

Beyond Adaptive Social Protection

What Role for Social Protection in a Climate Context?



Building back better: Luisa Curuki and her husband Rakula Vuabale constructing a more resilient house after the destruction of their village Cogeia, Fiji, by a Cyclone in 2020. Social protection systems protect individuals in case of loss and damage, but they can also reduce vulnerability and contribute to positive social transformations.

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Introduction

Climate change is significantly altering and exacerbating individual and collective risks and their impacts. These impacts concern everyone across the globe but are particularly felt by the most vulnerable population groups in low-income countries who are disproportionately exposed to climate related risks: They tend to live in high risk-prone areas and work under precarious social and economic conditions. Their livelihoods are particularly affected by climate change, such as agriculture and fishing. At the same time, they have fewer resources to cope and adapt to climate change (Ulrichs et al. 2019).

Social protection is increasingly understood as playing a critical role in supporting human beings in dealing with the social and economic consequences of climate change, enabling them to better adapt and increase their resilience to withstand them, both in the short and the long-term (for example, IGPPC 2023; Costella and McCord 2023).

The potential role of social protection in addressing climate related shocks, stresses and hazards is commonly referred to as adaptive social protection (ASP) (Bowen et al. 2020; European Commission 2020; Costella and McCord 2023; Davies et al. 2009; Davies et al. 2013; Arnall et al. 2010). The term was originally coined by Davies et al. (2009) referring to a series of measures that support individuals, households and communities to adapt to climate change by combining elements of social protection, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) in programmes, projects and policies with the overall aim to increase the resilience of people, societies, communities and the environment to climate change (Arnall et al. 2010; Davies et al. 2013). The underlying assumption is that by combining these three components, efficiency of interventions will increase and so the impact on the poor's living conditions. The specific role of social protection is to integrate and address the structural social and economic vulnerabilities people are exposed to and which reinforce and define their climate vulnerabilities. This in turn will enhance their ability to adapt to climate change (Davies et al. 2013).

Over the last 10 years the concept of adaptive social protection has gained increasing momentum in the global development discourse. Academic and policy literature on adaptive social protection in a low-income context has been growing rapidly (for example, World Bank 2019; Coudouel et al. 2023; Costella et al. 2023; Costella and McCord 2023; Tenzing 2020; Ulrichs et al. 2019; Johannson et al. 2013; Fitzpatrick 2014; Gough et al. 2008) emphasising the

critical role of social protection for climate change. The topic has also been at the centre of a range of important global events, including the Global Forum on Adaptive Social Protection in Berlin in 2023 which was co-organised by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the World Bank. An important aspect that receives increasing attention is the financing of social protection in a climate-change context (for example, Alexandrova 2021; GCSPF 2024). A range of different development partners have taken the concept of adaptive social protection on board refocusing their social protection approaches through this angle (for example Bouwen et al. 2020; UNICEF 2019, WFP 2022).

While it has drawn attention to the key role of social protection in climate change adaptation, the original notion of ASP as a tool to address the social dimension of climate change has given way to a somewhat more ambiguous notion of ASP as a risk management tool “(...) *to help poor and vulnerable households and communities better cope and become more resilient to climate change and other covariate shocks.*” (World Bank 2024). Indeed, global debates and policies over the past decade have overwhelmingly focused on short-term, shock-responsive social protection measures to complement humanitarian and disaster risk reduction efforts. This focus on shock-responsive measures has long overshadowed a broader engagement with the concept of adaptive social protection, in particular with its preventive and transformative dimensions for adaptation and resilience to climate change, which is characterised by a long-term perspective. As a result, adaptive social protection has to some extent become synonymous with shock-responsive measures (Costella and McCord 2023).

This article argues that this somewhat narrow view of adaptive social protection tends to obscure the full potential of social protection in addressing climate risks, while ignoring the underlying more systemic inequalities and risks of climate change. The reductionist approach to social protection as a shock-response mechanism for poor and vulnerable people is limiting adaptive social protection to a post-disaster risk management tool and short-term safety net, including targeting methods and choice of instruments. As a result, underlying more systemic issues of inequality and exclusion tend to be reproduced rather than addressed. Also, it creates a compartmentalised narrative on social protection in a climate context, where shock-responsive social protection is being divorced from a transformative long-term perspective or adaptive

social protection or from other fundamental aspects, such as how climate change is altering social protection itself and the way it is functioning, for example in the context of transition of work (ILO 2015). Such a compartmentalised approach prevents a comprehensive view of how these different processes which involve different timescales play out in the context of adaptive social protection and how they influence each other.

Discussing the various definitions and concepts and their shortcomings, the article argues for a return towards a more comprehensive understanding of adaptive social protection that integrates both short-term and long-term measures addressing protective and promotive, but also preventative and transformative dimensions of social protection to support people to adapt and make them more resilient to climate change. This does not only concern the individual or household level but encompasses national, regional and global stakeholders and fields of action. Bringing the social dimension of climate change back into the debate, it is argued, allows to design more equity-oriented ASP measures, thereby contributing to climate justice. A vulnerability concept that goes beyond climate vulnerabilities finally, also reminds us that social protection is but one sector in a multi-disciplinary attempt to address climate change and that there is an urgent need for it to be expanded regardless of climate change.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Chapter 1 discusses conceptual approaches to social protection, disaster risk management and climate change adaptation, Chapter 2 is analysing ASP in a development context while Chapter 3 summarises the debate, concludes and sets out a set of recommendations.

