



Joint Partnership on Adaptive Social Protection in the Sahel
(UNICEF, WB-SASPP, WFP)

Temporary Coordination Group on Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) in the Sahel

Convergence principles for support to social protection systems



Photo: Modified from the original photo by Stephan Gladieu / World Bank

Introduction



Sahel countries have demonstrated their commitment to scale up social protection and invest in adaptive social protection systems that reduce poverty and promote resilience to shocks. Evidence proves that ASP is a critical instrument to build resilience to climate shocks, help the poorest and most climate-vulnerable households adapt to climate change, and mitigate the impacts of shocks. In the Sahel, countries have been establishing social protection systems since 2012 and are leveraging these systems to address chronic poverty, lean season food insecurity, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the German presidency of the Sahel Alliance, a temporary coordination group was set up in December 2023 to enhance members' joint understanding, coordination and approaches on ASP in the Sahel. The group's activities contribute to the Sahel Alliance priority area "Strengthening resilience to climate, economic and other shocks through adaptive social protection systems and integrated food systems" agreed by the General Assembly. The coordination group aims to support increasing coverage of ASP in the Sahel, improved coherence and convergence of current and future ASP-related programmes, and joint advocacy and communication on ASP. The coordination group consists of donors and implementing agencies engaging in adaptive social protection in the Sahel.

The impact of ASP is currently hampered by strong fragmentation between institutions and programmes. This results in uncoordinated small-scale, potentially overlapping interventions with relatively low levels of coverage, but also creates inefficiencies in operations, and low levels of government ownership. There is also relatively weak governance of the social protection sector, which both results from and produces fragmentation. ASP is further thwarted by low levels of coordination with humanitarian action as well as a fragmentation between domestic and international financing flows and between humanitarian and development financing.

In the face of increased needs and shrinking resources, humanitarian and development partners should work through and/or coordinate with national systems, where possible, and optimize their support to building national systems by converging their efforts to build more effective, efficient, and sustainable adaptive social protection systems.

A series of principles are proposed to ensure convergence of support at policy, financing and programming levels.

Convergence Principles

The Sahel Alliance temporary coordination group for Adaptive Social Protection in the Sahel proposes a set of convergence principles that guide the engagement of financial and technical partners willing to support social protection systems in the region. These serve as a checklist to ensure that this support is guided by the same standards.

Through convergent support to social protection systems in the Sahel, development partners will seek to:



POLICY CONVERGENCE

support **national ownership**, leadership and oversight;



PROGRAMMATIC CONVERGENCE

support and **align with national strategies**, processes, programs and tools;



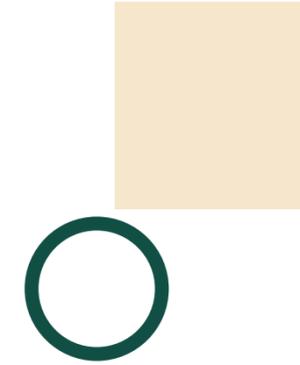
FINANCIAL CONVERGENCE

ensure **predictability of financing** and technical assistance arrangements.

1. Policy Convergence

Strong policy frameworks are essential to create an enabling environment for **adaptive social protection**. Partners should converge in supporting governments with developing national social protection policies and strategies, and subsequently costed implementation plans with appropriate human resources and clear responsibilities. Once these are in place, partners need to ensure that their support for the sector is aligned with these strategic frameworks.

Fragmentation and duplication need to be addressed through effective coordination structures. Partners should converge in supporting the set-up and functioning of strong central and sub-national coordination mechanisms, working with and through them. Partners should also commit to working within their own organizations to break their internal silos and foster stronger coordination.



2. Programmatic Convergence



The social protection landscape in the Sahel is marked by high levels of fragmentation and low levels of coverage. To simultaneously address these challenges, partners should seek to converge in supporting the expansion of national safety net programmes. This entails refraining from funding or implementing parallel pilot or small-scale programmes which are not in line with the national safety net programmes or with the overarching policy framework.

