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# Climate resilience and social assistance in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS)

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Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research (funded by UKAid) aims to inform policy and programming on how to help poor and vulnerable people cope better with crises and meet their basic needs through more effective social assistance. All costs related to BASIC Research are covered by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

# Summary

This paper aims to improve our understanding of the nature, causes, and multiple dimensions of how social assistance may address climate vulnerability and resilience within fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS), as part of the inception phase of the Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research programme. Over recent years, social assistance, such as cash transfers and voucher programmes, has been seen as a way of reducing the impacts of climate-related shocks and stressors, and of increasing the resilience of recipient households and communities. It has also been seen as a mechanism for delivering adaptation funding, showing promise in tackling short-term shocks as well as longer-term adaptation to climate change. Yet despite FCAS hosting some of the most vulnerable populations in the world, so far there has been little attention to these settings.

We examine the linkages between social assistance and climate resilience in FCAS and in turn, implications for BASIC Research. Specifically, we ask what the evidence is on whether existing approaches to social assistance are appropriate to reducing climate vulnerabilities and building climate resilience in FCAS, and, if not, how they might be reformed. We address this through three sub-questions. First, what are the major conceptual discussions on climate resilience and social assistance, and what is the extent of work in FCAS? This is addressed in section 2.1, based on an extensive literature review. Second, to what extent does the literature on social assistance and climate resilience apply to the particular concerns of FCAS? This is covered in section 2.2, based on a framework informed by work in political economy and political ecology. Third, what are possible future research directions? We conclude with reflections on what BASIC Research may contribute in section 3. These three areas may be summarised, as follows:

## Conceptual linkages and coverage of FCAS

Social assistance can assist climate resilience in four different ways. It can build anticipatory capacity by improving the lives and livelihoods of the poor against risks, such as climate-related shocks and stressors, before they happen. It can help build absorptive capacity, enabling people in FCAS to cope with shocks, such as floods, when they happen. It can improve household longer-term adaptive capacity by helping to build assets, diversify, or improve understanding of climate information. Last and most challenging, it may improve transformative capacity through addressing deeper structural drivers; for example, access to land, markets, basic services, social equity, and gender relations.

We find that the literature overwhelmingly focuses on stable contexts, with very little detail on social assistance for climate resilience in FCAS. Four lessons emerge from the literature review:

- **Framing matters.** How climate change is understood and framed has implications for the role social assistance can play; that is, knowing what capacities are supported. Notably, vulnerability tends to be understood in terms of the effects of biophysical shocks plus social vulnerabilities at the individual, household, and community levels.
- **Short-term responses trump longer-term adaptation concerns.** There is extensive evidence and agreement that social assistance can contribute to anticipating and absorbing climate-related shocks. The evidence and emphasis on building longer-term adaptive capacities through social assistance is much less than for shock-responsive efforts.
- **Risks of maladaptation is an increasing concern.** Some existing literature recognises that social assistance programmes may lead to negative coping strategies or maladaptation. Some studies find that when long-term impacts of climate change are not considered in design and planning phases, social assistance may create incentives to stay and invest in locations and livelihoods that may become unviable in the future under increased climate risks.
- **Implementing capacities are key.** Widespread concern is expressed both in research and policy reports that governments may lack the capacities necessary for integrating climate resilience into social assistance programmes, especially as this may require institutional changes. Challenges identified relate to different forms of technical expertise in the climate change and social protection spheres, different concepts and terminologies, and different government structures and approaches.

## Challenges to the particular concerns of FCAS

Based on the literature review, we discuss the particular challenges faced by social assistance for climate resilience in FCAS. We make three key points. First, FCAS are termed 'fragile and conflict-affected' not mainly because of the climate, but for political and often also political-economic reasons. Political grievances, ethnic divisions, ideological projects, elite resource capture, and weak state legitimacy and administrative capacity, often exacerbated or even structured by cross-border and geopolitical dynamics, as well as social and economic inequalities and poverty, are well established as the main types of causes of protracted instability.

Second, each FCAS has its own specific history and dynamics of conflict and fragility. Typically, patterns of conflict and fragility vary significantly from one part of the country to another. Some current FCAS were not fragile or conflict-affected ten years ago – and still less 15 years ago. Equally, some contexts that are currently categorised as stable include at least elements, or particular geographical zones, of conflict and fragility. While we use the abbreviation 'FCAS' as our analytical category, we recognise the difficulties and dangers inherent in generalising across this category. Third, conflict and fragility, and associated factors such as weak administrative capacities, highly politicised decision-making, and armed conflict, can pose huge challenges for social assistance programmes, whether these are framed as being about climate. Conversely, conflict and fragility can have significant impacts on the nature and causes of climate-related vulnerabilities.

We suggest six main ways in which conflict and fragility matters for design and delivery of social assistance to strengthen climate resilience; namely, political violence, political divisions, attenuated legal and institutional regimes, conflict-related displacement, the role of international actors, and the primacy of emergency assistance.

## Future directions

The paper concludes by pointing to areas and priorities for research on social assistance and climate resilience in FCAS. We outline five questions in particular:

- Problem definition: Are existing approaches to social assistance based on adequate framings and understandings of the nature and causes of climate vulnerability in FCAS? What are the potentials and limits for social assistance addressing them?
- Resource allocation: Are existing patterns of social assistance resource allocation, including climate finance, appropriate to limiting climate vulnerabilities and building climate resilience in FCAS?
- Implementation: Are social assistance programmes as implemented actually helping to build climate resilience in FCAS? Are problems of implementation encountered within FCAS contexts specifically?
- Change: How might patterns of problem definition, resource allocation, and implementation be reformed or transformed? Benchmarks from the three previous questions could provide a basis for identifying possible areas for change.
- Explanation: What are the limits to and potential for reform of social assistance programmes within FCAS, and how might BASIC Research contribute to changes?

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# List of acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ASP | Adaptive Social Protection |
| FCAS | Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings |
| SRSP | Shock-responsive social protection |

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Motivation and context

The aim of this paper is to help improve our understanding of the nature, causes, and multiple dimensions of how social assistance may address climate vulnerability and resilience in FCAS. The paper is part of the Climate Resilience theme of the FCDO-funded BASIC Research programme.

Over the past ten to 15 years, there has been considerable attention to the linkages between social assistance[1] and climate change. Social assistance has been seen as a way of reducing the impacts of climate-related shocks and stressors, and of increasing the resilience of recipient households and communities. It has also been seen as a mechanism for the delivery of adaptation funding, showing promise in tackling short-term shocks and longer-term adaptation to climate change.

This interest has been accompanied by the development of concepts such as 'Adaptive Social Protection' (ASP) (Davies *et al*. 2009; Arnall *et al*. 2010; Bowen *et al*. 2020), 'Climate-Responsive Social Protection' (Kuriakose *et al*. 2012, 2013), and most recently 'Shock-Responsive Social Protection' (SRSP) (O'Brien *et al*. 2018; Beazley, Solórzano and Barca 2019). There have been efforts to integrate these and similar approaches in country programmes, such as the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) Climate Smart Initiative (CSI) in Ethiopia (Lind *et al*. 2014), the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) (Davies *et al*. 2012), and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) programme in India (Godfrey-Wood and Flower 2018; Kaur *et al*. 2019; Fischer 2020). Interventions to address climate change and social assistance have received funding from the Green Climate Fund (e.g. as part of the Poverty, Reforestation, Energy and Climate Change (PROEZA) project in Paraguay)[2] and multi- and bilateral development agencies (World Bank 2019, 2021). In many way, discussion of the linkages between social assistance and climate change has mirrored discussion on the potential role of social assistance in strengthening resilience as a way to bridge the gap between humanitarian emergency interventions and long-term development. Reflecting this, and building on the work of Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004), these linkages have commonly been understood through what is referred to as the '3A framework' – aiming to enhance anticipatory, absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities. A part of this discussion is also the call for stronger integration between humanitarian cash and voucher assistance (CVA) and social protection (SP) programmes (Longhurst *et al*. 2020).

