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T7 Task Force Social cohesion, economic transformation and open societies

POLICY BRIEF

A SOCIALLY JUST TRANSFORMATION THROUGH INTEGRATED SOCIAL PROTECTION 'PLUS' PROGRAMMING

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Abstract

Increasingly, the world's 2-3 billion poor and vulnerable people face multiple overlaying crises – climate-related disasters, conflicts, the COVID-19 pandemic and others. The complex challenges resulting from the ambition to become carbon-neutral by 2050 and tackle these crises in tandem may adversely affect vulnerable people and communities, including people in and near poverty. To achieve a socially just transition, the G7 should lead a global campaign to promote integrated social protection programmes and the concept of 'growth from below' as cornerstones of development strategies, which together form the Integrated Social Protection Plus (ISSP) approach. This would enable a green recovery and fair transition towards green energy in the G7's Just Transition Partnerships countries while helping to protect vulnerable people and households against some of the many risks they face. The ISSP approach would not only contribute to reducing poverty rates and preventing impoverishment but also help address multidimensional inequalities, working towards the 2030 Agenda's mandate of leaving no one behind.

Challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular subsequent unprecedented economic shutdowns and public health measures, has contributed to a considerable rise in global poverty. Estimates by the World Bank pointed to an additional 97 million people being in poverty in 2020 (Mahler et al., 2021). The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), pioneer of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), estimated that gains in multidimensional poverty reduction, including health, education and standards of living, have been set back as much as four to 10 years (Alkire et al., 2021). UNDP (2020) corroborates this finding. Starting from a position of unequal vulnerability and disadvantage makes resilience to shocks more difficult. In the context of climate change, for example, initial multidimensional inequality increases the exposure of people in poverty to climate hazards and their susceptibility to damages, thereby affecting their ability to cope and recover (Islam and Winkel, 2017). The same is true during the pandemic. For example, in Afghanistan in 2020, the probability of welfare loss during COVID-19 was highest for households reporting residence in insecure districts and also for households affected by environmental and agricultural shocks (Diwakar, 2022). In high poverty countries in Africa and Asia, the pandemic had already inflated the cost of living significantly, especially for the urban poor and vulnerable and casual labourers, with massive impoverishing and potential long-term effects on children's nutrition and cognitive development (CPAN, 2022). Informal workers above the poverty line but without coverage of social protection measures, the so-called missing middle also suffered from inflation and income loss and had to invest their savings in cushioning the pandemic's effects (IPC-IG & UNICEF ROSA, 2020; Lustig et al., 2020). More recently during this period, the effects of the war in Ukraine on global food production and energy prices are becoming more visible and may increase pressures on households during the recovery (Kornher & von Braun, 2022).

The intersecting socio-economic impacts during the pandemic, like increased social vulnerabilities of women and children, produce negative effects in the medium to long term that will persist long after the pandemic's end and affect people's ability to cope with other crises (UNICEF, 2021). For example, one result of the stay-at-home policy implemented by governments during COVID-19 has been an alarming increase in gender-based violence (GBV). One Oxfam (2021) report noted that calls to domestic violence or GBV helplines jumped from 25% to 111% in ten countries in the first few months of the pandemic. Poverty not only aggravates GBV, but is a consequence of it, too; violence against girls and women can affect their education and health, among other developmental areas. In short, pre-existing poverty, vulnerability and inequality compound the consequences of stressors, leading to further impoverishment and a deepening of multidimensional inequalities.

The climate crisis has also been threatening the livelihoods around the world well before the pandemic, as countries are yet to adequately invest in adaptation strategies to deal with the impacts of rising temperatures that will adversely affect approximately 3.4 billion people (IPCC, 2021). Carbon neutrality is front and centre in the current policy debate to meet the 1.5-degree goal and assumes a prominent place on the G7 agenda, alongside a focus on a socially just transformation. However, the shift towards green energy, sustainable as well as inclusive economic transformation, a greening of agriculture and broader land use, and more carbon-neutral management of natural resources will challenge communities' adaptive

capabilities. During this transformation process, low- and middle-income countries will need support to deal with increases in unemployment, precarious employment and energy prices, disruptions in local economies, and the training needs of low-skilled workers (Lazer, 2021) as well as food price increases. Trade-offs between different areas of sustainable development are likely to materialise if policy-making is configured and implemented in silos; the consequences can include a deepening of inequality (Shawoo et al., 2020).

