



Social Protection for Food Security Instruments

Social protection for food security covers a broad and growing range of instruments. The limits of 'traditional' social safety nets (notably food aid and public works) and the need to meet increasingly complex needs have led to the emergence of a wide diversity of instruments that seek to integrate the essential components of food security (food availability, nutrition and households' access to food), effectively target different segments of the population based on their vulnerability (women, children, the elderly, etc.), and more sustainably fight hunger. Thus, today, there is a wide diversity of social protection for food security instruments: transfers (both conditional and unconditional) of money, staples and small livestock; public works programmes, school meals, and even, according to some experts, agricultural input subsidies and harvest insurance. The table below presents the main instruments used today in social protection for food security approaches.

	Food Distribution	Food Subsidies	Emergency Cash Transfers	Conditional Cash Transfers	Public Works Programmes	Input Subsidies	School Meal Services
Purpose	direct supply of food	lower the cost of food	increase beneficiaries' purchasing power	increase beneficiaries' purchasing power and change their behaviour (e.g. school attendance or vaccines for children)	provide money or food in exchange for participation in building public infrastructures	lower agricultural input prices	provide children with meals at school
Advantages	better food availability	better access to food	- better access to diverse food - ability to invest in other goods or activities	reduced transmission of food insecurity to following generations	- better access to food - infrastructures that are useful for development	increased agricultural production (and improved access to and availability of food)	- targeting a vulnerable category - school attendance encouraged
Criticisms and Constraints	- destabilise the local market (price drops for local products) - high logistical costs	- expensive and difficult to control - affects the non-poor - difficult to stop programmes	- costly, especially for universal programmes - issue of targeting if not universal - cumbersome management	need for good quality, accessible social services (health and education)	- excludes people unable to work - infrastructure maintenance difficult	- difficult to target the poorest - not very efficient and destabilises the local market if poorly targeted	difficult to target the criteria of vulnerability or poverty

Food Aid: An Old Model that Has Limits

The most classic form of assistance for the food insecure consists of the free distribution of food to people living in zones affected by crises. These distributions are limited in time and used in particular during major incidents (drought, storms, wars, etc.). These instruments have been the object of much criticism in recent years. Requiring expensive and complex logistics, food distribution is difficult to implement rapidly and efficiently. It can trigger a drop in agricultural prices on local markets, with devastating effects on small farmers. More fundamentally, the current forms of food crisis show that food security does not depend on agricultural production alone; rather, it depends heavily on people's ability to access food, the sanitary and nutritional quality of food, water, and diets. We have also understood that food insecurity is not limited to temporary hunger (following a crisis). It is also cyclic (hitting a large share of the population every year, for example in the pre-harvest period) or even chronic (people going hungry constantly). While food distribution can be effective in the context of humanitarian crises, it is not designed to fight chronic hunger.

Cash Transfers: Growing Success

Cash transfers have been increasingly popular in recent years because they improve populations' access to a diverse range of foods (that they choose) and can even allow people to begin the process of lastingly climbing out of poverty by starting a small-scale economic activity or sending their children to school. They can stimulate the local economy as households buy more locally produced goods (whether food or other). In order to strengthen

The largest conditional cash transfer programmes are found in Brazil (the *Bolsa Familia*, 11 million households) and Mexico (*Oportunidades*, 5 million households).

the positive effects of cash transfers, some programmes include conditions (for example, obliging households to send their children to school or receive medical check-ups). Mexico is the first country to have set up a national (conditional) cash transfer programme at the end of the 1990s. Following the success of this experiment, programmes of this type spread in Latin America, Asia and more recently sub-Saharan Africa. In this last region, cash transfers are less often conditional because there are fewer health care centres and schools. Some African countries have set up cash transfer programmes on a vaster scale. In South Africa, 10 million children and more than 2 million elderly people receive unconditional cash transfers. In West Africa, most programmes nevertheless take the form of projects piloted by donors (European Union, World Bank, USAID, etc.) and executed by NGOs, although a shift seems to be underway towards larger-scale national programmes. Despite their success, cash transfer programmes have their limits: when markets are narrow, they can notably drive up food prices, lowering households' access to food.