Chapter 1

Definitions

1.1 Social Protection

Over the last two decades or so, social protection in a development context has evolved from a narrow notion of safety net to a more broad-based approach that encompasses measures to reduce the impact of short-term shocks along the life-cycle, such as sickness or unemployment as well as more systemic measures that are trying to address underlying vulnerabilities, such as chronic poverty or social exclusion aiming at more transformative change. Based on these considerations, Devereux and Wheeler (2004) have conceptualised social protection as having four major functions and related instruments: **Protection** (1) referring to the role of social protection in protecting chronically and transient poor and vulnerable groups from falling (deeper) into poverty through the provision of consumption smoothing measures, thereby protecting human capital and livelihoods (ex-post). Examples are social transfers in cash and in-kind for families or for chronically poor, public works, food vouchers or school feeding. In a disaster context this usually encompasses distribution of food or cash. **Prevention** (2) referring to measures that help people and households to anticipate risks through mechanisms that allow to reduce them from the outset or mitigate them once they occur. Typical examples are (social) insurance schemes, such as health, old age, unemployment or insurance against disability that allow to anticipate risks, but can also comprise regular cash transfers, such as child allowance or social pension. Preventative mechanisms play an important role in reducing negative coping strategies, such as selling off productive assets, taking children out of school or foregoing necessary health care treatment. Insurance mechanisms from environmental risks, such as crop insurance or insurance against floodings are of particular relevance in a climate change context. **Promotion** (3) makes reference to the critical role of social protection in enhancing the productivity and income of individuals, households and communities thereby stabilising and improving their livelihoods, for example through regular cash transfers, asset transfer programmes or public works. Through complementary measures, such as the provision of productive assets or skills training, these effects may even become more pronounced. **Transformation** (4) finally refers to the role of social protection in transforming peoples' livelihoods through measures that address structural economic, social or political exclusion and inequalities aiming at enhancing social inclusion, equity, empower-

ment and rights. This may include the promotion of minority rights or positive discrimination policies or land-(re)distribution but may also refer to measures around transparency and social accountability. These measures are of specific relevance for the most vulnerable who tend to suffer most from intersecting vulnerabilities, such as women, ethnic minorities or people with disabilities. They tend to be less covered by social protection mechanisms and have less access to productive resources, including land and formal labour. At the same time, they are more exposed to social and economic risks.

The different functions of social protection are not clear-cut and in practice tend to overlap. Cash transfers for example, tend to be mainly viewed in relation to their protective function, but also underpin the promotive function by enhancing livelihoods as well as gaining a preventative role by hindering people from deploying negative coping strategies, such as selling off productive assets or taking children out of school (Ibid.).

1.2 Climate-Change Adaptation

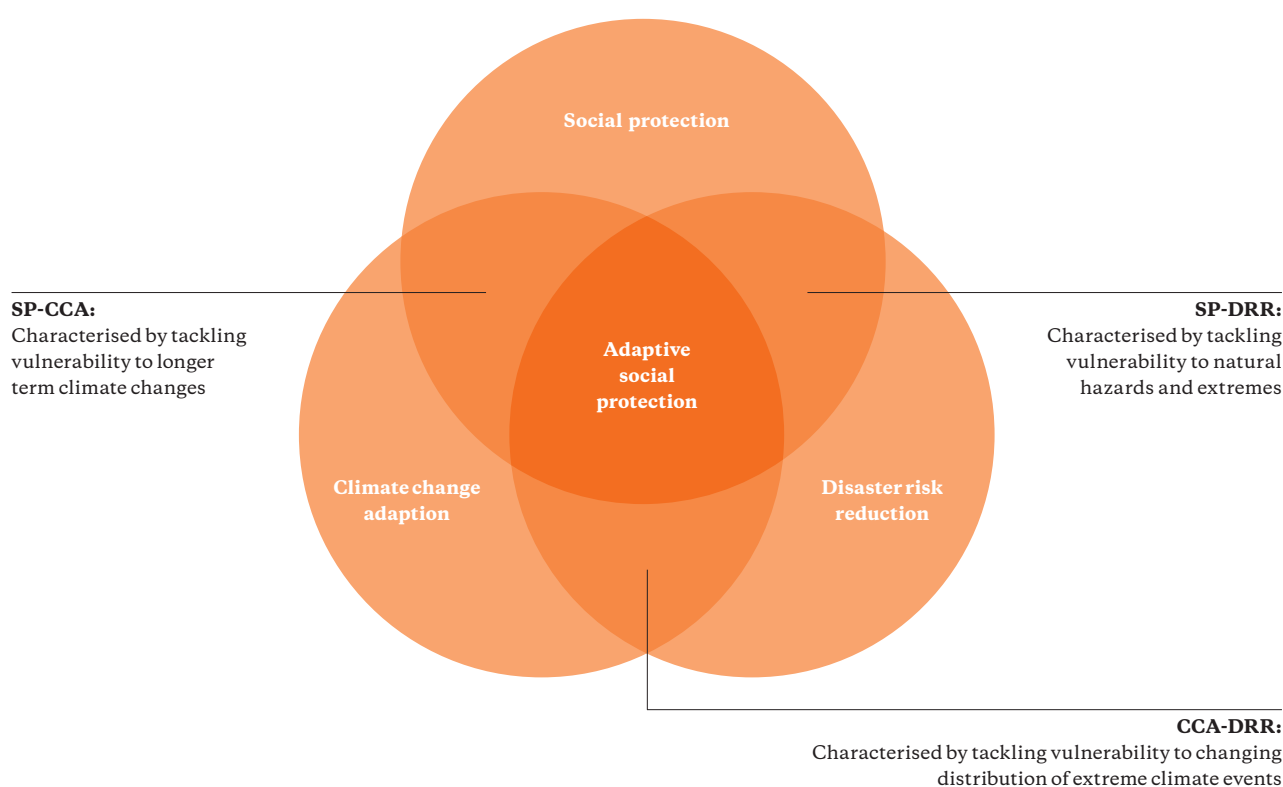
Climate change adaptation refers “(...) to a wide range of measures to directly reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts, from planting crop varieties that are more resistant to drought to enhancing climate information and early warning systems to building stronger defence against floods.” (UNDP 2024). While climate-change adaptation (CCA) and disaster risk reduction (DRR) are being criticised to be too similar to be different and debates around a stronger convergence have been ongoing for a while (for example Schipper 2009), CCA tends to distinguish itself by a climate focus and a long-term perspective “aiming at making adjustments to reduce the potential negative impacts of climate change on society with regard to both climate extremes and gradual changes in mean climate” (Clegg et al. 2019). Looking at CCA through a social protection lens, CCA thus may be characterised by a focus on prevention and adaptation/promotion and transformation rather than protection. From a temporal perspective, CCA is characterised by a long-term perspective aiming at measures that support people to adapt to climate change, such as making investments to modify their livelihoods and increase resilience to climate change or through the provision of regular cash transfers to be better able to cope with them (Davies et al. 2013).

