



Articulating social and environmental policy for post-COVID-19 recovery:

Opportunities to respond and build back better **while leaving no one behind** in Latin America and the Caribbean

POLICY BRIEF

Environmental considerations can be integrated in the response to and recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. **This document presents feasible examples and policy tools that integrate and complement social protection goals with environmental sustainability.**

In fact, **the relationship between poverty and environment has been recognized by the Forum of Ministers of Environment of the region.** Its latest Declaration (Buenos Aires, 2018) reaffirmed its contribution to integrate the environmental dimension in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, therefore, to reduce poverty and inequality.

The increasing pressure on land and natural resources, and the consequent degradation of the environment, along with the impacts of climate change, have severe economic and social repercussions for the poor (UNDP/UNEP, 2017) and **can impede the sustainability of the response and recovery actions related to the COVID-19 crisis in the medium and long terms.** Social protection is a fundamental mechanism to contribute to the full realization of social rights and, therefore, has been recognized as an essential instrument to accelerate the progress towards the SDGs and, in the case of the COVID crisis, is being used by governments as a basic response and recovery mechanism to reach the most vulnerable



In Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of people living in poverty reached 184 million (30.2% of the population), of whom 62 million live in extreme poverty (10.2% of the population) (ECLAC, 2018), and the COVID crisis is pushing this number higher.



As of 2015, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes served one fifth of the region's population –132 million people and 30 million households– with an investment equivalent to 0.33% of regional GDP, or US\$ 153 per capita (ECLAC, 2017).

Currently, countries throughout the region have implemented a set of immediate measures to protect the labor force and household income and to reduce social impact on the poor through subsidies, Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) or advanced payments through ongoing social programmes and protection schemes. Additionally, countries are also designing or implementing monetary, fiscal and social measures to prevent a collapse of the economic system considering, among other measures, the expansion of social protection systems to reach underemployed and self-employed workers, youth, women, children and the elderly (ECLAC, 2020).

The following policy options and examples show concrete solutions for.



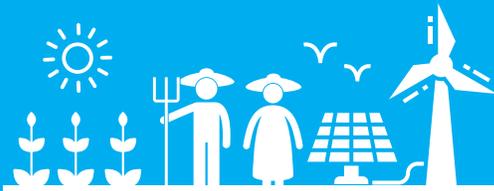
Including the environment in social policies.



Building resilience and adaptation to climate change through social programmes.



Integrating a social equality component in environmental policies.



Linking food security programmes and the environment, to ensure the activation and restorations of sustainable livelihoods.



Beneficiaries of the Microfinance for Ecosystem-based Adaptation (MEbA) project that seeks to provide vulnerable rural and peri-urban populations with access to microfinance products and services that allow them to invest in activities that improve their income, increase their climate resilience and allow them to sustainably use ecosystems and their services. Photo: MEBA - UNEP.

Main policy options

1 Conditional Cash Transfers programmes can include incentives to environmental conservation and sustainable production and consumption at household level.

Social protection must be articulated with other public policies and be a key transformative and redistributive tool to achieve the welfare of all, to protect the most excluded groups and to support a structural transition towards more sustainable economic and development models. For example, CCT programmes can incorporate actions to preserve the natural resource base, on which the population and production depend.

Bolsa Verde in Brazil provided an additional cash transfer or green grant conditioned to the protection of ecosystems to more than 76,000 families living below the poverty line.

Cash for work programmes have supported the creation of jobs in the recycling sector for Venezuela's migrants. Recycling cooperatives are common in several countries of the region and a source of green employment for vulnerable populations when formalized.

2 Environmental policy instruments such as Payment for Environmental Services can improve the quality of life of the rural population while protecting key resources.

Environmental conservation, and sustainable natural resource management initiatives, such as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), can include a pro-poor component to ensure that marginalized and vulnerable populations benefit from them.

· *BANCO₂ engaged 72 private companies to offset their environmental footprint through direct payments to poor families that protect 1,800 Ha. of forest in Colombia.*

· *Quito's Water protection Fund supports activities upstream to restore and plant forests as well as to promote sustainable livelihoods upper basin of the Guayllabamba River and its direct area of influence engaging more than 40.000 leaders, professionals and students.*



3 Countries in the region can adopt social protection policies that generate resilience to disasters and climate change.

Innovative approaches and methods can be useful at the local level to facilitate the integration of adaptation to climate change, risk management and social protection systems, from the small scale of CCTs to large public investments in resilient infrastructure.

· Measuring climate vulnerability at household level allowed to better target the beneficiaries of social programmes in Dominican Republic and reduce the impact of extreme climatic events.

· The Microfinance for Ecosystem based Adaptation (MEBA) have helped to implement practices that build resilience to climate shocks and has so far issued almost 14,000 microcredits in Colombia and Peru.

4 The linkages of social protection systems with food security and sustainable agriculture are key to creating opportunities for a sustainable exit from poverty.

There is ample potential to simultaneously address food security and poverty reduction while limiting impacts on ecosystems. This implies a combined response to social, economic and environmental challenges, in which support for the resilience of the most vulnerable communities must be accompanied with strengthening the rural economy and improving productive capacities.

· The Mexican Special Programme for Food Security integrated an environmental component with 1,200 comprehensive projects for soil conservation and water storage for irrigation, as long as other conservation practices such as terracing and reforestation.

· The Quesungual system in Honduras ensures higher yields of corn (42%) and of beans (38%) and better water use, less fertilizers and 6 times less soil loss than slash-and-burn farm plots, by combining several practices that are environmentally sustainable (no burning, manage stubble, natural regeneration and no tilling the soil, among others).

· Adopting silvopastoral production systems in 2,500 cattle farms associated to FEDEGAN in Colombia have increase water flow (by 72%), reduce soil erosion (by 7 tons/Ha), increase 32% biodiversity and sequestrate 14,000 tons of carbon per year.



Ecosystem-based adaptation demonstration farm (EbA) in Oxapampa, Pasco, Peru. Photo: MEBA - UNEP. Photo: MEBA - UNEP.

UNEP can provide support and solutions to integrate environment in the social response to the crisis and recovery related to COVID19 in all the options described above.

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For more information:

