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**SAHEL ADAPTIVE
SOCIAL PROTECTION
PROGRAM**



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STRESS TESTING ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN THE SAHEL

SUMMARY REPORT

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ABOUT THE SAHEL ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION TRUST FUND

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FOREWORD

The Stress Testing Adaptive Social Protection Systems in the Sahel report examines the existing social protection systems in the Sahel and identifies elements that need strengthening to address the needs in the region. The work for this report began during the COVID-19 pandemic, which tested the capacity of the adaptive social protection systems in the Sahel countries. The economic consequences of the pandemic were extensive, particularly for vulnerable and poor households in the Sahel, and reversed years of poverty reduction efforts. While the Sahel countries are showing signs of economic recovery from the pandemic, they continue to face a multitude of ongoing crises, including global challenges, such as the inflation and economic fallout from the war in Ukraine, and localized shocks linked to insecurity and worsening climate — the Sahel recently experienced very severe droughts and food insecurity, alongside more frequent and severe flooding.

These increasingly challenging contexts call for effective adaptive social protection (ASP) tools and strategies. ASP is a critical tool to reach the World Bank’s goal of a world free of poverty on a livable planet. Indeed, to face worsening climate change, increasingly frequent climate-related shocks, and economic shocks from an ever more globalized world, it is essential to have systems in place that can build the resilience of the poorest and most vulnerable households ahead of shocks, as well as protect them, their productive investments, and their human capital from the negative impacts of shocks.

In recent years, the Sahel countries, with the support of the World Bank and the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP), have begun to invest in adaptive social protection systems. Governments have established national safety net programs, which offer regular support to some of the poorest segments of the population. ASP systems were designed for these programs to scale up, in coordination with humanitarian partners, to respond to shocks such as food insecurity and pandemics. While their reach and scale remain limited, their successes are not to be minimized, and some successful elements have inspired other countries in Africa and beyond.

This report draws lessons from the ASP trajectory in the Sahel. It uses the stress test methodology, designed by the World Bank, to assess the ability of social protection systems to respond to shocks. The report provides a rich overview of the existing systems in the Sahel along the four building blocks of ASP. First, it examines the institutional arrangements for ASP and shock response in the region, and explores linkages across government agencies and external partners, which play an important role in responding to shocks. Second, it provides an overview of the data and information systems in the Sahel countries, including a review of the achievements in building social registries, which can be leveraged by multiple actors for more efficient and effective interventions. Third, the report focuses on programs and delivery systems — highlighting innovations in each country along the delivery chain. Finally, it reviews the limited progress in developing ASP financing mechanisms. Building on the progress and limitations, the report concludes with a set of recommendations for governments, donors, and implementing partners to further invest in ASP.

We welcome the Stress Testing Adaptive Social Protection Systems in the Sahel report as an important milestone in the development of ASP systems in the region and beyond.

Ousmane Diagana,
Regional Vice President for Western and Central Africa, World Bank



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sahel region of Africa faces multiple crises, which further compound structural economic and human development challenges. The Sahel is one of the world's poorest regions and displays some of the lowest levels of human capital globally. Violence and insecurity in the Sahel have significantly increased in the past decade, with several countries experiencing active armed conflict and unrest. The impacts of climate change compound existing vulnerabilities and risks. Due to its high exposure and low coping capacity, the Sahel is among the world's most vulnerable regions to climate change and hazards, such as drought, floods, heatwaves, and crop pests. Finally, the external shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have impacted the Sahel, eroding purchasing power and aggravating poverty. These multiple crises have resulted in a significant deterioration of food and nutrition security in the region, and more than 13 million people were estimated to have faced severe food insecurity during the 2022 lean season — one of the worst crises in the last decade.

Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) plays a critical role in preventing or mitigating the negative impacts of shocks and boosting resilience for long-term development. ASP has emerged as a flexible and dynamic approach to social protection during the past decade. It combines and exploits synergies between social protection, disaster risk management (DRM), and climate change adaptation. This enables social protection to be leveraged as an effective tool to reduce household vulnerability to covariate shocks, such as economic downturns, natural disasters, conflict and violence, forced displacement, and health emergencies, including the recent COVID-19 pandemic. By providing tailored, targeted, and timely support during, or in the aftermath of a crisis, ASP enables poor and vulnerable households to meet their basic needs in the short term, while strengthening their resilience in the medium and longer term by reducing negative coping strategies (such as lowering food consumption, selling productive assets, or taking children out of school, and by protecting their human capital and livelihoods). ASP also promotes livelihoods, by increasing productivity and promoting diversification, which are central to resilience to future shocks and sustained poverty reduction.

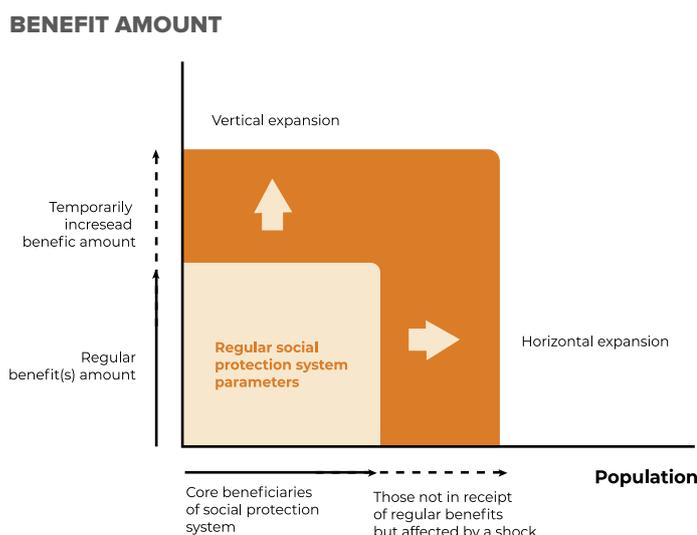
ASP comprises a suite of interventions that can be 'flexed' and layered before, during, and after a shock strikes. ASP interventions include — but are not limited to — cash transfer programs, public works and cash-for-work programs, livelihood support programs, and productive and economic inclusion programs. These programs are designed to provide poor and vulnerable households with targeted and direct support and access to socioeconomic opportunities to offer a way out of poverty. In

doing so, they also protect individual well-being and human capital accumulation from the negative and long-lasting impacts of shocks. During times of need, different approaches can be adopted to ensure that poor and vulnerable shock-affected households are effectively reached. For example, small adjustments can be made to routine social protection programs to ensure the continuity of assistance during times of shocks; vertical expansions can be implemented, to temporarily increase the benefit value or duration of an existing program for some or all current beneficiaries ([figure O.1](#)); and horizontal expansions can be designed, to temporarily expand coverage to new households affected by a shock (either new or existing programs).



Photo credit: From World Bank

FIGURE O.1: Social Safety Net Programs, Vertical and Horizontal Expansion



Source: Bowen et al. 2020

The Sahel's vulnerability and exposure to shocks and crises is set to increase with accelerating climate change, calling for a shift from often externally funded, ad hoc responses toward building sustainable, government-led systems. In the past, the response to shocks and crises predominantly relied on a humanitarian approach and with year-to-year ad hoc programs.

For example, food insecurity resulting from the annual lean season was largely addressed through externally funded humanitarian aid. While humanitarian aid continues to play an important role in navigating food security shocks, countries in the Sahel are increasingly putting forward government-led ASP interventions and are beginning to invest in systems. Although ASP has been shown to be an effective tool in responding to the region's compounding challenges, leveraging its full potential requires government-led national systems that can operate at scale — with a suite of national programs at scale, mature information systems, readily budgeted and pre-positioned finance, and clear institutional arrangements. The principle of a systems approach permeates the four pillars of the ASP framework, and the latent-advanced framework of the Social Protection Stress Test Tool is framed around a gradual strengthening of national systems.

Over the past decade, ASP has been on a remarkable trajectory in the Sahel, and this is an appropriate time to take stock of the situation. This report provides an overview of the state of ASP across six Sahelian countries — Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal — as well as a set of recommendations for actions to strengthen the adaptiveness and responsiveness of existing systems to shocks. This report leverages the application of the Social Protection Stress Test Tool in the six countries between October 2021 and September 2022. The Social Protection Stress Test Tool builds on the four pillars of the ASP framework to assess

the adaptiveness and scalability of social protection systems in response to shocks, and to identify priority areas for improvement (Box O.1, figure BO.1.1, and figure BO1.2). This report seeks to capture the developments that took place since the test was applied, though some of these may not be fully reflected in this report.

BOX O.1: WHAT IS ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION?

