



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



GREEN
CLIMATE
FUND

Social protection and inclusive climate action

A review of social protection
for rural populations within
Green Climate Fund projects



CONTENTS

Executive Summary	III
1. Background	1
2. Social protection for inclusive climate action	3
3. Study overview	5
4. Key findings	6
5. Considerations for future projects and investments	12
Notes	14
Appendix	15

TABLES

1	Key steps in project review process and results	5
2	Social protection programmes, instruments and elements by category and sub-category	7
3	Dimensions of system strengthening in four projects	11

FIGURES

1	Global distribution of identified projects	6
2	Climate objectives of social protection programmes and instruments	8
3	Approach to gender within the social protection components of projects	9
4	Population groups targeted by the social protection components of projects	9
5	The social protection solar system	10
6	Presence of system-strengthening objectives within social protection components of projects	11

BOXES

1	Multilateral climate funds and inclusive climate action	1
2	Social protection in United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) decisions and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports	2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social protection is a powerful yet underutilized tool for delivering inclusive climate change adaptation, mitigation, and just transitions for vulnerable populations, particularly in rural areas. While the Green Climate Fund (GCF) has incorporated social protection in some projects, its use remains limited and unevenly distributed, especially in low-income countries. There is also scope to enhance approaches to social protection to better address gendered inequalities, broader inclusion and long-term, system-strengthening efforts.

This review of 23 GCF-funded projects highlights promising approaches, for example through public works programmes and cash plus approaches combining income support with climate-smart agricultural practices. It also identifies key challenges, such as weak coordination between the climate and social protection sectors, gaps in targeting marginalized groups (e.g. migrants and persons with disabilities), the absence of social insurance mechanisms in the current funded portfolio, and limited financing for long-term sustainability.

To maximize impact, future GCF investments should scale up the use of social protection as an instrument for inclusive climate adaptation, mitigation and just transitions for rural populations in low-income countries, while enhancing gender and inclusion efforts, strengthening long-term system building and cross-sectoral coordination, and fostering global partnerships for financing and knowledge-sharing. Through these efforts, the GCF can play a pivotal role in ensuring climate finance reaches the most vulnerable, driving sustainable, inclusive, and just climate action.



1. BACKGROUND

It is critical that climate finance is mobilised to deliver an inclusive and just response to the climate crisis. This remains a major challenge - for example, only 0.8 percent of the limited pool of climate finance currently reaches small-scale agricultural systems,¹ even though they are among the most vulnerable to climate change and have contributed least to its causes. Further, as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)'s recent report – The Unjust Climate² – shows, the impacts of climate change perpetuate and exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities. For example, floods and heat stress were found to widen the income gap between poor and non-poor households in rural areas by a combined USD 41 billion a year, and the gap between female-headed households and male-headed households by USD 53 billion annually. In this context, there is a growing awareness of the significant role that social protection can play in advancing inclusive climate adaptation, mitigation and just transitions through its focus on poorer, vulnerable and at-risk populations,³ including rural populations who are often disproportionately affected by climate change.⁴

The GCF is the world's largest climate fund, supporting transformative climate action in developing countries through a country-owned partnership approach with an equal focus on mitigation and adaptation investment. The GCF is mandated – through its adaptation focus – to pay particular attention to the needs of the most vulnerable developing countries, including least developed countries, small island developing states (SIDS) and African States. More recently, the GCF's Strategic Plan 2024–2027 commits the fund to enhancing support for the most vulnerable people and communities to address their adaptation and resilience needs. Targeted results include, for example, support to smallholder farmers to adopt low-emission, climate-resilient agricultural and fisheries practices, and investments in the establishment of new or improved early warning systems. In common with other multilateral climate funds (see **Box 1**), the GCF has also reaffirmed its commitment to strive for inclusive climate action, including through the integration of local communities, Indigenous Peoples, women and girls, and persons with disabilities as agents of change. In line with these objectives, social protection offers a powerful mechanism for delivering inclusive climate action that meets the needs of the most vulnerable rural communities.

BOX 1. MULTILATERAL CLIMATE FUNDS AND INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION

Multilateral climate funds play a key role in financing climate adaptation and mitigation, both directly through their own investments and indirectly by supporting innovations and catalysing other sources of finance. While each fund has a different mandate, they are increasingly aligned in recognising the importance of socially inclusive climate action. As reflected in joint statements at COP28 and COP29 by the four main multilateral climate funds – the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility, the Adaptation Fund and the Climate Investment Funds – there is growing recognition of the critical role these funds have to play in channelling much-needed finance towards the most vulnerable countries and communities. This support helps them to adapt to climate change and to ensure the transition towards inclusive, climate-resilient societies is underpinned by a just transition. With a renewed focus on unlocking greater financial flows, the climate funds are well positioned to seize new opportunities, accelerating meaningful progress in ensuring that resources reach those who need them the most, including rural populations.

Social protection policies and programmes – such as cash transfers, public works programmes and social insurance – aim to address poverty and inequality, promote economic inclusion, and protect vulnerable people from shocks and disasters. When climate objectives are incorporated into social protection systems, they provide an established mechanism, operating at scale, to reach and support at-risk and marginalized populations, including vulnerable rural populations. Drawing on a growing evidence base on social protection and inclusive climate action, global climate policies and processes increasingly recognise that social protection has a key role to play in advancing inclusive and resilient climate adaptation and mitigation, in responding to loss and damage, and in supporting a just transition.

BOX 2. SOCIAL PROTECTION IN UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (UNFCCC) DECISIONS AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC) REPORTS

Q Global Goal on Adaptation Framework – Recognises the role of social protection in reducing the adverse effects of climate change on poverty and livelihoods.

Q Decision on Operationalizing the Loss and Damage Fund – Calls for the scale up of support for social protection mechanisms.

Q Just Transition Work Programme – Advocates for the incorporation of social protection into climate action for a just and equitable transition.

