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► Integrating and Extending Social Protection to Support a Just Transition in Côte d'Ivoire

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► Policy Options and Implications for Climate Strategies and Plans

Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, as evidenced by the increasing frequency of urban flooding, rising temperatures, shifting growing seasons, and worsening droughts. These changes impact both the livelihoods of millions of Ivorians and their families, as well as business incomes. Health is also affected—especially among vulnerable groups (including children, pregnant women, and the elderly)—through the spread of malaria, respiratory illnesses, and waterborne and diarrhoeal diseases (MINEDD 2022). In this context, the country is firmly committed to implementing the key strategic directions outlined in the 2015 Paris Agreement. This commitment is guided by an overarching goal of a just ecological transition, aimed at establishing a sustainable socio-economic development framework that integrates climate change challenges across all sectors and improves both living conditions and population resilience.

Social protection is essential for a just transition (ILO 2024). It helps prevent poverty and the social and economic exclusion of people affected by illness or by the partial or total loss of income, employment, or livelihoods resulting from the effects of climate change. In addition, it supports productive risk-taking and helps safeguard the incomes and living standards of workers involved in implementing new activities or transitioning to greener, more resilient economic sectors.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) supports the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection (*Ministère de l'emploi et de la protection sociale* - MEPS) and the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (*Ministère de l'environnement, du développement durable* - MINEDD) in

promoting green jobs and advancing a just transition toward an environmentally and socially sustainable economy. In this context, the ILO conducted a feasibility study in 2024 on the integration of social protection to support the ecological transition in Côte d'Ivoire. The study explores how social protection can be incorporated into climate action—both in terms of mitigation and adaptation—to promote the implementation of a just transition in the country.

Box 1. Key terminology

Climate change mitigation refers to policies and actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions (e.g., phasing out fossil fuels or promoting energy efficiency) and enhance or protect carbon sinks that remove these gases from the atmosphere (e.g., forests, oceans, soils) (IPCC 2022).

Climate change adaptation refers to adjustments made in response to current or expected effects of climate change to reduce harm. This includes actions that lower vulnerability to extreme weather events, natural disasters, rising temperatures and sea levels, or desertification (IPCC 2022).

Social protection refers to a set of policies and programmes implemented by governments to protect people from income loss, vulnerability, or poverty in the face of adverse situations such as job loss, illness, disability, old age, or the impacts of crises, transitions, and social exclusion that may arise throughout their lives (ILO 2024).

The results of this study were presented and validated at a national workshop in April 2024, which brought together stakeholders from various state and non-state interest groups, including social partners. Building on the study's findings, the workshop provided an opportunity to discuss measures to be incorporated into national policies and strategies, including the next Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).¹ These measures aim to integrate and expand social protection in support of the ecological transition, while strengthening the population's resilience to climate shocks.



Participants in the validation workshop of the feasibility study on the integration of social protection to support an ecological transition in Côte d'Ivoire. Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 16-17 April 2024.
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This document summarizes the main findings and recommendations from the study and workshop, along with their implications for Côte d'Ivoire's next NDC.

Investing in the social protection system is a concrete means of advancing the objectives of the NDC, supporting a just transition, and responding equitably to both mitigation and adaptation imperatives.

The ecological transition in Côte d'Ivoire

The National Development Plan (*Plan national de développement* - PND (2021–2025), which outlines Côte d'Ivoire's development priorities, incorporates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and emphasizes the transition to a green and inclusive economy. The country's commitment to the PND is reflected in several areas, including strengthening governance in the environment and sustainable development sector, improving the sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity, integrating sustainable development into policies and strategies, and enhancing the population's resilience. These objectives are further detailed in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (*Stratégie nationale de développement durable* - SNDD) (2019–2030), which sets out the directions and actions to integrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in Côte d'Ivoire.

The country has also adopted a robust legislative and regulatory framework aimed at combating global warming and reducing its effects on economic and social development. These instruments cover sectors such as forestry, protected areas, water, classified installations, land use, and wildlife protection. They also reflect Côte d'Ivoire's international commitments, including the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the adoption of the final declarations from the Rio 92 and Rio+20 conferences, and the SDGs.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Global warming affects a wide range of climate- and resource-dependent economic activities. Agriculture, forestry, water resources, coastal areas, and land use are among the most impacted sectors (MINEDD 2022). Over two-thirds of the coastal zone is threatened by erosion, compounded by the salinization of freshwater at river mouths and the destruction of mangroves—jeopardizing key livelihoods and jobs. Tourism is also affected by the degradation of ecological and environmental resources, as are industrial activities, particularly around the ports of San Pedro and Abidjan. Waste management poses another major challenge. Only 5 to 20 percent of waste is recycled, while the rest is discarded in the streets, dumped illegally, or burned in the open air—posing serious health and environmental risks. Economic activities in the informal

¹ An NDC is a country-defined strategy for mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. All countries that have signed the Paris

Agreement are required to submit updated NDCs every five years. The next round of NDCs, known as NDC 3.0, is expected in 2025.

economy—which accounts for nearly 90 percent of the labour force—are among the first to be affected. Agriculture, which employs 46 percent of the labour force and serves as the main source of income for two-thirds of households, is one of the most vulnerable sectors (IFAD 2025). Moreover, some environmental protection measures can also result in job losses or the cancellation of potential job creation. For example, although enforcement of the law banning plastic bag production remains limited, its strict implementation could lead to the loss of nearly 26,000 jobs, particularly in sachet production plants and among small-scale operators, such as sachet water vendors (Educarriere 2013). Another example is the cancellation of a planned thermal power plant, which eliminated the potential for new job creation.