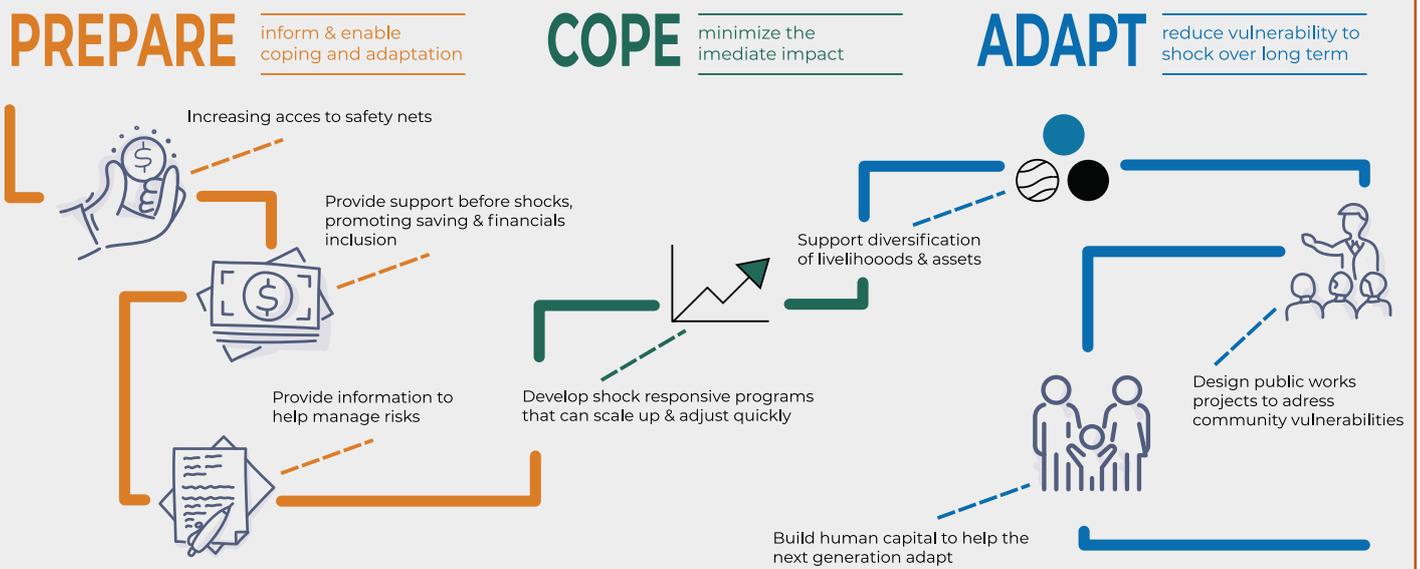
Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) helps to build the resilience of poor and vulnerable households by investing in their capacity to **prepare for, cope with, and adapt** to shocks, thus ensuring that they do not fall deeper into poverty. The ASP approach integrates basic social protection with disaster risk management (DRM) and adaptation to climate change.

Through its four building blocks — **Programs and Delivery Systems, Data and Information, Financing, and Institutional Arrangements and Partnerships** — ASP has emerged as a critical tool to help poor and vulnerable households and communities become more resilient to shocks and stresses, especially to the impacts of climate change. It achieves this by providing a combination of cash transfers and assistance to strengthen knowledge and behavioral change for the promotion of sustainable and diversified livelihood opportunities.

The four building blocks include a range of dimensions that are critical for ASP to successfully provide a basis for shock-response. They include the following technical, financial, and political dimensions :

- ▶ **Institutional Arrangements and Partnerships.** To support government leadership in the coordination of actors, based on the clear articulation of roles and responsibilities.
- ▶ **Data and Information.** To ensure that the design and implementation of ASP programs are informed by information on household vulnerability to shocks and their capacity to cope and recover, including through dynamic social registries.
- ▶ **Programs and Delivery Systems.** To promote programs and delivery systems that are responsive to shocks, in that they have anticipated and planned for shocks.
- ▶ **Finance.** To establish risk financing strategies that promote proactive response planning, enable the availability of funding in case of a shock, and limit delays in response.

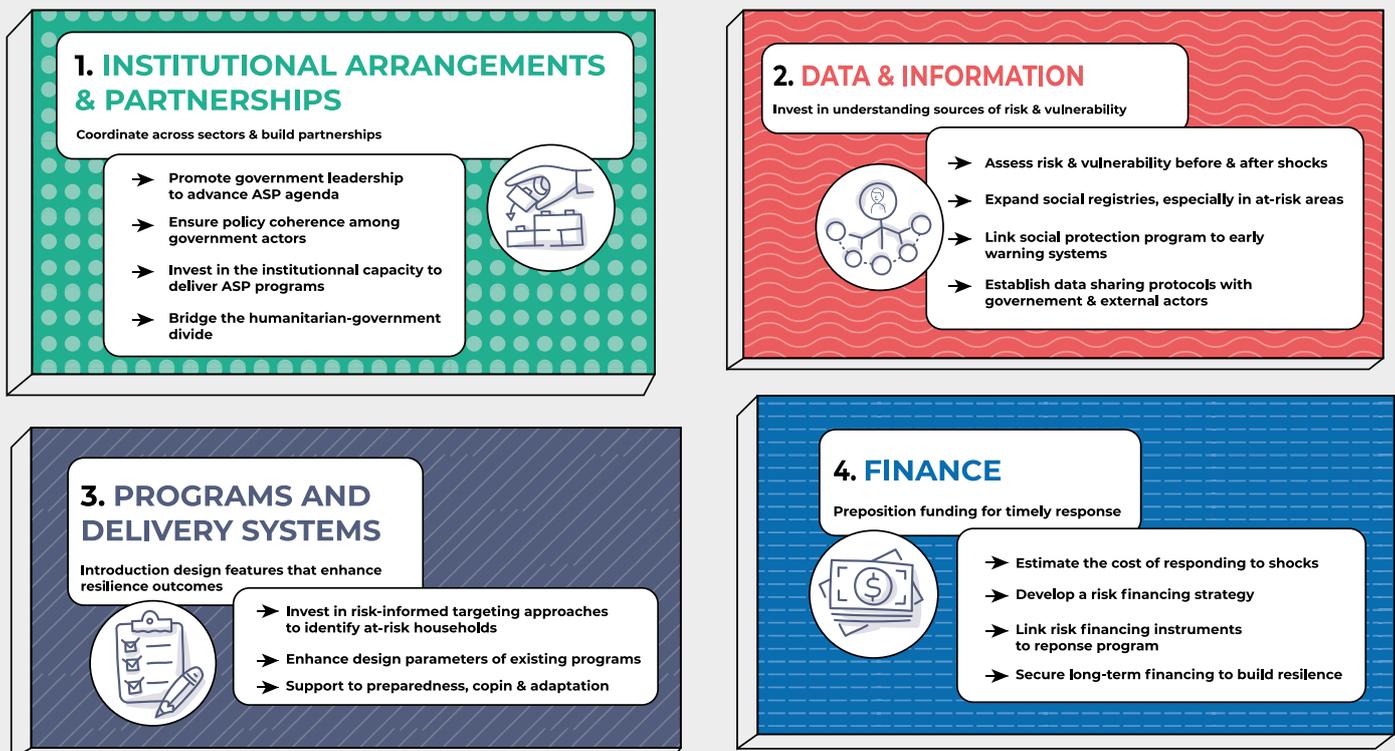
FIGURE BO.1.1: How Can ASP Help?



