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## **Extension of Social Security**

### **Realising the Right to Social Security and the Right to Food**

The contribution of national social protection floors  
towards food security and the realisation of the right  
to adequate food for all

Stephen Devereux

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## Abstract

This paper identifies conceptual synergies and dissonances between food security and income security. It considers the contribution of mainstream social protection instruments, such as cash transfers, to food security. The paper presents specific food security policies that would strengthen the ability of national social protection floors to address food insecurity. The paper explores the links between other policies necessary to ensure food security and the national social protection floors. The paper also presents the experiences of Ethiopia and India on the implementation of extensive social protection programmes with explicit food security objectives.

*JEL Classification:* H55, Q11, Q18

*Keywords:* social protection, social security, food policy, food security, vulnerable groups, rural area



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## Executive summary

Social protection systems, and in particular social protection floors, can contribute to achieving food security and realizing the right to food. While recognising the complementarities between the right to social security and the right to food, this paper argues that a rights-based national social protection floor might not be sufficient to guarantee food security for all people at all times. This paper identifies several conceptual and operational synergies, but also many dissonances, between income security and food security.

Food security has four pillars: availability, stability, access, and utilisation. The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) conceptual framework for food and nutrition security highlights that a person's nutritional status is determined by a range of factors, including whether food is physically accessible, food prices, household income, individual health status, water quality, sanitation practices, and intra-household resource allocation.

In the social protection floor framework, social transfers (either in cash or in kind) are used to ensure income security, which is a means to an end – food security and adequate nutrition. But social transfers are demand-side interventions, they have limited impact on food production and negligible impact on food systems and the broader macro-policy context. The determinants of food security are complex and multiple, and a range of complementary measures need to be added to the toolkit.

Despite the recent trend towards cash transfers and against food aid as well as direct public interventions in agricultural production and food marketing, food security cannot be guaranteed by cash transfers alone. They might not be sufficient to purchase adequate food at all times, due to inflation, price seasonality or price spikes. Families might not use cash transfers to purchase adequate food, because of competing needs for cash. Cash transfers might not be equitably distributed to all household members, or might be diluted among many unintended secondary beneficiaries. Also, adequate food intake might not translate into nutrition security if the disease environment undermines effective utilisation of food, or if feeding and caring practices are inappropriate.

A national social protection floor that aims to guarantee income security must recognise these limitations of cash transfers. Adjusting cash payments regularly might not be adequate; food transfers or commodity vouchers might be more effective in some contexts. Setting cash transfers higher than the cost of a minimum food basket would allow for essential non-food needs to be met. Targeting women, or “full family targeting”, can ensure that transfers meet the subsistence needs of all men, women and children. Income transfers should be complemented by public health and nutrition interventions, to maximise positive impacts on food security.

A case study of Ethiopia reveals how efforts to achieve income security can be driven by interventions that have as their primary objective the reduction of food insecurity. The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) provides a package of support to graduate people into resilient livelihoods, including cash or food transfers, public works employment, income-generating assets and training. Although the PSNP has installed an effective safety net, graduation outcomes have been constrained by the harsh physical environment and difficult local economic context, as well as severe shocks (droughts, price spikes) that have undermined progress towards household food security and sustainable escapes from chronic poverty.

The recent experience of India reveals how economic growth does not automatically translate into reduced hunger and nutrition insecurity. Rising average incomes have left millions of the poor and socially excluded behind. Extensive social transfer programmes

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do not address these deepening inequalities, and sometimes reinforce them. As a case in point, although public health care is accessible to all, the quality of provision tends to be lower for marginalised groups. This case study also reveals how addressing poverty and food insecurity has social and political dimensions that require complementary interventions, beyond income transfers.

Social protection floors should aim to tackle both the economic and non-economic drivers of poverty and food insecurity. This implies: strengthening the synergies between social protection and other economic and social policies; adapting the design of a social protection floor to the national socio-political culture and to unpredictable changes in the macro-economic context (e.g. financial crisis and austerity regimes); considering that a social protection floor is a fundamental element of a comprehensive social protection system.

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FIVIMS	Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System
FSP	Food Security Programme (Ethiopia)
HLPE CFS	High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) for the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)
HSNP	The Hunger Safety Net Programme (Kenya)
ILO	International Labour Office/Organization
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (India)
PDS	Public Distribution System
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
SPF	Social Protection Floors
UNCESCR	United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights



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## 1. Context

In June 2012, the 101<sup>st</sup> International Labour Conference adopted the Recommendation concerning national floors of social protection, 2012 (No. 202) (ILO, 2012). Social protection floors (SPF) aim to extend at least a basic level of social security to all people throughout the life cycle, and specifically to guarantee universal access to essential services such as health and education, as well as income security, which will also contribute to ensuring food and nutrition security.

Also in June 2012, the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) for the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) published its report on “Social Protection for Food Security” (HLPE, 2012).<sup>1</sup> The HLPE report argued that, while a national SPF “establishes a minimum set of interventions that will achieve the right to social security or social protection for all”, this might not be sufficient to guarantee food security for all. Although there are strong overlaps between the two agendas, the SPF needs to be complemented by “measures to ensure or protect individual access to food, which is especially important in countries or regions affected by chronic food deficits or occasional food shocks” (HLPE, 2012, p. 58). Only if this is done can countries fulfil their responsibilities to deliver on the right to social security as well as the right to adequate food, for all their citizens and residents at all times.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the concepts of food security, drawing on FAO’s conceptual framework for food and nutrition security, and the social protection floor, and identifies several conceptual synergies and dissonances between food security and income security. The next three sections are organised around three questions:

- Section 3: How can national social protection floors be designed and implemented to address food insecurity?
- Section 4: How can food security instruments be integrated into national social protection floors?
- Section 5: What other policies are necessary to ensure food security, and how can they be linked with national social protection floors?

Section 6 and section 7 discuss two country experiences in programming for social protection and food security – Ethiopia and India – which were selected as country case studies because both have implemented extensive social protection programmes, which are rights-based in India and have explicit food security objectives in both countries.

Section 8 concludes by arguing that national SPFs need to be carefully designed to account for local determinants of food insecurity, in particular with regard to the combination of instruments (transfers in cash and in kind, and other instruments), and it needs to explore ways to address the structural determinants of poverty and food insecurity – a challenge that also needs to be faced by social protection programming more broadly.

<sup>1</sup> The author of this paper was Team Leader for the HLPE report.

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## 2. Conceptual frameworks

### 2.1. Food security

Food security means that all people have access to adequate food at all times.<sup>2</sup> “The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement” (UNCESCR, 1999, para. 6). Standard conceptual frameworks for food security identify a number of factors that work together to determine an individual’s nutritional status, ranging from the national macro-economic context to the individual’s nutritional knowledge and eating habits (see Figure 1). Four key concepts should be highlighted: food availability, stability, access, and utilisation. These four pillars of food security were adopted by 180 countries at the 2009 World Summit on Food Security (FAO, 2009a, p. 1).

1. *Food availability* is often captured by “food balance sheet” calculations, as the sum of food production + stocks + imports + food aid – exports – losses in storage.
2. *Food stability* over time can be compromised by fluctuations in weather and market prices, by seasonality, and by economic or political shocks.
3. *Access to food* is constrained by income poverty, as well as by fragmented or missing markets and inadequate transport infrastructure.
4. *Food utilisation* refers to how efficiently individuals absorb nutrients they consume, and is affected by their health status, which in turn is determined by food and water quality, health care and child care practices, and the sanitation environment.

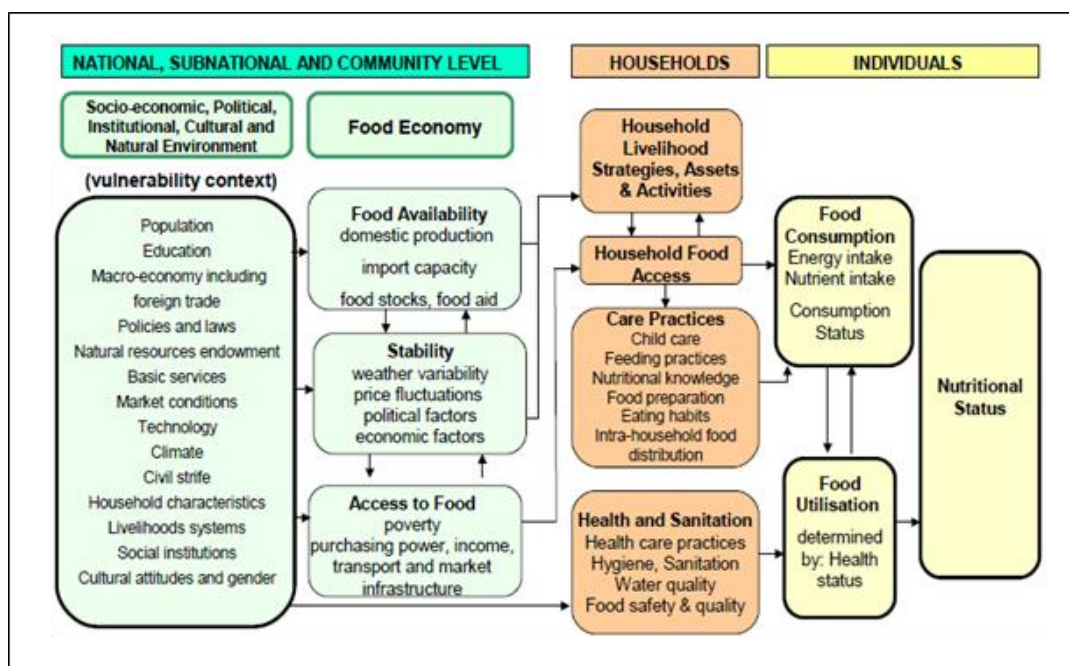
An individual’s nutritional status is determined not only by how much food they consume – which is the product of food availability and stability (supply of food) as well as access (demand for food) – but also by how they biologically process the food they consume (food utilisation).<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1 provides a comprehensive framework illustrating all the factors that influence food security, from the macro-context to sectoral interventions to micro-level determinants of nutrition outcomes. One immediate important conclusion is that the social protection floor is likely to impact mainly at the micro-level – on households and individuals – and will have very limited influence on macro- and sectoral level factors. This is why the social protection floor is likely to be inadequate to achieve food security and nutrition objectives on its own, but needs to operate together with complementary policies and interventions.

