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# Social protection response to COVID-19 in rural LAC: Social and economic double inclusion<sup>1</sup>

*Camila Rolon, Beatriz Burattini, Lucas Sato, Victor Thives, Louisa Wagner and Nicole Figueiredo, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and Arniela Rénique and Mauricio Mireles, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-RLC)*

## Abstract

This policy brief reflects on how to improve social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean after the COVID-19 pandemic, analysing how it can ensure food security and social and economic 'double inclusion'. In particular, it provides a regional overview of the social protection measures to respond to COVID-19 in rural areas, and analyses four country-level examples that show promising features for building back better during the recovery process. Finally, it delivers policy recommendations to enhance the design and implementation of rural social protection schemes to protect rural households' food security and enable their 'double inclusion'.

## 1 Introduction

The prevalence of food insecurity was high and rising in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) before the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, 225.8 million people suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity, corresponding to 31.9 per cent of the region's population (FAO n.d.). Rates of poverty, one of the main drivers of food insecurity, were also high, especially in rural areas, at 45.7 per cent in 2019, compared to 26.9 per cent in urban areas (ECLAC 2021). Data published in 2015 stated that 80 per cent of people in LAC who suffer from food insecurity live in rural areas (FAO et al. 2020).

This results from vulnerabilities and risks that rural populations in LAC are exposed to (FAO 2018). LAC's rural working-age population tends to work informally in precarious working conditions and with low earnings (76.3 per cent of rural workers were informal in 2019) (ILO 2021). Most of the people living in poverty in rural LAC work in agriculture, with those living in extreme poverty primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture (FAO 2020b). Family farmers are especially vulnerable, as they might lack access to land, inputs, human capital and credit, hampering their productivity. Moreover, other population groups, such as women, indigenous populations and afro-descendants, are extremely vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity in rural environments (FAO et al. 2020).

The seasonality of agricultural work, making it an unstable source of income, further hinders rural households' ability to meet their food consumption needs all year round (FAO 2019a). Agricultural activities depend heavily on the climate, natural resources and ecosystems, thus they are more exposed to climate shocks (FAO 2016a). Since poor people living in rural areas tend to live in ecologically fragile areas and depend on natural resources, their vulnerability to such events is greater (FAO 2018).

The rural population engaged in food production is fundamental to food security. Small farmers, who comprise most of the rural population living in poverty, provide up to 80 per cent of food consumed in low- and middle-income countries. Hence, it is crucial to support small-scale food producers to guarantee sustainable production (UNHCR 2020). To enhance food systems and food insecurity, the resilience of those who are vulnerable to climate and economic shocks must be strengthened, and rural poverty and inequality tackled. It is, thus, imperative to address vulnerable populations' risks, increase their access to productive resources and improve their integration into food chains, financial systems and social networks (FAO et al. 2021).

However, despite the risks people in rural areas face, the majority are not adequately covered by social protection systems. In 2019, only 21.4 per cent of the rural population was affiliated with a pension system (ECLAC 2021). This is mainly due to barriers in accessing social protection, such as population dispersion, legal obstacles and a lack of contributory capacity and access to services (Rossi and Faret 2019; Allieu and Ocampo 2019). It is also necessary to ensure the adequacy of the benefits to rural realities, ensuring their sufficiency to mitigate rural vulnerabilities and risks while promoting social and economic 'double inclusion' (FAO 2018) and enhancing synergies between social protection policies and inclusive rural production. This is even more important after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively impacted rural populations and national food systems.

## 1.1 Impacts of COVID-19

The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing drivers of food insecurity, especially among people living in poverty, women and children (FAO et al. 2021). As economies contracted in 2020, rural poverty in LAC increased from 52 million to 58 million people, while food prices increased by 16 per cent (ECLAC 2021; FAO et al. 2021). Consequently, LAC witnessed the sharpest increase in severe and moderate food insecurity in the world between 2019 and 2020: 9 percentage points, the equivalent of an additional 60.2 million people. Now, about 40 per cent of the Latin American and 71.3 per cent of the Caribbean populations are food insecure (FAO et al. 2021).

COVID-19 has accentuated rural populations' vulnerabilities and caused disruptions in food value chains, resulting in income and livelihoods losses for agricultural workers, especially informal ones. In five LAC countries, after one year of the pandemic, 84 per cent of surveyed family farmers noticed a drop in their income (Salazar et al. 2021). Restrictions imposed to contain the virus negatively affected seasonal migrant work and other agricultural activities where working from a home office is not an option. Most agricultural workers were unprotected by social insurance during the COVID-19 crisis, as 85.7 per cent of them are informal (Quicaña 2020). The pandemic also resulted in the closure of street and local markets, where most small agricultural producers sell their produce, thus diminishing demand. This led to food shortages and losses, resulting in negative impacts on their productive capacities and income, and also hindered people's access to local and fresh food (FAO 2020a). Therefore, disruptions in the food systems caused by COVID-19 affected both food demand and supply. This, in turn, affected the food security of the population—especially rural communities, who depend on food systems not only for consumption but also for their livelihoods.

Therefore, this policy brief reflects on how to improve social protection systems in LAC after the pandemic. It studies the regional social protection response to COVID-19 and analyses country-level examples that show promising features for promoting an agenda for social and economic 'double inclusion' (FAO, 2018). Based on this analysis, it recommends measures to build rural social protection back better.

## 1.2 Ensuring rural double inclusion through social protection

Social protection has the potential to guarantee rural populations' ability to participate in society—their social inclusion (O'Shea et al. 2015)—and, simultaneously, promote their economic inclusion. The combination of the two is called 'double inclusion', and the role of social protection in achieving it is explained below.