Source: Adapted from World Bank 2020a

FIGURE BO.1.2 : The Four Building Blocks for Putting ASP Systems in Place

FOUR BUILDING BLOCKS FOR PUTTING IN PLACE ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS



Source: Adapted from World Bank 2020a

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Overall, when considering their starting point nearly a decade ago, each of the Sahel countries has made significant progress toward establishing some of the key ASP building blocks. All countries have successfully laid the foundations for ASP systems and have the capacity to provide regular cash transfers to the poor and to respond to some shocks (especially in response to annual food insecurity), albeit with some delays and limited coverage. The Sahel countries are also piloting innovative approaches, related to Early Warning Systems (EWS), program design, program triggers, and payments. The greatest advances have been observed in Mauritania and Senegal — particularly on the Data and Information and Programs and Delivery Systems building blocks of the ASP framework. In this respect, Senegal is the only country whose system has achieved an “emerging” level of development. The coverage of routine social safety nets in these two countries is now nationwide and provides a strong foundation for the launch of shock-responses. This is illustrated by the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Mauritania, which scaled up its safety net programs to 210,000 households (the routine safety net program had 80,000 beneficiary households at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic). In Niger, despite its lower foundational coverage, cash transfer programs were scaled up to reach 375,000 households in response to COVID-19 in 2021.

Progress is not uniform across all countries or building blocks (figure O.2). All countries have either established a social registry or the foundations of a social registry. However, the static (nondynamic) approach to data collection and the registries’ limited coverage in some countries result in potentially obsolete or incomplete data and make it difficult for countries to identify poor and vulnerable households affected by shocks. The limited coverage of social safety nets remains a critical constraint to the adoption of a more mature approach to ASP in four of the assessed countries—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger. Similarly, the low penetration of digital payment systems hinders the capacity of countries to adopt modern payment systems. Finally, the Finance building block has made the least progress across all countries. This is due in part to a strong reliance on international assistance. The low ratings in the Finance building block also point to a need for other components of the system to be in place, with sufficient coverage and delivery capacity, before countries can focus on the mobilization and coordination of financing.