<sup>2</sup> “Food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 1996).

<sup>3</sup> “People are malnourished if their diet does not provide adequate nutrients for growth and maintenance or they are unable to fully utilize the food they eat due to illness” (UNICEF 2012a: 41).

Figure 1. FAO/FIVIMS framework for food and nutrition security



Source: Thompson et al. (2009).

## 2.2. Social protection floors

The UN Social Protection Floor Initiative conceptualises a national SPF as “the first level of a comprehensive national social protection system”. It has two components:

- “Universal access to essential services (such as health, education, housing, water and sanitation and other services, as nationally defined);
- Social transfers in cash or in kind, to ensure income security, food security, adequate nutrition, and access to essential services.”<sup>4</sup>

The International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), herewith Recommendation No. 202, was adopted virtually unanimously (with one abstention) by the 185 Member States of the ILO in June 2012. Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Recommendation define SPFs as nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees which should ensure at a minimum that, over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential health care and to basic income security which together secure effective access to goods and services defined as necessary at the national level. These national SPFs should comprise at least the following basic social security guarantees:

- 1) access to a nationally defined set of goods and services constituting essential health care, including maternity care, that should be available, accessible, acceptable and of quality for all;
- 2) basic income security for all children, at a nationally defined minimum level, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services;

<sup>4</sup> [www.socialprotectionfloor-gateway.org/](http://www.socialprotectionfloor-gateway.org/)

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- 3) basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for persons in active age unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and
  - 4) basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for older persons.

It follows that the *objectives* of a national social protection floor are to ensure, for all individuals, throughout their life-cycle:

- 1) income security;
- 2) food security;
- 3) adequate nutrition; and
- 4) access to essential services (health, education, housing, water and sanitation).

Various policy *instruments* may be used for this purpose, including:

- 1) cash transfers;
- 2) in-kind transfers; and
- 3) fee-free services.

This implies that cash plus in-kind transfers must be sufficient to meet basic needs – food and nutrition, health care, education, housing, water and sanitation.<sup>5</sup>

Since three of the four “social security guarantees” in the SPF refer to “basic income security” (for children, persons in active age and older persons), it is important to unpack what “income security” means. Income is a means to an end. Just as “food security” implies having enough food for adequate nutrition at all times, so “income security” implies having enough income to purchase a minimum set of essential goods and services – including, but not only, food. “Access to nutrition” is mentioned explicitly only for children, but is implicit in the phrase “a nationally defined minimum level” [of income] for persons in active age and older persons, since national minimum income levels are typically defined as covering the cost of a basket of basic food items. As will be seen, however, defining and costing a basket of basic food items, and ensuring that all persons have access to adequate food at all times, are bigger challenges than they might appear, both for national social protection floors and for food security programming.

### 2.3. Conceptual synergies and dissonances

The concept of food security and the social protection floor framework are both useful in their own right, both have been endorsed by the international community, and

<sup>5</sup> Note that social transfers (in cash or in kind) are broadly defined and can be delivered through a range of benefits and schemes: “[...] (2) Benefits may include child and family benefits, sickness and health-care benefits, maternity benefits, disability benefits, old-age benefits, survivors’ benefits, unemployment benefits and employment guarantees, and employment injury benefits as well as any other social benefits in cash or in kind. (3) Schemes providing such benefits may include universal benefit schemes, social insurance schemes, social assistance schemes, negative income tax schemes, public employment schemes and employment support schemes.” (Recommendation No. 202, paragraph 9).



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both inform national policies in many countries. The purpose of this section is to explore the convergences and divergences between them, with a view to identifying ways to maximise the positive synergies. There are several conceptual overlaps between the social protection floor framework and the FAO/FIVIMS (Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System) food security framework.

As noted above, undernutrition can be caused either by inadequate food consumption or by a physiological inability to process food consumed. The first three food security pillars – food availability, access to food, and stability of food supplies – determine whether an individual’s *food* consumption is adequate at all times. Under the SPF framework, social transfers (cash or in-kind) may be used to ensure income security, food security and adequate nutrition. Since social transfers are demand-side interventions, they can stimulate individual or household access to food directly, through increasing purchasing power. On the supply side, social transfers can have a direct effect on food supplies (food availability and stability) if recipients who are farmers invest them in agriculture to produce more food. Increased purchasing power can also generate a knock-on effect on local economies, including on local food production. There are also other indirect positive effects of social transfers on food availability, access, and stability (see Table 1).

The fourth food security pillar – *food utilisation* – is determined by each individual’s physical health, which is affected partly by access to health care services but also by environmental and behavioural factors such as hygiene practices, sanitation, drinking water quality and food safety. The SPF aims to guarantee “access to at least essential health care” for all (ILO, 2012), which should contribute to effective “food utilisation”. So a well-functioning national SPF should make a positive contribution towards all four food security pillars.

But these frameworks also reveal that a national SPF is not necessarily sufficient to guarantee food security and adequate nutrition for all people “at all times” (in food security terminology), or “over the life cycle” (in social protection floor terminology), unless it is complemented by other policies.

The first column of Table 1 lists the four pillars of the FAO/FIVIMS framework – “*What are the components of food security?*” The second column – “*How can national SPFs address food insecurity?*” – lists several ways (not necessarily all ways) in which the main SPF instruments of cash transfers, in-kind transfers, and free services can be used by recipients or beneficiaries to enhance food availability, access, stability and utilisation. Note that “cash transfers” are broadly defined to include several “benefits” specified in Recommendation No. 202: “child and family benefits ... disability benefits, old-age benefits, survivors” benefits, unemployment benefits” (paragraph 9 (2)) – as well as social assistance and conditional cash transfers.

The third column of Table 1 – “*Which food security instruments could be integrated in, or linked to, national SPFs?*” – lists several interventions that are typically considered to be food security rather than social protection instruments, but which might be incorporated into or linked to national SPFs. These include agricultural input subsidies, public works programmes, school feeding schemes, food price subsidies and weather-indexed insurance.

The fourth column – “*What complementary policies are needed to ensure food security?*” – adds several instruments from the broader development policy toolkit that can contribute to enhanced food security, but are not mainstream food security or social protection instruments. These include policies to enhance farmers’ access to land and financial services, trade policies, asset transfers, grain reserve management and addressing micronutrient deficiencies.

**Table 1. National social protection floors and food security**

What are the components of food security?	How can national SPFs address food insecurity?	Which food security instruments could be integrated in, or linked to, national SPFs?	What complementary policies are needed to ensure food security?
<b>AVAILABILITY</b> Domestic production Import capacity Food stocks Food aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Farmers often invest <b>cash transfers</b> in food production</li> <li>■ Spending of <b>cash transfers</b> on food can stimulate domestic food production</li> <li>■ Access to essential <b>social services</b> (e.g. health, education) can raise the productivity of farmers so they produce more food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Agricultural input subsidies</b> stimulate foodcrop production and household food security, especially if they are targeted to food insecure farmers</li> <li>■ <b>Public works</b> projects that support farmers (e.g. soil and water conservation, hillside terracing) can raise agricultural production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Food production can be promoted by all policies that enhance farmers' <b>access to agricultural inputs</b>: arable land; irrigation; fertiliser; seeds; tools; and financial services</li> <li>■ Food availability can also be influenced by favourable national and international <b>trade policies</b></li> </ul>
<b>ACCESS</b> Poverty Purchasing power Income Transport Market infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Cash transfers</b>, including public works payments, can finance food purchases</li> <li>■ Regular <b>cash transfers</b> allow recipients to take calculated risks, and/or invest in more profitable livelihood activities</li> <li>■ <b>In-kind transfers</b> of food increase access to food directly</li> <li>■ Access to essential <b>social services</b> (e.g. education) can promote livelihoods and increase income for buying food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>School feeding</b> increases access to food for poor children; "home grown school feeding raises local farmers" incomes</li> <li>■ <b>Public works</b> projects that build feeder roads can link people to markets and lower food prices</li> <li>■ <b>Food price subsidies</b> can raise access to food by lowering the cost of food in local markets or retail stores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Asset transfers</b> and livelihoods support (e.g. training for diversification) can graduate people out of food insecurity</li> </ul>
<b>STABILITY</b> Weather variability Price fluctuations Political factors Economic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Cash transfers</b> can respond to fluctuations in food prices if they are indexed to food prices</li> <li>■ Regular <b>cash transfers</b> stabilise income and allow savings and asset accumulation that buffer against price shocks and income variability</li> <li>■ <b>In-kind transfers</b> (food) ensure stable access to food even if market supplies and prices are unstable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Weather-indexed insurance</b> schemes compensate farmers for harvest failure or livestock losses</li> <li>■ Seasonal <b>public works</b> or employment guarantee schemes stabilise household incomes (cash-for-work) or access to food (food-for-work)</li> <li>■ <b>Price controls, tariff reductions, export taxes or bans</b>, all protect consumers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Grain reserves</b> or buffer stocks can be strategically managed to stabilise food supplies and prices throughout the year</li> </ul>
<b>UTILISATION</b> determined by: Health status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Access to essential <b>social services</b>, especially health care, should improve the biological utilisation of food by individuals</li> <li>■ <b>Supplementary feeding</b> provides nutritious food to vulnerable individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Linking the delivery of social transfers to <b>health and nutrition education</b> or awareness raising sessions (e.g. conditional cash transfer programmes) should improve the utilisation of food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Child nutrition status can be enhanced by providing <b>vitamins and minerals</b>, promoting <b>breast-feeding</b>, and treating <b>acute malnutrition</b></li> </ul>

Figure 1 and Table 1 both highlight the complex, multiple determinants of food security, and the range of complementary measures, at both the sectoral and macro-level, that need to be considered. Synergies should be pursued and strengthened between social protection and other economic and social policies. It should also be recognised that some policies and contextual conditions need to be taken as given, and national social protection floors need to be sufficiently flexible to adapt to these conditions and to increasingly unpredictable changes in the macro-context (e.g. financial crisis and austerity regimes).

