hunger and achieving sustainable development. It accelerates the frequency and intensity of extreme natural hazards, thus affecting the lives and livelihoods of those living in rural areas. Protecting poor and vulnerable small-scale food producers from climate change-related risks is necessary for achieving FAO's strategic objectives and Sustainable Development Goals 1 (No poverty) and 2 (Zero hunger). This brief stresses the important role social protection plays in supporting inclusive climate risk management strategies that contribute to safeguarding livelihoods and increasing the resilience of households.

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SOCIAL PROTECTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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Climate change poses a major threat to achieving Agenda 2030, particularly efforts around eliminating poverty (SDG 1) and reaching zero hunger (SDG 2).

Climate variability and extremes are among the key drivers of the recent rise in hunger, especially in rural areas (FAO *et al.*, 2018).

The reasons are twofold. First, climate change is accelerating the frequency and intensity of extreme natural hazards, leading to an increase in disasters, which have severe impacts on people's lives and livelihoods (Hallegatte *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, while some longer-term impacts of climate change may not be apparent for many decades, observed changes – such as increases in temperature – are already significant and relevant to poor and vulnerable households depending on agriculture, as they contribute to declining productivity and to the spread of harmful plant pests and deseases (Porter *et al.*, 2014).

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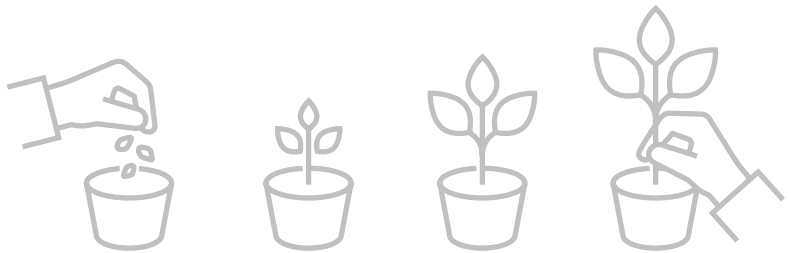
Rural poor

Focusing on the **rural poor** when designing climate change policies is key as **80 percent of the world's extreme poor live in rural areas**. Of these, **76 percent work in agriculture** (De La O Campos *et al.*, 2018; World Bank, 2016).

The rural poor are custodians of a significant share of the world's natural resources, particularly forests.

The poor, especially those living in rural areas, are disproportionately affected by climate hazards (e.g. river floods, lack of or excess rainfall, extreme changes in temperature) for multiple reasons.

These include: a greater likelihood of living in high-risk locations; high vulnerability due to lack of access to risk management instruments such as insurance; low incomes; limited savings; low asset bases; and heavy reliance on agriculture and natural resource based livelihoods.



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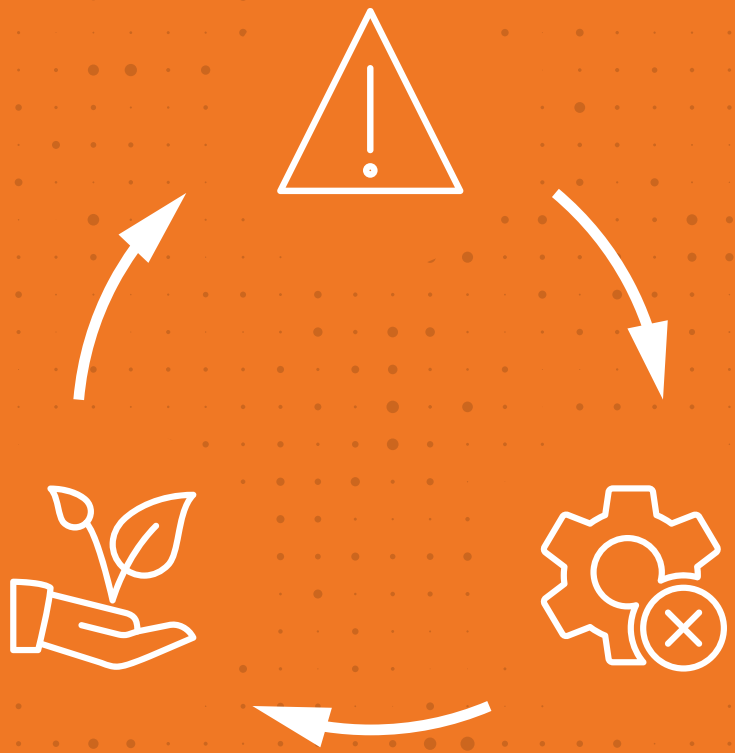

Consequently, the poor experience relatively greater losses of income and assets following natural disasters, as well as slower recovery and higher mortality rates in disaster-affected areas, compared with the non-poor (ESCAP, 2017; Winsemius *et al.*, 2015).