### *The role of social protection in supporting economic inclusion*

The concept of economic inclusion refers to a process composed of mechanisms that "enhance the income-generation capacity of the poor, or marginalized individuals within non-poor households, addressing social, environmental and productive constraints in a sustainable manner, to ensure a certain level and stability in income sources, out of poverty" (FAO 2020b, 4). Economic inclusion involves a broader, rights-based approach to include productive and other economic support, focusing on the system, individuals and households, and it is closely intertwined with social dimensions (FAO 2019a).

In addition to its social impacts, social protection may enhance the economic and productive capacity of the poorest and most vulnerable. In particular, cash transfers can support the ownership of assets, promote investment in productive activities, improve risk management and empower rural communities (FAO 2017). Evidence also shows that households participating in cash transfer programmes diversify their income-generating activities. The additional income releases liquidity constraints and allows for better labour allocation, which in turn allows households to increase and diversify their engagement in non-farm businesses (FAO 2020b).

### *Designing and implementing social protection programmes for double inclusion*

Social protection fosters double inclusion by addressing poverty and vulnerability through income support, investment in productive capacity and human capabilities, and promoting rights and access to services (Babajanian 2013). Social protection programmes devised from an inclusion perspective can secure market-based employment opportunities for socially excluded groups (Koehler 2021).

Nevertheless, social protection programmes alone are not enough to ensure the double inclusion of rural communities living in poverty. They must be implemented in tandem with policies from other sectors, such as agriculture, natural resource management and finance. Coherence and coordination improve the effectiveness and efficiency of social protection and agricultural programmes, when considered from the political to the operational level (Daidone, Rossi, and Soares 2018). Adequate social protection—and its synergies with sectoral policies—is a precondition for the success of ambitious economic reactivation and inclusion policies. Furthermore, sectoral emergency-responsive productive policies can have 'protective' effects on rural populations, which would be more efficient and effective when articulated with integral social protection responses (FAO 2016b).

This can be done through three main approaches. First, **a single intervention can address multiple needs** at the same time, such as social protection programmes that are coherent with the agricultural livelihoods of their beneficiaries. Another way of achieving this coherence is through **multiple integrated interventions combining different components**, such as social protection programmes that incorporate productive elements to increase and diversify their livelihoods (a Cash+ programme, for example). Finally, **different programmes can also be implemented in synergy**, meaning they are different interventions that can reach the same target group but provide complementary interventions (FAO 2016b). To successfully build coherence between social protection and double inclusion, it is also necessary to ensure that there is an enabling environment, including:

- political commitment;
- policy architecture that allows for a joint role of social protection and productive sectors;
- institutional coordination capacity;
- strong financing arrangements between the articulated sectors; and
- dedicated staff responsible for implementing the policies with the required skills (FAO 2016b).

## 2 Methodology

To reach the objectives outlined in the introduction, this policy brief analyses LAC's good practices in linking social protection and economic inclusion to ensure rural food security. The methodology outlined in Box 1 was applied in all three policy briefs comprising this series.

Based on this methodology, the following programmes were selected for analysis. None of these programmes were implemented without any problems, and the authors allowed positive or interesting factors to

compensate for the lack of correspondence with some selection criteria.

- Argentina: Critical and Direct Assistance Programme for Family, Peasant and Indigenous Agriculture (PACyD)
- Belize: Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC)
- Mexico: *Bienpesca*
- Panama: *Plan Panamá Agro Solidario*.

### BOX 1

#### Methodology for case study selection and analysis

An initial pool of programmes that targeted rural populations and addressed food security or production during the COVID-19 pandemic was selected based on a mapping of social protection responses to the pandemic conducted by the IPC-IG (2021). This mapping contains adapted social protection programmes and new measures created specifically to respond to COVID-19 that were implemented by governments of low- and middle-income countries up to July 2021

While this mapping does not discriminate by ministry, measures by ministries not typically associated with social protection may have been overlooked. Thus, based on the literature and discussions with the FAO, the sample for case study selection was adapted to include interventions that combined social protection for food security with economic inclusion.

The final step to select the case studies entailed the definition of the following selection criteria based on which the programmes were evaluated:

- Explicitly targeting vulnerable groups within the rural population
- Sustainability of the programme:
  - Prioritisation of programmes funded by domestic resources
  - Preferably linked to existing social, farmers' or beneficiary registries
  - Priority given to programmes that already existed before the pandemic, and to programmes created during the pandemic with the goal of remaining after it
- Government-led implementation was compulsory, but the responsible line ministry was not a selection criterion. Programmes with too many reported implementation issues were excluded. For that, we considered the following:
  - Programmes with low coverage rates (less than half) of target groups during the pandemic were avoided, but not necessarily excluded.
  - The suitability of benefits was only considered for cash benefits, where the value of the benefit in relation to the minimum wage or the national poverty line could be estimated by the authors.
  - News reports about implementation issues were also considered, although positive factors could outweigh some of the problems encountered.
- Case studies ideally covering LAC's different sub-regions
- Availability of information

The analysis of the selected programmes was based on a desk review of official public documents, as well as semi-structured interviews triangulated with relevant secondary literature. The interviewees were officials responsible for devising and implementing the programmes, researchers or FAO country office experts. Through their responses, the case studies' planning and implementation phases, factors pertaining to political will, and the programmes' success, obstacles and future plans were investigated. Our analysis of the interviews and secondary data considered how local particularities may have impacted the programmes, by including questions about this matter in the interviews and comparing country responses.

Note that interviewees' willingness and ability to elaborate on more controversial aspects of these programmes was a limitation. Related to this, their answers may have been biased towards pointing to programmes' successes, given their relationships with the respective governments. For programmes implemented during the pandemic, no impact evaluations could be considered to overcome this bias, as they are too recent. Finally, some interpretation was needed to clearly identify interviewees' main points.

