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HOW TO MAXIMIZE THE IMPACT OF ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION IN CONTEXTS OF FRAGILITY, CONFLICT, AND VIOLENCE: **FOUR OPERATIONAL LESSONS FROM BURKINA FASO AND CAMEROON**

Written by Mira Saidi



**SAHEL ADAPTIVE
SOCIAL PROTECTION
PROGRAM**

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1 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In recent years, violent conflict has spiked significantly, affecting low-income countries in particular, and shaping an increasingly complex fragility landscape. By 2030, over half of the world's extreme poor are expected to live in countries experiencing fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV). Conflict and poverty are strongly interconnected; not only does conflict compound experiences of poverty, but economic instability, resource scarcity, and state weakness also exacerbate conflict dynamics. In the Sahel, one of the poorest and most conflict-affected regions in the world, countries additionally face high vulnerability to climate change and other shocks, and a growing influx of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is placing further strain on limited services and resources.

Adaptive social protection (ASP) has been proven to have strong positive impacts on poverty and vulnerability globally and in the Sahel, but its impact in FCV settings is less documented. The World Bank's Social Protection and Jobs (SPJ) Global Practice

has increased its support to ASP systems in Sahelian countries experiencing FCV. To deepen our understanding of ASP impacts in FCV settings, the [Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program \(SASPP\)](#) conducted almost 400 in-depth qualitative interviews with ASP program beneficiaries in Burkina Faso and Cameroon.

The following recommendations, drawn from analysis of these interviews, can maximize the impacts of ASP in FCV settings:

- Consider providing longer term and greater support for households experiencing significant conflict and insecurity.
- Incorporate flexibility into program objectives and anticipate the need to adapt programs to changing security environments.
- Make deliberate efforts to design programs that strengthen social cohesion.
- Strengthen communication to boost trust in government and reinforce the social contract.



2 INTRODUCTION

Violent conflict has spiked significantly in recent years, particularly in low-income countries, and the fragility landscape is becoming increasingly complex. By 2030, it is estimated that almost 60 percent of the world's extreme poor will live in countries experiencing fragility, conflict and violence (FCV). In 2024 alone, inflation and worsening climate impacts are expected to further reduce income per capita in low-income FCV countries.¹ Low-income FCV countries, including in the Sahel, face a multitude of overlapping shocks and challenges, exacerbated by insecurity and fragility, and disproportionately affecting the poorest and most vulnerable. This is compounded by a growing number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), placing further strain on limited services and resources.

Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) programs have demonstrated their ability to address poverty and some of its associated vulnerabilities, but their impact in FCV contexts is less documented. Staying engaged in FCV settings is essential to preserving economic and human capital gains. Recognizing this, the [World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020-2025](#), highlights the Bank's commitment to staying engaged, whether in contexts experiencing longstanding FCV challenges or in settings only recently experiencing FCV-related shocks. As part of this effort, over the last decade, the World Bank's Social Protection and Jobs (SPJ) Global Practice has significantly increased its engagement in FCV countries. Understanding the impacts of ASP programs in FCV contexts

and the channels through which they materialize is critical to adapting their design and implementation processes to maximize their impacts.

To better understand the role social safety nets can play in FCV environments, the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP) conducted almost 400 in-depth qualitative interviews with ASP program beneficiaries in Burkina Faso and Cameroon.

This study complements the existing literature, summarized in "[The Impact of Social Safety Nets on Economic, Social and Political Outcomes in Fragile, Conflict and Violent Contexts: A Review of the Evidence](#)". Interviews were undertaken in Burkina Faso, in the provinces of Yatenga and Passore (Nord region) between July and November 2022, and in the provinces of Ngaoui, Dhojong and Meiganga (Adamaoua region) and Koza and Mora (Far North region) in Cameroon between January and April 2023. The interviews were conducted with program beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (within benefitting and non-benefitting villages), as well as with community leaders. Sites were selected to reflect varying levels of insecurity and to include regions with high numbers of refugees or IDPs.

Results and analysis of these interview are presented in the [SPJ Discussion Paper, "Safety Nets in Contexts of Violence, Fragility and Forced Displacement: The Case of Burkina Faso and Cameroon"](#). This policy note, informed by the discussion paper, summarizes key findings and recommendations to guide ASP operations and policy to maximize their impacts in FCV settings.



