

Social Protection and Climate Change



How can social protection address regular climate-related risks in the Sahel?

The effects of climate change are increasingly apparent in many Sahel countries. Relief efforts during crises and in response to everyday deprivation have been largely led by outside actors. However, many Sahel countries have now adopted national strategies for social protection, providing new opportunities for them to establish basic guarantees and incorporate lessons from neighbouring countries on addressing climate-related risks.

1

Recurrent food crises have become a regular feature of life in the Sahel.

Decades of drought, increasing temperatures and erratic rainfall brought on by climate change have made recurrent food crises a regular feature of life in the Sahel. Extreme rainfall events have become more frequent over the last decade, with instances of flash flooding and soil erosion increasing.

2

Many Sahel countries have developed national strategies for social protection.

International actors play a large role in providing protection in many Sahel countries. Increasingly, however, countries are developing national social protection strategies that would provide protections for a range of risks, including those related to climate change.

3

Countries can design and implement social protection systems with measures for relief in anticipation of or following climate-related shocks.

With the consideration of several climate factors when designing and implementing social protection systems, including social protection floors, Sahel countries can provide essential protections for all, while also addressing specific climate-related risks.

4

International actors must be ready to incorporate climate considerations into social protection technical assistance.

Following climate discussions in Paris, the international community is now tasked with integrating climate factors into efforts to extend essential and sustainable social protection coverage in the Sahel and elsewhere.

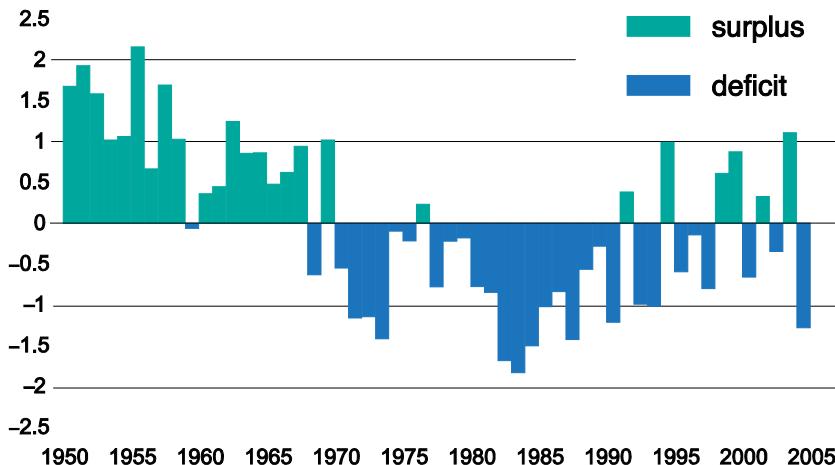
A more volatile Sahel climate.

The Sahel region in Africa sits below the arid Sahara desert but above the tropical savannahs and lush rainforests that cover much of the continent.¹

The region, already suffering from protracted rainfall deficits monitored since the 1960s, is proving itself particularly susceptible to the increasing effects of climate change.

Following decades of drought, rainfall has become increasingly unpredictable in the Sahel.

Mean annual precipitation, as per cent of 1950-2004 annual average.



Source: Joint Institute for the Study of the Atmosphere and Ocean (JISAO)

In the last decades, the region has suffered long-running food crises and dislocation triggered by spikes in the severity of a drought spanning more than three decades. During that time, food crises have claimed the lives of some 100,000 people, and left 750,000 across Mali, Niger and Mauritania dependent upon food assistance.

But while the protracted drought yielded consistent rainfall deficits for years, recently a different trend has emerged. Wide variations in annual rainfall from one year to the next now characterize more extreme weather conditions facing the region. Extreme rainfall events have become more frequent during the last decade, with flash flooding and soil erosion occurring more frequently during the rainy

period. In 2013, severe flooding was reported in many countries across the Sahel, affecting more than 300,000 residents, damaging houses, infrastructure and crops. This increased volatility, coupled with consistently higher average annual temperatures, is often attributed to the increased concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

These changes pose considerable challenges to residents who rely on fertile, irrigable land on which to grow crops and graze livestock for livelihoods generation, many of whom may be forced to seek suitable land elsewhere. Already, the traditional nomadic patterns of migration are observed giving way to more permanent southward movements. And if the current trends of unpredictable and extreme rains and temperatures continue, they could lead to a large-scale displacement of people across the region and potentially towards other regions and continents.

