

Invigorating Links Between Social Protection and Nutrition

December 6, 2022 | 9:00-12:00AM | Room G610

Background

The prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) plateaued between 2014 and 2019 (FAO, 2021). Then, in 2020, the PoU suddenly surged upwards by almost 18 percent after the socioeconomic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, worldwide obesity has nearly tripled since 1975, creating corresponding increases in non-communicable diseases; heart disease is the leading cause of deaths globally (WHO, 2021).

This public health crisis has coincided with other crises, such as the conflict in Ukraine. Ukraine and Russia provide around one-third of the world's wheat and barley, one-fifth of its maize, and over half of its sunflower oil, while Russia alone exports a fifth of the world's fertilisers and is the world's top natural gas exporter (UN News, 2022; IEA, 2022). The Food Price Index therefore soared since the conflict began and reached its highest level since FAO started recording (FAO, 2022). Around 1.7 billion people now live in an economy severely exposed to rising food prices, rising energy prices, and increased fertilizer prices, as well as tightening financial conditions, which means that people are increasingly unable to afford safe, nutritious, and healthy diets (UNCTAD, 2022).

Connections between food security, nutrition and social protection programs are increasingly recognized, informed by new data on the cost and affordability of healthy diets. The FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2022) annual flagship report on [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World](#) now reports for each country, at national level, the cost per day of the least expensive locally available foods needed to meet international standards of diet quality as well as its affordability. Furthermore, the Systems Analysis for Nutrition team at WFP has conducted more than 40 'Fill the Nutrient Gap' situation analyses that estimate the cost and affordability of nutritious diets at sub-national level and for different target groups to inform a multi-sectoral dialogue towards integrating nutrition across different platforms (www.wfp.org/fillthenutrientgap). Those metrics on cost and affordability of healthy, nutritious diets quantify food access in a way that can readily be used to guide a variety of social protection programs on a routine basis as well as in times of crisis. Globally comparable data on the cost and affordability of healthy diets produced for UN system agencies are readily available from the Food Prices for Nutrition DataBank ([World Bank, 2022](#)) and WFP's data viz system, and similar methods are increasingly used within countries to monitor spatial, temporal and demographic variation ([Tufts University, 2022](#)).

New data introduced by FAO, the World Bank, and Tufts University find that the cost per day of healthy diets is typically between \$3 and \$4 dollars per day at purchasing power parity prices, which is well above the \$1.90/day poverty line commonly used by the World Bank. These costs are also higher than the expenditure levels available for most social protection programs in low- and lower-middle income countries, but the affordability of healthy, nutritious diets provides a very powerful and useful new way of guiding a variety of social protection modalities. Beyond in-kind food transfers, school meals, and agricultural

programs, other modalities such as cash and voucher assistance have potential impacts on nutrition outcomes; several studies have demonstrated that such transfers lead to increased expenditures on food (Basagli et al., 2016).

The link between social protection and access to a healthy diet has led many countries to see social protection as a long-term investment toward nutritional outcomes and health, food security and livelihoods of individuals, households, and communities. Social protection schemes have increased markedly in prevalence and robustness in the past decades, with an estimated 3,856 social protection and labour measures in place globally as of January 2022 (Gentilini et al., 2022). Emerging and ongoing threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine, with their own implications for nutrition, have spurred additional interest in and need for social protection. However, there is an evidence gap around whether social protection programmes reduce multidimensional poverty (Borga & D'Ambrosio, 2021), and about which mechanisms can be efficacious in addressing nutritional vulnerability (Teklewold et al., 2022). Moreover, insights remain limited on approaches to overcome affordability and accessibility constraints, and a lack of comprehensive links to complementary nutrition-specific services and WASH infrastructure persists. Filling this evidence gap and elucidating the synergies between social protection and nutrition systems is critical to break the vicious cycle of malnutrition and poverty.