1.3 Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster Risk Management as defined by the Sendai terminology refers to the “*application of disaster risk reduction policies and strategies to prevent new disaster risk, reduce existing disaster risk and manage residual risk, contributing to the strengthening of resilience and reduction of disaster losses.*” (UNDRR 2024). It includes measures to reduce or avoid the development of new or increased disaster risks, such as better land-use planning, corrective measures, such as retrofitting critical infrastructure and compensatory risk management, including contingency funds, insurance or social safety nets. From a social protection perspective Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) – while contributing to long-term adaptation – has thus, a particular focus on preventative action and in particular protection, i.e. supporting people to cope with risks once they occur (Ibid.). From a temporal perspective, this places DRR in the context of short-term relief rather than adaptation, promotion or transformation (see Figure 1).

1.4 Adaptive Social Protection

Adaptive social protection (ASP) tries to combine all three of these elements at policy and implementation level. Taking vulnerability as the starting point that links social protection, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, it is understood not simply as a result of shock- or disaster-related vulnerability, but as encompassing also other, more structural vulnerabilities that expose some people more to the consequences of climate change than others. Addressing these structural vulnerabilities lies at the core of adaption. Social protection has a key role in reducing these social vulnerabilities to climate change and establishing climate justice. However, this is not a one-way relationship. Social protection complements DRR measures in enabling people to better mitigate climate risks and support people to adapt to it (Davies et al. 2013). DRR may also support social protection in better addressing climate aspects of social and economic risks, for example by building resilient health



Graph 1: Adaptive Social Protection

Source: Davies et al. 2013

and education infrastructure, providing climate-related information to better manage risks or adapt social protection to fit a changing risk landscape.

Lying at the intersection between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction and social protection, adaptive social protection combines also different time dimensions, i.e. the short-term perspective of DRR and the long-term perspective of CCA. Per definition, adaptive social protection thus includes both short-term protective measures and long-term preventative, promotive and transformative action. As Davies et al. (2013) emphasise, one advantage of integrating DRR, CCA and SP into ASP is precisely the change in perspective from purely short-term measures, as we know them for example from disaster risk management, to longer-term promotive and transformative interventions. Heltberg et al. (2009) refer yet another dimension of adaptation which is linked to the spatial or geographic dimension of the concept. For adaptation to succeed it cannot be confined to the household or individual level only. Adaptation needs to simultaneously take place at various levels, including the local, national, regional and global one, including measures addressing changing productive systems or ways how to finance ASP for example.

increase support to those who are (Kreft 2023). Such measures require a complex administrative architecture, including efficient delivery systems being built around comprehensive single registries, flexible payment mechanisms, targeting and early warning systems (for example World Bank 2019). Evidence from a number of studies suggests that shock response works best where routine social protection systems have been in place for some time and can be built upon (e.g. Coudouel et al. 2023 on the Sahel). At the same time, in protracted crisis contexts, where humanitarian assistance is provided over years or decades, established humanitarian systems are increasingly considered an important basis on which to build and integrate national social protection systems (for example, SDC 2023).

1.5 Shock-Responsive Social Protection

Shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) is part of the adaptive concept but refers to the role of social protection as a risk management instrument to disaster preparedness in the context of DRR, i.e., the use of established social protection systems to cope with large-scale shocks and disasters, often in alignment with humanitarian action. The rising number, frequency and extent of natural disasters have put enormous financial and institutional pressure on humanitarian aid actors requiring new and innovative approaches. In this situation, the use of established social protection systems for disaster preparedness has gained prominence as a mechanism to complement humanitarian aid, making it more effective and less costly. A commonly cited example refers to the use of established social protection systems by expanding its beneficiary base or temporarily increasing the transfer size in case of large shocks to provide timely assistance in a post-disaster context also to people who usually are not part of the core beneficiary group and

