

UPDATE OF WFP'S SAFETY NETS POLICY



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I. RATIONALE

Introduction

1. In October 2004, WFP presented its corporate policy on safety nets as a subset of social protection interventions. The paper identified WFP's roles and experience in food-based safety nets and laid the policy foundations for WFP's engagement in the area.¹ While a range of considerations set out by that paper are still relevant, various global and internal developments have generated the need to revisit the existing policy framework.
2. For instance, new sources of risk have compounded long-standing patterns. These new risks include high and volatile food prices, the growing frequency and magnitude of weather-related disasters, protracted crises, rapid urbanization, and the straining of social fabric by pandemics such as HIV/AIDS and by widening inequalities. Populations lacking access to any form of public transfer are particularly affected, and include nearly 70 percent of households in South Asia and 80 percent in sub-Saharan Africa.²
3. To address these challenges, the high-level Cannes Summit Final Declaration called for "... safety net programmes to address hunger and malnutrition", and the Seoul Action Plan recommended efforts to "... support developing countries to strengthen and enhance social protection programs". A main priority set out by the G20 Development Working Group is "... cushioning vulnerable population from shocks through social protection systems", while the Busan Outcome Document underscores the importance of "... social protection systems for at risk communities".³ Continental movements, such as the African Union-sponsored Livingstone Call for Action and subsequent declarations, have galvanized governments' financing commitments.
4. These initiatives are grounded in robust empirical studies.⁴ For example, a comprehensive report by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group concluded that evidence on safety nets is "... richer than most other areas of social policy" and that "... each intervention has positive

¹ "WFP and Food-based Safety Nets: Concepts, Experiences and Future Programming Opportunities" (WFP/EB.3/2004/4-A).

² World Bank. 2011. *Social Protection Atlas*. Washington, DC.

³ Cannes Summit Final Declaration, 2011, p. 16; Seoul Development Consensus for Shared Growth, 2010, Annex II, p. 7; G20 France. 2011. Report of the Development Working Group, p. 11; and Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, 2011, Outcome Document, p. 8.

⁴ For example, *Journal of Nutrition*, 140 (1) and *Development Policy Review*, 29 (5).

impacts on the original objectives set out in the programs”.⁵ As a result, many low-income countries have recently introduced and expanded their national safety nets. Emerging economies are upgrading their social protection systems, often capitalizing on lessons from the first generation of conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes. South–South learning initiatives and research hubs have been launched, such as the Africa Platform for Social Protection, the Centre for Social Protection, the Inter-American Social Protection Network and WFP’s Centre of Excellence in Brazil.

5. Over the past decades, the nature and volume of its operations demonstrate WFP’s leading role as a global practitioner in safety nets. WFP’s strategic evolution into a food assistance agency has energized these efforts. As emphasized in WFP’s Strategic Plan 2008–2013, “by integrating assistance into national social protection strategies, safety nets help (...) assist governments in developing sustainable food assistance systems”.⁶ The ensuing flexible use of multiple instruments – including food, voucher and cash-based transfers – is yielding new opportunities for partnerships, learning platforms and technical support activities. Initiatives for enhancing WFP’s programme quality, spurring home-grown approaches and developing capacities have driven WFP’s support to safety nets.
6. This paper does not provide a major overhaul of WFP’s policy framework. Instead, it re-examines WFP’s approach to safety nets in light of the evidence, experiences and lessons emerging from analytical work and practical engagement. Overall, the paper seeks to clarify the concepts of safety nets and social protection and to illustrate how these relate to WFP’s activities, while laying out roles, opportunities and challenges for WFP in supporting and enhancing national safety net systems.

Principles and Lessons Learned

7. Several lessons emerged from the implementation of WFP’s 2004 policy and from broader international experience. These important lessons may represent a set of guiding principles to inform WFP’s engagement in safety nets for food and nutrition security. Lessons and principles include the following:

⁵ IEG. 2011. *Evidence and Lessons Learned from Impact Evaluations on Social Safety Nets*, p 3. World Bank, Washington, DC.

⁶ “WFP Strategic Plan 2008–2013” (WFP/EB.A/2008/5-A/1/Rev.1), p. 22, paragraph 46.

- *Understand the context.* Safety nets need to be nationally led and adapted to countries' diverse economic and socio-cultural contexts, and to their fiscal, institutional, technical and administrative capacities.
- *Assess what is available and build on what works.* Particularly in low-income countries, it is important to lay the basic groundwork for safety nets. This includes mapping and appraising available programmes and their comparative performances. This is essential for building on existing structures and best practices rather than creating parallel processes.⁷
- *Ensure coordination and predictability.* Safety nets require a high level of institutional coordination, particularly across ministries, between central and local authorities, and between governments and international partners. Safety nets should be underpinned by predictable support for addressing long-term challenges, and be flexible for adjusting to changing circumstances.
- *Focus on the most vulnerable.* Safety nets are the component of social protection targeted to the people in greatest need. However, attention should be paid to the multidimensional nature of poverty, its relative uniformity in many contexts, and the fact that exposure to one risk – such as malnutrition – may not correlate to vulnerability in other dimensions, such as income poverty.
- *Be system-oriented.* An overriding lesson centres on the importance of establishing safety nets before crises hit.⁸ This entails developing well-functioning *systems* of safety nets as opposed to isolated projects. A national system involves the progressive integration of various activities – assessments, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) – into a coherent policy framework, including clear institutional mechanisms, financing arrangements, solid information management arrangements such as an integrated beneficiary database, and linkages to other initiatives. Benefits yielded from a system approach include the following:
 - ◆ *Reduced disaster risk and need for emergency response.* When basic systems are in place, countries can reduce emergency response time and resources by increasing the size of existing transfers, as in Brazil and Mexico; expanding the coverage of existing programmes, as in the Philippines and Malawi; or providing one-off transfers to registered beneficiaries, as in Chile. In

⁷ For example, an estimated nearly 45 percent of safety net programmes in sub-Saharan Africa are not embedded in government structures (World Bank, 2011).

⁸ Kanbur, R. 2010. *Protecting the Poor Against the Next Crisis*. Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA.

other words, safety nets are emerging as platforms for providing assistance *ex-ante* and multi-annually as opposed to *ex-post*. This makes safety nets an integral component of the disaster risk reduction and preparedness agenda, as exemplified by the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia.⁹

- ◆ *Enhanced process effectiveness and efficiency.* An institutionalized system of targeting, delivery mechanisms, integrated beneficiary databases and M&E tools helps identify gaps in coverage, reduce duplication of efforts and enhance coordination.¹⁰ Ongoing efforts to enhance existing systems in Bangladesh and Kenya illustrate this point.
- ◆ *Integration of different social protection components.* A system makes it possible to connect and create interfaces among different components. For example, countries such as Colombia have built on the targeting of the national CCT programme to provide health insurance to beneficiaries. In Pakistan, the infrastructure for relief assistance was leveraged to provide recovery and reconstruction support to targeted households.
- *Be accountable and open to learning.* A safety net should be continuously improved and refined. This includes establishing consultative processes, ensuring systematic evaluation, translating evidence into implementation improvements, and generating open and accessible data to enhance accountability towards beneficiaries, civil society, governments and development partners.
- *Strengthen ownership and social contracts.* Weak social contracts between citizens and the State are often a core factor fuelling riots and instability. Safety nets are a crucial part of social contracts, and should strengthen ownership of and alignment with national priorities.¹¹ An important element in formalizing social contracts is the translation of commitments into legislation. Examples include the recent legal framework for social protection in Mozambique, or the national cash-for-work programme mandated under the

⁹ “WFP Policy on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management: Building Resilience and Food Security” (WFP/EB.2/2011/4-A). See also recommendations on safety nets laid out by the Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change. 2011. *Achieving Food Security in the Face of Climate Change*, pp. 10–11.

