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7 things to know about managing climate risk through social protection

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Why focus on social protection for climate risk?

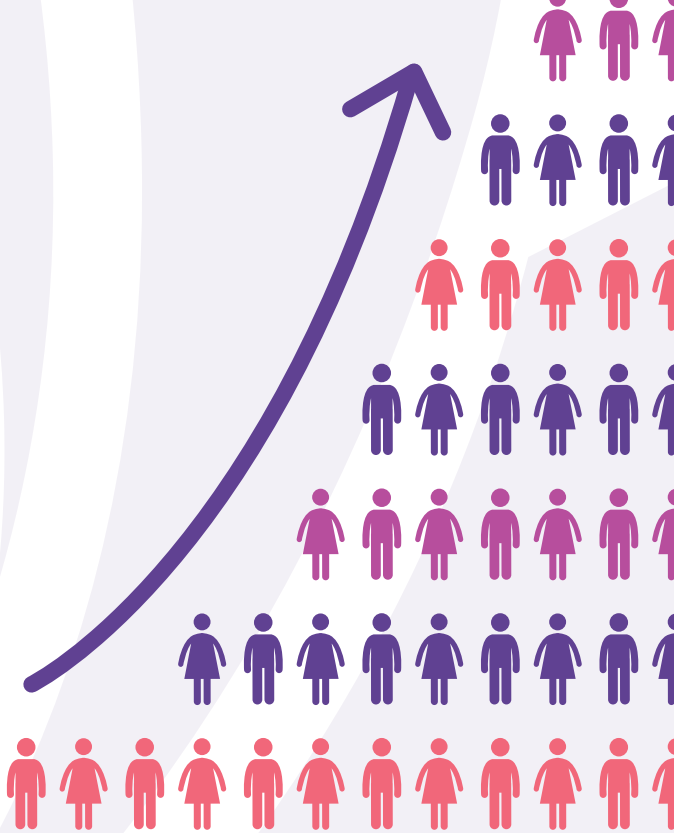
At least 300 natural disasters are reported annually worldwide; most are weather-related.[1,2]

Climate shocks and natural hazards represent a significant part of the global humanitarian burden and hinder poverty eradication.[3]

While climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts are under way, their goals are not being achieved fast enough. As a consequence, we are now bound to experience more frequent and severe extremes climate events. The poorest and vulnerable are the ones who will suffer the impacts the most.

Climate risk management is intrinsic to long-term development and growth; it requires established and sustainable systems that support both humanitarian action and long-term poverty and vulnerability reduction.

Social protection can be a key instrument to help reduce poverty and vulnerability and deal with climate shocks and natural disasters. Its role in climate risk management has been recognised in a series of global agreements in recent years.



Climate change could force more than 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030.[4]

What is social protection?

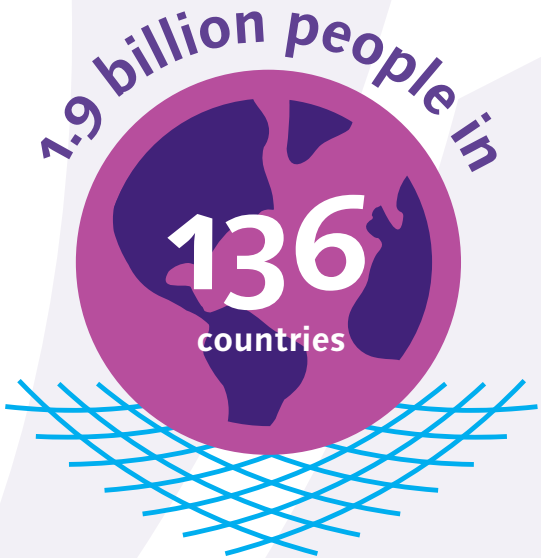
Social protection systems include policies and programmes intending to reduce poverty, deprivation and vulnerability by helping people manage various risks. Typical forms of social protection include:

- Social safety nets: cash and food transfers, pubilc works programmes, school feeding programmes
- Social insurance: pensions; health, unemployment or disaster insurance
- Labour market interventions: job market integration, job benefits, labour standards
- Social services: social care, nutrition services, disability services

While all social protection instruments can help the poor and vulnerable manage risks, social safety nets have the greatest potential for dealing with climate shocks. Safety nets – the fastest-growing type of social protection programme in developing countries – provide benefits to vulnerable individuals or households with no means of adequate support or who experience a sudden loss of income.

