

POLICY BRIEF



How does social protection build resilience?

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KEY POLICY MESSAGES

RESILIENCE OBJECTIVES ALONE ARE NOT ENOUGH.

To have an impact, there is a need to translate resilience objectives into the design of programmes, and to back them up with the necessary investments in institutional capacity to ensure effective delivery.

A HEALTHY DOSE OF REALISM IS REQUIRED.

Expectations of what single social protection programmes can or cannot do to build resilience need to be realistic, particularly in terms of the timeframes required to build programmes' capacity to deliver outputs well. Even well-established, large-scale social protection programmes won't lead to sustainable resilience outcomes unless complementary interventions are provided as part of a national effort to build sustainable livelihoods.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT CLIMATE.

Vulnerability is multidimensional and the poor are exposed to a range of risks that go beyond climate shocks. Programmes that aim to build resilience need to apply a comprehensive approach to reducing risks, which include slow-onset changes related to the climate as well as social, economic and health risks.

BRACED aims to build the resilience of up to 5 million vulnerable people against climate extremes and disasters. It does so through 15 projects working across 13 countries in East Africa, the Sahel and Asia.

Box 1: What is BRACED and the Knowledge Manager?

Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) is a UK-government funded programme which aims to increase the resilience of up to 5 million people.

The BRACED Knowledge Manager generates evidence and learning on resilience and adaptation in partnership with the BRACED projects and the wider resilience community. It gathers robust evidence of what works to strengthen resilience to climate extremes and disasters, and initiates and supports processes to ensure that evidence is put into use in policy and programmes.

This brief summarises findings from three country studies (Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) that analyse the role of social protection programmes in building resilience to climate-related shocks and stresses.

SOCIAL PROTECTION AS A RESILIENCE TOOL

The rising challenges climate change poses are increasingly requiring policy-makers to put in place programmes that enhance resilience and ensure efforts to reduce poverty and inequality are sustainable. Social protection programmes are becoming popular tools to help people cope with climate-related shocks and stresses, and there are good reasons for optimism.

Evidence from programmes like Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) and Mexico's conditional cash transfer, for example, indicates that participation in cash transfers allows people to meet their basic needs, even in times of drought (de Janvry et al., 2004; Merttens et al., 2011). Beneficiaries can also avoid coping strategies that are damaging in the longer term, such as taking their children out of school, eating seeds needed for the next season or engaging in income generation activities that undermine the natural resource base on which they depend (e.g. charcoal production, soil mining). But caution is also required: there are cases where the support provided through long-term cash transfers may have remained insufficient to buffer beneficiaries from extreme climate shocks. And some social protection programmes, like old age pensions and child grants, are currently not perceived as being tools to reduce vulnerability to climate change. Their contribution to helping recipients cope with climate shocks and stresses remains largely hypothetical; analysis has focused almost exclusively on social protection programmes that promote livelihoods and create or transfer productive assets.

As part of the BRACED Knowledge Manager (see Box 1), this briefing summarises evidence from Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia on how large-scale national social protection programmes contribute to resilience (Ulrichs and Slater, 2016). In particular, the conceptual framework adopted here suggests evaluating resilience-building efforts on the basis of three outcomes: the capacity of both people and national

systems to absorb, anticipate and adapt to climate-related shocks and stresses (see Box 2). This allows us to break down a concept that is widely used yet difficult to define and operationalise, by assessing how programmes contribute to one or more of the three capacities.

Box 2: Resilience can be broken down to three capacities

Absorptive capacity is the ability to cope with climate variability and extremes during and after a disturbance to reduce the immediate impact on people's livelihoods and basic needs.

Anticipatory capacity is the ability of social systems to actively anticipate and reduce the impact of climate variability and extremes through preparedness and planning.

Adaptive capacity is the ability of social systems to adapt to multiple, long-term and future climate change risks, and also to learn and adjust after a disaster.

Source: Bahadur et al. (2015).

DOES SOCIAL PROTECTION CONTRIBUTE TO ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY?

In the case of social protection, findings from the three country case studies highlight that national programmes currently make a strong contribution to people's capacities to absorb the negative impacts of climate-related shocks and stresses on their livelihoods. They do so through the provision of well-implemented, regular cash transfers – regardless of whether these aim specifically to address climate or lifecycle-based risks. This highlights that, to achieve resilience outcomes, there is a need for a stronger focus in programme design and evaluation on the quality of programme delivery. A decade of delivering the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia demonstrates just how long it can take a new programme to deliver transfers regularly and reliably enough to start to enhance resilience. This finding also suggests a need to broaden our understanding of resilience policy

and programming to go beyond efforts that specifically aim to address climate risks and incorporate more holistic understandings of vulnerability.