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The next three sections of this paper provide more elaboration of the second, third and fourth columns in Table 1. Note that each column asks a question which is answered with respect to the four food security pillars, so the analysis is organised around these pillars in each case.

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### 3. How can national social protection floors address food insecurity?

Table 1 lists several ways in which the main instruments of the social protection floor can contribute to food availability, access to food, stability of food and utilisation of food:

- **Availability:** *Cash transfers* can be invested in food production or spent on purchasing local food which stimulates demand for local production. Conversely, *in-kind transfers* (food aid) could undermine incentives to local farmers, unless the food is sourced locally. Access to *education and health services* can raise the productivity of farmers.
- **Access:** *Food transfers* increase access to food directly, whereas *cash transfers* can buy food or can be invested in income-earning activities. (Cash transfers can include various social protection instruments, including contributory, partially contributory or non-contributory schemes such as social pensions, disability grants and child benefits.) *Access to education* can reduce poverty and raise income-earning potential, which also allows more food to be purchased.
- **Stability:** Regular *food transfers* guarantee stable access to food even if prices are unstable. Regular *cash transfers* are vulnerable to price variability and need to be index-linked to ensure stable access over time. This is consistent with the principle of “adequacy and predictability of benefits” in Recommendation No. 202 (paragraph 3), which also notes that “the levels of basic social security guarantees should be regularly reviewed” (paragraph 8(c)).
- **Utilisation:** The Social Protection Floor’s guarantee that, “at a minimum [...], over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential *health care*” (paragraph 4) should improve the health status of individuals and their ability to utilise food more effectively.

National SPFs aim to guarantee “income security” for all through various means, including transfers of cash, food or other commodities. In practice, however, social protection programmes are moving increasingly towards delivering cash transfers (see, for instance, Hanlon, Barrientos and Hulme, 2010; DFID, 2011; Garcia and Moore, 2012; ILO, 2014). It is important, therefore, for all social protection policy-makers and food security programmers to be aware that cash transfers alone cannot guarantee access to adequate food at all times in all contexts, for several reasons that are outlined below.

It should be recognised that the ambition of delivering food security or social protection for all is extremely challenging on several levels, especially but not only in low-income country contexts. In terms of implementation, ways must be found to deliver benefits (cash or in-kind) to populations living in remote, food insecure areas that are difficult to access, with limited infrastructure and services and no representative organisations to assist with identification, registration and verification of beneficiaries. Politically, it is often challenging to “sell” these programmes to the public and to build public and political support for them. In terms of financing, the challenge is to mobilise adequate resources – domestically rather than relying on development partners – to ensure these programmes are fiscally sustainable.

Efforts to ensure that all individuals achieve food security specifically through income transfers (cash or in-kind) raise two familiar practical challenges: how to identify who needs to receive income transfers (defining eligibility); and how much income each eligible individual needs to receive. These two considerations are further complicated by the time dimension: the individuals who need support to achieve food security tend to

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change over time (e.g. the numbers will rise following a natural disaster or during economic crises), and the levels of need vary over time (e.g. hunger tends to rise and fall seasonally in agrarian communities). A final complication derives from the reality that income transfers delivered to households or even to targeted individuals might not achieve their intended impacts, because of decisions taken within the household. These four issues are discussed next.

### 3.1. Defining eligibility

Several alternative strategies can be considered for trying to ensure that everyone achieves income security and their right to adequate food. Universal entitlements for the entire population – like a general food price subsidy (still common in North Africa and some Gulf states) or a “Basic Income Grant” (which was successfully piloted in one community in Namibia (Haarmann et al., 2008)) – have the advantage of zero exclusion errors, so they are truly benefits “for all”, but the disadvantage of being extremely expensive and inefficient (large leakages to the non-poor).

A second option would be categorical benefits, such as universal pension schemes for all older persons, which are feasible and affordable in many countries, and can reach high proportions of food insecure people. Alternatively, different schemes can be coordinated to extend coverage. In Chile, for example, the non-contributory “solidarity pension” (*Pensión Básica Solidaria*) complements the contributory pension to fill the coverage gap, but without creating disincentives to making contributions.

A third option is to deliver targeted cash transfers to poor and vulnerable households that meet eligibility criteria that are defined through a means test or a proxy means test. However, targeting by income or poverty levels inevitably introduces inclusion and exclusion errors. For the purpose of achieving income security and the right to food “for all”, inclusion errors are an inefficiency but do not compromise this objective – but exclusion errors do. This problem can be partly mitigated by an effective grievance procedure or complaints mechanism that allows anyone who believes they have been unfairly excluded to present their case for being included in the programme, but this is unlikely to resolve all errors completely. (Poor people feel intimidated by bureaucratic systems, grievance procedures are not always sufficiently independent, and so on.)

A fourth option is to deliver transfers in kind rather than in cash. If the objective is to ensure that everyone has enough food for their nutritional needs, a package of basic food items could be given to poor households (calibrated by household size and composition), or vouchers could be given to food insecure households, entitling them to collect this package of food items for free or at subsidised prices from government warehouses or private retail stores. (This is the principle behind the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India – see the India country case study below). The social protection floor makes provision for delivering “social transfers in cash or in kind”; there is no presumption that cash transfers should be preferred. However, the trend in social protection programming is away from food transfers towards cash transfers. Even in India, problems with the PDS motivated the introduction of a demand-driven public works programme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and a cash transfer programme to meet the constitutional right to food.

### 3.2. How much income do people need?

The challenge of ensuring income security lies in assessing how much income, in cash or in kind, is needed to enable economic access to enough food for subsistence, as well as to enable economic access to essential services. Even if health and other essential

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services are delivered free at the point of delivery (to guarantee universal accessibility), there are often additional associated costs, such as transport to clinics and schools, costs for medicines, or non-fee levies by schools.

The distinction between income for food security and income for non-food needs is explicit in the “household economy approach”, which draws a useful distinction between two levels of income or food security. The “survival threshold” is defined as:

The total food and cash income required to cover the food and non-food items necessary for survival in the short term. It includes: (i) 100% of minimum food energy needs; (ii) the costs associated with food preparation and consumption; and (iii) where applicable, the cost of water for human consumption.

(FEG; SC-UK; RHVP, 2008, p. iv)

The “livelihood protection threshold” is set higher than the “survival threshold”, and is defined as:

The total income required to sustain local livelihoods. This means total expenditure to:

- (i) ensure basic survival (i.e. all items covered in the survival threshold);
- (ii) maintain access to basic services e.g. health and education;
- (iii) sustain livelihoods in the medium to longer term e.g. purchase of seeds or veterinary drugs; and
- (iv) achieve a minimum locally acceptable standard of living e.g. purchase of basic clothing or coffee/tea.

(FEG; SC-UK; RHVP, 2008, p. iii).

It might be argued that some of these non-food items are also essential for survival in the short term, such as the costs of accessing emergency health care (transport, fees, and medicine), shelter and clothing. Also, it might be advisable to add a contingency component, to protect against risks and unforeseen essential expenses. But the focus on food as a basic need for survival is useful for our purposes here. This distinction is analogous to that often drawn between an “extreme” poverty line which is based mainly on nutritional requirements (the cost of acquiring a subsistence basket of food) and a poverty line set slightly higher that also factors in essential non-food expenditures.

Although nutritional requirements are relatively easy to determine in theory, it is more challenging to estimate nutritional requirements for every individual or household in a country (calibrated by household size and composition, which change constantly as household membership alters and children’s nutritional needs evolve as they grow). Even if every individual receives enough food, or sufficient cash to buy enough food, to reach their personal “survival threshold”, people living at the margins make trade-offs between food and non-food needs, which means that food security could be compromised if some food aid is sold or some cash transfers are spent on health care or other essential expenses (Because food is fungible and can be sold or exchanged, giving social transfers in food or vouchers rather than cash does not necessarily avoid this possible outcome.)

### **3.3. What about variability in needs over time?**

People’s needs for income support for food security purposes vary over time, according to at least three factors: variability in income, variability in food production, and variability in food prices. In low-income contexts, variability on both the demand side (income) and the supply side (food production and food prices) raises serious challenges to guaranteeing income security and food security for all.

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Some social protection benefits respond to *variability in income* throughout the life-cycle: *social insurance* is designed for working people during non-income earning periods (unemployment benefits, compensation for employment injury, maternity benefits, sickness benefits, old age pensions), and *non-contributory benefits* (means tested or not) provide benefits to specific groups of the population (children, orphans, older people) or provide income support to households. Such benefits serve to stabilise incomes and smooth consumption over the life-cycle.

Many working people with no “standard employment relationship” (e.g. smallholder farmers, or people who are (self-)employed or in the informal sector) have irregular, unpredictable and variable incomes, with no or limited access to social insurance schemes to buffer them through periods of low or zero income. In particular, smallholder farming families who grow foodcrops for subsistence and depend on a single annual harvest for most of their food and income are highly vulnerable to *variability in food production*. When harvests fail, emergency food aid is often required to protect the food security of affected households. Even when harvests are “normal”, there is often a regular cycle of falling food availability in farmers’ granaries and local markets between one harvest and the next.