Photo: Arne Hoel / World Bank

3 CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS CAN IMPACT INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES IN FCV CONTEXTS

In FCV settings, the study identified three key channels through which ASP programs impact individuals and communities – material, social, and political. The *material* channel refers to the (re) distribution of monetary benefits and resources provided by safety net programs. By providing economic benefits, programs can strengthen households' economic wellbeing and resilience to shocks, caused directly or indirectly by conflict. The *social* channel refers to the role that ASP programs play in supporting individuals to form new relationships and ensure greater participation in communities. These new relationships can act as social insurance

mechanisms. Finally, the *political* channel refers to the impact of programs on citizen-state relationships and the social contract. The allocation of resources by the state can enhance citizens' trust in and favorable attitude towards it, thereby increasing state legitimacy and citizen's confidence in and expectations of the state, and compliance with state institutions and authority. Table 1 illustrates the potential impacts, both positive (+) and negative (-), of ASP programs on individuals and communities across these three channels and highlights the importance of program design and implementation in ensuring positive impacts.

TABLE 1. Examples of channels for ASP programs' impact on households and communities in FCV contexts

Material channel	Social channel	Political channel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + New resources reduce food insecurity and improve wellbeing. + New resources provide a buffer for emergency expenses. + New resources support investments in human capital – nutrition, health, and education. + New resources support investments in livelihoods that build resilience against future shocks. + New resources promote the diversification of productive activities. + New resources can reduce vulnerability to theft or violence (e.g., by building enclosures for livestock). - New resources can make recipients more vulnerable to theft. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Savings and investment groups supported by programs can foster social insurance mechanisms through new business partnerships and contacts. + New resources and program activities (training, sensitization, group activities, etc.) can foster new social relationships. - Programs can create social tensions between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. + Programs can reduce intimate partner violence by reducing poverty and stress. - Programs can exacerbate intrahousehold conflict over control of resources. + By creating new economic opportunities, programs can result in new relationships (i.e. hiring of day-laborers by beneficiaries). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Benefits provided by (and attributed to) governments can raise confidence in, and expectations of, the state. + New resources can build confidence/independence of marginalized groups, changing their position vis-à-vis the state. + Increased participation in the economy can shift beneficiaries' plans for the future and alter their standing, boosting citizen engagement. + Productive inclusion measures can bolster confidence in business opportunities and individuals' perceptions of what is possible. + Access to health and education can change attitudes toward, and expectations of, government. + Access to identification documents can foster a sense of citizenship or belonging.

4 FOUR OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE THE IMPACT OF ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION IN FCV ENVIRONMENTS

1. Consider providing longer term and greater support for households experiencing significant conflict and insecurity.

ASP programs seek to improve the economic wellbeing of poor households and their long-term resilience, however strengthening long-term resilience remains a challenge in insecure settings. Beneficiaries in insecure or highly insecure areas of Burkina Faso and Cameroon did not invest most of their assistance toward productive activities for fear of losing their investments to armed group attacks and raids, due to prior occurrences of such events.² Beneficiaries also faced security challenges in accessing their fields or the market, further limiting their economic activity. Beneficiaries in these areas also indicated greater risk aversion due to heightened uncertainty, prioritizing immediate needs and consumption over future planning.

For households in relatively more secure settings, greater support (value of transfer) may be needed to ensure longer-term impacts and benefits. Beneficiaries in relatively more secure regions (such as in Passore in Burkina Faso), invested in cattle or in productive activities, maintaining benefits long after program completion. However, even in more secure settings, some beneficiaries were too poor to invest, instead using most of the assistance for immediate consumption. This was especially the case for displaced individuals, who had very limited resources as a result of their displacement.

For households in FCV settings, social safety nets provide essential support, particularly among the poor, however longer-term support in these settings may be needed. Households in proximity to conflict have limited access to markets or opportunities to engage in income generating activities. Global evidence has found

that such households are highly vulnerable to food insecurity and have less access to support.³ Social safety nets in these conditions are essential. In Burkina Faso and Cameroon, program beneficiaries reported increased expenditure on health emergencies and education, essential to protecting and strengthening human capital. These findings are in line with the limited literature, which shows that cash-based interventions support consumption and improve food security and nutrition, even in FCV contexts.⁴ However, the current study found that the reported reduction in household vulnerability and food insecurity was not maintained beyond the program end, due to the limitations imposed by conflict on household capacity to productively invest part of the support received. **Given the limited economic opportunities for these households and the insecurity they experience; it may be necessary for programs to consider longer term consumption support.**

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We just buy the necessities (food, clothing and others) for the household, the rest we complete with little money that we manage to have and we save. The money is not enough to invest in breeding and resell afterwards to make a profit.

—Beneficiary husband 674-H, Sector 10, Burkina Faso

2. Incorporate flexibility into objectives and anticipate the need to adapt programs to changing security environments.

Insecurity varies in form and intensity across regions and timelines. As evidenced by Burkina Faso and Cameroon, levels of insecurity vary across provinces and even communities. Social safety nets can have positive impacts in insecure environments.

However, to maximize their potential impact, programs may need to adapt their objectives and delivery to the specific sub-context in which they are operating.

