



WORLD FOOD DAY 2015

SOCIAL PROTECTION AND AGRICULTURE: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF RURAL POVERTY

This brief aims to familiarise teachers and students with the concept of social protection.

The note is developed in the form of Question and Answers and explains key concepts related to social protection.

We hope the brief note will help you create an original Poster!

1. I learnt that the theme of 2015 World Food Day Poster is “Social Protection and agriculture: breaking the cycle of rural poverty”, but what is social protection exactly?

When a poor household is in distress due to illness or an external shock or when a family doesn't earn enough to provide for its members, social protection helps to move the family out of poverty or to prevent it falls into the cycle of poverty and hunger.

Social protection can therefore be described as a blend of policies, programs and interventions aimed at protecting poor and food insecure people or those who may be vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity.

People are food insecure when they don't have regular access to sufficient nutritious food needed to lead active and healthy lives.

Access to food not only depends on food availability but also on people's ability to produce or purchase food.

2. I understand, social protection can help poor and vulnerable people, but how?

Social protection translates into a variety programmes that provide financial or in-kind support to poor and vulnerable people in order to enhance their income, capacities and rights.

Social protection programmes are broadly classified as follows:

- **Social assistance programmes** are those that distribute cash or vouchers or in-kind contributions to vulnerable families. In some cases, entitlement to aid, means that families need to fulfill specific requirements such as agreeing to send children to school and ensuring their education.

In other cases, families are entitled to the support without being obliged to follow any specific action or condition.

School feeding is a form of social assistance. Thanks to regular meals offered to schoolchildren, school feeding programmes encourage children attendance while enhancing their diets – due to better calorie and macronutrient intake - and improving their ability to concentrate. In some cases the meal offered to schoolchildren is purchased from local farmers. This helps farmers earn additional income.

When social assistance programmes are able to provide regular and reliable cash transfers, they also provide some security in the face of health contingencies or shocks of different nature. When households feel more secure, they are more likely to invest and improve their incomes. Social assistance programmes can, therefore, prevent households from selling their assets or taking their children out of school as a strategy to cope with a shock of any nature - when a storm, for instance, hits their crops or livestock.

Social insurance programmes are typically financed by contributions from employees, employers and from the state. In this scheme people protect themselves against risks (sickness, accidents, etc.) by pooling resources with a larger number of similarly exposed individuals or households. Insurance programmes address life cycle, employment and health contingencies.

- **Labour market programmes** provide unemployment benefits, build skills, and enhance workers' productivity and employability.

3. Why is social protection so important?

Social protection is critical because not only prevents people from going hungry in the short run, but also stimulates production and provides greater income stability in the longer-term, thus reducing food insecurity and poverty.

In 2013, for example, up to 150 million people worldwide were helped out of extreme poverty thanks to social protection programmes.

4. I understand but what is the relation between Social Protection and Agriculture?

More than 75 percent of the extreme poor and chronically undernourished in developing countries live in rural areas. Agriculture is an important part of their livelihood.

However, most family farmers and agricultural workers face a variety of challenges - such as limited access to productive means, agricultural inputs and services - that make it hard for them to use agricultural production as a pathway out of poverty. In the absence of social protection, they may be forced to cope with the effects of a shock with measures that further increase their vulnerability or undermine their future income generation capacity. For

example, they may have to sell livestock, or opt to grow crops that are more hardy but less remunerative.

Social protection programmes can raise farm incomes, crop yields and livestock productivity. They are more effective when supported by complementary interventions such as support to soil improvements, resilient water management, better connectivity to markets and storage capacity, and access to higher-yield inputs.

5. Can you provide some concrete examples of programmes that have been successful?

The **Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Programme** (PSNP) is a public works programme that provides wage employment and uses this labour to build community assets and infrastructure. The programme assists about 7.5 million people and is the largest safety net programme in Sub-Saharan Africa after South Africa. The programme facilitated the rehabilitation of over 167,000 hectares of land and 275,000 kilometres of stone and soil embankments and saw the planting of more than 900 million samplings. Participating households invested in livestock, with the impact stronger among households that participated for longer periods of time. The impact of the programme was also stronger in those cases where households were targeted by agricultural support programmes providing credit, tools, seeds, support to irrigation.

The programme lowered national poverty by about two percent and helped reduce the length of beneficiaries' hungry seasons by a third.

In Mexico, the ***Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación*** provides cash transfers to mothers in households living in extreme poverty in rural areas. Cash transfers are conditional on regular school attendance of their children and visits to health care centres. Today, the programme reaches about 32.9 million individuals and is credited with having reduced poverty by about 10 percent, and the poverty gap¹ by about 30 percent in the span of two years. Recipients have also increased food expenditures, especially of fruits, vegetables and animal products. It is also considered to have been instrumental in reducing deficiencies in height-for-age, stunting and overweight, and in improving physical, cognitive and language development.

Through the years the programme has been enriched with new components to ensure that families living in poverty continue to invest in their children's human capital development.

¹ How much money they would need to reach the poverty line.

In many countries the positive experiences with large-scale programmes that help the poor and vulnerable, have given impetus to a reassessment of the value and role of social protection in combating poverty and hunger.