While increased unpredictability of weather patterns makes planning more difficult for individual households, it presents new opportunities for governments and their partners to integrate new risk management and coping mechanisms into social protection

systems. For the Sahel region in particular, building social protection floors that are resilient against climate shocks and responsive to slow onset events is increasingly being prioritized as economies and societies seek to adapt to the inevitable effects of climate change.

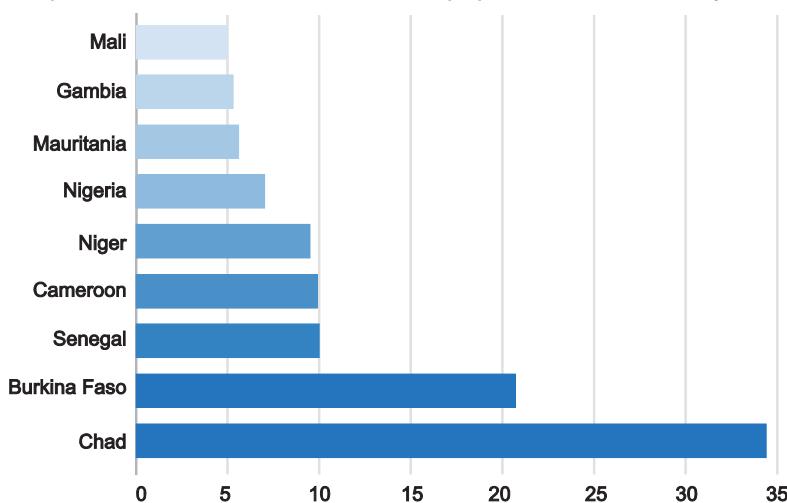
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- *In the Sahel, basic social security provisions are needed to protect against the everyday deprivation many face.*
- *Most Sahel countries have national social protection plans or strategies that recognize specific, climate-related risks.*
- *Certain design factors can make social protection systems and floors better at addressing these risks.*

¹ Delineations of the “Sahel region” vary. Statistics provided in this brief cover the countries of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

Food insecurity varies widely across the Sahel.

Proportion of undernourished in total population, 2014-16, by country.



Source: FAO Hunger Map 2015

2 A sparsely woven safety net.

Some 23.5 million people across the Sahel region are currently food insecure, with roughly 4.5 million children malnourished. The region suffers from chronic poverty, low levels of development and, in recent years, increased instances of armed conflict, the effects of which are only compounded by the looming consequences of a more volatile climate.

Much of the concerted response by Sahel countries to food insecurity in the region has been to address obstacles to food production and sale. The Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA), created in 1984, brings together countries in the region, humanitarian and development agencies to share information about agricultural conditions and coordinate food assistance and subsidy planning without distorting local markets or production. Another joint initiative is the creation of a regional agricultural policy among members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that would include the establishment of a Regional Food Security Reserve as a resource in case of a major food crisis while also supporting national and sub-national food storage capacities. Specifically to deal with the impending effects of climate change, a common risk pooling mechanism for African countries, the African Risk Capacity agency, was established in 2012 under the African Union through which participating governments,

including from several Sahel countries, purchase an insurance policy and receive an automatic disbursement to carry out relief activities that would help affected households in the event of extreme rainfall or drought.

Humanitarian and development actors continue to play a large role in social protection provision in countries of the Sahel. Many aim at providing food assistance and health care services to fight malnutrition, while others support cash-for-work and food-for-work programmes whose beneficiaries perform activities to increase yields and make crops less vulnerable to adverse weather. But as the programmes rely upon external financing and administrative capacities, these protections—in particular those that provide vital cash support—are vulnerable to vacillations in donor funding and priorities. It is precisely for this reason that development actors are now seeking to assist these countries to develop nationally-owned social protection systems. To this end, in Mali, with support from the European Commission several NGOs have committed to harmonizing targeting approaches and other parameters in their programmes with a view toward eventually creating a more coherent set of social protection interventions, which could eventually be taken up by the government and made part of a national social protection system in that country.

Comprehensive social protection systems or social protection floors have yet to take root in most Sahel countries. However, many have developed ambitious national social protection strategies, often with specific references to climate-related risks (e.g. Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, among others). This often represents a first step in the development of a nationally-defined social protection floor. However, implementation remains a challenge due to fiscal and administrative capacity constraints. As development partners formulate technical assistance to support these countries in the roll out of social protection systems to provide at least floor-level provisions, the particular exposure of their populations to risks associated with climate change effects should be considered.

National strategies for social protection in Sahel countries

National strategies for social protection that aim to extend coverage in Sahel countries also make references to the need to address the increased risks faced by many from climate change.

NIGER

"Niger commits to a vision of ... a social protection policy ... to face environmental and climate-related risks."