¹⁰ For example, the flagship Mexican CCT programme, Oportunidades, replaced 15 pre-existing programmes (Levy, S. 2007. *Progress Against Poverty Sustaining Mexico's Progres-a-Oportunidades Program*. Brookings Institution Press. Washington, DC).

¹¹ OECD. 2009. *Making Economic Growth More Pro-Poor: The Role of Employment and Social Protection*. In OECD. *Promoting Pro-Poor Growth: Social Protection*. OECD, Paris

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India.

- *Promote inclusive development pathways.* Evidence shows that safety nets represent an investment in economic growth¹² (Box 1). Although safety nets may require trade-offs, the multiple ways in which productive potential can be unleashed are triggering a major paradigm shift towards the understanding that economic and social policies are, over time, closely intertwined and that safety nets are central to both domains.

Box 1: Safety nets as an investment in economic growth

Findings from empirical studies and impact evaluations^{*} show that well-designed safety nets can spur economic growth in various ways, including through:

- *accumulating human capital*, particularly through early investments to improve cognitive development, school attainment and labour productivity – the combination of which are correlated with higher incomes as adults;
- *protecting human capital during crises*, because children born during times of crisis are more likely to be malnourished than children born in non-crisis years, with irreversible impairments to their long-term socio-economic potential;
- *improving risk management*, including with predictable transfers that may enable households to take risks and pursue higher-income livelihood opportunities that would otherwise be too costly to seize;
- *mitigating some market failures*, such as through integrating markets by building infrastructure, supporting the poorest households not eligible for credit or without access to insurance, and generating multipliers in ossified economies;
- *enhancing equity*, as high initial inequality stifles longer-term growth and poverty reduction, hence the need for interventions that “level the playing field”, strengthen social cohesion and reduce inequalities in opportunity.

^{*} E.g., Barrientos, A. 2012. Social Transfers and Growth: What Do We Know? What Do We Need to Find Out? *World Development* 40(1): 11–20 Alderman, H. & Hoddinott, J. 2009. Growth-Promoting Social Safety Nets. In von Braun, J., Vargas Hill, R. & Pandya-Lorch, R. (eds.) *The Poorest and Hungry. Assessments, Analyses, and Action*. IFPRI. Washington DC.

Concepts and Definitions

8. There are a wide range of views on the scope and definition of safety nets. Differences may be elicited by the theme’s somewhat elusive and cross-cutting nature, by proliferating and possibly misleading terminology and, to some extent, by actors’ competing views about the role of governments and public policy in development (Box 2). However, common ground is emerging. There is growing consensus in defining safety nets as *formal or informal non-contributory transfers provided to people vulnerable to or living in poverty, malnutrition and other forms of deprivation*. Therefore, safety nets require no payment from beneficiaries – such as

¹² Sometimes, safety nets are further differentiated into “productive” and “social” safety nets. This may be a misleading dichotomy as all safety nets can be productive, although in different ways and forms (see Box 1).

contributory premiums to obtain insurance – and can be provided publicly and privately.¹³

Box 2: Different terms for the same instruments

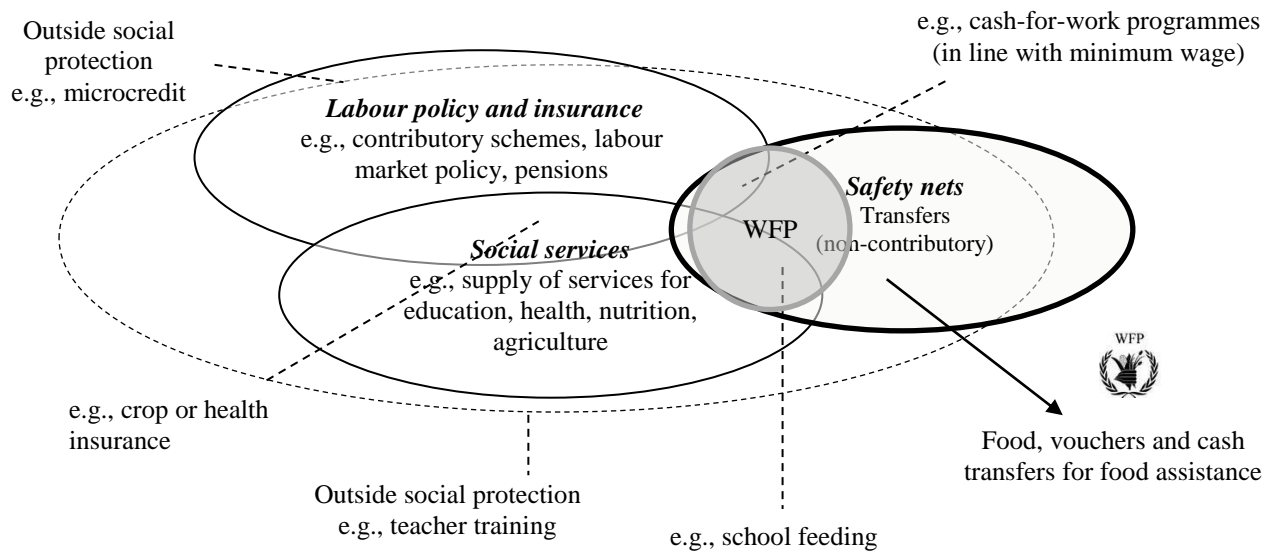
The terms “safety nets”, “social transfers” and “social assistance” all refer to non-contributory transfers. However, there is sometimes a degree of discomfort with the term “safety net”. This is because of, for example, difficulties in translating the term into national languages, the possibly disturbing image of catching people as they fall, or association with austere, compensatory measures. While actors may use one term or the other, it is important to recognize that, substantially, they all indicate the same set of social protection instruments.

9. According to international standards,¹⁴ safety net transfers can be grouped into three core categories:
 - *Conditional transfers.* These are provided contingent on a desired behaviour by beneficiaries – such as school meals, take-home rations, food-for-training.
 - *Unconditional transfers.* These provide people in need with direct support, without reciprocal activities – such as general food distribution.
 - *Public and community works.* Depending on the level of technical complexity, these can range from simple, labour-intensive livelihood activities such as maintenance of feeder roads, to more sophisticated, higher-quality asset creation programmes such as those linked to natural resource management.
10. However, safety nets are only a component of broader social protection systems. Social protection also includes labour and insurance-related interventions – such as health insurance, pensions and various labour policies – and the provision of social services as part of sectoral policies for the education, nutrition, health and other sectors. The scope and range of labour/insurance and social services often go beyond social protection, to include interventions such as microcredit or teacher training. Overall, the three broad components of social protection – safety nets, labour/insurance and social services – are often underpinned by rights and legislation, such as minimum wages. Figure 1 maps out social protection components and illustrative activities.

¹³ Public transfers are provided formally by governments or States and can be funded domestically, such as through tax revenues; externally, such as by donors and international agencies; or by a blend of both. Private transfers can be provided informally, such as through community sharing arrangements or remittances; or formally through market transactions, such as health insurance products.

¹⁴ Grosh, M., Del Ninno, C., Tesliuc, E. & Ouerghi, A. 2008. *For Protection and Promotion: The Design and Implementation of Effective Safety Nets*. World Bank, Washington, DC.

Figure 1: Social Protection Components



Source: Adapted from Gentilini & Omamo, 2011¹⁵

11. A large body of WFP interventions can be interpreted as safety nets. The important role that WFP activities play in safety nets has been widely underscored in international fora and analyses (Box 3). Depending on programme objectives and design, some of these activities may be positioned at the intersection of safety nets and sector social services in Figure 1, such as school feeding embedded in national education policies; others are at the interface between safety nets and labour/insurance, such as guaranteed employment generation activities. In 2010, WFP's conditional, unconditional and public/community work programmes accounted for nearly 21, 59 and 20 percent, respectively, of its portfolio.¹⁶

¹⁵ Gentilini, U. & Omamo, S.W. 2011. Social Protection 2.0: Exploring Issues, Evidence and Debates in a Globalizing World. *Food Policy*, 36 (3): 329-340.

¹⁶ Since 2005, when the 2004 policy was first implemented, unconditional transfers have increased by nearly 15 percentage points in WFP's portfolio, reflecting relative declines of 10 percentage points in conditional transfers and 5 percentage points in public works.

Box 3. Selected safety net-related initiatives with WFP engagement

In recent years, WFP has been involved in various international initiatives on safety nets and social protection. These include annual platforms such as the World Bank-supported South–South Social Protection Learning Forum (2005–2011) and the multi-agency Social Protection Show and Tell Seminar Series (2006–2011). WFP has also contributed to joint initiatives such as the United Nations Social Protection Floor Initiative, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) Povnet work on social protection, and the G20 Development Working Group on Social Protection. WFP has participated in more than a dozen international conferences on safety nets, and far more national initiatives. In addition, WFP hosted two global workshops on safety nets in 2009 and 2011, including international experts, academia and practitioners. Between 2004 and 2011, about 50 WFP staff attended the World Bank’s safety net training. Examples of selected WFP publications and corporate materials on safety nets include:

- WFP, 2011, “WFP and Safety Nets: A Policy Guidance Note”;
- WFP & BCG, 2011, “Safety Nets Assessment: Benefit-Cost Analysis and Best Practices”;
- WFP, 2010, “Nutritional Dimension of the Social Safety Nets in Central America and the Dominican Republic”;
- WFP, 2009, “OMC Region-Wide Study on Food Subsidy and Safety Nets: Opportunities for Capacity Support”;
- WFP, 2007, “Social Protection and Human Security for Chronically Food Insecure Populations in Countries with a High Prevalence of HIV and AIDS”.

Other analyses include Gentilini, U. & Omamo, S.W. 2009. *Unveiling Social Safety Nets*. WFP Occasional Paper No. 20; and Bundy, D. Burbano, C., Grosh, M., Gelli, A., Jukes, M. & Blake, L. 2009. *Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development and the Education Sector*. World Bank and WFP.

12. However, as noted by a recent strategic evaluation, simply recasting the full range of WFP activities as safety nets may not be appropriate.¹⁷ For instance, safety nets often pursue wider objectives than food assistance, sometimes including general poverty reduction or income support goals. Hence, the scope of WFP’s interventions does not encompass the whole safety net spectrum, but only a limited portion of it. WFP plays an important role in social protection through safety nets as they relate to food assistance for food and nutrition security.
13. From another perspective, some activities can be classified as safety net “instruments” or “transfers” – such as cash/food for work, and school feeding – and others as “functions in support” of safety nets. The latter may include cross-cutting services such as vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM), procurement or logistics, which inform and support the implementation of instruments. Similarly, food reserves supply locally procured food to support safety net programmes. Initiatives such as Purchase for Progress (P4P), when integrated into social protection strategies such as in Brazil, can reinforce safety net systems.
14. Credible engagement in safety nets also requires an upfront approach to providing, whenever possible, assistance that helps build and support national systems. This may be challenging, for example, in contexts

¹⁷ The evaluation highlighted that “... simply relabeling projects and programmes as safety nets or social protection will have a negative effect on WFP’s credibility”. “Summary Report of the Strategic Evaluation of WFP’s Role in Social Protection and Safety Nets” (WFP/EB.A/2011/7-B), p. 13.

lacking formal government systems or in the immediate aftermath of sudden shocks. In these instances, the provision of assistance may not build on existing institutional structures, because these are unavailable, inadequate or disrupted. Support may be provided through one-off and temporary arrangements, which although vital may have limited potential for connecting to longer-term, institutionalized systems of safety nets.¹⁸

II. WFP'S ROLES AND EXPERIENCES

Overarching Roles and Comparative Advantages

15. WFP plays several core roles in support of national safety nets. These are defined in line with WFP's comparative advantages and can be articulated as follows:

- *Collecting, analysing and disseminating information and data on risk, vulnerability, food security and nutrition.* This is based on WFP's capacity to conduct analyses on national and household-level risks, emergency or comprehensive food security assessments and geospatial mapping, to establish and interpret signals from early warning systems and to conduct specific assessments of livelihoods, markets and crop supplies. For example, from 2008 to 2011, WFP conducted more than 220 assessments – 130 emergency food security assessments, 60 market assessments and 30 comprehensive food security and vulnerability analyses – to inform decision-making and programming. These activities are often undertaken in partnership with governments' statistics institutes, and have proved important for informing programmatic choices in several national safety net programmes.
- *Designing safety nets that provide food assistance for food and nutrition security.* This embraces activities such as devising targeting methods, defining criteria for transfer selection, choosing appropriate delivery mechanisms, sensitizing and mobilizing communities through participatory approaches, and setting up monitoring systems and contingency plans.
- *Operationalizing and implementing safety nets.* This encompasses activities related to procurement, logistics and the operational delivery and distribution of food, cash and vouchers to targeted

¹⁸ Programmes with limited potential for connecting to safety nets include support to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in civil war-affected Northern Uganda in 2005, or air-dropped assistance in conflict zones. However, this does not mean that no IDP operation is a safety net. For example, a different approach was possible in IDP programmes in Colombia, where beneficiaries received food assistance and information about their entitlements and the procedures for registration and inclusion in the national system, enabling them to obtain access to safety net programmes.

beneficiaries. With a total of nearly 410 offices in the field, WFP has an unparalleled presence on the ground. Through its logistics cluster leadership and its network of more than 3,500 non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, WFP has been providing food transfers – mostly procured in developing countries – to a yearly average of about 90 million beneficiaries. With a volume of approved programmes of about US\$190 million in 2011, WFP is ramping up its cash-based portfolio in line with its Cash-for-Change initiative.

- *Evaluating and generating evidence on safety nets.* This embraces analyses of the effectiveness and efficiency of food assistance instruments for household food and nutrition security and livelihoods, including process-wide appraisals from supply chain analysis to monitoring of the final transfer distribution. For example, in partnership with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Institute of Development Studies, the World Bank and others, WFP has been generating state-of-the-art evidence on the performance of food- and cash-based safety nets.
 - *Cross-cutting technical and analytical activities.* These involve a range of functions such as capacity building, advocacy and advice regarding all the other activities – from assessments to evaluation. Their aim is to enhance ownership, raise awareness and influence policy-making in safety nets for food assistance. For example, through its 20 country strategy documents formulated by 2011, WFP has forged stronger partnerships with governments, and leveraged consultations to achieve better alignment with and engagement in poverty reduction strategies and United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes.
16. However, there are activities and contexts where WFP does not have a comparative advantage. For example, WFP may not be best positioned to design safety nets for shelter purposes, track public expenditure for sectoral services, devise comprehensive financing mechanisms, or simulate the fiscal implications of alternative safety nets. Partners may have comparative advantages in pursuing these activities, and WFP's important roles, experiences and contributions should be positioned and interpreted to complement these.