Poor rural households do not have the proper tools to manage risk, thus they tend to spread risk over a large array of lower-risk activities and to be less inclined to adopt new techniques or inputs.

Climate variability increases uncertainty, and with it risk aversion, further perpetuating the cycle of vulnerability and exposure (Prifti *et al.*, 2019).

How is the COVID-19 pandemic compounding the impact of climate change on vulnerable rural households?

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The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to compound the impact of climate change, especially on the poorest and most vulnerable rural households.

Since early 2020, governments across the world have introduced containment measures aimed at halting and preventing chains of virus transmission. While these measures have proven necessary to save lives and reduce pressure on healthcare systems, they have unleashed adverse impacts on people's lives and livelihoods (Patrone, Spano and Jones, forthcoming).

The negative socio-economic fallout of COVID-19 containment measures is heavily felt by rural households through reduced access to income-generating opportunities, drop in remittances sent by family members living abroad, shortage of agricultural labourers as well as disruptions of transhumance patterns, supply chains and markets to buy agricultural inputs or sell produce.

In this way, the pandemic is poised to exacerbate the impact of climate change, extreme weather events and conflict, pushing 150 million people worldwide into extreme poverty in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). New spikes of poverty will drive communities into further destitution and hunger, rising the number of those acutely food-insecure in low and middle-income countries to 265 million by 2021 (WFP, 2020).

FAO's approach

In order to develop sustainable climate change policies, **FAO supports holistic strategies that bring together technical solutions and socio-economic interventions.**

The technical solutions increase the capacity of rural households to cope with and adapt to climate shocks, while the socio-economic interventions address the barriers that the poor and most vulnerable face in their efforts to enhance their resilience (FAO and RCCC, 2019).

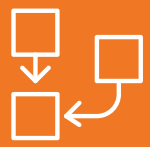
In a recent publication launched at the UN Climate Change Conference in 2019 - COP 25 (Charles *et al.*, 2019), FAO made the case for jointly addressing the climate agenda (mitigation and adaptation) and the development agenda (poverty reduction and food security) in order to achieve the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The publication highlights priorities for improving the 'response nexus' that links the two agendas together. This involves improving the coherence and coordination of policies and programmes to avoid unintended negative impacts of climate responses on poverty and food insecurity, and to make development actions for adaptation and mitigation more effective and inclusive.

Social protection is key to supporting inclusive climate change strategies. Social protection can support climate risk management along three main pathways:

Reducing vulnerability and reliance on negative coping strategies in the event of climate shocks.

Smoothing consumption, and promoting livelihood diversification, investment in human capital and asset protection, thus increasing coping capacity.



Providing a stepping stone towards climate-resilient livelihoods

Addressing risk aversion and the economic barriers for the adoption of climate smart agriculture (CSA) practices.

Supporting inclusive disaster preparedness and response.

Reaching poor populations affected by climate shocks in a fast and cost-efficient manner (FAO and RCCC, 2019).

More generally, social protection can address climate risk management by supporting poverty reduction, by enabling households to maintain and build up assets, increasing household livelihoods diversification, capacities and thus overall resilience, and providing a buffer to prevent falling back into poverty.

FAO's work

Advocacy

In partnership with the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre (RCCC), FAO recently developed a framing paper on how social protection systems can support climate risk management; a guidance note for practitioners on the same topic will soon be released.

FAO is also exploring the linkages between disaster risk insurance and social protection systems, documenting and analyzing good practices, to foster a stronger role for disaster risk insurance in protecting the livelihoods of vulnerable agricultural producers.

Since 2016, FAO has been actively promoting social protection as part of national climate policies as discussed at the annual UN Climate Change Conferences. Additionally, since 2017, FAO has been one of the organizers of the "Development and Climate days", a civil society-based event that is held in conjunction with the UN Climate Change Conferences.

Capacity development

FAO has developed several interactive learning tools to educate users on the benefits and trade-offs of linking social protection, resilience and climate change policies at local, national and global level.

These tools allow national stakeholders and policymakers to experience first-hand the challenges that smallholder farmers face when dealing with scarce availability of productive assets and deteriorating climate conditions.

