

## WORKING PAPER

July 2023

# **Shock-Responsive Social Protection in the Sahel: Niger, Mauritania, and Senegal**

Carol Watson

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Working Paper

# **Shock-Responsive Social Protection in the Sahel: Niger, Mauritania, and Senegal**

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## Summary

In the face of shocks that are recurrent, predictable, interrelated, and multi-annual, governments and the international community are increasingly looking to the potential of shock-responsive and adaptive social protection to address multidimensional risk in a sustainable and integrated manner. This is the case in the West African Sahel, where social protection systems are being strengthened and an array of new delivery approaches are underway to coordinate efforts and address shocks related primarily to food security arising out of climate and conflict-related shocks and displacement. Drawing on more detailed assessment of shock-responsive policy and programming in Niger, Mauritania, and Senegal, and informed by current global thinking, this paper identifies key issues, trends, and lessons learnt, and highlights emerging themes for support and engagement.

The review of country experiences highlights a number of emerging issues and priorities for moving forward with shock-responsive social protection in the West African Sahel. These include strengthening systems and expanding coverage of programmes; further aligning programmes, tools, and mechanisms for food security, humanitarian and social protection; joining up the adaptive and shock-responsive social protection and resilience agendas, and both expanding fiscal space overall for social protection in the Sahel and developing new instruments for shock-responsive social protection financing. It is also critically important to strengthen nutrition sensitivity and enhance gender equality, empowerment, and protection through shock-responsive social protection. Expanding on the design and implementation of different components of social protection beyond cash transfers in response to shocks would represent a key innovation, along with the development of conflict-sensitive models, analyses, and approaches. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation of social protection programmes and systems is vital to promote a continuous learning cycle, foster transformation in social protection, and improve service delivery. At the same time, research on relatively neglected themes at community level would further reinforce the knowledge base necessary for construction of locally appropriate mechanisms and responses.

**Keywords**

Shock-responsive social protection; food security; Sahel; Niger; Mauritania; Senegal.

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## Executive Summary

**In the face of shocks that are recurrent, predictable, interrelated, and multi-annual in nature, governments and the international community are increasingly looking to ‘new ways of working’** to address multidimensional risk in a more sustainable, integrated manner. Discussion on ways of doing so includes making social protection systems more ‘shock responsive’ and ‘adaptive’ and improving the links between humanitarian assistance and social protection. Shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) has evolved furthest in countries with strong existing social protection systems. Yet, the potential of SRSP to strengthen the delivery of social assistance has encouraged social protection stakeholders to experiment in countries with far weaker systems.

**This is the case in West Africa, where an array of new delivery approaches have been attempted under the rubric of making social protection more shock responsive and/or adaptive** and, in turn, strengthening coordination with other inherently shock-responsive domains related, in particular, to food security. Less concerted thinking has taken place around social protection responses to conflict and insecurity, though this is currently underway.

**This paper contributes to learning about SRSP in the West African Sahel.**

Drawing on more detailed assessment of policy and programming in Niger, Mauritania, and Senegal, and informed by current global thinking, it identifies key issues, trends, and lessons learnt, and highlights emerging themes for support and engagement.

**Until recently, much of the regional focus on shock response in the Sahel revolved around seasonal food insecurity** – a recurrent ‘shock’ to lives and livelihoods in the region’s arid environments. Regional and national mechanisms for surveillance, alert, and response to seasonal food insecurity have been developed and annual response plans undertaken involving both government and humanitarian actors. There has been less attention to flooding, which is also a key risk depending on the intensity of the seasonal rains. More recent responses to rising situations of conflict and displacement have largely been channelled through humanitarian response systems, with growing efforts to organise partnerships around a ‘humanitarian–development–peace’ approach.

**Social protection thrusts in the region have variously engaged with these different shock-response structures.** The regional framework for adaptive social protection in the Sahel, supported by the World Bank through a Multi-Donor Trust Fund, has set the scene for the development of national social safety net programmes. Focused in the first instance on chronically poor households, these are progressively evolving to address specific livelihood

shocks linked to seasonal drought or rains, often through pilot initiatives, though overall coverage remains low and national systems are still nascent. More recent national responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have also spurred intensive focus on the strengthening of basic social protection systems and capacities to expand in times of shock, but without a common regional approach.

**National social protection policies and strategies are in place and institutional structures have been developed in the countries of the Sahel.**

These generally: (1) place social protection within a risk management framework for both idiosyncratic and covariate shocks; (2) identify the need to strengthen the collection and analysis of data on poverty and vulnerability, including through early warning and targeting systems; (3) highlight food and nutrition security as a focus; (4) identify social transfers as an instrument of choice to reach the poorest and most vulnerable households; and (5) underscore the importance of multisectoral action and a move towards integrated and coherent social protection systems. The frameworks thus appear conducive to the development of SRSP.

**Key SRSP programmes in the country case studies revolve largely around seasonal food insecurity and less around conflict-induced insecurity.** The Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP) provides a key framework for the development and implementation of social safety net systems in the three countries. While designed essentially to address chronic poverty, the mechanisms set in place – such as social registries and payment modalities – are being gradually refined and adapted to respond to seasonal food security shocks, and pilots have been implemented in response to other types of shock. A range of multilateral and bilateral agencies are involved in the region, engaged at different levels in the policy space that sits at the nexus of the very different fields of development, humanitarian response, and peace-building.

**The three countries face significant challenges in realising the potential of SRSP.** Key issues include: low overall coverage of national safety nets; varying degrees of reliance on donor support for both safety nets and food security responses; and persistent issues of coordination and convergence between humanitarian action and social protection, though this is improving. In all three countries, the Covid-19 pandemic response has highlighted gaps in social protection systems and coverage, galvanising further action and support plans.

**This review highlights a number of emerging issues and priorities for moving forward with SRSP in the Sahel:**

- **Strengthening systems and expanding coverage of programmes** are critically important, as the ability of social protection programmes to expand in response to shocks depends in large part on the solidity and scope of the existing system.

- **Further aligning programmes, tools, and mechanisms for food security, humanitarian, and social protection assistance** is important to ensure greater convergence and promote positive synergies.
- **Strengthening nutrition-sensitive programmes and approaches** is essential to maximise the impact of SRSP on nutritional outcomes for the most vulnerable households.
- **Enhancing gender equality, empowerment, and protection** through SRSP is a relatively neglected focus that requires specific programming approaches to respond to gendered differences in risks and vulnerabilities.
- **Joining up the adaptive and SRSP and resilience agendas** could help realise the full transformative potential of social protection.
- **Expanding on the design and implementation of different components of social protection beyond cash transfers in response to shocks** would represent a key innovation, including active labour market programmes and productive inclusion as well as social care services.
- **Developing conflict-sensitive models, analyses, and approaches** is essential in the Sahel, where insecurity and conflict are contributing to vulnerability and risk, and resulting in complex and ongoing emergencies.
- **Expanding fiscal space overall for social protection in the Sahel and developing new instruments for SRSP financing** are both critical for sustainability, with more efforts needed to support systematic reform in areas of relevance to SRSP and its links with disaster risk financing (DRF).
- **Strengthening monitoring and evaluation of SRSP programmes and systems** is vital to promote a continuous learning cycle, foster transformation in social protection, and improve service delivery.
- **Conducting research on relatively neglected themes at community level** would reinforce the knowledge base for SRSP including, for example, around: questions of appropriate assistance for mobile pastoralists; support for local social solidarity mechanisms and informal social protection; analysis of gender dynamics and the potential for gender-sensitive programming; and the promotion of more participatory processes of programme design and implementation at local level.

**There are numerous broad areas for potentially engaging development partners.** They include: (1) policy and programme development; (2) promotion of partnerships and participation in partnership fora; (3) systems strengthening; and (4) research, knowledge, and evidence-generation.

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

ACF	Action Against Hunger / Action contre la Faim
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data
ACMS	Multisectoral Cash Alliance / Alliance Cash Multisectorielle (Mauritania)
AFD	French Development Agency / Agence française de développement
AfDB	African Development Bank
ASPIRE	Adaptive Social Protection – Information for Enhanced REsilience
BASIC	Better Assistance in Crises
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development / Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
CaLP	Cash Learning Partnership
CCA	Food Crisis Unit / Cellule crises alimentaires (Niger)
CFS	Safety Net Unit / Cellule des filets sociaux (Niger)
CILSS	Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel / Comité permanent inter-états de lutte contre la sécheresse dans le Sahel
CNSA	National Food Security Council / Conseil National de Sécurité Alimentaire (Senegal)
CP-SNPS	National Social Protection Strategy Steering Committee / Comité de pilotage pour la stratégie national de protection sociale (Mauritania)
CSA	Food Security Commission / Commissariat à la sécurité alimentaire (Mauritania)
CSO	civil society organisation

CT–SNPS	National Social Protection Strategy Technical Committee / Comité technique de la stratégie national de protection sociale (Mauritania)
DCAN	National Mechanism for the Prevention and Response to Food and Nutritional Crises / Dispositif national de prévention et de réponse aux crises alimentaires et nutritionnelles (Mauritania)
DGPSN	General Delegation for Social Protection and National Solidarity / Délégation générale à la protection sociale et à la solidarité nationale (Senegal)
DNPGCA	National Mechanism for the Prevention and Management of Food Crises / Dispositif national de prévention et de gestion des crises alimentaires (Niger)
DRF	disaster risk financing
DRM	disaster risk management
DRR	disaster risk reduction
EC	European Commission
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EPRI	Economic Policy and Research Institute
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK)
FCFA	West African franc
FSN	National Solidarity Fund / Fonds de solidarité nationale (Senegal)
G5 Sahel	Group of 5 Sahelian countries
GAM	global acute malnutrition
GDP	gross domestic product
GSA	Food Security Group / Groupe sécurité alimentaire (Mauritania)
HDI	Human Development Index
i3N	3N Initiative / Les nigériens nourrissent les nigériens (Niger)
IDP	internally displaced person
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification / <i>Cadre Harmonisé</i>
IRAM	Institute for Research and Application of Development Methods / Institut de Recherche et d'Applications des Méthodes de Développement
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MAEPSP	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Promotion of Productive Sectors / Ministère des affaires économiques et de la promotion des secteurs productifs (Mauritania)
MASEF	Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family / Ministère des affaires sociales, de l'enfance et de la famille (Mauritania)

MDCEST	Ministry of Community Development, Social and Territorial Equity / Ministère du développement communautaire, de l'équité sociale et territoriale (Senegal)
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
MEB	minimum expenditure basket
MRU	Mauritanian Ouguiya
MSCWG	Multi-sectoral Cash Working Group / Groupe de travail multisectoriel sur les transferts monétaires (Niger)
ND-GAIN	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (United Nations)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIT	organisation internationale du travail
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
OSA	Food Security Observatory / Observatoire à la sécurité alimentaire (Mauritania)
OSCAR	Civil Society Implication in Social Protection / La société civile s'implique dans la Protection Sociale (Senegal)
PARCA	Refugee and Host Community Support Project / Programme d'appui aux réfugiés et aux communautés hôtes (Niger)
PDES	Social and Economic Development Plan / Plan de développement économique et social (Niger)
PER	programme expenditure review
PMT	proxy means test
PNBSF	National Stipend Programme for Family Security / Programme national de bourses de sécurité familiale (Senegal)
PNGRC	National Platform for Management of Risks and Catastrophes / Plateforme nationale de gestion des risques et des catastrophes (Senegal)
PNPS	National Social Protection Policy / Politique nationale de protection sociale (Niger)
PNR	National Response Plan for Food Insecurity / Plan national de riposte à l'insécurité alimentaire (Senegal)
PNSN	National Nutritional Security Policy / Politique nationale multisectorielle de sécurité nutritionnelle (Niger)
PPPT	protection, provision, promotion, and transformation (Niger)
ProPEP	The President's Expanded Priority Programme for Economic Recovery / Programme prioritaire élargi du Président (Mauritania)
PSE	Emerging Senegal Plan / Plan Sénégal Émergent
PSMN	Multisectoral Strategic Plan for Nutrition / Plan stratégique multisectorielle de nutrition (Mauritania)

REPROSEC	Reinforcement of Civil Society for an Effective Social Protection / Renforcer la société civile pour une protection sociale efficace (Senegal)
RIM	Islamic Republic of Mauritania / République Islamique de la Mauritanie
RNU	National Unified Registry / Registre National Unique (Senegal)
RSU	Unified social registry / Registre social unique (Niger and Mauritania)
SAM	severe acute malnutrition
SAP	early warning unit / Système d'alerte précoce (Niger)
SASPP	Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program
SAVS	Village Security Food Stock / Stock alimentaire villageois de sécurité (Mauritania)
SCAPP	Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity 2016–30) / Stratégie de croissance accélérée et de prospérité partagée
SDDCI	Strategy for Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth / Stratégie de développement durable et de croissance inclusive (Niger)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SE–CNSA	Executive Secretariat of the National Council on Food Security / Secrétariat exécutif du sécurité familiale (Senegal)
SNPS	National Social Protection Strategy / Stratégie nationale de protection sociale (Mauritania and Senegal)
SNSA	National Food Security Strategy / Stratégie nationale de sécurité alimentaire (Mauritania)
SNSAR	National Strategy for Food Security and Resilience / Stratégie nationale de sécurité alimentaire et de résilience (Senegal)
SRSP	shock-responsive social protection
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIS-Sahel	United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel
WFP	World Food Programme

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In the face of shocks that are recurrent, predictable, interrelated, and multi-annual in nature, governments and the international community are increasingly looking to 'new ways of working' to address multidimensional risk in a more sustainable, integrated manner. Discussion on ways of doing so includes making social protection systems more 'shock responsive' and 'adaptive' and improving the links between humanitarian assistance and social protection. Shock-responsive social protection (SRSP), defined as 'the adaptation of social protection programmes and systems to address large scale shocks, and / or connecting more coherently with other sectors to do so' (O'Brien *et al.* 2018a: 7), has been a particular focus of policy and programming discussions in recent years.

In general, SRSP as a policy and technical agenda has evolved furthest in countries with strong existing social protection systems. Yet, notwithstanding the need for strong systems to be in place, the potential of SRSP to strengthen the delivery of social assistance has encouraged funders, international agencies, and other social protection stakeholders to experiment in countries with far weaker systems. This is the case in West Africa, where an array of new delivery arrangements and approaches have been attempted under the rubric of making social protection more shock responsive and/or adaptive and, in turn, strengthening coordination with other inherently shock-responsive domains related, in particular, to food security. There has been less concerted thinking or development around social protection responses to conflict and insecurity, though this is currently underway.

In partnership with Irish Aid, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) is conducting research across multiple regions on the African continent to evaluate the shock-responsiveness and conflict-sensitivity of social protection in a number of different regions. The current piece of work relates specifically to SRSP in Sahelian West Africa.

## 1.2 Research objectives and methodology

The research in the Sahel aimed to: (1) assess regional trends, mechanisms, and programmes related to SRSP; and (2) provide more detailed analysis and case studies of SRSP in three selected countries: Niger, Mauritania, and Senegal. Overall, the research aims to identify key issues and trends and highlight learning points for moving forward. The guiding questions for the review were as follows:



- What is known about where, when, how, and why SRSP is delivered in the West African Sahel?
- What gaps are there in the knowledge agenda that deserve further policy and programmatic attention and research in order to strengthen the shock-responsive capacity of social protection systems in the Sahel region?

The research was primarily desk-based, accompanied by a limited number of interviews with knowledgeable actors in the region and in specific countries carried out over the course of 2022. It also drew on the author's ongoing research and experience in the Sahel, and most particularly in Niger and Mauritania, where numerous engagements have fed into knowledge generation for the current report.

### 1.3 Conceptual frameworks and terminology

Social protection has long been conceptualised as a form of 'social risk management' – providing protection against both 'idiosyncratic' risks affecting individuals (relating to lifecycle vulnerabilities, disability, loss of employment and the like) as well as 'multivariate' risks (affecting entire communities or groups such as natural disasters) (Holzmann 2001). As such, social protection has 'shock response' built into its repertoire, set within a broader framework that has further been conceptualised along the key dimensions of protection, prevention, promotion, and transformation (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004). The 'adaptive social protection' framework meanwhile posits domains of interaction between three spheres: social protection; disaster risk reduction (DRR); and climate change adaptation (Davies *et al.* 2008).

Building on, and sometimes conceptually and programmatically merged within, adaptive social protection, the term 'shock-responsive social protection' has come into wider usage more recently, arising (among other things) out of growing concerns about linking humanitarian responses to multivariate shocks with broader national social protection systems. An influential approach to how this might be done posited a number of modalities, including: (1) 'design tweaks' – making small adjustments to the design of a core social protection programme; (2) 'piggybacking' – borrowing elements of an existing programme or system while delivering a separate emergency response; (3) 'vertical expansion' – topping up support to beneficiaries; (4) 'horizontal expansion' – temporarily extending support to new households; and (5) 'alignment' of social protection and humanitarian interventions, with the suggestion that a combination of these may be most appropriate (O'Brien *et al.* 2018a).

Further conceptual development suggests 'unbundling' the variety of ways and options that different actors can consider for better connecting approaches and collaborating on the ground around selected programmatic functions along the

social protection delivery chain (Seyfert and Quarterman 2021; Seyfert *et al.* 2019). More recent analytical frameworks build on this earlier work to suggest options and determine how best to link social protection and humanitarian assistance, including in situations of forced displacement (Lowe, Cherrier and Holmes 2022; OECD 2022). All of this work builds on lessons from experience and, in turn, helps guide the way forward for further development.

## 1.4 Organisation of the report

After this introduction (section 1), we present an overview of common shocks and shock-responsive mechanisms that have evolved in the Sahel region (section 2). The subsequent three sections are the country case studies: Niger (section 3), Mauritania (section 4), and Senegal (section 5). These outline the different national contexts of poverty, vulnerability and shocks; examine the national policy frameworks and institutions for shock response; and identify key programmes and partnerships at national level. Section 6 identifies key emerging issues and lessons for moving forward, while section 7 highlights potential areas for engagement by development partners. Separate country case study background documents are also available for further reference.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Available on request; please contact Carol Watson ([carol.watson94@gmail.com](mailto:carol.watson94@gmail.com)).

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## 2. The Sahel: regional overview

### Key points

The Sahel forms a vast geographic belt of territories that are affected by complex and protracted crises. Food insecurity as well as chronic and acute malnutrition are persistently high, fuelled by widespread poverty, escalating conflict and displacement, an environment threatened by land degradation, limited and unequal access to basic services, poorly integrated markets, recurrent episodes of drought and flooding, and erratic rainfall patterns linked to climate change. Since early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic fallout have placed additional strain on an already vulnerable region and precarious livelihoods (WFP Sahel Integrated Resilience Programme 2021).