Contexts and Experiences

17. WFP operates in a wide range of contexts with different national safety net capacities.¹⁹ It therefore needs to calibrate specific roles within these diverse contexts. Building on analytical work, countries can be categorized into five typologies, ranging from scenario A, limited safety net capacity, to scenario E, advanced capacity.
18. The five scenarios represent a development from the three-pronged framework laid out in the 2004 policy. This has been refined to give a fuller account of the factors – including complex and political issues – that often complement considerations regarding technical capacity. The proposed typology neither aims to compartmentalize the fluid state of social protection across countries, nor suggests linear pathways for developing systems. Instead, it is intended to facilitate the positioning, illustration and articulation of the core issues emerging in different contexts.

Scenario A – Lower capacity, relatively unstable contexts

19. This scenario includes low-income, post-conflict and fragile states characterized by chronic needs, generally volatile conditions and receipt of large volumes of international support, where governments and partners have commenced laying the foundations for safety nets, often in response to recurrent shocks. Examples include Afghanistan, the Sudan, Haiti, Liberia, Niger and Yemen.
20. In this scenario, WFP is called on to undertake several core roles in safety nets. These include providing a range of supportive functions – such as assessments, design and M&E – and leading the implementation of large-scale, food security and nutrition-oriented safety nets. In these contexts, WFP has been leveraging its extensive field presence and experience to inform programmatic enhancements to safety nets, such as in Niger and Yemen (Box 4).

¹⁹ National capacities are here defined as the financial, institutional, administrative and technical ability to introduce, expand or sustain appropriate safety net systems. See, for example, Gentilini, U. & Omamo, S.W. 2011. Social Protection 2.0: Exploring Issues, Evidence and Debates in a Globalizing World. *Food Policy*, 36(3): 329–340.

Box 4. WFP and safety nets in scenario A

Designing safety nets in Niger: bridging and operationalizing lessons from relief and recovery

In 2011, the Government of Niger launched a National Social Protection Policy (PNPS) that envisages food transfers, but also emphasizes the use of cash-based programmes. The institutional home for this strategy is the Ministry of Population and Social Reforms, which has established a Safety Nets Unit (SSU). WFP has growing experience of cash transfers, in both emergency and recovery settings. Part of WFP's cash portfolio is supported by high-quality M&E frameworks developed in partnership with IFPRI. WFP helped implement the PNPS in two ways: i) as the institutional responsibilities for relief-oriented programmes are placed in the Office of the Prime Minister, and those for social protection in the Ministry of Population and Social Reforms, WFP's work with both helped improve the bridging and interconnection between the two institutional structures and their perspectives on dealing with cash transfers; and ii) to inform detailed national programmatic guidance on the use of cash-based safety nets within the PNPS, WFP and partners continuously cross-fertilized and shared technical issues and implementation practices with the SSU, including as part of the local Cash and Learning Partnership forum.

Enhancing safety nets in fragile states: insights from crisis-affected Yemen

The Social Welfare Fund (SWF) is one of Yemen's most important national safety nets. Housed in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the SWF assists more than 1 million households with monthly cash transfers of US\$20, delivered through the national post office system. In 2010, WFP launched a seasonal emergency safety net (ESN) providing food transfers – and in 2011 cash transfers – to severely food-insecure households. Rather than developing a parallel and distinct safety net scheme, WFP reinforced and complemented the SWF's beneficiary targeting, transfer values and distribution modalities. For instance, household-level targeting was based on existing SWF beneficiary lists, with new caseloads identified by a World Bank survey. Using the merged beneficiary list, WFP field enumerators conducted door-to-door campaigns to verify households' identities and provide eligible recipients with WFP ration cards. The verification campaign identified approximately 96 percent of targeted households, affirming the legitimacy of the SWF target list, although it must be noted that this exercise did not seek to reassess whether households were correctly categorized. WFP distributed cash through the same post office network as the SWF used, hence further strengthening the complementary nature of WFP's interventions. As the Government improves its capacity and starts to integrate more explicit food security indicators into its SWF targeting mechanism, it is expected that WFP will be able gradually to downsize its ESN activities and shift responsibility to the SWF.

Scenario B – Lower capacity, relatively stable contexts

21. In these contexts, capacities for safety nets are still comparatively limited but have improved significantly. Safety nets are largely externally financed, but the shares of government domestic revenues are growing. Other social protection components, such as insurance, are being introduced, alongside larger volumes of cash-based safety nets. Examples include Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal and Uganda.
22. Although many of the countries in scenario B have made significant progress in enhancing food security and nutrition, the needs and challenges are still significant. While maintaining a strong focus on operational issues, WFP tends also to perform selected technical advisory roles, support the formulation of national safety net strategies as in Cambodia and Mozambique, introduce and expand innovations, enhance programme quality, and help foster evidence-based decision-making processes overall as in Ethiopia. Case studies in scenario B are presented in Box 5.

Box 5. WFP and safety nets in scenario B

Supporting the formulation of national social protection strategies in Cambodia and Mozambique

In 2011, the Royal Government of Cambodia endorsed its National Social Protection Strategy for the Poor and Vulnerable 2011–2015. National efforts were led by the Government's Council for Agricultural and Rural Development, with support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the German Agency for International Cooperation, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP and the World Bank. A strategic framework was developed in a two-year process informed by analyses, reviews and research regarding the availability, objectives, performance and reform options of different social insurance and safety net instruments. Preliminary drafts and results were discussed and disseminated at national consultations. These initiatives were conducted under the auspices of a Technical Working Group on Food Security and Nutrition, facilitated by WFP, within which an Interim Working Group on Social Protection and a smaller Social Protection Core Group with an advisory role were established.

In Mozambique, a regulation on basic social protection was recently translated into legislation (Decree 85/2009), and a five-year National Strategy for Basic Social Protection 2010–2014 (NSBSP) was endorsed in 2010 and is housed in the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs. In addition to WFP, major actors included ILO, UNICEF, the World Bank, the Department for International Development (DFID), the Netherlands and civil society. WFP informed formulation of the NSBSP by providing support and technical advice on targeting, transfer selection, institutional coordination, graduation, linkages to other interventions such as the unconditional e-voucher Cesta Basica programme, and convergence with the climate change and disaster risk reduction agenda. To learn from other countries' lessons and practices, WFP arranged a study-tour for government officials to visit Ethiopia's safety net programmes.

The evolving programmatic and institutional framework of safety nets in Ethiopia

Launched in 2005, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is coordinated by the Food Security Coordination Directorate and has benefited from multi-year support from a coalition of actors including the Canadian International Development Agency, DFID, the European Commission, Irish Aid, the Netherlands, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the United States Agency for International Development, WFP and the World Bank. It provides cash or food transfers to a yearly average of about 7 million chronically food-insecure beneficiaries, 80 percent of whom participate in public works while 20 percent receive unconditional support. Although underpinned by a "cash-first" principle, it adopts a pragmatic approach for the selection of cash and food transfers, based on how well markets are functioning, local administrative capacities and communities' preference. On average, WFP has been supporting nearly 30 percent of yearly PSNP beneficiaries. Over the years, the timeliness of both cash and food transfers – a particularly important issue for "entitlement-oriented" programmes such as the PSNP – has improved significantly, and transfer levels and composition have been adjusted to food prices. More attention has been paid to enhancing the quality of assets created. WFP played an important role in developing technical guidance on public works, which has been incorporated into the Government's Community-Based Participatory Watershed Development Guidelines. The institutionalization of risk financing mechanisms – such as for analysing, estimating, costing and funding additional temporary needs – has been a main tenet of the PSNP's evolution, including through the WFP/World Bank Livelihoods, Early Assessment and Protection project. Graduation potential has been enhanced by linking the PSNP to other prudent risk-taking initiatives, such as the Household Asset-Building Programme and, more recently, pilot interventions such as the WFP-Oxfam R4 Rural Resilience Initiative. While challenges remain, it is widely recognized that the PSNP has been instrumental in stabilizing and protecting the consumption and assets of chronically poor households and promoting a forward-looking approach to safety nets.

