



# Advancing Child-Sensitive Social Protection

DFID, HelpAge International, Hope & Homes for Children,  
Institute of Development Studies, International Labour Organization,  
Overseas Development Institute, Save the Children UK, UNDP,  
UNICEF and the World Bank

## Joint statement on advancing child-sensitive social protection

### *Rationale*

Social protection has long been used in industrialized countries to help ensure that the benefits of economic growth reach the poorest and most marginalized, helping to fulfil the internationally accepted right to a decent standard of living. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the International Labor Organization's (ILO) constitution and legal instruments on social security all establish social protection as a means for States to protect their most vulnerable citizens. Yet for most of the world's population, adults as well as children, such protection is far from the norm.

Social protection is generally understood as a set of public actions that address poverty, vulnerability and exclusion as well as provide means to cope with life's major risks throughout the life cycle. Social protection can increase the effectiveness of investments in health, education, and water and sanitation as part of an essential package of services for citizens. Investing in social protection not only supports progress towards a range of Millennium Development Goals, it has the potential to reduce poor people's vulnerabilities to global challenges such as aggregate economic shocks, instability in the price of food or other essential commodities, and climate change. Many societies recognize that such provision can also contribute to social cohesion and broader national socio-economic development and security.

The failure to invest adequately in the well-being of children from an early age has long-term implications for children and societies, because it increases the likelihood of poverty in adulthood and perpetuates the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

There is a growing body of evidence from a range of developing countries that social protection programmes can effectively increase the nutritional, health and educational status of children and reduce their risk of abuse and exploitation, with long-term developmental benefits (*see Note, page 4*). Social protection is increasingly viewed as a key investment in human capital and in breaking inter-generational poverty traps, results that are more likely when children's interests are taken into consideration from the outset.

### *Why promote child-sensitive approaches to social protection?*

Children's experiences of poverty and vulnerability are multidimensional and differ from those of adults. Children undergo complex physical, psychological and intellectual development as they grow, and are also often more vulnerable to malnutrition, disease, abuse and exploitation than adults. Their dependency on adults to support and protect them means that loss of family care is a significant risk, particularly in the context of conflict, humanitarian crises, and HIV and AIDS. Intra-household discrimination can also result in

#### **About the joint statement**

The joint statement aims to build greater consensus on the importance of child-sensitive social protection. It lays out the particular vulnerabilities that children and families face, the ways that social protection can impact children even when not focused on them, and outlines principles and approaches for undertaking child-sensitive social protection. The statement emerged from meetings and discussions between partners to consider and outline the importance of furthering social protection and ensuring it is child-sensitive. Moving forward, we hope the statement will support further dialogue among stakeholders on the evolving policy and programming aspects of child-sensitive social protection. The statement is an open one; for information on joining the signatories and supporting the statement, please visit the website: [www.unicef.org/socialpolicy](http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy).

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child poverty and hunger, lack of access to services, and abuse and exploitation. These risks may increase in situations where women's access to independent livelihoods is lower and the distribution of power and resources within the household particularly inequitable, since women bear the greatest responsibility for children's care and protection.

While many social protection measures – ranging from pensions to unemployment insurance – already benefit children without explicitly targeting them, small nuances in how children are considered in the design, implementation and evaluation of social protection programmes can make a huge difference. Making social protection more child-sensitive has the potential to benefit not only children, but also their families, communities and national development as a whole:

- Children compose more than one third of the population in most developing countries – particularly in the poorest – and tend to be over-represented among the poor within countries. Accordingly, effective development strategies must be informed by an understanding of the patterns of children's poverty and vulnerability.
- Child-sensitive social protection strategies can address the chronic poverty, social exclusion and external shocks that can irreversibly affect children's lifetime capacities and opportunities.
- By virtue of their age and status in society, children are practically and legally less able to claim their rights without the strong support that social protection strategies can offer.
- Child-sensitive social protection can address the risk of exclusion that is intensified for children in marginalized communities and for those who are additionally excluded due to gender, disability, HIV and AIDS, and other factors such as harmful sociocultural norms that can marginalize children and leave them vulnerable.

### Principles of child-sensitive social protection

The following principles should be considered in the design, implementation and evaluation of child-sensitive social protection programmes:

- Avoid adverse impacts on children, and reduce or mitigate social and economic risks that directly affect children's lives.
- Intervene as early as possible where children are at risk, in order to prevent irreversible impairment or harm.
- Consider the age- and gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities of children throughout the life-cycle.
- Mitigate the effects of shocks, exclusion and poverty on families, recognizing that families raising children need support to ensure equal opportunity.
- Make special provision to reach children who are particularly vulnerable and excluded, including children without parental care, and those who are marginalized within their families or communities due to their gender, disability, ethnicity, HIV and AIDS or other factors.
- Consider the mechanisms and intra-household dynamics that may affect how children are reached, with particular attention paid to the balance of power between men and women within the household and broader community.
- Include the voices and opinions of children, their caregivers and youth in the understanding and design of social protection systems and programmes.

### *What does it mean to make social protection child-sensitive?*

Child-sensitive social protection is an evidence-based approach that aims to maximize opportunities and developmental outcomes for children by considering different dimensions of children's well-being. It focuses on addressing the inherent social disadvantages, risks and vulnerabilities children may be born into, as well as those acquired later in childhood due to external shocks. It is thus best achieved through integrated social protection approaches.