Côte d'Ivoire's social protection system

In 2014, Côte d'Ivoire adopted its National Social Protection Strategy (*Stratégie nationale de protection sociale* - SNPS), with the objective of gradually establishing a social protection system that strengthens the capacities of the most vulnerable households and individuals, enabling populations to better manage risks. Climate shocks are mentioned among these risks but are not specifically addressed. A new five-year SNPS has been developed and is currently in the process of being adopted by the government.

The PND 2021–2025 also outlines the main five-year orientations for the Ivorian social protection system, in line with the government's 2025 vision. It aims, on one hand, to improve the living standards of the poorest and protect vulnerable groups, and on the other, to progressively achieve higher levels of social protection for workers in both the formal and informal economy.

The social protection measures identified include the enrolment of populations in both contributory and non-contributory universal health coverage (UHC) schemes, as well as the rollout of the social scheme for self-employed workers (*Régime social des travailleurs indépendants* - RSTI), given that the informal economy accounts for 90 percent of the country's labour force. To support these objectives, Côte d'Ivoire's social protection system includes:

- **A contributory social insurance system that protects employees in the public and private sectors** against risks such as illness, old age, maternity, family responsibilities, occupational accidents, and occupational diseases. Benefits are provided through the national social insurance fund (*Caisse nationale de*

prévoyance sociale - CNPS) for private-sector workers and the general retirement fund (*Caisse générale de retraite des agents de l'État* - CGRAE) for state employees. In 2019, the RSTI was created to extend CNPS benefits—covering old age, maternity, occupational accidents, and occupational diseases—to workers in the informal economy, particularly self-employed individuals and those in agriculture.

- **A Universal Health Coverage (UHC) system**, introduced in 2014 and operational since October 1, 2018. Since 2019, UHC has been mandatory for all residents of Côte d'Ivoire, including non-nationals. It comprises a general basic scheme (*Régime Général de Base* - RGB), funded by contributions from insured persons, and a medical assistance scheme (*Régime d'Assistance Médicale* - RAM), financed by the State, targeting economically disadvantaged individuals. UHC benefits are managed by the national health insurance fund (*Caisse nationale d'assurance maladie* - CNAM). As of February 2025, effective UHC coverage has reached 62 percent of the population, with further expansion planned (ILO 2025).
- **Non-contributory social assistance mechanisms**, primarily in the form of social transfers aimed at reducing poverty and vulnerability, increasing access to essential social services, and ensuring a minimum level of economic well-being. These include the Productive Social Safety Net Programme, which provides conditional and unconditional cash transfers to extremely poor households, as well as food-for-work and cash-for-work initiatives, labour-intensive public works programmes, and occasional in-kind or emergency assistance for those in need.

Côte d'Ivoire has made significant progress in recent years in building its national social protection system. However, fewer than 15 percent of the population receives at least one social protection benefit, with the exception of health coverage, which has made notable progress toward universal coverage (ILO 2025).

Although mechanisms exist for informal workers to register for social security, the majority remain uncovered. This lack of coverage significantly weakens their resilience to the impacts of climate change and poses a major barrier to achieving a just transition in Côte d'Ivoire.

Measures to strengthen the social protection system to support a just transition

The State is making significant efforts to extend social protection to all individuals. It implements livelihood, income, and employment support mechanisms that can effectively contribute to addressing the challenges of the green transition. In this context, four main measures are proposed:

1. Support the enrolment of workers in the agricultural sector and informal economy in contributory social protection. Jobs created through ecological transition activities are still largely outside the scope of social security coverage. However, this trend can be reversed through the expansion of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Social Scheme for Self-Employed Workers (RSTI), helping to promote a just transition in Côte d'Ivoire.

The organization of sectors such as agroecology, forestry, and waste management into economic interest groups (EIG) and cooperatives presents an opportunity to extend social protection coverage. This is particularly important given the challenges that social protection schemes face in identifying and managing memberships and contributions from informal sector workers. Social protection initiatives are already being integrated into environmental projects, such as Abidjan's Urban Mobility Project (*Projet de Mobilité Urbaine d'Abidjan* – PMUA). The project is introducing a policy to encourage enrolment in the RSTI and UHC among actors in the paratransit sector in Abidjan, who also receive support for vehicle renewal to reduce or eliminate pollution caused by an aging fleet. Another example is the directive issued by the government instructing the Coffee-Cocoa, Cotton-Cashew, and Rubber-Oil Palm Councils to pay UHC contributions for the planters affiliated with these structures (see Box 2).