Scenario C – Medium capacity, relatively unstable contexts

23. This scenario includes countries that have medium capacities but face ongoing political or complex challenges, such as Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, or that have recently experienced severe crises, such as Egypt and Georgia. In these contexts, the establishment of social protection systems – and safety nets as a component of these – represents a growing national priority for restoring social contracts as conditions stabilize and improve.

24. In this scenario, WFP is often engaged in a blend of advisory and implementation roles. Hand-over opportunities emerge, although recurrent shocks and lingering crises make WFP an important partner in safety net provisioning, especially as part of transition agendas. Activities may include supporting supply chain management, providing expertise and methods for VAM and targeting, rolling out and institutionalizing innovations, and ensuring that food security and nutrition considerations are embedded in national policy agendas. Examples from Georgia and Egypt are provided in Box 6.

Box 6. WFP and safety nets in scenario C

Forging joint safety nets in conflict situations: the United Nations platform in Georgia

In 2008, conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation resulted in displacement of nearly 140,000 beneficiaries. Following needs assessments and analyses, WFP's emergency response included a cash transfer component to provide food assistance to IDPs. The programme benefited from WFP's multi-annual experience of implementing cash-based programmes in Georgia, and its pre-established partnerships with the Peoples' Bank of Georgia (PBG), which is responsible for delivering a range of State-provided social protection instruments, such as pensions and poverty allowances. At the same time, UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were considering cash transfers for providing clothing to various target groups, but the three programmes were formulated independently. As part of United Nations humanitarian coordination mechanisms, WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR agreed to unify approaches for, respectively, food security, nutrition and shelter under a joint cash-based programme for IDPs. Agreements were signed between the agencies and the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation and the Civil Registry. These outlined the operational process, most of which was led by WFP, for determining criteria for beneficiary identification, targeting, transfer size, opening of bank accounts and issuance of smart cards by PBG. This joint, one-card platform for delivering different programmes was eventually incorporated into the Government's social protection system.

Harnessing the nutritional potential of safety nets in Egypt

The public food subsidy and distribution system is one of Egypt's core national safety nets. WFP leveraged its VAM expertise to enhance the targeting efficacy of the system, including by conducting two studies released in 2005 and 2009. WFP also provided technical support to enhance the system's nutrition focus. Following a nationwide flour fortification initiative, the Government requested WFP's support in fortifying subsidized vegetable oil to reduce vitamin and iron deficiencies. WFP commissioned a study to assess the scope for food fortification with vitamin A. The study identified the fortification of oil, in partnership with the Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade, as a cost-effective option. This was eventually included in the National Nutrition Strategy. As a result, fortification units have been installed in ten of the 22 factories supplying oil to the Government, and a manual for quality control has been issued. WFP supported the establishment of an online information system in which public and private mills can enter daily data related to production and quality. WFP also provided training for and set up a laboratory in the Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade, to analyse the level of iron in flour and bread provided under the safety net. Following the January 2011 revolution, WFP signed an agreement with the Cabinet Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) for the establishment of a market surveillance system. This will enhance the Government's capacity to manage and sustain food monitoring systems, and will enable it to take strategic decisions on adapting and scaling up its safety nets. Information from the initiative is provided in a joint IDSC-WFP publication, *Egyptian Food Observatory: Food Monitoring and Evaluation System*, produced monthly.

Scenario D – Medium capacity, relatively stable contexts

25. In this scenario, social protection systems are relatively mature: safety nets are generally domestically funded, contributory schemes are expanding, market-based insurance is growing and – in some cases – entitlements are mandated by law. However, there are still pockets of persistent needs, growing inequality, gaps in coverage or high exposure

to natural disasters. Examples include Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, India, Indonesia, Namibia and the Philippines.

26. In these contexts, WFP is more widely engaged in technical support and capacity development activities. WFP implements its programmes within the full institutional systems and structures put in place by governments. Programmes tend to complement and expand existing ones, including by adhering to specific programming issues such as targeting and transfer size. Although capacities are generally available, there is often scope for upgrading the quality of existing safety nets, making them more food security- and nutrition-oriented, enhancing outreach, piloting new delivery methods and technologies, and refining the institutional links between safety nets and emergency-related mechanisms. These contexts may also include engagement in non-traditional ways, through policy dialogue, trust funds, sector-wide approaches, etc. Box 7 documents the experience in three countries in scenario D.

Box 7. WFP and safety nets in scenario D

Innovating and complementing an established national safety net: insights from India

The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) is a flagship food-based safety net scheme in India. With an annual budget of more than US\$10 billion, and nearly 300 million beneficiaries, the scheme's performance is undermined by issues such as leakages and weak targeting. With support from AusAID, Adobe and the Government, WFP has introduced a package of technology-based solutions to streamline the TPDS in the State of Orissa. Under the pilot, beneficiaries' biometrics – fingerprints and iris scan – were recorded, and biometric-based food entitlement cards were distributed to about 1 million households. The approach has significantly reduced errors of inclusion and exclusion, fraudulent distribution of food, and duplications in the system. The initiative is aligned with the Government of India's ongoing Unique Identity Number project, which envisages creating a fraud-proof identity for each citizen, based on biometric identifiers. The Government is now planning to roll out the pilot initiative nationwide.

Phased institutionalization of safety nets in Ecuador and El Salvador

In 1987, WFP began providing school feeding services in Ecuador; two years later, the Government established an operational unit to institutionalize the project under the Ministry of Education. In 1999, school feeding was reaching 667,000 school-age children in 3,000 schools in poor rural areas; the Government provided 80 percent of the funds. By 2004, Ecuador school feeding programmes were financed entirely by the Government. As national capacity for implementation was still limited, WFP managed a trust fund on behalf of the Government for ten years, through which it provided services in procurement and logistics. In 2008, WFP officially handed over all responsibilities to the Government, following a year of intensive capacity development in all aspects of implementation.

In El Salvador, the school feeding programme started during the country's crisis in 1984, reaching 300,000 students, or 90 percent of school-age children in rural areas. In the early days, most of the financing for government programmes came from a trust fund generated through a national privatization initiative. In 1997, six years after the signing of peace accords, the Government began to take over programme management responsibilities, while WFP withdrew from all but the most food-insecure departments. Later, the national school feeding programme was financed through increasingly regular government budget allocations. The programme was included in the broader National School Health Programme, a core national safety net. By 2006, government allocations totalled US\$10 million, reaching nearly 650,000 children in 3,500 schools. In 2008, after 24 years of partnership with WFP, the Government achieved complete coverage and the school feeding programme was fully institutionalized. Currently, WFP is piloting procurement innovations under its corporate P4P initiative, which aims to link local procurement with the school feeding programme.

Scenario E – Higher-capacity contexts

27. This scenario consists of middle-income and emerging countries, such as Brazil, China and Mexico, which are playing important roles in knowledge transfer initiatives. Such countries are in the process of leveraging their multi-annual experience of large-scale programmes, such as CCTs, to develop comprehensive social protection systems that are appropriate for the ongoing structural economic and social transformations. These developments are informed by the systematic, high-quality evaluations and social contracts that were built as initiatives were gradually institutionalized.²⁰
28. South–South collaboration plays a critical role in enhancing safety net systems in different contexts. Although WFP has no operational presence in countries in scenario E, it can play a catalytic role in identifying relevant lessons that are transferable and applicable elsewhere. In this context, initiatives such as WFP’s Centre of Excellence in Brazil will promote South–South cooperation for instruments such as school feeding and beyond. The centre is designed to support countries in improving national safety nets by enabling them to benefit from Brazil’s lessons, technical expertise and experience in establishing integrated social protection systems.