National programs should adapt to insecurity and incorporate a more modular design in FCV countries. National safety net programs are typically designed for secure environments. To be effective in insecure environments, it is important that these programs adapt to the contexts and needs of beneficiary households. Intervening in an insecure context is similar to responding to a protracted crisis. Short-term shock responses aim to temporarily safeguard household consumption and human capital.⁵ However, households in insecure settings face an ongoing and longer-term shock. In such contexts, it may be necessary for programs to prioritize safeguarding consumption, survival, and human capital, rather than longer term objectives of increased productivity and resilience. For instance, in insecure areas, national programs could promote savings mechanisms to assist households in accumulating funds for use in emergencies or for productive investments when insecurity subsides, rather than propose economic inclusion interventions. This flexibility needs to be anticipated and reflected in program procedures, institutional arrangements, and budgets.

Adaptations should also be built into delivery mechanisms. Some beneficiaries in both countries faced security issues when retrieving their benefit. In Burkina Faso, payments were digital, but, as in many other low-income contexts, beneficiaries still traveled to retrieve the benefits, and some reported having their benefits

or mobile phone stolen. Similarly in Cameroon, where payments were not digital, some beneficiaries were targeted by thieves and armed men for their benefits. **While there is no ideal or completely safe delivery method, programs may consider ensuring discreetness with regard payments, staggering or spacing out payment days,** or even not maintaining regular payment schedules to avoid predictability. Though this last approach is not generally recommended for ASP programs – since their impacts rely on the regularity and predictability of payments – it may be necessary in FCV contexts. Developing various scenarios and codifying them in programs’ operational manuals is necessary to ensure swift adjustments in fast changing environments.

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I have heard that many women beneficiaries have been victims of theft. I know three women who were victims of theft ... When thieves see the big black cellphone in your hand, they know you’re a beneficiary.

—Female beneficiary 188-F, Sector 13, Burkina Faso

3. Make deliberate efforts to design programs that strengthen social cohesion.

Adaptive social protection can contribute to social cohesion in contexts of fragility and insecurity, with long term impacts.

Program beneficiaries in Burkina Faso and Cameroon reported forming new relationships or strengthening bonds - being a beneficiary created a new shared identity.⁶ The opportunities for social interaction that are integrated into ASP programs (through assemblies, payment points, accompanying measures, etc.), contributed to building these new relationships and strengthening social cohesion. These findings support evidence from other FCV contexts.⁷ Program beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries also reported resource sharing. Beneficiaries helped their extended families and friends, while providing more limited support to more distant acquaintances or villagers. Sharing was even more common within displaced communities, which may be due in part to homogeneity, or because their shared trauma led to a greater understanding of each other’s plight. Overall, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries reported having confidence in their ability to rely on others for help in times of need. **The new bonds formed, and resources shared as a result of the program can thus have**

lasting impacts beyond the program timeline, acting as a long-term informal social insurance for households.

Enhancing social cohesion through social safety nets requires strong communication and delivery mechanisms; a challenge in FCV contexts. While social safety nets can contribute to social cohesion, they may also increase grievances, particularly from non-beneficiaries. This outcome is not unique to FCV contexts; however, it

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Yes, some people when they receive their money, they give some to those who don’t receive the money. We’re all from the same group, so the money belongs to all of us, even if they only register certain people

—Male non-beneficiary, refugee, Yamba Baya, 10-H, Cameroon

should be carefully managed in conflict environments. Perceptions of inequality and resentment among non-beneficiaries are often more frequent when they do not understand the targeting methodology, or assume it is unfair.⁸ In locations where communication about the program was stronger, non-beneficiaries tended to exhibit less animosity. Strong communication around the program objectives and targeting is essential to limit discontent, though this may not be programs' priority in areas with limited implementation capacity or greater constraints. In addition, the challenges of program access and delivery in contexts of fragility and insecurity can extend to

communication. Other communication mechanisms are equally important, particularly grievance redress mechanisms that enable beneficiaries to voice their concerns and provide feedback. Such mechanisms can also provide beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries with additional information, contributing to shifts in perception and understanding. Innovative solutions for effective two-way communication is a challenge in FCV environments, however they are essential for increasing the impact of programs on social cohesion.

4. Strengthen communication to boost trust in government and reinforce the social contract.

ASP can enhance positive attitudes towards government, which can be invaluable in low-income and FCV settings.

In low-income and FCV settings, the social contract can face significant challenges. Citizens can have limited expectations of their governments due to the governments' inability to provide services or security, in addition to limited opportunities for political participation or participatory processes to impact policies. **Knowledge of the government's role in providing ASP programs is important to its contribution to the social contract. In this study, when beneficiaries were aware that the government was responsible for the program, they exhibited more positive attitudes toward the state and toward their future, regardless of the level of insecurity.** They viewed the current situation with more hope than beneficiaries who were not aware of the government's role or non-beneficiaries.⁹ Displaced populations expressed greater positivity toward the government for

the support they received. In Burkina Faso, respondents reported limited knowledge of the government's role in the ASP program, with many attributing their benefits to donors - indicating a missed opportunity to build trust in public authority. More evidence is needed of the potential stabilizing role that positivity toward the government and toward one's future could play in disincentivizing collaboration with armed groups.