Until recently, much of the regional focus on shock response in the Sahel revolved around seasonal food insecurity – a recurrent ‘shock’ to lives and livelihoods in the arid environments in the countries of the region, around which regional and national mechanisms for surveillance, alert, and response have been developed, alongside annual response plans involving both government and humanitarian actors. There has been less concerted attention to flooding, which is also a key risk depending on the intensity of the seasonal rains, though this is increasingly coming to the fore; often, responsibility for the response to flooding lies outside of the food security sector, couched rather in disaster response ministries or social affairs. More recent responses to rising situations of conflict and displacement have largely been channelled through humanitarian response systems. There are growing efforts, however, to organise partnerships around a ‘humanitarian–development–peace’ approach commonly referred to as the ‘triple nexus’, which has both global and regional application.

Social protection thrusts in the region have engaged with different degrees of intensity with these different structures. The regional framework for adaptive social protection in the Sahel, supported by the World Bank and a consortium of donors included in a Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF), has set the scene for the development of national social safety net programmes. Focused in the first instance on chronically poor households, these programmes are progressively evolving to address specific livelihood shocks linked to seasonal drought or rains, often through pilot initiatives, though overall coverage remains low and national systems are still nascent. More recent national responses to the pandemic have also spurred more intensive focus on the strengthening of basic social protection systems and capacities to expand in times of shock, but without a common regional approach.

## 2.1 Poverty, vulnerability, and shocks

The five core Sahelian countries (G5 Sahel) include Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, but Senegal is also often included as part of the Sahel. With the exception of Mauritania, the G5 are all low-income countries, with an average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of US\$790 in 2021. Thirty-one per cent of the population falls below the international poverty line. Each country sits near the bottom of both the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Human Capital Index (HCI), so that children born today in the Sahel will be only 30–38 per cent as productive as they could have been with better education and health. All five countries have long histories of conflict and display a fragile social contract, with more than 30 military coups since independence in 1960 (World Bank 2022).

Rural livelihoods in the Sahel are marked by extreme fragility in the face of recurrent shocks, underinvestment, and limited access to services. Economic diversification remains limited, and livelihoods based primarily on agriculture and agropastoralism face seasonal shortfalls and multiple threats of water stress, environmental degradation, and competition between farmers and pastoralists for scarce resources (*ibid.*). Recent household data from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Senegal indicates that the majority of the population is exposed to repeated idiosyncratic and covariate shocks, including climate and conflict-related shocks, in response to which households resort to a variety of negative coping strategies that make it difficult to escape a cycle of poverty and vulnerability. Climate and weather shocks are more concentrated among the poorest households, whereas conflict-related shocks tend to be more regionally concentrated (SASPP 2020).

Climate change is contributing to severe stress in the countries of the Sahel. The region is one of the most vulnerable in the world to more extreme droughts, floods, heatwaves, and other impacts caused by climate change. Three of the G5 countries – Chad, Niger, and Mali – rank among the top seven countries most vulnerable to climate change (ND-GAIN n.d.). Already, communities across the region are being threatened by frequent – and often more severe – droughts and floods. Since 2000, an average of 248,000 people per year<sup>2</sup> have been affected by floods that have damaged homes, roads, and other infrastructure and assets, and disrupted services. Meanwhile, droughts harmed more than 20 million people between 2016 and 2020 because of food insecurity or economic hardship. Repeated droughts are driving rural migration, but cities can offer only limited economic opportunities to rural migrants (World Bank 2022).

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<sup>2</sup> See **EM-DAT, the International Disaster Database**, which has been inventorying hazards and disasters worldwide since 1988.

Food and nutritional insecurity are constant threats and are rising at unprecedented levels. The Sahel and West Africa region is currently facing a third consecutive year of food and nutrition crisis, affecting between 30 million and 40 million people in 2022 (FSNWG 2022). The prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM) and the absolute number of stunted children have been growing since 2018, with stunting rates particularly high in the Sahelian countries, where almost one in three children under the age of five is stunted (low height-for-age) and the cost of healthy diets, which is critical for food security and nutrition, exceeds the poverty line and average food expenditures (WFP 2022b; UNICEF *et al.* 2021). During food crises, women and children are most vulnerable to malnutrition and hunger and associated rights violations (FSNWG 2022).

The Africa Gender Index finds social, economic, and political gender equality and empowerment gaps to be highest in the Sahelian region, where countries score poorly on indicators linked to women's health and education, nutritional status and access to food, gender-based violence, economic opportunities and productive inclusion, as well as political representation and leadership. Women and girls in the region are also found to be particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change (AfDB and UNECA 2020).

Armed conflict and instability in the central Sahel is persistent, expanding, and escalating. Over the past four years, insecurity has become the main driver of food insecurity (FSNWG 2022). Armed conflict in the region has forced more than 2.5 million people to flee their homes over the past decade. Internal displacement has increased tenfold since 2013, from 217,000 to 2.1 million by late 2021. The number of refugees in the Central Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger now stands at 410,000, with an additional 85,000 Malian refugees in Mauritania. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and humanitarian partners face mounting challenges to access people in need and deliver lifesaving assistance and protection. Humanitarian personnel continue to face road attacks, ambushes, and carjacking (UNHCR 2022d). In 2022, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED 2022) recorded some of the deadliest attacks on civilians since the beginning of the crisis.

The challenges in the Sahel region are thus now both structural and cross-cutting. Crises emerge from the combination of different triggering cyclical factors (climatic hazards, variability of cereal prices, restriction of cross-border trade flows, pressure on natural resources, and armed conflicts) in a context of significant structural constraints (poverty and inequality, fragile ecosystems, desertification, demographic pressure, etc.) and production constraints (limited access to land and no guarantee of land property rights, low access to inputs and agricultural services, poor transport and communications infrastructure). Food crises are occurring increasingly close together; they can no longer be

perceived as ‘exceptions’ calling for emergency responses but must now be seen as the new ‘order’, calling for long-term intervention strategies (O’Brien *et al.* 2017).

## 2.2 Regional shock-response mechanisms and partnership platforms

A significant feature of the Sahel is the set of regionwide institutions, strategies, and initiatives that aim to address recurrent food and nutritional crises. The Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) has set up a regional mechanism for the prevention and management of food crises (*Prévention et gestion des crises alimentaires*, PREGEC), conceived as a system for gathering and disseminating information on food security through rapid assessments, agricultural surveys, the analysis of satellite data, and market analysis (*ibid.*). The *Cadre Harmonisé* has been developed as a tool for analysing the vulnerability of populations to food and nutrition insecurity, drawing on various information sources and a common methodology to identify the numbers and geographic areas of food-insecure people, with efforts over the years to harmonise tools and approaches with Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) partners (*Cadre Harmonisé* n.d.).<sup>3</sup> The Food Security Prevention Network brings together more than 100 stakeholders at national, regional, and international levels to promote dialogue and coordination, build a coherent and shared understanding of the food and nutrition situation, and nurture decision-making (SWAC and OECD 2020).

The African Risk Capacity (ARC Ltd) and ARC Replica are insurance facilities designed to improve responses to climate-related food security emergencies. Though not restricted to the Sahel, the six Sahelian countries are members of ARC Ltd, which is a specialised agency of the African Union and includes capital contributors who provide premium subsidies. ‘ARC Replica’ is an insurance product offered by ARC Ltd to humanitarian partners as an innovative approach to expand climate risk insurance coverage to more people and improve the effectiveness of emergency humanitarian response. Partners can match the insurance coverage of ARC members by purchasing a ‘replica policy’. ARC member countries can then access additional protection through the matching policies acquired by humanitarian agencies. Replica thus enables ARC to expand its portfolio to better meet the disaster financing requirements of its member states by cost-effectively capitalising on ARC’s government-led risk management system and using international resources to potentially double the coverage of climate risk insurance (WFP 2018a).

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<sup>3</sup> For details, see also the *Cadre Harmonisé* website.

Broader cooperation frameworks and platforms have been developed to strengthen partnership responses to overlapping crises within the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. The ‘triple nexus’ approach was formulated in 2019 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development–Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) as a means of fostering greater coherence among actors working to strengthen resilience in fragile contexts and to address the root causes of humanitarian challenges. Backed in particular by the European Union (EU) and currently also including the United Nations (UN) system, it is seen as a means of helping to steer the ‘paradigm shift’ and systemwide changes called for at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 (OECD 2022). The United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), and the accompanying UN Sahel Support Plan, are formulated around three broad areas of support for governance, resilience, and security, and include a focus on social protection (O’Brien *et al.* 2017). The G5 Sahel is an institutional framework for coordination of regional cooperation in development policies and security matters (Cooke, Toucas and Heger 2017), while the Sahel Alliance – launched at the initiative of Germany, France, and the EU – aims to provide concrete and collective responses to the intersecting challenges facing G5 Sahel countries. The Sahel Alliance now brings together most of the institutional actors in international cooperation working in the Sahel and, in 2021, created the G5 Sahel Facility, a new multi-donor financial instrument that allows for rapid and flexible action in crisis situations (Sahel Alliance 2022a).

## 2.3 Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program

The Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP) was launched in 2014 to support the design and implementation of adaptive social protection programmes and systems in the six Sahelian countries (see Box 2.1). These programmes aim to help poor and vulnerable households become more resilient to the effects of climate change. During its first phase (2014–19), the SASPP supported the design and introduction of new, foundational social protection systems. As of 2019, nearly 2 million people across the Sahel benefited directly from innovations and programmes with SASPP support. The programme is now in its second phase (2020–25), with a focus on systematically strengthening adaptive social protection systems to enhance household resilience and expand the reach of shock-response cash transfer programmes, through a mix of (cross-)country innovation and knowledge work, and investments in design and piloting innovations in the six countries. SASPP is funded by an MDTF managed by the World Bank and supported by donor contributions from the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the French Development Agency (Agence française de développement, AFD), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche

Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, BMZ), and the Danish government, which joined the programme in 2020.<sup>4</sup>

## Box 2.1 The Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP)

The SASPP aims to support countries in the Sahel to strengthen their adaptive social protection systems across four 'building blocks' of adaptive social protection: (1) programmes and delivery systems; (2) data and information; (3) finance; and (4) institutional arrangements and partnerships supporting government leadership. To this end, SASPP provides technical assistance and capacity building, and finances pilot interventions covering the following elements:

- Adaptive safety net programmes that help poor households meet basic needs and diversify their livelihoods, and can be easily scaled up to respond to climate-related and other types of shocks.
- Complementary 'productive inclusion' interventions like community savings and loan groups or life skills and entrepreneurship training for beneficiaries to reinforce their adaptive capabilities.
- Investments in delivery systems (unique IDs, social registries, digital payments) as critical foundations for social safety nets to reach affected people.
- Linkages to early warning and climate information systems to design effective emergency response and adaptation programmes.
- Design of proactive (risk) financing mechanisms to complement and support social protections systems.
- Design and development of targeting mechanisms to identify ex-ante those most vulnerable to natural hazards and climate change-related risks, and quickly scale up a programme in case of necessity.
- Monitoring systems to improve transparency, governance, and accountability.

While the principal focus of the SASPP is climate shocks, safety net systems in the Sahel were leveraged in 2020 for immediate relief following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Countries expanded coverage of shock-response cash transfers to households affected by the pandemic. The SASPP supported this short-term relief effort through adaptive social protection systems, thus strengthening these systems and reinforcing their capacity to respond to future

<sup>4</sup> For details, see the World Bank website, 'Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program'.



climate shocks. In 2021, these programmes reached nearly 1.3 million households.

Overall, since the inception of the SASPP in 2014 and up until 2022, the MDTF has allocated US\$165.45m to investment projects in the six countries as part of International Development Association (IDA) engagement. At the regional level, SASPP has allocated around US\$6.5m to the analytical work and knowledge-exchange agenda. And at country level, about US\$9.4m has been allocated to country-specific technical assistance during Phase 2.

Sources: World Bank website, '[Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program](#)'; Sahel Alliance (2022b); SASPP (2022a).

The UK-funded ASPIRE (Adaptive Social Protection – Information for Enhanced REsilience) project (2017–20)<sup>5</sup> provided technical support to the SASPP by demonstrating the use of climate forecasts in adaptive social protection and promoting dialogue between climate and social protection stakeholders. Along with significant progress in (for example) national capacity development for seasonal forecasting, the ASPIRE project encountered a number of challenges. These include: the variable availability and quality of climate information to inform adaptive social protection; difficulties in bridging the priorities and activities of different stakeholder organisations; lack of sustained funding and investment in climate and livelihoods research, data, and services; and limited understanding on the part of social protection stakeholders of climate science and forecast information (Daron *et al.* 2021). Such challenges point to broader issues around the difficulties of linking different sectoral domains and competencies within integrated approaches to shock response.

An extensive regional research agenda has been developed around the SASPP. The regional analytical and knowledge-exchange programme focuses on five critical areas: (1) analysing the poverty impacts of climate and other shocks; (2) designing climate shock-responsive adaptive social protection programmes and delivery systems; (3) providing evidence of productive inclusion and women's empowerment programmes; (4) improving the delivery of social protection within the contexts of fragility and forced displacement; and (5) understanding how adaptive social protection programmes can enhance investments in human capital and protect households from divestments in the face of an increased frequency and severity of natural shocks due to climate change (SASPP 2022a). Box 2.2 provides key findings from some of the analytical work conducted to date.

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<sup>5</sup> See the Met Office website for details of the [ASPIRE project](#).

## Box 2.2 Selected findings from key SASPP research and analytical work

### **Pillar 1: Poverty, vulnerability, and resilience**

- Drought is the most prevalent shock in the Sahel, with 29 per cent of the population reporting being adversely affected by drought over the past three years. Droughts increase liquidity constraints faced by smallholder farmers and exacerbate price seasonality.

### **Pillar 2: Climate shock-responsive delivery systems**

- Emerging lessons on disaster risk financing (DRF) include: the need for governments to focus on building reliable safety nets before turning to DRF; the importance of sequencing with the initial focus on more frequent, lower severity shocks rather than extreme ones; the need for DRF strategies to account for continued external humanitarian assistance; and the consideration that sectoral DRF strategies may be a more suitable starting point for national DRF agendas than comprehensive national strategies.

### **Pillar 3: Productive inclusion and women's empowerment**

- Productive inclusion measures added to regular cash transfer programmes are highly effective in raising consumption and food security. They also increase psychological and social wellbeing as broader dimensions of women's empowerment and are highly cost-effective, generating welfare impacts much larger than programme costs, particularly when including psychosocial components (Niger).
- Productive inclusion measures also have positive spillover effects on non-beneficiary households in targeted communities, pointing to positive effects on the local economy (Chad).
- The productive inclusion package also showed strong impacts on household resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis (Senegal).

### **Pillar 4: Fragility and forced displacement**

- A stronger sense of urgency is needed to achieve productive convergence between humanitarian assistance and national adaptive social protection systems; donors could usefully nudge this forward.
- Reducing overhead costs is seen as an important added-value of convergence either by leveraging government social protection delivery systems, or by negotiating better delivery terms and conditions (e.g. with financial service providers), or by applying a more united approach to assessments.

- Common tools can be a way of achieving efficiencies, but the investment in their set-up is often a long-term endeavour.
- Documenting experiences and decision-making around harmonising approaches contributes to better understanding of the opportunities and barriers.

#### **Pillar 5: Adaptive social protection and human capital**

- Behavioural change interventions added to an existing cash transfer programme improved parenting practices around nutrition, health, stimulation, and child protection, and led to moderate gains in children's socio-emotional development (Niger).

Source: SASPP (2022a).

An analysis of targeting approaches across six countries in the Sahel provides lessons on the identification of social safety net beneficiaries in ultra-poor settings. Two of the key findings are that higher budgets for safety nets are needed to significantly reduce poverty, and that expanding social protection coverage – currently very low in the region, at less than 5 per cent of the eligible population – is far more important than fine-tuning targeting methods. Large informal economies mean that information on household welfare is not readily available. Recurrent shocks also mean that even if measured, household welfare is constantly changing, making data collection efforts quickly outdated. A comparison of approaches based on proxy means test (PMT) and community-based targeting (CBT) found that when it comes to identifying food-insecure households, there is no clear method that dominates; once geographical targeting is applied, most PMT and CBT schemes perform no better than a random allocation of benefits. Moreover, there is mixed and limited evidence on social cohesion and fairness perceptions of targeting methods; this implies that whatever method is selected should be adequately communicated and accompanied by robust grievance mechanisms (Schnitzer, Della Guardia and Lake 2022).

An adaptive social protection stress test has been developed as an innovative assessment instrument for critical social protection systems across the six Sahel countries (World Bank 2021a). The results of the stress tests showed that all six countries had made progress in establishing key building blocks of social protection systems and embedding shock-responsive functions (around programme and delivery systems, data and information, finance, and institutional arrangements and partnerships). The response to the Covid-19 pandemic triggered additional buy-in in strong shock-responsive systems that can build on regular programmes and existing systems (social registries, etc.). The stress test also revealed, however, that different levels of progress have been made across the four building blocks and six countries, and identified

areas for additional work. Key findings included the following: (1) regular social safety net programmes are growing, but their coverage remains low in some countries; (2) all countries have social registries (or foundations of social registries), which are essential for regular safety net programmes but might not be sufficiently dynamic for shock response; (3) finance remains the least developed building block across the region; and (4) buy-in for adaptive social protection has grown since the pandemic but has not necessarily translated fully into progress on the institutional, legislative, or policy fronts (SASPP 2022a). Of the three countries included as case studies in this paper, Niger falls within the ‘nascent’ category of shock-responsive systems-building, while Mauritania and Senegal are categorised as further along, with ‘emerging’ systems.

A series of workshops hosted by BMZ in 2021 drew together key partners and stakeholders to identify ways of strengthening collaboration around nationally led adaptive social protection systems in the Sahel. Focusing on the four ‘building blocks’, the following priorities emerged: (1) **programmes and delivery systems**, with further efforts needed to enable local-level governance structures to fulfil their crucial roles for adaptive social protection delivery, to harmonise analysis of multidimensional vulnerability and poverty, and to draw in a wider set of stakeholders in discussions and implementation; (2) **data and information**, as adaptive social registries face key conceptual and operational challenges that require further collaborative work around institutionalisation, interoperability, updating, and scaling up; (3) **finance**, specifically that fiscal space for social protection overall is limited in the Sahel, and there is an urgent need to build the case for adaptive social protection financing with governments, linking into current processes such as the revision of social protection policies and legislation; and (4) **institutional arrangements and partnerships**, as although coordination and coherence at the technical and operational levels are increasing, national governments, policies, and processes are not keeping pace and need further support; more work is also needed to enhance partner coordination and fragmentation of approaches (BMZ *et al.* 2021).