III. EMERGING ISSUES

29. Various cross-cutting issues affect WFP’s engagement opportunities and capacity in safety nets. Some of these issues are connected to factors of broad relevance, such as debates on institutional factors, while others are more WFP-specific, such as programming, partnership and policy issues.

Programming Choices

Targeting

30. The selection of targeting methods for safety nets has stimulated lively debate. The issue becomes more contentious as programmes face declining resources and higher needs, and as the distinctions among household vulnerability profiles become blurred – “everybody is equally poor”. In southern Africa, for example, some approaches have proposed providing assistance to the poorest 10 percent in communities, or increasing the use of means- or proxy means-testing methods. In other

²⁰ Systems in high-income and advanced economies form a possible sixth scenario F.

cases, geographical, self- and community-based targeting methods have been deployed.²¹

31. The right targeting method, or combination of methods, depends on multiple factors and cannot be predetermined. Selection involves activities spanning assessments and design, making it an inherently dynamic and iterative process. Important issues to consider for selecting optimal targeting criteria might include:
- context – such as peri-urban areas or rural highlands;
 - possible types of shock – such as sudden-onset natural emergencies;
 - identified vulnerabilities and needs – such as micronutrient deficiencies;
 - livelihood, seasonal and cultural profiles – such as pastoralists;
 - institutional and partner capacities – such as infrastructure, outreach and skills;
 - national legal and policy framework – such as specific normative discipline and minimum wages.

Conditionality

32. There is lively discussion regarding the appropriateness of conditionalities (defined in paragraph 9), especially in scenarios A and B. Once it has been determined that it is appropriate to provide a transfer,²² emerging research suggests that the choice between conditional and unconditional programmes involves considering three broad classes of factors:
- *Approach and cultural issues.* There is philosophical debate around conditionalities. In some contexts, they are interpreted as coercive impositions on beneficiaries; in others, they are accepted as a way of promoting co-responsibility between governments and citizens.
 - *Feasibility and efficiency.* These factors include identifying the full gamut of short- and long-term costs, to ensure administrative capacity for programme management and – for conditional transfers – to monitor compliance and enforce conditions.
 - *Expected effectiveness.* Determining whether programme outcomes or impacts are attributable to complementary services – the conditions – or the transfers themselves is often a challenge.

²¹ AusAID. 2011. *Targeting the Poorest: An Assessment of the Proxy Means Test Methodology*. Canberra; Schubert, B. & Huijbregts, M. 2006. “The Malawi Social Cash Transfer Pilot Scheme: Preliminary Lessons Learned”. Paper presented at the conference Social Protection Initiatives for Children, Women and Families, New York, 30–31 October 2006.

²² For example, poor educational outcomes may be the result of weak school curricula, absent teachers or other supply-side issues, which the provision of transfers – conditional or not – may not address (Pritchett, L. 2012. Seeing A Child Like A State: Holding the Poor Accountable for Bad Schools. World Bank, *Development Impact*: guest blog post, January 3).

Comparative evidence on the causal imputation of impacts is mixed, depending on contexts and indicators.²³

Transfer selection

33. The selection of safety net modalities – food, cash or vouchers – should be based on a balanced, pragmatic and evidence-based approach. This is important because “social protection” and “cash transfers” are sometimes treated as being almost synonymous. As laid out in WFP’s policy and programme materials,²⁴ the appropriateness of alternative transfers hinges on context-specific parameters such as:
- programme objectives – such as providing wages or addressing micronutrient deficiencies;
 - functioning of markets – such as defined from supply-chain analysis;
 - implementation capacities – such as infrastructure, partners and delivery mechanisms;
 - performance regarding efficiency – costs and time – and effectiveness – outcomes, impacts and multipliers;
 - security conditions, including risk analysis and contingency planning;
 - beneficiaries’ preferences, and effects on social relations;
 - governments’ approaches and policy positions.
34. As part of transfer debates, it is often assumed that the use of information technology (IT) applies only to cash-based safety nets. Although they were initially sparked by cash assistance, IT innovations present opportunities for coordination and transparency for cash-, voucher- and food-based transfers. For example, electronic verification systems, common beneficiary databases and e-ration/entitlement cards yield benefits for all modalities. Cash-based programmes often require the possession of national identity cards, especially when implemented in partnership with commercial banks. These cards may be linked to national beneficiary databases, which connect information on beneficiaries to the programmes that they are entitled to or enrolled in. However, this does not mean that cash-based transfers are necessarily easier to institutionalize than food-based instruments (Box 8).

²³ Ozler B. and Ferreira F 2011. *Conditions Work! But Are They Good Thing?* World Bank, Washington, DC; Fiszbein, A. & Schady, N. 2009. *Conditional Cash Transfers: Reducing Present and Future Poverty*, World Bank, Washington, DC.

²⁴ WFP. 2011. “Cash and Voucher Programming”, Directive OD2011/004; “Update on the Implementation of WFP’s Policy on Vouchers and Cash Transfers” (WFP/EB.A/2011/5-A).

**Box 8. Programme institutionalization and hand-over:
Are cash-based safety nets different?**

WFP has experience of successfully handing over food-based programmes to governments. Recent examples in school feeding, for instance, include El Salvador, Peru and Cape Verde. However, it is often argued that cash-based programmes are easier to hand over and incorporate into national safety net systems, and governments are increasingly establishing long-term, cash-based safety nets. In Asia, for example, the Pakistan Benazir Income Support Programme reaches nearly 5 million households; in Bangladesh, cash-based programmes of various sorts reach about 11 million people; and the national CCT programmes in Indonesia and the Philippines – Programme Keluarga Harapan and the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programme respectively – have recently been allocated domestic resources of nearly US\$230 million. It may be easier for governments to institutionalize programmes that are the result of partnerships among actors than to incorporate dispersed projects. In this regard, cash-based programmes may have the advantage of representing a common denominator – such as common delivery systems, as in Georgia (Box 5) – among agencies providing assistance for diverse purposes. However, it should be emphasized that the viability of the hand-over process is also linked to the development of infrastructure, such as common verification systems and operational protocols – which also support food-based programmes, as in India (Box 6) – and to the fostering of national approaches, which may generate local multipliers, for example. These considerations suggest that the hand-over of programmes could depend less on the type of transfers provided and more on the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the initiative, whether food- or cash-based.

Monitoring and evaluation

35. The importance of sustainable, cost-effective and efficient programming has increased the relevance of accountability and evidence. Evaluation methods for safety nets are becoming increasingly sophisticated and include a growing use of experimental evaluations or randomized controlled trials²⁵ (RCTs) alongside more traditional methods. Widely adopted in medical science, RCTs have been deployed in evaluating CCTs in scenario E countries, and are increasingly applied in other contexts, such as Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Uganda.
36. The RCT method assigns a transfer to some randomly selected eligible beneficiaries, the “treatment” group, and assesses the transfer’s effect through subsequent comparisons of this group with a “control” group of people who do not participate in the programme but possess similar characteristics. The experience of WFP and its partners shows that although RCTs have improved the quality and rigour of evidence, they also present important limitations (Table 1). The pros and cons of RCTs and other methods need to be taken into account when selecting the most appropriate evaluation technique or combination of techniques.

²⁵ Barrett, C. & Carter, M. 2010. The Power and Pitfalls of Experiments in Development Economics: Some Non-Random Reflections. *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, 32(4): 515–548.