Despite progress, challenges remain in capitalising on the promise of social assistance–resilience linkages. Aleksandrova and Eberle (2021), for example, refer to the untapped potential of investments to social protection from global climate funds. Importantly, and a key motivation for this paper, most work on social assistance and climate change has so far been carried out in stable political, social, and economic settings, or in settings assumed to be so. While sizeable bodies of literature exist on the role and challenges of social assistance and protection in FCAS (Harvey 2009; Ovadiya *et al*. 2015; Rossi *et al*. 2017; Brück *et al*. 2019; Mackinder 2020), and on climate resilience in FCAS (Neaverson, Gould and Peters 2019; Vivekananda, Schilling and Smith 2014; Crawford *et al*. 2015), little of this work has so far been linked or integrated.

With this in mind, this paper reviews the diverse bodies of literature on social assistance, climate resilience, and FCAS to develop a framework and a set of questions to inform the work of the BASIC Research programme. The paper both examines existing debates and emphases on social assistance and climate resilience, identifying a series of tensions and weaknesses therein. It also considers whether and how insights and approaches developed in relation to stable states are translatable to FCAS, or whether new and different approaches are required.

[1] We use the term 'social assistance' throughout this paper as this is the focus of the BASIC Research programme. In contrast, much of the literature we review uses the broader term 'social protection'. For further clarification of the difference between these two terms, see section 1.2.

[2] For more information, see: https://www.greenclimate.fund/project/fp062.

Specifically, we ask what the evidence is on whether existing approaches to social assistance are appropriate to reducing climate vulnerabilities and building climate resilience in FCAS, and, if not, how they might be reformed. To unpack this further, we discuss three sub-questions in the following sections:

1. What are the major conceptual discussions on climate resilience and social assistance, and what is the extent of work in FCAS? We cover this in the next section 2.1, where we review the linkages between social assistance and climate resilience following our approach as set out above.
2. To what extent does the literature on social assistance and climate resilience apply to the particular concerns of FCAS? This is covered in section 2.2, where we suggest six main ways in which conflict and fragility may, or should, matter for the design and delivery of climate-related social assistance.
3. What are possible future directions? In section 3, we summarise the findings of gaps and suggest five thematic areas for BASIC Research to consider in its next phase.

We should emphasise that the paper is first intended as a literature review, and second in terms of developing an initial framework and a set of questions for future research. It presents neither research findings, nor a complete analytical framework or approach. Moreover, it presents our emerging framework – which is informed by work in political economy and political ecology – only in the second half of the paper, building upon the prior review of the existing bodies of literature on climate resilience and social assistance. Future work will include a fuller articulation of our political economy and political ecology-informed approach to climate resilience and social assistance.

The paper has linkages to other themes of BASIC Research, including: (1) Financing and value for money; (2) Livelihoods and transformation; (3) Shock responsive social protection; and (4) Inclusion. Note that climate finance as it relates to social assistance is not covered in this review, but rather is considered in a separate report under BASIC Research (Longhurst 2022).

## 1.2 Concepts and approach

### 1.2.1 Terminology

In this paper, we focus on the term 'social assistance', understood as a subset of social protection concerned with cash, food, and asset transfers (Slater and Sabates-Wheeler 2021). Social assistance is typically subdivided into the terms 'social transfers' (including emergency cash transfers, vouchers, and in-kind transfers such as school meals), 'public works programmes' (cash for work, food for work, vouchers for work), and 'fee waivers and subsidies' (*ibid*). Other types of social protection, such as social care, social insurance, as well as labour market programmes and social services, are usually considered as separate from social assistance and hence not directly addressed in this review. We sometimes refer to the term 'social protection' as a generic term, however, given that it is widely used in both the literature and programming on climate resilience.

By the term 'resilience', we refer to the capacity of people and systems to cope with and recover from shocks as well as the capacity to adapt and transform. This definition follows the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change[3] and goes further than early definitions of resilience (e.g. Holling 1973; Walker et al. 2004: 1),[4] which had more emphasis on the capacity to absorb shocks and bounce back to a pre-existing state, and less on the capacity to transform. We consider resilience in relation to human-induced climate change, including changes in patterns and intensity of short-term, rapid, or slow-onset events such as droughts and floods, as well as longer-term trends or changes in the variability of temperature and rainfall. We discuss resilience in relation to climate-related shocks and stressors in this paper. Hence, the terms 'climate resilience' and 'resilience' are used interchangeably.

[3] The Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Working Group II, defines resilience as 'the capacity of social, economic, and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance, responding or reorganizing in ways that maintain their essential function, identity, and structure, while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation' (Agard *et al*. 2014: 1772).

[4] Walker *et al*. (2004: 1) defines resilience as 'the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks'.

Impacts from climate change are usually seen as a combination of, on the one hand, exposure to climate hazards (manifest as shocks and stressors), and on the other, the vulnerabilities[5] that are determined by the broader political, social, economic, and environmental/ecological context, structures and institutions, as well as individual and household level factors (e.g. IPCC 2012). Hazards are driven by natural variability and human-induced factors. The exact causes of climate-related impacts are therefore highly context specific and closely linked to the capacity to cope with, and recover and adapt from, climate-related shocks and stressors, including factors such as gender, income/wealth, livelihood source, and social status. Thus, climate is hardly if ever a sole cause of impacts associated with events such as floods, storms, or droughts. Rather, impacts are an outcome of the hazard in combination with vulnerability. Locating causes of impacts in biophysical factors are therefore often unhelpful in understanding impacts and how to counteract them (Ribot 2014).

Adding to this complexity is the fact that particular manifestations of climate shocks and stressors can be understood in a number of different ways. Drought, for example, can be defined according to meteorological, hydrological, or socioeconomic characteristics. Important distinctions can also be drawn between availability (there not being enough water, in the meteorological definition) versus access (not having enough water, in the case of hydrological and socioeconomic definitions). The latter follows Sen's (1981) definition of famine as a lack of entitlements to food, not a shortage of it. While climate change can act as a risk multiplier, hydrological and socioeconomic drought may be driven by factors such as unsustainable irrigation, corruption, expropriation of water by dominant groups/classes, and fuel shocks.

### 1.2.2 Linkages between social assistance, adaptation and resilience

There are two main linkages between social assistance, adaptation,[6] and resilience. On the one hand, climate change may increase the need for social assistance or reverse achievements to date through changes in patterns of biophysical shocks and stressors (such as increased or changing patterns of droughts, floods, or storms). Droughts and floods, for example, can rapidly increase the risk of beneficiary households falling into poverty and needing humanitarian assistance, as can household responses to them, such as running down household assets. They can also put new groups of households at risk of sliding below the poverty line.

On the other hand, social assistance may help reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience to current and future hazards through scaling up programmes or increasing their ability to respond quickly, adjusting targeting, and building in more flexibility in social assistance programmes. As Costella et al. (2021) point out, there are aspects of this within the core remit of social protection in protecting gains to date and considering increased climate-related risks to beneficiaries, but also aspects that imply an expanded role for social protection in strengthening climate resilience in the longer term.[7] In programming, a distinction is made between shock-responsive social protection (SRSP), which is typically about short-term coping capacity and humanitarian assistance, and adaptive social protection (ASP), which emphasises longer-term adaptation (and transformation). In practice, however, there is a significant level of overlap between these (Béné, Cornelius and Howland 2018). The role of social assistance in strengthening resilience is thus about reducing the impact, and helping individuals and households (whether existing or new beneficiaries) bounce back after current shocks, in a way that strengthens their ability to better cope with and adapt to future shocks.

### 1.2.3 Conceptual framework

Commonly used frameworks that bring together these linkages are the 3A (Bahadur *et al*. 2015) or 3D frameworks (Béné *et al*. 2018). While the emphasis varies, these frameworks are typically focused on the anticipatory, absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities needed to underpin resilience (Bahadur *et al*. 2015; Béné *et al*. 2016). These combine the protective, preventive, promotive, and transformative (3P-T) framework developed by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004) with three different (and interlinked) aspects of adaptation and resilience; namely, short-term coping (anticipative and absorptive capacities), medium-term

[5] We understand vulnerability as '[t]he propensity or predisposition to be adversely affected' (Agard *et al*. 2014: 1775), determined by biophysical exposure to climate risks as well as biophysical and social sensitivity, and adaptive capacity, which are driven by underlying social, economic, and political factors and processes.