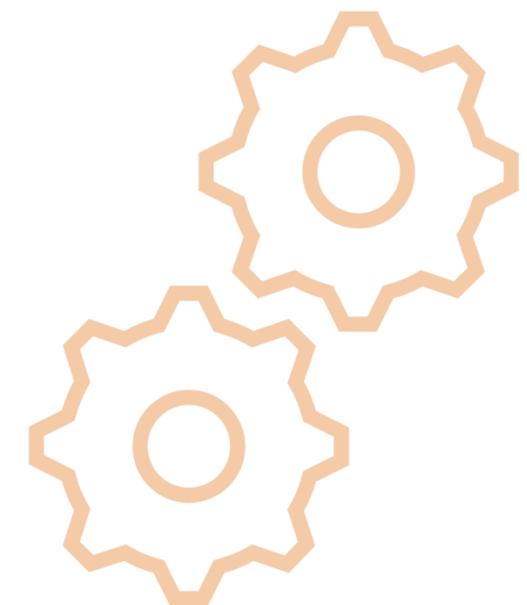
Expanding the coverage of national safety net programmes should be done through national systems in the first place. Working through non-governmental partners should only be considered when capacity or access is constrained. In this case, a twin-track approach should be considered, which ensures that (partial) delivery through partners outside the national system is aligned with and coordinated under national programmes and delivery parameters.

Partners should strive to align to national frameworks, plans, and tools to maximize efficiency and ownership:

- Following national priorities to plan geographic expansion.
- Using social registries for beneficiary selection when available and relevant.
- Using the transfer amount defined in national programme documents, strategies, and response plans.
- Strengthen national accountability and grievance redress mechanism when available.

When direct support to national programs is not possible or not as a single option, **partners will converge to support alignment:**

- Prioritizing twin-track approach models (as opposed to only parallel delivery through third-party implementers).
- Complementing benefit delivery with system strengthening to support efficient and effective delivery and strengthen accountability.
- Defining pathways from parallel delivery to government delivery in the medium or long term.



3. Financial Convergence



Funding streams and complexities often play a role in the social protection landscape fragmentation, especially in fragile contexts like the Sahel where humanitarian funding streams and development funding streams overlap but often do not connect.

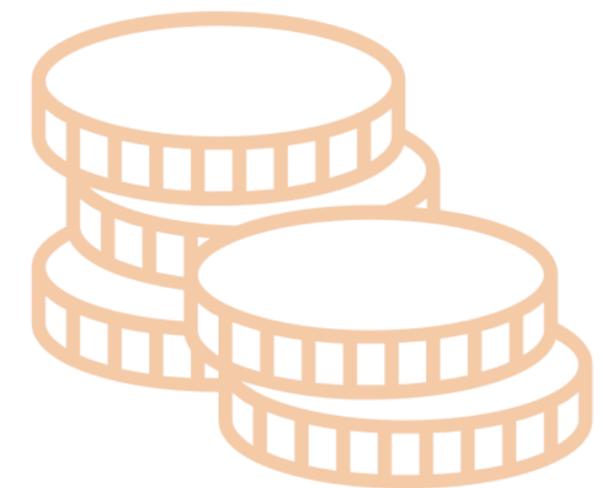
Partners should converge in channeling funding directly through national systems whenever possible. When that is not possible or sufficient, donors should fund partners implementing a twin-track approach – establishing clear criteria and accountabilities.

The following additional convergence principles will apply:

1. Actively seek to pool resources. Pooling resources reduces duplication, fragmentation, and the multiplication of single donor compliance requirements. Pooling can occur between donors – converging to support initiatives to reach scale – but also between humanitarian and development funding streams of a single donor. The latter particularly requires clarifying grey areas where support to government systems is discouraged.

2. Strive to offer predictability of financing on a multi-year basis as national systems require support over time. Short-term funding discourages investments in systems and promotes pilot or temporary approaches, which further create fragmentation.

3. Ensuring that safety net benefits are provided on a needs basis and following program objectives and not based on funding conditions and timing.



4. Conclusion



Currently, programs such as the [Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program](#) and the [Supporting Social Protection Systems in the Sahel](#) UNICEF-WFP Joint Program already focus on ASP in the Sahel and promote national ownership and alignment with national systems.

The Coordination Group encourages further investments in such programmes and continued dialogue between interested parties. Based on our common understanding and through working and implementing with Sahel governments, adaptive social protection will lead to increased resilience of the most vulnerable, reduction in humanitarian needs, and increased human capital.

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