Managing these overlaying crises while structurally transforming countries' energy systems towards renewable energy sources requires interventions beyond adaptive and shock-responsive social protection measures, which focus primarily on protecting people. To achieve a Socially Just Transformation while addressing the long-term socio-economic effects of COVID-19 and impacts of climate change, **this brief argues that the G7 should lead a global campaign to promote integrated social protection, in particular complementing social protection programmes with other measures which will ensure inclusion and sustainability – 'integrated social protection plus' (ISPP)**. The integration of different social protection instruments with inclusive economic development, including 'growth from below' (i.e. through small investments by households in micro-enterprises, smallholder agriculture, the rural non-farm economy, and through the urban informal sector) and supporting education and skills training (Shepherd et al., 2019), will help societies cope with transitional problems, while addressing the adverse socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and fostering the societies' resilience to other crises as described above. In other words, ISSP offers the potential to drive socially just transitions by enabling poverty escapes, preventing impoverishment and supporting vulnerable groups during the change, ensuring that no one is left behind. Crucial to this end is an operationalisation of the concept of policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), a governance framework to adopt synergic solutions to sustainable development problems, maximise the co-benefits and reduce the trade-offs at both the national and global level (OECD, 2015), which are inevitable during this structural transformation process.¹

Proposals

Social protection has the potential to play a key role in the transition process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 222 countries implemented over 3,000 social protection measures between March 2020 and May 2021 with cash and in-kind transfers, expanding social protection measures to vulnerable groups and increasing benefit levels for programme participants (Gentilini et al., 2021). These programmes were strongly focused on the short-term and coverage of basic needs during the crisis, following a shock-responsive approach (Beazley, Gorman, Satriana & Attenborough, 2021; UNICEF, 2021). The emphasis to date in these efforts has been on tackling poverty; however, such efforts can be undermined if the potential for impoverishment and greater social inequalities resulting from the pandemic and compounding crises are not concurrently addressed. ISSP focuses on the long-term and aims to ensure that no one is left behind during the transformation process, including those who may have already suffered during COVID-19 and continue to be threatened by the impacts of climate change.

Integrated social protection programmes have great potential to improve the capacities of people and communities to cope with the transition towards renewable energy, enabling a socially just transformation. In particular, integrated social protection programmes can facilitate synergic benefits that can lead to gains

in human development (Sammon et al., 2020). For example, an integrated set of programmes in Malawi, including cash transfers, financial and business training, and community mobilisation for social integration, was observed to increase financial inclusion and economic empowerment when compared to single interventions (Burchi & Strupat, 2018). During the green transformation, social protection can provide compensation for energy price increases. Where there are energy price rises, poor consumers also need to be protected through cash transfers or subsidies; however, a big issue in many low and lower middle-income countries is to expand access to the grid or to decentralised renewables to enable productivity increases in farm and non-farm enterprises. This offers the potential to drive poverty reduction.

In the long run, an inclusive and green transformation needs to acknowledge the importance of the small scale, often informal and household-level economies on which people in poverty generally rely upon to escape poverty and to survive. This is where an additional 'plus' of integrated social protection comes in, creating ISPP. Other interventions beyond integrated social protection to promote sustained poverty escapes include support to 'growth from below' (as detailed above) balanced with 'growth from above' (medium-large formal investments). Moreover, much greater public investments in education and health are necessary to foster people's capabilities, allowing them to reach their full potential (Shepherd et al., 2019). Synergistic action through investments in health and education should then be made to help support people's pathways out of monetary and multidimensional poverty and increase resilience, thereby helping prevent future impoverishment. From pre-pandemic experience, we know that access to health insurance (or effective universal health coverage) is essential to prevent downward mobility, but insurance premia need to be subsidised for those who cannot afford to pay (Diwakar et al., 2018). Education has been widely neglected during the pandemic (as often in emergencies more generally), but a fair investment in education is critical in the medium-long term to enable sustained pathways out of poverty. Such investments require additional reforms which will enable children in poor and vulnerable households to progress far enough through the education system to make a difference in their future human capital (UNICEF, 2021). In the aftermath of COVID-19, this requires a greater understanding of how the pandemic has caused multiple deprivations across livelihoods, education as well as health, to the point of exacerbating multidimensional poverty, which will create additional pressures during the just transition process.