[6] The term 'adaptation' is understood here in broad terms as the 'process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects' (*ibid*. 2014: 1758).

[7] Costella *et al*. (2021) also discuss effects of mitigation responses, which is outside the scope of this review.

incremental adaptation (adaptive capacities), and ultimately transformative adaptation (transformative capacities). It is useful to elaborate these four capacities, as follows:

- **Anticipatory capacity** refers to the ability of social actors to anticipate, and through that to reduce the impacts of climate variabilities and extremes through preparedness and planning.
- **Absorptive capacity** is about coping, both immediately with the shocks per se and over the longer term with the responses to them; for instance, when coping mechanisms affect productive capacities and thereby reduce longer-term livelihood resilience.
- **Adaptive capacity** refers to the ability to 'adjust to potential damage, to take advantage of opportunities, or to respond to consequences' (Agard et al. 2014: 1758). It is usually understood to mean the capacity to adapt beyond initial shocks, and is determined by capital and assets as well as governance. Social assistance may support, for example, the capacity to diversify livelihoods (within or outside agriculture), to build up productive assets as buffers against future shocks, or the capacity to improve access to climate information.
- **Transformative capacity** is about the ability to address structural drivers of vulnerability to climate risks such as access to land, markets, basic services, social equity, and gender relations.

From earlier reviews (e.g. Béné et al. 2018; Tenzing 2020) it is clear that most work to date linking social assistance (and social protection more broadly) and climate resilience focuses on anticipatory and absorptive capacities (i.e. the short term shock-responsive concerns), with less attention to longer-term concerns around adaptive capacity, in particular transformative capacities. The latter remain the most challenging element. In programmatic terms, the role of social assistance to strengthen resilience may be either introducing specific new types of social assistance to address shocks and longer-term resilience strengthening, or adjusting existing social assistance programmes to incorporate climate change considerations; notably, making them more flexible, agile, and robust in the face of a possible range of future climates (e.g. Lemos et al. 2016; Ulrichs, Slater and Costella 2019).

The premise for this paper is that to understand the prospects for social assistance to strengthen resilience to climate change in FCAS, we need to understand what individual, household, and systemic factors are driving vulnerability among existing (and potential) recipients, how climate-related shocks and stressors are interacting with these drivers, and their patterns of change with human-induced climate change. There is also a need to understand what other key factors, notably systemic vulnerability drivers, are important for the success or failure in strengthening resilience in the future. In particular, we discuss the transformative (i.e. underlying structural) drivers in view of the gaps identified in earlier reviews of the role of social assistance and social protection in addressing climate resilience (e.g. Tenzing 2020).

Following from this, we take a more political and political-economic approach to the study of social assistance and climate resilience in FCAS than most research on the subject to date. Among others, we draw on research on the political economy of civil wars and the political ecology of conflict. Research in the former category emphasises, in particular: (1) The rational as against irrational character of violent conflict; (2) The structural causes of conflict and state fragility, linked to uneven patterns of capitalist development and the reactions to them, as well as to militarisation and specific state-building agendas; and (3) The important cross-border regional and international causes of supposedly local or internal conflicts – causes that are often obscured by the language of fragile states and civil wars (e.g. Pugh, Cooper and Goodhand 2004; Cramer 2006; Mamdani 2009; Carmody 2011; Cramer and Richards 2011; Stavrianakis and Selby 2012; Murray Li 2014).

Intersecting with this, research in political ecology: (1) Emphasises the fundamentally political and political-economic causes of environmental (or socio-environmental) crises; (2) Critiques Malthusian accounts of livelihoods crisis as arising primarily from population growth- or climate-induced resource scarcities; (3) Views resource scarcities as caused by processes of marginalisation, expropriation, and dispossession, often linked to state-building and capitalist development; (4) Finds that environmental agendas can also contribute to expropriation and dispossession; and (5) Argues that the vulnerability consequences of climate change need to be understood within such contexts (e.g. Watts 1983; Blaikie 1985; Le Billon 2001; Peluso and Watts 2001; Davis 2002; Nixon 2011; Fairhead, Leach and Scoones 2012; Selby et al. forthcoming 2022).

Our conceptual framework for the review is drawing in part on the 3A/3D frameworks, combined with our approach to FCAS. We focus on five aspects, in particular: the framing of social assistance–climate resilience linkages (including issues of targeting); the relative focus on short- versus long- term concerns (anticipation, absorption, and adaptation); the potentials and prospects for transformation; consideration of risks of maladaptation; and evidence and assumptions about implementing capacities.

First, the framing of linkages between social assistance and climate change matters because these linkages define the scope of the problems and the acceptable or appropriate role of social assistance. For example, if climate change is seen as a key driver of conflict, or if drought is seen as the sole or main cause of food shortages, solutions are likely to be very different than if these challenges are seen – as is backed up by a substantial body of literature – as outcomes of a wide range of structural (political, social, economic causes of conflict and food insecurity) and individual drivers (entitlements to food). In the latter instance, climate plays a role as one of the proximate causes or as risk multipliers rather than the sole or dominant cause. This also raises the question of what role social assistance can be expected to play in addressing the causal drivers of vulnerability, alone or in combination with, or leveraging other efforts.

Second, the relative emphasis on anticipation, absorption, and adaptation is key because it cannot be assumed that interventions to strengthen capacities to respond to short-term disasters will automatically lead to long-term resilience. On the contrary, decisions taken in the short term will have implications both for the prospects of longer-term transformative change, and the risks of maladaptation (see below).

Third, the level of focus on transformation is key because of the argument that resilience in the face of climate change will require more than incremental changes within current structures, but rather structural changes that address the very root causes of vulnerability to climate stresses, such as inequitable gender relations, or rights to land and water. This relates in part to the first aspect on framing above.

Fourth, maladaptation is included as a separate point because the increasing realisation that short-term responses to climate shocks and stressors, either by external agencies or households themselves, may undermine longer-term resilience. Examples are when households run down assets to survive food shortages during droughts, thereby increasing their vulnerability to future risks (Singh et al. 2018), where flood protection in one area increases flood risks downstream (Magnan et al. 2016), or where populations move or are moved out of flood zones as a short-term coping response, but have little opportunity to rebuild their livelihoods (Arnall et al. 2010). By not understanding these multiple and context specific drivers, there are risks that interventions fail to improve the situation and, on the contrary, may worsen vulnerability and hence be maladaptive (Eriksen et al. 2021).

Fifth and finally, assumptions about **implementing capacities** are key because of concerns around the ability of government actors to integrate climate resilience into social assistance. This is particularly so as strengthening climate resilience will need to go beyond responding to climate shocks and stressors in isolation, and beyond techno-managerial fixes to instead acknowledge that such strengthening requires changes to institutions and ultimately power relations. As noted by Béné *et al*. (2018: 13), transformative changes will require an understanding of the political economy drivers and obstacles to change, and they may often require new skills, knowledge, or resources. These factors will be important everywhere, but will be particular concerns in FCAS.

## 1.3 Methodology

The literature review was carried out as follows. Targeted searches were conducted of a small number of academic databases (International Bibliography of the Social Sciences [IBSS], Proquest Central, Scopus, and Web of Science) and open-source databases (3ie Development Evidence Portal, World Bank Open Knowledge Repository, and United Nations University Collections). We searched for literature – including academic journal articles, reviews, book chapters, and research and policy reports – published since 2005, in English or French (given the focus on the Sahel region, including countries where French is the official language). Keywords used in the literature searches include: “social protection” OR “social assistance” OR “social safety” OR “social security” OR “social welfare” OR “social insurance” OR “employment guarantee” OR “cash transfer*” OR “cash assistance”) AND (climate* OR “global warming” OR “environmental change”.

# 2. Social assistance, vulnerability and climate resilience: implications for FCAS

## 2.1 Social assistance for climate resilience: a review of the existing evidence

We identify 49 journal articles and three book chapters that address both social assistance and climate change (both primary research and secondary reviews), as well as 33 policy and research reports (including reports identified through these searches, in addition to those already in the BASIC Research Zotero database). This section of the paper summarises our findings and observations on this evidence, in line with the conceptual framework as outlined above, before considering six specific issues in greater detail in section 2.2.