Q IPCC 2023 Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – Recognises the contribution of social protection to climate change adaptation

Source: Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030). 2024. *Integrating social protection in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)*. <https://usp2030.org/wp-content/uploads/Joint-Guidance-Note-Integrating-Social-Protection-in-the-NDCs.pdf>

Taking stock of the extent to which multilateral climate funds are using social protection as an instrument within their current investments – and a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches in delivering inclusive climate action – is an essential first step in expanding and strengthening the role of social protection in future programming. This briefing paper therefore presents the findings of a review of social protection for rural populations within the current portfolio of GCF investments with the aim of supporting future project formulation by fostering sustainable and inclusive solutions which include a key role for social protection within their project architecture. The paper is intended to be a live document to be updated on a regular basis with the ambition to learn from ongoing projects under implementation, new projects being designed as well as projects being supported by other funds and partners. This will allow for a regular review of best practices and lessons learned that can feed into future GCF project designs.



2. SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION

Social protection can be understood as “a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing and protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, throughout their life cycle placing a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups”.⁵

There are three main types of programmes:⁴

1. **Social assistance** – Support to households and individuals to maintain a minimum level of income and consumption. For example, cash or in-kind transfers and labour-intensive public works programmes.
2. **Social insurance** – Contributory programmes^a that provide a buffer against different contingencies across the life cycle. For example, health insurance and pensions.
3. **Labour market programmes** – Targeted at working age populations to improve the employability and earning capacity of individuals by building skills and training workers. For example, vocational training.

In the context of climate action and climate-related projects, social protection takes on an additional dimension. It is not just about addressing traditional risks across the life cycle – like poverty, ill-health or unemployment – but also about building resilience to climate shocks, strengthening long-term adaptive capacity, contributing to climate mitigation and ensuring that climate action is inclusive of the poorest and supports a just transition. By integrating climate risks, countries can leverage their existing social protection systems and know-how to safeguard vulnerable populations and deliver inclusive climate action that is efficient, effective and scalable. In this way, climate-responsive social protection helps to ensure that vulnerable groups can cope with, recover from and adapt to the growing and compounding risks and impacts associated with climate change. At the same time, social protection programmes can contribute directly to climate mitigation efforts while supporting those most in need with the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to thrive in the transition to low carbon economies.

In a rural context, social protection instruments – such as cash plus approaches that combine cash transfers with complementary measures such as skills, training and productive assets – not only address underlying vulnerability and provide for basics needs, but have the potential to promote adaptation and enhance economic inclusion and rural livelihoods in three main ways:⁴

1. adoption of climate adaptive agricultural practices and technologies;
2. diversification of income sources and livelihoods, both on and off farm, to those that are less sensitive to climate variability; and
3. improved natural resource management and ecosystem restoration.

Social protection is also a critical tool in responding to the increasingly severe climate shocks and disasters that rural communities face through income transfers that cushion the effects of shocks in advance (anticipatory action) or in response (shock-responsive social protection). Furthermore, social protection systems are expected to play a growing role in addressing residual or unavoidable loss and damage incurred by rural populations as a result of climate change.

a In which beneficiaries are required to make payments into a scheme, often alongside government and employer contributions.

Increasingly, social protection programmes are also making direct contributions to climate change mitigation by generating public goods which reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration. For example, public works programmes are being used to carry out activities at the community level to support the restoration of forests and the conservation of other natural resources. Similarly, environmentally conditioned cash transfers can incentivise rural households to adopt more sustainable environmental practices that reduce deforestation and other forms of environmental degradation. Income transfers can also be used to address the potentially negative social impacts of climate mitigation policies in rural contexts, while investments in skills development can help people access new opportunities in the green economy supporting a just transition.



© FAO/PiseyKhun

3. STUDY OVERVIEW

The study’s overall objective was to explore whether and how GCF projects are using social protection as an instrument for inclusive climate action in rural settings in order to better understand current approaches and inform future project development. It was structured around three key questions in relation to social protection for rural populations within the GCF’s current portfolio of projects and investments:

1. What type of social protection programmes and instruments are being used and for what purposes?
2. Are gender inequalities and other dimensions of inclusion being addressed through social protection in these projects?
3. Do these projects aim to strengthen the overall social protection system?

It was conducted using the GCF’s publicly available project database^b and focused on projects in rural settings with clearly identifiable social protection components, rather than general references to social protection within project documents. Approved funding proposals were reviewed for all projects along with gender assessments, gender action plans and the latest annual performance report where available.

The initial review was conducted in September and October 2023, followed by a second phase in 2024 to cover projects approved at GCF board meetings between October 2023 and July 2024. Two studies published in early 2024,^{6,7} which had carried out analyses of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) climate funds and the GCF were also reviewed to identify any additional projects. Eighteen projects were identified through the two main rounds of review with a further five projects included from the external study⁷ focused on the GCF resulting in a total of 23 projects for detailed analysis. A full list of all 23 projects is provided in the Appendix .

TABLE 1. KEY STEPS IN PROJECT REVIEW PROCESS AND RESULTS

PROJECTS REVIEWED	STEP 1 INITIAL SEARCH	STEP 2 SCREENING	STEP 3 DETAILED ANALYSIS
219	38	18 + 5 ⁱ = 23	See below for findings

Source: Authors’ analysis.

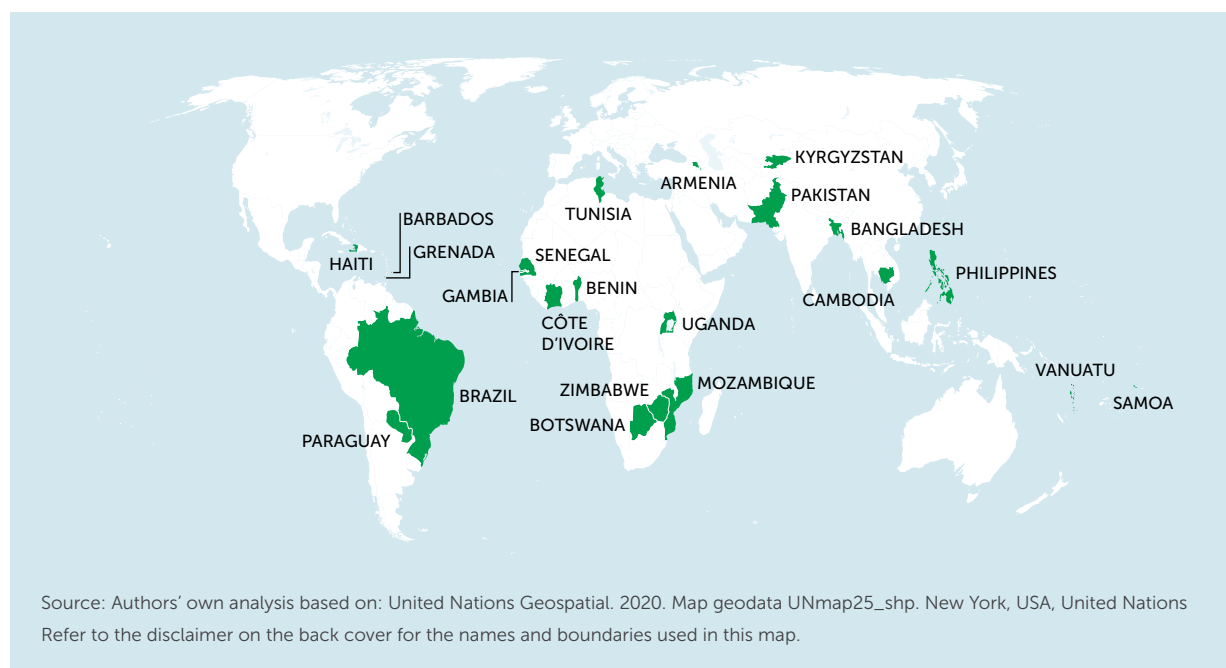
ⁱ Aleksandrova, M., Kuhl, L. and Malerba, D., 2024. Unlocking climate finance for social protection: An analysis of the Green Climate Fund. *Climate Policy*, 24(7), 878–893.

^b Accessible at www.greenclimate.fund/projects.

4. KEY FINDINGS

The projects were widely distributed and found in almost all regions of the world, although Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia-Pacific accounted for the largest proportion with eight projects each. In total, five projects were in SIDS across both the Pacific and the Caribbean. The majority of projects were in lower-middle-income (13) or upper-middle-income countries (5), rather than in low-income countries. The exceptions were projects in Uganda (FP034), Mozambique (SAO042) and the Gambia (FP011). Given that climate vulnerability and need are greatest in low-income contexts, this is a concerning finding and – as discussed in the conclusions below – warrants further attention in terms of future project design and financing.

FIGURE 1. GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF IDENTIFIED PROJECTS



1. What type of social protection programmes and instruments are being used and for what purposes?

Social assistance programmes were the most commonly used approach, with six examples of cash transfers, ten of public works programmes and one of in-kind transfers. Two cash transfers included complementary cash plus services to support climate resilient agricultural livelihoods, with beneficiaries in both Paraguay (FP062) and Brazil (SAP031) receiving cash payments alongside support for sustainable agroforestry practices. In Vanuatu (FP184) and Pakistan (SAP039), in contrast, the focus was on enhancing institutional capacities for responding to climate shocks, either just before or just after they occur, rather than providing cash payments directly through the project. Public works programmes were primarily concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, with seven out of ten projects using this instrument from across the region. Labour market interventions were also an important component in a smaller number of projects. For example, in Uganda (FP034) the project provides vocational training to support people living within and around vulnerable and degraded wetland catchments to shift into non-farm employment, including in tourism, health and construction. Notably, however, while some GCF projects do include agriculture-related microinsurance, such as weather indexed crop or livestock insurance, no projects were identified using social insurance instruments such as national or provincial health insurance schemes or contributory pensions.^c

^c For a longer discussion of the relationship between social protection and agricultural insurance in the context of disaster risk management, see *Protecting livelihoods – Linking agricultural insurance and social protection* (FAO, 2021).

TABLE 2. SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES, INSTRUMENTS AND ELEMENTS BY CATEGORY AND SUB-CATEGORY

TYPE	CATEGORY OF PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT / ELEMENT	NO.	SUB-CATEGORIES
Social assistance	Cash transfers	6	Shock-responsive cash transfers (4) Environmentally conditioned cash transfer (2)
	Vouchers or in-kind transfers	1	Food coupons for climate vulnerable households (1)
	Public works programmes	10	Cash for work (6) Food for work (1) Food assistance for assets (3)
Social insurance		0	
Labour market intervention	Active labour market	4	Vocational training (4)
Additional elements	Use of social protection systems	11	Targeting of social protection beneficiaries (10) School feeding supplier programme (1)
	Complementary services	5	Climate resilient agricultural livelihoods
	Projects combining multiple approaches	11	Two approaches (8) Three approaches (3)

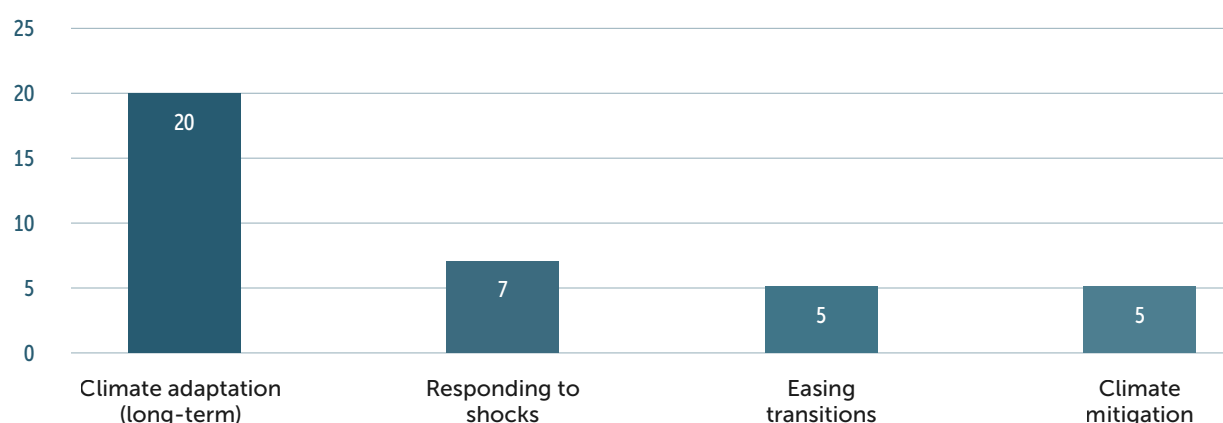
Source: Authors' analysis of social protection components of the 23 identified projects using GCF project database.