### 3 Findings

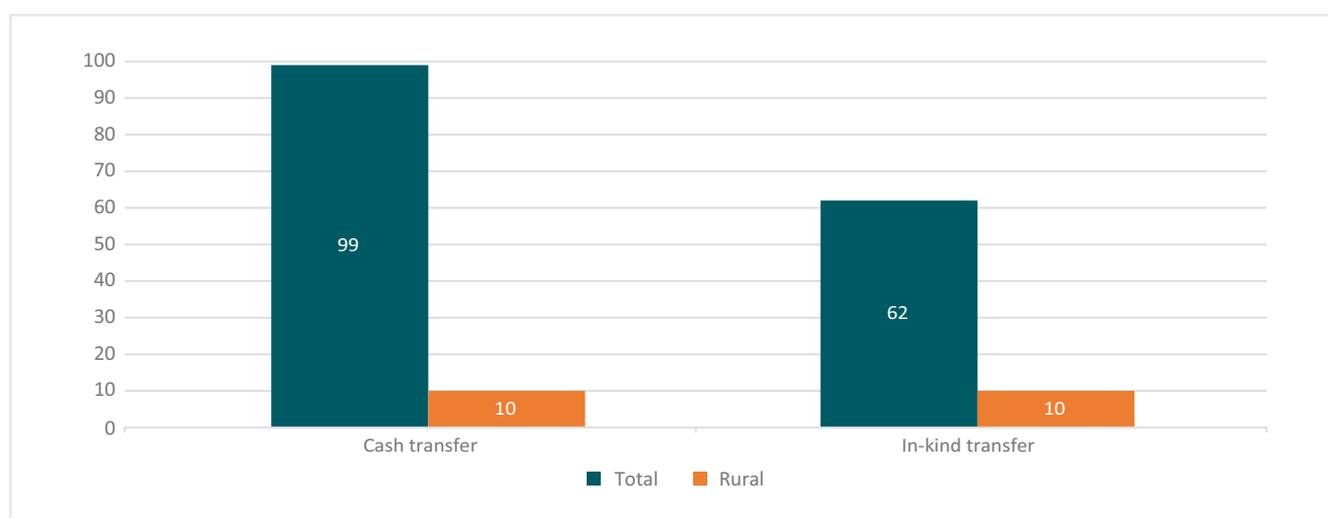
#### 3.1 Social protection responses to COVID-19 in LAC

This subsection is based solely on the IPC-IG 'Mapping of Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in the Global South',<sup>2</sup> and examines social assistance, social insurance and labour market measures. It takes a shock-responsive perspective, considering programmes that were **horizontally or vertically expanded or operationally adapted**<sup>3</sup> to function during the pandemic. In LAC, this mapping identified 413 social protection responses in 37 countries and territories.<sup>4</sup> Among them, we identified which of the interventions could address disruptions of supply and demand in food systems, and, consequently, enhance households' resilience to shocks. The social protection measures identified mainly addressed disruptions to food demand but rarely food supply, and only a minority targeted rural people explicitly (IPC-IG 2021). This is addressed in further detail below.

The COVID-19 crisis had negative impacts on **food demand**, due to the reduction in purchasing power, increased prices, and changes in food consumption caused by the income reduction experienced by many households (ECLAC and FAO 2020). To mitigate these effects in LAC, school feeding programmes were maintained despite school closures (24 programmes), and other in-kind food transfers were adapted or created (38 programmes). Further, the mapping identified 99 cash transfers. **Only 10 per cent of the cash transfers explicitly targeted rural households, and only 16 per cent of the in-kind transfers either focused on rural populations or required purchasing part of the food from family farmers** (Figure 1). Note that general social protection programmes do not necessarily exclude rural communities. Social assistance in particular is likely to cover rural areas due to their high poverty rates. However, general programmes may overlook the specific socio-economic vulnerabilities of rural populations.

**FIGURE 1**

Number of cash and in-kind transfers explicitly targeting rural people and those targeting the general population



Source: Authors' elaboration based on IPC-IG (2021).

Programmes focused on **food supply** address barriers to access inputs and working capital for food production, such as by distributing inputs and offering credit to affected producers (ECLAC and FAO 2020). Cash transfers can also have a positive effect on food supply when targeted at rural communities, by enabling resources to be invested in production, as rural households can be both consumers and producers (ibid.). The mapping did not identify any cash transfers explicitly targeting rural communities with that approach, however. Further, **only seven of all the measures implemented in LAC focused on farmers and food production**, suggesting that little attention was paid to the needs of rural producers during the pandemic. Four of these measures entailed cash support to keep businesses running, while the others included payroll and wage subsidies,<sup>5</sup> subsidised credit and training. Further, the design and implementation of the programmes explicitly focused on the rural population lacked a gender and intercultural approach. **Only one programme specifically targeted female farmers, and just three explicitly targeted indigenous peoples.**

In the following sections, four good practices of social and economic double inclusion are presented. They are intended to provide relevant lessons to enhance the design and implementation of adapted social protection schemes to enable socio-economic inclusion and strengthen rural households' resilience to future emergencies.

Recalling the limitations of the study undertaken by IPC-IG (2021) highlighted in Section 2, after finding a limited number of social protection responses focused on rural areas, we expanded our research to programmes that may have been overlooked due to their implementation by institutions not typically associated with social protection. Both the PACyD and the *Plan Panamá Agro Solidario* were identified as good practices but were not originally included in IPC-IG (2021). Based on the findings from this policy brief series, the IPC-IG aims to update its COVID-19 response mapping.