### 2.1.1 Framing of climate change–social assistance linkages

To start with, we wish to make four general observations about the overall framing of the implications of climate change for social assistance in the existing literature. First, there is consensus in this literature on the need for wider, more flexible understandings of vulnerability, so as to include both already chronically poor households and those vulnerable to climate-related shocks, which may be temporarily pushed into poverty due to climate-related shocks (Siddiqi 2011; Kuriakose et al. 2013; Ovadiya et al. 2013; Costella and Ovadiya 2014; Carter and Janzen 2015, 2018; del Ninno, Coll-Black and Fallavier 2016; Godfrey-Wood and Flower 2018; FAO and Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre 2019). We concur with this.

Second, the existing literature focuses overwhelmingly on agricultural livelihoods and rural areas. The most common forms of climate-related assistance considered (especially cash transfers and insurance) relate to hazards and vulnerabilities linked to crop and livestock-based agricultural livelihoods (Arnall et al. 2010; Davies et al. 2011; Banerjee et al. 2013; Panda 2013; Hochrainer-Stigler et al. 2014; Akter et al. 2016; Lemos et al. 2016; Chort and de la Rupelle 2017; Asfaw and Davis 2018; Lawlor, Handa and Seidenfeld 2019; Nobre et al. 2019). Other initiatives, for instance, employment guarantee programmes, also focus largely on rural areas and households (Weldegebriel and Prowse 2013; Bahinipati and Venkatachalam 2015; Jha et al. 2017; Godfrey-Wood and Flower 2018; Kaur et al. 2019; Fischer 2020). A small number of studies focus on issues of migration and displacement; for instance, on the use of social assistance to manage or reduce the risks of forced displacement associated with environmental change, or its potential role to facilitate migration as an adaptation strategy (Johnson and Krishnamurthy 2010; Deshingkar, Wood and Béné 2015; Santha, Sasidevan and Jaswal 2016; Chort and de la Rupelle 2017; Schwan and Yu 2017; Mueller et al. 2020).

Third, in the literature reviewed, the term ‘vulnerability’ tends to be understood in terms of the effects of biophysical shocks plus social vulnerabilities at the individual, household, and community levels (with a focus on demographic characteristics, household income and assets, and livelihood type). Largely missing here is consideration of broader structural vulnerabilities associated with political, economic, and environmental dynamics and inequalities, as discussed above. There is also limited research on the specific vulnerabilities of socially marginalised groups in relation to climate or the potential role of social assistance in addressing these, including addressing the specific needs of women, young people, older people, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities (Béné et al. 2014; Aleksandrova 2019, 2020). Only two reviewed studies focus specifically on the gendered dimensions of social assistance and climate resilience – one on gendered differences in preferences for and trust in forms of social protection (Akter et al. 2016); the other on gendered inequalities in power, resource access, and decision-making preferences within ASP (Bee, Biermann and Tschakert 2013).

A fourth factor concerns the fact that social assistance programmes may run the risk of increasing vulnerabilities if climate change is not explicitly considered. Most research on social protection programmes combining social and environmental objectives concurs with Schwarzer, van Panhuys and Diekmann (2016: x) that ‘it is essential to carefully formulate and consider both goals from the onset’. Ulrichs and Slater (2016: 5) argue that ‘[a]t a minimum social protection needs to consider the implications of climate risks in programme design to avoid unintended impacts in relation to maladaptation and to harness any potential positive impacts on adaptation’, while Lemos et al. (2016: 171) argue that social protection programmes

should address both 'the forms of assets and entitlements that enable households to invest constructively in their future well-being and welfare, irrespective of the nature of the future challenges they face (generic capacities) and the forms of assets and entitlements that specifically address climatic risk (specific capacities)'. By contrast, some evidence suggests that social protection programmes which are not specifically climate-focused can have positive impacts on adaptive capacities and resilience (Ulrichs and Slater 2016; FAO and Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre 2019; Ulrichs et al. 2019). One example is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India, which is 'framed as a rights-based programme, rather than one which specifically responds to climate-related shocks and vulnerability' (Godfrey-Wood and Flower 2018: O587); i.e. that it can address some of the major underlying drivers of vulnerability to climate change such as equity, rights, and access to resources.

Paralleling this, however, is the recognition in the literature that tensions may exist between social assistance programmes focused on the most vulnerable people or households as measured by conventional standards focused on wealth or income criteria, which may not capture all those who are vulnerable to climate-related shocks, and climate-focused programmes prioritising those in areas of high environmental risk, which may exclude vulnerable people outside these areas (Coirolo et al. 2013; Schwarzer et al. 2016; Béné et al. 2018; Solórzano and Cárdenes 2019; Bowen et al. 2020).

The implications of this for targeting clearly remain contested. Different types of targeting criteria, or a combination of them, may be used for climate-related social assistance: (1) Geographical targeting of at-risk areas (i.e. areas with extensive damage or where most households are affected); (2) Community-based targeting in which the distribution of benefits is delegated to the head of a formal or informal community (e.g. clustered livelihood communities); (3) Categorical targeting (e.g. of specific age groups, single-parent households, or people with disabilities); (4) Climate-sensitive poverty-based targeting (using integrated measures of changes in welfare as a result of climate-related shocks with other welfare measures); or (5) Self-targeting (in which individuals have to opt in, generally to public works or employment guarantee programmes) (Kuriakose et al. 2012; Ovadiya et al. 2013; Costella and Ovadiya 2014; Hallegatte 2016; O'Brien et al. 2018; Bowen et al. 2020).

Some global policies and programmes highlight the need for a multidimensional approach to targeting in order to respond to both socioeconomic and environmental risks and vulnerabilities: the FAO's (2017) Social Protection Framework, for instance, combines income poverty, food security, and climate-related risks. A World Bank report on social protection in African drylands finds vulnerability to generally be defined by a combination of geographical location, livelihood, and income, focusing on households below the poverty line (varying according to severity of drought) with agriculture-dependent livelihoods (crop farmers, pastoralists, and agro-pastoralists) in dryland areas (del Ninno *et al*. 2016). Other studies describe social protection programmes as targeting beneficiaries – whether understood as households, communities, or localities – based on both socioeconomic vulnerability to poverty and vulnerability to climate-related risks such as floods (Gros *et al*. 2019; Karim and Noy 2020).

How this should optimally be done is still unclear, however. The National Social Protection Policy in Niger (République du Niger 2011), for example, states that identification and targeting of vulnerable populations may be based on general categories (women, children, people with disabilities, older people), more specific categories (pregnant women, widows, women heads of household, young or school-aged children, etc.), sub-categories (e.g. pastoralists who have lost livestock), or geography (e.g. all people in a specific area identified as being at high climatic risk). Some research examines results and gaps associated with different targeting tools/methods for ASP systems in Niger (proxy means testing, household economy analysis, geographical targeting), highlighting the value of combined methods (Schnitzer 2016, 2018). Existing literature emphasises the importance of community participation in the development of beneficiary selection criteria and identification of the most vulnerable people – community-led approaches to targeting beneficiaries (Coirolo *et al*. 2013; Ovadiya *et al*. 2013; Costella and Ovadiya 2014; Sabates-Wheeler *et al*. 2014).

In Mauritania, the social register used to target beneficiaries includes two components: a basic component of the poorest households, which are prioritised for broader social protection programmes; and an adaptive component that includes households not in the basic register but which might be significantly affected by climate-related shocks (Blanchard and Ishizawa 2018). An evaluation of the World Bank ASP programme in the Sahel similarly finds targeting to be one of the main challenges; i.e. identifying those households and

individuals who are chronically poor and keeping up-to-date information of those at risk of transitory poverty following climate shocks (Béné et al. 2019).