The tools focus on introducing the basic concepts of social protection, access to early warning systems to inform social protection programme design, the use of social protection for disaster response, and the use of social protection ahead of climate shocks.

A Handbook page on risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection was developed as part of the FAO Corporate Handbook on Emergency Preparedness & Response.

This guidance tool is meant to support field practitioners responding to climate shocks through social protection.

FAO also developed a three-day training module on managing climate risks through social protection. The training, designed for policy makers and civil servants, was delivered in Bangkok (with participants from eight Southeast Asian countries) in 2019 and will be delivered in other regions in the near future.

In addition, FAO is producing an e-learning course on social protection and climate risk management that will be be publicly available in the FAO e-learning academy. Finally, a section dedicated to social protection has been developed within the Corporate CSA Sourcebook to provide guidance on the interlinkages between climate smart agriculture and social protection.

Country level policy and programming work

The core of FAO's work on linking social protection to climate change policies is carried out at country level. There is ongoing work in several countries, and some of the most interesting examples include Paraguay, Malawi, South East Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

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Paraguay: FAO is supporting the Ministry of Planning for Economic and Social Development in the implementation of *PROEZA*. *PROEZA* is a five-year, USD 90 million initiative (co-funded by Green Climate Fund – GCF) that uses an innovative territorial approach towards climate change resilience. The programme provides technical and financial support to 17 100 poor and extremely poor households with a high level of social and environmental vulnerability, to enable them to produce food while adopting low-emission and climate-resilient practices. *PROEZA* builds on the *Tekoporã conditional cash transfer scheme* – the government's flagship social protection programme. FAO is also supporting GCF programmes in other countries, such as El Salvador and Mexico, to strenghten the linkages between climate change mitigation and social protection.

Malawi: FAO, in partnership with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, is delivering the *Promoting coherence between disaster risk reduction, climate action and social protection programme*. The programme provides CSA technical training and crop inputs to enhance the adaptive capacity of the poor and vulnerable farmers in the framework of the *Malawi National Social Support Programme*, in alignment with the National Resilience Strategy.

Southeast Asia: In partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), FAO is implementing the multi-country programme *Scaling up EWEA and Shock-responsive Social Protection with innovative use of climate risk information for disaster*. The programme aims to enhance the usage of early warnings to inform the scale-up of national social cash transfers to mitigate the negative impact of climate shocks before they materialize (rapid onset) or reach their peak (slow onset). It focuses on Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam. In all countries, FAO is working at both policy level, supporting cross-sectoral policy dialogue and design, and programmatic level, with implementation of pilot interventions and support to rethink national programmes.

Latin America and the Caribbean: FAO, in partnership with several regional and national stakeholders, is implementing a multi-country programme titled *Articulando acciones tempranas ante alertas climáticas, de desastres y crisis con la protección social desde un enfoque de género*. The programme, with country-level activities in Colombia, Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, aims at defining protocols to use early warnings to inform the scale-up of national social protection programmes to mitigate the negative impact of climate shocks on agricultural livelihoods.