► The organization of sectors, such as agroecology, forestry and waste, into economic interest groups and cooperatives is an opportunity to extend social protection coverage.

2. Support the enrolment and maintenance of the rights of poor and vulnerable individuals in social protection schemes. This measure would aim to promote synergies between environmental protection, sustainable development, and poverty reduction to address the interlinkages between poverty, resource conservation, environmental degradation, and food security. Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation. In meeting their basic needs, poor populations often rely on environmental goods and services that are freely available and easily accessible. However, the overexploitation of these resources can lead to their degradation or even disappearance, further undermining the well-being of those who depend on them. To break this cycle, the strategy calls for strengthening the social protection of poor households—particularly beneficiaries of safety nets—by supporting their enrolment in the non-contributory UHC scheme, while also preparing for their transition to the contributory scheme once they no longer meet the eligibility criteria for social transfers.

► Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation.

Box 2. Enrolling cocoa farmers in UHC

In 2024, the government of Côte d'Ivoire decided to extend UHC to more than one million cocoa producers, with the Coffee-Cocoa Council covering their required contributions. This initiative, financed at a level of 12 billion CFA francs, aims to strengthen the resilience of agricultural households by enabling them to access health care services. As part of this effort, the Coffee-Cocoa Council transferred 952 million CFA francs to the CNAM on April 3, 2025, to provide coverage for 700,000 cocoa producers. The collection of UHC contributions from informal economy workers—including cocoa farmers—has been a longstanding challenge in expanding UHC. This approach is now being extended to other agricultural sectors.

3. Support the upholding of the rights of workers affected by climate shocks within contributory social protection schemes. Extreme flooding and droughts—

both in urban and rural areas—result in losses of assets, production, and income for entrepreneurs and agricultural producers. These assets are not currently covered by existing protection mechanisms and are typically ineligible for safety net programmes. This area of intervention therefore aims to explore, in collaboration with the CNPS and the CNAM, the feasibility of a temporary mechanism to preserve UHC and RSTI entitlements for workers who are unable to pay their contributions following a climate shock. The design and implementation of such mechanisms should be guided by dialogue and agreements with professional organisations or sectoral bodies, particularly concerning the processes of declaration and monitoring.

4. Develop retraining programmes and access to green jobs. This area of intervention targets workers affected by job losses or relocations resulting from the implementation of the NDC. It aims to anticipate evolving labour market needs and promote the development of new skills required for the ecological transition of the Ivorian economy, thereby enhancing employability—particularly among young people—and supporting professional retraining. This recommendation builds on the Integrated Strategy for the Promotion of Green Jobs in Côte d'Ivoire. It includes monitoring at-risk jobs in sectors affected by climate change, including in the informal economy, and identifying emerging green occupations and skills requirements. This information will guide the adaptation of training programmes and vocational pathways to better align with entrepreneurship opportunities in the green economy. In the long term, such initiatives could be supported by the establishment of an unemployment insurance system. In the interim, the feasibility of a non-contributory unemployment support mechanism could be assessed to provide temporary financial assistance to workers who have lost their jobs due to the green transition, while accompanying them in job searches or retraining efforts.

Recommendations for Côte d'Ivoire's NDC 3.0 and other climate strategies and plans

In 2025, countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, will be required to submit the third generation of NDCs, covering the period

2031–2035. Each new generation must reflect increased ambition to accelerate climate action and meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement. The development of NDC 3.0 offers an opportunity to integrate the just transition, which is not explicitly reflected in Côte d'Ivoire's current policy and strategy documents. A just transition includes the establishment of a strong social protection system as part of an integrated response to equitably address both mitigation and adaptation requirements.

This study presented several options for strengthening and extending Côte d'Ivoire's social protection system, which could be integrated into its NDC 3.0. Although the current NDC (2021–2030) does not explicitly reference social protection, it does aim to improve living conditions and enhance population resilience (MINEDD 2022). Investing in the social protection system is a concrete means of achieving this objective.

In addition to recommending the integration of social protection measures into national climate action and just transition strategies, the study's validation workshop also led to the development of a roadmap for implementing the proposed measures. One key recommendation from the workshop is the involvement of tripartite actors. In this regard, the National Council for Social Dialogue has recently established a special commission on the just transition. Its mandate is to coordinate all relevant stakeholders in the world of work—government, employers, and workers—alongside business development and related dimensions such as trade, within the framework of a just ecological transition in Côte d'Ivoire.

The validation workshop also resulted in a range of additional recommendations in support of the measures proposed by the study:

- Integrating a just transition into the revision of the national social protection policy and its financing strategy, including the incorporation of social levies into the cost of agricultural inputs.
- Ensuring the involvement of all stakeholders—such as producer organizations, social protection institutions, key ministries, and social partners—in the promotion and implementation of a just transition.
- Establishing a national pool of experts on social protection and the ecological transition in Côte d'Ivoire.



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