Similar issues arise on the question of how other established social assistance programmes should respond or be adapted to climate shocks. In the SRSP framework (O'Brien *et al*. 2018), the emphasis is on leveraging existing social protection programmes to respond to shocks, including through small adjustments to existing social protection programmes (flexibility to maintain regular service for existing beneficiaries), vertical expansion (temporary increase in value or duration for existing recipients), horizontal expansion (temporary inclusion of new beneficiaries in existing programmes by enrolling more households, extending geographic coverage, or altering enrolment criteria), piggybacking (or the emergency use of established systems; e.g. beneficiary lists, staff and payment mechanisms), and alignment (in which shock response is aligned with, but separate from existing social protection programmes, with for instance alignment of objectives, targeting methods, transfer value, and delivery mechanisms) (also see: Costella and Ovadiya 2014; FAO and Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre 2019; Agrawal *et al*. 2019; Bowen *et al*. 2020; Tabe-Ojong, Boakye and Muliro 2020). The extent to which such alignment and leveraging operate in practice is unclear, however (see also Longhurst and Slater 2022).

To sum up, while there is a recognition in the literature that a broad understanding of vulnerability is needed, there is a level of slippage in attributing problems to climate shocks and stressors, rather than analysing the underlying drivers. This could risk reinforcing structures and processes that cause vulnerability rather than mitigating or alleviating them. For example, providing emergency seeds or flood relief to the poorest will be of limited long-term use if their rights and access to resources are not improved in a way that makes them better prepared for future extreme events. There are also, arguably, large outstanding issues – and tensions in the literature – on whether and how social assistance is suited to and/or capable of addressing these broader challenges, either in regular social assistance or separate climate change-specific programmes. The literature also shows advances as well as remaining challenges in methodologies for understanding and implementing adjusted targeting to account for climate shocks and stressors. It highlights that in the face of uncertain climate change, building in flexibility and robustness is key.

### 2.1.2 Anticipation, absorption and adaptation

The literature reviewed offers extensive evidence and agreement that social assistance can contribute to anticipating and absorbing climate-related shocks; that is, to cope with climate-related vulnerabilities (Macours, Premand and Vakis 2012; Banerjee et al. 2013; Bahinipati and Venkatachalam 2015; Jha et al. 2017; Mesquita and Bursztyn 2017; Gros et al. 2019; Lawlor et al. 2019; Dyngeland, Oldekop and Evans 2020; Fischer 2020; Yiridomoh et al. 2021).

The social assistance programmes that consider climate resilience focus largely on either anticipatory measures, such as early warning systems, and increasingly on financial mechanisms, such as forecast-based financing[8] (Costella et al. 2017), or mitigation or rebuilding after climate-related shocks, especially drought, heatwaves, flooding, and storms (Béné et al. 2014; Aleksandrova 2019). So far, there has been less focus on the implications of longer-term climatic changes. For example, little research examines social assistance and slow-onset climate change-related events, such as sea level rise, increasing temperatures, glacial retreat, or secondary impacts such as salinisation or biodiversity loss. Moreover, there has also been limited integration of long-term climate risk considerations into existing social protection programmes (Aleksandrova 2019, 2020).

The existing research that does explore adaptation focuses on areas such as building social as against (or in addition to) individual and household assets, including knowledge and skills, social networks, and institutions (Ulrichs and Slater 2016; Hossain and Rahman 2018; Kaur et al. 2019; Solórzano and Cárdenes 2019; Tabe-Ojong et al. 2020). Some of this has explored the use of social assistance to strengthen local institutions; for instance, through supporting participation in local governance bodies, and planning and decision-making over social protection interventions (Strickland, Dazé and Lind 2014; Steinbach et al. 2016; Hossain and Rahman 2018; Kaur et al. 2019; Fischer 2020).

[8] Note that climate finance is covered separately in BASIC Research (see Longhurst 2021a).

Other research examines efforts to strengthen community infrastructures; for instance, through public works or employment guarantee programmes (Kuriakose *et al*. 2013; Ovadiya *et al*. 2013; Kaur *et al*. 2019). A small number of studies discuss the potential for social protection initiatives, especially cash transfers, to support migration as adaptation (Black *et al*. 2011; Hallegatte 2016), as a way of managing and reducing the risks of forced displacement or distress migration associated with climate change (Johnson and Krishnamurthy 2010; Schwan and Yu 2017). At the same time, other research finds that cash transfers have rarely been used directly to fund migration (Deshingkar *et al*. 2015) or are associated with decreased climate-related migration (Chort and de la Rupelle 2017; Mueller *et al*. 2020). Finally, a number of studies provide evidence of the inclusion of climate-proofed infrastructures in public works programmes; for example, as part of water conservation and management, flood control, and sanitation schemes (Siegel, Gatsinzi and Kettlewell 2011; Kuriakose *et al*. 2013; Ovadiya *et al*. 2013; Lind *et al*. 2014; del Ninno *et al*. 2016; Steinbach *et al*. 2016; Godfrey-Wood and Flower 2018; Kaur *et al*. 2019; Fischer 2020; Norton *et al*. 2020). It is worth noting, however, that these types of public works infrastructure could also have maladaptive effects. As Godfrey-Wood and Flower (2018: S590) note, 'To date evidence of the impact of PWPs [Public Works Programmes] on building resilience has been mixed.'

Reviews of the World Bank ASP programme in the Sahel provide further pause for thought. Strengthening the adaptive capacities of households and communities is a key principle of this programme,[9] while early independent evaluations find little evidence of the programme improving adaptive capacity outcomes (Béné *et al*. 2018; Béné *et al*. 2019). One review also identifies major difficulties encountered in adding adaptive elements into existing national social protection programmes, describing situations in which adaptability is added in an *ad hoc* manner (Béné *et al*. 2018).

In summary, there is an emphasis in the literature on short-term responses over longer-term adaptation concerns. There is much less evidence related to building longer-term adaptive capacities (as commonly understood, see section 1.2 above) through social assistance than for the shock-responsive side.

### 2.1.3 Transformation

It is increasingly clear that incremental changes are necessary, but not sufficient, in order to be resilient in the face of climate change, and that transformative changes are also needed (Pelling 2011; O'Brien et al. 2015). Transformation is a core part of the 3P-T framework developed by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004), based on the argument that social protection can (and should) aim to be socially transformative. Transformation is likewise part of the 3A framework for resilience, as discussed earlier. Beyond financial supports such as short- and longer-term cash transfers or credit provision, several authors point to the need for social protection interventions that have transformative elements to address systemic drivers of vulnerability; for instance, by addressing labour laws, health and safety regulations, land rights and land distribution, inheritance law reforms, and infrastructure quality codes (Siddiqi 2011; Davies et al. 2013; Johnson et al. 2013; Browne 2014; FAO and Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre 2019). Studies on linkages between social protection and climate change argue that interventions explicitly integrating social protection, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation are more likely to foster transformative aspects because of the attention to longer-term implications. A focus on disaster risk reduction only tends to focus mainly on shorter-term concerns and a return to normalcy (Arnall et al. 2010; Davies et al. 2013), hence risking overlooking longer-term changes and trends.

In practice, however, so far few SP-climate change programmes address such transformative dimensions (Browne 2014; Agrawal et al. 2020; Tenzing 2020). As noted above, most focus on coping with climate-related shocks and strengthening adaptive capacity, but within the current structural contexts and without addressing the underlying conditions that make individuals and households vulnerable (Lemos et al. 2016). The World Bank ASP programme in the Sahel, for example, which is described in some literature as including a focus on transformation (Bee et al. 2013: 102) or having the potential to be transformative both at beneficiary and systemic levels (Béné et al. 2018), so far shows little evidence of addressing the power relations that shape the deeper structural causes of vulnerability.

[9] The programme focuses on five areas in particular: (1) Government leadership; (2) Institutional arrangements; (3) Data and information; (4) Programs and their delivery systems; and (5) Finance; see: https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/sahel-adaptive-social-protection-program-trust-fund.

Thus, while it is generally clear that transformation will be needed as part of the considerations for social protection programmes, as yet there is little evidence to show how exactly programmes may contribute to addressing the structural causes of vulnerability and building long-term resilience to climate change (Aleksandrova 2019, 2020; Tenzing 2020).