Chapter 2

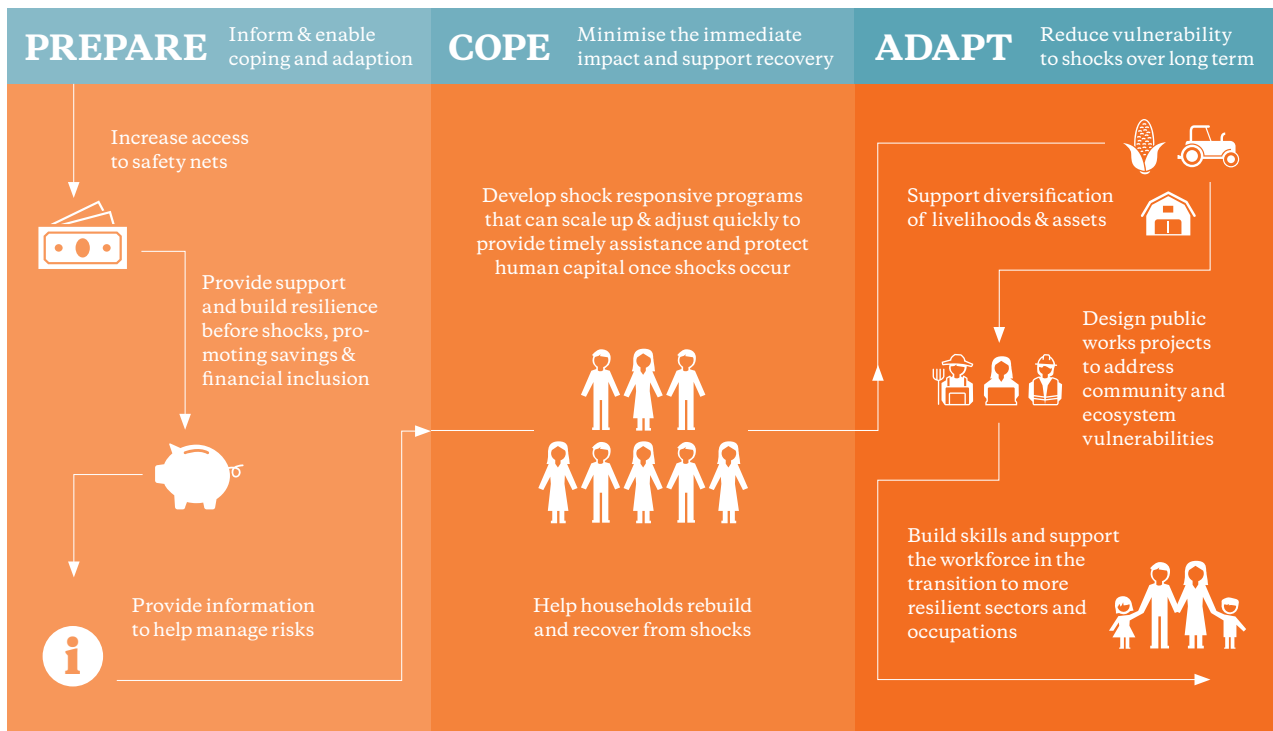
Adaptive Social Protection in the Development Discourse

2.1 Adaptive Social Protection as Shock Responsive Social Protection

While adaptive social protection had been around for a while it has received specific attention in the development arena during the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. The pandemic has led to an unprecedented number of measures put in place to respond to the crisis. This has led to reflections on how countries can be supported to prepare for such situations in the future and how their social protection systems can be better adapted to them.

The World Bank's approach to adaptive social protection presented in 2020 (Bouwen et al. 2020) can probably be considered emblematic for how the concepts has become mainstreamed into the development discourse. ASP is mainly understood as a risk management strategy to address climate vulnerabilities. It encompasses three phases or stages that are centred around the risk of climate-related large-scale shocks: (1) the preparational dimension referring to measures that prepare households

and individuals to be better able to deal and anticipate shocks and mitigate their impact, e.g., through cash transfer programmes complemented by savings or financial inclusion to build up financial resilience before shocks; (2) the coping function protecting individuals and households, once a shock occurs, including those that hitherto have not been beneficiaries and provide timely assistance in case of a large-scale shocks, such as through cash or in-kind transfers. This is also referred to as shock-responsive social protection. Finally, 3) adaptation in order to reduce vulnerability over the long-term, for example through support aiming at diversification of livelihoods or by addressing vulnerable eco-system through public works linked to preserve natural resources (Kreft 2023) (Graph 2). While adaptive social protection combines efforts to reduce vulnerability to shocks and stressors which occur over short- and long-term timescales, global debates and policies over the last decade or so have been overwhelmingly focused on shock-responsive social protection while overshadowing a wider debate on adaptive social protection and in particular on its preventative and transformative dimensions to adapt and resist climate change.



Graph 2: Adaptive Social Protection

Source: Kreft 2023

Two systematic reviews of adaptive social protection in South Asia 10 years apart (Davies et al. 2013 and Costella and McCord 2023) show that not much has changed. Although Costella and McCord (2023) use a different analytical approach than Davies et al. (2013), based on five climate-related social protection functions, their findings are similar: Programmes that have fully integrated DRR, CCA and SP are relatively rare, while short-term shock-responsive measures linking DRR and SP are much more common. This suggests an overall pattern of shock-responsive, short-term programmes receiving overwhelming attention, as opposed to longer-term structural measures to increase resilience and preparedness and address underlying vulnerabilities. Innovative adaptation measures that seek to link social protection to CCA, such as employment measures that support conservation measures or more transformative measures such as land redistribution, appear to have increased, but the overall bias towards short-term, shock-responsive measures within SP persists (*ibid*).

