The state of social protection for
agrifood system workers in West Africa

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Workers in agrifood systems in West Africa[1] face multiple issues that threaten their livelihoods, including economic fragility, conflict, limited access to agrifood production inputs, high mobility, informality, post-harvest losses, and global trade restrictions due to COVID-19 and the Russia–Ukraine conflict. In face of low and irregular incomes, remoteness and marginalisation, many agricultural workers, including fishers, foresters and pastoralists, are prone to additional risks, such as natural disasters and climate change impacts. Social protection can play diverse roles in protecting agrifood system workers, such as protection against shocks and risks they might face, contributing to decent working conditions and enabling and enhancing livelihood strategies and adaptation to climate change. Some specific complementary interventions can also benefit these workers, such as the provision of income-generating activities or linking school feeding programmes to their local production. Nevertheless, social protection coverage in West Africa for these workers is still very low. Despite interesting initiatives, such as in the country cases presented below, social protection mechanisms are still limited.

Overview of the state of social insurance in West Africa
Social insurance mechanisms provide essential protection against many of the risks workers face during their active life. The report, therefore, examines how different types of benefits—across some of the main branches of social insurance, from maternity cash benefits to old-age pensions— reach agrifood system workers and safeguard their rights.

Social insurance in West Africa is marked by low levels of coverage (almost all countries cover fewer than 10 per cent of their population). When looking at the different social insurance mechanisms in the region, certain challenges become apparent, such as legal barriers that exclude informal or self-employed workers, low and irregular income that is not taken into account by the social insurance system, and the lack of access to services and to proper administrative support in rural areas. These challenges tend to explain some of the issues countries face in including agrifood system workers in their social protection mechanisms.

Overview of the state of social assistance in West Africa
Social assistance in West Africa is less advanced than in other parts of the continent. In terms of coverage, the total number of active social assistance programmes operating at a national scale in the region is relatively small. Almost all countries with available data cover fewer than 20 per cent of their population with different types of social assistance programmes. This percentage is higher in rural areas, where most agrifood system workers reside and/or work. As for adequacy,[2] the analysis shows that the average adequacy level of all social assistance programmes per country is 10.3 per cent, with higher levels of adequacy of social assistance transfers recorded in urban areas than rural areas.

With regards to finance, the analysis reveals that average spending on social assistance per country as a percentage of gross domestic expenditures is 0.69 per cent, with eight countries spending less than 1 per cent of their gross domestic expenditures on social assistance. These programmes tend to prioritise particular vulnerable socio-demographic groups, such as older persons, children, or persons with disabilities, who are mostly outside the workforce.

Based on data from socialprotection.org country profiles, the UNDP social assistance database and World Bank reports, a total of 40 social assistance programmes[3] that are currently being implemented by governments in West Africa were mapped. Among these programmes, the main types of social assistance are cash transfers (conditional and unconditional) and public works. Moreover, the assessment reveals that 33 of the 40 social assistance programmes mapped target rural and poor areas, and thus possibly agrifood system workers. Only nine programmes explicitly target agrifood system workers. Although they are not necessarily the intended beneficiaries of most of the programmes, more than half of the programmes include at least one benefit feature that might be deemed relevant for agrifood system workers.

Case studies
The report also presents five country case studies in West Africa that address the barriers faced by agrifood system workers to join social assistance programmes and social insurance schemes:

- Ghana's Labour-Intensive Public Works, Mali's Safety Net Programme *Jigisemejiri* and Senegal's National Programme of Family Security Grants (*Programme National de Bourses de Sécurité Familiale*) extend forms of social assistance to rural areas and agrifood system workers;

- Côte d'Ivoire is currently undergoing a major extension of its social insurance and health care mechanisms, targeting rural areas and workers who were not previously included; and

- Cabo Verde has a two-pronged approach, including a social pension for poor and vulnerable individuals and extending its social insurance scheme to independent workers.

Reference:
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Notes:
1. Fifteen countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.
2. The World Bank ASPIRE dataset calculates the adequacy of social assistance programme benefits using the amount of the transfer, divided by the total income or consumption of beneficiaries.
3. Subsidies are not included.