



Cash distribution in Madagascar as part of a Welthungerhilfe project. Through this forecast based action the expected negative effects of climate change on the food security of the vulnerable population are being prevented.

## SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEMS – KEY TO FOOD SECURITY

**Emergency aid, fuel rebates, energy price brakes – the German government has put together numerous relief packages to cushion the negative effects of the current rapid rise in the cost of living. This also applies to a large number of other industrialized nations. In the countries of the global South, on the other hand, people have to do without such measures to a far-reaching extent; only a fraction of the population there enjoy social security systems. This means that poverty and hunger are inevitable.**

"Zero Hunger": With global Sustainable Development Goal number 2 (SDG 2), the international community has set itself the goal of ending hunger in the world by 2030 and achieving food security for all people. But we are still a long way from achieving this goal. In 2022, the number of acutely hungry people rose to 345 million, 200 million more than before the outbreak of the Corona pandemic. Furthermore, 828 million people suffer from chronic hunger, meaning they do not consume enough calories over long periods. This level of global hunger is also due to the fact that millions of people were already living on the edge of deprivation before the worsening situation of multiple crises (climate impacts, wars, Corona pandemic). Under these circumstances, events such as a price shock or a natural disaster, but also a case of illness or death in the family, can quickly lead to hardship for the entire household.

Functioning social safety nets can help avoid or at least mitigate such emergencies. However, developing and transition countries spend just 1.5 percent on average of

their gross domestic product (GDP) on social security (see World Bank, 2018). By comparison, in Germany, around 1.1 trillion euros was spent in this area in 2020, corresponding to 33.6 percent of GDP (cf. BMAS, 2021). For 4.1 billion people, or 53 percent of the world's population, there are no social security services at all. This affects 87 percent of people in sub-Saharan Africa and 61 percent of people in Asia and the Pacific (cf. ILO, 2022).

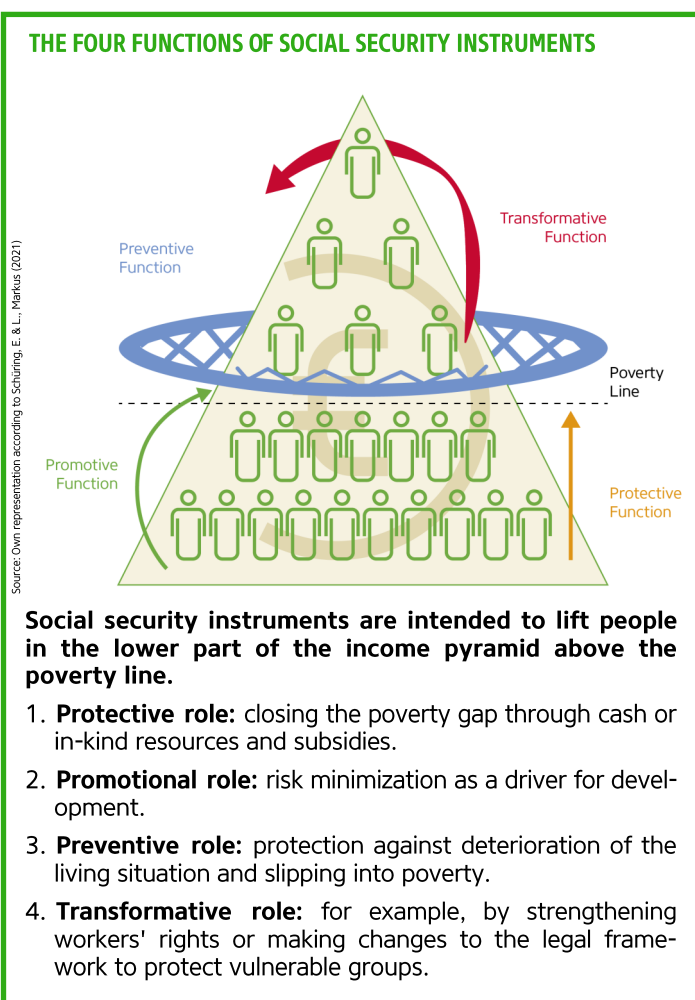
This is an unacceptable state of affairs, because "social security", like "food security", is one of the fundamental human rights laid down, inter alia, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (cf. United Nations, 1948, Arts. 22 and 25) and the UN human rights conventions (cf., inter alia, United Nations, 1966). Moreover, because it is a cornerstone of food security, the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Human Right to Food also demand: *"States should consider, to the extent that resources permit, establishing and maintaining social safety and food safety nets to protect those who are unable to provide for themselves"* (FAO, 2005).

