

Joint Message on Social Protection responses in the context of COVID-19 in Eastern and Southern Africa

Background

In Eastern and Southern Africa, COVID-19 is foremost a socioeconomic crisis, with severe economic contractions threatening to quickly reverse development gains made in past decades. Although the number of confirmed cases still remain relatively low in the region, government containment measures, including border closures, curfews and lockdowns, are exacerbating the economic impacts. At the household level, the global and national forces from COVID-19 are lowering incomes and assets, increasing the costs of basic goods, reducing access to social services and severely disrupting food systems. For a population that was already grappling with a multitude of compounding shocks, including flooding, drought, locusts, and protracted conflicts prior to the arrival of COVID-19, in addition to extreme poverty, millions of households are under extreme risk of irreversible harm and even death.

The depth of the socioeconomic crisis will play out over the coming months, but what is clear is that families that rely on the informal sector, seasonal employment, cross-border trade and hawking, as well as those living in squatter or informal settlements, are being hit the hardest. Financial barriers also mean that these populations will be the least likely to access testing and treatment services. Given the powerful benefits for households and children and the surrounding economy, social protection must feature as a central policy response to COVID-19. UNICEF and WFP are proud to see that social protection has already featured as a central part of policy responses in some countries in the region. Yet we know that existing safety nets have limited coverage, while existing programs are largely focused in rural areas and far away from reaching the newly vulnerable in urban areas. This demands new solutions, stronger collaboration and drastically increased external funding to avert catastrophe.

The purpose of this note is to highlight practical ways that UNICEF and WFP can deepen partnership and support national social protection responses to COVID-19 across Eastern and Southern Africa.



Systems Driven

First and foremost, in line with the UN Development System Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, UNICEF and WFP will focus on the use and strengthening of existing government social protection systems and services and contributing to building nascent systems where appropriate. This can help efficiency and delivery, and build systems for the longer term to strengthen national capacity to effectively respond to future shocks. UNICEF and WFP can also bring their complementary strengths to support effective coordination between emergency response and social protection systems.



UNICEF and WFP priorities for joint support

| Type of response | Areas of joint support |
|--|--|
| Ensuring existing safety nets are not disrupted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify possible risks and advise on program adjustments to limit risk of virus transmission and support people facing COVID-19 related restrictions, especially during distribution of entitlements (this can include changing distribution schedules, ensuring safe practices at distribution, and temporarily removing program restrictions to enable access); Support linkages between social protection programs and other key sectoral interventions, in particular water and sanitation, protection improved access to information, and food systems; Advocacy to ensure that funding for existing programs is protected from national budget reallocations to address the crisis. |
| Expanding reach of existing safety nets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy and technical assistance for Governments to rapidly expand cash transfer programs including increasing the value of transfers and the number of beneficiaries (especially in urban and COVID-19 hotspots); Support governments to mobilize resources for temporary expansion, including through national budget reallocations, donor funds and accessing emergency funding facilities from the international financial institutions; Support monitoring and revision of implementation where needed. |
| Introducing new safety nets | <p>Where coverage of social protection and government capacities are limited, administer emergency safety net programs with focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design: contribute to the common analysis of vulnerability to understand who and where to target, common benefit generosity, and distribution modalities; Implementation: share evaluations and lessons learned, piggy-back upon each other's distribution, monitoring and grievance mechanisms; Coordination: continue to support government engagement and coordination role with the intention to inform and strengthen the national social protection system. |



WFP/UNICEF Joint Regional Collaboration Efforts

UNICEF and WFP are committed to work together across these regions to support the design and implementation of the much larger-scale national social protection responses that governments will be undertaking. This includes:

- ✓ **Ensure coherence and complementarity of COVID-19 specific humanitarian assistance with national systems, including social protection systems;**
- ✓ **Provide joint technical support to governments and partners to think through options for new and large-scale safety net responses; and**
- ✓ **Prioritize mechanisms that can contribute to longer term strengthening of the social protection system, without compromising on the urgency of assistance provided in the immediate term.**

Regionally, UNICEF and WFP are sharing methodologies and models to ensure harmonized analysis of the magnitude of the economic shock and the implications for the scaling up of social assistance under different scenarios. In Southern Africa, UNICEF and WFP have set-up a regional social protection working group that will be a forum for knowledge sharing and coordination.

WFP/UNICEF Joint Country Level Progress



pictured, a Tosika Fameno beneficiary receives her first payment during the week of 27 April, 2020

At the country level, respective teams are drawing on their complementary strengths to work through and in support of national social protection systems for COVID-19 response. For example, in Ethiopia, UNICEF and WFP are coordinating their respective support to the scale up of the Urban Productive Safety Net Programme (UPSNP), including targeted support to the most vulnerable Temporary Direct Support (TDS) to meet their essential nutritional needs. In Kenya, UNICEF and WFP are working together through the UNDAF Social and Child Protection team joint technical assistance to support and complement the government-financed expansion of social safety nets in response to COVID-19. And in Madagascar, UNICEF and WFP jointly contributed to the design of the government's Tosika Fameno urban cash transfer response.

UNICEF works with national governments and partners in Eastern and Southern Africa to strengthen national social protection systems and programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this includes supporting governments to leverage resources to prioritize social protection and enable expansion of national safety nets. Over the past two decades, technical assistance has been provided to ensure appropriate design, implementation and monitoring of these expansions as well as encourage linkages between social protection and other social services. Support during the COVID-19 pandemic is always provided with the long-term goal to continue building government systems and their ability to adapt and respond to shocks as and when they arise.

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WFP is increasingly focusing on providing technical assistance to governments to achieve measurable progress towards SDG 2 targets through scalable, cost-efficient and shock-responsive national safety nets and social protection systems. WFP is able to draw on decades of experience in safety net programming in crisis contexts and technical expertise in analysis, assessment, programme design, delivery systems and protection. WFP's long term vision is to contribute to the establishment and strengthening of national social protection systems that support people to meet their essential needs; contribute to food security and nutrition; reduce humanitarian need and have the potential to flex in response to shocks.

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Additional Resources

- [Impact of COVID-19 outbreak on livelihoods, food security and nutrition in East Africa](#) (WFP)
- WFP Regional Bureau for Southern Africa COVID 19 (March 2020) Economic and Health impacts on regional food and nutrition security (available via email)
- Supporting national social protection responses to the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19: Outline of a WFP offer to governments (forthcoming)
- [UNICEF ESARO Social Policy Guidance Note for COVID-19](#)
- [Gender-Responsive Social Protection in Response to COVID-19](#) (UNICEF)
- COVID-19 Impact on Household Poverty and Inequality in Eastern and Southern Africa (forthcoming, UNICEF)
- [CVA in COVID-19 Contexts](#) (CaLP)
- [COVID-19: Safe distribution of food, cash and non-food items](#) (CaLP)

