



How is social protection building resilience in Uganda

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KEY POLICY MESSAGES

THE PROVISION OF regular cash transfers has a greater impact than short-term public works programmes on people's capacity to absorb, adapt and anticipate climate-related shocks. This is even the case for cash transfers, such as old age pensions, that primarily address lifecycle-based risks.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS for Empowerment (SAGE) programmes that address economic and social vulnerability can have positive impacts in terms of increasing people's adaptive capacity. A better understanding of how programmes can support adaptation could provide valuable lessons to increase the effect of social protection programmes in relation to reducing vulnerability to climate risks.

SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES focused on asset-building, such as Uganda's Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), need to ensure coherence between programme objectives, programme design and implementation capacity to have a long-lasting impact on the resilience of people to climate shocks.

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 is one of 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 IN UGANDA

As part of the Knowledge Management component of the Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme (see Box 1), this briefing summarises evidence from Uganda on how large-scale national social protection programmes contribute to resilience. 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.

In Uganda, the social protection sector is still divided into different sectors and institutions, which all fall under the life-cycle-based National Social Protection Policy. Up to 2015, Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) covered two types of cash transfers for vulnerable poor people: the Senior Citizen Grant (SCG) and the Vulnerable Family Support Grant (VFSG). Both aimed to address social and economic risks through the provision of regular cash transfers over several years. The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) on the other hand combines different types of interventions, such as temporary employment schemes through public works, household asset-building and community infrastructure programmes. It has been in place since 2003 and has changed in focus over the three phases until now, from peace and reconstruction, to basic services, to a stronger focus on resilience building and disaster risk financing in its third phase (NUSAF 3 2015–20). In this research we conducted qualitative research in Kampala, as well as focus group discussions with beneficiaries of both programmes in rural villages in Apac district.

CAN CASH TRANSFERS AND PUBLIC WORKS HELP PEOPLE ABSORB SHOCKS?

Both SAGE and NUSAF 2 aim to assist people in absorbing shocks, albeit in different ways. The temporary employment schemes of NUSAF 2 provide cash support during the lean season, whereas SAGE delivers ongoing cash transfers to vulnerable households and individuals. While SAGE does not explicitly intend to assist households in absorbing climate-induced shocks and stresses, the regularity and predictability of the cash transfers seems to be more effective than the short-term assistance NUSAF 2 provides. The short-term nature of NUSAF 2 assistance, as well as unreliable payments and the timing of its public works activities, has limited its impact on chronic food insecurity; it is akin more to *ad hoc* emergency relief than to a long-term development project (McCord et al., 2013). In the case of NUSAF 2's asset transfer programme, the extent to which the absorptive capacity of the household is built depends on the type and value of the asset transferred. Goats, for example, are kept as savings, whereas oxen serve mainly a productive purpose and are unlikely to be sold in an emergency, given their high value. SAGE cash transfers on the other hand are used for food, schooling and health care, as well as to purchase small livestock throughout the year. During the lean season, however, cash alone can help bridge the food gap, and the transfer is spent predominantly on food. SAGE beneficiaries also use the transfer for emergencies, such as in health shocks or to purchase food when crops are destroyed as a result of climatic conditions (Merttens et al., 2015).

HOW DO PROGRAMMES INCREASE THE CAPACITY TO ANTICIPATE SHOCKS?

In terms of increasing the capacity of households and individuals to be better prepared for a shock, receiving a cash transfer allows people to save and have a buffer in the case of an emergency. Based on qualitative data beneficiaries indicated that SAGE has a positive impact on savings, and the money set aside is used to respond to household needs and to shocks, such as illness. Savings also take the form of assets,

particularly livestock, which beneficiaries explicitly perceive as a strategy to mitigate risks and generate cash in times of need (Merttens et al., 2015).

At the systems level, social protection programmes in Uganda are currently not strengthening the capacity of national institutions to anticipate climate-related shocks (e.g. by integrating scalability mechanisms to expand support following disasters). But plans are already in place for a Disaster Risk Financing component in NUSAF 3, which will trigger contingency funds through a satellite-based early warning system.

WE NEED MORE THAN CASH TO BUILD ADAPTIVE CAPACITY AND LONG-TERM RESILIENCE

The contributions of social protection to adaptation to climate-related risks are not clear (Johnson et al., 2015), and this also applies in Uganda. SAGE cash transfers provide a basic income stream that allows beneficiaries to opt out of negative coping strategies that can be considered a form of maladaptation, such as cutting firewood to produce charcoal. This is an unintended positive impact observed by programme implementers and beneficiaries.

Whereas NUSAF 1 and 2 have focused on rehabilitating basic infrastructure, NUSAF 3 is now integrating a strong climate change adaptation lens in its public works activities, with the aim of building community assets such as through soil and water conservation activities. This model can potentially contribute to climate change adaptation, if previous shortcomings in NUSAF are taken into account and addressed. These include a lack of coherence between the programme's objectives, its activities and its capacity to implement. A direct link between community assets built through public works programmes and pressing livelihood needs to address food security has been missing (McCord et al., 2013). The design and implementation of public works programmes need in the future to take into account a coherent theory of change, which needs to be informed by rigorous monitoring and evaluation efforts to provide evidence of its effectiveness.

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).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A better understanding of and a stronger evidence base on social protection's contributions to adaptive capacity is needed, not only to avoid maladaptation but also to build sustainable livelihoods in the long term. NUSAF 3 aims to increase resilience to disasters through the construction of community assets. Evaluating the impact of temporary employment schemes and community assets on the adaptive capacity of the poor will be critical to understand the effectiveness of the approach. There is currently little evidence to assess the long-term impact on livelihoods of social protection programmes combining cash and assets through public works schemes.

Further, more focus needs to be placed on the quality of implementation to deliver on resilience objectives. This is not to say that objectives are irrelevant – but they need to be coherent with the programme's theory of change, design and capacity to implement. Examples from SAGE highlight that, in the end, it is programmes' ability to deliver cash transfers on time in a reliable way that contributes to people's capacity to absorb and anticipate – regardless of whether resilience forms part of the objectives.

Programmes like SAGE, despite their contributions to reducing the vulnerability of poor people - including in highly vulnerable drought-prone districts like Karamoja - do not form part of national or donor-led resilience strategies. National programmes like SAGE could be taken into account in a national policy framework that situates different interventions in a multi-sector strategy that aims to increase resilience to drought through a multi-pronged approach. This could emerge from existing initiatives endorsed by the Government of Uganda, such as the regional IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI), for which Uganda's Country Programming Paper is complete but not yet linked into national policy frameworks. Experiences from programmes implemented by a range of actors, including NGOs, could feed into the development of national resilience strategies to reduce fragmentation and contribute to building a national system to respond to drought and build sustainable livelihoods.

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ACRONYMS

- BRACED
Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes
- NUSAF
Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
- SAGE
Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment
- SCG
Senior Citizen Grant
- VFSG
Vulnerable Family Support Grant

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Slater, R. and Ulrichs, M. (2017)
How is social protection building resilience in Ethiopia? 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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