Almost all projects used social protection to support longer-term adaptation to the impacts of climate change. This included all three approaches of relevance to rural livelihoods outlined above:

1. adoption of climate adaptive agricultural practices and technologies;
2. diversification of income sources and livelihoods; and
3. natural resource management and ecosystem restoration.

A smaller number of projects (7) included a specific focus on responding to rapid-onset climate shocks, either through shock responsive cash transfers or, for example in Haiti (FP208) and Samoa (FP037), through vouchers or public works programmes for flood-affected communities. The five projects helping to ease transitions related to climate mitigation actions were largely associated with incentives and support for populations affected by changes in land use – such as in forests, pastures or wetlands – including through transitions into non-farm employment. A similar number of projects also aimed to make direct contributions to climate mitigation, primarily involving enhanced carbon sequestration through better management of forests, pastures and wetlands.

FIGURE 2. CLIMATE OBJECTIVES OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES AND INSTRUMENTS



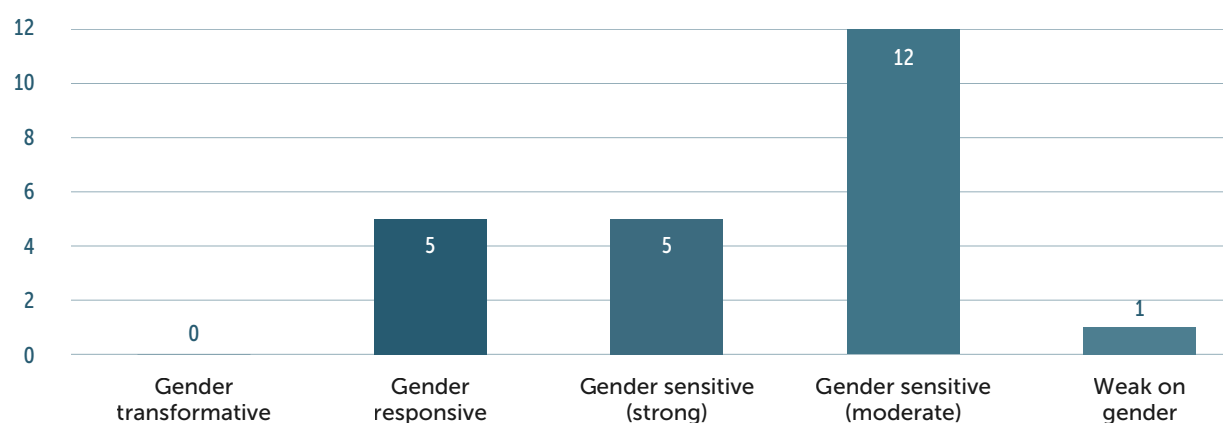
Source: Authors' analysis of social protection components of the 23 identified projects using GCF project database.

2. Are gender inequalities and other dimensions of inclusion being addressed through social protection in these projects?

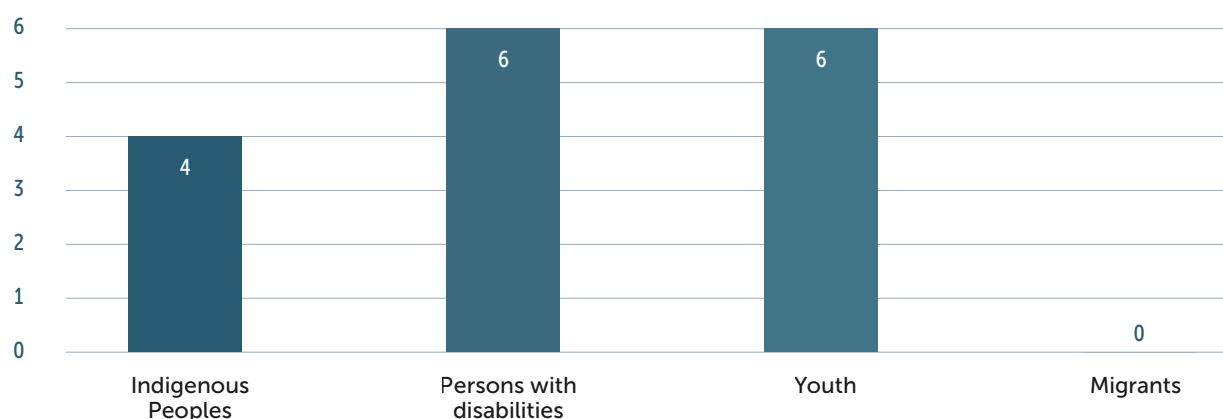
The analysis of gender inclusion focused specifically on the social protection components of projects, rather than the project as a whole, and used criteria adapted from the Guidelines for Measuring Gender Transformative Change in the Context of Food Security, Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture.⁸ No projects were found to be gender transformative, understood as an explicit approach to addressing gendered inequalities through targeting underlying gender norms and gendered power relations. However, five projects were found to be gender responsive, incorporating inequalities as a core concern and aiming to respond to the gendered needs of women and men, underpinned by well-justified and specific targets. For example, in a project involving a public employment scheme in Botswana (FP158) supporting restoration of communal rangelands – which had a target to include 60 percent women – issues raised about safety and caregiving responsibilities that might discourage some women from training as ecorangers led to the development of a new role of restoration worker to help address these concerns.

The majority of projects aimed to be gender sensitive by identifying and specifying different practical and strategic needs of women and men, with five projects having a more robust approach to setting and justifying targets. Only one project was assessed as weak on gender, where a public works component in the Gambia (FP011) introduced mid-way through the project was reported to be primarily benefitting men, without explicit consideration of the gendered implications of this approach.



FIGURE 3. APPROACH TO GENDER WITHIN THE SOCIAL PROTECTION COMPONENTS OF PROJECTS

Source: Authors' analysis of social protection components of the 23 identified projects using GCF project database.

FIGURE 4. POPULATION GROUPS TARGETED BY THE SOCIAL PROTECTION COMPONENTS OF PROJECTS

Source: Authors' analysis of social protection components of the 23 identified projects using GCF project database.