Several authors have identified the following reasons for this persisting trend:

2.2 Reduced Vulnerability Concept in a Climate Change Context

Conway and Tenzing (2023) point out, that the framing of adaptive social protection as it is currently promoted is limiting, because it is based on a different vulnerability concept. Vulnerability so they argue is narrowly interpreted as a result of direct exposure to a changing hazard while ignoring the fact that vulnerability is also shaped by the specific contexts in which a hazard occurs. These social, political and economic conditions shape the capabilities of people and societies to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to risks (Tenzing and Conway 2023; Bahadur et al. 2015; Eriksen et al. 2021, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2007; Ribot 2011). A reductionist approach to adaptive social protection and its underlying vulnerabilities also influences the choice of specific social protection instruments, in particular cash transfers and public works as opposed to others, such as contributory insurance schemes. While recognising the importance of this concept in highlighting the critical role of social protection in the context of climate change, the application of a narrow concept of climate-adaptive social protection risks to reduce social protection, particularly in low-income countries, to a

safety net approach that serves mainly to address large-scale risks, while ignoring the fundamentals of social protection in terms of its functions, rights and related mechanisms. This negatively impacts in particular on the transformative dimension of social protection (for example, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004; Davies et al. 2009) which critical scholars argue tends to be ignored or at best reduced to a transversal aspect of climate justice (for example Tenzing and Conway 2023; Costella et al. 2023). Adaptive social protection risks to be reduced to a technocratic and managerial debate focusing on so-called climate smart solutions (Tenzing and Conway 2020) while leaving aside underlying systemic non-climate related vulnerabilities (Costella et al. 2023).

These concern in particular systemic vulnerabilities related to ethnicity, race, physical and mental conditions or gender. They tend to be reinforced and exacerbated by climate change and its consequences, often exposing already vulnerable people to multiple vulnerabilities thereby reinforcing inequality and exclusion. Poor people are most affected by climate change. Being largely dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods and commonly working under precarious working conditions, including irregular and informal jobs (ILO 2015; 2018), they are disproportionally exposed to the risk of diminishing income opportunities, facing a heightened risk of extreme poverty (Bladon et al. 2022). Climate change affects in particular women and girls, because they have less control over and access to land, money, workforce, food, information, technology and credit while being more dependent on climate-sensitive resources than men (FAO 2007). This stands in stark contrast to their role as the main carer of children, elderly and others and their productive role, in particular in the rural household, including overseeing nutrition (Ngigi et al. 2017). All this makes it more difficult for them to adapt and cope with climate change (for example, Bullock et al. 2024). Gendered differences are also discernible in off-farm activities with women earning substantially less than men for the same work while being less covered by social protection measures at the same time (for example Nelson 2011; Ulrichs et al. 2019). Women and in particular poor women are disproportionally affected by disaster, including agricultural losses and loss of home-based businesses. They usually make the greatest sacrifices in terms of reduced quantity and quality of food consumption, often shouldering the burden of ill-health (Nelson 2011; Islam and Winkel 2017). The competition over constrained re-

sources, such as food, water and land, is increasing the potential for conflict (Costella et al. 2023; Lankes et al. 2023). It can exacerbate gender-based violence as a means of control and reinforcement of unequal power dynamics, including child marriage and sexual exploitation (Ibid.).

2.3 Reductionist Approach to Social Protection

Climate change is increasingly affecting our ecosystems and ecosystem services, including water and food security, health and well-being, as well as our economies, livelihoods and culture. This has a direct impact on the adaptation capacities of systems and human beings with vulnerable people and communities being disproportionately affected (IPCC 2022). It profoundly impacts on social protection: Climate change leads to an unprecedented increase in co-variate risks. Evidence suggests that extreme weather events increase in frequency, intensity and duration in many parts of the world. While the majority so far has occurred in upper-middle and high-income countries, low- and lower-middle income countries suffer the most from these events in terms of loss of lives and long-term consequences, including economic and physical well-being (ICPCC 2023; Lankes et al. 2023). Frequent extreme weather events are already leading to rising illnesses and deaths. Disrupted food systems due to crop failures and water scarcity resulting from climate shifts are exacerbating hunger and malnutrition, with severe implications for health and child development as well as chronic poverty situation (Alderman et al. 2006). Rising food prices are one of the most important channels through which climate change impacts on poverty and food and nutrition security (Jafino et al. 2020; Dasgupta et al. 2023; Hallegatte et al. 2017). If the current warming trajectory is maintained and climate hazards will intensify, it is estimated that the number of people pushed into extreme poverty by climate change will increase by 130 million by 2030 (Jafino et al. 2020). The majority of these “climate-poor” will live in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. They are also the least protected in terms of social protection: Although coverage has increased over the past five years, only one-third of the population in lower-middle-income countries is covered by at least one social protection scheme, while coverage is less than 10 % in low-income countries (ILO 2024).

Climate change alters individual life-cycle risks, such as illness or unemployment which appear to become increasingly interdependent and indistinct from climate related risks (Ibid.). The negative impact of climate change on water and land resources, as well as changing weather patterns make it increasingly expensive and difficult for farmers to cultivate or sustain livestock. The rising human pressure on systems of lands, soils and fresh water is putting especially rainfed and irrigated production under pressure slowing down agricultural productivity growth (FAO 2021; Ortiz-Bobea et al. 2021). This affects agricultural incomes leading to inequalities, rising poverty and unemployment. Global warming is changing disease patterns with severe consequences for health and well-being. Climate change has a direct impact on zoonoses, i.e., diseases caused by germs that spread between animals and people while contributing to a substantial increase in food-, water- and vector-borne diseases, such as malaria, and mental health (WHO 2023). Evidence suggests that climate change will aggravate half of all known pathogenic diseases, in particular those related to cardiovascular, cerebrovascular and respiratory conditions (Mora et al. 2022; Romanello et al. 2022).