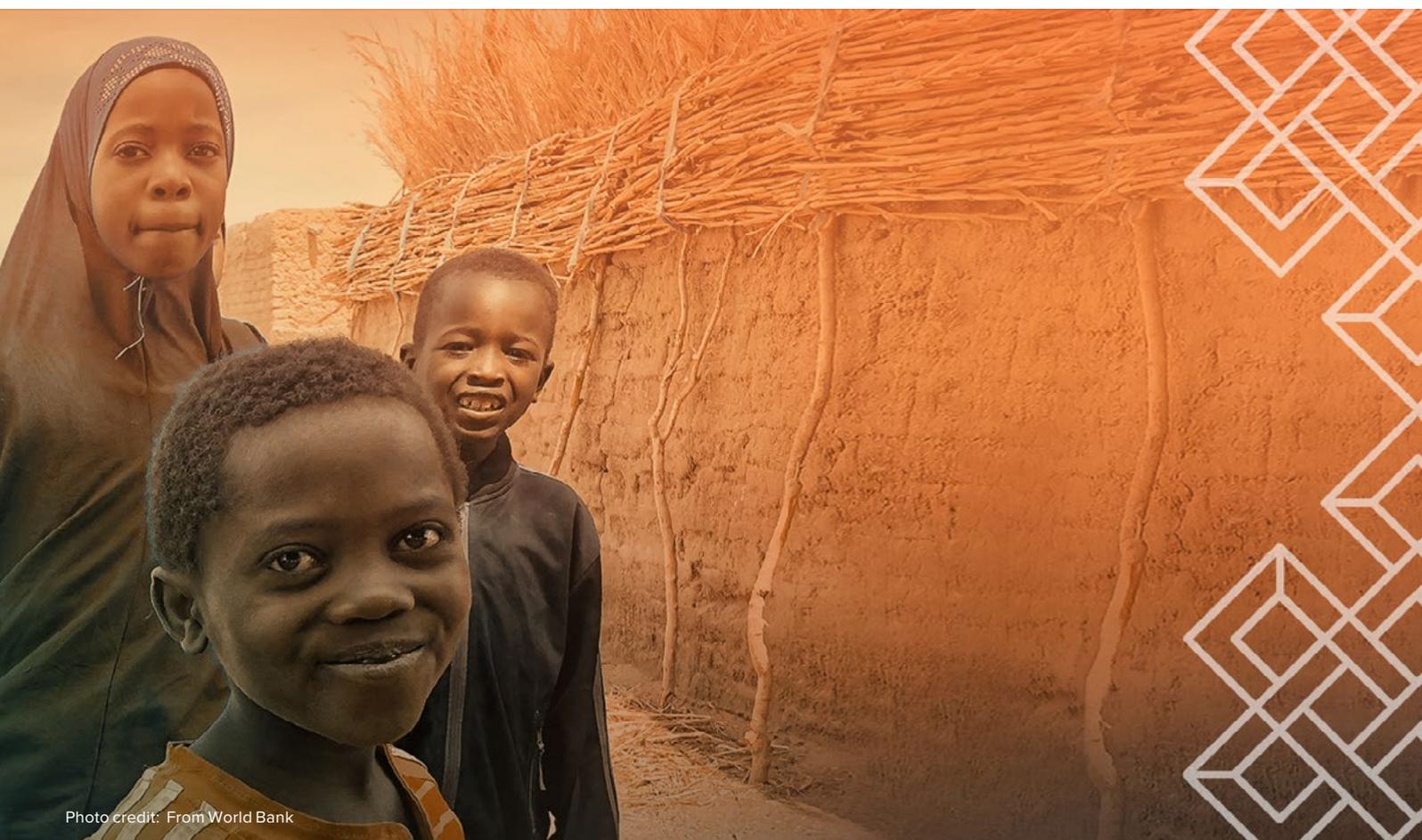
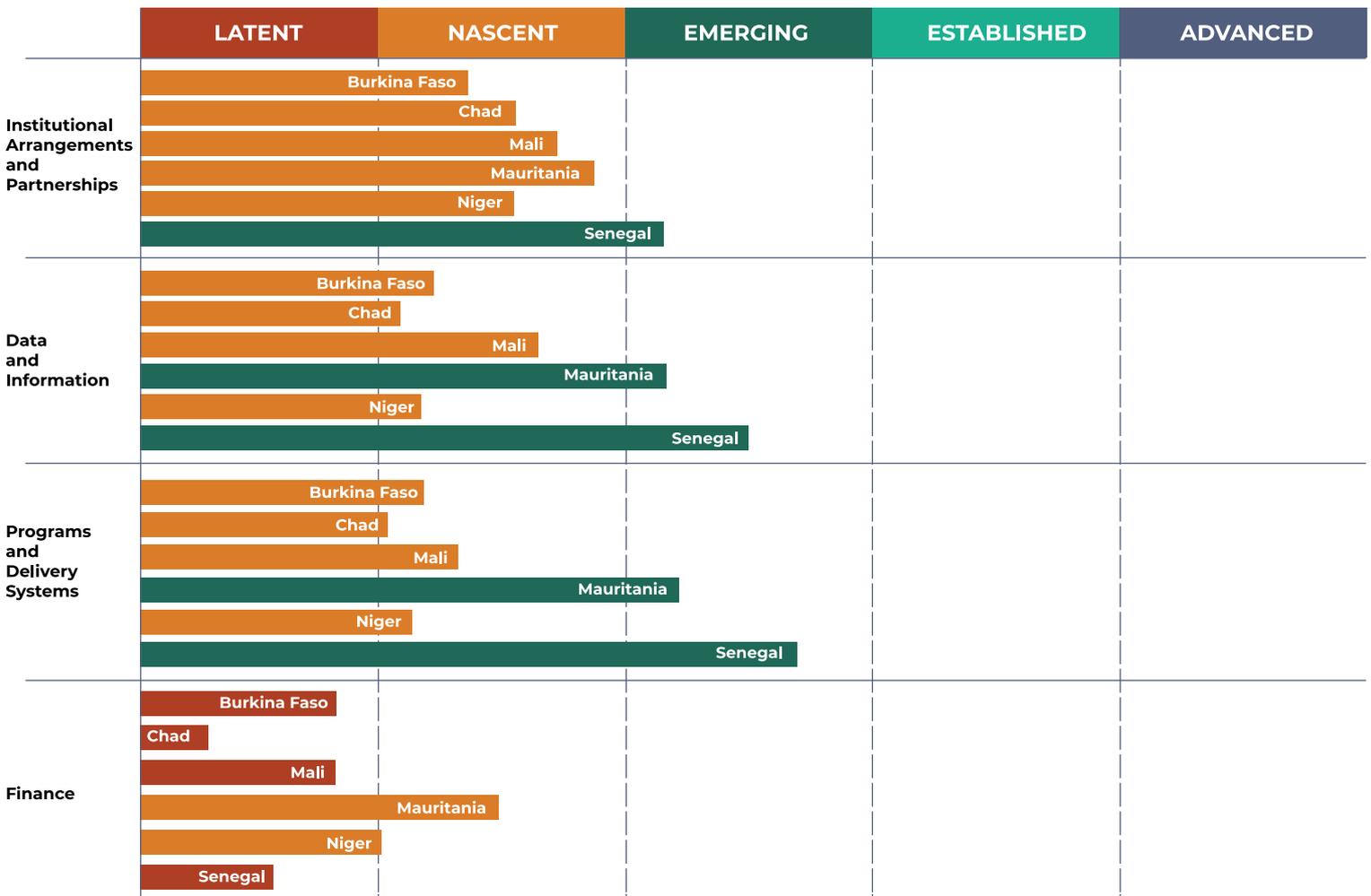