Unlike emergency programmes, safety nets are part of an established country system that provides support to people who are faced with temporary shocks or long-term chronic poverty.

Through safety nets, benefits such as food, cash or vouchers may be provided unconditionally or upon completion of a specified action (for example, school attendance). Safety nets can be targeted to some individuals based on stipulated criteria or can be universal in coverage.



are now registered as beneficiaries of social safety net programmes.

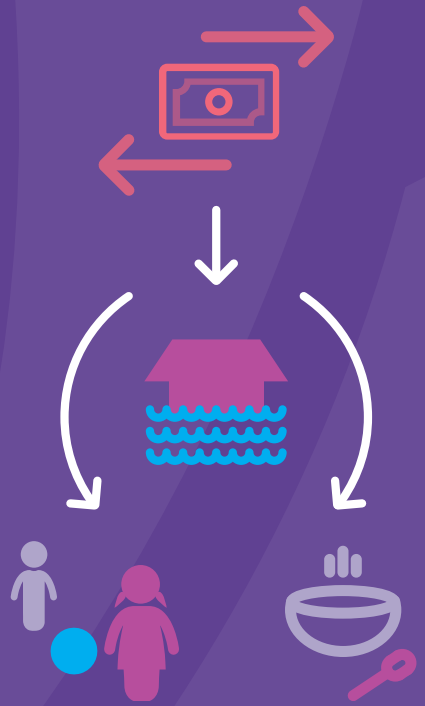
Today, every country in the world has at least one social safety net programme in place.[5]

1 Social protection can help bridge the gap between humanitarian and development aid

To end poverty, it is essential to build the resilience of the poor and vulnerable to shocks and disasters. As the international aid system struggles to keep pace with humanitarian challenges, there is a need to shift to more sustainably funded, longer-term strategies that use nationally owned systems for delivery and action.

Social protection systems and programmes can help protect poor and vulnerable people from the impacts of climate shocks and disasters, by supporting short-term anticipation and response but also by reducing vulnerability and increasing adaptive capacity through long-term, predictable and cost-effective systems.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Humanitarian Summit have committed to scaling up the use of social protection instruments in conjunction with nationally owned schemes.



Cash transfers help prevent harmful coping strategies after natural disasters, such as child labour or reduced food consumption.[6]

2 Social protection can help anticipate, absorb and adapt to climate shocks

Social protection can provide benefits that help people **anticipate and prevent** disasters **before they happen**, by taking early action and by improving incomes and livelihoods.

> *After the 2011 drought in Kenya, overall poverty increased by 5%; but Hunger Safety Net Programme beneficiaries that were receiving regular transfers in advance were shielded from it.*[7]

After a shock, social protection benefits help people **absorb the impacts** by providing direct support to affected populations, and preventing some of their negative consequences.

> *Mexico's conditional cash transfer programme, Progresa, allowed poor families affected by a drought to keep their children in school.*[8]

In the **long term**, social protection can help improve or diversify livelihoods, reduce poverty and vulnerability, and increase **adaptive** capacity to deal with future climate risks.

> *Public works projects that focus on building assets aimed at protecting the environment can reduce exposure and sensitivity to droughts and floods.*[9]

