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Social Protection and Climate Change Adaption

Mark Davies, Jennifer Leavy, Tom Mitchell and Thom Tanner
Institute of Development Studies

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Postal address: Kräftriket 2B, SE 106 91

Visitors' address: Kräftriket 2B, SE-106 91

E-mail: info@ccdcommission.org

Website: www.ccdcommission.org

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Social Protection and Climate Change Adaptation

Mark Davies, Jennifer Leavy, Tom Mitchell and Thom Tanner,
Institute of Development Studies, UK.
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Social protection initiatives 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 for the UK Department of International Development (DFID), researchers at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) 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. As we understand more about the impacts of climate change, adapting to these impacts has grown from a minor environmental concern to a major challenge for human development, and a crucial element in eradicating poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Social protection has witnessed a similarly rapid rise up the development policy agenda and growing experience, together with improved evidence, suggests that it can effectively contribute to poverty reduction and move people into productive livelihoods. Many of the policy instruments associated with social protection have targeted and contributed to reducing vulnerability related to the variations and extremes in climate and their impact on rural livelihoods.

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. Likewise, climate change adaptation has not fully considered the policy and programmatic options that social protection can provide.

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 helps both policy makers and researchers to identify and mitigate gaps between agendas, encouraging the development of more comprehensive and appropriate approaches.

Enhancing adaptive capacity through social protection

Climate change adaptation cannot effectively address the root causes of poverty without taking a differentiated view of poverty and vulnerability. Table 1 shows how social protection can enhance climate change adaptation approaches with respect to different categories of the poor and vulnerable.

Adaptation involves reducing the risks posed by climate change to people's lives and livelihoods

Table 1: Linking social protection to adaptation (drawing on Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004)

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 causes.

Building climate resilience into social protection

Many social protection interventions are commonly planned over relatively short time frames. More recent social protection policies and programmes refer to the need for '*long-term*' interventions. Nevertheless, how this will be achieved and analysis of how long-term they need to be to achieve stated objectives is rarely well thought-out. Considering adaptation and disaster risk reduction in the context of social protection provides a strong incentive for developing longer-term perspectives.

Social protection describes all initiatives that transfer income or assets to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised.

The *activist* arguments underpinning social protection as an inviolable right to combat social injustice and inequality also have parallels with climate change debates. Social protection rationale is informed by the ideal of a guaranteed 'universal social minimum' based on citizenship.

A key implication for designing and implementing social protection in the context extreme events and climate change is therefore likely to be an enhanced engagement with rights and equity-based arguments around climate change injustice.

Linkages explored in practice – evidence in agriculture

In a recent study conducted on behalf of DFID, IDS researchers revealed how country experiences of social protection instruments can enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities and point to ways in which social protection measures could better integrate climate change adaptation. These experiences are divided into four areas:

Weather-indexed crop insurance

In recent years, there has been a shift away from insuring against poor crop yields toward insuring directly against bad weather. A contract is written against an index establishing a relationship between lack of rainfall and crop failure, verified by long historical records of both rainfall and yields. Farmers collect an immediate payout if the index reaches a certain measure or “trigger,” regardless of actual losses, so farmers still have an incentive to make productive management decisions. When well-designed, they may also permit farmers to enhance adaptive capacity through greater risk-taking experimentation in agriculture practices not possible in crop-insurance schemes.

Seed fairs

As an alternative to traditional input distribution programmes, DFID has supported partners to implement a seed voucher and fair programme to 35,000 households throughout Kenya’s semi-arid region in response to prolonged drought. Beneficiaries were given vouchers to purchase seeds at locally organised seed fairs. Farmers and local traders were encouraged to bring their surplus seeds to fair sites where voucher holders were able to select seeds of their choice. On completion of the seed fair, seed retailers redeemed their vouchers for cash. In contrast to the package of inputs approach which can undermine biological diversity and leads to mono-cropping (Thompson, *et al* 2007), seed vouchers and fairs have encouraged farmers to maintain crop diversity on their farms, contributing socio-ecological resilience. Seed voucher and fair projects present a cost-effective way to assist post-disaster recovery and enhance resilience by promoting crop diversity and information sharing between farmers.

Asset transfers

Selling productive assets such as livestock is a common coping strategy among the rural poor during times of climatic stress or shock. Inability to access such assets traps the poor in a persistent cycle of chronic poverty (Chronic Poverty Research Centre 2004; World Bank 2001). So a sustainable strategy for disaster reduction must focus on activities to help the vulnerable build assets (UN-ISDR 2004; Wisner *et al* 2004; Vasta 2004) that incorporate climate screening in order to ensure that such assets are able to support resilience in a changing climate (Tanner *et al* 2007).

Social protection measures can contribute to asset accumulation, for example through unconditional and conditional cash transfers, micro-credit as well as the direct provision of livestock or poultry through asset transfer programmes. The Reducing Vulnerability to

Climate Change (RVCC) project has explicitly mainstreamed climate change throughout its design and implementation. One adaptation strategy identified by the programme is the need to promote alternative livelihoods. The project encouraged the uptake of assets such as duck-rearing which would enhance income and prove to be resilient in the face of climate change (Mallik 2005).

Cash transfers

Predictable cash transfers could play an important role in mitigating the vulnerability of the chronic poor who will increasingly be exposed to climate related shocks and stresses. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is a cash (and food) transfer programme aimed at alleviating household vulnerability to seasonal food insecurity consumption across the hunger period, by providing seasonal employment on public works in exchange for cash or food transfers to help protect household assets and smooth a shift in thinking away from emergency food aid toward a more predictable and targeted safety net.

So far, the programme has successfully prevented the use of damaging coping strategy during periods of increased stress. There is also some evidence that cash transfers can build assets or provide households with contingency finance for mitigating climate-related risks. But the timing has to be right, both in terms of coinciding with the hungry season and also making sure the amount of transfer takes adequate account of purchasing power, which can vary over the course of a year. The Government of Ethiopia is aiming to graduate all participants from the programme after five years. However, in a changing climate, social protection measures must reduce risk and reduce poverty proactively over *extended* timeframes, particularly in ecological and social environments subjected to high states of flux (Tanner and Mitchell, 2007).

Key policy issues: opportunities to develop '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 transforming productive livelihoods as well protecting, and adapting to changing climate conditions rather than simply reinforcing coping mechanisms.
- ∞ Grounding in 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 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 longer-term perspective for social protection policies that takes into account the changing nature of shocks and stresses.

Turning opportunities into practice – gaps to address

Roles for specific policies and instruments within each of the fields remain. However, the adaptive social protection framework analysis does permit the identification of a number of potential areas for future work that links these related fields together.

These include:

- ∞ Improving the evidence base: lessons learned, poverty impact and cost effectiveness
- ∞ Developing tools and resources, for example climate risk assessment to be used with social protection programmes
- ∞ Supporting collaboration by engaging in national and international events and conferences
- ∞ Funding for adaptive social protection, integrating social protection into adaptation funding and vice versa
- ∞ Encouraging dialogue among the disciplines

Key reading:

Devereux, S., Sabates-Wheeler, R. 2007. Editorial Introduction: Debating Social Protection. IDS Bulletin Vol 38. No 3. May 2007. IDS, Brighton.

IDS 2007, 'In Focus' Issue 1: Looking at Social Protection through a Livelihoods Lens

www.ids.ac.uk/ids/pvty/socproinfocus.html

IDS 2007, 'In Focus' Issue 2: Climate Change Adaptation, www.ids.ac.uk/climatechangeadaptation

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