TABLE 1: PROS AND CONS OF EXPERIMENTAL/RANDOMIZED EVALUATIONS	
Pros	Cons
Can statistically detect causality of/attribute impacts	Costly and administratively intensive
Powerful for evaluating programmes of similar contexts or scales (“internal validity”)	Limited lessons for programmes of different scales or contexts (“external validity”)
Important for testing new and innovative approaches	Difficult to institutionalize – require highly specialized skills
Promote a scientific approach to decision-making	Possible ethical issues – control groups may get no transfer

37. The establishment of effective monitoring mechanisms is also crucial. This may include the systematic set-up of baselines before programmes are initiated; surveillance systems to track programme performance against objectives and adjust as conditions change; and integrated databases providing reliable and updated information on beneficiaries and programmes, such as the innovations in India and Georgia. These mechanisms are not only essential for programmatic purposes, but also provide the basis for informing broader coordination and institutional issues, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

Institutional Coordination and Flexibility

38. A major challenge for safety net platforms is balancing the predictability of support with institutional flexibility. This entails meeting planned needs and establishing coordinated and dynamic mechanisms to respond to emergencies, promote long-term household graduation and foster community ownership and bottom-up approaches.

Emergency preparedness and response

39. While often planned for longer-term purposes, safety nets should also be designed to respond to unpredictable shocks. However, although some safety nets have been complemented by risk management mechanisms – such as in Ethiopia (Box 5) – in others, the institutional and programmatic links between safety nets and emergency preparedness/response remain tenuous. Ministries for disaster management or similar functions are often less involved in the planning of safety nets than, for example, ministries of social affairs. As a result, when unpredictable shocks occur, responses tend to be implemented by different institutional actors. Emergency preparedness and response mechanisms need to be more fully coordinated and integrated into safety net platforms.

Graduation

40. The term “graduation” refers to the state people reach when they are no longer in need of safety nets and can enter pathways of self-reliance. This issue has gained prominence because of lingering concerns that safety nets can bolster dependency, i.e., they may reduce incentives for self-sufficiency or lack up-front exit strategies. There is limited evidence that safety nets can generate unintended negative consequences, such as dependency among able-bodied populations, and more evidence is needed to understand how to promote targeted beneficiaries’ sustained graduation out of safety nets.
41. An important factor, mentioned in paragraph 7, is the development of safety net systems. Establishing connections among different social protection programmes, and between them and other developmental opportunities, is a central tenet in enabling graduation. In practice, however, safety net interventions are often dispersed among different ministries and sectors. For example, asset creation programmes may be housed in the ministry of agriculture, school feeding in the education sector, and conditional cash transfers in the health realm. The establishment of governance mechanisms for inter-sectoral coordination is therefore essential for building systems of safety nets that are sustainable and incentives-compatible.

Decentralization and bottom-up approaches

42. Most of the debates around safety nets assume that transfers are provided publicly by governments. However, communities and households also deploy a wealth of traditional or informal mechanisms – such as *hawala* in Muslim countries – for mutual support; these include loans, risk-sharing arrangements and remittances. Such informal safety nets are often under severe stress, especially as a result of covariate shocks. In general, public safety nets should be designed to complement and promote these initiatives. Instead, however, some public programmes reinforce top-down approaches, with limited involvement of beneficiaries. Establishing synergies between formal public support and informal mechanisms is key to fostering a conducive environment for ownership and accountability, especially at the community level.

Policy Engagement

43. Some countries have recently developed specific national strategic frameworks for safety nets and social protection, including in contexts where WFP operates (Table 2). These initiatives set out the relevant discipline for a range of food security and nutrition issues central to WFP’s work. “Upstream” policy work significantly shapes

“downstream” implementation approaches, in terms of both design choices – targeting, choice of transfer, etc. – and assigning institutional responsibilities for coordination and implementation.

TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SAFETY NET POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Country	Title of policy	Year of release
Afghanistan	“Social Protection”, in the National Development Strategy	2008
Bangladesh	“Comprehensive National Strategy on Social Protection”	In progress
Cambodia	“National Social Protection Strategy for the Poor and Vulnerable”	2011
Ethiopia	“Productive Safety Net Programme”	2005
Ghana	“National Social Protection Strategy: Investing in People”	2008
Kenya	“National Social Protection Policy”	In progress
Liberia	“Social Welfare Policy”	2009
Malawi	“Social Protection and Disaster Management”, in the Growth and Development Strategy	2006
Mozambique	“National Strategy for Basic Social Protection”	2010
Nicaragua	“Social Protection Network”	2000
Niger	“National Social Protection Policy”	2011
Pakistan	“National Social Protection Policy”	In progress
Rwanda	“National Social Protection Strategy”	2011
Swaziland	“Social Protection”, in the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan	2007
United Republic of Tanzania	“National Social Protection Framework”	2008
Zambia	“National Policy on Social Welfare”	2008

44. WFP has contributed to several of these frameworks, but engaging and supporting the formulation of national safety net policies – working with and partnering the broad range of actors encompassed by social protection consortiums – often demands significant capacities. For example, recent evaluations have noted the constraints to WFP staff managing long-term policy relationships.²⁶ While other partners benefit from field-based senior social protection policy advisers, WFP’s implementation orientation generates challenges for systematic engagement in national policy platforms.

²⁶ “Summary Report of the Strategic Evaluation – From Food Aid to Food Assistance: Working in Partnership” (WFP/EB.1/2012/6-A).

45. Country experiences in Cambodia and Ethiopia, for example, show that successful engagement requires holistic and consensus-seeking approaches rather than a “WFP-centric” focus. Work on safety nets demands long-term vision, prudent risk taking, an appreciation of policy processes, negotiation skills, documented practices and evidence, and dedicated staff with technical expertise.
46. Especially in smaller country offices, engaging in policy work on safety nets may require trade-offs among competing priorities, including among alternative policy matters – such as safety nets, nutrition and the agriculture/P4P agenda – or between a policy and a programming focus. Strategic capacity-enhancing interventions should be designed in the light of such quandaries, including through staffing decisions and cultural change and knowledge management that help address some of the tensions.

Partnerships

47. As underscored in the first section of this paper, safety nets are becoming a central issue in discussions in global fora such as the G20, or regional bodies such as the African Union. They are also a core tenet of United Nations collaboration such as the Social Protection Floor. WFP has contributed significantly to these platforms, and has also forged specific collaboration, including fruitful partnerships with the World Bank. All these initiatives have underlined partnerships’ crucial role in shaping safety net policy and programmatic and advocacy efforts.
48. Partnering of governments for safety nets is clearly connected to capacity development initiatives. WFP’s efforts should always be tailored to the local context and be in response to a government request for capacity development support. In some instances, as in some scenario A and B countries, developing government capacities in safety nets may entail activities to transfer WFP’s own tools and approaches, such as training on VAM or supply chain management. In other cases, as in some scenario C and D countries, governments may request WFP to enhance their own national structures and systems. Such support is likely to be independent of WFP-supported programmes and may entail a more problem-solving, technically oriented approach that draws on WFP expertise, for example to make safety nets more nutritionally sensitive or to improve the targeting of a national cash transfer programme.
49. Experience shows that there are also specific operational challenges for partnerships at the country level. For example, recent appraisals found that “... the short duration of WFP’s project cycle hinders a long-term approach”, and that partners did not “... have confidence in WFP’s long-term commitments due to its funding structure”.²⁶ Partnerships often

need more time, predictability and sustained support than WFP's project cycles allow. Other barriers may include the overall aid modalities in a country. For example, in contexts where budget support is used widely, safety nets tend to be discussed among partner organizations that deliver aid in similar ways.

50. WFP has enacted several innovations to overcome these bottlenecks. Regarding business models, the financial framework review, the Immediate Response Account and the working-capital financing facility have enhanced the predictability, efficiency and flexibility of WFP's funding structure. These improvements could also facilitate WFP's engagement in safety nets – both by allowing the decoupling of technical support from tonnage-based programming and by providing more predictable and flexible support for longer-term initiatives.

