

Weathering Storms and Stresses: Adaptive and Shock-Responsive Social Protection

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ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

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KEY POINTS

- Asia and the Pacific is among the most vulnerable regions in the world to shocks and stresses. Marginalized groups such as women, girls, and people with disabilities are typically worst impacted.
- Adaptive social protection helps build resilience to shocks and stresses, through improved links between social protection, disaster risk management, and climate change adaptation. It should address how vulnerability to shocks is exacerbated by existing forms of marginalization.
- Effective adaptive social protection requires system-wide investments to strengthen robustness of routine provisions, and to develop or expand adaptive provisions.
- Policy-level investments can enhance strategic and institutional arrangements for adaptive social protection across key sectors. Existing and new programs can be designed and/or redesigned to help vulnerable populations to effectively anticipate, absorb, and adapt to shocks and stress in the longer term. Delivery systems can be strengthened to sustain routine programming in times of disruption and to implement additional adaptive provisions.

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Adaptive and Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH ADAPTIVE AND SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

Adaptive and shock-responsive social protection are among the key strategic objectives for social protection activities of the Asian Development Bank (ADB 2022a).¹ This brief aims to clarify what is meant by these terms, outlines why they are important, and provides examples of work to strengthen systems at the policy, program design, and implementation levels.² The policy brief concludes with recommendations to further support this agenda in Asia and the Pacific.

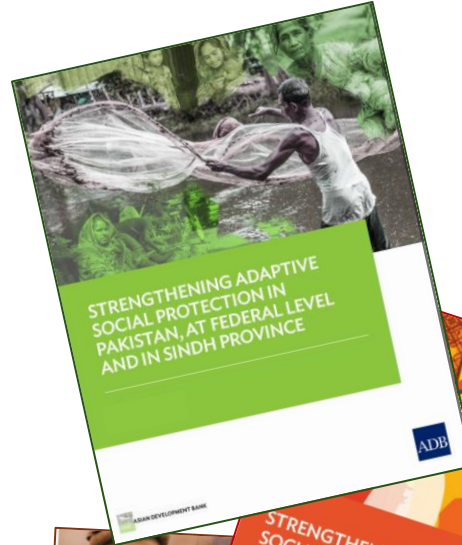
Social protection systems aim to prevent and protect people from poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion. Historically, social protection has been associated with addressing risks faced at the household or individual level, such as poverty, ill health, or unemployment. However, there is increasing attention to the role that social protection can play alongside other sectors in addressing covariate risks, meaning large-scale shocks and stresses that affect entire communities, such as climate change, natural hazards, conflict, economic downturns, and pandemics (ADB 2022a, ADB 2022b; Costello and McCord 2023).

"Adaptive social protection" refers to the integration of social protection with disaster risk management and climate change adaptation. Adaptive social protection helps build the resilience of poor and vulnerable households by investing in their capacity to prepare for, cope with, and adapt to shocks and stresses, protecting their well-being and ensuring that they do not fall into or become trapped in poverty as a result (ADB 2022a). "Shock-responsive social protection" is generally considered as a subset of adaptive social protection that focuses on the integration of social protection and disaster risk management, though in some countries it may be used interchangeably with the broader

Note: In this publication, "\$" refers to United States dollars.

¹ This brief was written by independent consultants and social protection experts Alexandra Barrientes, Rebecca Holmes, and Christina Liew under the overall guidance of Roshan Balgobain, senior social development specialist (social protection), ADB, as a deliverable of the Regional Technical Assistance for Developing Inclusive and Resilient Social Protection Systems in Asia and the Pacific. The brief benefited from the peer review of Kathryn Milliken, senior climate change specialist, ADB.

² While recognizing that many governments and partner agencies are undertaking an impressive array of activities to support adaptive social protection, the examples in this brief are primarily drawn from a recent report on ADB's work in this area, featuring details on various new and emerging initiatives.



BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE
through Social Protection
10-12 November 2025 | Manila, Philippines



Adaptive Social Protection: Looking Ahead in Asia and the Pacific



Watch on YouTube



What is Adaptive Social Protection (ASP)?

What is Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP)?



What does ASP aim to achieve?