It was not possible to assess other dimensions of inclusion in as much detail as the approach to gendered inequalities since less data was available.^d Nonetheless, efforts were made to determine if there were targets related to the inclusion of four specific population groups within the social protection components of projects – Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, youth and migrants – and if these targets were associated with specific actions to address their needs. Indigenous Peoples were reported as being present in seven project areas, although only four projects included social protection components that explicitly incorporated Indigenous Peoples – in Botswana (FP158), Paraguay (FP062), the Philippines (FP201) and Brazil (SAP031). Persons with disabilities were specifically targeted in just six projects in total (26 percent), three of which were in SIDS – Vanuatu (FP184), Samoa (FP037) and Barbados (FP060). Six projects also had specific targets for youth inclusion in relation to their social protection components, for example in public works components in Botswana (FP158) and Côte d'Ivoire (SAP028). Finally, while migrants were often mentioned in project documents – reflecting strong interlinkages between the impacts of climate change, rural poverty and migration – there were no examples of projects attempting to incorporate internal or international migrants and their families into their social protection components. Given that many migrant workers and refugees already face legal and practical challenges in accessing social protection⁹ – and that in some contexts social protection could play a role in supporting or incentivising migration as adaptation – this is a potential area for exploring improvements in project design.

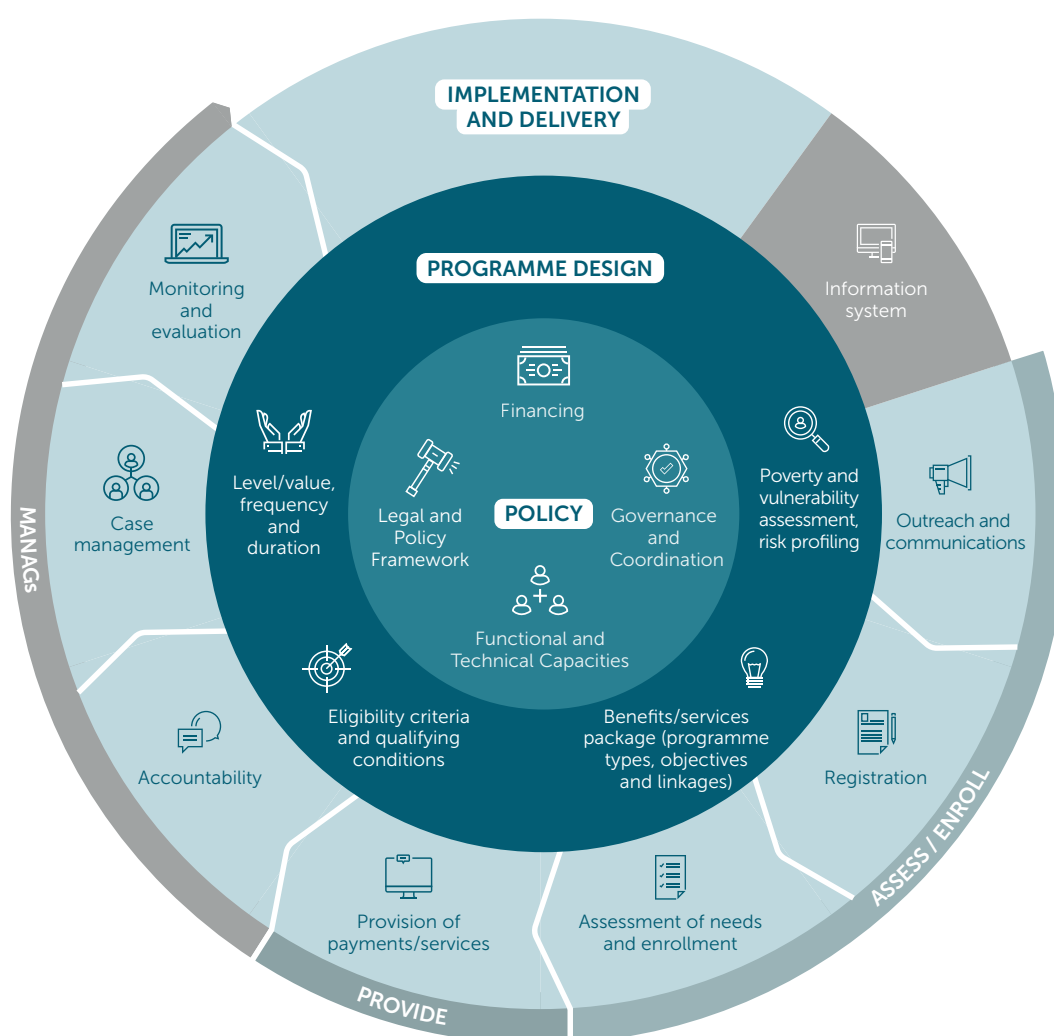
^d For most GCF projects separate gender assessments and gender action plans are available alongside approved funding proposals.

3. Does the approach to social protection aim to contribute to system-strengthening?

To maximise the effectiveness, sustainability and long-term impacts of social protection as an instrument for inclusive climate action, it is important to avoid isolated interventions and wherever possible to strengthen the wider social protection system. Projects were therefore reviewed to assess whether they aimed to support the development of climate-adaptive social protection systems by incorporating explicit climate objectives into national social protection programmes, policies and governance.

This was understood to apply across the full range of building blocks that underpin effective social protection policy, programme design and implementation, as set out in the 'solar system' below. It encompassed both the integration of climate action into existing social protection policies and programmes and supporting the establishment of new ones. Attention was also given to harnessing synergies and cross-sectoral coordination between ministries with responsibility for social protection, agriculture, employment, environment, climate and other related sectors. For example, through the use of climate information systems to support social protection planning and delivery, or through integrating climate-smart agricultural support services.