#### 3.2 Argentina: PACyD

The PACyD was created and implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic and will remain in place after the crisis (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1**

Programme information: PACyD

<b>Goal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aid family, peasant and indigenous agriculture (AFCI) producers whose production is at risk due to shocks such as climate-related disasters, critical social situations or fortuitous individual or collective building events</li> <li>• Improve their quality of life and mitigate losses resulting from negative shocks</li> <li>• Promote, support and strengthen their social and cultural inclusion</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation year</b>	2020
<b>Implementing institution</b>	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fishing
<b>Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-refundable and non-contributory financial support (cash); or</li> <li>• Delivery of inputs</li> </ul>
<b>Value and frequency of the benefit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-off benefit granted on request, not available again within six months</li> <li>• The value of the financial support or the inputs is defined by the Secretaría de Agricultura Familiar, Campesina e Indígena (SAFCE) on a case-by-case basis and cannot exceed ARS100,000 (USD3,008 purchasing power parity—PPP) per family farming nucleus (NAF).<sup>6</sup> In the case of associations and cooperatives, it cannot exceed an amount that is greater than the maximum amount for individual cases for the number of signatories, with a total limit of ARS2.5 million (USD 75,204).</li> </ul>
<b>Targeting mechanisms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Categorical</li> <li>• Means-testing (to define the amount awarded to the beneficiary, their income is assessed to determine whether it is below the national poverty line)</li> </ul>
<b>Target group</b>	Small APCI producers, associations, cooperatives and indigenous peoples
<b>Eligibility criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registered in the National Family Agriculture Registry (RENAF)<sup>7</sup></li> <li>• Membership of an APCI household or organisation</li> <li>• The emergency must be jeopardising the current production cycle</li> <li>• Prioritisation of NAFs living below the national poverty line and owned by women</li> </ul>
<b>Coverage</b>	No data
<b>Expenditure</b>	ARS30 million (USD902,443.17 PPP) in 2020 (fixed annual budget for the PACyD's first year)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Government of Argentina (2020); Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Pesca (2020); and Bohl (2021).

### *PACyD and disruptions to the food system*

By targeting APCI producers, the PACyD focuses on a sector of agriculture that encompasses 25 per cent of Argentina's productive lands and those who were most affected by COVID-19. Further, 52 per cent of Argentina's family farmers live below the national poverty line (Government of Argentina 2020). By receiving financial support or productive inputs after shocks, these farmers may be more likely to maintain their food production. Consequently, this may allow them to sustain their income and livelihood strategies.

By remaining in place after the pandemic, the PACyD has the potential to protect APCI farmers from risks that are specific to agricultural work, such as climate-related shocks. The impacts of a drought and wildfires in Argentina were highlighted as additional challenges faced by farmers during the interview with Bohl (2021). A shock-responsive programme tailored to these risks is, therefore, necessary to guarantee that farmers can maintain food production for their own consumption and for Argentina's food supply, and to ensure that they feel secure enough to invest in their productive capacity in periods without shocks.

### *PACyD and double inclusion*

The PACyD's role in supporting food production highlights the programme's potential to ensure the economic inclusion of APCI producers. Additional features of this programme further support this group's double inclusion.

### **The involvement of farmers' associations in the PACyD may enhance APCI producers' social inclusion.**

Family farmers' organisations are well organised in Argentina, and have a lot of strength to lobby for and implement public policies that reach the population in remote territories (Bohl 2021). By including these organisations in programme design, the PACyD potentially offers family farmers more representation in policymaking, which may support their social inclusion as they gain access to political decision-making. Consequently, this social inclusion may translate into programmes more suited to APCI producers' needs, potentially further supporting their economic inclusion.

### **The PACyD may also support the double inclusion of farmers through coordination with other social protection and economic inclusion programmes, primarily through its link with the RENAF.**

Once registered, producers have access to other programmes such as subsidised credit lines, the Programme for the Promotion of Local Labour, Rootedness and Supply (PROTAAL),<sup>8</sup> support with opening bank accounts, a micro, small and medium-sized enterprise certificate,<sup>9</sup> and rights exclusively for APCI producers, such as the allocation of land to family farmers (Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Pesca n.d.). **PACyD beneficiaries can also register for the social monotax, which allows farmers to contribute to social security free of charge:** half of the contribution is paid by the Ministry of Social Development, and the other half by the Ministry of Agriculture

(Government of Argentina 2019). Note that the RENAF is designed to consider Argentina's cultural diversity, potentially contributing further to social inclusion (Bohl 2021).

### 3.3 Belize: CERC

The **CERC** is a component of the Climate Resilient Infrastructure Project (CRIP), a Government of Belize programme created in 2014 and funded by the World Bank. The CRIP aims to enhance the resilience of road infrastructure against flood and impacts of climate change and to improve Belize's capacity to respond promptly and effectively to an emergency (World Bank 2020a). Normally, USD1 million of the CRIP's total budget of USD30 million is committed to the CERC, but the government can request funds to cover emergency responses. During the COVID-19 pandemic,

the government asked to trigger the CERC, and USD19.5 million was reallocated from the CRIP. Different government ministries submitted proposals to qualify for funding, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise (MAFSE) and the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (MHDFIPA) were selected to implement programmes under the CERC (Pascual and Novelo 2021; Butler 2021). The MAFSE's intervention was selected for further analysis in this policy brief<sup>10</sup> (see Table 2). The MHDFIPA's component consisted of a vertical expansion of the existing cash transfer programme, Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation (BOOST), to 3,016 households, and its horizontal expansion to an additional 10,500 households through the Belize COVID-19 Cash Transfer Program (BCCAT) emergency cash transfer (World Bank 2020b).