This evolving risk landscape will also alter the demand for social protection both in scale and duration, as crisis situations may occur more frequently and increase in intensity. Already now, we are facing situations where more people are in need for support, also over a prolonged period of time. New risks and vulnerabilities will require social protection mechanisms to adapt and provide adequate services. Changing patterns of disease prevalence will for example, require a re-thinking and re-definition of essential health care benefit packages, i.e., the set of prioritised health programmes, services and interventions that are accessible to all and related financing. Costella and McCord (2023) also remind us of a changing spatial distribution of needs and demands. Until recently most social protection programmes in low-income countries were focusing on rural areas. Evidence suggests that demand for support is also rising in urban areas, partly due to increased rural-urban migration as disruptions to agricultural production accelerate livelihood transitions from rural agriculture to urban wage employment, particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America (IPCC 2022). Increasing urban migration due to climate change also raises the question of how social protection can support migration as a mitigation and adaptation mechanism to climate change, for example by integrating refugees into

national social protection systems (World Bank 2024) or strengthening international agreements on the portability of social security rights (ILO 2019).

The focus on adaptive and in particular shock-responsive social protection by donors and policy makers has reduced the wider debate on social protection as a mechanism in its own right. However, there are many reasons why it is also important for climate change to continue working on the extension of basic social protection: One, there is ample evidence that social protection – even without any green design tweak – has an important role to play in supporting people to prevent, cope and adapt to climate change. Social protection increases the capacity of people to anticipate and absorb the consequences of extreme weather events or other large-scale shocks, even if these are not specific programmes goals (for example Ulrichs et al. 2019 on cash transfer programmes in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda; Asfaw et al. 2017 on the Zambian Child Grant Programme). The social and economic consequences of the Covid-19 crisis and other large-scale crises over the last decades, such as the 2008 global economic crisis, have shown that people and societies covered by more comprehensive social protection systems were not only able to better cope with shocks, but were also able to recover quicker (Ortiz et al. 2019; Gentilini et al. 2022). Green transition policies work best

in countries where fully fledged social protection schemes are in place which allow countries to invest in new and greener jobs while making sure that no one is left behind, for example through early retirement schemes, social pensions or employment-related measures, such as skills training (Triangle 2024). Finally, the degree to which social protection, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures can be integrated into adaptive social protection depends to a large extent on how each sector (DRR, CCA and SP) is performing individually. Where adaptive social protection policies, including both short-term protective and long-term adaptive measures can build upon established schemes, they are more efficient and less costly.

2.4 Limits in Measuring Impacts

The focus on climate-specific measures in ASP to measure climate-related impact through social protection represents also a methodological challenge. Mappings on climate-related impacts of social protection tend to focus on green programmes only, i.e. those with a specific climate-related function and outcome. They are leaving aside routine social protection programmes who do provide important climate-related social protection functions without being tagged ‘green’, for example, health insurance, pensions or unemployment schemes as well as routine cash transfers in the form of child allowances or social pensions. While there is strong evidence that social protection positively impacts on post-disaster situations supporting people to smooth consumption and strengthening their absorptive capacity, the impact in terms of increasing long-term resilience and adaptive change are less clear, partly also due to a lack of longitudinal studies and a lack of conceptual clarity on how to operationalise and measure adaptation and over which time-horizon (Johnson et al. 2013). Panda (2013) points out that the impacts of programmes on climate resilience are not always straight forward and may actually allow people outside climate-related programmes to profit more from overall programme impacts as the poor target groups, for example from public works programmes that aim at strengthening public infrastructure and natural resource management (Mersha and van Laerhoven 2018).

Box 1

Green Transition

Social protection has a critical role in offsetting some of the negative impacts of climate transition policies, such as reduction in carbon fuels subsidies, carbon pricing or the closure of highly emitting industries (Costella and McCord 2023; ILO 2015 and 2018). The role for social protection is twofold: one, to support workers affected by green transition to improve their labour market performance through re-skilling or training; two, to protect workers that are laid-off through unemployment insurance or early retirement schemes and protect people directly affected by the reduction or removal of carbon fuel subsidies or carbon tax.

2.5 Compartmentalised Narrative on Adaptive Social Protection

Adaptive social protection was initially conceived as a comprehensive framework of all four social protection functions (i.e. protective, preventative, promotive/adaptive and transformative) and different timescales (short-term and long-term measures) (Davies et al. 2009; Davies et al. 2013, Arnall et al. 2010). The current discourse on ASP has been dissected into various components with various international organisations and donors emphasising specific dimensions more than others. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has developed a strong narrative on green transition (ILO 2015) while World Bank and others are focusing on the shock-responsive dimension (Bowen et al. 2020). This reinforces a compartmentalised approach to ASP and put different dimensions in competition to each other, also in terms of financing rather than seeing them as what they are: different dimensions of one ‘problem’ or solution. These different strands of debates also involve different stakeholders both at national and global level who rarely exchange; many of them with a limited knowledge on (adaptive) social protection.