FIGURE 5. THE SOCIAL PROTECTION SOLAR SYSTEM

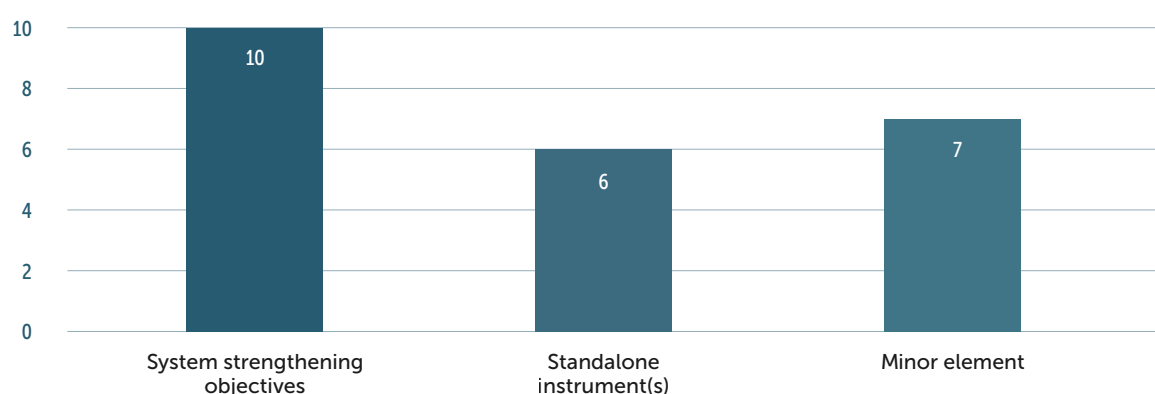


Source: Barca, V., Jaramillo Mejia, J.G. 2023. *Social Protection as a 'Solar' System*. Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR). United Kingdom, DAI Global UK Ltd. This publication is subject to Crown copyright. Reproduced with permission.

4. KEY FINDINGS

A total of ten projects incorporated system strengthening objectives. This included strengthening existing national social protection programmes by introducing climate-adaptive components, for example in Paraguay (FP062), Botswana (FP158) and Mozambique (SAP042), and the development of new climate-resilient programmes to be integrated within national social protection systems, for example on shock-responsive social protection in Vanuatu (FP184) and through the Asian Development Bank (ADB) multi-country project across Asia and the Pacific (FP215). Similarly, two projects in the Philippines (FP062 and SAP010) aimed to leverage existing or emerging social protection programmes to support climate resilient agriculture and to establish multi-stakeholder partnerships for forecast-based early action and shock responsive social protection. Of the remaining projects, six had clearly defined social protection instruments but with either minimal or no explicit aspirations to integrate these into wider national social protection systems. A further seven projects incorporated social protection only as a very limited element of a programme, for example by targeting a small number of beneficiaries through a government social registry.

FIGURE 6. PRESENCE OF SYSTEM-STRENGTHENING OBJECTIVES WITHIN SOCIAL PROTECTION COMPONENTS OF PROJECTS



Source: Authors' analysis of social protection components of the 23 identified projects using GCF project database.

TABLE 3. DIMENSIONS OF SYSTEM STRENGTHENING IN FOUR PROJECTS

PROJECT	POLICIES AND GOVERNANCE	PROGRAMMING	DELIVERY MECHANISMS
Paraguay (FP062)	Coordination mechanisms ✓ Integrated policy ✓	Integrating climate action into existing social protection programmes ✓	Targeting criteria ✓ Information flows and trigger mechanisms ✓
Botswana (FP158)			
Mozambique (SAP042)			
Vanuatu (FP184)			

Source: Authors' own analysis of four selected programmes in the GCF project database.

5. CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS AND INVESTMENTS

Existing evidence shows that investments in social protection can be a critical mechanism for delivering inclusive climate adaptation and mitigation that supports a just transition and reaches the poorest and most vulnerable. This was highlighted in the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report, and at COP28, social protection was explicitly recognised in three major UNFCCC strategic workstreams: the Global Goal on Adaptation, the Just Transition Work Programme and the operationalization of the new Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage. There is increasing appetite among the existing multilateral climate funds and other key actors in climate policy and finance to work to strengthen and expand the role of social protection to deliver inclusive climate action.

As this review of the GCF's existing portfolio of projects shows, there are cases of social protection being used to promote inclusive climate action for rural populations across different regions and a wide range of national contexts, including approaches that aim to support and strengthen climate-adapted national social protection systems for the long-term. This provides an important foundation upon which to build future programming that maximises the benefits of using social protection for inclusive climate adaptation, mitigation and a just transition. However, these approaches still represent only a small proportion of projects financed by the GCF.

Scale-up GCF investments in social protection

Efforts are therefore needed to **scale-up GCF investments in social protection** for inclusive climate action while learning from these projects to ensure there is a growing pipeline of investments going forward. This means both increasing the number of projects in which social protection plays a key role and enhancing the size of investments in social protection within individual projects to ensure they can deliver effectively, efficiently and at sufficient scale. Crucially, as the examples in this review show, in many contexts the GCF is well-placed to leverage additional finance alongside its direct investments for climate-adaptive social protection systems from multilateral, bilateral and national sources. This includes stimulating increased national co-financing through the existing social protection system, which is often essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of approaches embedded within government systems. However, for social protection to play a major role across the full range of vulnerable countries contexts^e – including SIDS and low-income countries – flexible and innovative approaches will be needed that leverage additional sources of international finance and are suitable even where national financing for social protection is currently very limited. For example, the limited number of existing projects found by the review in low-income countries suggests that more efforts are needed to address barriers preventing these countries from developing projects involving social protection. These may reflect both wider challenges that low-income countries face in accessing climate finance as well as specific resource and capacity constraints in relation to the existing social protection system.

Leverage social protection to support a more ambitious inclusion agenda

At the same time, to enhance their contribution to effective, sustainable and inclusive climate action, new projects should incorporate an even **more ambitious inclusion agenda** which harnesses and maximises the potential of social protection to reach vulnerable population groups. This includes incorporating gender-responsive or gender-transformative approaches into social protection interventions, supporting the participation of marginalised groups such as Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants and internally displaced people who are often excluded from climate action, and increasing the quality and effectiveness of delivery and implementation to address their needs. For example, by learning from projects

^e See the GCF's Governing Instrument (2011, p13) for the Fund's definition of vulnerable countries.

that have sought to include Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities – as well as from successful approaches to inclusion in social protection programming more generally – a knowledge base and community of practice could be established to help strengthen and scale-up these approaches in future project design and implementation, and to extend and adapt them for groups such as migrants who are currently not proactively included.

