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Integrating and Extending Social Protection to Support a Just Transition in Sengegal

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Policy options and implications for climate strategies and plans

Introduction

At the 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit, Senegal reaffirmed its commitment to supporting a just transition in line with the principles outlined in the preamble to the Paris Agreement adopted at COP21 in 2015. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines a just transition as the process of greening the economy in a way that is fair and inclusive for all those affected, creating decent work opportunities, reducing poverty, and promoting social inclusion (ILO 2015). A just transition involves, among others, the establishment of a social protection system as part of an integrated and equitable climate change mitigation and adaptation response (Box 1).

Social protection plays a vital role in preventing poverty and social and economic exclusion, especially when climate change affects people's health, income, employment, or livelihoods (ILO 2024). It also enables individuals to take productive risks and helps safeguard the incomes and living standards of workers transitioning to greener and more resilient economic activities.

To fulfil this role in the context of climate change, national social protection systems must be strengthened and adapted. In 2024, the ILO conducted a study to assess how Senegal's social protection system can contribute to a just transition. The study examined options to enhance and adapt social protection programmes to extend coverage to workers and their families, particularly those in the informal economy working in sectors such as agriculture. It offers policy and operational recommendations grounded in a holistic approach to social protection, aimed at effectively supporting Senegal's green transition.

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 study's recommendations were discussed and endorsed during a validation workshop held in Mbour, Senegal, on 21–22 March 2024. The workshop brought together representatives from key government ministries, including those responsible for Environment, Labour, and Family and Solidarity through the General Delegation for Social Protection and National Solidarity (*Délégation générale à la protection sociale et à la solidarité nationale –*

DGPSN) alongside social partners, civil society actors, and national and international experts. Participants concluded the workshop with a strong call to pursue further work in line with the recommendations, which were complemented by proposals outlining operational strategies for their implementation.

Participants of the validation workshop for the feasibility study on social protection in support of a just transition. Saly, Senegal, 21-22 March 2024, Saly. © ILO

This document summarizes the main findings and recommendations from the study and workshop, along with their implications for Senegal's next submission of nationally determined contributions (NDC)[1].

> The study emphasizes the need to strengthen and adapt social protection programmes to extend coverage to workers and their families in sectors linked to the green transition.

The ecological transition in Senegal

Senegal's long coastline and heavy reliance on natural resources for economic activity, employment, and livelihoods make it especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Gaye et al. 2015).

Agriculture is among the sectors most vulnerable to climate change, with rising temperatures and environmental degradation contributing to declining crop yields and increasing the risk of chronic poverty in rural areas. Tourism, one of Senegal's key economic drivers and the second-largest source of employment after agriculture, is also heavily impacted, particularly due to its concentration along the coast. Coastal erosion and extreme weather events are similarly affecting the fishing sector, especially artisanal fisheries. At the same time, national strategies and policies recognize agriculture, tourism, and fisheries, alongside forestry, energy, and waste management, as priority sectors with strong potential for growth, job creation, and workforce retraining (ILO 2022).

Given its vulnerability to climate change, Senegal has been actively engaged in promoting a green economy since the 1990s. The country has ratified several international agreements and integrated their principles into national policies. Through its commitment to the 2015 Paris Agreement and various biodiversity conventions, Senegal has pledged to embed sustainable development into its national agenda and to halt the degradation of natural resources. This commitment is reflected in a range of sectoral strategies and policies, including the Policy Letter on the Environment and Sustainable Development Sector (2016–2020), the NDC for 2020–2025, and the National Sustainable Development Strategy 2015–2020. The second Priority Action Plan (2019–2023) of the Emerging Senegal Plan (*Plan Sénégal émergent* - PSE)—the country's main policy framework at the time—also prioritized efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. This focus led to the development of a "Green PSE," aimed at fostering green and climate-resilient growth. In 2024, Senegal adopted a new national policy framework: the National Transformation Agenda "Senegal 2050." This long-term strategy reaffirms the country's commitment to sustainable ecosystem and biodiversity management, a just energy transition, and its ambition to become a model for the circular economy.

These various policy documents outline a range of measures aimed at accelerating climate action, developing both natural and human capital, and ensuring the effective coordination of a just transition across all sectors of society and the economy. In 2024, Senegal adopted the National Ecological Transition Strategy, which seeks to establish an integrated and coordinated approach that balances ecological, economic, and social priorities to guide the country toward a more sustainable future. That same year, Senegal also updated its National Strategy for the Promotion of Green Jobs. The revised version has been

[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.

technically validated and is expected to receive political approval before July 2025.