CASE STUDY

Brazil's *Bolsa Família*

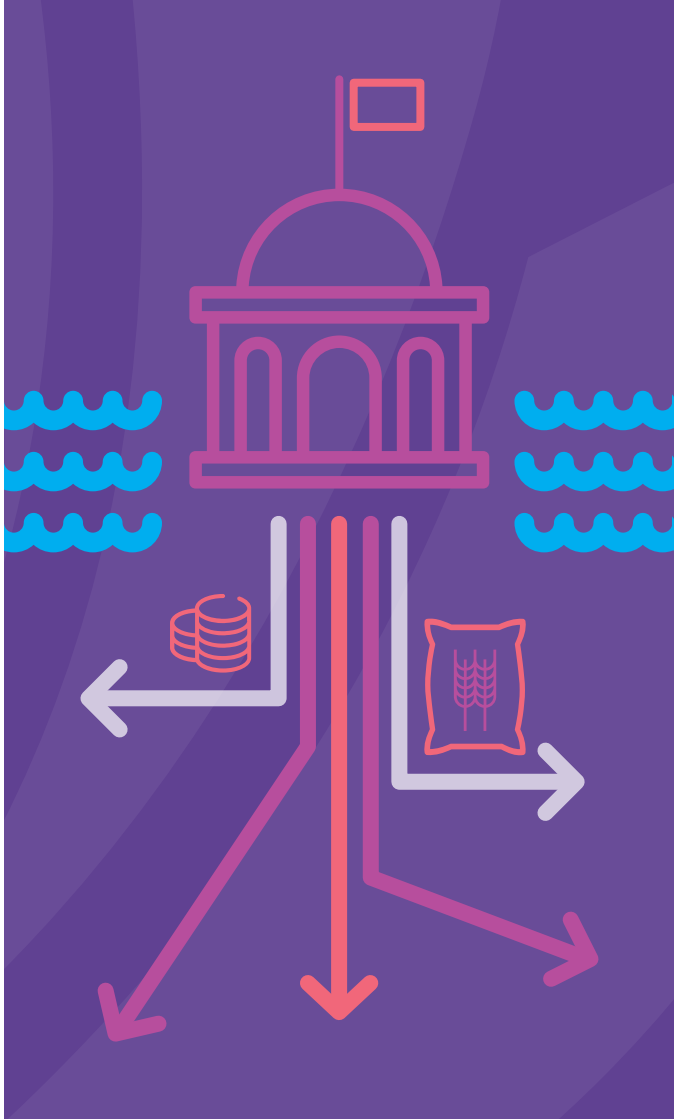
Brazil's *Bolsa Família* aims to reduce poverty by providing direct cash transfers that require beneficiaries to take their children to school and to health checks. The programme has helped Brazil more than halve its extreme poverty rate, from 9.7% to 4.3% of the population. *Bolsa Família* now reaches nearly 14 million households, or 50 million people (around a quarter of the population).[10] In 2011, the programme was scaled up to provide benefits to 162,000 families affected by floods within 10 days.

3 Social protection can support disaster response

The regular administrative and operational systems of social protection programmes can be used during emergencies, with the potential for a quicker, more predictable, more efficient and therefore more effective response. For instance through increasing the value or the duration of an existing cash transfer programme to support existing beneficiaries; adding new beneficiaries to an existing programme; or adjusting the social protection system to re-focus assistance on the groups most vulnerable to the shock.[11]

Existing mechanisms can be used to identify beneficiaries as well as deliver the benefits (e.g. transfers) to provide timely support to communities or households at large scale.

> *In Lesotho, after a combination of erratic weather patterns left 750,000 people food insecure in 2012, the unconditional cash transfer Child Grant Programme both increased the value of payments to existing beneficiaries and expanded the reach to include disaster-affected households that were not beneficiaries. Combining disaster payments with the existing benefits made it to possible to reach those in need quickly, but also ensure the help went to those who needed it most.*[12]