### 3. Niger country case study

#### Key points

Niger consistently ranks at the bottom of the Human Development Index. The country is marked by widespread and multidimensional poverty, fragile livelihoods, high levels of cyclical and recurrent food and nutritional insecurity, and limited basic social service provision. Growing conflict, insecurity, and displacement caused by the rise of violent extremist groups in the region have resulted in a complex emergency. The Covid-19 pandemic has also contributed to increased poverty and vulnerability.

An overarching policy framework provides guidance for national development, and the institutional food security architecture in Niger is comparatively well developed, while the National Nutrition Security Policy takes a holistic approach to nutrition promotion. The National Social Protection Policy (2011) includes a strategic focus on food and nutritional insecurity and is currently being updated, while a law of 2018 establishes social protection as a right. However, government responsibility for the social protection function is splintered among different institutions and, to date, there is only an embryonic system in place. The focus of humanitarian assistance has expanded in recent years from seasonal food insecurity to conflict and displacement, and a newly developed Ministry for Humanitarian Action has been established, along with a high-level committee on the humanitarian–development nexus.

The national safety nets programme has been in operation since 2011, in its current form as an adaptive social safety net implemented as part of the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program. Safety net implementation has been accompanied by considerable investment in systems-building and a number of pilot shock-responsive actions have been implemented through the programme, which aims to scale up and strengthen such responses in the future. The safety net was activated and systems strengthened as part of the government's Covid-19 response, supported by partners. Cash transfers have been used as a modality of assistance in humanitarian response since 2017, with a multisectoral cash working group in place. The government's annual national support plan provides both cash and in-kind assistance for households that are chronically and seasonally food insecure, identified through the *Cadre Harmonisé*. Niger is a member of ARC and has activated insurance payouts in previous years. Partner coordination around both food security and social protection is being enhanced.

### 3.1 Poverty, vulnerability, and shocks

Niger has consistently ranked at the bottom of the Human Development Index, at position 189 out of 189 over the past five years and among the bottom five countries at least since 2005.<sup>6</sup> The country is marked by chronic poverty (around 41 per cent of the population were living below the poverty line in 2018), high levels of food insecurity (between 10 per cent and 15 per cent of the population are chronically food insecure), limited reach of quality basic social services and social protection, and growing conflict, insecurity, and displacement caused by the rise of violent extremist groups in the region (World Bank 2021b). As a combined result, an increasing number of people in Niger are affected by multiple and complex shocks coming together to create a complex emergency.

Close to 80 per cent of the population rely on pastoralism and/or agriculture for their livelihood, often in combination with labour migration, artisanal mining, or trade. With two-thirds of the territory desert, and most of the rest in the arid Sahelian zone, environmental fluctuations and acute shocks are common. Major Sahelian droughts (in 2009–10 and 2012), floods (in 2010, 2012–13 and 2019–20), and locust invasions (in 2012 and 2017) are among recent events that had devastating consequences in terms of deepening poverty, malnutrition, and loss of property, particularly in rural areas (Mohamed *et al.* 2021). Recurrent fluctuations in rainfall lead to annual lean seasons, creating serious food deficits for vulnerable populations and contributing to high rates of malnutrition. Recurrent seasonal production deficits are exacerbated by the negative effects of climate change, bringing elevated risk of extreme droughts, heatwaves, and floods. Food insecurity has been exacerbated by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and response (République du Niger DNP-GCA 2020).

Niger is currently being affected by the worst food security crisis of this decade. Between 3.6 million and 4.4 million people were projected to be food insecure in the lean season of 2022 and in need of humanitarian assistance. Seasonal movements of herds have been disrupted due to shortages of food and fodder as well as conditions of security, bringing an over-concentration of herds in agricultural zones and increasing clashes between farmers and herders. Grain production has declined by 39 per cent as a combined result of failure of rains and closure of borders due to the pandemic and insecurity, leading to inflation of over 40 per cent on the prices of some staples (IFRC 2022). Results of the latest Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART) nutritional survey reveal GAM rates of 12.5 per cent and chronic malnutrition of 43.5 per cent among children under the age of five. These rates are above the World Health Organization (WHO) emergency threshold (République du Niger INS 2021).

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<sup>6</sup> 'Niger – Human Development Index', [Country Economy website](#).

Over the past ten years, cross-border violence from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria has displaced many people, and ruined assets and livelihood activities. Of the estimated population of 22 million (as at 2021), about 280,000 are in high-intensity conflict zones, 3.5 million in medium-intensity conflict zones, and 6.2 million in zones at risk of conflict (World Bank 2021b). In May 2022, Niger was hosting 291,629 refugees and asylum seekers (primarily from Nigeria and Mali, but also Burkina Faso), with an additional 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) or Nigerien returnees fleeing conflict in border countries (UNHCR 2022c). Regions hardest hit lie in the border zones. Conflict-induced insecurity and displacement are exacerbating existing chronic food and nutritional insecurity, including through disruption of fragile livelihoods and increased competition over access to and use of land.

## 3.2 Policy and institutional frameworks

The Strategy for Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth (SDDCI) in Niger 2035 provides the overarching policy framework for national development, with its first plan for implementation, the Social and Economic Development Plan (PDES) 2017–21, covering a broad spectrum of development goals, including social protection. The PDES aimed to strengthen access of vulnerable groups to social services with a focus on children, integrating youth, and improving humanitarian support to aid recovery from shocks. It works to strengthen the social protection floor through incentives for job creation, promoting labour standards, economic empowerment, and minimum income security for poor households, and an institutional framework for implementation (République du Niger Ministère du Plan 2017). The second five-year plan (PDES 2022–26) adopted in June 2022, is articulated around three strategic pillars: (1) development of human capital, inclusion, and solidarity; (2) consolidation of governance, peace, and security; and (3) structural transformation of the economy (FAAPA 2023).

With the National Social Protection Policy (PNPS) adopted in 2011 currently undergoing review for update, and a social protection law established in 2018, Niger has made progress in the development of social protection mechanisms and approaches, but to date, there is limited coverage and only an embryonic system in place. Stakeholders observe that part of the problem is that current government responsibility for the social protection function is splintered among different institutions, including: the Ministry of Employment, Work and Social Protection; the Ministry of Public Health, Population, and Social Affairs; the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and Disaster Management; and the Social Safety Net Unit (CFS), established in 2017 within the National Mechanism for the Prevention and Management of Food Crises (DNP-GCA).

The PNPS sought to join universal human rights and the values of solidarity and mutual aid on which informal social protection is based in Niger, setting

out protection, provision, promotion, and transformation (PPPT) as the overarching conceptual framework. The strategic priority areas span: (1) food security and nutrition; (2) social security and work/employment; (3) basic social services; (4) programming targeted at vulnerable groups; and (5) establishing a legislative and regulatory framework for social protection. The strategy points to exposure to shocks and food insecurity as key drivers of vulnerability and to social safety net programmes involving cash transfers as appropriate social protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups, particularly households susceptible to agropastoral risks and crises (République du Niger 2011).

The institutional food security architecture in Niger is comparatively well developed, with the DNP-GCA responsible for overseeing activities through its Early Warning Unit (SAP) and Food Crisis Unit (CCA). This includes the annual identification of geographic zones facing food insecurity through the Sahel-wide mechanism known as the *Cadre Harmonisé*, resulting in an annual response plan for assistance in the form of food distribution, subsidised sales of grains and animal feed, cash-for-work activities for land rehabilitation, and local purchase from small producers for replenishment of the national security stock (IRAM and COWI 2019). The EU has been the lead agency for the group of 14 donors and partners supporting the DNP-GCA in Niger, which stakeholders observe has now largely taken on leadership for the response. WFP is a key actor in the national food security support plan, which is included in the first strategic outcome of its country plan (WFP 2019a). The Food Security Cluster is co-chaired by WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The National Nutrition Security Policy (PNSN 2016–25) and its action plan aim to eliminate malnutrition through a holistic approach that combines nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. The National School Feeding Strategy and the 2016 National Strategy for Purchases from Smallholder Farmers guide home-grown school-feeding activities, through which school feeding serves as a vehicle for stimulating the local economy and improving children's food security and nutrition status while contributing to education (WFP 2019a).

From the development or promotive side, an important overarching platform for actions oriented around food security is the Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens (i3N) initiative, launched in 2012, coordinated by a High Commissioner (HC3N) working directly under the presidency. The i3N is a large-scale, cross-sectoral initiative that increases livestock, agricultural, and forest productivity, while strengthening the resilience of farmers and herders to climate change and food insecurity. The initiative focuses on sustainable agricultural practices, irrigation and erosion control measures, afforestation, and income generation, as well as social integration of the most vulnerable people, including women. It has been



implemented to date through two successive strategies (2012–15 and 2016–21).<sup>7</sup>

The focus of humanitarian assistance has expanded in recent years. Since the rise of conflict leading to massive displacement and a humanitarian emergency in affected zones, stakeholders note that much of the humanitarian funding and many of the humanitarian actors – including European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that used to work on seasonal food insecurity issues (including through cash transfers) – have turned their attention to relief and rehabilitation work in conflict-affected areas. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) functions as a coordinating body for cluster activities in these areas, with annual humanitarian needs assessments (HNAs) and humanitarian response plans (HRPs) guiding interventions. A newly developed Ministry for Humanitarian Action has been established, which will lead an approach to stabilisation in supporting the return of displaced populations to their home communities in Diffa. However, stakeholders suggest there may be some questions around its capacity and effectiveness as a national coordinating body, as well as overlaps in mandate with other entities.

The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2022 classifies 15 per cent of Niger's population (3.7 million people) as in need of humanitarian assistance, with 2.3 million in need of urgent assistance, and an estimated US\$552.6m required to cover these needs. Needs are highest in the regions affected by conflict-induced displacement (OCHA 2022). A rapid response mechanism, first established in Niger in 2015, has been activated for the four most affected regions – Diffa, Tillabéri, Tahoua, and Maradi – in order to facilitate timely response to the most urgent needs for populations who have been displaced by conflicts, natural catastrophes, or epidemics. Composed of eight agencies, it operates under the coordination of the Ministry of Humanitarian Action, with support from OCHA, WFP and UNICEF, as technical lead (OCHA 2021).

A High Level Tripartite Committee on the Humanitarian–Development Nexus was established under the Prime Minister in 2018, along with a Technical Committee coordinated by the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and the HC3N, with a road map for implementation adopted in 2019, and an action plan in place for the period 2021–31 (République du Niger CTTNUD 2021). The government has also established a strategy for the security and development of Sahelo-Saharan zones, with an executive secretariat to oversee activities (World Bank 2018; SDS Sahel Niger 2013). A tripartite collaboration has also been developed between the Government of Niger, the World Bank, and UNHCR for integrated

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<sup>7</sup> See 'Le Cadre Stratégique', [HC3N website](#).

support for refugees and host communities (UNHCR 2021), an approach that stakeholders report is also being supported by the EU.

Key challenges faced in the humanitarian response overall include ever-present problems of coordination, funding gaps, timely reporting, and difficulties of access – primarily due to insecurity and the states of emergency in place in certain areas, but also to logistical challenges encountered in the rainy season (OCHA 2021).

### 3.3 Programmes and partnerships

The social protection programme expenditure review (PER) for 2008–17 identified the National Safety Nets Programme along with WFP's seasonal transfers and asset-creation activities as the two main programmes in Niger, benefiting (in 2017) 6.5 per cent of the population living below the poverty line and 10.9 per cent living in chronic poverty (Anon n.d.). Shock-responsive pilots have been implemented and social protection responses to the pandemic have been taken as an opportunity to strengthen the overall system, including through development of a unified social registry. Yet, some key stakeholders suggest that Niger is falling far behind other countries in the region in establishing a truly adaptive or shock-responsive social protection system, also observing that these notions are not widely understood.

With World Bank support, the National Safety Nets Programme has been in operation since 2011, currently as an adaptive social safety net implemented as part of the MDTF-supported SASPP. The programme combines cash transfers with both human capital development and productive inclusion measures as well as a cash-for-work component focused on climate resilience. By 2019, the safety net programme covered 95 communes (36 per cent of all the communes in Niger) and reached approximately 140,000 households, providing an adaptive cash transfer for resilience. An additional 50,000 beneficiaries were involved in the cash-for-work programme. Currently, the Programme Implementation Unit operates under the CFS within the DNP-GCA, acting as its implementation arm, with staff at national, regional, and commune levels (World Bank 2021b).

Safety net implementation has been accompanied by considerable investment in systems-building, including payment platforms, grievance mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation and a social registry. Recent progress in development of the Unified Social Registry (Registre social unique, RSU) has included significant expansion of the database (household data collected on almost 250,000 households in 2020); refinement of the targeting tool to enable expansion of the programme in urban areas not yet reached by the safety net project; and enrolment of 399,000 households in the pandemic short-term response (World Bank 2021b).

A number of pilot shock-responsive actions have been implemented through the National Safety Nets Programme. These include in response to: floods in Tahoua (2012–13); the Boko Haram security crisis in Diffa (2016–17);<sup>8</sup> livestock losses in Agadez (2017); and, more recently, responding to floods in four regions of the country (2020).<sup>9</sup> The programme has also topped up transfers to households with adolescent girls attending primary and secondary school (Anon n.d.; World Bank 2021b). Plans are underway for a new programme for long-term preparation / response to drought based on early warning indicators that will be used to identify communes likely to suffer from seasonal food shortages, which will then benefit from regular cash transfers for a full year (Brunelin 2021). The programme was activated for the first time in 2022, with a total of 15,200 drought-affected households receiving monthly emergency cash transfers (SASPP 2022a).

In its second phase, the current National Safety Nets Programme (2021–26) aims to scale up existing safety nets to strengthen resilience of poor and vulnerable households to climate and other shocks, including conflict-related shocks and the Covid-19 pandemic, while continuing to strengthen the capacity of the adaptive safety net system to respond to covariate shocks, and to enhance the welfare and resilience of the poorest and most vulnerable populations. The programme includes technical assistance, institutional capacity-building support for an early warning system anchored in the national food security mechanism (DNP-GCA) to strengthen its capacity to monitor, geo-map, coordinate and plan safety net interventions, as well as to collect, store and manage data, improve data collection protocols and methodologies, and analyse early warning data, especially related to climate events, which can then be used by the CFS to launch timely shock-response interventions. Building on the experience of the drought response programme, the safety nets programme will work on the development of a rapid-onset, shock-response mechanism, which will be sequenced and will initially focus on floods, as floods are the second most frequent climate-related shock (after drought) and have had severe impacts in 2020. A shock-response programme specialist will be hired in the Programme Implementation Unit to support the implementation of the shock-response programmes (World Bank 2021b).

In 2020, the World Bank team began conversations with the Nigerien government on the importance of disaster risk financing (DRF) in ensuring timely

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<sup>8</sup> The project delivered cash transfers over a 12-month period to 2,500 households in Diffa and Tahoua, including host communities, IDPs, and Nigeriens returning from insecure parts of Nigeria (World Bank 2021a).

<sup>9</sup> In September 2020, Niger faced devastating floods that killed at least 65 people and affected about 490,000 people who endured severe damage and destruction as a result. Responding to a request by the Government of Niger, the Adaptive Safety Net Project 2 is providing emergency support to 13,500 households impacted by floods in four regions (Dosso, Maradi, Niamey, and Tillabéri) (World Bank 2021a).

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response to shocks, and the key steps toward development of a DRF framework for shock response. Technical assistance has been provided to start preparing a DRF diagnostic, analysing the financing landscape for disaster response in Niger. The diagnostic seeks to improve understanding of how response activities to natural disasters, especially droughts, are financed by analysing the historical fiscal impact on government and donor budgets, including an analysis of contingent liabilities. It will also take stock of available financing instruments for disaster response and, pending data availability, evaluate their performance. Finally, the diagnostic will look to explore financing options that would enable expansion of core social protection programmes and scale-up of interventions in case of shocks (SASPP 2020).

A concurrent project of the World Bank on refugees and host communities (PARCA), implemented with UNHCR, addresses issues of displacement, but is not linked to the broader social protection agenda or safety net system, and implementation has been marked by significant delays (World Bank 2021c).

An ECHO-funded technical assistance facility, managed by WFP, explored how social protection systems can be strengthened in fragile and forced displacement contexts focusing, in Niger, on the feasibility of institutionalising a cash response for acute/seasonal food security crises as an alternative or complement to food distributions, with a roadmap developed for the operationalisation process and capacity-building needs (WFP 2019b). The study found that: (1) cash could be a feasible and appropriate crisis response if current gaps can be addressed; (2) early warning systems designed for food and nutritional insecurity can support social protection targeting; and (3) linkages between predictable social protection and food security response are conceptually appropriate but require care for effective implementation, with particular attention to targeting, strengthening, and expanded use of the unified social registry, and coordination (*ibid.*).

Cash transfers have been used as a modality of assistance in humanitarian response since 2017 (earlier than that for seasonal food security), with 29 organisations and agencies providing cash transfers in 2020 for multi-purpose use, including food security, education, livelihoods, protection, and shelter. A needs assessment in 2020 indicated that community preferences for assistance in cash or kind vary by locality and sector, with monetary assistance increasingly preferred as displacement becomes more protracted – that is, beyond the emergency response. The Multi-Sectoral Cash Working Group has defined a minimum expenditure basket; UN agencies involved in cash assistance (WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, and UNICEF) are working towards a common targeting approach; and in 2021, the humanitarian response plan aimed to create stronger linkages between humanitarian cash transfers and the social protection system. The Food Security Cluster strategy includes cash or food assistance plus

distribution of productive inputs and other livelihood support to strengthen resilience (reported on through the rapid response mechanism), making a link between emergency relief and recovery, and seeking to support construction and implementation of an adaptive social protection system (OCHA 2021). The Multi-Sectoral Cash Working Group continues to work to strengthen and harmonise approaches: among priorities for 2022 were: further operationalisation of the minimum expenditure basket (MEB); capacity building; and enhanced information-sharing among stakeholders. The group also aims to strengthen interactions with the CFS through the Interdisciplinary Social Safety Nets Working Group to discuss better coordination between regular social safety nets and humanitarian transfers (OCHA 2022).

