



WFP and Urban Safety Nets

Maximizing food security and nutrition

The World Food Programme (WFP) is working with governments at all levels to maximize food security and nutrition through safety net programmes.

More than half of the global population lives in urban settings, and this proportion is expected to increase to 66 percent by 2050¹. Of these, an estimated 863 million people live in informal settlements without adequate and equal access to public goods and basic social services envisaged by the New Urban Agenda. Social protection, including social assistance or 'safety nets', is a proven means of reducing poverty and promoting livelihoods, improving food security and nutrition, and enabling access by the poorest to health and education services.

*"We envisage cities and human settlements that ... progressively achieve ... **equal access for all to public goods and quality services in areas such as food security and nutrition, health, education ... and livelihoods. To achieve our vision, we resolve to ... leave no one behind, by ending poverty ... and ensuring equal rights and opportunities including in education, food security and nutrition, health and well-being ...**"²*

Why are Urban Safety Nets important?

Poverty is urbanizing, and it is doing so rapidly. Concerned by the high poverty rate in rural areas, and assuming that urban dwellers have better

access to labor markets and basic social services, many governments focus on providing social assistance in rural areas. While the poverty rate in rural areas may be much higher than in urban areas, the absolute number of poor people is much higher in urban areas. For instance, in Colombia, while the poverty rates in rural and urban areas are 40.3 percent and 24.1 percent respectively, the absolute numbers are 4.6 million and 8.9 million - almost double in urban areas³. Furthermore, urban safety net interventions only cover approximately 3-4 percent of the urban poor⁴.

Countries' poverty reduction goals cannot be achieved without tackling urban poverty. Well-designed and targeted safety net programmes that are tailored to urban contexts can also help poor families reduce and manage disaster risks, adapt to climate change and become more resilient. As systems to address urban poverty are reimagined, there is growing interest in the role that targeted safety nets can play in urban areas.

Challenges of Urban Safety Nets

The serious gap in urban coverage is due not only to a common preoccupation with the need for social assistance in rural areas but also by the complexities of identifying and targeting urban beneficiaries. Reaching out to targeted beneficiaries is often problematic as people might have just moved to urban areas or are living in informal settlements like slums. To address such

complexities, urban safety nets need to be designed to match the unique characteristics of specific urban contexts, rather than simply replicate those implemented in rural areas. Social safety net programmes adapted to urban contexts are beginning to emerge, although more practical learning, experimentation and knowledge exchange are needed.

WFP and Urban Safety Nets

WFP collaborates with governments at all levels to maximize the food security and nutrition impact of existing safety net programmes and offers technical advisory services to design, operationalize and evaluate cost-efficient and effective food security and nutrition-sensitive safety nets. Specific areas of expertise include: analysis (e.g. food security, disaster risks and trends, market and value chain); design of operational systems to support targeting, transfer delivery and M&E; disaster risk management; emergency preparedness; linking national safety nets to local production; and supply chain optimization.

Shock-Responsive: Scaling up National Social Protection Systems

Increasingly WFP is providing technical assistance to governments to scale up countries' existing safety nets to provide coverage in urban and rural areas when disaster hits. WFP collaborates with countries to prepare for disasters ahead of when they strike – providing early warning, emergency preparedness, risk assessment and targeting, and payment advisory services - in order to enable national systems to respond quickly with needed assistance to affected urban and rural populations:

- **Ecuador**

After a devastating earthquake struck the northern coast of Ecuador in April 2016, WFP worked with the Government to provide emergency assistance – in the form of cash

transfers – to affected populations through the existing social protection programme platform *Bono de Desarrollo Humano*. Cash transfers boosted the local economy and helped people rebuild their livelihoods. WFP also provided a training to the staff of the Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion to sensitize families on the best use of the cash transfer for the purchase of nutritious foods, healthy eating and hygiene practices.

- **Philippines**

When Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in November 2013, WFP worked with the Government of the Philippines to scale up *Pantawid Pamilya*, a national conditional cash transfer programme targeting poor households, to provide rapid assistance to populations affected by the typhoon.

- **Lebanon**

In partnership with the Government and the World Bank, WFP supported the expansion of the coverage of the National Poverty Targeting Programme to provide assistance to vulnerable Lebanese through an electronic food voucher system.

WFP is also working towards a world where school meals are universal. School meals can act as an easily scalable, effective social protection instrument to respond to shocks and bring positive long-term impacts. For example, during the food price crisis in 2008, school meals programmes were scaled up in 17 countries to encourage poor households in urban and rural areas to keep their children in school.

¹The state of social safety nets (World Bank Group 2015)
HABITAT III New Urban Agenda, Draft outcome document for adaptation in Quito, October 2016 (Sep 2016)

²Entering the City - Safety Nets in Urban Areas (World Bank Group 2015)

³The state of social safety nets (World Bank Group 2015)

⁴Entering the City - Safety Nets in Urban Areas (World Bank Group 2015)