At the same time, adaptive social protection continues to be discussed mainly as an operative approach applied at programme and implementation level and as a mainly national policy level concern which is often expressed in the need for improved coordination across sectors and policy areas (Costella and McCord 2023; World Bank 2023; Bouwen et al. 2020). As Heltberg et al. (2009) point out such a focus is limiting. Adaptive social protection needs to take place at many different levels from the household to the regional and global level combining programmatic operational aspects at local level with an international social justice agenda. This would amongst others also require a burden sharing of global climate financing (for example, Costella and McCord 2023; GCSPPF 2024).

Chapter 3

Discussion and Recommendations

The paper has critically reviewed the concept of adaptive social protection against the basic core functions of social protection, including protection, prevention, promotion and transformation. The analysis has shown that the global debate and donor activities around adaptive social protection has substantially expanded over the last decade, having a positive impact in supporting people to cope and adapt to climate-related risks.

At the same time, the analysis has shown that along the way the concept has been somewhat modified and reduced to a focus on mainly its protective function in order to complement disaster risk reduction and humanitarian aid efforts. This focus on shock-response is also driven by a vulnerability concept which concentrates around climate-related risks while largely ignoring the underlying, more systemic vulnerabilities related to poverty and inequality that continue to define to large extent climate vulnerabilities and risk to reinforce them if not addressed. Furthermore, the focus on adaptive social protection tends to overshadow the continuous need for basic social protection for all which, so it is argued, is even more pressing in an overall changing risk landscape due to climate change. Finally, the analysis of adaptive social protection has revealed that ASP is mainly discussed as an approach for designing and implementing programmes and policies at individual, household and community level, but rarely as an approach to frame the climate change debate overall, including national, regional and global level pointing at the need for better coordination and alignment of know-how, experiences, policies and financing mechanisms.

Based on these considerations and the review of the literature, following aspects appear to be important to incorporate in a future climate discussion:

More Preventative, Transformative and Rights-Based Adaptive Social Protection

The focus on short-term measures to complement and support humanitarian aid actors is important but risks to reduce social protection to a safety net approach. There is need to engage and invest more in long-term, preventative and transformative social protection measures. Social protection can have a critical role in incentivising people to adopt innovative measures and livelihoods that enable them to better adapt to the new climate context, including new agricultural practices or through changing their behaviour. A wide variety of social protection programmes that are linked to adaptive climate measures already exist aiming at amplifying the potential impact of adaptation

Box 2

Protecting the People and the Forest

Bolsa Verde in Brazil

The Bolsa Verde, a conditional cash transfer with a behaviour change component was implemented by the Brazilian Government between 2011 and 2018 and targeted extremely poor people in the Amazon region. Its objectives were to encourage the conservation of ecosystems, promote citizenship and improve living conditions by raising the incomes of extremely poor individuals who carry out natural resource conservation activities in rural areas. Additionally, it encouraged beneficiaries to participate in environmental, social, technical and professional training activities. Beneficiaries were to maintain the forest cover above 80 %; otherwise, all beneficiaries in the region would lose the cash payments. Training opportunities were provided on topics concerning alternative land use, sustainable production, enterprise development and marketing eco-friendly products. Opportunities for employment were created in latex extraction, artisanal fishing and handicraft production. The programme has decreased deforestation between 44 % and 53 % creating a carbon reduction valued at approximately USD 335 million between 2011 and 2015. The Bolsa Verde created behavioural change by shifting livelihood practices away from deforestation through its employment related activities, including new job opportunities through training (McCosha 2020).

measures: Public works programmes that provide cash for work to build climate smart community infrastructure or engage in natural resource management, for example the Ethiopian PSSNP programme (e.g. Knippenberg 2017); cash transfers that link the benefit to environmentally friendly behaviour, such as Bolsa Verde in Brazil (Oxfam 2019, Box 2) or so-called cash plus programmes that link cash transfer programmes to asset transfers or improved access to savings, credits or skills development and training to diversify away from the dependence on ecologic-

ally sensitive resources, including measures in the context of green transition (Box 3, Box 4). As some authors point out, it is important to carefully keep in mind the ecological trade-offs produced in this regard. If not carefully designed, such type of policies may also produce carbon emissions or may promote policies or behaviour that actually contribute to climate change, such as industrial forestry and farming (e.g., Tenzing and Conway 2023 on Ethiopia; Panda 2013).

Achieving Climate Just Through Bringing the Social Dimension Back In

Adaptive social protection is not only about climate vulnerability, but also about the social, economic and political vulnerabilities that shape it. These systemic and institutionalised vulnerabilities vary from context to context but generally affect those groups most discriminated against or excluded from society, including the

poor, children, the elderly, women, ethnic minorities or migrants. These vulnerabilities often overlap. People who are poor or less educated, or who work in the informal sector, are often women or ethnic minorities. They are most exposed to climate change and have the least resources to cope with it, including social protection. Addressing dimensions of inequality and exclusion is therefore key for achieving equitable approaches to climate change.

Basic Social Protection for All

Long-term adaptation to climate change can only work if everyone is protected. Achieving a basic social protection coverage for all is therefore important even without any green design tweak. Not everyone will be able to increase his or her resilience through taking part in economic inclusion measures. Also, it will not be possible to find climate-friendly green jobs for all. Basic social protection systems, such as suggested by the UN social protection floor initiative based on the ILO recommendation 202, which provide income guarantees throughout the life-cycle in case of unemployment, sickness or poverty are key to adaptive social protection, as they allow to flexibly address changing needs and respond to transformative shocks, including the so-called transition to a carbon-neutral economy (ILO 2020; ILO 2018). Creating a systemic approach that guarantees for all four basic dimensions of social protection (protection, prevention, promotion and transformation) will also be the best guarantee for a climate just social protection that takes account of underlying non-climate related vulnerabilities. This is in line with a human rights-based approach to social protection as opposed to a programme-based short-term measures.