The government's annual National Support Plan provides for food assistance for households that are both chronically and seasonally food insecure. Geographic targeting is by IPC level of food insecurity as determined by the *Cadre Harmonisé* combined – as relevant – with crisis/disaster information and/or data on malnutrition. Activities are staggered throughout the year, by type of support (lean season or non-lean season, crisis response, etc.). Assistance modalities include unconditional transfers in cash and in kind, cash/food for work or cash/food for assets (labour-intensive public works), and subsidised food sales as well as blanket feeding for the prevention of malnutrition among children aged 6–23 months and emergency school feeding. There is also distribution of different types of agropastoral inputs (improved seeds, fodder, plant, and animal health products) to support livelihood security. Regular cash transfers and accompanying measures provided through the social safety net programme are reflected in the plan, as is support for IDPs, refugees, and returnees in zones of crisis, and treatment of malnutrition; this reflects efforts to bring together in one plan the different elements of shock response in Niger. Other structural activities in the National Support Plan include maintaining security food stocks, strengthening early warning systems, and mobilising resources. The 2022 National Support Plan evokes the humanitarian–development–peace nexus in calling for a stronger articulation between pluri-annual social safety nets and lean season responses through (among other things) enhanced development and utilisation of the unified social registry (République du Niger DNP-GCA 2022).

The United Nations system is a prominent actor in the humanitarian assistance domain, situating itself squarely within the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and working towards focusing efforts on vulnerable populations in 'zones of convergence' where at least 50 per cent of the planned budget for the Framework of Cooperation 2023–27 will be invested and joint programmes will be prepared. The priority geographic areas for action are selected on the basis of a joint assessment of a number of vulnerability indicators. They include those with: (1) high levels of insecurity and inter-communal conflict; (2) high vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters; (3) low basic social service

coverage; (4) limited state presence (administrative, investment); (5) scarcity of economic opportunities (particularly for women, youth, and vulnerable people); (6) high impacts of population displacement and migration; (7) little or no coverage by development programmes; and (8) border areas (Nations Unies Niger 2022).

The government developed an ARC implementation plan in 2014 (DNP-GCA and ARC 2014) and in 2015 Niger received US\$3.5m for conditional cash transfers and food distribution to support vulnerable families in drought-affected areas. In total, 157,000 people were assisted with ARC-funded interventions: 115,000 received cash support and 42,000 people benefited from rice distribution. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Government of Niger and the ARC Secretariat in July 2016. Niger is included in the 2021 *Africa RiskView* (ARV) Bulletin, a regular publication of the ARC Agency, which provides information on rainfall and drought indices, and their potential impact on vulnerable populations, for all of the countries in the given risk pool. It also provides updates on estimated response costs to assist people who may be affected, which are the underlying basis of the insurance policies for countries participating in the ARC insurance pool.<sup>10</sup>

The government enacted a comprehensive response plan to tackle the health, social, and economic aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of the response, the government revised its humanitarian response plan, targeting an additional 3.1 million people with an added budget of US\$82.3m (World Bank 2021, cited in EPRI 2021a). In parallel to the emergency food assistance programme, the Government of Niger, with the support of the World Bank, UNICEF, and WFP, under the leadership of the CFS, initiated a two-stage response through: (1) one-off cash transfers to households affected by the crisis in urban and rural areas; and (2) plans for longer-term livelihoods support for the poorest households and strengthening long-term resilience to future shocks through regular cash transfers and accompanying measures as part of the Adaptive Social Safety Net Project (World Bank 2021b). In the medium and longer term, the beneficiaries of the emergency Covid-19 cash transfer programme will be able to apply for the adaptive social cash transfer programme and, if eligible, benefit from a two-year monthly cash transfer programme and accompanying measures (SASPP 2020).

A mid-term review of the joint UNICEF–WFP Covid-19 response through social protection project generated a number of valuable findings. These include: (1) the value of the ‘two-track’ approach; (2) the need for flexibility and adaptive approaches in inter-agency collaboration; (3) the advisability of

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<sup>10</sup> See the **ARC website**; see the **list of countries that have signed a memorandum of understanding with ARC Group**; see also **ARV Bulletins 2020 and 2021** (month / country).

pre-designing support packages to be offered as accompanying measures for child-sensitive and nutrition-sensitive social protection; (4) the importance of communication among all partners; and (5) the need for ongoing capacity building and capacity-gap assessment of government actors and systems (EPRI 2021a).

Partner coordination around social protection is being enhanced, with key international partners (including the World Bank, WFP, and UNICEF) aiming to harmonise their engagement with government on aligning resilience with social protection programming, building a social registry, reviewing the national social protection policy, and enhancing decentralised capacity – all with a view to reaching the most vulnerable households and addressing shocks as a core component. Among the key donors and technical assistance partners supporting social protection in Niger are FCDO, BMZ, AFD, and Danida (MDTF for the SASPP), the EU, the UN system, and a variety of international NGOs.

Key priorities for adaptive social protection in Niger have been identified in a recent regional workshop. These include: (1) further strengthening partnerships to support government leadership and vision for adaptive social protection; (2) reinforcing early warning systems at all levels; (3) strengthening nutrition sensitivity and child sensitivity, including through appropriate targeting, determination of transfer values, and monitoring and evaluation; (4) linking shock response with longer-term social protection, resilience, and development programmes; and (5) promoting appropriate financing (BMZ *et al.* 2021).

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## 4. Mauritania country case study

### Key points

A vast, arid country, characterised by widespread, multidimensional poverty, structural and recurrent food insecurity, and high rates of malnutrition, Mauritania ranks near the bottom of the Human Development Index. Traditional rural livelihoods based primarily on pastoral production systems, agriculture, and fishing have been disrupted by climate change and recurrent drought, compelling populations into the urban zones and contributing to urban poverty. Poverty has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Currently stable, the country hosts the largest caseload of Malian refugees in the region, contributing to humanitarian needs.

The national development strategy promotes human capital development, including through social protection, while the President's Expanded Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (ProPEP) provides for the acceleration of a number of social protection measures. The National Social Protection Strategy of 2013, whose implementation has been overseen by a multisectoral steering committee, is currently being updated and revised to reflect considerable evolution in the sector and to respond to current challenges. The establishment of Taazour – a public agency for social solidarity and social protection directly under the President – has enhanced investment in and implementation of a variety of programmes targeting the poorest and most vulnerable households. The food security sector has been boosted by the recent establishment of a national coordinating mechanism supported by partners, and the food security working group has been influential in working towards harmonisation of approaches.

Mauritania has, in many senses, become a leader in the region in building shock-responsive mechanisms and linking social protection to both food security and refugee response, largely as a result of intensive interactions over the years among key stakeholders from government and partner organisations. The flagship national social safety net programme (Tekavoul) has been heavily supported by the World Bank since its inception in 2015. It is implemented by Taazour as part of the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program and aims to support the poorest 100,000 households (based on households included in the social registry), which has reached national coverage and is being updated and improved, and includes refugees. While seasonal shock response has recently been initiated through Tekavoul (through vertical and horizontal expansion), the government's principal shock-responsive social protection mechanism is El Maouna, which is implemented by the Food Security Commission and provides seasonal cash transfers as part of a coordinated food security response with



multiple actors. The social protection system was activated during the Covid-19 pandemic response, supported by a variety of partners, and Mauritania was one of the first countries to develop and use ARC and ARC Replica as a climate insurance mechanism.

## 4.1 Poverty, vulnerability, and shocks

Mauritania is a vast, arid country situated in the intersection of North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, with an ethnically diverse population. More than two-thirds of the territory is desert and only 0.5 per cent is arable land. Over half (55 per cent) of the population live in urban areas (particularly the capital, Nouakchott, and the port city of Nouadhibou) – propelled by the precarity of traditional livelihoods based on pastoralism, agriculture, and fishing, though the Senegal River Valley continues to support agricultural livelihoods in the southern provinces, while mining is an important activity in the interior (World Bank 2020).

The country fares poorly in terms of human development outcomes, ranking 167 out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index in 2022 (World Population Review 2023). While monetary poverty has declined in some regions, the overall poverty rate (2014) remains high at 31 per cent, with significant disparities between rates in rural and urban areas (44.4 per cent and 16.7 per cent respectively) (RIM ONS 2014). The highest poverty rates remain among rural households engaged in rainfed agriculture and livestock activities in the south of the country (World Bank 2020).

Mauritania ranks among the top 20 countries in terms of vulnerability to climate disruptions,<sup>11</sup> contributing to high levels of food insecurity. Grain production is structurally deficient and covers only about 30 per cent of annual food needs. The impact of environmental degradation is stark; recurrent shocks – including seasonal rainfall deficits and flash flooding, soil erosion, and decreased arable land quality – all threaten the livelihoods and food security of the poorest and most vulnerable households. Conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, notably in oases, over diminishing natural resources threaten social stability and economic empowerment (*ibid.*). Food insecurity is predominantly rural, affecting regions in the south and southeast, where poverty rates are also highest (GTSAN 2019). In 2022, more than 660,000 people (15 per cent of the country's population) were estimated to be food insecure – a 36 per cent increase from 2021 (ACAPS n.d.).

Malnutrition is also widespread. Nationally, the GAM rate is 11 per cent and severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rate is 1.9 per cent. But nearly half of the country's 55 districts were experiencing a nutrition emergency in 2022, with GAM

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<sup>11</sup> This is according to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Index ranking for vulnerability.

rates exceeding 15 per cent and SAM rates above 2 per cent. The Ministry of Health estimated that 136,254 acutely malnourished children, including 32,740 cases of SAM, require urgent care in 2022 (UNICEF 2022).

Mauritania has also been further impacted by the pandemic from March 2020 onwards. According to World Bank estimates, the pandemic and measures of response resulted in a contraction of economic growth of 1.8 per cent in 2020. While growth picked up to 2.3 per cent in 2021, fuelled by a strong extractive sector and fewer containment measures, inflation has risen to 3.6 per cent over that same period, driven primarily by food prices. The negative impacts on the economy have had repercussions on the labour market and on the living conditions and wellbeing of populations, and are disproportionately affecting poorer households (World Bank n.d.).

The country hosts more than 85,000 refugees from Mali – the largest Malian caseload in the region – a spillover effect of insecurity in the Sahel. Many have lived in Mauritania since 2012, but the number of refugees increased sharply since March 2022, owing to increased violence and insecurity in Mali. Most refugees (more than 70,000) live in the Mbera refugee camp in the arid southeastern part of the country, while more than 10,000 refugees and asylum seekers live in the cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. In rural areas in particular, refugees have been slowly integrating into society, with most working in agropastoral activities. They have been faced with consecutive periods of drought since at least 2019, however, and more than 60 per cent of refugee households report inadequate food consumption (UNHCR 2022a; UNICEF 2022).

## 4.2 Policy and institutional frameworks

The National Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity (SCAPP 2016–30) provides orientation for national development plans and projects. With a vision aimed at creating a robust economy, strengthening human capital, and achieving sustainable development, it identifies three strategic ‘levers’ to guide the way forward. This is seen as a means of promoting inclusion and fighting against social exclusion. Within the second lever of human capital development and access to basic social services, ‘social protection, gender equality and support for women and the family’ figures within one of four strategic workstreams identified within the set of priority plans of action developed for the period 2016–20, with the aim ‘to ensure social protection for vulnerable populations, enhance their resilience to food insecurity and reduce gender gaps’. In addition, the SCAPP explicitly sets as a priority the establishment of a permanent national mechanism for preparing and planning for the response to food security shocks and nutrition (RIM MEF 2016). After an overall review, a series of strategic orientations for the second phase of

implementation (2021–25) include strengthening institutional structures for coordination (RIM MAEPSP 2022).

The President's Expanded Priority Programme (ProPEP) for Economic Recovery (launched in 2020 for a total of MRU 24,162.9 (Mauritanian ouguiya)) aims to: (1) improve economic infrastructure and performance; (2) strengthen social service supply and access; (3) enhance productive capacity with a view towards attaining food self-sufficiency; (4) strengthen both the formal and informal private sector; (5) enhance employment and accelerate environmental actions focused on reforestation; and (6) improve overall governance. Its second priority domain includes a number of actions directly linked to social protection, including: the extension and increase in value of cash transfers to vulnerable people; the provision of free health services to the poorest people; the establishment of a system for universal health insurance; the establishment of a government-supported school meals programme; and economic inclusion of people with disabilities (RIM Comité Interministériel 2020).

The National Social Protection Strategy (SNPS 2013), which is currently being reviewed and updated, has served as a framework document for social protection in Mauritania. Its overall strategic objective is to 'contribute to the mitigation of the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups and to help people cope with the most significant risks of life'. Structured around five strategic pillars (see below) and articulated around the PPPT conceptual framework, it provides for the establishment of an integrated social protection system, based on a vision that seeks to: (1) consolidate, strengthen, and complement existing legal, regulatory, institutional, and programmatic measures, in order to gradually arrive at a coherent and unified system; (2) strengthen and implement programmes by strategic pillar, in line with national priorities; (3) design and enforce a new governance structure for social protection; (4) stimulate pro-poor and equitable growth, supporting the most vulnerable groups to participate in development while reaping its full benefits; (5) ensure the effective integration of social protection measures into sectoral strategies; (6) strengthen national solidarity through mechanisms to promote equity; and (7) establish mechanisms for the sustainable financing of social protection (RIM MAED 2013).

The five strategic pillars of the SNPS seek to: (1) enhance food and nutritional security; (2) reduce obstacles to health and education services; (3) reinforce social security, and promote work and employment; (4) improve living conditions; and (5) develop social assistance programmes for vulnerable groups. Although the SNPS was elaborated well before the development of programmes anchored in concepts of adaptive or shock-responsive social protection, its first strategic pillar nevertheless takes into account the need for protective, preventive, and promotive responses to food and nutritional insecurity and to the negative effects of climate change on the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable populations, linking

as well into the ‘resilience’ agenda (*ibid.*). A multisectoral steering committee (CP–SNPS) in charge of strategic guidance and supervision of SNPS implementation was established by decree in 2013<sup>12</sup> and co-directed by the Ministry of the Economy and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children, and the Family, under the Prime Minister. A technical committee was also created (CT–SNPS), chaired by the Ministry of the Economy and co-chaired by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The establishment in 2019 of the Taazour General Delegation for Social Solidarity and the Fight Against Exclusion (a public agency directly under the presidency) added an additional layer of governance.<sup>13</sup> Created by decree, its objectives are to: (1) define national social protection, solidarity, and social cohesion policies; (2) coordinate implementation of the national social protection policy for the targeted poor and vulnerable populations; and (3) ensure universal access to basic services for these populations (RIM Présidence 2021). Taazour, with a budget of 40 milliards MRU in 2020 and 50 milliards in 2022, implements five key social protection programmes – including the national social safety net programme, Tekavoul, in line with the basic thrusts of the SNPS (see below) and is in charge of the social registry (pers. comm. with Taazour representative; RIM Taazour 2022).

A social registry (Registre social unique, RSU) was initiated in 2016, lodged first within a Social Protection Unit within the Ministry of the Economy, but later (2020) transferred to Taazour where a General Directorate has been established. Its aim is to identify potential beneficiaries of social programmes and, in 2017, by the start of the first national social transfer programme (Tekavoul), to support households in extreme poverty. The RSU has been rolled out to each region and aims to cover 200,000 households (150,000 chronically poor and 50,000 vulnerable to shocks), representing 31 per cent of the population, including refugees (RIM Taazour 2021). In addition to national budget funding, the RSU receives World Bank technical and financial support (as one of the three main components of the World Bank-supported Social Safety Net System project). A methodological guide for the utilisation of the RSU for food security targeting was developed in 2019 (RIM Régistre Social 2019). The RSU is currently being used by 15 operational actors in the field as a basis for the initial identification of social assistance programme beneficiaries (including for seasonal food security assistance programmes, which add an additional targeting and identification component at local level to ensure that food-insecure

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<sup>12</sup> Arrêté conjoint No MAED/MASEF 2013 portant création d’un dispositif institutionnel pour la mise en œuvre de la Stratégie Nationale de Protection Sociale (SNPS) (Joint MAED/MASEF Decree of 2013 on the Creation of an Institutional Framework for the Implementation of the National Social Protection Strategy (SNPS)).

<sup>13</sup> Taazour replaced the previous agency, Tadamoun, established just after adoption of the SNPS. It was created by decree in 2019 (RIM Présidence 2019) and its attributes were adjusted by decree in 2021 (RIM Présidence 2021).

households are included) (discussions carried out with national stakeholders in Nouakchott over the course of 2022).

Current issues around the social registry include: (1) the need to ensure rapid and inclusive updates of the database in order to capture changes in demographic characteristics of households and volatility in poverty and vulnerability indicators (current plans are to update every 2.5–3 years – starting in 2022 and with subnational quotas to be recalculated based on the 2020 Permanent Survey of Living Conditions of Households – EPCV); (2) continuing to ensure the integration of wide and varied vulnerability criteria in order to meet the needs of a variety of social assistance programmes; and (3) strengthening systems and channels of communication between database users and providers. Efforts are underway to strengthen household assessment tools and approaches at local level (changing from a process of community-based targeting by the village assembly followed by household survey of those identified, to blanket household surveys) (World Bank 2020; discussions carried out with national stakeholders in Nouakchott over the course of 2022) (see also Leturque and Thoreux 2019).

The National Food Security Strategy (SNSA 2015 – vision 2030) includes a National Agricultural Investment Programme as well as a priority action plan. The main objective is to ‘enable the most vulnerable populations to have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food at all times’ (RIM MAED 2012). It groups interventions into three categories: (1) preventive (early warning systems and lines of defence to respond quickly to emergency food needs); (2) palliative or emergency measures (distribution of food to specific groups, sale of subsidised food, etc.); and (3) remedial measures (environmental protection, combating desertification, water supply and irrigation at lower costs, etc.) (Watson *et al.* 2021).

The Multisectoral Strategic Plan for Nutrition (Plan stratégique multisectorielle de nutrition, PSMN 2015–25) highlights the structural nature of malnutrition in Mauritania, and calls for a coordinated response with integrated multisectoral interventions for scale-up. Interventions include prevention and treatment of malnutrition, social mobilisation and reinforcement of community nutrition, development of school nutrition, and improvement of mechanisms for coordinating nutrition programmes. The PSMN emphasises overall the importance of synergies with nutrition-sensitive actions in the field of food security, water and sanitation, social protection, and education to ensure the strategic synergies to combat malnutrition and the sustainability of achievements (RIM MEF 2015). There is also a National Strategy for School Feeding (2016) (RIM MEN 2016).