**TABLE 2**

Programme information: CERC (MAFSE)

<b>Goal</b>	Assistance to farmers impacted by COVID-19 and by the 2019 drought
<b>Implementation year</b>	2020 (activation)
<b>Implementing institution</b>	MAFSE in partnership with the World Bank
<b>Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compensation to farmers affected by market contraction (voucher for productive inputs)</li> <li>• Voucher for post-harvest management inputs (harvesting crates, wash tubs, vegetable sorting and grading equipment, heavy-duty scales)</li> <li>• Compensation to farmers affected simultaneously by COVID-19 and drought (direct cash assistance)</li> <li>• Support to farmers affected by drought (voucher for productive inputs)</li> <li>• Technical assistance and capacity-building for the coordinating team</li> </ul>
<b>Value and frequency of the benefit</b>	<p>Vouchers and cash transfer were one-off benefits.</p> <p>Voucher values per farmer varied by component (1, 2 and 4), type of production and size of production. If a farmer has more than one type of production, they receive a voucher for each. Average voucher sizes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Component 1: USD727.67</li> <li>• Component 2: USD265.98</li> <li>• Component 4: USD440.35</li> </ul> <p>Vouchers can be redeemed at pre-selected suppliers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Component 3: USD250 per farmer</li> </ul>
<b>Targeting mechanisms</b>	<p>Categorical</p> <p>Means-testing: for some components and commodities, the farmer's financial loss was assessed</p> <p>Geographical: for some components, the farmer's location was also considered</p>
<b>Target group</b>	<p>Family farmers registered in the Belize Agricultural Information Management System (BAIMS) whose commodities contribute to food security and socio-economic development and suffered losses during the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>All components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registered in the BAIMS until May 2021</li> </ul> <p>Component 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producers of commercial poultry, dairy, cattle, pigs, sheep, shrimp, pulses, grains, beans and rice</li> <li>• Farmers from Stann Creek and Toledo who produce cabbages, melons, onions, potatoes, sweet peppers or corn, and tomatoes</li> <li>• Severely affected by COVID-19</li> </ul> <p>Component 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vegetable producers and agricultural cooperatives (small farmer groups)</li> <li>• Involved in consolidation, packing and distribution</li> </ul> <p>Component 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female farmers</li> <li>• Male farmers cultivating 20 acres of land or less</li> </ul> <p>Component 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers operating in Cayo, Belize, Orange Walk and Corozal districts</li> <li>• Producers of sugar cane and vegetables</li> <li>• Severely impacted by the prolonged 2019 drought</li> </ul>
<b>Coverage</b>	Around 10,000 farmers (nationally)
<b>Expenditure</b>	USD8 million allocated to the agriculture component of the CERC

Source: Author's elaboration based on World Bank (2020a; 2020b); Pascual and Novelo (2021); and Butler (2021).

### CERC and disruptions to the food system

The MAFSE's component of CERC potentially ensured the continuation of Belize's food production. Through the vouchers, farmers could purchase an array of production inputs. To select the products available with these vouchers, the Government of Belize consulted the private sector for their assessment of producers' needs. Interviewees reported that food production rebounded. Notably, the CERC also supported large-scale producers; therefore, they may have played an important role in this. In fact, it was due to the World Bank's suggestion that smallholders were included in the programme (Pascual and Novelo 2021).

Further, the cash transfer component—also promoted by the World Bank—allowed more vulnerable farmers, such as women and small producers, to use the benefit for water, electricity or health bills or food, potentially supporting their food security. However, note that the definition of farmers in the BAIMS excludes particularly small producers likely to be involved in subsistence farming. Therefore, the MAFSE's component of the CERC probably excluded subsistence farmers. The MHDFIPA's component, on the other hand, prioritises rural and indigenous communities, despite also targeting the urban population. The BCCAT, therefore, may have supported food production and consumption among more vulnerable subsistence farmers and other segments of the more vulnerable rural population (Butler 2021).

### CERC and double inclusion

The CERC promoted double inclusion through the combination of benefits and through the engagement

of two ministries focused, respectively, on economic and social inclusion.

The above-mentioned role of the MAFSE's CERC component for food production is one way in which it can promote economic inclusion of smallholders, even though it does not apply to the smallest—probably subsistence—producers (Pascual and Novelo 2021). If the CERC were a permanent programme, it could support the double inclusion of its beneficiaries in a similar manner to the PACyD: insuring farmers against risks and, consequently, allowing them to invest in their productive capacity more securely, and by potentially preventing female and small farmers who receive the cash component from falling into poverty after shocks.

With BOOST and the BCCAT, the MHDFIPA prioritised social inclusion, as it aimed to protect the more vulnerable segments of the urban and rural population from falling into poverty (Butler 2021). Nevertheless, it is notable that the two components of the CERC are not linked, and there was no data cross-checking between them. Thus, while the MHDFIPA's cash transfers may have reached the subsistence farmers and indigenous communities excluded from the MAFSE, there was no mechanism in place to guarantee that those outside the BAIMS were automatically eligible for BOOST or the BCCAT.

### 3.4 Mexico: *Bienpesca*

**Bienpesca** is a component of the Programme for the Promotion of Agriculture, Livestock, Fishing and Aquaculture (PFAGPA) (Government of Mexico 2019; 2020a; 2020b; Flores 2021). It aims to mitigate the effects of shocks and of national fishing bans on fishers (see Table 3).

**TABLE 3**

Programme information: *Bienpesca*

<b>Goal</b>	To promote fishing and aquaculture activity for small fisheries and aquaculture producers to increase their production, improve their welfare conditions and help with food self-sufficiency
<b>Implementation year</b>	2019
<b>Implementing institution</b>	Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development
<b>Components</b>	Cash transfer
<b>Value and frequency of the benefit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is activated whenever there is an adverse situation affecting the beneficiaries</li> <li>MXN7,200 (USD673.08 PPP) per beneficiary</li> </ul>
<b>Targeting mechanisms</b>	Categorical
<b>Targeted group</b>	Small fishers and/or aquaculture producers registered in the Register of Fisheries and Aquaculture Producers
<b>Eligibility criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A natural person (no legal person allowed)</li> <li>Registered in the Registry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Producers; or</li> <li>Work under the protection of a concession title or valid fishing or aquaculture permit; or</li> <li>Be in the process of extension; or</li> <li>Have registered production through arrival notices or harvest; or</li> <li>Registered in any Comisión Nacional de Acuicultura y Pesca (CONAPESCA) programme for the legal formalisation of fishing and/or fishing or aquaculture management</li> </ul>
<b>Coverage</b>	Horizontal expansion during the pandemic: 201,436 fishers in 2021, up from 50,094 in 2019
<b>Expenditure</b>	MXN1.436 billion (USD134 million PPP) in 2020

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Government of Mexico (2020b); Flores (2021); Ministerio de Hacienda (2021); and Secretaría de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural (2020).