To frame our focus on ISPP's contribution to the Socially Just Transition process, we follow a combination of the 3Ps (protection, prevention, promotion) with a poverty dynamics lens (*Table 1*) introduced by Diwakar and Adedeji (2021). A poverty dynamics lens can contribute to the development of more effective policies for poverty eradication by ensuring not only that people in chronic poverty are targeted by social protection but that responses are also developed to adequately respond to preventing impoverishment and enabling individuals and households to sustain escapes from poverty (Shepherd et al., 2014). An example of merging the 3Ps with a poverty dynamics framing has been applied to a case study in Nigeria, where it was found that effectively addressing ill-health through access to quality services free at the point of delivery, coupled with responding to livelihood risk in agriculture, and supporting asset development, were components around which an integrated social protection system might focus (Diwakar and Adedeji, 2021).

Protect: Tackle chronic poverty	Prevent: Prevent impoverishment	Promote: Promote sustained poverty escapes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address multiple and overlapping deprivations (e.g. conflict, climate shocks, limited human development) • Enhance food security (e.g. comprehensive approach to sustainable food systems) • Develop savings and asset base, including through non-contributory assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address ill health and expand health insurance (with provisions for people in poverty) • Conflict prevention and peacebuilding • Limit agricultural risk (e.g. scale up irrigation, diversify crops, provide micro-insurance) with a focus on climate-smart agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve financial inclusion (e.g. ladders from informal groups to formal banking) especially access to capital for non-farm enterprises • Climate-sensitive peacebuilding and livelihood recovery plans in conflict regions • Ensure access for all to a minimum of 3 years of secondary school, and strengthen links to employment, including through public works

Table 1: Examples of interventions within an integrated approach by poverty dynamic and 3Ps (Diwakar and Adedeji, 2021)

In this process, it was suggested that social assistance gradually be combined with interventions across human development and livelihood sectors. Where these efforts enhance climate change adaptation as noted above, for example, through mitigating climate-related agricultural risks or extending inclusive access to renewables, they offer the potential to enable socially just transitions within a green recovery. This is schematically outlined in *Figure 1*. A socially just transition embedded within a green, inclusive and equalising recovery from COVID-19 in low and middle-income countries requires international and national public policy support for ISPP. Moreover, universal approaches offer the potential to strengthen societies' acceptance of the transition process and the ability to deal with social challenges that may follow such changes. Through an integrated focus, social protection can play a decisive role in both tackling existing poverty and, if broadened in a relevant way, in preventing present or future impoverishment and reducing multidimensional inequality.

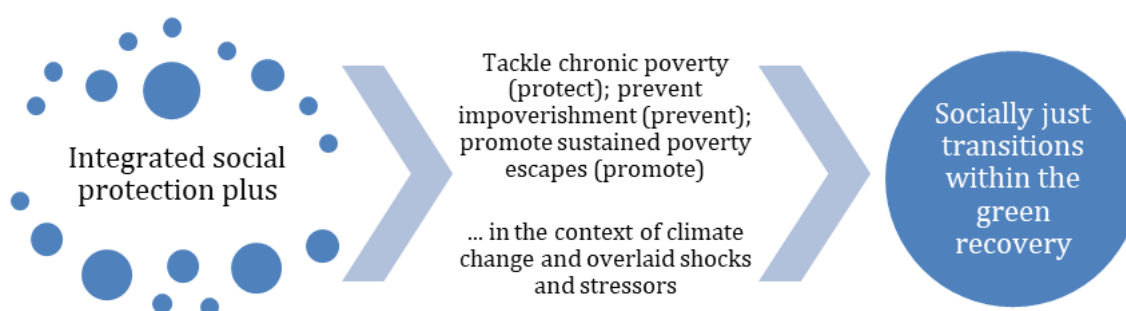


Figure 1: Linking ISPP to socially just transitions

Implementation

To implement ISPP in the G7's Just Transition Partnerships to ensure a socially just transition process, we suggest strategic areas of development. These areas are necessarily broad, as the degree of transformation required is great. At the same time, we do suggest certain combinations to consider as examples and make reference to other complementary Think7 policy briefs that provide additional detail on implementation around specific issues identified. The focus of this present brief, instead, is to suggest a strategic direction for the integration of issues to work towards a socially just transformation. This direction is outlined below.