Photo credit: From World Bank

FIGURE O.2: Summary of Stress Test Assessment



Source: Original figure for this publication.

Overall, despite the existence of solid foundations and firm governmental commitment to ASP, significant progress needs to be made by all countries for the ASP agenda to be effectively advanced. In each country, a concerted and carefully sequenced plan of action needs to be applied across building blocks. Operationalization must be prioritized, because systems, policies, or delivery mechanisms have frequently been established but not yet fully implemented. The following sections of this Executive

Summary present the findings and overarching recommendations that are emerging from the report for each of the four building blocks of ASP — Institutional Arrangements and Partnerships, Data and Information, Programs and Delivery Systems, and Finance. The main report provides additional details and overarching recommendations, as well as specific recommendations for governments and for donors and implementing partners.



Photo credit: From World Bank

Note: Figure based on assessments completed in October 2021 in Burkina Faso; September 2022 in Chad; June 2022 in Mali; November 2021 in Mauritania; May 2022 in Niger; and January 2022 in Senegal. Progress realized since these assessments are reflected in the text.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Countries in the Sahel are incorporating ASP principles in their national social protection policies and are periodically preparing contingency plans to guide their responses to food insecurity.

All Sahel countries have national social protection policies, and most governments are taking steps to incorporate the core ASP principles into these frameworks. In the Sahel, the main instruments for ASP, and shock-responses more generally, are country-level response plans. In many instances, the realization of commitments to shock responsiveness in social protection policies and response plans have been hindered by financing challenges.

In most countries in the Sahel, the institutional landscape for ASP lacks strong anchoring, clear roles, and robust coordination mechanisms for government agencies and external partners involved in shock or disaster risk management. Coordination within the ASP sector remains complex, and coordination between the agencies that are responsible for routine safety nets, rapid-onset shocks and food insecurity remains weak. Some countries, such as Mauritania, are making progress toward creating institutional links between social protection and food security actors, but unclear roles and responsibilities among governmental actor's limit progress.

Government leadership and the capacity to align partners is essential but remains constrained. In the Sahel, nongovernmental partners will continue to play a central role in the ASP agenda for mobilizing financial resources and, in some fragile contexts, for implementing shock-response interventions. While there are emerging examples of partners aligning with national systems and priorities, as opposed to operating parallel systems, coordination

remains limited. Strong collaboration between governments and nongovernmental partners is essential to avoid duplication, inefficiencies, and tensions, and is particularly critical in the Sahel, where fiscal spaces are constrained. Government leadership is essential to ensuring the alignment of humanitarian actors with national social protection systems and strengthening this leadership should be a key objective of nongovernmental partners and those financing their interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Incorporate shock-response functions and instruments into national social protection strategies and include ASP programs as response vehicles in national shock-response plans.
- ▶ Define roles and responsibilities and establish coordination mechanisms among a broader range of ASP actors and with other governmental and non-governmental DRM actors.
- ▶ Strengthen the government leadership and convening role on ASP and promote the alignment or integration of financial and operational partners' support within national systems.