ASP helps build the **RESILIENCE** of poor and vulnerable households, by investing in their capacity to prepare for, cope with, and adapt to shocks and stresses

Visual: Cornelius et al. (2018); modified in GIZ (2021)

ASP Framework: Davies et al. (2008)



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Source: [Bahadur et al. \(2015\)](#)

Resilience = the capacity to:

ANTICIPATE



ABSORB



ADAPT



Underpinned by systems and societal **TRANSFORMATION** to go beyond incremental changes and seek a more fundamental shift, including to **address underlying social and economic vulnerabilities and inequalities**





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How Can Social Protection Contribute to Building Resilience?

ABSORB

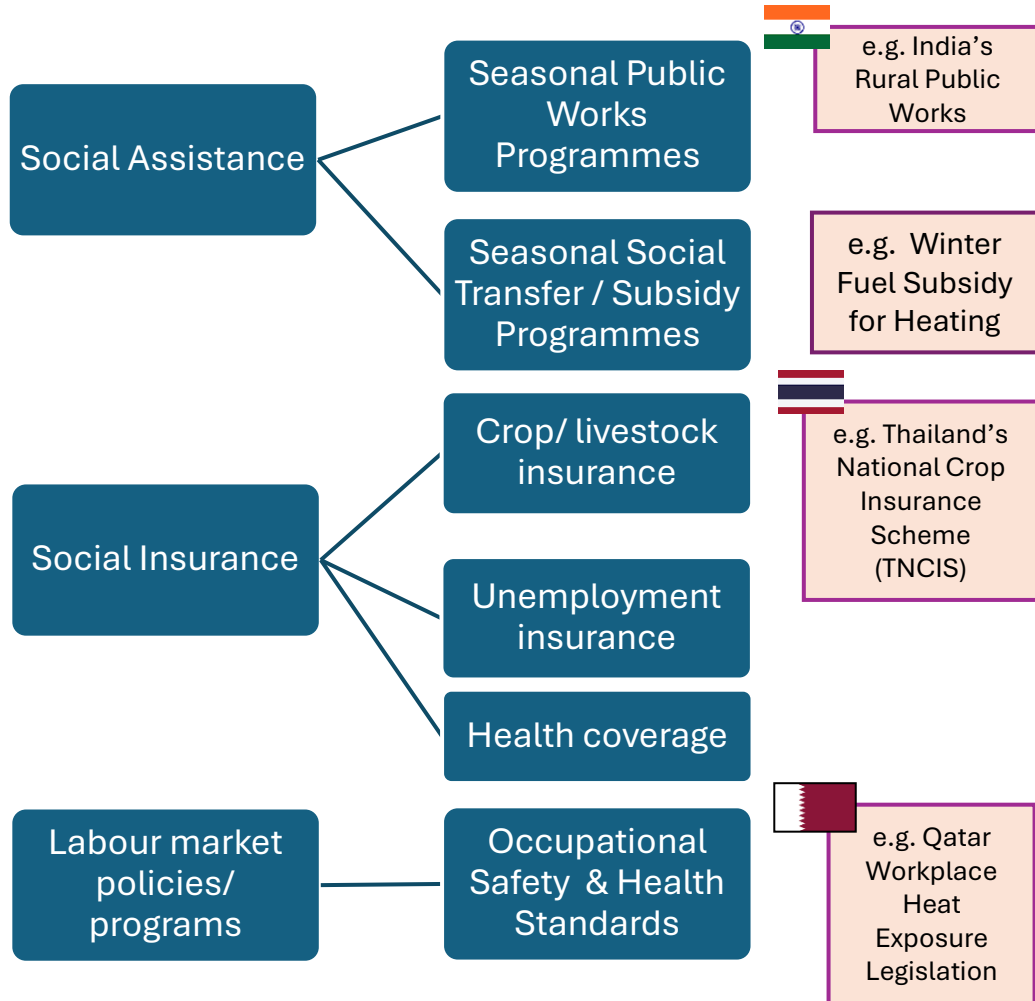
**SHOCK-
RESPONSIVE
SOCIAL
PROTECTION**
(the most
common)

Underpinned by systems and societal **TRANSFORMATION** to go beyond incremental changes and seek a more fundamental shift, including to **address underlying social and economic vulnerabilities**