> Senegal's reliance on natural resources for economic activity, employment and livelihoods make it especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change

Senegal's social protection system

In 2015, Senegal adopted its first National Social Protection Strategy (*Stratégie nationale de protection sociale* - SNPS), with the overarching goal of establishing, by 2035, a social protection system that is accessible to all. The strategy aims to guarantee a minimum income and health coverage for everyone, along with comprehensive protection to help people withstand shocks and crises that could drive them into poverty. The SNPS explicitly recognizes climate change as a covariate shock that intensifies the frequency and severity of crises—such as disasters, seasonal poverty, and food insecurity—and emphasizes the need to address these challenges through a systemic and integrated approach.

The SNPS follows a life-cycle approach and brings together a range of schemes and programmes. It also includes cross-cutting interventions aimed at two key objectives: strengthening the physical protection of people and economic infrastructure against risks and disasters and improving governance to enhance the effectiveness of disaster risk reduction and management efforts.

Employed workers in Senegal's formal public and private sectors are covered by various social security schemes and insurance mechanisms that provide protection against all risks outlined in the ILO's Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102, 1952), except for unemployment. In 2013, Senegal introduced universal health coverage (UHC), which includes a voluntary contributory scheme for informal sector and agricultural workers, alongside a non-contributory scheme targeting the most disadvantaged populations. However, coverage among these groups remains limited and faces several challenges. A new Social Security Code, expected to be enacted in 2025, aims to strengthen and expand coverage, especially for old age, maternity, occupational accidents, and family benefits, to informal workers through a simplified scheme for small taxpayers (*Régime Simplifié pour les Petits Contribuables* - RSPC).

The non-contributory system includes various social assistance programmes managed by the government and supported by external partners. These programmes include the National Family Security Grant Programme (*Programme national de bourses de sécurité familiales* - PNBSF), which provides financial support to poor households, the Equal Opportunities Card for people with disabilities, school feeding initiatives, and a range of cash and in-kind transfer schemes.

Since 2019, efforts have intensified to strengthen the PNBSF's capacity to respond to shocks such as floods, fires, food insecurity, and drought that affect poor households. Other development partners, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), have also launched initiatives to build resilience, prevent food and nutrition insecurity, and promote healthy, sustainable agriculture. However, these initiatives typically follow a programme-based approach and depend heavily on the availability and duration of funding, which limits their ability to fully meet needs.

Moreover, shock-response interventions primarily target poor households registered in the Single National Register (*Registre national unique* - RNU). In June 2023, a process began to expand the RNU's coverage from 541,000 households in 2022 to 1 million by 2024. This expansion aims to include all poor households as well as those at risk of falling into poverty during shocks—whether climate-related, economic, or health crises—that are becoming increasingly frequent (DGPSN 2023). Despite these efforts, many informal workers affected by shocks remain excluded.

Measures to strengthen Senegal's social protection system to support a just transition

During the study consultations, stakeholders highlighted the importance of promoting decent work, protecting workers, and strengthening family livelihoods in the context of climate change, with social protection playing a central role in these efforts.

However, Senegal's national social protection system still has many gaps that need to be addressed. To this end, the study has identified the following priorities to strengthen the social protection system so that it can effectively support climate change mitigation, adaptation, and a just transition.


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Measure 1 – Anchor shock-responses in a rights-based approach

This measure seeks to formalize cash or in-kind transfers as a predictable and sustainable response to climate-related shocks. Such interventions can be strengthened within adaptation strategies by using existing tools like African Risk Capacity and the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment to assess needs and tailor responses for specific vulnerable groups during climate-related shocks.

The goal is to establish minimum guarantees for these population groups when climate shocks occur. These guarantees should be embedded within a legal framework, supported by predictable and sustainable financing that ensures rights can be sustained, with responsibility shared by the Executive Secretariat of the National Food Security Council (SECNSA), in coordination with DGPSN and the National Solidarity Fund (FSN).

Measure 2 – Promote public employment programmes that contribute to environmental objectives

Another key measure is promoting public employment programmes (PEPs) to create green, decent jobs and develop the skills needed for them, especially linked to projects like the Great Green Wall initiative. These efforts aim to boost sustainable, green employment under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour, working closely with the Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, and other sector stakeholders involved in the ecological transition.

PEPs serve a dual purpose: (i) to build, restore, and maintain public infrastructure that supports environmental goals such as climate change mitigation or adaptation and disaster resilience; and (ii) to provide vulnerable and heavily affected populations with guaranteed employment and opportunities to earn additional income.

> The goal is to establish minimum protections for specific population groups in the face of climate-related shocks.

Measure 3 – Extending social security to informal workers in the green economy

Many stakeholders interviewed during the study highlighted the importance of extending social protection to agricultural producers and (micro)entrepreneurs involved in green economy activities. Since these activities are often fragile, the transition can create risks for both farmers and entrepreneurs (DyTAES 2020). Having the right social protection mechanisms in place can help safeguard incomes and livelihoods against risks like illness, while also supporting increased productivity.