While it is clear that in most low-income countries the extension of social protection coverage has been mainly achieved through the extension of social assistance, i.e. cash transfers and public works, there is a need to reconsider other mechanisms and forms of social protection, in particular social insurance models that enable workers to transition into the formal sector economy and provide risk management mechanisms against ill-health, unemployment and old-age. So far, the debate on social protection in a climate change context focuses on cash transfers and public works (for example Costella and McCord 2023). Insurance mechanisms do not only have a high potential to anticipate risk in a changing climate context. Their extension may also provide an important building block of a future sustainable financing strategy for ASP.

Box 3

Cash for Work to Adapt to Climate Change

The Indian Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act Programme

The MGNREGA Programme is the largest cash transfer programme globally providing 100 days of guaranteed wage employment per year to the rural poor (or a compensatory payment in case where job positions can't be provided). The aim is to enhance livelihood security and durable public assets. The program which currently engages 128,659,039 active workers, was not originally designed as a climate-response program, but in recent years environmental and climate-related objectives were explicitly included, including water conservation activities, drought proofing, flood control and protection works amongst others (Rural development Department 2024). 1.3 million of the 8.9 million public and private infrastructure works carried out in the context of the Indian Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act Programme, are focusing on natural capital improvements projects (MGNGRA 2019).

Box 4**Forest Conservation Program
China****Setting Off Climate Impacts through
Employment Measures**

The programme was put in place as response to massive flooding in 1998 of the major river basins of China. The aim was to control timber harvest in the natural forests and increase the total area of forest protection. A key component of the NFPP was the development of alternative employment opportunities for the 1 million forest workers affected by ban on logging in the natural forests. Around two thirds were re-trained to work in specifically created Forest Production units in charge of conserving the forests (e.g., working in resource management, silviculture including seedling production, planting, etc.). The rest received a lump-sum pay-out of three times of their annual salary. Due to the quick growth of China's economy during this period, many displaced workers were absorbed into non-forest employment, including construction, mining, and tourism or became self-employed in cultivation of non-timber forests, another aspect of the employment activation plan (Yang 2017).

Adaptive Social Protection Across All Levels

Adaptive social protection is an approach that aims at integrating various sectors and various levels, including the local, national and global level. This implies not only aligning programmes, but also stakeholders, policies, strategies and financing arrangements (GCSPF 2024).

A Comprehensive Approach to ASP

In order to be able to address social protection needs and challenges in a new climate context, also in terms of securing a sustainable financing, it will be important to bring the different strands of the debate around social protection in a climate context closer together and align them better. This will require moving away from a compartmentalisation of the debate into basic, adaptive and shock-responsive social protection towards a more com-

prehensive and systemic approach based on a thorough analysis of contextual risks and social protection needs taking into account the potential that lies in the development of systemic social protection systems rather than a piece-meal approach at different levels. Clearly, discussions on specific programmes will always require a focused discussion on for example, protective short-term measures or transformative long-term ones. However, it will be important to ensure that these discussions and the way programmes are designed reflect a comprehensive adaptive model of social protection. Otherwise, there is a real risk that different ASP measures are carried out and implemented in parallel. This may lead to situations where they may even compete with each other in terms of resources and political prioritisation. The way how ASP measures are implemented and in which order, will depend a lot on country contexts, including their social protection systems, climate risk profile and abilities and capacities to implement such approaches. In order to be able to do this in an effective way, a thorough and context-specific analysis of the potential role of social protection in responding to climate related risks will be necessary. What role may social protection play in the future in responding to climate related risks? What are target groups which will be disproportionately affected, such as informal workers, indigenous populations or workers in the agriculture or fishery sector? How can different sectors be better aligned with social protection in order to increase impacts of adaptation measures, such as the protection of the environment (Oxfam 2019; Norton et al. 2020). Costella and McCord (2023) remind us that ASP must also go beyond the triangle of SP, DRR and CCA and will require broader alliances across sectors, such as agriculture or economics and labour.

Strengthening the Exchange between CCA and DRR and SP

Adaptive social protection is an increasingly recognised concept, also among climate experts. The knowledge on social protection, including the range of instruments and their functions is however limited, in particular in relation to instruments and their functions focusing on measures that are known from short-term and shock-response, i.e. cash and public works. There is a need to increase the exchange and knowledge on social protection on part of CCA and DRR as well as humanitarian actors to be able to come up with more sophisticated and long-term solutions and also long-term policy measures, including

regulatory frameworks and financing mechanisms, also at the global and international level (see also Costella and McCord 2023).

Systematically Measuring Climate Impact

There is ample evidence that shock-responsive social protection is an important safety net in post-crisis situations. At the same time, evidence tells us that routine social protection mechanisms, such as regular cash allowances play an important role in enhancing livelihoods and allow people to apply alternative coping strategies when disaster hits, such as falling back on savings or informal social support mechanisms. Systematic evidence on the impact of adaptive social protection measures on climate outcomes and/or the climate outcomes on routine social protection mechanisms is however, limited. There is a need to systematically include questions around the impact on climate-related risks in assessments of social protection programmes and policies, while also gather more evidence on adaptive social protection measures and proposed climate-related impacts. This will also allow to better understand which mechanisms really work as opposed to others and or develop them further.

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