Cash transfers, including social insurance benefits, are sometimes index-linked against general inflation, but rarely against food prices specifically, which makes them and their recipients vulnerable to *variability in food prices*. Food security that is underpinned by cash incomes can be undermined by seasonal food price variability (when granaries are empty and market supplies are low, prices can double within six months of the harvest) or food price spikes. In 2008, for instance, global food prices “increased by 6.8 per cent, adding 44 million people to the ranks of the malnourished” (UNICEF, 2012a, p. 12). Kenya was one of many countries affected by the global food price crisis. The Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) in northern Kenya set the level of its cash transfer at an amount sufficient to purchase a basic food basket during its design phase, but by the time the first transfer was paid 18 months later the value had fallen by two-thirds due to price rises, so the cash transfer could purchase only one-third of the intended food basket. So the HSNP was unable to achieve its objective of providing an effective safety net against hunger. The most effective solution to variability in food prices is to index cash transfers tightly to local food prices. In Malawi, for example, an Irish Aid-funded project implemented by Concern Worldwide matched food price rises in a cash transfer programme every month (Devereux, 2008). Although this protected household food security against fluctuating food prices, it required unprecedented levels of administrative and budgetary flexibility, and is unlikely to be replicated very often or at scale, for this reason.

Table 2 highlights some essential differences between a formal employment context, in which social security schemes are accessed by most of the working population, and contexts of acute and chronic food insecurity, in which social security is not accessible to the majority of working adults. (Note that this is a stylised and simplified representation of differences in selected indicators of vulnerability; it is neither representative of a specific country context nor generalisable across all countries at all times.)

**Table 2. Contrasting contexts: formal employment context (formal sector employees) versus a challenging food security context (self-employed farmers)**

Variables	A formal employment context (e.g. wage-earning employees in the formal economy)	A challenging food security context (e.g. self-employed smallholder farmers in the rural economy)
Household income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular</li> <li>- Predictable</li> <li>- Constant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Irregular</li> <li>- Unpredictable</li> <li>- Variable</li> </ul>
Markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong</li> <li>- Integrated</li> <li>- Respond rapidly to demand signals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Weak</li> <li>- Fragmented</li> <li>- Respond slowly to demand signals</li> </ul>
Food prices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relatively stable</li> <li>- Tend to rise slowly over time due to regular consumer price inflation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relatively unstable</li> <li>- Can fluctuate daily due to supply failures and agricultural seasonality</li> </ul>

Numerous informal and semi-formal social protection mechanisms also exist that partially fill the gaps when formal social protection interventions are absent or inadequate. Muiruri (2013), for instance, identifies various social networks, welfare societies, accumulating savings and credit associations (ASCAs), microfinance institutions (MFIs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) that all contribute to providing social protection for residents of low-income settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. The problem with informal social protection mechanisms is that they tend to have limited coverage and do not fully insure against major covariant shocks.

### 3.4. From households to individuals: ensuring social protection and food security for all

Social protection is often insufficiently sensitive to gender and social relations, within and between households. Holmes and Jones (2013) argue that programmes such as conditional cash transfers tend to reinforce women’s “traditional” roles and responsibilities, that the heavy manual labour required by public works programmes is inappropriate for women and fails to acknowledge their time-poverty, and that social protection generally fails to address gender-specific vulnerabilities. One reason for this gender-blindness might be that social transfers are usually tagged either to households or to individuals, and what happens within the “black box” of the household is seen as beyond the mandate of programme administrators. But there are many reasons why income transfers to a household (e.g. a cash transfer programme that targets poor households) or even to one member of a household (e.g. a social pension or a child grant) might not be equitably distributed to all household members such that they each achieve food security all the time, even if the total income accruing to the household or the individual is sufficient to meet all their subsistence needs. There is a long history of theorising and evidence on this topic, in both the food security and feminist economics literatures. The six issues identified below illuminate the implications for the social protection floor of intra-household relations between the genders as well as the generations.

#### 3.4.1. Gendered differences in spending patterns

Cross-country evidence confirms that men tend to spend a higher proportion of incremental income on personal consumption and investment in assets and livelihoods, while women tend to spend more on food and basic needs for the family, especially for children. It follows that who receives income coming into the household is a critical determinant of individual food security outcomes. An income transfer that is calibrated to



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meet the subsistence needs of all household members (sometimes called “full family targeting”)<sup>6</sup> might achieve this outcome if it is delivered to a female household member, but might not achieve this outcome if it is delivered to a male household member. In South Africa, for example, a survey found that social pensions had a positive and statistically significant impact on the anthropometric status of children in the care of female pensioners, but no such impact on children in the care of male pensioners (Duflo, 2000).

### **3.4.2. Intra-household discrimination**

Power imbalances within households, and systematic biases in favour of some household members and against others, could lead to distorted allocations of household resources that result in sub-optimal food security outcomes for certain individuals. In particular, in societies where boys are favoured over girls, or where older people are seen as economic burdens on their families, wellbeing outcomes (in terms of food security and nutrition, but also health, access to education, etc.) for girls, women and older persons can be very negative, even in households that appear to be income secure. Dramatic evidence for this effect comes from the “missing women” literature, which analysed demographic data to reveal that in some highly patriarchal societies the sex ratios are so skewed that they can only be explained by neglect or even infanticide against girls (Agnihotri et al., 2002). Such situations exemplify the need for social transfers to be complemented by “transformative” social policies that address the structural causes of poverty and vulnerability (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, 2008). Examples might include awareness raising to challenge patriarchal attitudes or practices that discriminate against girls and women, and creating incentives for girls to access education (such as cash transfers or take-home rations targeted to girls who attend school).

### **3.4.3. Gendered control over income and food**

In many “traditional” communities in rural Africa, men control cash income, cash crops and major assets such as livestock, while women control foodcrop production and minor assets such as kitchen utensils. This gendered division of responsibilities and power within the household can have detrimental outcomes for individual income and food security. In Tanzania in the 1980s, rising food prices resulted in maize switching from being a subsistence crop cultivated and controlled mainly by women to becoming a commercial crop controlled mainly by men. This resulted in an intriguing paradox: average household incomes increased as more maize was being marketed than before, but children’s nutrition status deteriorated – because more maize was sold and less was consumed than before, and not enough of the incremental income was allocated to food purchases (Geier, 1995). This case study revealed that income security and food security can under certain circumstances move in opposite directions.

### **3.4.4. “Dilution” of social transfers**

Income transfers delivered to individuals do not necessarily translate into adequate food intake, even for that individual, because this income is often shared among a wider group. For instance, pensions are usually calibrated to meet the basic needs of a single person – the pensioner – but empirical evidence from several countries with social pension programmes (including Bolivia, Lesotho and South Africa) reveals that social pensions are invariably shared with family members – unemployed adult children, or orphaned grandchildren (Willmore, 2007). Because of this “dilution” effect, even relatively generous

<sup>6</sup> For example, participants in Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) who work on a public works project take home enough cash wages or food rations to feed their entire family – so a five-person household earns five times as much as a single-person household.

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social pensions do not guarantee the income and food security of the pensioner. This effect can even apply to transfers made in the form of food, because of cultural norms in some societies that dictate that men and boys should be fed first. As noted above, one option for addressing this possibility is “full family targeting”, or delivering transfers that are proportional to household size. If this is not done, smaller households will receive higher per capita benefits than larger households, which are often already poorer and more food insecure because they have high dependency ratios.

#### **3.4.5. Inadequate care practices**

The UNICEF model of the causes of malnutrition (UNICEF, 2012a) reveals that an individual’s nutrition status (a measurable food security outcome indicator) is determined not only by household access to food or even individual consumption of food, but also by utilisation of food, which depends on non-income factors such as the public health environment, whether the diet includes essential micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) as well as macronutrients (calories, protein, fats), and – especially for children – adequate care practices (e.g. breastfeeding and weaning). Recent evidence finds that “failure to achieve exclusive breastfeeding was associated with a 10 per cent increase in the risk of a child being wasted” (Save the Children Fund, 2013, p. 6). Nutrition education and interventions to improve care and sanitation practices might be more effective pathways to food and nutrition security than income transfers.

#### **3.4.6. Intergenerational transmission of malnutrition**

Malnourished mothers give birth to low birthweight babies, and unless the infant receives special nutritional attention especially in its first two years of life, it will never catch up this lost growth potential, in terms of both physical and cognitive development. Giving cash or food transfers to a food insecure household, or school meals to a malnourished child, is important and necessary, but in a very real sense it is too late. The mother should not have been allowed to become malnourished and her child should not have been born underweight. For both these reasons – to address the nutritional needs of young women and to break the intergenerational transmission of malnutrition from mothers to children, it is now widely accepted that a key food security intervention is to invest in the nutritional status of adolescent girls and mothers, with fortified food, iron supplements and nutrition education (UNICEF, 2012a).

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## 4. How can food security instruments be integrated into national social protection floors?

Section 3 of this paper considered the contribution of mainstream social protection instruments, such as cash transfers, to food security. This section shifts the analysis to a number of policy instruments that are specifically intended to address problems of food insecurity caused by inadequate food availability, stability, access or utilisation, by elaborating on the instruments outlined in column 3 of Table 1 above. It is argued that the ability of national social protection floors to address food insecurity would be strengthened if these instruments were considered as part of the menu of interventions that can contribute to income security and food security for all, even if instruments such as agricultural input subsidies and weather-indexed insurance are not normally considered as part of the standard social protection toolkit.

### 4.1. Food availability

Food availability can be increased at the national level by policies that increase aggregate food production, and at the household and individual level by forms of assistance that increase crop yields for farming households. Food production can be stimulated at both levels with agricultural *input subsidies*, which typically boost both national food production and household food availability and consumption. General input subsidies (e.g. selling all fertiliser at below market price) are controversial – they tend to be expensive, the benefits are disproportionately captured by non-poor farmers, and they are politically difficult to remove. Targeted input subsidies – for instance, giving fertiliser coupons to smallholder farmers but not to commercial farmers – are cheaper, have less distorting effects on trade and markets, and have more direct food security impacts – for instance, they can help specific groups such as women farmers overcome access barriers (HLPE, 2012).