### SOCIAL SECURITY AS THE BASIS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Social security systems not only protect households from slipping into poverty in precarious life situations, but also pave the way to an adequate standard of living – for example, by making harmful coping strategies superfluous. After all, poor families often take their children out of school in order to use their labor to secure their livelihoods, or they find themselves forced to sell important assets such as their own livestock.

Social security systems stabilize income flows, thereby strengthening local demand and contributing to regional economic development. They enable people to adopt new ways of generating income – for example, to grow riskier but higher-yielding crops, buy machinery, invest in training or start a business. Moreover, low-income households that receive transfer payments spend significantly more on average on food, and thus on food security, than those that do not. Social security systems thus reduce inequality, strengthen social cohesion and contribute to stability and peace. Hence they are a key instrument for achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the closely related human rights to healthy food, health and an adequate standard of living.

They are also an important building block in the so-called triple nexus approach combining humanitarian aid, development cooperation, and peacebuilding.



## LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In responding to Covid-19, many countries have demonstrated that they are able to scale up existing social security programs, either qualitatively (level of benefits) or quantitatively (number of beneficiaries). The importance of the "shock-responsive social protection" approach, which involves adapting routine social security programs and linking them to other emergency measures, has also become visible. This approach is particularly important in light of other major hunger drivers such as extreme

weather events or armed war and conflict.

It also became clear that countries with already established social security systems were able to respond faster and better to the pandemic. These countries generally had high-quality population and social registries, strong legal frameworks, and sufficient domestic funding. They also had intact information systems and the capacity to scale up programs quickly and safely. Conversely, this means that countries that do not yet have this level of organization in particular need support to establish social security systems and adapt them accordingly in the event of shocks.