Focus investments on strengthening national capacities

Equally importantly, these investments should incorporate a firm commitment to **strengthening climate-adaptive social protection systems** for the long-term. This will ensure that interventions avoid isolated approaches and instead support the development of social protection programmes and policies that systematically and strategically address the climate risks faced by vulnerable rural populations while contributing to national climate goals. This includes, for example, the use of climate information systems and climate risk analysis provided by government agencies to support the planning and delivery of social protection systems that are resilient, account for multidimensional vulnerabilities and can respond to emerging needs as climate risks evolve. Cross-sectoral coordination is critical to this approach, so projects must avoid working in siloes and bring together all relevant ministries, including those responsible for social protection, agriculture, environment, labour, disaster risk reduction and finance. This will enable them to maximise their potential by harnessing synergies between the social protection system and agrifood, natural resource management, climate and employment policies, programmes and data to deliver inclusive climate action for rural populations.

Foster collaboration between national and international partners

Finally, the review found that GCF projects involving social protection are being delivered by a wide range of partners and executing entities, including UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and multilateral development banks. This indicates extensive scope for **joint work and collaboration between national and international partners to create an enabling environment** for social protection as an instrument for inclusive climate action and to **develop new approaches**. A good example of this are efforts being made through the Universal Social Protection 2030 (USP 2030) Working Group on Social Protection and Climate Change to support countries to incorporate social protection into the 2025 revision of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as a crucial foundation for drawing down climate finance.¹⁰ Similarly, the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)–supported Task Force for Linking Adaptive Social Protection and Climate Financing brings together key stakeholders from both the social protection and climate finance sectors – including the GCF, FAO and other multilateral and bilateral partners – to identify concrete proposals for strengthening and better integrating social protection in climate strategies and financing. Other important platforms include the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty – which aims to foster collective action, knowledge sharing and innovation to support countries in implementing social protection and other evidence-based policy instruments at scale – and the Food and Agriculture for Sustainable Transformation (FAST) Partnership – which aims to unlock more and better climate finance for agrifood systems.

As this suggests, to drive this agenda forward at scale and maximise the benefits of social protection as an instrument for inclusive climate action – including for rural populations who are on the front line of climate change – will require collaboration between partners across the social protection and climate sectors, including national governments, multilateral climate finance providers, UN agencies, civil society organisations and other key stakeholders. This review is an important step in this journey. By identifying a range of projects that are already underway, it provides proof of concept that social protection has an important role to play in supporting inclusive climate action for rural populations as well as insights into how future GCF and other climate-financed projects can be conceived and delivered that build on and scale up this ambition.

NOTES

- 1 CPL (Climate Policy Initiative). Chiriac, D., Vishnumolakala, H. and Rosane, P. 2023. *The climate finance gap for small-scale agrifood systems: A growing challenge*. CPL. www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/The-Climate-Finance-Gap-for-Small-Scale-Agrifood-Systems-3.pdf
- 2 FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). 2024. *The unjust climate – Measuring the impacts of climate change on rural poor, women and youth*. Rome. doi.org/10.4060/cc9680en
- 3 ILO (International Labour Organization). 2024. *World Social Protection Report 2024-26: Universal social protection for climate action and a just transition*. Geneva. www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/WSPR_2024_EN_WEB_1.pdf
- 4 Bhalla, G., Knowles, M., Dahlet, G. and Poudel, M. 2024. *Scoping review on the role of social protection in facilitating climate change adaptation and mitigation for economic inclusion among rural populations*. Rome, FAO. doi.org/10.4060/cd0287en
- 5 SPIAC-B (Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board). 2019. *Collaboration for policy coherence and development impact*. New York. www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@nylo/documents/genericdocument/wcms_644769.pdf
- 6 Sengupta, S. and Sivanu, S. 2024. *Climate funds and social protection: What is the progress to date?* Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre. www.climatecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/RCCC-Climate-Funds-and-Social-Protection-V4.pdf
- 7 Aleksandrova, M., Kuhl, L. and Malerba, D. 2024. *Unlocking climate finance for social protection: An analysis of the Green Climate Fund*. Climate Policy, 24(7), 878–893. doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2024.2338817
- 8 FAO, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), WFP (World Food Programme) and CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform. 2023. *Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture*. Rome, FAO, IFAD, WFP and CGIAR. doi.org/10.4060/cc7940en
- 9 ILO. 2021. *Extending social protection to migrant workers, refugees and their families: A guide for policymakers and practitioners*. Geneva. www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_protect/%40protrav/%40migrant/documents/publication/wcms_826684.pdf
- 10 USP2030 (Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals). 2024. *Integrating social protection in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)*. usp2030.org/wp-content/uploads/Joint-Guidance-Note-Integrating-Social-Protection-in-the-NDCs.pdf

APPENDIX

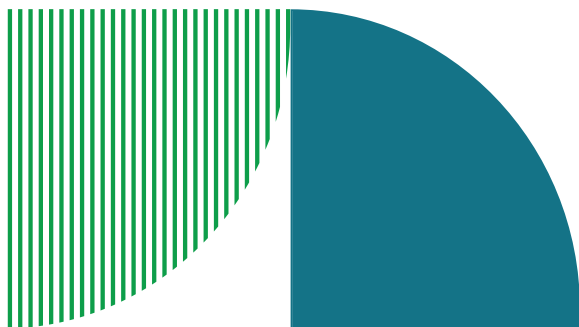
Summary of findings: GCF projects for rural populations with social protection components identified during the review.