*Public works* projects that support farmers directly can raise agricultural production. Examples include soil and water conservation measures (e.g. digging irrigation canals), and terracing of hill-slopes to make more land available for cropping and reduce rainwater run-off and erosion. It should be noted that public works is already listed as a possible national SPF modality under Recommendation No. 202: “Schemes providing such benefits may include [...] public employment schemes and employment support schemes” (paragraph 9 (3)).

### 4.2. Access to food

*School feeding* programmes transfer food directly to children from poor and food insecure households, if they are either universal or well-targeted schemes. “Home grown school feeding” is a variant that requires food to be purchased locally instead of using imported food aid. This creates a “structured demand” from local farmers and therefore enhances their access to food as well (Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler, 2011). There are numerous case studies from across the world demonstrating how local procurement of food items for school feeding schemes helped to develop local markets (e.g. in Guatemala), increased local farmers’ sales and income (e.g. in Chile and Indonesia) and created jobs (e.g. in Thailand’s dairy industry) (WFP, 2009).

Depending on which projects are undertaken, *public works* projects can enhance access to food as well as food availability. A popular public works activity is construction or maintenance of rural feeder roads, which has the advantage of linking rural communities to markets, thereby reducing travel costs and making food more accessible.

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*Food price subsidies* improve access to food by lowering the cost of food in local markets. As with input subsidies, generalised food subsidies are expensive and inefficient, and targeted subsidies are more popular nowadays, though they often record high inclusion and exclusion errors. Targeting can be done by means testing or proxy means tests (to reach the poor), or it can be categorical (to reach specific vulnerable groups). Another option is self-targeting, which is achieved by subsidising the price of food items that are consumed disproportionately by poor people (e.g. unrefined flour, or yellow maize rather than white maize). One of the biggest food subsidy schemes is India's Public Distribution System (PDS), which dispenses ration cards to households below the poverty line, allowing them to purchase foodgrains at subsidised prices from "fair price" shops (see the India country case study below).

### **4.3. Food stability**

Food insecurity is often related to instability of food production and variability of food prices. Small producers are typically unable to afford insurance premiums, they have limited savings and their livelihoods are undiversified so weather shocks undermine their harvests, kill their animals and reduce local employment opportunities. Attempts to extend access to insurance to small farmers and pastoralists include *weather-indexed crop and livestock insurance*, but mainly on a subsidised pilot project basis to date. Although farmers do recognise the value of insuring their crops and livestock against shocks, especially in drought- or flood-prone areas, commercial take-up of insurance opportunities is disappointingly low, probably because the poorest farmers cannot afford full-priced premiums or do not believe they will be adequately compensated following a harvest failure or livestock losses (Giné, 2009).

*Public works* programmes can also play a role in stabilising household income and access to food. If they are well timed to coincide with the off-season or the "hungry season" in rural areas, public works can help to smooth household food consumption across the year by providing cash income (cash-for-work) or food rations (food-for-work). Even more effective are "employment guarantee schemes" that give all households a right to work up to a certain number of days at any time of year that they need it and, if work is not available, to receive a cash benefit anyway.

Food price instability also affects consumers who buy food, not only farmers who produce food. Most of the interventions introduced by governments in response to the food price crisis of 2007-08 were targeted at consumers. These included price stabilisation measures "designed to put a wedge between international and domestic food prices" (HLPE, 2012, p. 39), such as price controls or subsidies, tariff reductions, export taxes or bans and, in 35 or more countries, release of public grain stocks.

### **4.4. Food utilisation**

A coordinated approach to social protection often includes linking the delivery of social transfers to *health and nutrition education*, or awareness raising sessions. In conditional cash transfer programmes this linkage is formalised: beneficiaries must attend health or nutrition sessions as a precondition for receiving their cash transfers or other benefits. If this helps programme participants to change their behaviour in ways that improve their health and nutrition status, their utilisation of food that they consume should also improve.

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## 5. What other policies are necessary to ensure food security, and how can they be linked with national social protection floors?

There is also a set of “bigger picture” issues, which is a criticism that is sometimes made against social protection generally, and specifically against social transfers such as cash transfers or food aid. Social transfers that are delivered to poor or food insecure individuals and households individualise the problem of poverty or food insecurity, and “solve” it by providing compensatory transfers that aim to assure these individuals or households a minimum level of subsistence. But these social transfers do little to address the structural causes of poverty and food insecurity.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the “right to food” and the “right to social security” also individualise the problems of food and income insecurity.

But some determinants of poverty, food insecurity and income insecurity are structural, and might be better addressed by interventions at the sectoral or macro-level than the household or individual level. For instance, if food insecurity is a result of *market failures* rather than lack of income, then the appropriate intervention is on the supply side, not the demand side. Strengthening markets through investments in infrastructure, for instance, might be more effective and “developmental” than cash or food transfers. This situation is common in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and partly explains the popularity of public works programmes, which combine household-level transfers with investment in community-level assets – short-term transfers of food rations or cash wages linked to the creation or maintenance of essential infrastructure, such as rural feeder roads that connect isolated communities to markets and reduce transactions costs for traders.

It follows that food security cannot be guaranteed through social protection measures alone. If the right to food is to be guaranteed, national social protection floors must be linked to other policies and programmes that address deficits in food availability, access, stability or utilisation.

### 5.1. Food availability

Food availability can be increased at household and national levels by raising *food production*, especially by ensuring that farmers have adequate, timely and affordable access to essential agricultural inputs, such as arable land (and grazing land for (agro-pastoralists); irrigated water; fertiliser and seeds; and financial services (e.g. seasonal input credit) (Table 1). To the extent that these policies are pro-poor and reduce food insecurity, they can contribute directly to social protection objectives, even though they are not classified as social protection instruments.

Access to inputs is not only a technical or financial issue; it is often related to power imbalances, social exclusion and marginalisation. The solution in such circumstances is not only to transfer resources (e.g. by subsidising fertiliser prices or distributing input vouchers) but to empower vulnerable people – such as rural women – to claim the resources they need to pursue viable livelihoods that ensure their right to adequate food.

<sup>7</sup> Many social protection programmes do have direct linkages and/or indirect multiplier effects that can impact on the structural determinants of poverty and food insecurity, but these outcomes are secondary and do not affect the basic argument here.

[...]

Empowerment helps people by ensuring they are better able to access the productive resources (such as land, water, infrastructure, and credit) they need, and can participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. [...]

[...] Rural women are highly dependent on subsistence agriculture to feed their families, however their access to natural resources such as land, water and wood is often limited. Discrimination, resulting from laws or social norms and customs, and lower levels of access to education (amongst other factors), restrict women's access to credit, agricultural inputs, technologies and services.

(MDG-F, 2013, pp. 12-13).

Food availability is currently threatened in many countries by processes such as land-grabbing and “water-grabbing” (e.g. damming or diverting water up-river that reduces water for irrigating farmlands downstream), population mobility up the food chain (dietary diversification towards cereal-consuming meat and dairy products) and the diversion of certain foodcrops to biofuels, which reduces food available for consumption by limiting the amount of land dedicated to foodcrop production, or by using food harvests for fuel or animal feed rather than human consumption. Governments that are concerned with ensuring the right to adequate food for all citizens or residents need to maintain a close oversight of these trends, and ensure that sufficient food is either produced or on sale in local markets at affordable prices at all times.

Food availability can also be influenced by domestic and international *trade policies* (Table 1). But the effects of trade policy changes are complex and must be disaggregated in terms of their impacts on different affected groups. For instance, if a high-income country reduces its agricultural import tariffs this will improve the incomes of those farmers in low-income countries who can benefit from higher exports, but it will lower the purchasing power of non-farmers if they face higher prices for domestic produce that is not exported (Stevens et al., 2003).

## **5.2. Access to food**

Many food security strategies include programmes such as *asset transfers* and *livelihood packages*, given either for free or on credit, together with training or coaching. Often these instruments are part of integrated packages of support that aim to “graduate” people out of poverty and food insecurity. In the “graduation model” pioneered in Bangladesh, beneficiaries first receive consumption support, then access to savings facilities, then skills training and an asset transfer (such as livestock or arable land), then access to microcredit. This approach has been adapted in other countries, including in Ethiopia, where the Productive Safety Net Programme is complemented by the Household Asset Building Programme (see Ethiopia case study below).

## **5.3. Food stability**

In contexts of variable food prices, interventions that stabilise food prices might be more appropriate and simpler to administer than compensating people for rising or unpredictable costs of living with variable income transfers, that need to be constantly recalibrated against changes in the national Consumer Price Index – or, even more disaggregated – recalibrated against food supplies and prices in local markets throughout the country. Policies that operate at this macro- or meso-level include risk reduction, food price stabilisation, national grain reserves, and trade policies. They complement (or in

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some cases substitute for) targeted instruments such as risk management, social transfers, and income-generating activities that operate at the individual or household level.

In countries where agricultural marketing agencies play an active food security role, strategic management of *grain reserves* or buffer stocks is often implemented to stabilise food supplies and prices through the year. This is usually done by the agency purchasing foodcrops after the harvest when supplies are abundant and prices are low, storing these stocks until supplies are scarce in local market and prices are high, then selling this food at cost (purchase plus storage) or distributing it for free or subsidised to poor and food insecure people. However, grain reserve management is less popular than it used to be. It has been heavily criticised as a food security intervention for interfering with markets and being expensive and prone to political manipulation.

Climate variability and climate change present particular challenges for social protection. Rural livelihoods that are dependent on rainfall are especially vulnerable, as are populations who live in environmentally stressed or threatened areas. Interventions to build resilient livelihoods and protect food security in these contexts include:

[...] the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices through technical support, the establishment of water storage and irrigation systems, the adaptation of crops to the new climatic patterns or the establishment of defensive and preventive measures to protect communities and their livelihoods from natural events, such as floods and droughts.