First, to counteract poverty, reduce inequalities and increase acceptance of ecological structural changes, partner countries will require a greater understanding of how the pandemic has caused multiple deprivations across livelihoods, education and health. Strengthening the capacities of national statistics offices and funding in-depth research on the impacts of the pandemic and other compounding crises with a strong focus on monetary and multidimensional poverty and inequality will enable countries to design coherent ISPP measures, using a poverty dynamics lens.

Second, comprehensive data can contribute to the development of more effective policies for poverty eradication and fight inequalities that would affect the transition process. An important step would be to identify context-specific combinations and sequences within an ISPP. The mentioned study from Nigeria indicates how this could be better balanced within a 3Ps framing (*Table 1, above*). For example, the G7, development partners, and the government could gradually combine social assistance in the Just Transition Partner countries with individual and collective savings, education catch-up, and technical and business skill upgrading, including business development advice and climate-smart agricultural extension support. Through this, ISPP could enable escapes from poverty, help prevent impoverishment, and potentially support inequality reduction on the road to achieving a green recovery from COVID-19 towards a socially just transformation.

ITUC (2018) provided several examples of how social protection can support the just transition process. For instance, the Indian government aimed to improve rural infrastructure through its public works programme, thereby providing people in poverty residing in rural areas with 100 days of guaranteed work to improve their resource base. Such programmes have the potential to support 'growth from below' and provide vulnerable groups with access to new opportunities. A green revolution that creates jobs, if inclusive, would similarly fit well within this framing. Governments would benefit from providing universal access to programmes, as vulnerabilities can increase fast due to the asymmetric impact of crises. Furthermore, key to functioning programmes is policy coherence between the participating actors and the integration of a diverse set of programmes to address multiple issues together. To this end, it is important that the G7 drive ISPP initiatives based on core areas that must be addressed synergistically for a green and just recovery from COVID-19. These include climate change, the [energy transition](#) and [health](#).

Second, there will undoubtedly be trade-offs that need to be managed in the design and implementation of policies in the Just Transition Partnerships, especially in terms of increased fiscal pressures on post-pandemic expansions. In this context, joining up is unlikely to happen organically as there are resistances, requiring special mechanisms backed with power and resources. The G7 could provide the needed push for increased collaboration and support initiatives like the Global Social Protection Fund that would help countries establish ISPP.

Third, there is some evidence that Sustainable Development Councils, operating near the national centre of power (President or Prime Minister) have the potential for joining up the operations of sector ministries across economic, social and environmental dimensions (Pickard and Lemma, 2022, forthcoming), which is crucial for a successful and socially just transformation process. However, the successful collaboration of these institutions requires a shared understanding of the issue at hand, and stakeholders frequently disagree as they work with differing definitions and ambitions. Here, the G7 have a unique opportunity to create a shared understanding of challenges and potential [cooperative approaches to solve conflicts](#) to

ensure the success of the Just Transition Partnerships. The implementation of ISPP, demonstrating their effectiveness through evidence-based approaches, could encourage others to use them as well.

Climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and violent conflict are only three of the most pressing global challenges. To mitigate their impact, the world must act collectively. The envisioned Just Transition Partnerships should embed ISPP to achieve an inclusive economic transformation, broaden human development and mitigate existing socio-economic vulnerabilities. Low- and medium-income countries will especially struggle to implement climate action and address the ongoing consequences of the pandemic without (further) exacerbating existing poverty and inequality in their countries. Without a clear vision of how integrating different social protection and climate-change programmes can support the just transition process, the G7 might jeopardise the success of their partnerships and global climate action efforts in the long run. To avoid this, the G7 must lead a campaign in favour of ISPP and 'growth from below' initiatives now, creating a roadmap for other countries and donors toward a socially just energy transition.²

Endnotes

¹ The trade-offs are considerable, and is a suggested area for future research that is beyond the scope of this briefing note.

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