The study also found that the ecological transition in Senegal is generating a wide range of new economic activities in the private sector and through economic interest groups (EIGs) or women's empowerment groups (WEGs) (see Box 2).

These groups, along with the development of value chains, offer great potential for extending universal health coverage to informal workers through health mutual funds. With the ongoing rollout of the RSPC in Senegal—including in the agricultural sector—a similar approach could be used to enrol informal workers in contributory schemes adapted for small contributors that would also provide protection for other risks and vulnerabilities worsened by climate change, such as poverty in old age, workplace accidents, and maternity.

This measure would not only help ensure that the jobs created by the ecological transition are decent and secure but also strengthen workers' resilience to climate impacts.

The current revision of the Agrosylvo-Pastoral and Fisheries Orientation Law presents a valuable opportunity to integrate such measures for the extension of social security to workers in resource-based sectors, helping to make agriculture more climate-resilient.

▶ **Box 2. Role of Economic Interest Groups (EIGs) and Women's Empowerment Groups (WEGs) in Senegal's ecological transition**[2]

EIGs and WEGs play a key role in Senegal's green transition across various sectors, especially in agroecology, forestry, fisheries, and waste management. With support from national institutions and external partners, smallholder farmers are coming together to form EIGs focused on activities like land restoration, using biopesticides and biofertilizers, integrating agriculture with livestock and fish farming, as well as promoting, marketing, researching, training, and fostering integration of agroecological products. These EIGs are organized into value chains, some of which partner with private companies—particularly for producing organic inputs and exporting products like organic bananas.

In the forestry sector, EIGs manage community farms and forest product processing units with support from the Senegalese Agency for Reforestation and the Great Green Wall (ASERGMV). They are also organizing supply chains, such as for the production and processing of gum arabic. Additionally, EIGs play an active role in waste management, including collection, transportation to disposal sites, and sorting and recovery. Several EIGs have also emerged in camp management and the organization of tourism activities, supported by various projects and external partners.

> Senegal's ecological transition is creating many new economic opportunities that hold great potential for bringing informal workers into social security schemes

[2] Source: discussions with stakeholders consulted for this study, including the NGO ENDA and the Senegalese Agency for Reforestation and the Great Green Wall (ASERGMV).

Measure 4 – Establish labour market programmes to facilitate the transition to green jobs

The greening of Senegal's economy is seen as a key opportunity to tackle persistent underemployment and unemployment among youth and women, which remain major concerns for the government. In this context, a key priority is to establish labour market programmes that support the transition to green jobs, tailored to different population groups.

Several initiatives are already underway to promote training, retraining, and entrepreneurship in green sectors, supported by partners such as the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the FAO, and the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI). While these programmes contribute to the expansion of vocational training in green technologies, they remain fragmented and relatively unknown.

There is strong potential to consolidate them into a coordinated intermediation mechanism that links workers and entrepreneurs with training providers—including hands-on training such as farm schools—and with entrepreneurship support and financing programmes, such as, for example, the General Delegation for Rapid Entrepreneurship for Women and Youth.

Recommandations for Senegal's NDC 3.0 and other climate strategies and plans

In 2025, countries—including Senegal—will be required to submit their third generation of NDC (NDC 3.0), covering the period from 2031 to 2035. Each new NDC must reflect increased ambition to accelerate climate action and meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. This should also include actions to support a just transition, particularly through social protection measures, which would help raise ambition, especially in terms of building resilience.

Senegal's second NDC 2.0 (2021–2030) includes mitigation measures and highlights the need to strengthen the resilience of the national economy through adaptation efforts (Republic of Senegal, 2020). It also identifies significant economic potential in terms of wealth and job creation through climate action. However, NDC 2.0 makes no explicit mention of a just transition and fails to recognize the importance of creating decent jobs, and therefore extending social protection to the green economy.

Another specific objective of Senegal's NDC 2.0 is to ensure the health, well-being, and protection of the population against risks and disasters related to extreme weather events and climate change. While the NDC 2.0 acknowledges a link between climate change and social protection, it includes no specific actions to strengthen or adapt the social protection system, improve the resilience of workers in affected sectors, or support people impacted by climate-related disasters and health risks.

> The goal is to integrate social protection into the NDC 3.0 and align it with national strategies for climate action.

The NDC 3.0 offers an important opportunity to advance a just transition. The goal should be to integrate social protection measures into the new NDC, while strengthening links between existing social protection programmes and national strategies for climate action.

To this end, integrating the measures identified above—already validated and endorsed by key government actors and social partners in Senegal—would be a strategic step to ensure that the country's NDC addresses the social dimensions of climate change and delivers on its just transition commitments. In addition to the NDC, Senegal should also consider including social protection measures, such as those proposed in this study, in its National Adaptation Plan. This would represent a significant contribution to reducing the impact of climate change on poverty and livelihoods through adaptive social protection for all.


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