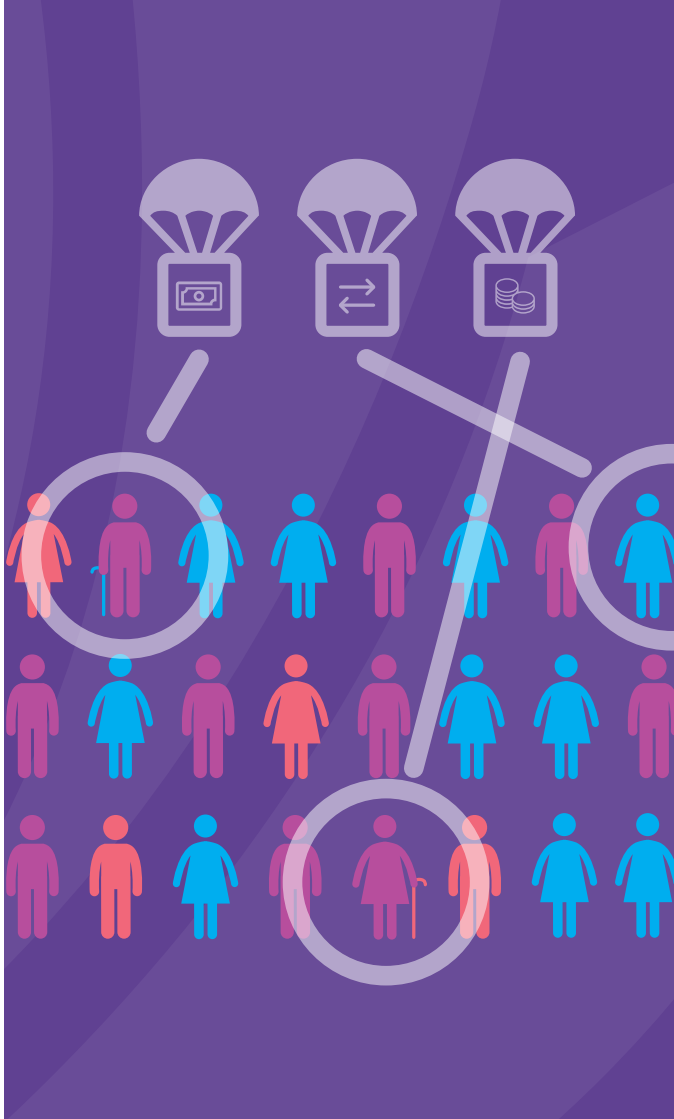


4 Social protection can help better identify and target vulnerable people

Traditionally, beneficiaries of social protection programmes are identified and selected based on an assessment of their socioeconomic vulnerability (such as their income, age, or any disability). When a natural hazard or climate-related shock occurs, these people and others will need help.

Adding targeting criteria based on exposure to climate or natural hazard allows programmes to distinguish people who need support on a long-term basis from those needing it on a temporary basis as a result of a climate shock. By considering climate risk in social protection programmes, it is possible to identify those at risk in advance of a shock and provide transitory support to them when they need it.

> *The Kenya Hunger Safety Net Programme conducted a mass registration of all households – 374,000 in total – in its four counties of operation and provided them with a bank account and a bank card. Chronically poor households – 27% of the total – receive regular bi-monthly cash transfers. The remaining households may receive one-off payments at the same rate when the risk of a shock increases, depending on their geographical area, for each month they are deemed at risk. Payment is triggered automatically by a satellite-based assessment of vegetation conditions that indicates a severe risk of drought.*[13]

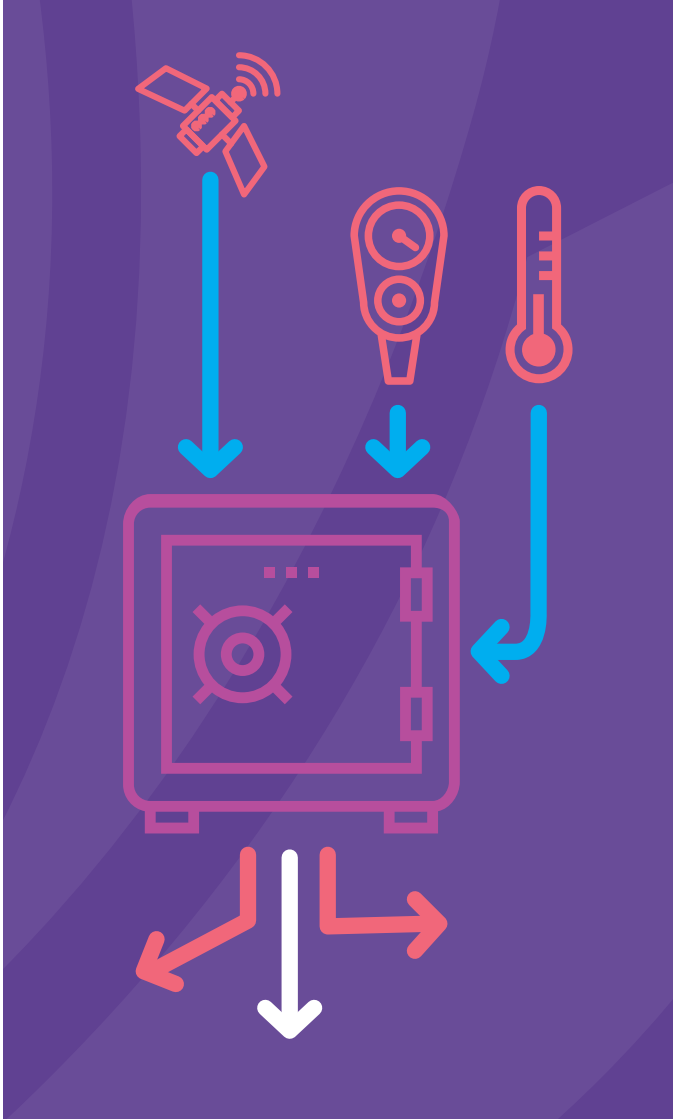


5 Social protection can serve as a platform for early warning and action

The faster support reaches people affected by an extreme event, the less likely they are to resort to negative coping strategies.[14] Even when governments have early warning and contingency financing systems, delayed action still can cause losses of life and livelihood.[15]

An existing social protection system can use its administrative structure to channel support for early action, such as cash transfers to vulnerable people in anticipation of a disaster or as early as possible after it. Coordination between humanitarian and social protection programmes can enable more timely support, especially when contingency funding and a clear plan of action are in place before the emergency.