### *Bienpesca and disruptions to the food system*

*Bienpesca* provides income to fishers when they are not able to earn it (solely) through work. This income can be used to maintain food consumption and, consequently, allows them and their families to avoid negative coping mechanisms, such as reducing food consumption or consuming food of lower nutritional quality. The benefit is transferred through the state-owned bank Banco del Bienestar via an electronic card that is distributed to all beneficiaries. This card can be used to purchase food at establishments such as supermarkets, restaurants and convenience stores (Comisión Nacional de Acuicultura y Pesca 2021).

During national fishing bans, it seems unlikely that this programme would guarantee food production through fishing. However, during other shocks, such as the pandemic, *Bienpesca* may ensure that fishers can make at least some of the necessary investments to maintain their activity either for subsistence or the market.

### *Bienpesca and double inclusion*

In LAC, fisheries and aquaculture generate 1.4 million direct jobs, and 6.3 million people depend directly or indirectly on this sector, but they are extremely vulnerable. Fishing is also greatly impacted by climate change and natural disasters, decreasing fishery resources and losses in production. This reduces the food security of families dependent on this activity. Fishers also work under precarious hygiene, health and safety conditions, and have limited access to pensions and health services. They work mostly informally, earning low incomes, resulting in a high incidence of poverty (FAO 2019b). This population was one of the most severely affected by the pandemic due to changes in consumer demand, decreases

in fresh fish prices and the cessation of fishing operations (ibid.). COVID-19 also caused disruptions to storage and transportation that affected perishable foods such as fish (ECLAC and FAO 2020). Thus, *Bienpesca* stands out as one of few regional examples of social protection measures targeting this particularly vulnerable rural subpopulation.

The programme's primary contribution to double inclusion is by being tailored to the specific characteristics of fishers' livelihoods. Fishing bans and the unpredictability of the fishing sector are examples of what rural social protection must consider. Like the PACyD, *Bienpesca* can potentially insure its beneficiaries. During the fishing season, this may allow fishers to use their income to invest in their well-being and productivity, instead of saving to prepare for potential fishing bans or shocks. These investments may also—albeit not single-handedly—support small-scale fishers in overcoming barriers to access to markets (FAO 2019b).

Further, the use of the bank cards mentioned above contributes to fishers' financial inclusion, as it is common for rural populations living in poverty to lack access to the banking system (Comisión Nacional de Acuicultura y Pesca 2021).

### 3.5 Panama: *Plan Panamá Agro Solidario*

The ***Plan Panamá Agro Solidario*** (Table 4) was created and implemented during the pandemic to encompass all public-sector agricultural interventions supporting small producers. It included two programmes focused on small producers: the *Programa Agro Solidario* and the *Programa Agro Vida*. The latter is also linked to the *Plan Colmena*—a government strategy to deliver public services in regions with higher multidimensional poverty (González 2021b).

**TABLE 4**

Programme information: *Plan Panamá Agro Solidario*

<b>Goal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Agro Solidario</i>: Enhancement of productive facilities and cultivation of pasture</li> <li>• <i>Agro Vida</i>: To equip subsistence farmers with inputs to plant enough and guarantee their food security, increase productivity and profit, decrease production costs and increase crop quality</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation year</b>	2020
<b>Implementing agency</b>	Ministry of Agricultural Development; and for <i>Agro Solidario</i> , the Agricultural Development Bank
<b>Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Agro Solidario</i>: credit</li> <li>• <i>Agro Vida</i>: distribution of tools, seeds, basic grains and other agricultural inputs, and technical assistance</li> </ul>
<b>Value and frequency of the benefit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Agro Solidario</i>: loans of up to PAB100,000 (USD211,572.23 PPP) with 0 per cent interest rate; up to PAB50,000 (USD105,786.12) for artisanal fishers</li> <li>• <i>Agro Vida</i>: tools (machetes, coa and hoes), seeds, basic grains (rice, corn, beans, pigeon peas), roots, tubers (yam, yucca, otoo, ñampi, pumpkin, sweet potato) and other inputs (compost, fungicide, insecticide)</li> </ul>
<b>Targeting mechanisms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Categorical</li> <li>• Geographical: for <i>Agro Vida</i>, only farmers living in the areas prioritised by the Plan Colmena are eligible</li> </ul>
<b>Targeted group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Agro Solidario</i>: agricultural producers, including small and medium-sized enterprises</li> <li>• <i>Agro Vida</i>: subsistence farmers</li> </ul>
<b>Eligibility criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Agro Solidario</i>: producers in the agricultural, livestock and aquaculture sector</li> <li>• <i>Agro Vida</i>: family farmers living in the areas targeted by the Plan Colmena<sup>11</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Coverage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Agro Solidario</i>: 1,106 loans approved up to December 2020</li> <li>• <i>Agro Vida</i>: 30,000 families reached</li> </ul>
<b>Expenditure</b>	<p><i>Agro Solidario</i>: USD300 million from the Inter-American Development Bank</p> <p><i>Agro Vida</i>: USD3 million from the Fondo Especial de Compensación de Intereses</p>

Source: Authors' elaboration based on González (2021a); Rognoni and Frías (2021); Government of Panama (2020a; 2020b; 2020c); Ministerio de Desarrollo Agropecuario (2020); Banco de Desarrollo Agropecuario (n.d.); and SERTV (2020a; 2020b).