There is an opportunity to improve nutritional outcomes through nutrition-sensitive social protection by bringing together the evidence, experience, and expertise of a variety of different actors. The Universal Social Protection 2030 (USP2030) is a global alliance of governments, international organisations, and civil society actors which aims to achieve SDG 1 (No Poverty) by implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all by 2030. As part of this initiative, a diverse range of research, policy, and practitioner organisations including GAIN, FAO, IRC, ILO, Nutrition International (NI), Tufts University, FHI, UNICEF, the World Bank and WFP, created the Social Protection for Food Systems Transformation Working Group, which aims to utilise social protection to enhance food security, livelihoods and guarantee adequate nutritional outcomes for all. This Working Group will host a satellite session for the main International Congress of Nutrition event focused on the link between social protection, foods systems and nutrition.

Overview and Objectives of the Event

The 3-hour satellite session will capitalise on the nutrition evidence shared in the main event to inform a discussion around the social protection-foods systems-nutrition evidence gap. This discussion will inform how and to what degree social protection can improve nutritional outcomes, how to foster linkages between social protection and food systems, and how to optimise social protection to create long-lasting positive changes to the nutritional status of people across the globe.

This event will collaboratively bring together members of the Social Protection for Food Systems Transformation Working Group to:

- Outline how social protection can support the achievement of nutritional outcomes.

- Present think pieces and studies which examine the relationship between social protection, food systems and nutrition.
- Address the role of social protection regarding the unaffordability of healthy, nutritious diets and how food systems considerations need to be incorporated when designing programmes to reduce the affordability gap.
- Open a discussion of how nutrition can influence social policy and social protection and enhance achievement of their broad socio-economic development objectives.
- Illustrate how poverty, vulnerability, and risk cause poor nutritional outcomes, and how poor nutritional outcomes cause poverty, vulnerability, and risk.
- Enable mind shifts in nutrition and social protection for both sectors to recognise their mutually overlapping priorities.
- Create bridges between social protection and nutrition researchers, policy organisations, and programmatic organisations to provide a platform for multisectoral collaboration.
- Assist national governments to build nutrition objectives into their social protection USP2030 roadmaps.

Outputs

- Keynote presentations from actors working at the forefront of social protection and nutrition, such as the Institute of Development Studies, WFP and the International Food Policy Research Institute.
- A symposium of research pieces detailing the pathways through which social protection can improve nutritional outcomes.
- A synthesis report that compiles the evidence presented and discussed during the satellite event, providing key recommendations to improve the nutrition-sensitivity of social protection and a refined framework which articulates the social protection pathways to nutrition first developed by WFP, IDS and IFPRI.
- An event brochure summarising research paper abstracts in preparation of the event.

Agenda

Time	What?		Who?		Format	Duration
9:00	Welcome and Introduction to the Symposium	Introduction to the interagency framework on food systems and social protection and rationale for the USP2030 WG.	Lawrence Haddad	GAIN	Plenary Presentation	10 mins
9:10	Setting the Stage	The relevance of social protection for nutrition.	Prof. Stephen Devereux	IDS	Plenary Presentation	15 mins
9:25	The State of the Evidence	An evidence-based analysis of the challenges and opportunities for linking SP and NUT	Eva Monterosa	GAIN	Presentations and Panel discussion	60 mins
		Review of the SP pathways of impact on nutritional outcomes.	Mandana Arabi	NI, presenting the joint work developed with IFPRI		
			Juan Gonzalo Jaramillo Mejia	WFP presenting the joint work developed with IDS and IFPRI		
		Regional perspectives and key emerging issues in nutrition-sensitive social protection	Yuko Okamura	WB		
Boitshepo Bibi Giyose	NEPAD					
10:25	Q&A with the Audience					15 mins
10:40	Coffee and Tea Break					15mins
10:55	Breakout Sessions Instructions					5 mins
11:00	Breakout Sessions	Present evidence and work advanced by different members of the WG and engage with participants to see opportunities and entry points for linking their research on nutrition in favour of social protection policy and programming to yield better food security and nutritional outcomes.	Deborah Ash and Stephen Devereux	FHI360 and IDS	Session A. Gender-Sensitive Nutrition Through Life Course	45 mins
			Mandana Arabi and Eva Monterrosa	NI and GAIN	Session B. Connections Between Social Protection and Health Systems that are Situated in the Food Environment	
			Saskia de Pee and Prof. William Masters	WFP and Tufts University	Session C. Unaffordability of Healthy Diets	
11:45	Recap and Closure					15 min