## SOCIAL SECURITY AS A JOINT TASK

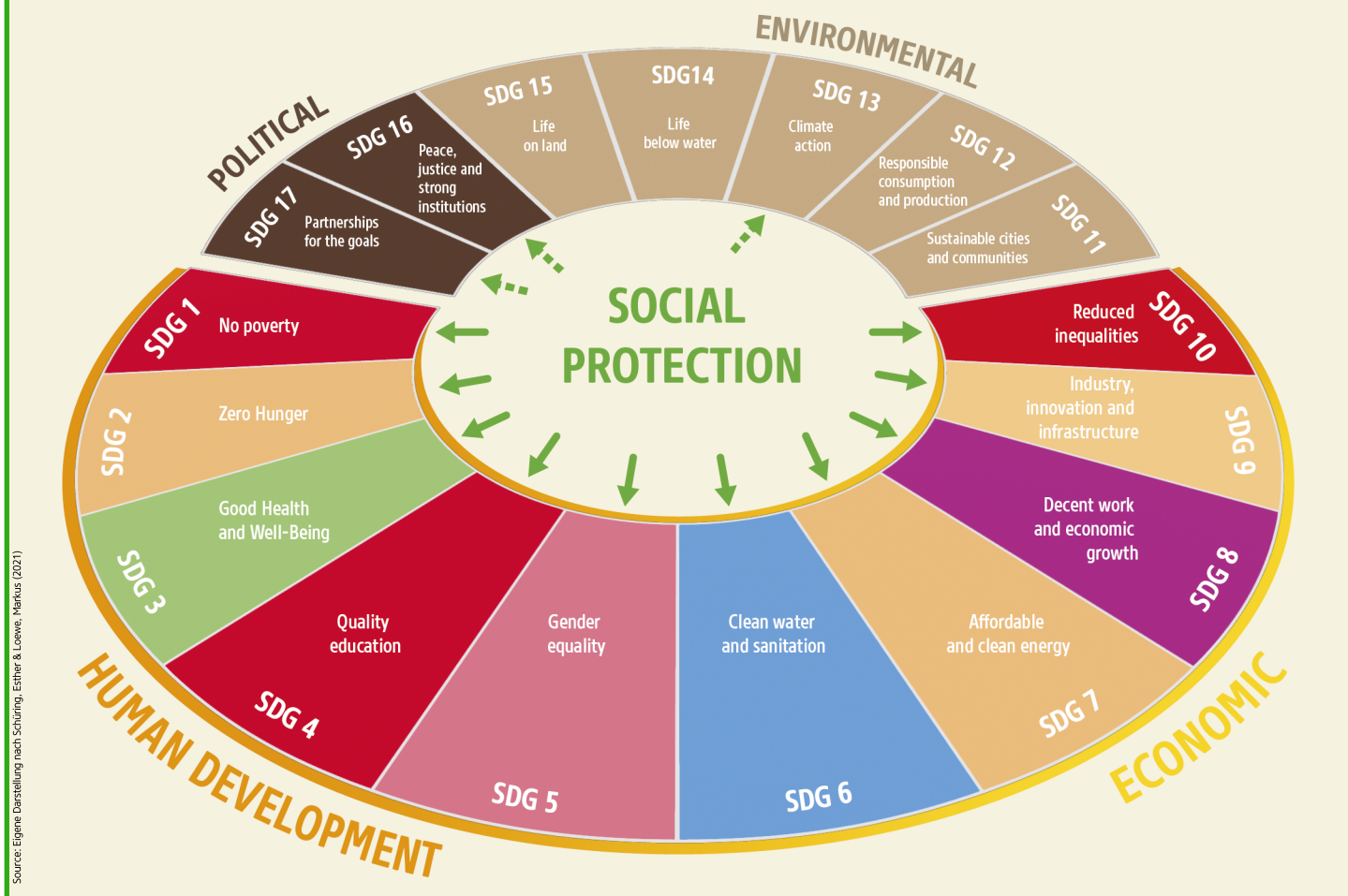
**The national governments** of the respective countries are primarily responsible for establishing or comprehensively expanding social protection measures, financing them, and creating the necessary framework conditions. The voluntary guidelines already mentioned continue to call for: *"States, in the design of safety nets, should consider the important role of international organizations such as FAO, IFAD and WFP, and other relevant international, regional and civil society organizations that can assist them in fighting rural poverty and promoting food security and agricultural development"* (FAO, 2005).

Where governments fail to provide social protection, **non-governmental organizations and international organizations** can provide support. The example of the Welthungerhilfe project in Bangladesh illustrates how necessary this often is (see text box).

In **Bangladesh**, prices for necessities such as wheat, lentils, chickpeas and powdered milk have risen steadily since the start of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. This price increase has particularly hurt people with no income and those with small and medium incomes who have lost their jobs because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the government has taken measures, including lowering tariffs on food imports, or selling subsidized food to vulnerable population, the initiatives are not fully sufficient and some of the foodbaskets do not reach the people who really need it. Also, thousands of people compete for too few products at the points of sale. Moreover, the distribution points are located in the cities. As a result, the rural population would have to spend transportation costs and time to obtain the subsidized food packages. This is not an option given their low incomes. Since the existing social protection benefits are far from sufficient, 1,340 families in the Cox's Bazar region currently receive food vouchers from Welthungerhilfe.

The **private sector** also bears responsibility for the realization of the human rights to social security and food. In formalized employment relationships, employers should pay social security contributions in addition to adequate wages and support workers in special situations such as pregnancy, illness or old age. Tax payments also enable the respective states to raise financial resources for social protection measures. The informal sector, in which around two billion

## SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)



Source: Eigene Darstellung nach Schüring, Esther & Loewe, Markus (2021)

people work worldwide, mostly in developing and emerging countries, and often under inhumane working conditions, therefore poses a particular challenge (see ILO 2018). Lack of formal social protection mechanisms is mostly compensated through family or neighborhood networks. However, this is particularly difficult in the case of overarching events such as natural disasters, pandemics or wars and conflicts, as the majority of a community are usually negatively affected here.