School Meals: Very Widespread Programmes

Approximately 368 million children (one out of every five children) receive a daily meal in 169 developed and developing countries.

School meal programmes usually take the form of a micronutrient-dense meal provided at school (breakfast, lunch or a snack). They are very successful: according to the WFP, nearly all countries in the world have a school meal programme. These instruments make it easy to target children, one of the groups most vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity; they also help prevent school drop outs among young generations and thereby reduce their long-term

vulnerability to food insecurity. The extent of these programmes is however still limited in areas where needs are greatest. In low-income countries, less than 20% of children receive a daily meal at school,

compared to nearly 50% of children in middle-income countries. In Latin America, 85 million children receive a daily meal at school, 120 million children receive one in South Asia, and only 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa.

Public Works: Still Widely Used Instruments

In Ethiopia, the Productive Safety Net Program executes more than 30,000 public works projects every year.

These programmes provide food (food-for-work) or money (cash-for-work) in exchange for general interest work (rural road construction, soil conservation, irrigation infrastructures, etc.). Such instruments have existed in many developing countries since their independence and are still frequently used. Given the low pay and work required, only the poorest apply to participate in these programmes, which makes it possible to reduce the cost and time needed to target beneficiaries. Nevertheless, in practice, this instrument excludes certain vulnerable population groups that are unable to work: the elderly, the disabled, pregnant or breastfeeding women, and children. In addition, the works built are sometimes poorly designed or difficult to maintain and may rapidly fall into disuse.

Challenge #1: Adapting Instruments to Needs

The existence of new social protection instruments is a response to the need to overcome different food security challenges and build the resilience of vulnerable populations. Each instrument is more or less adapted to a factor in hunger (food availability, households' access to food, malnutrition, resilience), a type of food insecurity (temporary, cyclic, structural) and a group of people (children, the elderly, pregnant or breastfeeding women, etc.). For example, a public works programme will be particularly suitable in contexts where hunger is mainly linked to a deficit of income-generating jobs. It will not, however, help fight child malnutrition. The option of cash transfers must be used if markets operate well. If they don't, it is more effective to use food distribution or food-for-work.

Challenge #2: Building a Coherent System

Ideally, a good social protection policy to fight hunger combines several instruments so as to be able to respond to the different needs of diverse groups and do so in the given economic and institutional contexts. Rwanda, for example, launched the 'Vision 2020 Umurenge' programme in 2008; it combines unconditional cash transfers for the poor who cannot work, public works for the poor who can work, and a credit system to grant loans to the poor to allow them to increase their production or develop micro enterprises. Some programmes attempt for their part to combine several targets and goals. For example, the *Bolsa Familia* programme in Brazil provides children with school meals by buying food locally from small farmers. The administration is targeting several objectives: feed children from poor households and prevent malnutrition among them, ensure they attend school to attempt to break the cycle of generational poverty, ensure income (and work) for poor farmers, and stimulate local production by structuring demand. Food reserves can be developed in parallel to support for small farmers to increase production.

Ethiopia's social protection program (nearly 8 million people) combines public works for those who can work (80% of recipients) and unconditional food or cash transfers for others.

Challenge #3: Increasingly Sustainable Systems

In West Africa, social transfers are the most frequently utilised components of social protection to fight food insecurity. Even though these transfers historically have had the goal of responding to shocks, the idea of adjusting them to become true social protection instruments that aim to provide minimum social benefits and tackle chronic poverty and food insecurity is up for question. Concretely, this evolution implies diversifying instruments and making them sustainable, including outside of 'crisis' situations and for longer periods of time (several years). Indeed, yearly cash transfers to households before the pre-harvest period or monthly transfers for several years can prevent food insecurity and even allow households to lastingly avoid hunger by giving them the means to invest in an economic activity, receive better medical care or send their children to school, for example.



Further Reading

Social Protection for Food Security, a report by the HLPE (2012)

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/me422e/me422e.pdf>

Social Protection for Inclusive Development, European Report on Development (2010)

<http://erd.eui.eu/erd-2010/final-report/>

Introduction to Social Safety Nets, FAO online class (2012)

<http://www.foodsec.org/dl/elcpages/food-security-courses.asp?pgLanguage=en&leftItemSelected=food-security-courses>

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