### 2.1.4 Maladaptation

Some existing literature recognises that social assistance programmes may lead to negative coping strategies or maladaptation. Some studies find that social assistance may create incentives to stay and invest in locations and livelihoods that may become unviable in the future under increased climate risks, when the long-term impacts of climate change are not considered in design and planning phases (Kuriakose et al. 2013; Béné et al. 2014; FAO and Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre 2019; Solórzano and Cárdenes 2019; Aleksandrova 2020). Moreover, some studies find cash transfers and input subsidy programmes to be associated with increased natural resource extraction, land clearances, loss of natural vegetation cover, deforestation, and soil degradation (Alix-Garcia et al. 2013; Weldegebriel and Prowse, 2013; Haug and Wold 2017; Dyngeland et al. 2020); for example, through cash access and new inputs enabling intensification of agricultural production. In contrast, other studies find social assistance to be associated with decreased natural resource exploitation, by reducing dependence on revenues linked to environmental resources (Malerba 2020).

Other research points to potential entry points for maladaptation, but without specifically discussing them as such (or acknowledging the potential for maladaptation). Access to social assistance programmes, especially in the form of cash transfers, public works schemes, and crop insurance, has been associated with agricultural intensification, shifts from subsistence to commercial crop production (e.g. from rice to cotton cultivation), mono-cropping, and in turn increased dependencies on high-cost inputs and vulnerabilities to price fluctuations, as well increased exploitation of water resources and biodiversity loss (Panda 2013; Jha *et al*. 2017; Asfaw and Davis 2018; Godfrey-Wood and Flower 2018; Dyngeland *et al*. 2020; Yiridomoh *et al*. 2021). Some authors note that public works programmes might have maladaptive effects, in that public works projects may be linked to large-scale infrastructure development, intensified/expanded agricultural production (including commercial crops), and in some cases re-greening initiatives such as reforestation/tree planting, which in some cases could lead to negative ecological impacts; for instance, increased water use through expansion and intensification of irrigation and cultivated land area (Panda 2013; del Ninno *et al*. 2016; Steinbach *et al*. 2016; Jha *et al*. 2017; Asfaw and Davis 2018; Godfrey-Wood and Flower 2018; Kaur *et al*. 2019; Bowen *et al*. 2020; Dyngeland *et al*. 2020; Fischer 2020; Norton *et al*. 2020; Yiridomoh *et al*. 2021).

As indicated above, while maladaptation is an increasing concern, there are gaps in the understanding of social assistance and how it may be designed and implemented to reduce the risk of maladaptation. As noted earlier, this may be seen partly as a result of the main focus being on short-term approaches (including SRSP) over longer-term adaptation concerns.

### 2.1.5 Implementing capacities

There is a widespread concern, expressed in both research and policy reports, that governments may lack the capacities necessary for integrating climate resilience into social assistance programmes, especially as this may require institutional reform or even the formation of new institutions (World Bank 2019). The literature points to challenges associated with different forms of technical expertise between the climate change and social protection spheres, different concepts and terminologies, and different government structures – with separate ministries, approaches, and systems for each sector (Vincent and Cull 2012; Ovadiya et al. 2013; Costella and Ivaschenko 2015; Mesquita and Bursztyn 2016; Steinbach et al. 2016; O'Brien et al. 2018; FAO and Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre 2019). Studies also point to limited climate expertise as a key barrier to the implementation of climate-responsive social protection (Vincent and Cull 2012; Strickland et al. 2014).

Some national-level policies outline divisions of responsibilities for climate-related social protection between government ministries: for example, the National Social Protection Policy in Niger (République du Niger 2011) identifies the different ministries involved in social protection coordination and implementation, and makes the Ministry of Environment responsible for actions related to life conditions, including climate change. A recent evaluation of the World Bank ASP programme in the Sahel (Béné *et al*. 2019), however, notes

relatively low levels of collaboration between actors involved in ASP activities, within and outside government institutions, and highlights the particular absence of ministries of environment from ASP discussions. In FCAS, these capacity issues are particularly acute and important, as further discussed below.

### 2.1.6 Overall coverage of FCAS contexts and concerns

Of the 49 journal articles, three book chapters and 33 policy and research reports examined in the literature review, only a handful look at social assistance and climate change in conflict-affected contexts. This includes two studies on Afghanistan and Pakistan (Arnall *et al*. 2010; Davies *et al*. 2013), and others on Colombia (Malerba 2020), Niger (Schnitzer 2016, 2018), Chad (World Bank 2016), and the wider Sahel region (Béné *et al*. 2018; Béné, Howland and Cornelius 2019; World Bank 2019). None of these studies explicitly consider the specificity of fragile or conflict-affected contexts, however, and the challenges they pose for social assistance and building climate resilience. Moreover, none of this research on conflict-affected contexts explores the specific effects or implications of fragility and conflict. One report discusses the implications of violent conflict for SRSP provision, noting that conflict can increase assistance needs while simultaneously changing the nature of the support required and undermining response capacities (O'Brien *et al*. 2018). Even this report does not focus specifically on climate-related social protection. Overall, we find that the literature on social assistance and climate change is heavily biased towards stable settings, and includes very little specific detail directly on or relevant to understanding social assistance for climate resilience in FCAS. Further research on the implications of conflict and fragility for climate-related social assistance is evidently required.

The review confirms that neither FCAS countries nor FCAS concerns have received extensive coverage in the literature on social assistance and climate change. We argue that while FCAS do not have entirely separate issues to what can be found in stable settings, the emphasis differs. Finding ways of understanding and addressing these gaps therefore becomes increasingly important.

## 2.2 Implications for social assistance and resilience in FCAS

What, though, are the implications of the above for FCAS? What are the particular challenges faced by social assistance for climate resilience in such settings?

As already discussed, there is very little research that directly addresses these questions. Even where case studies of climate-related social assistance have been undertaken, these generally do not consider the specific challenges posed by conflict and fragility. Here we simply map out what we view as the major themes and issues, building on existing research on the political ecology of conflict zones and the political economy of civil wars.

It is necessary to being with three framing points. First, it needs stressing that FCAS are fragile and conflict-affected not mainly because of the climate, but for political and often also political-economic reasons. Political grievances, ethnic divisions, ideological projects, elite resource capture, and weak state legitimacy and administrative capacity, often exacerbated or even structured by cross-border and geopolitical dynamics, as well as social and economic inequalities and poverty, are well established as the main types of causes of protracted instability. Thus, while it is sometimes implied that climate and conflict are parallel sources of vulnerability within FCAS (e.g. Vivekananda et al. 2019; ICRC 2020), this is misleading. There is no equivalence between the two. Moreover, while it has sometimes been suggested that climatic factors, most notably extreme droughts, have been significant contributors to conflict onset in places such as Darfur, Syria, and north-east Nigeria (e.g. Ki-moon 2007; Mazo 2010; Gleick 2014; Kelley et al. 2015; Kasperowicz 2015; Vivekananda et al. 2019), the evidence to this effect is very weak (e.g. Kevane and Gray 2008; Verhoeven 2011; Selby and Hoffmann 2014; De Châtel 2014; Magrin 2016; Selby et al. 2017; Daoudy 2020; Daoust and Selby forthcoming). Without doubt, climatic factors can exacerbate vulnerabilities in FCAS, acting as risk multipliers (Butler and Kefford 2018). There are, however, no reasonable grounds for understanding fragility and conflict as essentially products of climatic hazards, or thinking of these hazards as more than secondary, if compounding, sources of vulnerability and instability.

Second, although we are concerned with the specificity of 'fragile and conflict-affected settings, it should not be thought that they are a unitary type – all alike and wholly unlike all others. Each FCAS has its own specific history and dynamics of conflict and fragility. In most cases, moreover, patterns of conflict and fragility are internally heterogeneous, varying hugely from one province to another, or between core regions and

particular borderlands, peripheries, or environmental and developmental frontiers. Some current FCAS were not fragile or conflict-affected ten years ago – and still less 15 years ago. Equally, some contexts that are currently categorised as stable include at least elements, or particular geographical zones, of conflict and fragility. In what follows, we use FCAS as our main analytical category and suggest a framework for analysing climate-related social assistance within them. At the same time, however, we recognise the difficulties and dangers inherent in generalising across this category.