(MDG-F, 2013, p. 6).

## 5.4. Food utilisation

Micronutrient deficiencies – vitamin A, iron, zinc, iodine – are a significant cause of food insecurity and undernutrition, as well as child and maternal morbidity and mortality (Black et al., 2008). Addressing these sources of food insecurity requires public health interventions, such as promotion of iodised salt. UNICEF (2012a, p. 26) identifies four interventions to ensure that children are adequately nourished in their crucial first 1,000 days:

- 1) providing essential vitamins and minerals for mother and child;
- 2) promoting and supporting breastfeeding;
- 3) support for complementary feeding;
- 4) diagnosis and treatment of acute malnutrition.

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## 6. Country case study: Ethiopia

Ethiopia's long history of chronic food insecurity and vulnerability to famine has dominated efforts by successive governments to reduce poverty and promote rural development. Despite achieving impressively rapid economic growth rates since 2000, 30 per cent of the population still lives in poverty. According to Bishop and Hilhorst (2010, p. 182), "food security in Ethiopia has been deteriorating. Food production is now less than it was in 1984, and subsistence farmers today are poorer than they were then. Nearly half of the population continues to be undernourished".

The Federal Food Security Strategy has three pillars: (1) increase food supply or availability; (2) improve food access or entitlement; and (3) strengthen emergency response capabilities (MOARD, 2009, p. 10). The Food Security Programme has several components that aim to address these three pillars, including the Productive Safety Net Programme, the Household Asset Building Programme, Complementary Community Investments, and the Voluntary Resettlement Programme.

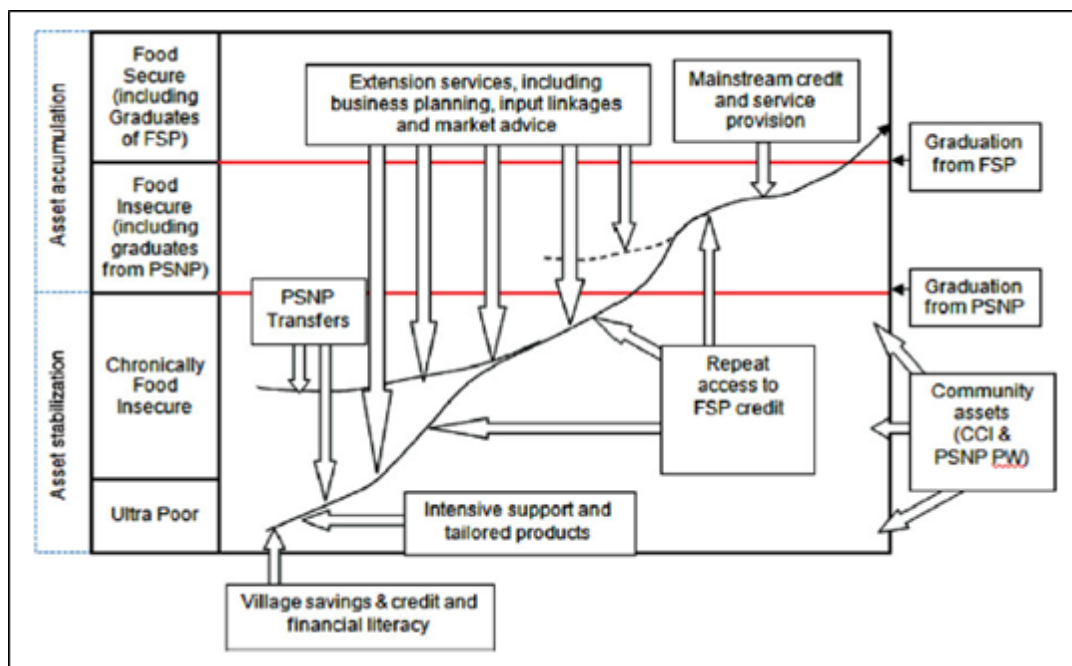
Since 2005, Ethiopia has implemented the largest social protection programme in Africa outside of South Africa. The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) aimed to break Ethiopia's historical dependency on food aid and instigate a shift towards cash transfers, as a more sustainable mechanism for achieving household food security. It was believed that cash transfers to poor rural households would stimulate demand for locally produced food, thereby inducing a supply response from farmers which would boost their income and strengthen markets, rather than undermining incentives for producers and traders, as food aid can do.

The PSNP has two sub-components: Public Works, which offers temporary employment on community infrastructure projects to eligible people who are able to work, and Direct Support, which delivers regular cash and/or food transfers to eligible people who are not able to work. Also under the Food Security Programme (FSP), the PSNP is complemented by the Household Asset Building Programme (HABP), which offers extension packages and credit to strengthen rural livelihoods, and Complementary Community Investments (CCI), which aim to strengthen rural infrastructure. The overall objective of this package of interventions is to strengthen household and national food security in Ethiopia and reduce the need for annual appeals for emergency assistance.

The key point is that food security is not expected to be achieved with targeted cash transfers alone. First, households receive not only cash or food transfers; they also receive livelihood support (extension services, training, credit, assets). Second, some interventions try to address contextual constraints, such as local infrastructure deficits (public works projects, community assets) (see Figure 2). This integrated approach recognises that food security cannot be achieved simply through food or cash transfers to food insecure households. "Graduation arises from the combined effect of the FSP components and other development processes. All of these components are required for graduation" (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, 2013, p. 921).



Figure 2. Graduation pathways from Ethiopia’s Food Security Programme



Source: MOARD, 2009, p. 17.

In their critique of “graduation” approaches to social protection, Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2013) argue that poverty and food insecurity are caused not only by household-level resource constraints but by deficits in the physical and economic environment (including market failures), which requires interventions to address these structural deficits, not only transfers of resources to food insecure households. More radically (and controversially) the Government of Ethiopia has implemented a Voluntary Resettlement Programme for several years, which reflects an assumption that parts of the rural highlands are so densely populated and vulnerable to climate variability that the local population can never achieve food security, and must therefore be assisted to move permanently to more favourable agricultural areas elsewhere in the country.

Graduation from the PSNP is defined as a movement by chronically food insecure households (those that received food aid for the preceding three years) to “food sufficiency: A household has graduated when, in the absence of receiving PSNP transfers, it can meet its food needs for all 12 months and is able to withstand modest shocks” (FSCB, 2007, p. 1). The difficulty of achieving “food sufficiency” – which could also be a proxy for “income security” – in a chronically food insecure context like Ethiopia is revealed by the fact that only 56,895 households graduated during the PSNP’s first five-year cycle (MOARD, 2009), even though the objective was for all 8.3 million participants to graduate within five years. By contrast, according to government estimates, 91 per cent of the 205,000 people who were voluntarily resettled between 2003 and 2010 achieved food sufficiency (MOLSA, MOA and NSPP, 2011, p. 8).

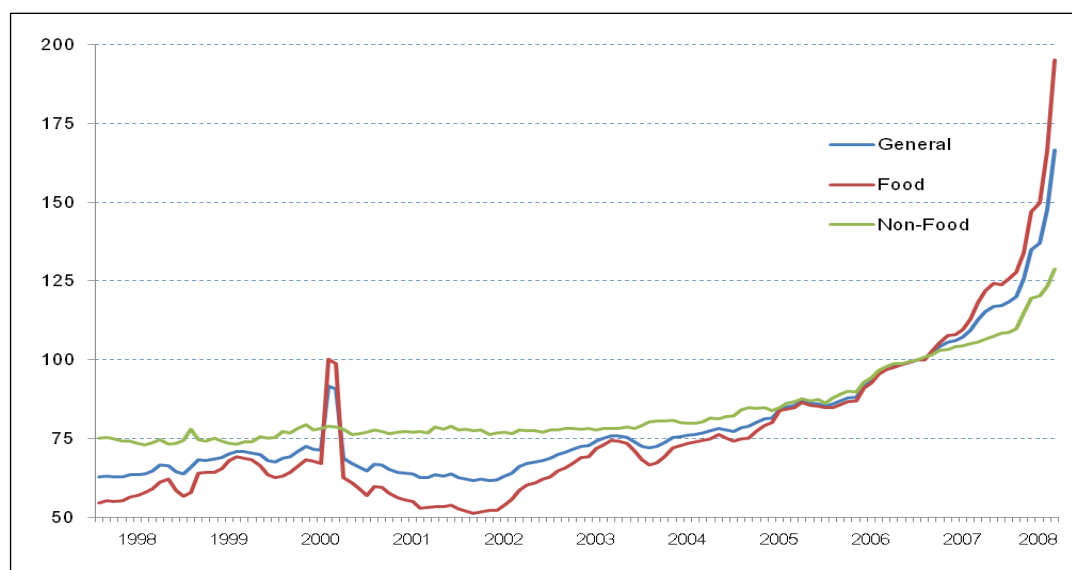
One limitation of graduation-oriented programmes is that they implicitly assume that livelihood trajectories are linear, in the sense that injecting resources into poor households will move them smoothly up the income ladder and out of extreme poverty and chronic food insecurity (as the relatively straight line in Figure 3 suggests). But is this a realistic assumption in a livelihood context that is characterised by highly variable and unpredictable levels of food production, prices and incomes?

Most smallholder families in Ethiopia are not self-sufficient in food production, but depend on market purchases for some of their subsistence food needs. Access to food through the market is influenced by food prices, which vary seasonally and rise year by year. Cash transfers delivered through the PSNP therefore face two challenges. First, seasonal variability in food prices translates into seasonal fluctuations in the purchasing power of cash. In one region, the average price of four staple food crops varied by 65 per cent within 12 months, meaning that the PSNP payment could buy almost 6 kg of cereal around harvest time, but only 3.5 kg during the hungry season when prices are highest (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, 2010, p. 277).