The Food Security Standard (FSS), co-developed by WHH, gives companies the opportunity to better meet their social due diligence obligations in agricultural production chains, both on smallholder farms and on plantations:

### SOCIAL SECURITY IN AGRICULTURAL WORK – THE FOOD SECURITY STANDARD (FSS)

Smallholders and farm workers who produce flowers, tea, coffee, palm oil, or rubber for our markets in the global South are rarely integrated into social security systems and are often affected by hunger. So far, these aspects have hardly been considered in sustainability standards and certification systems. Welthungerhilfe's Food Security Standard (FSS) closes this gap. In concrete terms, this means, for example, that all smallholders as well as all agricultural workers are connected to (statutory) health insurance systems. This way, they do not have to be afraid of not having an income in case of illness or possibly losing their job. Pension insurance or savings schemes are to provide for old age. The goal is to make the use and expansion of social security systems the minimum standard in agricultural production. To this end, the FSS is both an orientation aid and a monitoring instrument.

### ANCHORING IN THE NATIONAL LEGAL SYSTEM

In order to contribute to food security and poverty reduction in the long term, social security programs must be anchored legally and institutionally. The (national) states have a duty here. They must enshrine the associated human rights entitlements in the (national) legal system, develop strategies and financing plans, and make contribution-financed systems and/or tax-financed programs (such as social assistance, cash transfers, public work programs) available to the population. They must also inform the population about these systems and programs and establish monitoring and grievance mechanisms. This is where Welthungerhilfe comes in with a project to strengthen good governance for the right to food in rural areas:

### CITIZENS DEMAND ACCESS TO STATE SOCIAL SERVICES

In remote rural areas with their often inadequate infrastructure (roads, schools, hospitals), people are particularly affected by poverty and malnutrition. Even in countries where social security programs exist, they often do not even know that they are entitled to social benefits or how they can claim missing benefits. Welthungerhilfe partner organizations inform the rural population about their rights in their projects in Kenya, Malawi, Burkina Faso, and India. They support village communities and particularly vulnerable groups in gaining access to government health services and social assistance. An accountability process reviews the quality of public services based on criteria agreed with government authorities. The need for improvement is recorded in a jointly adopted action plan and reviewed regularly. For example, complaints offices have been set up to which families can turn if they are deprived of the state food rations to which they are entitled, or widows who are not paid their pensions.

If the state does not provide social security itself in a particular area, but relies on third-party benefits (e.g. private health, pension or microinsurance), it must take appropriate regulatory measures to ensure that access to benefits is guaranteed for all segments of the population. Especially in low- and middle-income countries with corresponding funding constraints, it is a major challenge to coordinate the work of all actors and sectors to implement

social protection systems and food security. This task should be a top priority for both nation states and the international community. This also applies to the German government. Universal basic rights apply to every person in the world and can only be secured if the international community of states works together to uphold them.

## DEMANDS ON THE DIFFERENT ACTORS:

### NATION STATES:

- The universal right to basic social security should be enshrined in law and institutionally in all countries. This applies in particular to women, who are often not in (official) employment and therefore have no protection at all.
- To build and implement social protection systems and reform fragmented programs, governments need political will, a stronger systems approach, and financing strategies (including coherent tax systems and efforts to systematically reduce corruption).
- The German government's commitment to date to human rights due diligence and environmental and social standards in global supply chains must be further expanded. Countries in the global South should use supply chain legislation to introduce minimum social standards.

### INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NGOs

- People in emergency situations who cannot expect assistance from their governments must receive immediate emergency aid in the form of food, material and cash resources, in accordance with humanitarian principles.
- NGOs can help people know, apply for, and claim the social benefits to which they are entitled (rights-based approach).

### PRIVATE SECTOR

- Companies must assume social responsibility for their employees; they must pay social security contributions and link their employees to health insurance and pension systems.
- Companies can make an important contribution to the expansion of social security systems by paying taxes conscientiously in the countries in which they operate and demanding from the governments there that their employees be included in adequate social security systems.

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