Third, conflict and fragility have two types of implication for climate-related social assistance. On the one hand, they have implications for its design, targeting, and delivery. Weak administrative capacities, highly politicised decision-making, armed conflict, and more can pose huge challenges for social assistance programmes, whether these are framed as being about climate. On the other hand, conflict and fragility can also have significant impacts on the nature and causes of climate-related vulnerabilities. As discussed above, patterns of vulnerability and resilience to climatic hazards are typically a function of a range of social, political, economic, and environmental factors. In FCAS specifically, vulnerabilities are often structured to a significant degree both by conflict, violence, and instability, and by the various, mostly political, factors underpinning them (such as political grievances or ethnic divisions). We consider both types of challenge to designing and providing climate-related social assistance in FCAS. Given that the first of these challenges is really a cross-cutting issue (which is relevant to all social assistance programmes in FCAS, not just to those focused on responding to climate shocks or building climate resilience), we concentrate mainly on the latter issue – the implications of conflict and fragility for the nature and causes of climate-related vulnerabilities.

With these qualifications in mind, here we suggest six main ways in which conflict and fragility may, or should, matter for the design and delivery of social assistance to strengthen climate resilience.

### 2.2.1 Political violence

Direct political violence and the threat or risk thereof can have significant consequences for both climate vulnerabilities and social assistance programmes. Most obviously, political violence may cost lives and cause injury, with knock-on implications for household economies and their capacities to absorb and adapt to climatic shocks. In addition, much modern political violence is directed against property and infrastructures, which are foundational to livelihoods strategies and climate resilience; for example, the destruction of water tanks, well pumps or diesel generators; the theft of agricultural machinery or pick-up trucks (e.g. Coward 2009; Graham 2010; Sowers, Weinthal and Zawahri 2017). Various coercive practices, including military restrictions on movement and forced tax farming by armed groups, may have similar effects. Violence or the risk thereof also may have significant implications for the delivery of climate-related social assistance, especially by complicating or in extreme cases preventing access to conflict zones (or areas beyond formal government control) by state officials and/or international organisations.

### 2.2.2 Political divisions

FCAS are characterised by particularly sharp political divisions, again with implications for both climate vulnerabilities and the programmes designed to mitigate them. They are often divided between dominant groups favoured by the state, which may be long-term beneficiaries of state support – through access to subsidies, credit, land, water resources, employment, and so on – and subordinate or marginalised groups, with much more limited access to these resources. Such divides may be maintained either through formal legal and administrative mechanisms, and/or informally through what in shorthand may be called ‘corruption’. In turn, patterns of climate vulnerability and resilience, and support (e.g. through climate finance) may be sharply divided along ethnic, party, or other political lines, to the extent that conflict may be associated both with increased vulnerability and, for specific dominant groups or actors, the reverse – namely, decreased vulnerability made possible by state support and resource capture. In such contexts, divisions may be either long term and set in stone or short term and changeable, highly dependent on the whims of particular leaders, alliances, or relations of patronage. This means groups that are at one time beneficiaries of official social assistance may suddenly find this withdrawn, with potentially disastrous consequences for livelihoods and vulnerability, including vulnerability to climatic shocks.

This acute politicisation has parallel implications for climate-related social assistance. First, state social assistance, and more broadly, social protection, may in some FCAS be heavily implicated in the historical production of climate vulnerabilities through denying or limiting access to resources that underpin their

capacity to cope with, or adapt to, climate-related shocks and stressors. Examples of this include contexts where subordinate groups are long denied equal access to subsidies, employment, or credit. Beyond this, political divisions and differential state support (or for that matter, international support) may pose extreme challenges for social assistance design and delivery. Even when overseen by international organisations, shock-responsive or adaptive social assistance programmes may be designed to funnel resources primarily to dominant groups. In pre-civil war Syria, for example, the United Nations-led response to the drought of 2008/09 exclusively provided support to Arab farmers and pastoralists, and provided no equivalent support to historically marginalised Kurdish communities, in line with Syrian regime interests (Selby 2019). Even when the politics of FCAS does not affect programme design and targeting, it may affect implementation, especially through the capture of social assistance resources as they are being distributed.

### 2.2.3 Attenuated legal and institutional regimes

While acknowledging the considerable diversity of FCAS, most share characteristics of being sites of highly attenuated or otherwise distorted legal and institutional regimes. National and local governments may lack administrative and legal capacities. Even when they do possess functioning capacities, they may be internally viewed as having only limited legitimacy. Conversely, some entities that may be referred to as 'empirical states' – that is, organisations that are effectively states when measured by their degree of internal control over populations and territory – are not recognised as such internationally, with significant consequences for international engagement and resource flows (Jackson 1993; Clapham 1998). Even in FCAS where none of this applies as a rule, legal and institutional control may nonetheless be limited within particular peripheral or frontier zones (see Lind 2022). It seems likely that all such scenarios have implications both for patterns of climate vulnerability, and for attendant social assistance programmes. In particular, weak state institutionalisation means that resource flows in FCAS often have a highly *ad hoc* character, subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation (de Waal 2009). Most of the resources upon which people rely to build resilience and respond to shocks may be outside official government channels. This includes high levels of reliance on diaspora remittances, religious institutions and funds, and illegal or unregulated economic activity.

### 2.2.4 Conflict-related displacement

FCAS are often home to high levels of conflict-related displacement, both to recognised camps and informal settlements in peri-urban areas. Again, this has implications for both climate vulnerability and any resultant social assistance. While there is little evidence to suggest that climate change is a direct driver for displacement, it is an additional stressor interacting with the multitude of social, economic, and political displacement drivers (IMDC 2021; Selby and Daoust 2021). For example, camps may be sites of extreme climate vulnerability given their dense populations, limited livelihood opportunities, poor infrastructures, and often very shallow natural resource bases, which quite understandably can quickly become over-exploited. For example, there is a well-established pattern of extreme groundwater and fuelwood depletion around camps (Buchanan-Smith and McElhinney 2011; Hagenlocher, Lang and Tiede 2012; Faour and Fayad 2014; Kranz, Sachs and Lang 2015; Al Wreikat and Al Kharabsheh 2020). Informal slums in peri-urban areas are likewise typically densely populated and poorly served by water, sanitation, and electricity infrastructures, making them very vulnerable to climate-related risks and, in turn, increasing the strain and demands on social assistance programmes. We can put to one side questions of social assistance provision for displaced populations, as these are addressed elsewhere in BASIC Research (Collyer et al. 2022; Zaman et al. 2022).

### 2.2.5 The role of international actors

For obvious reasons, FCAS are contexts where international actors are deeply involved in responding to humanitarian crises and often also delivering social assistance. Yet, these are places where international actors simultaneously often have only a limited understanding of local dynamics. As such, they are highly dependent upon local partners for access, information, and implementation. Among other things, international actors are thus often not particularly knowledgeable about, or even aware of, the local political, economic, and environmental causes of climate-related vulnerability. At the same time, local actors, especially state actors who have actually contributed to causing these climate-related vulnerabilities (e.g. through policies favouring particular ethnic groups or through subsidies that have promoted unsustainable resource use), may have interests in underplaying the importance of these long-term causes of vulnerability, and in exaggerating the impacts of climatic shocks per se (Paprocki 2019, 2020; Selby et al. 2022). International actor dependency on local regimes also routinely leads them to adopt postures that may be

defined in terms of 'anti-politics', whereby they favour less politically controversial forms of support and steer clear of criticisms of local state actors (Ferguson 1990). More so than elsewhere, the result is that in FCAS there are particularly strong tendencies for local and international actors to overstate the impacts of climatic shocks per se, or even to misattribute crisis situations to climate shock events when they actually have very different, more long-term, and structural causes. Stated differently, in FCAS there are arguably particularly high risks of maladaptive international support, including maladaptive social protection. The response of the international community to the 2008/09 drought in Syria – when the crisis in question actually preceded the drought, and was caused by long-term groundwater over-abstraction plus economic liberalisation much more than the drought itself – offers a clear example of such dynamics (Selby 2019).