> *In Ethiopia, the government manages a contingency budget comprising 20% of the annual Productive Safety Net Programme budget. The separate fund of $160 million (USD), based on a donor commitment, establishes a Risk Financing Mechanism for the mobilisation of up to $80 million (USD) each year in additional funds in case of a crisis. These mechanisms are based on an existing early warning system that monitors the situation and triggers the release of funds.*[16]



6 Social protection can offer long-term systems for climate risk management

Social protection programmes are often integrated into national systems for poverty and vulnerability reduction. While many countries have started with a limited number of programmes (e.g. safety nets) around specific goals or target groups, in some cases programmes are evolving and being scaled up into national systems that support the country's development goals.

These systems can be used to address long-term vulnerability to climate risks as well as during emergencies, to enable a more predictable and effective response. This includes more coherent policies and programmes that are better coordinated and aligned, as well as benefits that are better targeted. It can also support more efficient administrative and delivery mechanisms (enrolment, payment and delivery systems).

> *A review of the 10 countries that were the major focus for emergency cash and voucher transfers in the past three years by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection found that approximately two-thirds of countries had a long-term poverty safety net of some kind. "Providing assistance during crises through these systems allows national governments to take responsibility for meeting the needs of their citizens, providing a medium-term exit strategy for humanitarian aid," the review said.*[17]

Image adapted from World Bank (2013). For more, see our Further reading section.

7 Social protection programmes are starting to consider climate risks, but there is still work to be done

While there is growing demand for using social protection as part of an effective system of climate risk management, work needs to be done for better integration. For instance, few social protection programmes act in coordination with climate and disaster risk management agencies, missing out on their expertise to integrate these concerns.[18] Moreover, delivering climate-smart social protection programmes can be challenging if there are no systems in place for identifying populations at risk of climate shocks or funding rapid scale-up of benefits.

More importantly, the coverage of social protection systems remains low, especially in regions were the poor are most exposed to climate-related shocks such as in Asia and Africa.[19]

This highlights the importance of designing programmes that consider preparedness and response capacity from the outset, as well as of collaboration across the humanitarian, climate and disaster risk management and social protection sectors for long term risk reduction and adaptation.

In most countries, poor people are more likely to be affected by disasters. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where most of the global poor live, social safety nets cover one-tenth and one-fifth of the poor, respectively.[20]

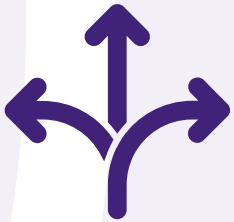
What are the key elements of a climate-smart social protection system?

For social protection systems to anticipate and absorb climate-related risks and shocks, **flexibility**, **scalability** and **sustainability** are key.

They can be achieved by:

- Considering climate and disaster risk when planning and designing social protection programmes
- Linking to early warning systems and contingency mechanisms
- Establishing delivery systems (targeting, registration and payment) that identify, enrol and make transfers quickly to crisis-affected populations
- Setting up a coordination mechanism among ministries and agencies, including institutional capacity
- Ensuring the funding and financing mechanisms are ready to be disbursed as needed

Bolsa Família *provided in-kind and cash benefits to 162,000 families in 279 municipalities, within 10 days of the 2011 floods that ravaged Brazil 2011. It used its registry of beneficiaries and identification cards to identify affected families, disbursing payments through the programme's banking arrangements with branches of the Caixa Econômica Federal. The fact that the programme was already in place sped up the delivery of assistance.*[21]



Flexible ☑

Scalable ☑

Sustainable ☑

What can humanitarian and development practitioners do to support these efforts?