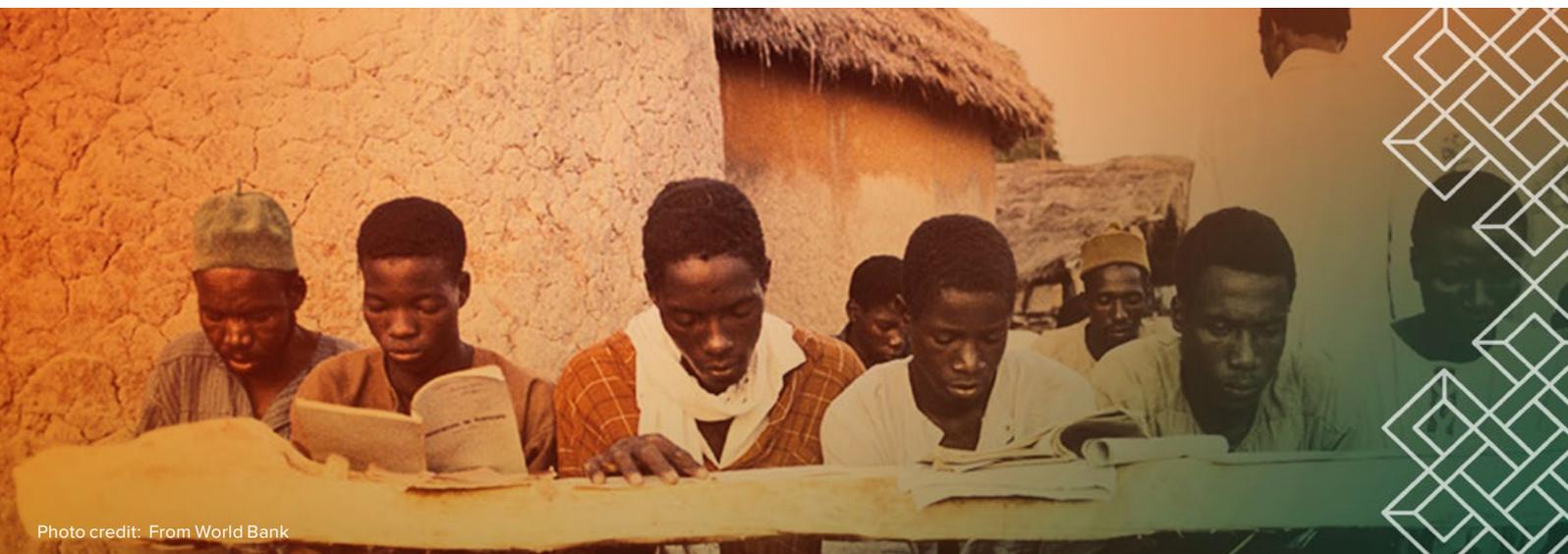


Photo credit: From World Bank

DATA AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS

A strong buy-in for social registries has translated to their progressive expansion across the region, though many countries are yet to cover all geographic areas and households vulnerable to shocks. One of the most active areas of progress on ASP in the region is the establishment of social registries. In Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad and Niger, the ability of social registries to inform shock-response is at times limited by incomplete geographic coverage and outdated information. Registries also typically focus on households that are chronically poor or food-insecure and are less able to identify households who are at risk but not in chronic poverty or food insecurity. Increasing the registration of at-risk populations in all regions is critical to preparing a system for shocks, however numerous operational challenges remain.

Maintaining updated social registries is a challenge in the Sahel, but this is essential for their use in shock-response. Currently, countries in the region collect information on households through waves of widescale data collection, which limits their ability to maintain current data. Adopting dynamic (or on-demand) inclusion methods, such as putting in place permanent local offices with strong local staff, or exploring modular data structures, could help ensure that data is adequately updated. While not all on-demand approaches are feasible in all Sahelian contexts, several options exist.

Social registries are not fully integrated or leveraged in the region, which limits the potential of their increased efficiency and timeliness during shock-response. In the Sahel, social registries are seldom integrated into the broader ecosystem of existing information systems of different sectors or actors, with the exception of Mauritania, whose system is interoperable with other government-held databases. In addition to coverage and quality issues, bottlenecks related to the lack of unique identifier, data privacy and data-sharing are key constraints to the broader leveraging of social registries by multiple actors. Harnessing the full potential of the social registry ecosystem requires political leadership, institutionalization, and coordination mechanisms.

While Sahel countries all have EWS for food security, their institutionalization and ability to provide timely and accurate predictions remain limited. EWS are critical inputs for the design and timeliness of shock-responses. Countries in the Sahel all have early warning tools that focus on food insecurity, though they face several technical financial and capacity challenges. Progress is being made toward improving data quality and integrating a wider range of outcomes and covariate shocks, in addition to the current focus on food insecurity. Some countries in the region are piloting the use of preagreed rules, based on information from early warning mechanisms, to trigger or guide the decision to launch responses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Expand the coverage of social registries to all geographic areas and all households vulnerable to shocks, to ensure they can be leveraged for shock-response.
- ▶ Operationalize protocols to regularly update social registry data, assessing the feasibility of combining administrator-driven methods, on-demand intake modalities, and the use of administrative records through interoperability.
- ▶ Promote the use of social registry data among a range of actors by ensuring its quality and relevance, and establishing adequate data privacy and sharing protocols.
- ▶ Enhance government ownership, institutionalization, and functionality of EWS to ensure they inform the elaboration of national response plans and guide program design.