### 2.2.6 The primacy of emergency assistance

At the risk of stating the obvious, FCAS are clearly contexts where needs are particularly acute, and where for the range of reasons outlined above even climate-related vulnerabilities are especially high. Consequently, and more so than elsewhere, social assistance in FCAS tends to have a focus on short-term emergency needs. In relation to climate specifically, in turn this means that long-term adaptation and transformation are likely to be even more secondary to social assistance objectives than they are elsewhere, and that the risks of maladaptation as a result of local–international interactions may be compounded (see above). At the same time, it bears emphasising that the fundamentally political and political-economic causes of the vulnerabilities in FCAS pose significant obstacles to transformative climate-related assistance. Long-term transformation of people's livelihoods in such contexts will often be impossible without confronting the political and political-economic causes of their vulnerabilities, demanding forms of assistance that are much more explicitly political than is the norm (Hickey 2009). Moreover, the combination of extreme needs and the range of local complexities outlined above clearly make FCAS particularly challenging sites for the delivery of social assistance, whether in relation to climate change or more broadly.

# 3. Conclusions and implications for BASIC Research

This paper maps out some of the challenges in designing and providing social assistance for climate resilience in FCAS. Our main arguments have been threefold. First, despite the large volumes of both academic and policy literature on the implications of climate vulnerability and resilience for social assistance, the bulk of this discussion remains focused on responses to short-term climate shocks and stressors, and tensions over integration and targeting. As yet, there is also insufficient focus on how to ensure that social assistance promotes flexibility and robustness in the face of uncertainty and avoids becoming maladaptive. The understanding of the implications of underlying political, economic, and environmental causes of climate vulnerability (including on gender inequities and social differences) for social assistance programmes remains weak.

Second, the literature on climate vulnerability and social assistance focuses overwhelmingly on stable contexts, such that understanding of how to design and provide social assistance for climate resilience in FCAS (as opposed to stable contexts) is especially weak. Third, FCAS present a series of particular challenges for climate-related social assistance, relating both to the causes of climate-related vulnerability in these contexts specifically and to the unique challenges associated with delivery there. Specifically, FCAS pose particular challenges in six (intersecting) ways that will have direct implications on vulnerability to climate change, because of: (1) the high incidence or threat of direct political and social violence; (2) their particularly sharp political divisions; (3) their weak or distorted legal and institutional regimes; (4) widespread displacement; (5) the particular complexities of local state–international actor relations in FCAS; and (6) the extent and gravity of assistance needs. It is suggested that these factors, both individually and in combination, make climate-related social assistance in FCAS especially challenging. This includes substantially increasing the risks of maladaptive support if patterns of climate change are not understood and considered in social assistance programmes.

These observations and considerations have a series of implications for BASIC Research. The above framework on the specific challenges posed by FCAS may be useful for the BASIC Research programme as a whole in providing one constructive way of thinking about the challenges that these contexts pose for social

assistance. More specifically, we suggest this analysis raises a series of questions and points to a number of areas and priorities for research agendas on social assistance and climate resilience in FCAS. Here, we outline five specific priorities:

**(1) Problem definition:** Are existing approaches to social assistance premised on adequate framings and understandings of the nature and causes of climate vulnerability in FCAS, and what are the potentials and limits for social assistance addressing them, alone or in combination with other interventions? As we have seen (section 2.1), social assistance tends to emphasise preparedness and short-term responses to shocks, with less attention to date on structural drivers of vulnerability and longer-term adaptation and transformations to strengthen resilience. As indicated above, our hypotheses are that there are shortcomings in the understanding of social assistance, and that social assistance (such as cash transfers) can rarely, if ever, be expected to address structural drivers of climate vulnerability in isolation. To test these two hypotheses in FCAS, this thematic area would: (1) Analyse how climate vulnerability is understood in existing social protection programming, both at global levels and in case study FCAS contexts; and (2) Compare this against global and case study evidence on the actual causes of climate vulnerability. The latter would involve analysing social and natural scientific evidence and scenario projections of exposure to climate-related hazards. More importantly, this would entail analysis of existing evidence of the socio-ecological causes of climate vulnerability in our FCAS case study contexts (patterns of resource depletion, unsustainable economic development, gender-based inequities, poverty, conflict-related infrastructure destruction, displacement, etc.). In addition, where there are significant gaps, this would involve primary research on the same, using questionnaires, interviews, and/or ethnographic methods. Ultimately, the purpose here is to better understand what this means for social assistance outcomes. Does the framing help us target social assistance in a way that helps the most vulnerable, or are some groups mis-targeted or omitted as a result? This is probably the most important of the suggested themes listed here, providing a foundation for much of what follows. It is also the most climate specific, as all the others are cross-cutting with other BASIC Research themes.

**(2) Resource allocation:** Are existing patterns of social assistance resource allocation, including climate finance, appropriate to limiting climate vulnerabilities and building climate resilience in FCAS? Focusing this time on resource allocation, this theme would parallel the one above by: (i) Analysing existing patterns of social assistance resource allocation; and (ii) Comparing this against what might be considered appropriate given the actual causes of climate vulnerability as analysed under theme 1. The aim here would not be to question overall levels of resource allocation (given that it is already widely appreciated that social assistance levels are not adequate), but to analyse whether resources are allocated appropriately given the complex nature and causes of climate vulnerability. Considerations of the potential role and allocation of other sources of finance, particularly climate finance, would be key here. In practice, this would involve: identifying any major gaps (i.e. any particular sources of climate vulnerability that are ignored or receive little attention in social assistance programmes); identifying and examining any forms of social assistance that might be increasing climate vulnerabilities (e.g. subsidies that might be promoting unsustainable resource extraction); and examining whether the targeting of social assistance resources (to which groups/areas, over what timeframes?) is appropriate to limiting climate vulnerabilities. It is worth noting that this theme would be unable to focus only on those social assistance programmes that are explicitly framed in terms of climate resilience. Rather, it would have to consider the broad sweep of social assistance programmes in each FCAS case study context (in keeping with the recognition that climate vulnerability and resilience are affected by all manner of non-climatic factors). Given this, this theme would inevitably have to be cross-cutting.

**(3) Implementation:** Are social assistance programmes as implemented actually helping build climate resilience in FCAS? The key issue here is whether problems of implementation encountered in FCAS specifically matter to the design of programmes for building climate resilience. This may involve analysing the implementation of projects explicitly framed as about building climate resilience; e.g. drawing on evidence of activities that has tried to track adaptation/resilience improvements and development progress in other areas.[10]

[10] For example, see: https://www.iied.org/tracking-adaptation-measuring-development-tamd.

**(4) Change:** If, as we assume, these existing patterns of problem definition, resource allocation, and implementation are not optimal, then how might they be reformed or transformed? Implicit in our analysis of themes 1 through 3 is a series of benchmarks for evaluation (e.g. the social protection programmes in a given country will be evaluated against evidence of the actual causes of climate vulnerabilities). These benchmarks would provide a basis for identifying possible areas for change – both in global social assistance programming and in our particular FCAS case study contexts. They would also offer a basis for determining social assistance priorities and targeting, as well as offer insight on the broader institutional social assistance landscape.

**(5) Explanation:** Assuming once again that the above patterns of problem definition, resource allocation, and implementation are not ideal, then why is this? This theme would examine the assumptions, interests, and other factors that explain why problem definitions are often so limited, resources allocated in ways that do not enhance climate vulnerability, and so on. This would involve analysing everything from global discourses and norms about climate vulnerability and resilience, to the specific economic and political agendas of actors in each of our FCAS case study contexts, which explain why social assistance resources are sometimes misdirected, contradictory, and/or maladaptive. The aim of analysing what we term these 'why issues' would be to understand the limits to and potential for reform of social assistance programmes in FCAS, and from there identify strategies for how BASIC can contribute to changes.

It is envisioned that these themes would be examined empirically and comparatively across multiple contexts, including in at least three of the BASIC Research core countries (Yemen, Niger, north-east Nigeria), plus Darfur and possibly other non-core country settings. These themes would need to be examined at multiple scales, from the global through to national and local. In practice, the five themes would have to be explored at the same time, such that there would be multiple sub-projects with these themes cross-cutting them.

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