DOES SOCIAL PROTECTION CONTRIBUTE TO ANTICIPATORY CAPACITY?

Social protection programmes that have been specifically designed to reduce vulnerability to climate-induced food insecurity, such as Kenya's HSNP, illustrate that integrating resilience objectives into design and implementation can increase the contribution social protection makes to the anticipatory capacity of national institutions and systems to better respond to climate-related disasters. The HSNP for example aims to reduce chronic food insecurity and disaster risks by incorporating a scale-up mechanism to expand support from routine beneficiaries to vulnerable non-beneficiaries during severe drought.

Even programmes that do not have resilience as an explicit objective, such as social pensions, present indications of preparedness for climatic shocks at the household level. Beneficiaries of Uganda's Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) for example used the cash transfer to accumulate savings for an emergency.

DOES SOCIAL PROTECTION CONTRIBUTE TO ADAPTIVE CAPACITY?

Case studies of Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, as well as wider social protection literature, confirm there is currently an evidence gap when it comes to social protection's contribution to long-term adaptation and sustainable livelihoods. While adaptation does not necessarily have to be an explicit objective of social protection programmes, contributions to adaptive capacity can potentially come from linkages with programmes that aim to build sustainable livelihoods, which the Ending Drought Emergencies (EDE) framework in Kenya for example aims for. This however can be a challenge in contexts where solid complementary programmes still have to be developed and put in place.

What did emerge from the case studies is that social protection programmes can in some cases have the unintended side-effect of supporting adaptation, but in other cases can lead to maladaptation. In Uganda for example the SAGE senior citizen grant reduced recipients' reliance on cutting firewood, whereas in Ethiopia participation in the PSNP can be linked to a striking increase in off-farm income from firewood collection (Weldegebriel and Prowse, 2013). At a minimum social protection needs to consider the implications of climate risks in programme design to avoid unintended impacts in relation to maladaptation and to harness any potential positive impacts on adaptation.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Social protection programmes need to be cognisant of climate change risks,

for two reasons. First, the design of social protection programmes should integrate climate risks to ensure, where possible, they do not lead to maladaptation or undermine existing resilience strategies. Social protection, as well as livelihood programmes, can have the unintended side-effect of locking people into unviable livelihoods. For this, we need a better understanding of and evidence base on social protection's contributions to adaptive capacity in the long term. Second, climate risks can undermine a programme's objectives and impacts. To counter this, programmes can be designed so as to ensure they still have the desired impact despite climate shocks. This could be done through vertical scale-up, meaning that the amount of cash delivered to existing programme beneficiaries is increased in a crisis situation. This is to take into account the increased levels of vulnerability so that people can still meet their basic needs.

We need to strengthen social protection's role in providing absorptive capacity.

Evidence from Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda makes a strong case for social protection's primary role being that of a safety net that allows people to absorb shocks without suffering significant negative setbacks. This means policy discussions around social protection

and resilience need to go beyond shock response. Shock-responsive programmes increase the quality and timeliness of humanitarian assistance in emergency situations but they do not reduce chronic vulnerability, which, is the underlying condition that turns climate shocks into disasters. Many social protection programmes in sub-Saharan Africa have emerged out of a need to stop decades of dependence on humanitarian assistance in regions of recurring food crisis. Efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance through social protection programmes need to ensure they do not shift the focus back to short-term assistance and undo decades of work to establish nationally owned safety nets.

Social protection is only one part of a bigger response. More focus is needed on assessing what types of complementary interventions are needed to social protection programmes to build sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable groups in the long term. Across the three countries, donors, non-governmental organisations and governments implement a wealth of programmes. Lessons learnt from these need to be harnessed to inform national and regional policy frameworks, through identification of the comparative advantage of different interventions in building the capacity of people and systems to absorb, anticipate and adapt to climate-related shocks and stresses.

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ACRONYMS

BRACED
Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes

EDE
Ending Drought Emergencies

HSNP
Hunger Safety Net Programme

PSNP
Productive Safety Net Programme

SAGE
Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment

This brief is part a series of publications which form part of BRACED Knowledge Manager work on social protection and resilience:

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Ulrichs, M. and Slater, R. (2017)
How is social protection building resilience in Kenya? BRACED Policy Brief. London: ODI.

Ulrichs, M. and Slater, R. (2017)
How is social protection building resilience in Uganda? BRACED Policy Brief. London: ODI.

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processes to ensure that evidence is put into use in policy and programmes. The Knowledge Manager also fosters partnerships to amplify the impact of new evidence and learning, in order to significantly improve levels of resilience in poor and vulnerable countries and communities around the world.

The Knowledge Manager consortium is led by the Overseas Development Institute and includes the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, ENDA Energie, ITAD, Thomson Reuters Foundation and the University of Nairobi.

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