



# The Role of Social Protection in Adapting to Climate Change

February 2009

**Comprehensive social protection – that aims to prevent impoverishment and protect, promote and transform livelihoods and social relations – could provide significant opportunities to help people adapt to climate change.**

There is growing awareness that development and poverty reduction programmes need to integrate climate change adaptation. Climate change poses a threat to attempts to reduce poverty. It also has implications for rights and justice as those who have done least to contribute to climate change are impacted the most.

Social protection covers a range of initiatives that transfer income or assets to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised. Social protection and climate change adaptation have much in common. They both seek to minimise the risks faced by – and promote resilience among – the most vulnerable people. Yet they remain separate fields of research, policy and practice.

Comprehensive social protection – that aims to prevent impoverishment and protect, promote and transform livelihoods and social relations – could provide significant opportunities to help people adapt to climate change. But social protection policies and programmes need to consider climate change and disaster risk reduction in order to effectively address the many risks and vulnerabilities faced by the poor.

Efforts to reduce disaster risks could benefit from using the established frameworks of social protection approaches – helping to build the resilience of the most vulnerable citizens. Examples of adaptive social protection measures that could both build resilience to climate change and benefit from integrating climate change adaptation include: weather-indexed crop insurance, asset restocking (including direct livestock provision) and cash transfers.

In Bangladesh for instance, an NGO has been working with a landless community

living on the embankment of a river affected by increasing flooding. The NGO transferred assets, in the form of land, housing materials and livestock, to help the community establish a small “cluster village” on raised ground further away from the river. By transferring those assets, as a social protection programme could have done, this project increased the resilience of this community to cope with flooding, one of the impacts of climate change.

There is a need for a wider evidence base on how to use social protection measures effectively – so that they can work to address the many vulnerabilities to climate change in different contexts and across different livelihoods, households, and groups. The Climate Change and Development Centre is working with our partners to strengthen this evidence base – exploring how social protection mechanisms could transform livelihoods in order to protect from and adapt to changing climate conditions, rather than just reinforcing coping mechanisms.



**Katy Oswald**  
Research Officer,  
Institute of  
Development Studies

Climate Lite makes climate change and development issues easy to digest. Download Climate Lite videos and briefings at: [www.ids.ac.uk/go/climate-lite](http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/climate-lite) Climate Lite is produced by the Climate Change and Development Centre (CCDC) at IDS.

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the CCDC or any of the other institutions involved.