PROGRAMS AND DELIVERY SYSTEMS

In the Sahel, routine social safety net programs are boosting the resilience of households, and their capacity to cope with shocks and provide a foundation for ASP, though their coverage remains limited. All countries in the region have developed routine social protection programs, however their coverage greatly varies across contexts. In the Sahel, routine social safety net programs have shown their ability to build the resilience of households to shocks, increase their productivity, and diversify their livelihoods. Routine social safety net programs and their delivery systems have provided a platform on which shock-response interventions have been deployed.

Delivery systems are not yet ready to be harnessed for shock-response in all countries of the Sahel, which hinders the ability of governments in the region to respond in a timely and cost-effective manner. Prior planning and preparedness actions are critical for timely responses to shocks. Parts of the delivery systems do not have the capacity to fully support shock-responses, which often puts them under additional pressure, due to the surge in activities to identify beneficiaries, put in place the payment instruments, ensure grievance management, and so on. It is critical to establish mechanisms to scale up and pre-position the required resources for shock-responses.

Payments across the Sahel can be scaled up in times of shock, but face challenges to their timely delivery through cash and digital modalities. Cash in hand is still the main payment mechanism in most routine safety net programs in the Sahel, which limits the ability of programs to scale-up in a timely manner in response to shocks. In the region, there has been progress toward establishing or piloting digital payment systems, as in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania, which can help to promote timely shock-responses. However, switching to digital payments and leveraging them for shock-response is challenging in the Sahel, particularly outside of urban areas. Regardless of the technology that is adopted, the rigidity of contracts and procurement procedures can limit the ability of systems to respond to shocks.

Inclusion challenges persist in the Sahel and need to be addressed before shocks, so that solutions can be effectively implemented in the context of shock-responses. Most routine social safety net programs have deliberately included a large share of women among their beneficiaries, but gender responsiveness is harder to achieve during horizontal expansions. There are opportunities to develop stronger strategies to address the risks faced by women, which need to be capitalized during the early design phases. Similarly, the design of ASP programs must be

more systematic to ensure the participation of other vulnerable groups. Finally, the inclusion of forcibly displaced population groups in the Sahel remains a challenge, though some countries have begun to address this issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ *Enhance the coverage of routine safety net programs to include all chronically poor and vulnerable households and strengthen the resilience-building properties of programs.*
- ▶ *Enhance government delivery systems so they can perform their functions in times of shock and, as part of the national response plans, clarify ahead of shocks how they will be used.*
- ▶ *Enhance payment mechanisms to improve timeliness and accountability, and ensure inclusion.*
- ▶ *Address the constraints faced by women, forcibly displaced households, and other vulnerable groups to clarify institutional responsibilities and embed operational solutions in the design and procedures of regular and shock-response programs.*



Photo credit: From World Bank

FINANCE

In the Sahel, the mobilization of financing for shock-response is typically ad hoc and piecemeal, which can be costly and create significant delays. Except for Mauritania, countries in the region have not put in place ex ante, or prearranged, financing instruments for ASP. More generally, no countries in the region have shock-response financing strategies in place. Because of limited ex ante financing, shock-responses are typically financed with significant delays, mostly through ex post international financing or domestic budget reallocation. The development of prearranged financing for ASP is constrained by the nascent nature of ASP systems in most Sahelian countries.

When broadening the notion of financing to that of routine safety net programs, some countries display greater government contributions. The stress test results presented above only reflect financing for shock responses. When also considering routine safety net programs, which are a critical base for shock-responses, a different picture emerges. Specifically, in Senegal, transfers of the regular safety net program, which is national in coverage, are fully financed by the national budget. Similarly, in Mauritania, the share of government financing for the routine national program is significant, and in Burkina Faso, plans anticipate a notable national government contribution.

To date, most risk financing instruments adopted in the Sahel have been insurance-based, though reserve instruments may be more adapted to the region's risk profile. Some countries have adopted sovereign drought insurance policies, but these are not specifically earmarked for ASP. Given the climate vulnerability profile of the Sahel, policy makers should consider alternative disaster risk financing instruments to insurance, such as reserve

funds. Some countries also have contingency instruments in place, but these frequently focus on food distribution rather than on cash transfers made through ASP programs.

Financing regular and shock-response ASP programs in the Sahel will require a mix of domestic and international funding for the foreseeable future. All Sahel countries, especially the four central Sahelian countries, are dependent on external support to respond to humanitarian needs, which is unlikely to change in the short to medium term. Disaster risk financing instruments and strategies in the Sahel should explicitly account for continued donor contributions. Some countries are developing instruments that receive contributions from government and donors, which could form the basis for broader donor-inclusive financing approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Identify options to establish prearranged financing instruments for shock-response programs using social protection mechanisms.
- ▶ Focus on instruments that are commensurate with the risk profile of the Sahel and ensure that contingency instruments are set up to support social protection shock-response programs.
- ▶ Put in place financial instruments for shock-response using ASP mechanisms that enable government and donor contributions, thereby boosting the leadership of governments and coordination of partners.



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SAHEL ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAM

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