### *Plan Panamá Agro Solidario and disruptions to the food system*

The loans from *Agro Solidario* may have supported small and medium-sized producers to access capital to maintain their production during the pandemic despite income losses. This may have ensured their food production and, consequently, part of Panama's food supply. *Agro Vida*, in turn, may have supported food production by providing essential agricultural inputs and technical assistance as required. Given that the target population of *Agro Vida* were subsistence farmers, its support to food production may also have protected these farmers' food consumption (González 2021b).

### *Plan Panamá Agro Solidario and rural double inclusion*

*Agro Solidario's* above-mentioned contributions to food production are not its only contributions to economic inclusion. The Ministry of Agricultural Development also promoted the economic inclusion of small farmers by:

- developing a new payment mechanism for small producers, which involved less bureaucracy and ensured faster payment;
- developing a risk matrix to identify the barriers to markets faced by small producers; and
- organising collection points where products were packed for commercialisation (Rognoni and Frías 2021).

In addition to *Agro Vida's* support for food production, its technical assistance may have supporting beneficiaries' economic inclusion by enhancing their human capital. Further, as it is tied to the *Plan Colmena*, *Agro Vida* linked the most vulnerable population to the social protection system during the pandemic.

Finally, several other programmes were implemented through the *Plan Panamá Agro Solidario*. One of them, for example, delivered productive inputs and training to indigenous women for food security and commercialisation (González 2021b). This programme was implemented by the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES), FAO and the World Bank. Through this coordination between ministries, it was possible to implement an integrated strategy reaching 3,000 women. The partnership with the MIDES also allowed the social registry of one of Panama's largest conditional cash transfer programmes (*Red de Oportunidades*) to be used for beneficiary identification (González 2021a). This created synergies between two programmes with complementary interventions for the same target group. This programme was a pilot that was expanded to other regions in 2021, and is intended to reach 100,000 women by the end of the year (ibid.).

### 3.6 Common features of good practices

Several commonalities between the case studies were identified which may offer additional lessons for rural social protection in LAC:

- All **measures were emergency responses led by ministries of agriculture**, highlighting their role in social protection for rural communities. These measures

relied on **pre-existing shock-response mechanisms** (Belize and Mexico) or on **structures of pre-existing social protection programmes** (Argentina, Belize and Panama) (Pascual and Novelo 2021; Butler 2021; Flores 2021; Bohl 2021; Rognoni and Frías 2021; González 2021a). These existing structures built the basis for coordination between the social protection and agricultural sectors (Argentina, Belize, Panama) (Bohl 2021; Pascual and Novelo 2021; Butler 2021; Rognoni and Frías 2021).

- Crucial to this implementation were **existing registries**—whether of farmers (Argentina, Belize) or fishers (Mexico) or social registries (Panama). When registries were not available, **the ability to gather beneficiary data rapidly during the pandemic** (Belize and Panama) was also key (Pascual and Novelo 2021; Butler 2021; Bohl 2021; Rognoni and Frías 2021; González 2021a).
- **Support from farmers' or fishers' associations during the implementation process** was a feature of most programmes (Argentina, Mexico, Panama), although the **extent to which this was seen as crucial for programme success varied by context** (Flores 2021; Bohl 2021; Rognoni and Frías 2021; González 2021a). In Argentina, farmers' associations were key players driving policies and ensuring they were tailored to producers' needs (Bohl 2021). In Panama, they were implementing actors, but the willingness of farmers to be transparent about their land ownership was mediated by a history of farmers' land disputes (González 2021a). In Mexico, the ability of fishers' associations to support their members depends on the economic value of their produce. While Mexican legislation outlines that fishers' associations must contribute to their members' social protection, not all have the same material and organisational capacity to do so (Flores 2021). Nevertheless, **support from non-state actors, international organisations or the private and third sectors** was a factor that supported the implementation of all programmes (Pascual and Novelo 2021; Butler 2021; Flores 2021; Bohl 2021; Rognoni and Frías 2021; González 2021a).
- Regarding common challenges, some programmes had to overcome **climate-related shocks** (Argentina and Belize) in addition to COVID-19, highlighting the necessity to protect rural populations from climate risks (Pascual and Novelo 2021; Bohl 2021).
- **Barriers to social protection due to informality** were also highlighted, such as the lack of data (Mexico), and being excluded from accessing benefits due to not being in the registry (Belize) or not having a fishing licence (Mexico) (Pascual and Novelo 2021; Flores 2021).
- While **digital tools for benefit registration and delivery** were used to reach beneficiaries, some farmers could not access their benefits due to their **lack of access to digital technology** (Argentina and Belize) (Butler 2021; Bohl 2021).

- **A lack of resources** was also cited by most interviewees. Human resources had either been dismissed during the previous administration (Argentina) or were overworked (Belize). Material inputs were reported as lacking (Argentina, Belize and Panama), although **one solution was to collaborate with other actors for resources** (Belize) (Pascual and Novelo 2021; Butler 2021; Bohl 2021; Rognoni and Frías 2021; González 2021a).
- All programmes faced **barriers to data access** due to a loss of records due to mismanagement before the crisis (Argentina), difficulties in assessing farmers' losses (Belize), a lack of a social registry (Belize), an outdated fishers' census and informality (Mexico), or farmers' unwillingness to provide data on land ownership due to a history of land disputes (Panama) (Pascual and Novelo 2021; Butler 2021; Flores 2021; Bohl 2021; Rognoni and Frías 2021; González 2021a).
- In most countries, some **farmers complained about not receiving assistance** soon enough (Argentina and Panama) or not at all (Belize). This was linked to **too much bureaucracy** (Panama) or a **lack of eligibility** (Belize) (Pascual and Novelo 2021; Butler 2021; Rognoni and Frías 2021; González 2021a). In Panama, attempts were made to bypass overly bureaucratic procurement procedures through executive decrees and ministerial provisions (Rognoni and Frías 2021). Note that overly bureaucratic procedures were also a complaint in Argentina, although it was not explicitly linked to benefit delivery issues (Bohl 2021).