A National Mechanism for Preparedness and Response to Food and Nutritional Crises (DCAN) was created in 2021 with support from technical partners such as

the WFP and World Bank. A key stakeholder has noted that ‘This moves us into a new era in food security’ (discussions carried out with national stakeholders in Nouakchott over the course of 2022). The DCAN draws together national authorities and partners from different sectors and is composed of a number of committees, with the Food Security Commission (CSA) serving as the secretariat, under the authority of the Prime Minister. Members of the oversight committees include the ministries of Interior, Economy, Finance, Agriculture, Livestock, Health, Rural Development, and Taazour. Its two main technical committees – supported by specialised technical groups and committees, and chaired by different directorships within the CSA – focus on: (1) needs assessment chaired by the Food Security Observatory (OSA), with technical working groups for the monitoring of annual agropastoral campaigns, analysis of vulnerabilities, assessment of markets, and monitoring and analysis of the nutritional situation; and (2) National Response Plan preparation and implementation, chaired by the Director of Emergency Aid, with specialised committees on social safety nets, livelihoods, food assistance, and nutrition. Taazour plays a key role as chair of two technical groups on vulnerability analysis and social safety nets (RIM PM 2021).

At decentralised levels there are regional committees for food and nutrition security presided over by the *walis* (governors), while at departmental level there are committees made up of local authorities and decentralised technical service representatives in charge of the local (communal) prioritisation for the National Response Plan. They constitute one layer of governance and coordination at the local level. However, they remain isolated with regard to the local institutionalisation of social safety nets.

The Food Security Group (GSA), chaired by CSA and supported by WFP and FAO (as the usual co-leads of food security clusters), has been influential in the work towards harmonisation of approaches, the development of common tools, and the coordination of various actors involved in the analysis of and response to food and nutritional insecurity in Mauritania. However, it is likely that this group’s structure and activities may now evolve in line with the more recent establishment and operationalisation of the DCAN. Decisions on targeting criteria, transfer value, duration, frequency, and outreach tools have been made through consultations with key stakeholders within this coordination fora and its technical working groups. It is also through this consultative process that the transfer value for the annual seasonal food insecurity response has moved from a lump sum according to a range of household sizes to an amount calculated using the effective number of individuals in the household, and that there have been discussions around the principle of geographical continuity of partner support for food security responses. A coordination matrix has been established for annual seasonal food insecurity responses that reflects each actor’s (government and partners) planning per district and level of coverage compared

to identified needs. This matrix has been presented during GSA coordination meetings and is updated regularly. Taazour's engagement in this coordination has gained momentum from the 2020 response learning workshop, in which it actively participated. This workshop informed the development of the 2021 National Response Plan and Taazour's participation supported efforts towards harmonisation within the response (Battas 2021; Watson *et al.* 2021).

The framework mechanism for rapid-onset disasters, such as floods, is led by the Civil Protection Delegation of the Ministry of the Interior. While institutionally distinct from the National Food Security Mechanism, the possibility of requesting support from the Food Security coordination architecture in the event of food and nutrition impacts is under development. A decree of 2020<sup>14</sup> foresees joint leadership for the food security and nutrition response by the CSA and the Ministry of the Interior. An Inter-ministerial Committee (CISU) is chaired by the Prime Minister and is in charge of analysing information related to emergency situations, and making decisions for the mobilisation and implementation of resources to respond to emergencies (Battas 2021).

Assistance for refugees in Mauritania is coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization, through the National Consultative Commission for Refugees (CNCR). Refugees from northern Mali receive their status on a *prima facie* basis. Humanitarian actors, led by UNHCR and WFP, have traditionally provided the bulk of assistance to refugees and, to some extent, host communities in refugee-receiving areas of Mauritania. To date, this has mitigated the impact of the demographic shock on service delivery. However, as humanitarian support declines, access to services will become a challenge. Moreover, economic opportunities are scarce in the region hosting the bulk of the refugees, and competition has increased for sources of energy and for water and pastures for livestock – the main economic sector for both refugees and host communities (World Bank 2020).

The National Response Plan for food and nutritional insecurity does not currently cover the refugee population, which takes place in a parallel process under UNHCR/WFP leadership. However, eligible refugees are being registered in the regular social safety net (Tekavoul), using a step-by-step approach, starting from piggybacking and aiming at a nationally led system. Moreover, refugees are covered in the second phase of the social safety net projects supported by the World Bank, to be included in the social registry based on vulnerability profiles, thus paving the way for inclusion in the Tekavoul and El Maouna programmes (see below) (Battas 2021; World Bank 2020).

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<sup>14</sup> Decree 2002 Related to the Organisation of Emergency Relief (J.O. RIM n.1023 30 Mai 2020, p.421 – Décret 2002-17, 31 Mars 2020).

### 4.3 Programmes and partnerships

Mauritania has, in many senses, become a leader in the region in building shock-responsive mechanisms and linking social protection to both food security and refugee response. A recent World Bank-supported comparative country analysis of the degree of convergence between humanitarian responses and social protection systems in the Sahel identified Mauritania as an example where such convergence is most advanced, noting that this has been the result of intensive interactions over the years among key stakeholders from government and partner organisations (SASPP 2022b). In the past decade, Mauritania has seen an important evolution from a humanitarian response that was entirely independent from social safety nets to the current approach that is blending social safety nets and humanitarian delivery systems. At least for the lean season shock response, this process is gradually moving towards a nationally led system that all stakeholders participate in and contribute to. Initial efforts focused on promoting harmonisation within the response to shock – first among humanitarian organisations implementing cash transfers, and subsequently between humanitarian cash transfers and the shock-responsive government-led safety net (Battas 2021).

Tekavoul is the flagship national social safety net programme in Mauritania, heavily supported by the World Bank since its inception in 2015 through the Social Safety Net System Project, currently in its second phase (2020–25) and implemented as part of the SASPP. Targeted at households that are extremely poor, it is designed as a permanent programme aiming to support the poorest 100,000 households. Implemented by Taazour, the programme's five-year cycle consists of quarterly cash transfers conditional on beneficiaries' participation in social promotion activities designed to promote knowledge of essential family practices and investment in early childhood development. Based on experience with a set of productive measures implemented as part of the overall programme, a fuller economic inclusion component is under development (Le Teuff 2020; World Bank 2020).

In addition to Tekavoul, Taazour implements a number of other social protection programmes supported by government and linked more specifically to shock response. These include Temwine, which focuses on food security through measures to strengthen both geographical and financial accessibility of foodstuffs, particularly through the establishment of shops for the sale of subsidised food and the development of village-level security food stocks (SAVS) and cereal banks (RIM Taazour 2022). Meanwhile, Tekavoul 'Shock' is a pilot vertical and horizontal expansion of Tekavoul initiated in 2021, participating in the National Response Plan for seasonal food insecurity by providing cash transfers to 56,789 people (i.e. 12 per cent of the identified caseload in need) (Battas 2021).



El Maouna is the government's principal SRSP mechanism. Launched in 2017, it has been implemented annually by the CSA through a Memorandum of Understanding with Taazour as a seasonal safety net, providing lean season cash transfers to households identified as food insecure, with transfers of around US\$266 per household (EPRI 2021b). The focus is on cash transfer response to recurrent seasonal livelihood and food security shocks linked to variable rainfall and lean season food shortages. In 2021, the El Maouna programme provided shock-responsive cash transfers to 27,600 food-insecure households during the lean season,<sup>15</sup> with a planned coverage of 65,000 households in 2022; this represents a significant expansion from the initial coverage of 1,200 in 2017. As with other food security cash transfer actors, the social registry is used as a basis for identification/targeting (although most actors also operate additional surveys to complete the beneficiary list beyond those on the social registry). In future, El Maouna hopes to cover the entire population in the most severe categories of distress (as measured by the *Cadre Harmonisé*), leaving partners to cover those in stress (discussions carried out with national stakeholders in Nouakchott over the course of 2022).

Collaboration between WFP and the World Bank around adaptive and shock-responsive social protection systems in Mauritania has been held up as a model example of partnership (Watson *et al.* 2021; WFP 2019d; Leturque 2017). The partnership – institutionalised in a Memorandum of Understanding for the period 2019–22 (PAM/Banque Mondiale (WFP/World Bank) 2019) and inscribed in each organisation's planning documents – aims to support the government to develop and implement a system of shock-responsive and adaptive social protection, focusing on five main pillars of action around: (1) early warning systems; (2) preparation and planning of responses; (3) targeting; (4) financing; and (5) modalities of distribution. An evaluation of WFP's contribution to adaptive social protection in Mauritania found that its work has helped bring together humanitarian and development actors, with significant progress made on each of these pillars (Watson *et al.* 2021).

The Food Security Group (GSA) has served as a dynamic platform for collective learning, harmonisation of approaches, and technical advances in SRSP. As noted earlier, this group is chaired by the CSA, with support from WFP and FAO and participation from Taazour, NGOs and UN agencies, serving as a critical body supporting convergence between seasonal food responses and broader social protection thrusts in Mauritania. The GSA has supported annual collective learning workshops since 2018, which have brought together government agencies and humanitarian partners. These exercises aim to review the response, identify lessons learnt, and make recommendations regarding the

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<sup>15</sup> Presentation by CSA/El Maouna, national social protection workshop, Noudahibou Mauritania, March 2022.

modalities and content of the next Response Plan. Such workshops have been complemented by monthly coordination meetings where plans are discussed and progress is reviewed. Decisions on targeting criteria, transfer value, duration, frequency, and outreach tools have been made through consultations with key stakeholders within this coordination forum and its technical working groups. Joint piloting of approaches has also been a vehicle for bringing social safety net and humanitarian actors closer together. For example, the use of the social registry for shock response was tested by Oxfam and WFP in 2017. This was documented and the lessons learnt informed the development of a guidance note for the use of the social registry in shock response (Battas 2021). Within the newly established structures set up as part of the national mechanism for prevention and response to food and nutritional crises (DCAN), the solid partnerships and experiences forged through the work of the GSA will undoubtedly continue to thrive.

The Multisectoral Cash Alliance (Alliance Cash Multisectorielle, ACMS) aims to prioritise food security actor engagement with social protection dynamics. Created in 2019 out of the former Cash Working Group, it is co-led by Action Against Hunger (Action contre la Faim, ACF) and WFP (Alliance Cash Multisectorielle 2020). It specifically aims to harmonise tools and operating modalities of cash transfers regarding the identification of needs, programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and learning, and to maintain a sustained technical dialogue with the government institutions (particularly Taazour) in charge of the development and implementation of the national cash transfer programme, Tekavoul, as well as with sectoral groups, with a view to ensuring better synergy and complementarity (Battas 2021).

The bulk of seasonal responses is currently through cash (with harmonised values at MRU 4,500/person/month); only CSA (outside of the direction responsible for El Maouna) continues to provide food transfers in a manner that remains somewhat opaque to other social protection and food security stakeholders. NGOs noted that as part of their own programmes they also provide nutritional supplements – enriched flour – with the cash transfers, in a sort of ‘cash-plus’ approach, which is not, however, fully articulated or recognised as a promising model/approach nationally. There is overall weaker development of mechanisms for other sudden-onset shocks such as floods, although these have been proposed by El Maouna (discussions carried out with national stakeholders in Nouakchott over the course of 2022).

Mauritania was one of the first countries to develop and use ARC and ARC Replica as a climate insurance mechanism. In 2014, the Government of Mauritania subscribed to the African Risk Capacity through a payment of US\$1.4m and benefited from a payment of US\$6.3m, which was used for general food distributions implemented by the CSA, for 60,000 households.

In 2017/18, the government transferred US\$1.8m for an insurance of US\$2.5m over five years, and a maximum coverage of US\$9m. ARC is being supported by WFP to link it with the preparedness and response national mechanism and was used in 2020 for a drought response (US\$167,000). Disbursements are conditioned by the presentation and validation of an operational plan, including a geographic and individual targeting strategy. It is being applied quite regularly as one of the tools in the repertoire of managing climate/rural livelihood risks, as well as the inclusion of pastoral insurance most appropriate in the Mauritanian context (Battas 2021; discussions carried out with national stakeholders in Nouakchott over the course of 2022). An independent evaluation in 2017 found that 'ARC appears to have made a crucial difference in the lives of highly vulnerable households in Mauritania' (OPM and Itad 2017: iii), with Mauritania highlighted as a promising example of sustainability of the initiative, through the integration of ARC into existing structures and continued payment by government of the annual premium. The combination of early warning, contingency planning, and risk transfer allowed the country to orchestrate a more timely and comprehensive response than ever before, achieving a cost-effective and efficient response delivery (*ibid.*).

Many partners were mobilised in support of the government's Covid-19 Response Plan. The World Bank-funded Safety Net Systems Support Project II was restructured in August 2020 to support the government's Covid-19 safety net interventions, with a US\$70m grant to support Mauritania in strengthening its response (EPRI 2021b). As in Niger, BMZ funded WFP and UNICEF in their two-pronged approach of direct delivery of cash transfers and systems-strengthening for national delivery as part of the national Covid-19 Response Plan (EPRI 2021b, 2021c). The EU provided three cycles of cash transfers to cover the basic needs of 1,550 vulnerable households and to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19, targeting populations already affected by seasonal food insecurity, whose situation had deteriorated due to the pandemic. Geographical targeting, vulnerability criteria, the use of the social registry, the transfer value, and the duration were agreed with the GSA and aligned with the National Response Plan modalities (Battas 2021).

A mid-term review of the joint UNICEF / WFP Covid-19 Response through Social Protection Project found that activities were well designed and aligned with national priorities and were mostly on track. Three streams of cash transfers were planned for the project: (1) a scale-up of seasonal cash transfers (WFP – partly through El Maouna and partly through WFP's direct delivery); (2) cash top-up for ten months to vulnerable Tekavoul beneficiary households with children under the age of two, pregnant or lactating women, or female heads of household (UNICEF); and (3) urban cash transfers of ten months to poor families with members who have a disability (UNICEF). The design called for cash interventions to be accompanied by complementary services ranging from

Covid-19 prevention messaging to supplementary feeding and child protection interventions. The third component for urban cash transfers targeting people with disabilities in Nouakchott was delayed due to the lack of coverage of either the social registry or Tekavoul in Nouakchott: this in turn led to a systems-strengthening activity supported by UNICEF to identify, inventory, assess, and register these households as a preparatory step (EPRI 2021b).

A number of key donors are particularly active in supporting humanitarian response and social protection in Mauritania. An analysis of humanitarian funding patterns indicates that the main humanitarian donors are the European Commission (through ECHO), the US and the UK, with the main funded sectors being nutrition and food security along with refugee response (OCHA 2021b, cited by Battas 2021). ECHO's Humanitarian Implementation Plan supports lean season response and disaster preparedness (Battas 2021). The SASPP MDTF underpins the World Bank's safety net support programme. BMZ supports other SRSP activities, in addition to its contributions to the MDTF (BMZ *et al.* 2021). The French Development Agency (AFD) also provides significant parallel support for shock-responsiveness in Mauritania, particularly through Taazour and El Maouna (discussions carried out with national stakeholders in Nouakchott over the course of 2022).

The UN system's Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development in Mauritania (CPDD) integrates the humanitarian and development planning of UN agencies and six international NGOs around three priorities: contributing to inclusive growth; strengthening human capital and basic social services; and governance support. Three convergence zones have been identified for this partnership framework (Hodh Ech Chargui, Guidimakha, and peri-urban Nouakchott) (SNU 2018; GTSAN 2019). A joint Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Fund project has been piloted as an integrated social protection model by UNICEF, WFP and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the region of Guidimakha (Joint SDG Fund 2020). WFP's support for shock-responsive and adaptive social protection has been outlined above; it also implements a cash-for-assets programme focusing on enhanced resilience and support for school feeding, which has recently been taken up for the first time by government through Taazour (WFP 2019c; discussions carried out with national stakeholders in Nouakchott over the course of 2022). UNICEF supports national social protection policy development as well as specific social protection measures for children and people with disabilities, as part of the Covid-19 response (discussions carried out with national stakeholders in Nouakchott over the course of 2022).

UNHCR has multiple partnerships with different donors to cover the needs of refugees, as well as support from the UN Peacebuilding Fund for refugees and host communities (UNHCR 2022b). Since 2018, the use of cash transfers in the

refugee response has expanded, including multipurpose cash delivered by UNHCR and NGO partners in order to address the needs of specific groups (supporting access to education, covering shelter and non-food needs, etc.). Cash transfers were also implemented in 2020 in response to the socioeconomic impacts of Covid-19. In addition, WFP is providing cash transfers for food assistance and livelihoods support (Battas 2021). UNHCR and its partners have been strong advocates of inclusion of refugees in the national social protection system and national safety nets (UNHCR and WFP 2021).

With funds from the IDA18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities (US\$18m), the World Bank aims to strengthen the institutional capacity of the government's social services and selected infrastructure in the region of refugee influxes. A key synergy across the World Bank programmes will be to support the inclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable refugee and host community households in targeted interventions to address inequities and promote access to services. This includes integration into the social registry and the Tekavoul social safety net (World Bank 2020); this is now effectively the case. Other areas for support include data-sharing, needs assessment, community sensitisation, protection analysis, targeting, and complaint and feedback mechanisms (Battas 2021).

## 5. Senegal country case study

### Key points

A stable democracy in an unstable region, Senegal remains in the category of a least developed country, marked by high levels of poverty, urban–rural disparities, food insecurity (particularly in the semi-arid north) and frequent climate-related shocks and disasters, including droughts and floods. While urbanisation is rising, the majority of the population rely on agropastoral production for livelihoods that are increasingly fragile. The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to deepening poverty and vulnerability.

The National Development Plan integrates the SDGs and includes social protection to reinforce human capital and sustainable development. Food security priorities are set out in a separate national strategy. An updated National Social Protection Strategy (2015) follows a life-course perspective and includes response to shocks as a core objective. The institutional framework for governance and implementation of the social protection system has evolved over time and will require continued reinforcement. A national single registry has been established and is used for targeting of beneficiaries across multiple sectors.

The flagship national safety net programme (Programme national de bourses de sécurité familiale, PNBSF), implemented as part of the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program, currently covers 300,000 beneficiary households in chronic poverty, with the government contributing to the cost of the cash transfers. Pilot ‘shock-responsive’ components of the safety net system have been implemented to provide temporary social assistance in response to large covariate shocks related to climate change in particular, but the bulk of lean season response lies outside of the social protection sector *per se* and the predictability of shock response is limited due to uncertain funding. The national Covid-19 response included social protection measures in the form of food rather than cash assistance to affected populations. Senegal has been an early participant in the ARC and ARC Replica initiatives aimed at strengthening climate risk management and response. There is a good level of coordination within the social protection system, within the ARC mechanism, and among food security actors; however, discussions and coordination between these three spheres is limited.

### 5.1 Poverty, vulnerability, and shocks

Senegal is a stable and democratic country in an unstable region; nevertheless, poverty rates remain high. In spite of progress over the past decade, Senegal remains among the world’s least developed countries, ranking 168 out of 189 countries on the 2022 Human Development Index (World Population Review

2023). An estimated 37.8 per cent of the population was living in poverty in 2019, with significant regional disparities. Poverty in rural areas was at 60 per cent compared to 25 per cent in Dakar, the capital, where a quarter of the population of 16.7 million is clustered (UE and MEPC 2021). The urban population has been growing significantly in recent years and was estimated at 46.5 per cent in 2017, with pockets of poverty in peri-urban zones (OIT 2021).

The country is frequently subject to climate hazards, especially in the semi-arid north. Insufficient food production, droughts, land degradation, high food prices, and low resilience have further compounded food insecurity. Food insecurity and malnutrition stand at 7.2 per cent and 8.2 per cent respectively, with major regional disparities and seasonal spikes (ENSANR 2019, cited in WFP 2022a). According to the March 2022 *Cadre Harmonisé*, 881,275 people were expected to suffer from food insecurity during the 2022 lean season (WFP 2022a; see also République du Sénégal SE–CNSA 2021).

Climate change is causing more frequent shocks and disasters. Droughts, floods, and fires are the most prevalent climate-related shocks affecting the Senegalese population according to the 2018–19 Harmonised Survey of Household Living Conditions. About 70 per cent of households are still engaged in agriculture and 40 per cent are engaged in livestock-rearing, making them particularly vulnerable to climate variability. In a context of limited use of technology and improved practices, rainfall deficits lead to decreases in food production and food intake among household members. Climate shocks also translate into large income fluctuations and consumption shocks that threaten food security. Climate shocks hit the poorest people disproportionately. While one in ten Senegalese households reported experiencing a climate shock in the past three years, the share was 20 per cent among the poorest households, who also rely more heavily on negative coping strategies such as foregoing consumption, taking children out of school, or selling productive assets – all of which have long-term negative consequences on welfare (World Bank 2021c).

The Covid-19 pandemic has severely affected Senegal's economy and population, deepening poverty and vulnerability. The crisis halted years of strong economic performance and threatens to reverse half of the past decade's poverty reduction. Real GDP growth is estimated to have declined by 3.3 per cent and household incomes have been squeezed, with disruptions to the normal functioning of economic activity hitting the informal sector particularly hard. Because of supply disruptions, prices increased by 2.5 per cent in 2020, with a more than 6 per cent increase for the most commonly consumed products such as cereals, fish, and fruits and vegetables; prices for transport increased by 4 per cent, further negatively affecting household purchasing power (*ibid.*).

Poverty incidence increased by 0.4 of a percentage point due to the pandemic, equivalent to 357,000 additional poor people. Senegal's statistics agency

estimated in September 2020 that 85 per cent of households saw their incomes drop over the first three months of the pandemic. It also found that 36 per cent of heads of household had stopped working, with about a third pointing to the Covid-19 crisis as the reason and 10 per cent still out of work six months after the outbreak. In March 2021, protests triggered by internal political and judicial developments were compounded by frustration over economic disruptions from the pandemic and turned violent. The unprecedented floods that devastated several neighbourhoods in the suburbs of Dakar at the end of 2020 have been an aggravating factor (*ibid.*).

## 5.2 Policy and institutional frameworks

National development priorities are set out in the Emerging Senegal Plan (PSE) for the period 2015–35. The plan integrates the SDGs and serves as a reference for sectoral strategies. The plan is articulated around three pillars aimed at: (1) structural transformation of the economy; (2) improvement in living conditions, reduction of inequalities, and preservation of natural resources; and (3) security, stability, and good governance (OIT 2021). Pillar 2 aims to reinforce human capital, social protection, and sustainable development through the promotion of: (1) improvements in health and nutrition; (2) quality education adapted to local needs; (3) research and innovation for development; (4) decent work; (5) social protection; and (6) measures to combat the negative effects of climate change (République du Sénégal 2018). Overall, the PSE identifies social protection as a lever for economic development to promote productivity, access to productive assets, the transition from an informal to a formal economy, and inclusive growth for all (OIT 2021).

An adjusted priority action plan aims to accelerate progress over the second phase of PSE implementation from 2021–23. This is in line with the President's Economic and Social Resilience Programme, which was launched in the wake of the pandemic. Priorities for this second phase aim at endogenous development, driven by the quest for food, health, and pharmaceutical sovereignty, and a reinvigorated private sector.<sup>16</sup>

The first National Social Protection Strategy (SNPS) of 2005 was updated by the current SNPS that sets out priorities for the period 2015–35 (République du Sénégal DGPSN 2016). The SNPS follows the life-course perspective predicated in the Social Floor initiative and is designed in the first place to respond to specific vulnerabilities by age group and by disability (Tounkara *et al.* 2021). It is also designed to respond to shocks, catastrophes, seasonal poverty, and food insecurity (*ibid.*). It centres around five core objectives: (1) integrated social protection for all children; (2) programmes and systems for people of

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<sup>16</sup> See **description of the PSE** on the website of the Ministère de l'économie des finances et de la souveraineté industrielle et numérique.



working age; (3) minimum income and guaranteed health care for all elderly people; (4) an integrated social security system for people with disabilities; and (5) building community resilience to shocks and disasters (Bossuroy 2021).

The SNPS prioritises measures to both prevent and manage covariate shocks. Programmatic thrusts aim to reinforce mechanisms for protection against risks and catastrophes through: (1) extension of agricultural insurance to 80 per cent of the rural population; (2) expansion of adaptive and productive safety nets to enhance the resilience of at least 70 per cent of rural poor households, in articulation with sectoral programmes; (3) establishment of decentralised local intervention funds in all of the country's departments; and (4) promotion of private insurance for diverse risks. Institutional thrusts aim to enhance governance through: (1) capacity strengthening; (2) development of contingency plans; and (3) reinforcement and decentralisation of the national platform for the management of risks and catastrophes (PNGRC) (République du Sénégal DGPSN 2016). The strategy is accompanied by a multisectoral action plan and a results measurement framework to promote regular monitoring of programme implementation. As well as the five strategic objectives of the SNPS, an additional priority outcome includes enhanced governance of social protection (OIT 2021).

The institutional framework for governance and implementation of the social protection system has evolved over the years. The General Delegation for Social Protection and National Solidarity (Délégation générale à la protection sociale et à la solidarité nationale, DGPSN) was created in 2021 and anchored within the presidency, with regional representatives since 2016. It is mandated to coordinate social protection, monitor implementation of the national social protection strategy, mobilise resources, and implement specific components of the system including the RNU and the PNBSF. Key agencies such as the Food Security Commissariat (CSA) and the National Solidarity Fund (FSN) were also initially anchored under the DGPSN (Bossuroy 2021). In 2019, however, the Ministry of Community Development, Social, and Territorial Equity (Ministère du développement communautaire, de l'équité sociale et territoriale, MDCEST) was created, with the mission to contribute to the development and implementation of policies for social inclusion and cohesion. The DGPSN was moved from the presidency to this newly created line ministry, along with agencies from other ministries such as the Community Development Directorate (initially in the Ministry of Family) and the Universal Health Coverage Unit (initially at the Ministry of Health and Social Action). The CSA and FSN were also directly attached to MDCEST, separate from the DGPSN (*ibid.*).

Questions of coordination for social protection as a whole, and for shock-responsiveness in particular, will require continued focus. While MDCEST now has a clear coordinating role for the sector, it is a newly established ministry with

low capacity and within which the division of roles and responsibilities between its different components remains at times unclear and contentious (*ibid.*; see also Tounkara *et al.* 2021). A recent analysis suggests that the recent institutional change has reduced DGPSN autonomy and has rendered coordination more difficult because it has become unclear which entry points they should use for what kind of issue – that is, addressing requests first to the Minister’s Office or addressing them directly at the DGPSN level (Kreidler and Ndome 2021). In terms of institutional structures that might be most conducive to SRSP, it might also be important to ascertain whether the ‘delinkage’ of FSN and CSA from the direct responsibility of the DGPSN has any potential effect on the desired integrated approaches that might be pursued.

The RNU was set up in 2013 to establish a common targeting and beneficiary identification tool. As a social registry, the RNU is viewed by the government as its central repository for data on the poorest households and has been built on the basis of a unified questionnaire that integrates the concerns of a broad spectrum of actors (Tounkara *et al.* 2021). It initially covered 450,000 poor households nationwide and catered primarily to the targeting needs of the flagship national safety net programme (PNBSF). In 2017, the questionnaire was updated to integrate data typically used by food security actors to assess the level of vulnerability (Kreidler and Ndome 2021). The RNU was thereafter extended in 2020 and now reaches approximately 550,000 households – about 30 per cent of the population (World Bank 2021c). A 2021 Presidential decree established the RNU as the mandatory tool for targeting all social programmes in the country. The government planned to expand the RNU to 1 million households in 2022, with support from the ongoing World Bank-supported operation, the Senegal Safety Net Project (Bossuroy 2021).

A growing number of programmes across sectors are using the registry for targeting. In 2016, 11 programmes were using the database for targeting of beneficiaries (Tounkara *et al.* 2021). Today, in addition to the PNBSF, the RNU is used by various food security programmes of the Executive Secretariat of the National Food Security Council (SE–CNSA) and WFP, by the governmental nutrition programme, and by the universal health insurance programme (CMU) (Kreidler and Ndome 2021; OIT 2021). The RNU is viewed by key stakeholders in the food security sector as a way to gain time and to reduce the cost of targeting beneficiaries for the lean season shock response. Partners have signed formal partnership agreements with DGPSN for using the data; they then apply their targeting criteria to the existing database to mitigate the shortcomings that they see in the quality of the data. The use of additional filters is explicitly recognised in the Presidential Decree. Partners report that a good percentage of their beneficiaries are included in the RNU but that their caseloads also regularly go beyond it, due to correcting exclusion errors or simply offering more spaces for one village than the RNU allows (Kreidler and Ndome 2021).

Nevertheless, certain challenges remain for ongoing development and expanded use of the RNU, including in relation to shock response. These include: questions about the quality and currency of the data; perceptions of subjectivity in community-based targeting approaches; the at times problematic application of beneficiary quotas established at communal level; and some indications of feelings of stigmatisation arising from the public nature of the beneficiary targeting and identification processes (Tounkara *et al.* 2021). Other challenges include: lack of seasonality in updates on vulnerability; lack of means for biometric verification of beneficiary identity; insufficient data user feedback; lack of cross-referencing of beneficiaries of the regular safety net with those receiving seasonal assistance; and heavy reliance on donor funding, calling into question long-term sustainability (Kreidler and Ndome 2021).

Food security priorities are set out in the National Strategy for Food Security and Resilience (SNSAR) 2015–35. SNSAR seeks to increase food availability, improve access to diverse and healthy foods, improve nutritional status (especially among women, children, and elderly people), enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations against climate shocks, enhance food security coordination and governance, and improve institutional systems for prevention of and rapid response to food crises. The National Food Security Council (CNSA), through its Executive Secretariat (SE–CNSA), produces analyses of the food security situation, based on the Sahel-wide *Cadre Harmonisé*. This serves as the basis for the development of a yearly National Response Plan for Food Insecurity (PNR) for assistance to affected populations in the form of cash, food vouchers, and food (WFP 2018b).

The PNR provides directions for the seasonal food insecurity response in terms of the objectives, the geographic and household targeting priorities, M&E procedures, as well as an estimate of the total costs. The plan is then implemented – to the extent possible given limited financial resources – by NGOs and UN agencies, as well as the government if budget permits. The number of seasonal support programmes has been reduced significantly in recent years and is currently very limited due to budget restrictions (Kreidler and Ndome 2021).

### 5.3 Programmes and partnerships

The flagship national safety net programme (PNBSF) was initiated in 2013 and currently covers 300,000 beneficiary households living in chronic poverty. It provides nationwide transfers of 25,000 West African francs (FCFA) (US\$40.85) per quarter per household, along with behaviour change promotion sessions in health, education, and civil registration. The transfers are made via post office or mobile money (*ibid.*). Productive inclusion measures have been introduced for a limited number of PNBSF beneficiaries (World Bank 2021a). On-the-ground

facilitation of cash transfers and accompanying measures is provided by NGOs contracted by the government using project funds. Women are prioritised to be recipients of the transfer within the household and thus account for the bulk of recipients.<sup>17</sup> Since 2020, the government has been covering the costs of the cash transfers, with a dedicated line in the national budget. Nevertheless, support costs for the programme, along with costs for the RNU, are borne largely by the World Bank through its Social Safety Net Support Project implemented as part of the SASPP (Kreidler and Ndome 2021; World Bank 2021c).

Pilot 'shock-responsive' components of the safety net system have been implemented to provide temporary social assistance in response to large covariate shocks, especially related to climate change. To provide an efficient response to food insecurity, a World Bank-financed pilot was implemented during the lean season 2017, building on existing programme infrastructure including the RNU (adapted to ensure that the most food-insecure were considered as beneficiaries), the PNBSF's payment system, and the network of social workers (World Bank 2021c). In two out of the six departments classified as being in Phase 3 of food insecurity, 8,175 households received an unconditional cash transfer of a maximum of FCFA 135,000<sup>18</sup> in two payments through a mobile money provider, showing that timely and well-targeted food assistance could be delivered to affected households (Kreidler and Ndome 2021). Based on this success, the government adopted the same methodology to coordinate the response in 2018. Another pilot was also successfully implemented to respond to fires in 2019, and the same mechanism (using the RNU for targeting and cash transfers) was triggered by the President in September 2020 to provide rapid assistance to households affected by floods. In total, 15,000 households received shock-responsive cash transfers in less than a month (World Bank 2021c). A similar operation in response to floods benefited about 10,000 households between September and November 2021 (Bossuroy 2021).

The bulk of lean season response lies outside of the social protection sector *per se*, guided by the national food security system and implemented by a variety of actors, but integrating use of the RNU within overall targeting. With the exception of the pilots described above and implemented by the DGPSN, seasonal food security programmes are coordinated by the SE-CNSA and may not commonly be referred to explicitly as 'social protection'.

The PNR 2021 emphasised the intersectoral nature of the response to food insecurity in Senegal and privileges the use of cash assistance. While coordination of the national food insecurity response is provided by the SE-CNSA, it is done in collaboration with other stakeholders such as the Food

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<sup>17</sup> Actual percentages vary by source: the World Bank reports that women comprise 63 per cent of beneficiaries; Kreidler and Ndome (2021) report that women comprise 80 per cent of beneficiaries.

<sup>18</sup> The West African franc is pegged to the euro: €1 = FCFA 655.96.

Security Commission, the DGPSN, the National Council for Nutrition Development, the Ministry of Health and Social Action, the Ministry of Livestock and Animal Production, the Regional and Departmental Food Security Committees, technical and financial partners, and NGOs. It offers three 'scenarios' for coverage depending on the scope of coverage selected and the resources available. It provides for assistance in cash (direct or electronic) fixed at FCFA 5,000 per month per person (up to a maximum of eight persons per household) for three months, explaining that cash is more effective than either vouchers or food distribution. It also sets out the programme of pastoral support in the form of distribution of animal feed (République du Sénégal SE–CNSA 2021).

Humanitarian actors align with the PNR and support its objective of 'improving the food and nutritional situation of households in crisis through emergency assistance'. Ideally, humanitarian actors would only complement where the government cannot cover all needs. In practice, however, there is no longer a government budget line linked to the PNR so humanitarian actors respond first and, in some years, the government also intervenes. However, a recent analysis found that official approval is late and the unpredictability of government resources delays interventions. In the meantime, NGOs already go ahead, once SN–CNSA gives them the green light to intervene (Kreidler and Ndome 2021).

The predictability of the shock response is limited due to uncertain funding. This is both because of the *ad hoc* nature of humanitarian funding, but also the government's reluctance to pre-position its own funding. If only humanitarian sources of funding are left, and if those are shrinking, this leads to a reduction of coverage for responding to needs. A recent analysis found that only 19 per cent of the people identified as critically food insecure in the PNR 2021 are currently receiving assistance because the government is not mobilising resources to complement the very limited and decreasing humanitarian funding (*ibid.*).

Senegal has been an early participant in the ARC initiative aimed at strengthening climate risk management and response. Senegal, along with Kenya, Mauritania, and Niger, was among the first countries to participate in ARC. Senegal has been involved in ARC since the first risk pool in 2014/15, paying an annual insurance premium of FCFA 1.8bn (about US\$3.1m) since 2014 with the cost being met from the government budget, but supported by the Government of Japan. A first insurance payment of US\$16.5m was made to the government in 2015 in response to drought in 2014. A Technical Working Group has been established to customise the Africa RiskView (ARV) model and develop contingency plans, and ARC has provided technical support and capacity building for disaster risk management (OPM 2021; Branders *et al.* 2018).

Senegal is also one of the first countries to have initiated ARC Replica, a model developed to expand participation in the initiative to civil society actors. ARC Replica was launched in Senegal in 2018 by six participating members of the Start Network. The partners include World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Plan International, Oxfam, Save the Children, and ACF. Its objectives are to further expand the coverage of ARC, while giving the opportunities for civil society to test new financing tools (especially insurance) and ultimately to expand the uptake of ARC. This initiative has been supported by the German Development Bank (KfW) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (Start Network 2020).

ARC is hosted by the Directorate of Civil Protection within the Ministry of the Interior. It is led by a coordinator who is a staff member of the Food Security Commission (CSA) within the Ministry for Community Development. The initiative has its own governance structures and coordination architecture, in which DGPSN participates but does not have a major role. The NGO-led ARC Replica initiative participates in all coordination structures but develops its own implementation plan in the case of a payout. There is limited connection between the ARC insurance mechanism and the social protection system. The framework for ARC is the biannual Operational Plan developed by SE–CNSA as a separate document from the PNR. The plan identifies the risk profile to be covered, and sets out modalities for response in the case of a payout (cash transfers, support for livestock, and nutrition interventions), the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, an M&E system, and a budget (Kreidler and Ndome 2021).

ARC Replica generated funding for a successful seasonal food insecurity response in 2020. A payout of US\$10.6m to the Start Network was confirmed in December 2019, which made it possible to support 335,000 people through the lean season in 2020, out of which 203,000 received a total of FCFA 5,000 per person, transferred through mobile money or cash in transit, for a maximum of eight persons in a household, for a period of three months. Targeting was based on the RNU, with some administrative corrections. In places where there were not enough RNU beneficiaries, partners added additional beneficiaries using food security-related criteria but still using the community targeting and validation mechanisms set up through the RNU registration process. The Government of Senegal also received a payout of US\$12.5m from the ARC programme in 2020, but used this for in-kind food assistance and not for cash transfers (*ibid.*).