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Concretely, child-sensitive social protection should focus on aspects of well-being that include: providing adequate child and maternal nutrition; access to quality basic services for the poorest and most marginalized; supporting families and caregivers in their childcare role, including increasing the time available within the household; addressing gender inequality; preventing discrimination and child abuse in and outside the home; reducing child labour; increasing caregivers' access to employment or income generation; and preparing adolescents for their own livelihoods, taking account of their role as current and future workers and parents.

While the diversity of social protection programmes and contexts means there can be no 'one size fits all' definition of what makes a social protection programme child-sensitive, there are key principles that should be considered in the design, implementation and evaluation of any programme (*see Box, page 2*). Taking account of these principles and aims, child-sensitive social protection systems ensure that institutional capacity and resources are available to efficiently and effectively implement appropriate instruments such as:

- **Social transfers:** regular, predictable transfers (cash or in kind, including fee waivers) from governments and community entities to individuals or households that can reduce child poverty and vulnerability, help ensure children's access to basic social services, and reduce the risk of child exploitation and abuse;
- **Social insurance:** that supports access to health care for children, as well as services to support communities and other risk-pooling mechanisms, preferably with contribution payment exemptions for the poor, that reach all households and individuals, including children;

- **Social services:** family and community services to support families and promote youth and adult employment; alternative care for children outside family environments; additional support to include vulnerable or excluded children in education; and social welfare services including family support, child protection services and assistance in accessing other services and entitlements;
- **Policies, legislation and regulations:** that protect families' access to resources, promote employment and support them in their childcare role, including ensuring access for poor people to basic social services, maternity and paternity leave, inheritance rights and anti-discrimination legislation.

Design and implementation features, including choice of instrument, targeting mechanism, use of conditionality and phasing, will need to respond to contextual factors such as the economy; poverty and vulnerability analysis; demographic data and trends; HIV and AIDS prevalence rates; resource availability; existing services; the political and institutional context and administrative capacity; and the available evidence base.

### *How can child-sensitive social protection be achieved?*

Governments and international development partners can take the following steps to further social protection and ensure it is child-sensitive. Any action should be guided by the principles of child-sensitive social protection (*see Box, page 2*):

- *Ensure existing social protection policies and programmes are child-sensitive.* Review the design and implementation of existing social protection policies and programmes to ensure they are child-sensitive, including taking into consideration the viewpoints of children, youth and their caregivers.

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- *Progressive realization.* Set priorities and sequence policy development and implementation to progressively realize a basic social protection package that is accessible to all those in need and is fully child-sensitive.
- *Increase available resources.* Governments and donors alike should seek to improve fiscal space and increase available resources for child-sensitive social protection programmes.
- *Increase capacity and co-ordination at all levels.* The design, implementation and evaluation of child-sensitive social protection involves a wide range of development actors. Accordingly, broad efforts are needed to build awareness, political will, capacity and intersectoral coordination.
- *Ensure balance and synergies between social transfers and social services.* Adequate investment in and linkages between transfers and social services is needed to ensure the reach, effectiveness and impact of social protection.
- *Continue to build the evidence base on child-sensitive social protection and ensure research findings are well-disseminated.* Ongoing research, data disaggregation, and monitoring and evaluation are needed to better understand effective programme design and implementation for maximum impact on children (particularly in low-income countries) as well as how child-sensitive approaches benefit the wider community and national development. Important in this work is including the voices and opinions of children and their caregivers in the understanding and design of these systems and programmes.

**Note:** There is growing body of literature on the impact of social protection programmes on children. In Brazil and Mexico, for example, affordable, well-targeted cash transfer programmes have reduced poverty and inequality (e.g., Soares, Fabio Veras, et al., 'Cash Transfer Programmes in Brazil: Impacts on inequality and poverty', International Poverty Centre Working Paper, no. 21, June 2006). An earlier programme in Brazil using both transfers and social welfare services also reduced child labour (Yap, Yoon-Tien, Guilherme Sedlacek and Peter F. Orazem, 'Limiting Child Labor Through Behavior-Based Income Transfers: An experimental evaluation of the PETI program in rural Brazil', World Bank, updated June 2002). In Bangladesh, the Food for Education programme increased overall school enrolment by 35.2% from 1992–1994; girls' enrolment increased 43.6% (Barrientos, Armando, and Jocelyn DeJong, 'Child Poverty and Cash Transfers', CHIP Report, no. 4, Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre, 2004). The programme also had an impact on child labour (Ravallion, Martin, and Quentin T. Wodon, 'Does Child Labour Displace Schooling? Evidence on behavioural responses to an enrollment subsidy', *The Economic Journal*, vol. 110, no. 462, March 2000). Poor children who receive the South African Child Support Grant are significantly more likely to be enrolled in school during the years following grant receipt than are equally poor children of the same age (Case, Anne, Victoria Hosegood and Frances Lund, 'The Reach and Impact of Child Support Grants: Evidence from KwaZulu-Natal', *Development Southern Africa*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 467–482, October 2005). Among families that received the old-age pension in South Africa, the health status and height of children in the household improved (Case, Anne, 'Does Money Protect Health Status?', Working Paper, no. 8495, National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2001). In Namibia, a significant portion of old-age pensions is spent on children's education (Devereux, Stephen, 'Social Pensions in Namibia and South Africa', IDS Discussion Paper, no. 379, Institute of Development Studies, February 2001). The nationwide Chile Solidario programme, which combines social work, preferential access to services, cash transfers and employment assistance, also has demonstrated results in reducing poverty, increasing adult employment and children's enrolment, including in preschool, and increasing awareness and use of other social services (Galasso, Emanuela, '“With Their Effort and One Opportunity”: Alleviating extreme poverty in Chile', Development Research Group, World Bank, March 2006).

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