IV. PRIORITIES AND IMPLICATIONS

51. *WFP plays a critical role in social protection through safety nets as they relate to food assistance for food and nutrition security.* WFP is a global leader in providing food assistance in the form of food or cash transfers. Providing non-contributory food or cash-based transfers for food assistance purposes is, in line with the discussion and caveats presented in this paper, an important function of safety nets as defined internationally. Therefore, WFP can play an important role in safety nets, and thereby in social protection, but one that is limited to food assistance activities.
52. *Providing technical support and practical expertise for safety nets.* WFP's field presence, experience and capacity to provide functions in support of safety nets, such as assessments and supply chain management, as well as practical and viable solutions – the “how to” knowledge – represent precious expertise to be tapped by governments and partners when formulating social protection and safety net policies and programmes.
53. *Ensuring that food and nutrition security objectives are embedded in safety nets.* Although safety net initiatives envision food and nutrition security outcomes and are implemented in high-burden contexts, they are often poverty-oriented. Hence, WFP should help ensure that food security and nutrition considerations are fully incorporated into decision-making processes, including for policy frameworks, programme design, M&E systems and advocacy efforts.
54. *Supporting governments in building systems of safety nets.* WFP and partners should support governments' progressive introduction and development of national safety net systems. Specific activities may include helping to establish unified beneficiary databases, forging joint delivery systems and devising common M&E frameworks. These “external” initiatives should

be complemented by “internal” efforts to enhance the integration and synergies among activities and programmes in WFP country portfolios.²⁷ Building on recent experience, activities may include developing internal databases of WFP beneficiaries at the country office level, streamlining M&E systems, and exploring ways to leverage the use of WFP beneficiary cards for multiple purposes.

55. *Helping to strengthen institutional mechanisms.* WFP could help governments and partners to enhance the coordination and flexibility of safety nets. Such support could be particularly useful in the realm of emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction, including through facilitating coordination between the national institutions responsible for relief and those for social affairs. WFP’s growing experience in nutrition, education and agriculture-related issues, such as from P4P, school feeding and high-quality asset creation activities, may help foster institutional synergies among safety nets and other sectoral initiatives.
56. *Ensuring that safety nets are informed by solid and context-specific evidence.* WFP should promote the nationally led and gradual introduction of safety nets, in line with national policies and capacities. As part of this, WFP is increasingly engaging with major research institutes to produce rigorous evidence on the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of safety nets. This offers a rich foundation on which WFP can build a more catalytic role in generating evidence to inform decision-making on safety nets in a diverse range of contexts.
57. *Forging strategic partnerships for safety nets.* The role of partnerships is central to supporting governments’ design of appropriate safety nets. WFP should pursue more deliberate initiatives to forge strategic partnerships with actors involved in safety nets, including United Nations agencies, international organizations, NGOs and academia. Although platforms already exist – such as with the World Bank, for school feeding – adapting these to include safety nets more broadly and explicitly may facilitate the establishment of technical platforms at the country level.
58. *Mobilizing resources.* Funding and financing modalities may deeply affect the quality of WFP’s support to national safety nets in several ways. As pointed out by the safety net strategic evaluation, the predictability of WFP’s assistance may be “... hampered by the lack of unrestricted and

²⁷ For example, in Haiti it was found that “... the country portfolio has been viewed and managed as a set of discrete food assistance activities and operations, not as an integrated portfolio. (...) [WFP] should explore the potential for integration across activities and with other partners (...) to multiply impact and ensure its efforts are achieving maximum results”. “Summary Evaluation Report – Haiti Country Portfolio” (WFP/EB.2/2011/6-C), pp. 12–13.

multi-year funding”.¹⁶ However, several government donors have recently started to increase substantially their multi-year and multilateral support through WFP, including their allocations to school feeding, nutrition and other safety net programmes. The financial framework review is also generating new opportunities for overcoming constraints identified by the recent livelihoods strategic evaluation²⁸ – by decoupling the tonnage delivered from the provision of technical advice. However, engagement in safety nets may also require a more proactive corporate effort by WFP, to seize non-traditional financing opportunities, especially – but not exclusively – in countries such as those in scenario D.

59. *Strengthening internal decision-making.* While many WFP activities and interventions already support national safety nets, more structured guidance is needed to help country offices improve their engagement in contentious debates. WFP will launch an initiative, Safety Nets in Practice (SNIP), to help elicit and streamline decision-making choices – why, which and how safety net interventions are selected, designed, implemented and evaluated. The roll-out of SNIP’s four components may entail an estimated financial requirement of nearly US\$3 million over three years:

- *Programming guidelines.* WFP has produced comprehensive materials to guide programme and operational choices. However, these are often not presented in ways that facilitate their use in safety net programmatic debates, such as those discussed in this paper. Some considerations are already enshrined in programme documents, but often in relation to specific instruments such as food for assets, or specific contexts such as emergencies. WFP will therefore issue guidelines to help guide decision-making on:
 - ◆ factors to be considered for selecting appropriate targeting criteria;
 - ◆ the choice between conditional and unconditional programmes;
 - ◆ the comparative merits and limitations of alternative evaluation methods, and ways of using findings to inform programme adjustments;
 - ◆ conditions for appropriate institutionalization and hand-over of safety nets to communities and countries.

²⁸ “Summary Report of the Strategic Evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihood Recovery Interventions” (WFP/EB.A/2009/7-B).

- *Tools and operational research.* These include the development of initiatives such as:
 - ◆ methods for mapping and assessing the availability, performance and readiness of national safety nets to respond to possible crises;
 - ◆ a database to identify, classify and track WFP's safety net interventions according to the international standards and definitions discussed in this paper;
 - ◆ a review of experience in and methods for setting up and managing integrated beneficiary information systems;
 - ◆ identification of specific strategic and capacity constraints or bottlenecks that prevent WFP from engaging in different contexts;
 - ◆ consultations with partners such as the World Bank and UNICEF to define safety net systems and their progressive introduction for food assistance in different contexts.
- *Enhanced technical skills.* These activities include developing a strategy for enhancing skills through a combination of institutional agreements to conduct overarching training, such as the World Bank's training in safety nets literacy; creating partnerships to fill specific technical needs, such as evaluation capacity; considering strategic secondments, both within WFP and externally by WFP staff; planning temporary staff exchanges to support major policy development efforts; and setting up a database of consultants and experts.
- *Information and knowledge management.* WFP will establish initiatives for knowledge generation and sharing to capture, adapt and disseminate lessons and experiences emerging from different contexts, particularly through South–South cooperation. This work will use evidence on internal and WFP-specific issues and on issues of broader relevance. In partnership with regional bureaux and country offices, new products will be designed to raise awareness on basic terminology, programme choices, evidence and events. As a member of research hubs such as the Centre for Social Protection, WFP will harness its engagement and contributions in various national, regional and international safety net fora.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CCT	conditional cash transfer
DFID	Department for International Development [UK]
ESN	emergency safety net
IDP	internally displaced person
IDSC	Cabinet Information and Decision Support Center
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
IT	information technology
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSBSP	National Strategy for Basic Social Protection
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
P4P	Purchase for Progress
PBG	Peoples' Bank of Georgia
PNPS	National Social Protection Policy (<i>Politique Nationale de Protection Sociale</i>)
PS	Policy, Planning and Strategy Division
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
RCT	randomized controlled trial
SNIP	Safety Nets in Practice
SSU	Safety Nets Unit
SWF	Social Welfare Fund
TPDS	Targeted Public Distribution System
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAM	vulnerability analysis and mapping