Overall, ARC is seen to be contributing to the strengthening of capacity for shock response, but with continued room for improvement. According to a recent evaluation, ARC has contributed to strengthening disaster risk management (DRM) capacity in Senegal principally through: (1) encouraging regular updates of operational plans and providing technical support to this process; (2) ARC Replica's support to NGO initiatives through the Start Network; and (3) provision

of the ARV system, and training support for it, which has contributed to strengthened analytical capacity, although the ARV is not used for estimating support requirements, with reliance instead on the *Cadre Harmonisé* developed by CILSS. The effectiveness of capacity development support provided by ARC has, to some extent, been reduced by trained government staff moving on to other roles, but in some cases they remain working on DRM within NGOs.

ARC's engagement with Senegal has contributed to strengthening government capacity for early warning and planning, while the ARC Replica initiative has improved coordination in the planning and delivery of relief among major NGOs, and between government and NGOs collectively. The funding of the Start Network through ARC Replica has also supported the use of cash transfers, and a strong approach to M&E, generating lessons that can be applied in the future by the government. Budgeting for the ARC insurance premium has largely replaced a previously higher but fluctuating annual budget for 'prevention and control of disasters', and has been integrated into the budget process, along with payouts under ARC insurance policies. ARC has therefore contributed to greater predictability in budgeting, while ensuring that additional resources have been made available to deal with drought. However, the government delayed payment of the premium to ARC in 2018 (ultimately being deducted from the 2019 payment) and, following an unexpected increase in the premium due, did not make a premium payment in 2020. It has now paid the premium for 2021/22 (OPM 2021).

The R4 Rural Resilience Initiative is the WFP's flagship approach for integrated climate risk management. The initiative aims to help communities build resilience, incomes, and wellbeing in the face of increasing climate variability and shocks. The initiative combines four risk management strategies: (1) reducing the risk of climate-related shocks through nature-based solutions and improved agricultural practices; (2) transferring the risk of catastrophic events to private insurance markets; (3) enabling better risk retention of households and communities through the promotion of group savings and integration with social protection systems; and (4) promoting prudent risk-taking through a combination of financial education, livelihoods diversification, and easier access to credit to enable better investments.<sup>19</sup>

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and WFP joined forces to help make weather index insurance available to farmers for the first time in 2015. By 2017, three different index insurance products were available to members of farmers' organisations to protect against the risk of lack of rainfall in different localities covered by the project. The initiative was able to expand its reach to smallholder farmers as a result of: (1) bundling of index

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<sup>19</sup> See details of the **R4 Rural Resilience Initiative**, Climate Initiatives Platform website, UN Environment Programme.

insurance with inputs and services, which brings more value than just insurance on its own; (2) aggregating distribution through farmers' organisations and unions, which helps the market efficiently serve the hardest-to-reach and provide direct benefits; and (3) using satellite data to expand regions where populations are dispersed and ground data is lacking and difficult to acquire (WFP, IFAD and AFD 2018).

In its current country programme, WFP plans to support an additional 20,000 smallholders producing cereals and pulses to enable them to pay agricultural insurance premiums, and will continue to use its three-pronged approach for resilience programming. WFP will facilitate improved access to agricultural insurance by transferring risks to the National Agriculture Insurance Company of Senegal (CNAAS). This will be coupled with climate-related services at community level and the establishment of village cereal banks to build resilience. WFP will facilitate smallholders' access to microcredit, savings, and agricultural insurance, and will promote rural financial inclusion as well as reinforce capacities of local authorities for climate change adaptation and food security planning. WFP aims to enable the Government of Senegal to mainstream climate risk management models such as R4 in its safety net and social protection programmes (WFP 2018b).

The national Covid-19 response included social protection measures in the form of food assistance to affected populations. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government chose the option of distributing food to the most vulnerable households, with a target of 1 million households. The RNU was used for this purpose and food kits of rice, sugar, oil, pasta, as well as soap were distributed to beneficiary households (United Nations Senegal 2021). The emergency food distribution went against the advice of many development partners who had been urging the use of cash transfers for this purpose, and it was seen by many partners as a 'missed opportunity' to demonstrate that using the social protection system for a nationwide shock response was possible. As one analyst put it: 'Competing political agendas... have called into question the consensus reached earlier on the use of cash for a shock response, thus reversing already achieved levels of alignment' (Kreidler and Ndome 2021: vii).

Recent evaluations of the Covid-19 response emergency food support programme suggest limitations in the approach. One evaluation noted that while the programme did build on basic tools in place for the targeting of vulnerable households – namely the RNU – there were difficulties in its application on the ground. Moreover, distribution of food aid, as a relief mechanism, was marked as elsewhere by inefficiencies arising from issues around transport, stockage, and handling (Toukara *et al.* 2021). A second assessment confirmed this analysis and additionally found limited impact on food insecurity of beneficiaries (Diouf, Alassani and Seck 2021; see also Ridde and Faye 2022; Ficou 2022).



Among the sectoral responses to Covid-19, the Ministry of Education launched a school feeding programme in March 2021. This received FCFA 552m in Global Partnership for Education (GPE) funding and operational support from WFP. The programme, which was expected to benefit more than 100,000 students, targets public schools in the most disadvantaged rural and peri-urban areas hardest hit by the pandemic, with the aim of alleviating its health and socioeconomic impacts on students and their families. Though funded by GPE, the programme has been delegated to AFD (GPE 2021).

There is good coordination within the social protection system, within the ARC mechanism, and among PNR partners; however, discussions and coordination between these three spheres is limited. Within social protection there are a number of high-level as well as technical committees where different governmental institutions and supporting partners meet. There is also an active Social Protection Thematic Group, in which only development partners participate (but no NGOs), which is currently chaired by UNICEF and ILO. Within the food security sector, there is a monitoring committee for the PNR that meets monthly under the chair of SE-CNSA. ARC's activities are coordinated through a technical working group in which DGPSN as well as SE-CNSA participate. Thus, both DGPSN and SE-CNSA have a role in more than one sphere, which enables dialogue. However, stakeholders invest mostly in the coordination of the domain in which they lead (DGPSN in social protection and SE-CNSA in seasonal food insecurity), and play a minor role in the others. Hence there is an exchange of information but little proactive effort to create synergies (Kreidler and Ndome 2021).

The World Bank provides significant support for social protection systems and programme development through its Senegal Safety Nets Support Project. First initiated in 2014/15, this project received its third additional financing in 2021. The project is also supported through the MDTF of the SASPP. A new programme of support for adaptive social protection in Senegal, planned to start up in 2022, includes a specific focus on the establishment of a shock-response programme as part of the social protection system and the implementation of shock-responsive assistance to support vulnerable households to cope with shocks (including climate shocks such as droughts, floods, or fires) (Bossuroy 2021).

WFP's current country strategic plan (2019–23) supports the government in operationalising sustainable safety nets and SRSP programmes. The focus is on addressing food and nutrition insecurity, resource degradation, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and educational development through school meals based on local smallholder production aiming for inclusive economic growth. The country plan focuses on gender-transformative and adaptive social protection and resilience programmes, which are seen as investments in the

humanitarian–development–peace nexus. The aim is to complement and help strengthen government-led safety nets and SRSP systems through: (1) provision of seasonal food or cash-based transfer assistance to complement the government's social transfers to food-insecure populations during lean seasons, using the RNU as an entry point for beneficiary household targeting; (2) creation of productive assets and provision of technical support for the diversification of rural livelihoods and facilitation of access to insurance and climate services, and the establishment of cereal banks to build resilience; and (3) provision and technical assistance for school feeding programmes linked to local food purchases from farmers' associations (WFP 2018b).

Other UN agencies such as UNICEF and ILO are important social protection actors in Senegal, but with less of a focus on shock-responsiveness. Senegal has been selected, along with seven other countries, to benefit from technical assistance from the 'Improving synergies between social protection and public finance management' initiative funded by the European Commission and implemented by ILO, UNICEF, and the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, in close cooperation with the EU Delegation to Senegal. The project will contribute to the reduction of poverty and social inequalities through the reinforcement of the social protection system to progressively achieve a rights-based universal coverage; it will be gender-sensitive and disability-sensitive, and adopt a lifecycle approach (UNICEF *et al.* 2020).

The EU, through its revised country strategy for 2021–23, supports the government's efforts to move forward on and achieve greater inclusivity in key ongoing social protection programmes. In collaboration with its Member States and other development partners such as the World Bank, priority in its third support programme pillar will be given to: (1) improving the sustainability of the PNBSF by introducing productive social safety nets; (2) institutionalising and scaling up the RNU as the common basis for targeting all social protection projects and programmes; (3) establishing an autonomous mechanism for financing social protection to ensure its budgetary, financial, and economic sustainability; (4) strengthening social transfer initiatives implemented in the context of addressing malnutrition and food insecurity by involving returning migrants and people living with disabilities; and (5) articulating and aligning response mechanisms to recurrent food and nutrition insecurity with existing social protection instruments (UE and MEPC 2021).

The French Development Agency (AFD) supports the European Union-financed project for social protection system development in Senegal, in partnership with others. This project aims to: (1) strengthen governance of the system (analytical work, support for coordination, national dialogue, and capacity building); (2) enhance reporting and M&E (working group, capacity building, information exchange, and information management for the RNU,

impact evaluation); (3) expand the reach of social protection mechanisms (universal health coverage, feasibility study for universal family allocation, policy development around people with disabilities and older people); and (4) reinforce the resilience of the social protection system (including in Covid-19 response, productive inclusion measures for beneficiaries of PNBSF, conceptualisation of SRSP) (Expertise France 2021).

The BMZ approved funding totalling €141m for development in Senegal. Major focuses include good governance, economic development, job training and employment, and climate and energy. BMZ has also supported the ARC Replica initiative (BMZ 2023; GIZ 2022).

NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) are important – if sometimes overlooked – social protection partners in Senegal. The secretariat of the West African Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) Network is based in the ACF office in Dakar, supporting the coordination of cash transfers, capacity building, knowledge management, and research. Local NGOs, known as social operators, play an active role in the PNBSF and some humanitarian programmes. As noted earlier, international NGOs are the key implementers of the ARC Replica initiative (Start Network 2020) and also serve as operational partners for implementation of WFP's seasonal cash transfers (Kreidler and Ndome 2021).

The EU-supported Platform of European NGOs in Senegal<sup>20</sup> includes a number of local civil society and research organisations that are involved in two new social protection projects: the REPROSEC (Reinforcement of Civil Society for an Effective Social Protection) project, and the OSCAR (Civil Society Implication in Social Protection) project. Both plan to conduct studies to provide reliable information on social protection to inform policies and advocacy for sustainable social protection financing. They will also set up a community monitoring system on social protection programmes, with recommendations for authorities, CSOs and other stakeholders. Members of the Platform are also involved in a variety of projects linked to food security.

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<sup>20</sup> For details of the Platform, including membership and projects, visit the website.

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## 6. Emerging issues and priorities for moving forward

### Key points

The country case study analyses and regional reviews highlight a number of key issues as priorities for moving forward with shock-responsive social protection in the Sahel. This section identifies ten such priorities, drawing on lessons learnt from global perspectives and experiences. Future efforts to provide shock-responsive social protection in the Sahel should:

- **Strengthen systems and expand coverage of programmes**, as the ability of a social protection system to expand in response to shocks depends in large part on the solidity and scope of the existing system; this implies further capacity-building at both national and subnational levels.
- **Further align programmes, tools, and mechanisms for food security, humanitarian assistance, and social protection** in order to ensure convergence and positive synergies.
- **Strengthen nutrition-sensitive approaches** in order to maximise positive impacts on nutritional outcomes in both the ‘silent emergency’ of undernutrition in the Sahel and the response to recurring seasonal shocks.
- **Enhance gender equality, empowerment, and protection** through appropriate programme design and implementation features, taking into account the context-specific gender differentials in the impacts and experiences of shocks.
- **Join up the adaptive and shock-responsive social protection and resilience agendas** to promote the full transformative potential of social protection, as set out in the protection, prevention, promotion, and transformation conceptual framework that guides a number of national social protection strategies in the region.
- **Move beyond safety nets to include broader dimensions of social protection in response to shocks**; this would represent a key innovation – going beyond the current focus on cash or food transfers to include other key components such as active labour market programmes and productive inclusion as well as social care services and further expansion of social insurance.
- **Develop conflict-sensitive models, analyses, and approaches** in the context of the Sahel, where growing conflicts are contributing to vulnerability

and risk, and resulting in different forms of forced displacement, leading to complex and ongoing emergencies.

- **Expand fiscal space overall for social protection in the Sahel and develop new instruments for shock-responsive social protection financing;** these are both critical for sustainability, with more efforts needed to support systematic reform in areas of relevance to shock-responsive social protection and its links with disaster risk management.
- **Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of shock-responsive social protection programmes and systems** to promote a continuous learning cycle, foster transformation in social protection, and improve service delivery.
- **Conduct research on relatively neglected themes at community level** to reinforce the knowledge base for shock-responsive programme development, including (for example) around questions of: appropriate assistance for mobile pastoralists; support for local social solidarity mechanisms and informal social protection provision; participatory processes to draw in local stakeholders; and analysis of context-specific gender dynamics (the differential impacts of shocks on men and women, and gendered capacities for adaptation and response).

## 6.1 Strengthening systems and expanding coverage

The ability of a social protection system to expand in response to shocks, through either ‘vertical expansion’ (a temporary increase in the value or duration of an intervention to meet beneficiaries’ needs) or ‘horizontal expansion’ (the temporary inclusion of a new caseload either by extending geographical coverage, enrolling more eligible households in existing areas, or altering the enrolment criteria) depends in large part on the maturity of the system, the completeness of its coverage, and the strength of its operational elements (including targeting tools, payment mechanisms, and the like) (O’Brien *et al.* 2018a). But as this current study has shown, national social safety net coverage remains limited, and a World Bank-supported review of six countries in the Sahel has concluded that: ‘Despite achievements and expanded reach, national systems in most countries still are not able to cover all the poorest through regular safety nets, and even less so provide at scale support in the lean season’ (SASPP 2022b: PowerPoint slide 2).

This implies that there is still a need for considerable ongoing investment in strengthening systems *per se*, focusing on the ‘nuts and bolts’ of assessment and delivery systems, and building national – and subnational – capacities to implement these. Expanding on and refining work on social registries would be particularly important, working to ensure that indicators of poverty and

vulnerability capture multiple dimensions, and that updates are conducted regularly to reflect the real dynamics of risk across the lifecycle and different livelihoods. Building technical, administrative, and operational capacity among government actors and their partners at all levels (both national and subnational) and in different sectors is also essential, and would be critical in each of the three country case studies in the Sahel.

The importance of capacity-building was among the key conclusions emanating from a series of BMZ-supported workshops on adaptive social protection in the Sahel, with an emphasis on both central and local governance structures:

The potential for the decentralisation and (A)SP agendas to nurture each other can be explored to identify synergies and influence national governments to enhance leadership, ownership and implementation capacity for ASP at all levels along the delivery and decision-making chain.

(BMZ *et al.* 2021: 3)

Key lessons learnt from the social protection response to the pandemic have offered valuable evidence and insights on crisis response effectiveness (Gentilini *et al.* 2022; Bastagli and Lowe 2021; Devereux 2021; IPC-IG 2021; World Bank 2021a). In the aftermath of Covid-19, the World Bank (2021a) has developed a 'stress test' tool to help assess a country's ability to adapt or scale up their national social protection systems in response to covariate shocks, as well as to identify priority areas for improvement. Such an exercise can provide the basis for investments in particular areas of social protection systems and mechanisms could contribute to strengthening shock responsiveness. UNICEF globally has also issued practical programme guidance on strengthening SRSP systems (UNICEF 2019).

## 6.2 Promoting coordination and convergence

Much has been written on the importance of aligning programmes, tools, and mechanisms for food security, humanitarian, and social protection assistance. Preliminary findings from the World Bank-supported six-country review of links between humanitarian assistance and national social protection systems in the Sahel show a mixed picture in terms of convergence, which is found to be overall weak in the region, despite opportunities and avenues for it. Established relations among partners are seen to be a key enabler of convergence, along with a history of collaboration and collective learning; this was seen in the Mauritania case study and, to some extent, in Niger, where food security actors have worked steadily together in a coordinated way. The review notes that donors can play a critical role in encouraging convergence but that this is not always the case, citing the example of Senegal, where some actors still opt for

parallel systems. It notes that in general, ‘Donors’ priorities and risk appetite can be a disincentive for convergence’ (SASPP 2022b: PowerPoint slide 8). At the same time, strong government leadership, such as in Mauritania and Senegal, provides positive potential for strengthening convergence. Nevertheless, diverging and often competing institutional interests (among both development partners and government agencies) can impede harmonisation of approaches and need to be taken into account in strategies to move forward (SASPP 2022b: PowerPoint slide 9).

There is some agreement that social registries can be a key connecting point. Already a key building block of social protection systems, they can also be a useful instrument for humanitarian programmes and food security actions if (as in the case of Mauritania) incremental and concerted efforts are taken to ensure inclusive development of indicators on multiple types of vulnerability; or (as in the case of Senegal) the use of the registry to target programme beneficiaries is made mandatory. At the same time, stakeholders across countries express concerns around the need to: (1) maintain updated data to reflect dynamic conditions (including for seasonal food insecurity); (2) broaden coverage to include wider national population sets; and (3) ensure interoperability of data and information systems (SASPP 2022b: PowerPoint slide 13; discussion carried out with key stakeholders).

Various frameworks have been developed to conceptualise approaches to fostering convergence (Seyfert *et al.* 2019; O’Brien *et al.* 2018a). A guidance package has also been developed by the European Commission on social protection across the humanitarian–development nexus, emphasising the benefits of convergence in terms of: (1) reducing response times and overlaps; (2) strengthening national systems; (3) offering choice and dignity through predictable support; (4) using cash-based assistance to support local economies and markets; (5) offering a progressive exit strategy in the transition between crisis and the return to ‘normal’; and (6) supporting the sustainability of impacts while enhancing value for money (European Commission 2019).

### **6.3 Strengthening nutrition-sensitive programmes and approaches**

There is strong evidence that social protection can support food security and dietary diversity but its impact on nutrition has been less clear, with a number of evaluations of social cash transfers in particular finding little to no impact on stunting and wasting. Stronger and more consistent nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific approaches are urgently needed to ensure that both regular social protection programmes and shock responses to crises build in the measures needed to improve nutritional outcomes.

This involves: including clear nutrition goals and indicators in social protection policies and institutional architecture; enhancing data, analysis, and evidence to inform programme design; ensuring that programmes target and reach nutritionally vulnerable groups with appropriate benefit modalities and amounts; and combining interventions with complementary health and nutrition services (WFP 2022b). Recent analyses suggest multiple options for strengthening the connections between social protection, food security, and nutrition: improving programmes that already exist; introducing innovations through more radical reforms (for example, overhauling the nature of a transfer programme); and adapting systems, including through enhancing linkages between early warning systems and social protection and shock-preparedness (Gentilini 2022).