BURKINA FASO

"Social protection aims to ... reduce the vulnerability of the population facing climate and environmental risks ..."

MAURITANIA

"... to strengthen the mechanisms to mitigate the effects of climate change on food and nutritional security of vulnerable communities."

Adapted from the original French.

protections, several additional factors can affect the ability of social protection systems to anticipate and respond quickly to climate-related risks relevant for Sahel residents.

CLIMATE FACTOR 1

Climate vulnerabilities used in the identification and selection of social protection beneficiaries

Climate vulnerabilities should be considered when articulating beneficiary identification procedures, selection criteria and targeting methods in order to reach climate-susceptible households.

Considerations can be informed by conducting new risk and vulnerability assessments at different levels of government (national and sub-national) or by using existing area-level and household-level data on climate exposure. These data can include certain geographic or topographic characteristics like rugged

terrain or proximity to water, or historical characteristics to identify areas prone to extreme weather like flooding or drought. They can also include hardship indicators where areas have experienced chronic food insecurity in the past, for example, or where damage from a previous hardship has been registered and aid previously delivered. Many of these protocols are already in use in some parts of the world. In Bangladesh, for example, poor communities living near rivers, vulnerable to flooding, are eligible for cash support as part of the Char Livelihoods Project. In Ethiopia, as part of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), residents in areas designated as chronically food insecure are specifically targeted for inclusion as a part of the programme's selection criteria. In Mexico, residents of areas with low average rainfall and rugged terrain are targeted for inclusion in a public works programmes, the Programa de Empleo Temporal (PET), to build and upgrade local roads.

CLIMATE FACTOR 2

Emergency protocols to expand eligibility and verification requirements and scale-up payments

For existing social protection programmes, particularly those with large beneficiary bases, contingency planning can lead to the development

3 Climate-ready social protection.

In a region like the Sahel, there is a dull roar of deprivation that continues between shocks.

Already, some efforts are underway to establish basic social protection guarantees. But given this region's particular and increasing vulnerability to climate change effects, flexible and anticipatory social protection systems can be designed to make regular cash transfer programmes more resilient and efficient following shocks. This makes particular sense in the design of climate-resilient social protection systems where the bulk of the effects manifest themselves in slow onset events, such as persistent environmental degradation, including repetitive floods and droughts, as in the case of the Sahel. Investing in the design of flexible national social protection systems in regions like the Sahel is useful given the inevitability of relatively frequent small- to medium-scale shocks, potentially on the rise as a result of global climate change.

Beyond the fundamental institutions and coordination efforts necessary to develop comprehensive systems that provide essential

Guidelines for a “just transition”

In 2015, a tripartite meeting of experts set out to develop a set of guidelines to promote the move toward greener economies and societies while protecting people in the transition. These policy responses were proposed and negotiated by ILO constituents from Brazil, Indonesia, Germany, Kenya, Mauritius, Turkey, South Africa, the United States and elsewhere. The first of the guidelines related to social protection policies (para. 34) reads, “Promote and establish adequate social protection systems ... with a view to increasing resilience and safeguarding populations against the impacts of economic and environmental vulnerabilities and shocks.”

The guidelines were later adopted by the ILO Governing Body in November 2015.

of emergency protocols that, when activated by authorities, can rapidly scale up benefits and reduce barriers to programme participation in the event of a disaster or other emergency. For example, in the United States, the Food Stamp Act requires the federal government to establish such protocols for the country’s largest food assistance scheme, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Following Hurricane Katrina, which hit the Gulf Coast in 2005, SNAP distributed at least US\$ 585 million in benefits under temporary emergency rules that came into effect after initial assessments of the disaster. Programme eligibility and verification rules were relaxed, and penalties were waived for administrative errors made during eligibility determinations (for subnational authorities, or states, participating in the federally-administered programme). Qualifying work requirements were waived, and benefit payments were expedited and maximized for affected recipient households.

In Mexico’s PET public works scheme, the government can increase the maximum number and length of days participants are permitted to work, allowing them to earn additional income in the wake of a disaster.

CLIMATE FACTOR 3

Index-based triggers to activate or scale-up payments complementing regular social protection transfers

Indices indicating seasonal or climate-change-related hardship are used regularly in agricultural

and livestock insurance schemes.

