

Connecting Social Protection and Climate Change Adaptation

Social protection initiatives, including cash transfers to the poor and improving the rights of the marginalised, are as much at risk from climate change as other development approaches. They are unlikely to succeed in reducing poverty if they do not consider both the short and long-term shocks and stresses associated with climate change. By exploring linkages between climate change adaptation and social protection in the agricultural sector, IDS researchers have developed the concept of ‘adaptive social protection’. Studying adaptive social protection involves examining opportunities that approaches to social protection provide for adaptation, and for developing climate-resilient social protection programmes.

Global processes and crises are changing and deepening the risks already faced by poor and vulnerable people in rural areas, particularly those involved in agriculture.

As approaches to minimising the risks faced by these vulnerable people, social protection and climate change adaptation have much in common as they both seek to protect the most vulnerable and promote resilience.

Yet they remain somewhat disparate fields of research, policy and practice. While social protection aims to build resilience to some climate-related disasters, insufficient attention has been played in the social protection sphere to the long-term risks posed by climate change. However, social protection approaches could inform disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation based on established implementation frameworks for vulnerability reduction.

A careful analysis of conceptual and practical linkages between social

protection and climate change adaptation is required to seek out mutually enhancing components. Such an examination, using the agricultural context, is helping researchers to identify and mitigate gaps between agendas, thereby encouraging the development of more comprehensive and appropriate approaches.

Enhancing adaptive capacity through social protection

Table 1 shows how social protection approaches can enhance coping strategies and could support climate change adaptation.

Table 1: Linking social protection to adaptation

Approach to social protection	Benefits for adaptation
<i>Provision</i>	Protection of those most vulnerable to climate risks who have low levels of adaptive capacity
<i>Prevention</i>	Prevents damaging coping strategies as a result of risks to weather-dependent livelihoods
<i>Promotion</i>	Promotes resilience through livelihood diversification and security in order to withstand climate related shocks Promotes opportunities arising from climate change
<i>Transformation</i>	Transforms social relations to help address underlying social and political vulnerability

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Building climate resilience into social protection

The need for social protection to take a long-term approach is increasingly recognised and climate risks heighten this need. Climate change also threatens to reduce the effectiveness of social protection measures to limit shocks and stresses. Addressing these vulnerabilities may require diversification of livelihoods away from climate sensitive livelihood activities, particularly in areas prone to severe droughts or floods.

Adaptive social protection for farmers could mean moving to off-farm activities, for which social protection measures could include promoting off-farm rural enterprise and industry, investment in urban services, assisted migration and improved remittance schemes.

Within the agricultural sector social protection measures that could both build resilience to climate change and benefit from integrating climate change adaptation include: weather-indexed crop insurance, asset restocking (including direct livestock provision), and cash transfers.

Programmes introducing duck-rearing in flood prone areas or camel-rearing in drought prone areas can help build climate resilience into livelihood asset-building. Breed selection is also a crucial component of such initiatives. In Bangladesh a selection of duck species that are more capable of living with less water, better suited to higher temperatures, and consume readily available non-aquatic vegetation aims to build climate resilience in light of climate projections for the region.

One of the limitations to developing appropriate long-term adaptive social protection options is the uncertainty attached to climate change impact modelling.

Adaptive social protection

To strengthen social protection and climate change adaptation approaches, IDS researchers have developed an ‘adaptive social protection’ framework. This framework characterises social protection measures that acknowledge the changing nature of climate-related impacts, including the future existence of conditions that have not been experienced before.

Features of this framework include:

- An emphasis on promotion that aims to transform productive livelihoods as well as protect, and adapt to changing climate conditions rather than simply reinforcing coping mechanisms.
- An understanding of the structural root causes of poverty in a particular region or sector, permitting more effective targeting of vulnerability to multiple shocks and stresses.
- Incorporation of a rights-based rationale for action, stressing equity and justice dimensions of chronic poverty and climate change adaptation in addition to instrumentalist rationale based primarily on economic efficiency.
- An enhanced role for research from both the natural and social sciences to inform the development and targeting of social protection policies and measures in the context of the burden of both geophysical hazards and changing climate-related hazards.
- A long-term perspective for social protection policies that takes into account the changing nature of shocks and stresses.

Further Reading

Stephen Devereux, Lawrence Haddad, Rachel Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2006) *Looking at Social Protection Through a Livelihoods Lens*, In Focus Issue 1, Brighton: IDS

Mark Davies, Tom Mitchell, Thomas Tanner et al. (Forthcoming 2008) *Climate Change Adaptation, Disaster Risk Reduction and Social Protection: Complimentary Roles in Agriculture and Rural Growth?*, IDS Working Paper, Brighton: IDS

Credits

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