There is growing global and national interest in further understanding and implementing climate risk management through climate-smart social protection systems. Humanitarian and disaster practitioners can engage in and support these efforts by:

- Promoting coordination between social protection, humanitarian and disaster risk reduction thematic areas in governments, donor agencies and civil society (such as on preparedness, early warning, cash transfers, etc.)
- Supporting policies that seek to make humanitarian action more effective by linking them to nationally owned systems such as social protection mechanisms
- Advising on and supporting activities that integrate climate risk management tools such as early warning and forecast-based action into social protection programmes
- Exploring – in collaboration with social protection practitioners – long-term funding and contingency financing mechanisms to ensure a streamlined national system response

Dealing with climate change will require increasing the capacity of systems and individuals to adapt to and bounce back from changes, even when those are not yet fully understood. As part of a system that considers different timescales and magnitudes of risk, social protection can be one of the solutions to build resilience to climate shocks and disasters.

Further reading

DFID shock-responsive social protection systems research: Literature review

Author: OPM, 2016
Type: Literature review
Details: Identifies types of shock, summarises key elements of the three overlapping disciplines, details the conceptualisation of shock-responsive social protection in the literature, sets out a typology of ways that social protection systems might respond to a shock, summarises recent trends in the funding of humanitarian response.

Adaptive social protection: Making concepts a reality

Author: IDS, 2012
Type: Guidance notes for practitioners
Details: Conceptualisation (social protection, climate change, disaster risk reduction, adaptive social protection); barriers to integration among domains (institutional, political, technical); case studies; inventory of toolkits to integrate climate change and disaster risk reduction into development programmes (and more specifically social protection).

Building resilience to disaster and climate change through social protection

Author: World Bank, 2013
Type: Toolkit for practitioners
Details: Provides guidance on preparing social protection programmes and offers examples of good practice and tips to implement and operationalise social protection. Draws on case studies from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Mexico and Pakistan.

How can social protection build resilience? Insights from Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda

Author: Martina Ulrichs and Rachel Slater, 2016
Type: Working paper
Details: This BRACED working paper presents a synthesis of findings from Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda on the role of social protection programmes in contributing to people's capacity to absorb, anticipate and adapt to climate-related shocks and stresses. The paper reflects on the actual and potential contributions social protection can make to increase the resilience of the poorest and most vulnerable.

Endnotes

1. CRED (2016) *2015 Disasters in numbers.* Louvain: CRED.

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5. World Bank (2015) *The state of social safety nets 2015*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

6. De Janvry, A., Finan, F., Sadoulet, E. and Vakis, R. (2006) 'Can conditional cash transfer programs serve as safety nets in keeping children at school and from working when exposed to shocks?' *Journal of Development Economics* 79(2): 349–73.

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8. De Janvry et al. (2006).

9. World Bank (2013). For more, see our Further Reading section.

10. Deborah Wetzel, 2013. 'Bolsa Família: Brazil's Quiet Revolution' in World Bank, November 4, 2013.

11. OPM (2016) *For more, see our Further Reading section.*

12. Niang, O. and Ramirez, B. (2014) 'Using social protection systems to implement emergency cash transfers: The case of Lesotho', *Humanitarian Exchange* 62, September 2014.

13. OPM (2016). For more, see our Further reading section.

14. Hillier, D. and Dempsey, B. (2012) *A dangerous delay: The cost of late response to early warnings in the 2011 drought in the Horn of Africa.* Oxford: Oxfam; WFP (2014) FoodSECuRE (Food Security Climate Resilience Facility): Supporting community resilience-building before and after climatic shocks. Rome: WFP.

15. Parker, D.J., Priest, S.J. and McCarthy, S.S. (2011) 'Surface water flood warnings requirements and potential in England and Wales', *Applied Geography* 31(3): 891–900.

16. OPM (2016). For more, see our Further reading section.

17. Maunder et al. (2015), in OPM (2016) For more, see our Further reading section.

18. World Bank (2013). For more, see our Further Reading section.

19. World Bank (2015).

20. Hallegatte, S. et al. (2016); World Bank (2015).

21. World Bank (2013). For more, see our Further reading section.

The BRACED Knowledge Manager generates evidence and learning on resilience and adaptation in partnership with the BRACED projects and the wider resilience community. It gathers robust evidence of what works to strengthen resilience to climate extremes and disasters, and initiates and supports processes to ensure that evidence is put into use in policy and programmes. The Knowledge Manager also fosters partnerships to amplify the impact of new evidence and learning, in order to significantly improve levels of resilience in poor and vulnerable countries and communities around the world.

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