Increasingly, they are also being looked at as triggers for top-up payments to social protection schemes that can be activated in the wake or anticipation of hardship. These types of mechanism are favoured for their speed in identifying hardship and triggering appropriate payments without the need to design and inaugurate new programmes to respond to each new incident. In some cases, systems are built such that payments are made with high levels of automation and little need for intervention by programme administrators. Many of these indices are compiled from monitoring data on indicators such as real and estimated rainfall, vegetation growth, and livestock mortality using a variety of sources including observation satellites, weather stations and census data. For example, in Kenya, drought emergency scale-up payments complement a regular, unconditional cash transfer programme, the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP). In addition to regular payments, more than 90,000 households received drought-related payments in April and May of 2015.

The Government of Ethiopia operates the Productive Safety Nets Programme, which offers a timely scale-up payment in anticipation of severe droughts or floods using a tool developed in collaboration with the World Food Program (WFP). The Livelihoods, Early Assessment and Protection (LEAP) system assesses agro-meteorological data to estimate future crop yields and rangeland production.

CLIMATE FACTOR 4

Adequate financing arrangements to ensure resilience of social protection systems in times of crisis

Adequate financing arrangements must be developed to enable the government to implement flexible components that rapidly expand in times of shock. While the core guarantees of a social protection floor should be financed using domestic resources to ensure their sustainability and predictability, contingency financing for rapid scaling-up of flexible components can be arranged through international donor support or through emergency reserves. For example, in Ethiopia, the Risk Financing Mechanism (RFM) provides funds

in case of drought and subsequent scale-up of the PSNP when needs exceed those that can be provided by the programme's regular contingency budget. This serves to ensure that the programme can absorb increased demand without undue budgetary pressures that might threaten future payments. In Kenya, the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) operates the country's Disaster Contingency Fund (DCF), which finances county-led responses to droughts, including the distribution of emergency cash transfers. DCF funds are limited to financing emergency transfers and do not, to date, support drought emergency scale-up payments of the HSNP. It is expected that the inauguration of a National Drought and Disaster Contingency Fund (NDDCF) would replace the DCF, which may eventually serve as a unified contingency financing mechanism for both dedicated emergency response and emergency scale-ups under the HSNP.

Instead, it calls on countries to cooperate in areas like in the development of early warning systems, disaster preparedness, risk assessment and management, as well as different types of insurance. This latter area could include social insurance and presumably other forms of social protection that make up a country's national social protection system.

The ILO, and many of its development partners within the UN system, are now tasked with integrating these and other considerations into the technical assistance the organizations provide. This will ensure that efforts to expand essential, sustainable social protection coverage also serve to make systems more adept at protecting vulnerable populations with new and evolving circumstances related to the effects of climate change.

4

Towards climate-ready systems.

In the Sahel, where social protection strategies are now emerging in several countries, there is a timely opportunity to support the articulation of nationally-defined social protection floors that provide basic provisions, while integrating flexible components to provide protection against climate-related shocks and vulnerabilities.

Calls for social protection responses to remedy some of the negative effects of climate change and of climate policies have made their way into several recent international agreements. For example, at the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in December 2015 in Paris, one subject in the talks was that of "loss and damage," which for the first time yielded a dedicated article in the Paris Agreement (Article 8). The agreement recognizes that climate change has tangible consequences on livelihoods. It does not, however, provide a basis for liability or compensation.

SOURCES

- World Bank, 2013, *Building Resilience to Disaster and Climate Change through Social Protection*
- National Drought Management Authority, Kenya, 2016, "Evaluation of the Kenya Hunger Safety Net Programme - Phase 2"
- Bastagli, F., L. Harman, "The role of index-based triggers in social protection shock response," Overseas Development Institute, 2015
- Richardson, J., "Federal Food Assistance in Disasters: Hurricanes Katrina and Rita," U.S. Congressional Reporting Service, 2006
- European Commission, 2016, "ECHO Factsheet – Sahel: Food & Nutrition Crisis – January 2106"
- The Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP), 2014, "Is Emergency Cash Transfer Programming 'fit for the future'?"
- World Bank, 2014, "Helping Poor Families Build Resilience to Climate Change and other Disasters in the Sahel"
- ILO, 2015, "Outcome of the Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Sustainable Development, Decent Work and Green Jobs," Geneva, 5–9 October 2015
- Hobson, M., L. Campbell, "How Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is responding to the current humanitarian crisis in the Horn," Humanitarian Practice Network, 2012

This brief was authored by James Canonge, Social Protection Officer and reviewed by Valérie Schmitt, Chief of the Social Policy, Governance and Standards Branch of Social Protection Department of the International Labour Organization (ILO). It also benefited from the contributions of Loveleen De, Social Protection Policy Officer at the ILO. The editor of the series is Isabel Ortiz, Director of the ILO Social Protection Department. For more information, contact: ortizi@ilo.org.