## 6.4 Enhancing gender equality, empowerment, and protection

Crises can intensify existing gender inequalities; women and girls often face different risks compared to men and boys during crises and are often disproportionately affected by shocks. Despite the increased investment in shock-sensitive social protection in recent years, most programmes have been gender-blind, with little attention to the specific needs of women and girls across the lifecycle in the context of crises. Overlooking gender and inclusion issues risks exacerbating poverty, vulnerability, and gender inequality, and misses opportunities for empowerment and transformative change (Holmes 2019).

While women are often the direct beneficiaries of social safety net support and humanitarian assistance, gender-specific analysis of vulnerability, coping capacity, and benefits from assistance are often lacking. A gender-sensitivity analysis of the SASPP highlighted overall the need to: develop a clear gender strategy for the programme; build capacity of programme staff and implementing partners; promote institutional structures to support actions for gender equality in adaptive social protection systems; amend programme design to address equality and inclusion; and strengthen routine M&E through disaggregated data collection and analysis (Pereznieto and Holmes 2020).

Key features of gender-responsive social protection programming that can be applied to SRSP would include: (1) using gendered poverty and vulnerability analysis to inform design and implementation; (2) ensuring gender sensitivity and gender-specific elements within programme design and implementation processes (including targeting, communication, delivery modalities, and grievance mechanisms); (3) coordinating with complementary programmes to enhance empowerment and transformative change; (4) monitoring and evaluating gender empowerment outcomes; and (5) building capacity by increasing skills, knowledge, and access to tools on gender and inclusion issues in emergencies (Holmes 2019).



## 6.5 Linking up the social protection and resilience agendas

In its original conceptualisation, adaptive social protection posits domains of interaction between three spheres: social protection, disaster risk reduction (DRR), and climate change adaptation (Davies *et al.* 2008). The DRR linkage has been influential in the development of current SRSP thinking and programmes; however, the climate change adaptation component has sometimes been left out, depriving some approaches of conceptual completeness that could link up the social protection and resilience agendas through support for livelihoods. The resilience element of DRR may also have become somewhat obscured in SRSP programmes that focus more on response than on preparation, but they converge along a number of dimensions (Cornelius *et al.* 2018). As Davies *et al.* point out, 'Disaster risk reduction aims to make livelihoods more resilient to the impacts of disasters, hazards and shocks before the event. There are multiple overlaps between disaster risk reduction and social protection in a livelihoods context' (2008: 2).

Stakeholders in a number of countries have stressed the importance of linking social protection, including SRSP, with resilience. National policy frameworks in the three country case studies provide for such linkages, with two of the countries (Niger and Mauritania) drawing explicitly on the social framework of protection, prevention, promotion, and transformation as a conceptual underpinning for such linkages. Some partners, such as WFP but also others, embrace all dimensions in their country cooperation programmes. And partnership frameworks such as the nexus point specifically to the importance of integrated humanitarian and development approaches. There may be a need for further conceptual harmonisation within the region around adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, which might lead to a stronger consensus around the links between social protection and resilience and the development of institutional coordination structures that embrace both. This was among the points arising from the series of BMZ-supported workshops on adaptive social protection in the Sahel. The current processes of review and updating of national social protection strategies in a number of the countries (including Niger and Mauritania) offer scope for such renewed reflection (BMZ *et al.* 2021).

## 6.6 Moving beyond social safety nets into broader areas of social protection

Social protection has been broadly conceived to include a number of different components for social assistance, social insurance, and social care services as well as active labour market policies and economic inclusion that together offer services and benefits along a continuum of different dimensions. While existing

experience in linking social protection and humanitarian assistance varies by programming approach, it has not so far covered all of the different dimensions or included all of the different programme components (*cf* Seyfert and Quarterman 2021). It has, rather, focused most extensively on cash transfers as a form of social assistance (through national social safety net programmes), and to a secondary degree on social insurance through the ARC initiative for crop protection, as well as recent pilots in Niger around pastoral insurance.

There is extensive literature on how to link cash assistance across the humanitarian and social protection domains; however, there are only limited examples of linking labour market interventions and there are hardly any sources discussing how to link social care programming to shock response. Yet a number of options exist (*ibid.*). Current processes underway for the review and updating of the first generation of national social protection policies and strategies (as in Niger and Mauritania) provide scope for renewed thinking about such programmatic issues. Even within the most frequently employed modality of cash assistance, introduction of integrated ‘cash-plus’ approaches would be an innovation and one way (among others) to help link up the social protection and resilience agendas in response to shocks. Developing and supporting innovative approaches to ‘nutrition-sensitive’ social protection, building on embryonic initiatives underway in different countries of the region, could also help link up nutritional services (such as those offered by malnutrition treatment centres) with cash and supplementary food distributions to the most vulnerable groups (young children and women of reproductive age) as a key element in SRSP.

## 6.7 Developing conflict-sensitive tools and models, and responding to forced displacement

In contexts where conflicts are contributing to vulnerability and risk and resulting in different forms of forced displacement, it will be important to: (1) develop holistic national frameworks for the integration of refugees into social protection systems (as in Mauritania); (2) determine the best forms of social assistance to offer in situations of internal displacement; and (3) perfect methods for conflict-sensitivity analysis and design of social protection programmes and of measures that both address some of the root causes of conflict and contribute to social cohesion and peace-building. A growing literature is developing around this (*cf* Grun *et al.* 2020; Idris 2017), with a number of current initiatives underway to explore such issues (see, for example, the Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research programme<sup>21</sup> and a recent example of conflict-sensitivity social protection analysis in Nigeria.<sup>22</sup> In conflict situations and in their aftermath, government services are often absent, and a heavy burden is placed on non-

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<sup>21</sup> For details of the BASIC Research programme, see the IDS website.

<sup>22</sup> See the 360 hsdI website.

formal service provision by civil society actors – and on international humanitarian mechanisms. Communities also provide support for the most vulnerable individuals or households. The social protection agenda in conflict or transitional situations may usefully support such efforts and include the restoration of access to basic commodities and services for whole communities, not just for particularly vulnerable households, so as to contribute to the rebuilding of social cohesion (Darcy 2004).

A recent OECD (2022) overview of efforts by low- and middle-income countries to extend the coverage of national social protection systems to people who are forcibly displaced – drawing lessons from Iraq, Sudan, and Uganda – identified challenges and successes, and offered guidance for moving forward. Contextual factors often determine the feasibility of inclusive social protection; favourable legislation and policies can facilitate access to social protection for forcibly displaced persons while economic and financial incentives can enable inclusion. In our country case studies, Mauritania stands out for how it has integrated refugee populations into the social registry for benefits through the national social safety net programme. This has been accomplished due to political will on the part of government, and advocacy and support by partners. Niger, at the same time, is grappling with both refugees and IDPs, and is straining to provide appropriate assistance to all. The OECD review identifies five key areas in which social protection coverage for all people who are forcibly displaced (whether refugees or internally displaced) could be improved, as follows: (1) incorporate refugees and IDPs into national social protection policy and planning; (2) support multi-year financing for the inclusion of forcibly displaced populations; (3) enhance coordination across the spectrum of key actors; (4) include refugees and IDPs systematically in data collection systems; and (5) monitor and evaluate inclusion regularly (OECD and EBA 2022).

A recent review undertaken as part of the BASIC Research programme offers further insights into the relationship between humanitarian response to initial displacement and longer-term development planning, including in social protection. This review suggests areas for further research into how and if the potential for social protection to offer more sustainable responses to displacement is being realised as a basis for further action. The research areas highlighted include the degree to which current approaches consider the following dimensions: (1) issues of intersectionality, particularly gender, age, and diversity; (2) the need for flexible registration systems taking into consideration issues of registration; (3) the implication of different levels of government and communities themselves in the provision of social assistance; and (4) the nature of efforts to promote either ‘self-reliance’ and / or more transformative ‘self-determination’ (Collyer *et al.* 2022). A recent analytical framework has been developed to conceptualise the linkages between humanitarian assistance and social protection in response to forced displacement (Lowe *et al.* 2022).

## 6.8 Ensuring sustainable financing

Fiscal space overall for social protection in the Sahel is very limited (BMZ *et al.* 2021). A recent review of financing for SRSP has drawn both parallels and distinctions between disaster risk financing (DRF) and broader SRSP financing, and sets out the basic principles for each. DRF is about planning comprehensively for the occurrence of a shock, looking both at the required response and how this response will be financed, ensuring that plans, capacity, coordination, delivery mechanisms, and financing arrangements to pay for implementation are in place before a shock occurs. SRSP is about integrating that approach into a wider system that also focuses on longer-term efforts to reduce residual risk and anticipate future shocks. This can include investing in longer-term, risk-aware social protection and resilience programmes, and aligning a broad constellation of actors to provide a ‘web of support’ for vulnerable people in times of shock that is more coherent, comprehensive, and adequate (Longhurst *et al.* 2021: 8).

Financing for SRSP and DRF aims to follow the same basic principles – that is, flexibility in approach and alignment across stakeholders –to ensure financing that is: (1) timely (to allow immediate response); (2) appropriate (sequenced according to need); (3) available (based on pre-agreed rules and straightforward administrative modalities for release); (4) deliverable (with the necessary capacity, infrastructure, and enabling conditions in place); (5) informed (based on objective and commonly agreed or understood data and information); (6) predictable (so that plans can be appropriately implemented); (7) coordinated (through intentional and coherent alignment of different forms of financing); and (8) equitable (to reach those most in need and ensure gender equity and social inclusion) (*ibid.*: 9).

Many challenges exist. While multiple sectors have the potential to fund SRSP, and financing comes from a mixture of sectoral sources and actors (including climate change adaptation funding, humanitarian funding, and official development assistance), funding in overall terms is currently low and hard to track. Moreover, there is a limited number of institutions that offer risk finance instruments, which in turn limits the options available to improve and diversify risk financing, and puts more pressure on humanitarian response in the event of shocks. Structural constraints such as tight donor conditionality, and limited investment in multi-year, pooled fund, or anticipatory mechanisms limit the ability of the humanitarian community to meaningfully engage in nexus and shock-responsive approaches (Longhurst *et al.* 2021). Efforts underway in the case study countries focus on predictable sources of financing for annual lean season responses.

There is a need for further support for systematic reform in areas of relevance to SRSP, including the increased use of pooled funds, anticipatory action, and cash to align and leverage investments ‘across the nexus’ between humanitarian,

disaster risk management, and social protection partners; and to prompt wider governmental reform in areas key to this agenda (around institutional mandate, public finance management, fiscal space, etc.). Without this concerted effort, SRSP (and its financing) may remain a low priority in the countries that could benefit from it the most. Climate finance, especially adaptation finance, has significant potential to fund SRSP while further research is needed into expanding financial protection strategies from climate- and weather-induced covariate shocks to cover other complex risks, including those linked to health. And in any introduction of new finance mechanisms, capacity development and affordability will be key issues to consider (*ibid.*).

## 6.9 Enhancing monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are normally activities carried out on the level of a discrete project or programme; less fully developed or applied are efforts to monitor and evaluate joint efforts or systems *per se*. As SRSP is inherently a multi-partner and multi-programme domain, cutting across different sectors, the complexities involved in M&E are multiplied. Additional challenges may arise from the following (Holmes *et al.* 2021):

- The pressure for urgent speed of decision-making and action when responding to rapid-onset disasters often leaves little time for functions that may be considered secondary, such as monitoring.
- Monitoring can become logistically more difficult – for example, if communication and access to people are disrupted or because the shock affected remote or marginalised populations.
- Demands for reporting and accountability for donors are increased in humanitarian contexts. This increases the pressure to focus monitoring more narrowly on those dimensions necessary for accountability to donors.
- There is still no widely agreed definition of SRSP, which means there is limited comparability and compatibility in how different agencies monitor SRSP interventions.

A good M&E system promotes a continuous learning cycle, fosters transformation in social protection, and improves service delivery. Ideally, it is triggered by a continuous demand for M&E and gives equal importance to M&E functions, to improve policy and programme management and planning, and enhance policy and programme accountability. An M&E framework that harmonises indicators from across social protection programmes can help to overcome potential fragmentation at the policy and programme levels, while reaping benefits in terms of cost and capacity synergies. Indicators must be agreed, prioritised, and refined as the result of participatory processes that draw in all relevant stakeholders. A range of data sources, both internal and external,

must be used, and appropriate institutional arrangements need to be established (Transform 2017).

A recent toolkit on SRSP suggests that good M&E can be achieved through the careful selection of appropriate and robust indicators, with consideration of harmonising indicators across interventions and sectors (social protection, DRM and humanitarian). In attempting to measure the performance of social protection systems in responding to shocks, four different categories might be considered. These cover measurement of processes and systems, outcomes and impacts, with a variety of indicators focused on: (1) the activities and effectiveness of the routine social protection programme in building household resilience by reducing vulnerability to shocks (for example, through continued protection of household income or preventing households from falling further into poverty as a result of a shock); (2) measurement of a routine social protection programme's ability to withstand shocks and continue operations in the context of a crisis; (3) the effects of the shock-responsive component so as to measure and compare emergency responses through social protection programmes and systems with traditional emergency response; and (4) coordination, integration and / or harmonisation of social protection, humanitarian, and DRM actors and interventions to better prepare for, respond to, and facilitate recovery from shocks (O'Brien *et al.* 2018b).

## 6.10 Researching unexplored issues

Much of the research and analytical work to date around SRSP focuses on issues to do with systems-strengthening, the development of operational mechanisms and targeting procedures, institutional configurations, and coordination and convergence – all clearly important domains, but all focusing, in a sense, on the providers or the 'supply side'. There appears to have been less attention to some of the more sociological themes around the potential beneficiaries – the 'demand side' – which is an important aspect of the overall evidence base for improved programming. Key questions that might be useful to explore include the following (for specific details of suggestions on Niger, see Watson 2021).

### **How to reach mobile pastoralists with appropriate forms of assistance?**

The Sahel is home to large populations of nomadic or transhumant pastoralists who are often both socially and economically marginalised and lack access to basic services, including social protection. Pastoralists' mobile livelihoods and risk-management strategies represent one of the most adaptive responses to the shocks and stresses of an arid environment, but they find themselves increasingly vulnerable in the face of changing circumstances and covariate shocks. Research on this neglected issue, along with piloting of trial interventions, would be important to understand how SRSP programmes can

best be tailored to the particular contours of pastoral livelihoods and wellbeing (see, for example, Watson 2016).

### **How can local solidarity mechanisms and informal social protection be strengthened in response to shocks?**

In the absence of adequate formal social protection provision across much of the Sahel, informal social protection mechanisms serve as vital safety nets for the majority of individuals and households. They take forms that can change over time and are based on ties of social solidarity deriving from shared kinship, religion, locality, or friendship. They serve as examples of social capital that bind individuals and groups together, promoting a pooling of risks and shared responses to common lifecycle and livelihood risks. Such mechanisms are themselves, however, vulnerable to shocks and stresses, and there is evidence to suggest that they are more effective in response to idiosyncratic shocks than to covariate shocks affecting broader communities. There are nevertheless promising examples of how external assistance can build on and help to strengthen the linking social capital functions of such informal mechanisms, enabling them to contribute more effectively to 'shock-responsive' social protection. These should be seen as complementary to, rather than a replacement for, formal social protection, which remains the responsibility of the state (*ibid.*). Further research into such mechanisms would be a first step towards efforts to strengthen their capacities to support livelihood adaptation and resilience, and provide assistance to the most vulnerable households and individuals in times of shock.

### **How to fully integrate gender needs and capacities into programme design and implementation ?**

The gender-sensitivity analysis of the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program recommended development of a gender-responsive research plan (Perezniето and Holmes 2020). Further research in specific country contexts could contribute to efforts to strengthen gender-specific analyses and gender-responsive actions that could help ensure that the differential needs and capacities of women and men are fully taken into consideration in all shock-responsive interventions.

### **How to more fully engage local stakeholders in the design and implementation of shock-responsive programmes?**

Participatory approaches to SRSP programme design and implementation are not well documented, and face specific challenges in emergency settings where time is of the essence in developing and delivering a response and a multitude of actors across the humanitarian and social protection sectors may already be struggling to consult and coordinate with each other. Yet failure to consult with affected communities and local community leaders, authorities, and governance structures as well as CSOs that are (or should be) on the front line of service

provision in the affected areas will likely lead to: (1) a failure to consider local sociocultural and political dynamics; (2) a misunderstanding of specific needs, particularly for the most marginalised groups; and (3) lack of buy-in and sustainability in the assistance that is offered. In the three case study countries, there are some attempts to strengthen community consultations, including through the integration of community-based targeting systems in the identification of vulnerable households and individuals. There are also efforts to strengthen and support community-based early warning systems as well as (for example, in the case of Senegal) to bring in local CSOs as social operators responsible for programme implementation. Such efforts require further systematic support and consolidation so that 'bottom-up' approaches can temper the 'top-down' tendencies of many SRSP programmes.



## 7. Broad areas for potential engagement

There are numerous areas of potential engagement by development partners around SRSP in the Sahel. They include the following.

### 7.1 Policy and programme development

- Promotion of more clearly defined gender-sensitive approaches and gender-responsive programming.
- Support for explicit nutrition-sensitive SRSP programming, including through piloting specific models.
- Initiation of ‘cash-plus’ approaches and pilots that could help link the social protection and resilience agendas.
- Support for the strengthening of conflict-sensitivity analysis and programme development.

### 7.2 Promotion of partnerships and participation in partnership fora

- Participation in regional fora and support for communities of practice around specific aspects of adaptive social protection, food and nutritional security, climate change adaptation, and the ‘triple nexus’.
- Participation at national level in partners’ groups around food security and resilience linked to SRSP.
- Support for the role of civil society in the diagnosis, response, and monitoring and evaluation of SRSP programmes.
- Specific support for capacity-building at local government level and for decentralised service providers.

### 7.3 Systems-strengthening

- Evidence-building and advocacy for increased national investment in SRSP.
  - Promotion and support for innovative disaster risk financing.
  - Promoting the use of climate adaptation funding for SRSP.
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- Support for effective inclusion of multidimensional poverty and vulnerability indicators in national social registries along with processes for continuous updates.
- Capacity-building around specific themes and / or operational mechanisms at both central and local levels.

## **7.4 Research, knowledge, and evidence-generation**

- Operational research around specific themes linked to policy priorities such as the gender dynamics of food insecurity and conflict-induced displacement, and women's roles in informal social protection and solidarity mechanisms.
  - Support for strengthened monitoring and evaluation systems.
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