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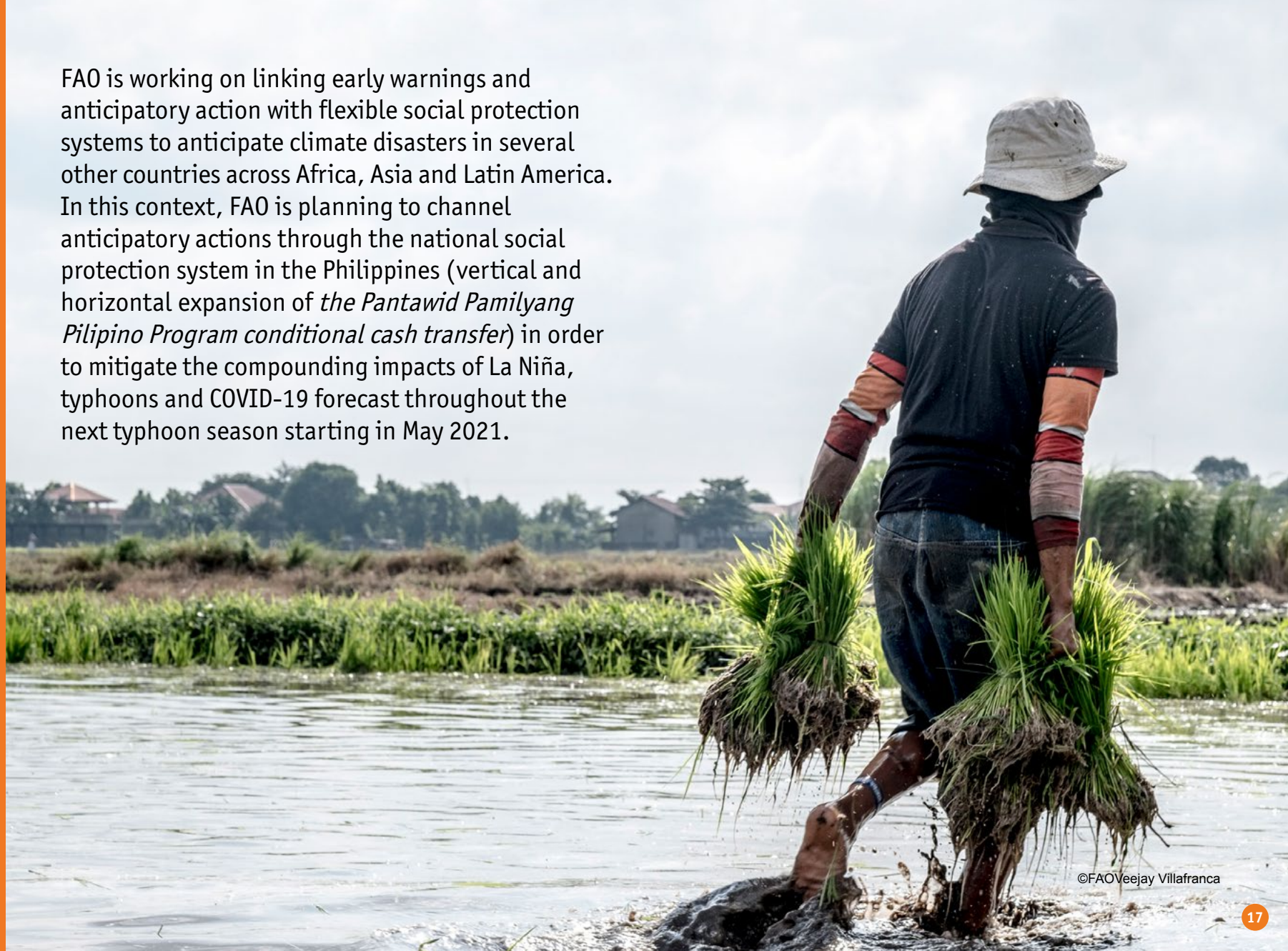
FAO is working on linking early warnings and anticipatory action with flexible social protection systems to anticipate climate disasters in several other countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. In this context, FAO is planning to channel anticipatory actions through the national social protection system in the Philippines (vertical and horizontal expansion of *the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program conditional cash transfer*) in order to mitigate the compounding impacts of La Niña, typhoons and COVID-19 forecast throughout the next typhoon season starting in May 2021.



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Building evidence

FAO is supporting national governments to build evidence on the role of social protection in promoting investment in agricultural productive activities and the adoption of CSA practices in Sub-Saharan Africa. Examples of this work include assessments of the role of food assistance in increasing CSA adoption among poor smallholder farmers in Ethiopia, Malawi and Tanzania.

In Malawi, FAO investigated the interactions between public works and training on CSA practices (Scognamillo *et al.*, 2020). These studies suggest that social protection interventions improve farmers' capacity to adopt, and sustain the adoption, of CSA practices by reducing liquidity and risks contraints that hinder their adoption.

They also suggest that the combination of social protection with training on CSA practices generates greater and more consistent positive impacts on farmer welfare than the standalone impacts of training alone (Sitko *et al.*, 2020).

FAO is also supporting the Independent Evaluation Unit of the GCF within the *Learning Oriented Real Time Assessment (LORTA) programme*. This work aims to build capacity and mechanisms for measuring causal impacts of GCF investments, building high quality and useful baseline data, supporting real-time learning on the likelihood of impacts and measuring causal impact.

FAO's contribution focuses on those interventions that use social protection measures to achieve climate change adaptation and mitigation objectives (e.g. *PROEZA* in Paraguay and *RECLIMA* in El Salvador). Recently, FAO has also been supporting countries to make informed decisions on how to leverage social protection to reduce short-term vulnerability and enhance the medium/long-term resilience of farmers' livelihoods and rural economies to the increasing threat of climate shocks.

FAO continues to actively explore new partnerships with development, humanitarian and climate actors to identify new linkages and actions between social protection, climate change and poverty reduction.

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