#### 4 Building back better

Considering the above-mentioned social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in LAC, the authors recommend the following measures to build social protection systems back better to support rural double inclusion and ensure food security.

##### 4.1 Integrate social protection with the agricultural sector

- Establish social, farmers' and fishers' registries and integrate them to allow for the line ministries responsible for social protection to share data on vulnerable rural communities who could be eligible for social protection and economic inclusion programmes.
- Automatically register beneficiaries of social protection or rural production programmes in farmers'/fishers' and social registries, facilitating cross-checking or verification of information between ministries and programmes. This could be an entry point for vulnerable rural communities into multiple social and economic inclusion programmes.
- Take advantage of rural censuses to cross-check data with the social, agricultural and other public registries, and to ensure that the most vulnerable households receive the benefits targeted at them.
- Provide certificates for small and medium-sized producers, including family farmers, that grant

them access to productive programmes from different ministries.

- Engage the Ministry of Agriculture in the development of national social protection strategies to ensure that specific rural issues are adequately considered. Similarly, include line ministries responsible for social protection in national agriculture strategies to ensure they promote inclusive economic development.
- Link agricultural development policies to poverty alleviation strategies. This may translate into the prioritisation of deprived regions or population groups for agricultural development programmes.

##### 4.2 Enhance programmes' potential for rural double inclusion

- Provide different types of benefits within the same programme that foster social and economic inclusion. Cash+ programmes, for example, may provide cash, productive inputs and training.
- Ensure that social protection programmes that transfer food procure from smallholders.
- Link social protection programmes with social and farmers'/fishers' registries.
- Include the Ministry of Agriculture in the implementation of social protection programmes, and include line ministries responsible for social protection in agricultural programmes.

##### 4.3 Adapt social protection to rural risks and vulnerabilities

- Develop risk matrixes to better understand small rural producers' barriers to the market. They can be used to design new and more effective social protection policies.
- If digital technologies are used for beneficiary registration or benefit delivery, include training on how to use them in programme design, and provide non-digital alternatives so that the most vulnerable populations unable to use digital technologies are not excluded from social protection programmes.
- Adapt programme design to include informal workers by ensuring that they can easily access the documentation required to request benefits. The benefit registration process can facilitate access to documentation by connecting the applicant to a unified social and/or farmers' or fishers' registry.
- Simplify procedures and documentation requirements for opening bank accounts, applying for permits and accessing public services.
- Distribute electronic bank cards to social protection programme beneficiaries to facilitate their financial inclusion.
- Design gender-sensitive interventions, and take the specific needs of rural women into consideration.

- Consider the cultural specificities and special rights of indigenous peoples and people of African descent to ensure greater inclusion of social protection programmes. This includes intercultural, multilingual application processes and the acknowledgement of free prior and informed consent protocols in programme design.
- Address pre-existing historical grievances when communicating with vulnerable rural communities to ensure lack of trust is not a barrier to application for benefits.
- Implement policies focused on increasing access to land, inputs, credit and human capital to enhance the potential positive impact of rural social protection. Such policies include land redistribution measures, programmes offering training for small producers, measures that protect small producers from income shocks while they invest in new inputs, and measures that enable the acquisition of inputs (including policies for rural financial inclusion, such as the facilitation of access to subsidised credit).
- Establish shock-responsive mechanisms, including emergency funds and programmes that can be easily adapted and activated during climate crises and shocks specific to rural settings. During periods without emergencies, these programmes can prevent shocks from occurring or from having particularly negative effects. This may include, for example, training about and distribution of financial and productive assets for irrigation to prepare for droughts.

#### 4.4 Collaborate with non-state actors

- Work with indigenous peoples', farmers' and fishers' associations to gain access to and improve trust among marginalised rural communities.
- Take advantage of the non-state actors' knowledge of producers' needs and markets to better tailor programmes to small producers. This includes close collaboration during programme design and implementation with forestry,

farmers' and fishers' associations, cooperatives, community organisations and the third and private sectors.

- International organisations can offer governments financial and technical support that is flexible enough to accommodate vulnerable rural populations' changing demands while promoting evidence-based policymaking.

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2. See the IPC-IG online dashboard ([Social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South](#)) and the [Dashboard methodological note](#).

3. Here, horizontal expansion refers to an increase in coverage to previously uncovered people by the social protection systems; vertical expansion refers to an increase in benefit amount or added benefits to existing beneficiaries; and operational adaptation refers to changes in payment methods or frequency and delivery mechanism, among others.

4. Apart from LAC's 33 countries, territories that are not sovereign countries, such as dependencies or dependent territories from other countries or areas of special sovereignty and autonomous territories (such as Anguilla, Aruba, Curaçao, Cayman Islands etc.), were also considered.

5. Not to subsistence farmers, but to small-scale producers, for example.

6. A NAF is a person or group that shares living space, food expenditure and income, and engages in shared agricultural work. For indigenous peoples, this includes their communities (Government of Argentina 2020).

7. The RENAF collects personal and productive information on NAFs. It identifies family farmers to provide information that shows their needs and priorities related to different productive activity. It also hopes to achieve the social recognition of the sector and appropriately guide the development of different public policies through different institutions (Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Pesca n.d.).

8. The PROTAAL's objectives are to guarantee stability and employment in food production, and to always supply food to the smallest villages.

9. This enables farmers to access labour market programmes targeting micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

10. The MHDIFIPA was not the focus of our case study, since it did not explicitly target the rural population.

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## International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth

SBS, Quadra 1, Bloco J, Ed. BNDES, 13º andar  
70076-900 Brasília, DF - Brazil  
Telephone: +55 61 2105 5000

[ipc@ipc-undp.org](mailto:ipc@ipc-undp.org) ▪ [www.ipcig.org](http://www.ipcig.org)