The only way these seasonal price fluctuations could be accommodated would be by adjusting the PSNP cash payment level monthly or seasonally, to maintain a constant “entitlement” to food all year round, by increasing the payment when prices rise and reducing the payment when prices fall. As noted above, this was trialled once in Malawi, but it required a degree of budgetary and administrative flexibility that is probably not feasible on such a large-scale programme as the PSNP.

Secondly, cash transfers are vulnerable to losing their purchasing power if they lag behind food price inflation. The global food price crisis of 2007-08, combined with a *belg* rain failure in 2008, caused food prices in Ethiopia to double in just 18 months (see Figure 3). PSNP cash transfers lagged seriously behind. The daily payment on PSNP Public Works was raised by 33 per cent in 2008, from Birr 6 to Birr 8, a wholly inadequate response to the 100 per cent increase in food prices.

**Figure 3. Price inflation in Ethiopia, 1998-2008**



Source: Central Statistical Agency, Ethiopia

As a consequence, beneficiary attitudes swung sharply against cash transfers. Surveys found that the proportion of beneficiaries who preferred receiving PSNP transfers in food rather than in cash increased from 55 per cent in 2006 to 84 per cent in 2008, the reverse of the government’s expectation that there would be a growing acceptance of cash transfers as a more flexible mode of transfer than food (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, 2010, p. 278).

- There exists a very strong preference for food payment, given uncertainly about prices, lack of food availability on the market, deliberate price hiking by traders when cash payments are being disbursed, and non-equivalent value of food basket and current cash payment. Beneficiaries were more likely to prefer cash when grain prices were below 3.5 birr/kg. [...]

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- [...] Many respondents indicated that they would prefer a seasonally-specific payment modality: food during the rainy season and cash during the dry season. [...]

(Guush Berhane et al., 2011, p. 164).

Again, this is a predictable response to the falling real value of cash transfers in the face of rapid food price rises, and could only have been avoided if PSNP cash payments were indexed to the cost of staple food in local markets, and were constantly increased as food prices escalated.

An evaluation of the PSNP found that the food gap – the number of months in the year that a farming household is unable to satisfy its food needs from its own production – had fallen on average from 3.6 months to 2.3 months among PSNP households (Guush Berhane et al., 2011, p. 49). This is a disappointing return on a substantial investment of government and development partners’ resources, but it illustrates the enormous challenge of realising the policy objective of food security for all in an extremely poor and highly vulnerable environment.

Ethiopia’s experience with trying to achieve national and household food security through a “productive safety net” and related programmes generates several cautionary lessons, that must be considered seriously by any future initiative to implement a social protection floor with “guaranteed income security for all” as an objective.

- Firstly, an integrated “package” approach is more likely to succeed than a single project or programme – but even multiple linked interventions face challenges of coordination.
- Secondly, social protection on its own cannot ensure food security, which requires linkages to agricultural and other economic policies.
- Thirdly, an effective safety net protects poor and vulnerable people against risks and shocks, but it is usually not sufficient to “graduate” programme beneficiaries or participants out of poverty and food insecurity – especially in rural livelihood contexts of erratic rainfall, weak markets and variable prices.
- Fourthly, cash transfers are susceptible to food price inflation, which undermines their ability to guarantee income security and food security; unless they are constantly adjusted as food prices fluctuate.
- Finally, despite the shift towards cash transfers in social protection programming, there remains an important role for food transfers, especially if the objective is to guarantee the right to adequate food for all people at all times.

## 7. Country case study: India

Despite India's impressive economic growth in recent years, with per capita incomes trebling since 2000, hunger and food insecurity remain at persistently high levels: "even before the financial and food-price crises of 2008/2009, more than 230 million people were 'food insecure' in India – meaning, in simple terms, they did not know where their next meal would come from and suffered from chronic under-nutrition" (Bonnerjee and Koehler, 2010, p. 3). Almost half (46 per cent) of all children in India are malnourished.

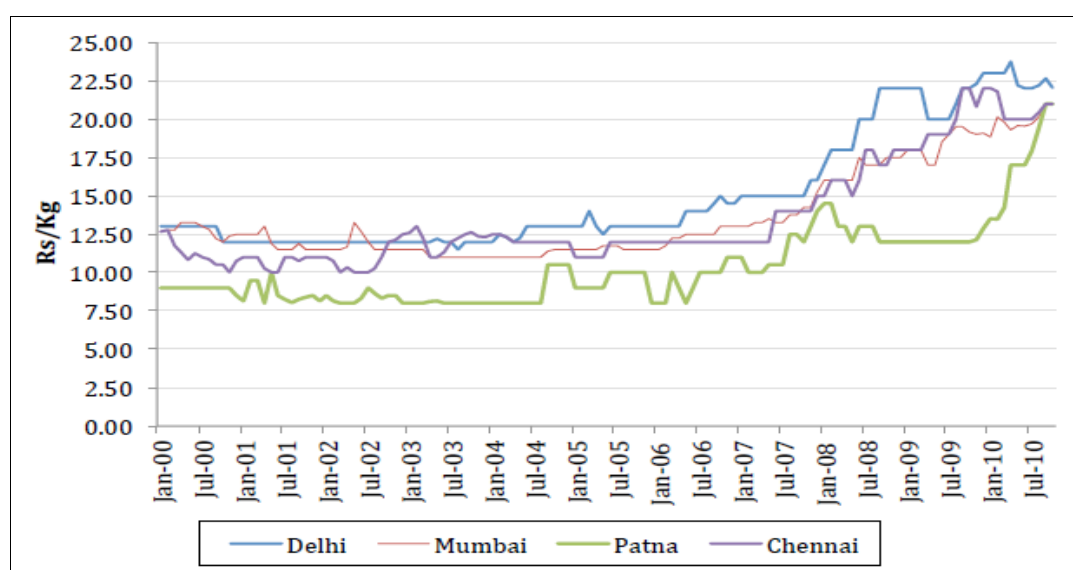
The government's sanguine expectations that growth along with residual programs, targeted to those most vulnerable and in need, would control the problem have not yielded the desired outcomes and been unable to make a dent on the problem of hunger and food and nutrition insecurity in India.

(Bonnerjee and Koehler, 2010, p. 10)

Although there is no aggregate shortage of food in India, government food procurement policies and excessive stockpiling have reduced the availability of food on local markets and driven up food prices. Foodgrain availability per capita in India has been falling since 1990, partly because agricultural production has stagnated and partly because the government exported record amounts of grain in the early 2000s. In the first half-decade of this century: "Despite falling per capita output, there were both rising net exports as well as huge addition to stocks year after year" (Saxena, 2008, p. 33). These trends in production, exports and procurement undermined food availability and contributed to hunger and food insecurity. In 2010, when people in Orissa were reportedly starving, the Supreme Court instructed the government to uphold the constitutional right to food and distribute food to hungry citizens from the 60 million tons it was storing in public warehouses (Bonnerjee and Koehler, 2010, p. 12).

On the supply side, food price rises undermine real purchasing power and can make achieving food security unaffordable for the poor (see Figure 4). There is some evidence that spending on foodgrains has been rising in recent years but consumption has been falling (Saxena, 2008, p. 31).

Figure 4. Rice prices in four Indian cities, 2000-2010



Source: Bonnerjee and Koehler, 2010, p. 10.

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The drivers of this persistent food insecurity are complex, but include both demand-side and supply-side factors. The main drivers are arguably income poverty and social exclusion.

On the demand-side, income poverty is widespread despite the rise in average incomes, which reflects rising inequality between rich and poor, rather than an upliftment of the poorest out of extreme poverty. Millions of poor Indian families simply cannot afford to buy enough food. Poverty transmits food insecurity inter-generationally. The National Food and Nutrition Bureau estimates that 20 per cent of India's children might be functionally impaired (Bhandari and Zaidi, 2004, cited in Bonnerjee and Koehler, 2010, p. 4). These children are at heightened risk of growing up poor and having malnourished children who will be similarly impaired.

Poverty and food insecurity in India are driven by a cluster of “intersecting inequalities” (Kabeer, 2010), many of which are sociocultural rather than economic – gender, caste, tribe, religion – and are not addressed by social transfers that alleviate the consequences of deprivation but ignore the causes. The challenge for social protection programming is how to identify and design appropriate policies that can address the sociocultural drivers of inequality.

Since food insecurity is a product of poor health and sanitation as well as of food consumption (see UNICEF conceptual framework), inequality and social exclusion, and especially exclusion from social services like education and health, can be seen as underlying drivers of food insecurity.

In India, the most important source of variation in the per capita state provision of doctors, nurses and teachers in rural districts is differences in religion and caste; the higher the percentage of *Dalits* and Muslims in the district population, the lower the provision of medical and educational services

(Kabeer, 2010, p. 35).

A Social Protection Floor guarantees universal access to health care, which would address the access constraints that *Dalits* and other marginalised groups face. But Recommendation No. 202 also emphasises “high-quality public services” (paragraph 3 (n)) and, as Kabeer points out, “the quality of service provision matters”:

Acts of discrimination against *Dalits* are reported in the public health services, along with prejudice towards religious minorities. This includes avoidance by health workers, particularly paramedics and nursing staff, of physical contact with *Dalits* and reluctance to visit *Dalit* households. In turn, both real and anticipated discriminatory behaviour on the part of health workers deters *Dalits* from using health providers, particularly for services that involve physical contact, such as giving birth.

(Kabeer, 2010, pp. 36-37).

Several very large and high profile programmes provide social assistance to the poor in India, with the objectives of alleviating poverty and food insecurity. These programmes include:

- 1) *Public Distribution System (PDS)*: The PDS aims to provide access for poor households to affordable (subsidised) food through a network of 400,000 Fair Price Shops. But it has been heavily criticised and its performance has been disappointing, in terms of both coverage (e.g. < 29 per cent of poor rural households and < 10 per cent of poor urban households reported receiving benefits in 2004) and adequacy (food allocations under the PDS are too small to meet minimum nutritional requirements).

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- 2) *Midday Meal Programme (MDM)*: The MDM programme delivers cooked lunches to 130 million schoolchildren and has proved to have positive impacts on education indicators such as school attendance and retention. But it fails to reach the most vulnerable children – those out of school, including street-children – and the quality of food provided is variable and often poor.
  - 3) *Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)*: Over 700,000 ICDS centres throughout India provide health, nutrition and education services to pregnant and lactating women and children under 6. But uptake of these services is limited to < 25 per cent of children (< 10 per cent in some states) and there is no focus on children under two years of age, when nutrition and health interventions would have maximum impact (Saxena, 2008).
  - 4) *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*: The MGNREGA is a demand-driven public works programme that aims to provide an effective safety net, especially against seasonal hunger and under-employment in rural areas. Although the MGNREGA promises a maximum 100 days of paid employment each year per rural household upon request, in practice most states cannot fulfil this promise, and large numbers of applicants are turned away. Typically, the most vulnerable groups (older men, women, *Dalits*) living in the poorest states have the lowest access to MGNREGA.

A cursory analysis of these programmes reveals that they have great potential to reduce hunger and food insecurity in India, but that their effectiveness is impeded by low coverage and problems such as corruption and discrimination against certain vulnerable groups. Kabeer (2010) identifies various efforts that have been made to include marginalised groups, including decentralised decision-making, mobilising women and Dalits and encouraging their participation in village assemblies, engaging communications in the design and implementation of projects, and strengthening the capacity of civil society to hold the government to account. Improved implementation and accessibility of existing programmes would go a long way towards delivering on the right to food and improving food security outcomes for all in India.

India's recent experience with economic and social policies generates several lessons for implementing national social protection floors, that have resonances for several other countries:

- firstly, rapid economic growth at the national level does not necessarily translate into food security for all citizens – in many countries (not only India) falls in malnutrition rates typically lag behind falls in poverty rates;
- secondly, government interventions in the food system – such as excessive procurement, stockpiling and export of food – can sometimes undermine rather than enhance household food security;
- thirdly, in contexts where food insecurity is substantially driven by sociocultural inequalities, standard social protection instruments that focus on poverty and economic risks need to be complemented by policies that tackle social exclusion and access to services;
- fourthly, despite India's constitutional commitment to the right to food, and the introduction of several large-scale social protection programmes such as food subsidies, school meals and employment guarantees, the effectiveness of these interventions in reducing hunger and food insecurity is undermined by problems in implementation;

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- finally, since the poorest and most food insecure people in India are often those who are socially excluded and politically marginalised, delivering social protection and food security for all is a political challenge as much as a technical and financial challenge. The solutions often lie in improved governance, specifically by empowering marginalised people to engage fully in policy processes and programmes that affect their lives and livelihoods.

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## 8. Implications for the design and implementation of programmes

The analysis in this paper generates several implications for the design and delivery of national social protection floors, if they are to give more focused attention to ensuring the right to adequate food for all. These implications are discussed here under two sub-headings: issues in implementation, and adopting a systems approach.

A national social protection floor consists of “basic social security guarantees” for all, which can be provided through a range of benefits and schemes, including cash transfers to eligible individuals or households. From a food security perspective, this paper has identified a number of circumstances under which cash transfers, including social security payments, might not be adequate for achieving food and nutrition security for all individuals at all times. Each of these circumstances can be addressed by appropriately modifying the design and delivery of social protection interventions:

1. Cash transfers might not be sufficient to purchase adequate food at all times, due to seasonal food price variability, regular food price inflation, unpredictable food price spikes, or market failures. As noted above, the principle of adequacy of benefits in Recommendation No. 202 calls for regular reviews of the levels of social protection benefits. However, regular reviews might not be sufficient in chronically food insecure contexts which are characterised by food price seasonality or erratic food prices due to weak markets. In these circumstances, the “right to food” guarantee of adequate food for all people at all times is especially challenging. Ensuring that all people have enough food at all times would require more regular reviews of cash payment levels than (say) adjusting payments by the inflation rate once a year, and might not be possible to maintain through cash transfers at all: food transfers or commodity vouchers might be more appropriate and effective mechanisms.
2. Cash transfers might not be used to purchase adequate food, because cash can be allocated to many different uses. One solution is to set the level of cash transfers higher than the cost of a minimum food basket, recognising that food insecure households have essential non-food needs (e.g. health care, groceries, education expenses, social obligations) that incremental income will be used to address.
3. Cash transfers to individuals or households might not be equitably distributed to achieve adequate food intake by all household members, or they might be diluted among several individuals other than the intended beneficiaries. Possible solutions to this include targeting women, if empirical evidence suggests that they are more likely to allocate incremental cash to meeting the subsistence needs of all household members, and “full family targeting” to ensure that transfers are adequate to meeting the needs of large and small households.
4. Adequate food intake might not translate into nutrition security for each individual, if the disease environment undermines effective utilisation of food, or if feeding and caring practices are inappropriate. We have seen that the determinants of food security are more complex than food consumption alone, and that nutrition status is determined by other factors including food hygiene, sanitation practices and breastfeeding of infants. This implies that achieving food and nutrition security for all cannot be achieved simply by transferring income or food. A household can appear to be income secure and yet have malnourished members. Income transfers should therefore be complemented by public health interventions and nutrition education.



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Several additional issues related to the implementation of social protection programmes for enhanced food security should also be highlighted:

1. National social protection floors that are designed with the right to food in mind should seek synergies between income security and food security wherever possible. One example discussed in this paper is to favour local procurement wherever this is feasible and cost-effective. For instance, home-grown school feeding creates structured demand for local produce and can (in the ideal case) deliver both higher incomes for local farmers and improved nutrition outcomes for schoolchildren.
2. Income security and food security do not always follow each other and there can even be trade-offs between the two objectives. For example, if smallholder farmers sell some foodcrop production to meet their needs for cash income, this can compromise the food consumption of vulnerable household members. Policy-makers need to be aware of such paradoxes and potential contradictions, especially if social protection programmes are being designed with food security objectives in mind.
3. National social protection floors should aim to tackle the causes of food insecurity, not just to alleviate the symptoms. For example, many social protection programmes target school-age children, which is appropriate and necessary if these children are malnourished and come from poor families. However, from a food security perspective, a more effective, sustainable and equitable approach would target infants and pre-school children, and their mothers (before and during pregnancy and during lactation), to protect mothers and to prevent children being born with low birthweight or becoming malnourished in early childhood.
4. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems should be sensitised to the complexity of the determinants of food security, which are not normally considered either when social protection programmes are designed or when their impacts are assessed. For instance, there are often gendered differences in spending patterns and control over income and food within households, and there is often intra-household discrimination against some members and “dilution” of transfers intended for one person among many others. M&E tools should include qualitative methods or modules within questionnaires that are designed to reveal how significantly these intra-household processes affect programme outcomes, and whether they compromise the overarching objectives of income security and food security for all. These findings can then be used to modify programme design appropriately – for instance, by transferring cash to women if this is found to maximise food security benefits for women and children.
5. Finally, it should be emphasised that policy instruments vary also in terms of costs and cost-effectiveness, and there may be trade-offs between different objectives. Although this has not been the focus of this study, it is important to recognise that it is not always possible to achieve multiple objectives through a single instrument, or even through a comprehensive framework such as the social protection floor.

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## 9. Conclusion: adopting a systems approach

A significant shift is underway in social protection thinking and programming at the global level: away from single instruments and discrete programmes, towards coordinated packages and integrated systems. There are several advantages of a systems approach, including:

- different components or instruments can address distinct needs of specific groups of people at various times – there is no assumption that one instrument or programme can address all the social protection needs of all people at all times;
- a comprehensive set of social protection interventions can address social vulnerabilities and the structural causes of poverty, instead of mainly addressing income poverty (with social assistance) and economic risk management (with safety nets);
- building strong linkages between social protection and other social sectors can ensure that demand-side policies (such as social transfers and fee waivers for essential services) are better coordinated with “appropriate supply-side investments to enhance availability and quality of services” (UNICEF, 2012b, p. 44).

An integrated systems approach is reflected in Recommendation No. 202, which recognises that national social protection floors are a “fundamental element of [Members’] national social security systems” (paragraph 1 (a)). In other words, a social protection floor is not a complete system on its own; it needs to be seen in the context of the overall social protection system (including existing social security schemes), and it needs to be well coordinated with other social and economic policies.

In terms of programming for the right to food, an integrated social protection system should recognise that food security raises different challenges to income poverty and economic vulnerability. Guaranteeing individual access to food for all individuals at all times requires identifying the weaknesses in the national and sub-national food systems, and intervening to strengthen the food system as well as drawing on the full range of social protection and food security instruments, to enhance access to food for – and utilisation of food by – food insecure individuals and groups.

It follows that national social protection floors that aim to realise the right to adequate food for all should draw on the full range of social protection instruments, including especially those that enhance access to food or deliver food directly, such as school feeding, public works, and food price subsidies. Moreover, standard social protection instruments such as social transfers must be complemented by appropriate food security instruments, such as agricultural input subsidies to stimulate food production, grain reserve management to stabilise food supplies and prices, and health and nutrition education campaigns to improve individual utilisation of food. An integrated approach to social protection also requires cross-sectoral linkages and coordination with other social sectors such as education and health, as well as with economic sectors such as agriculture and trade, to enhance the availability, access, stability and utilisation of food.

Finally, national social protection floors need to be adapted to the specific sociocultural and political contexts prevailing in each country. There are important social and cultural drivers of poverty and food insecurity – social exclusion, gender discrimination, political agendas – which are often overlooked in the design of social protection strategies and programmes, but can undermine the effectiveness of their implementation. The design and implementation of social protection floors should take due account of these non-economic causes of poverty and their potential implications for food availability, access, stability and utilisation.

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