PROJECT	EXECUTING ENTITY	COUNTRY	SOCIAL PROTECTION INSTRUMENT / PROGRAMME / ELEMENT	GENDER SCORE	OTHER TARGET POPULATIONS	CLIMATE OBJECTIVES			
						ADAPTATION	SHOCKS	MITIGATION	EASING TRANSITIONS
SAP014 – Forest resilience of Armenia, enhancing adaptation and rural green growth via mitigation	FAO	Armenia	Targeting of social protection beneficiaries	4	-	Yes	No	Yes	No
FP215 – Community Resilience Partnership Program	ADB	Asia-Pacific (7 countries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash transfer • Complementary services • Targeting of social protection beneficiaries 	2	-	Yes	Yes	No	No
SAP026 – Extended Community Climate Change Project-Drought	Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF)	Bangladesh	Public works programme	4	-	Yes	No	No	No
FP060 – Water Sector Resilience Nexus for Sustainability in Barbados	Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC)	Barbados	Targeting of social protection beneficiaries	4	Persons with disabilities	Yes	No	No	No
SAP032 – Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility – LoCAL	Fonds National pour L'Environnement	Benin	Public works programme	4	-	Yes	No	No	No
FP158 – Ecosystem-Based Adaptation and Mitigation in Botswana's Communal Rangelands	Conservation International	Botswana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public works programme • Vocational training 	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Peoples • Youth 	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

PROJECT	EXECUTING ENTITY	COUNTRY	SOCIAL PROTECTION INSTRUMENT / PROGRAMME / ELEMENT	GENDER SCORE	OTHER TARGET POPULATIONS	CLIMATE OBJECTIVES			
						ADAPTATION	SHOCKS	MITIGATION	EASING TRANSITIONS
SAP031 – Marajó Resiliente: Enhancing the resilience of smallholders to climate change impacts through adapting	Fundación Avina	Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cash transfer Targeting of social protection beneficiaries Complementary services 	3	Indigenous Peoples	Yes	No	Yes	No
FP199 – Public-Social-Private Partnerships for Ecologically-Sound Agriculture and Resilient Livelihood in Northern Tonle Sap Basin (PEARL)	FAO	Cambodia	Targeting of social protection beneficiaries	4	Youth	Yes	No	No	No
SAP028 – Women-Adapt: Enhancing the climate change adaptive capacity of smallholder farmer communities in the Poro Region, focusing on vulnerable women and youth	WFP	Côte d'Ivoire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publics works programme Supplying school feeding programme 	4	Youth	Yes	No	No	No
FP011 – Large-scale Ecosystem-based Adaptation in The Gambia: developing a climate-resilient, natural resource-based economy	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)	Gambia	Public works programme	5	-	Yes	No	No	No
FP059 – Climate Resilient Water Sector in Grenada	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)	Grenada	Targeting of social protection beneficiaries	3	-	Yes	No	No	No
FP208 – Enhanced climate resilience in the Trois-Rivières region of Haiti through Integrated Flood Management	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Haiti	Vouchers	4	-	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

PROJECT	EXECUTING ENTITY	COUNTRY	SOCIAL PROTECTION INSTRUMENT / PROGRAMME / ELEMENT	GENDER SCORE	OTHER TARGET POPULATIONS	CLIMATE OBJECTIVES			
						ADAPTATION	SHOCKS	MITIGATION	EASING TRANSITIONS
SAP02 – Climate services and diversification of climate sensitive livelihoods to empower food insecure and vulnerable communities in Kyrgyzstan	WFP	Kyrgyzstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public works programme Vocational training Targeting of social protection beneficiaries 	4	Persons with disabilities	Yes	No	No	Yes
SAP042 – Building climate resilience by linking climate adaptation and social protection through decentralised planning in Mozambique (LINK)	Save the Children Australia	Mozambique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public works programme Complementary services 	2	Persons with disabilities	Yes	Yes	No	No
SAP039 – Integrated climate risk management for strengthened resilience to climate change in Buner and Shangla Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan	WFP	Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cash transfer Targeting of social protection beneficiaries 	3	Persons with disabilities	No	Yes	No	No
FP062 – Poverty, Reforestation, Energy and Climate Change (PROEZA)	FAO	Paraguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cash transfer Complementary services 	2	Indigenous Peoples	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
FP201 – Adapting Philippine Agriculture to Climate Change (APA)	FAO	Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeting of social protection beneficiaries Complementary services 	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Peoples Youth 	Yes	No	No	No
SAP010 – Multi-Hazard Impact-Based Forecasting and Early Warning System (MH-IBF-EWS) for the Philippines	Landbank, WFP	Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cash transfer Targeting of social protection beneficiaries 	4	-	No	Yes	No	No
FP037 – Integrated Flood Management to Enhance Climate Resilience of the Vaisigano River Catchment in Samoa	UNDP	Samoa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public works programme Vocational training 	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons with disabilities Youth 	Yes	Yes	No	No

PROJECT	EXECUTING ENTITY	COUNTRY	SOCIAL PROTECTION INSTRUMENT / PROGRAMME / ELEMENT	GENDER SCORE	OTHER TARGET POPULATIONS	CLIMATE OBJECTIVES			
						ADAPTATION	SHOCKS	MITIGATION	EASING TRANSITIONS
FP049 – Building the climate resilience of food insecure smallholder farmers through integrated management of climate risk (R4)	WFP	Senegal	Public works programme	3	-	Yes	No	No	No
FP034 – Building resilient communities, wetlands ecosystems and associated catchments in Uganda	UNDP	Uganda	Vocational training	4	-	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
FP184 – Vanuatu community-based climate resilience project (VCCRP)	Save the Children Australia	Vanuatu	Cash transfer	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with disabilities • Youth 	No	Yes	No	No
SAP007 – Integrated Climate Risk Management for Food Security and Livelihoods in Zimbabwe focusing on Masvingo and Rushinga Districts	WFP	Zimbabwe	Public works programme	2	-	Yes	No	No	No



Rural Transformation and Gender Equality
Division - Economic and Social Development

Social-Protection@fao.org
fao.org/social-protection/en/

**Food and Agriculture Organization of
the United Nations**
Rome, Italy

info@gcfund.org
greenclimate.fund

Green Climate Fund
Songdo Business District
175, Art center-daero
Yeonsu-gu, Incheon
22004
Republic of Korea

X: @theGCF
Youtube: @theGCF
LinkedIn: @green-climate-fund
Facebook: @GCFOfficial
Instagram: @greenclimatefund
Threads: @greenclimatefund

Required citation: FAO and GCF. 2025. *Social protection and inclusive climate action – A review of social protection for rural populations within Green Climate Fund projects*. Rome and Incheon.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.



Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the
Creative Commons Attribution - 4.0 International licence (CC BY 4.0).