There are limits to the extent to which social safety nets can impact long term relationships with governments.

Awareness of the government's role can have differing impacts: in this study non-beneficiaries who knew the government was responsible for the program reported feeling abandoned by the government in both secure and insecure areas. This created negative attitudes toward the government and reduced positive perceptions of their future. In addition, the limited long-term economic effects or the temporary nature of programs may limit their ability to positively impact government relations and stabilization efforts. While budgetary and programmatic challenges prevent a universal approach, this can be difficult for communities to understand and accept in very poor settings. It is important to mitigate the risk this creates for the social contract, including through increased communication with communities, or through a program design that prioritizes social cohesion, and stability impacts by providing more limited resources to a larger share of the population.

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This transfer made us feel how much the government is there for us, that it has not forgotten us and that we should no longer worry about the security situation.

—Beneficiary husband 10-H, Mont Ngaoui, Cameroon

CONCLUSION

Social safety nets can yield positive impacts in FCV settings. Evidence from Burkina Faso and Cameroon demonstrate that ASP programs can effectively safeguard household consumption and human capital in FCV settings. Beneficiary households increased the number of meals and their expenditure on health and education. However, these benefits reduced after the program's end, while the context often remained fragile or insecure.

Program design requires careful consideration of the FCV setting and may require trade-offs with longer-term impacts. While national safety net programs are often designed to support poor and vulnerable households and promote their livelihoods and resilience, their objectives and design may need to be adjusted when they operate in FCV settings. Conflict calls for a greater focus on human capital safeguarding (rather than on economic resilience) and stabilizing through the promotion of social cohesion or trust in government. To achieve this, a broader approach over a longer timeframe may be necessary.

Greater care is needed to increase the impact of ASP programs on social cohesion, including on citizen-state relationships. When programs are designed to encourage interaction, particularly among different communities and ethnicities, they can strengthen social cohesion. Strong communication and citizen engagement interventions, such as grievance redress mechanisms, can also contribute to social cohesion. Enhanced outreach and communication can avoid misunderstandings about programs, provide opportunities for non-beneficiaries to voice their concerns, and reassure communities of the government's commitment. Although designing and implementing such efforts in FCV settings, where programs typically have limited access, remains a challenge, this policy note provides key pathways for adapting ASP programs in these contexts to maximize their impacts.

¹ World Bank. 2023. Global Economic Prospects, January 2023. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1586/978-1-4648-1906-3. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO

² “Before the transfer I had some animals but not many, and with the money [from the transfer] I bought even more. But Boko Haram took everything... We had goats and chickens, the Boko Haram removed everything.” —Female beneficiary 2-F, Moutchikar, Cameroon

³ Tranchant et al. 2019. The impact of food assistance on food insecure populations during conflict: Evidence from a quasi-experiment in Mali. World Development, Volume 113, 2019, Pages 253-265. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.01.027.

⁴ Fuselli et al. The Impact of Social Safety Nets on Economic, Social and Political Outcomes in Fragile, Conflict and Violent Contexts: A Review of the Evidence. Forthcoming

⁵ “Me and my family ate very well with the money from this program. Each time [we received the transfer] we bought meat, flour for porridge, rice, and cooking oil to make good dishes... I also used the money to go to the hospital during illnesses, and bought my children nice clothes during the Ramadan holidays... There are many children at my house, and they have to eat every day...” —Male beneficiary 18-H, refugee, Koldjima, Cameroon

⁶ “They have all become my friends, the day we meet, we laugh, we have fun like children. Each tells how the project has helped them. It's really good.” —Female beneficiary 333-F, Sector 13, Burkina Faso

⁷ Sharma, Ambika; Menke, Jan. 2024. How Does Social Protection Impact Social Cohesion in the Sahel? A Review of Existing Evidence and Gaps. SASPP Technical Paper Series; Special Edition. © Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/42232>

⁸ “It's become very complicated, because I face threats from many directions. It even happens, now that I think about it, that I'm sold products at higher prices on the market just because they think I have a lot of money.” —Beneficiary 3-F, Moutchikar, Cameroon

⁹ “We have never received help from the government, so they don't take care of us...” —Female beneficiary 12-F, Ouattinoma, Burkina Faso

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1818 H Street NW
Washington DC 20433
Telephone: 202-473-1000
Internet: www.worldbank.org

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For more information:
saspp@worldbank.org
www.worldbank.org/saspp