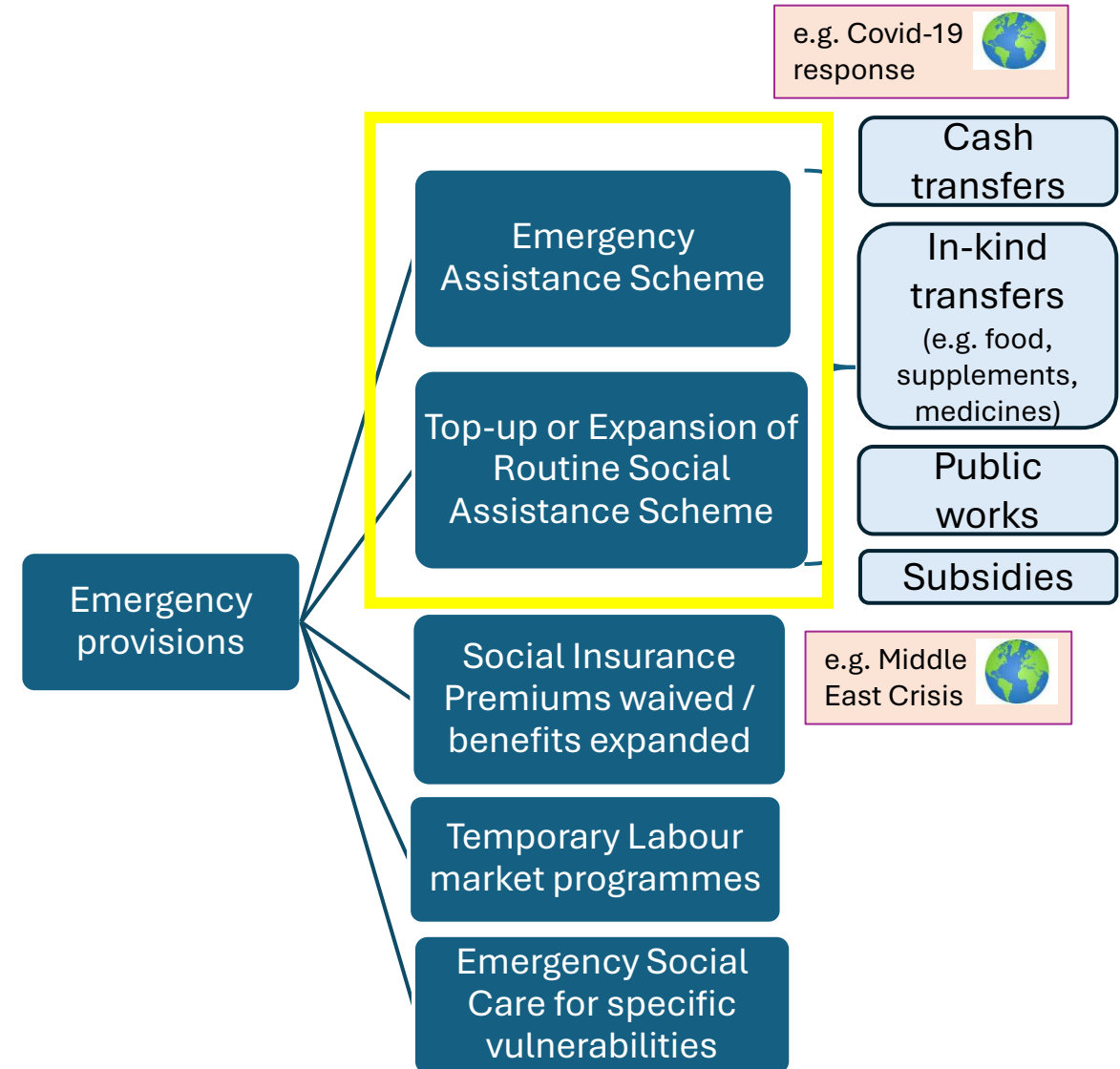
**ROUTINE SOCIAL
PROTECTION**

There Are Many Forms of Shock-Responsive SP

**‘Regular’ SP programming for ‘regular’
(e.g. seasonal) climate shocks**



Additional SP programming for ‘ad hoc’ emergencies





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KEY INSIGHT:

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**SHOCK-
RESPONSIVE
SOCIAL
PROTECTION**

*(the most
common)*

Requires:
**Strong Routine
Systems
+
Contingency
Planning**



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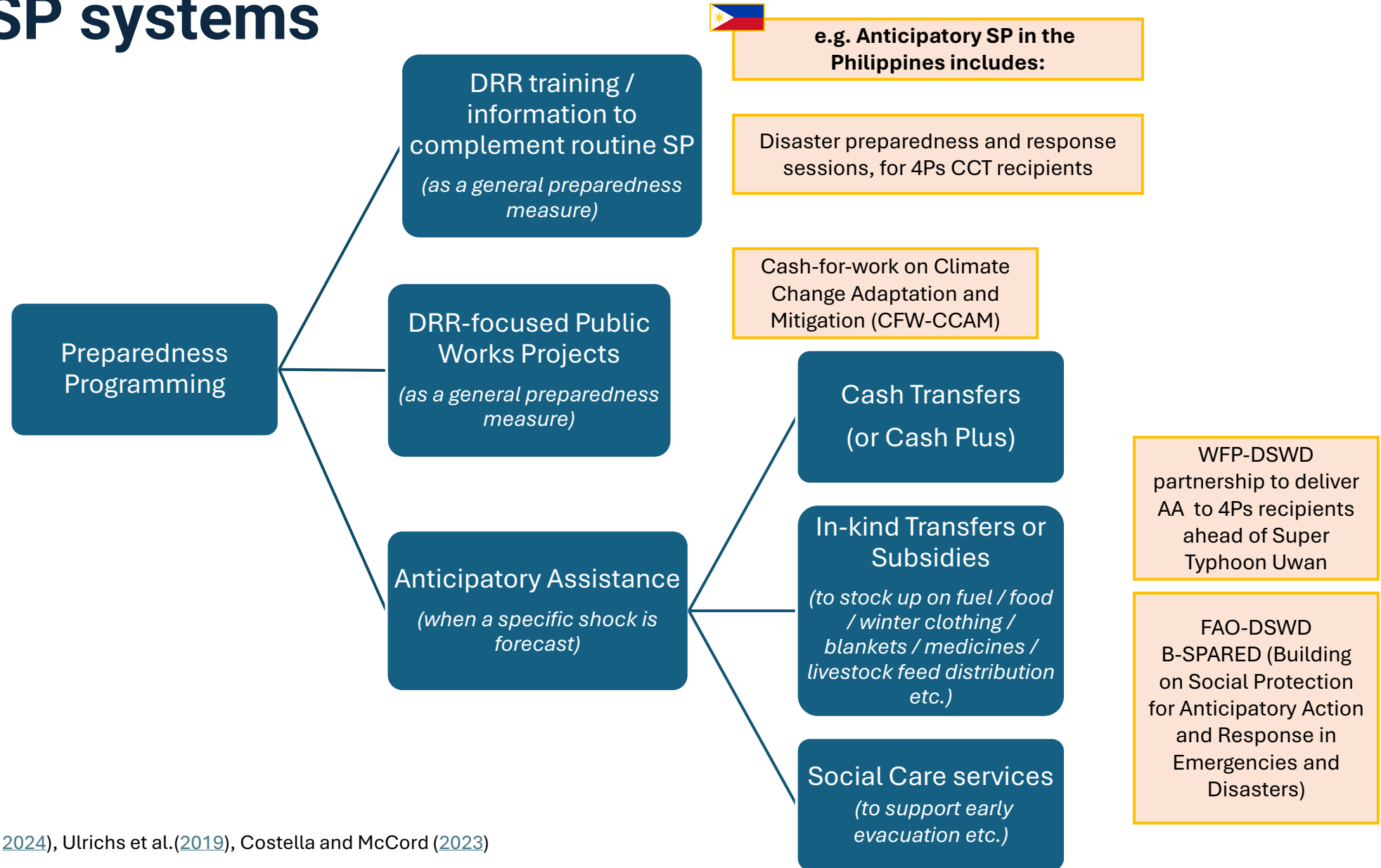
How Can Social Protection Contribute to Building Resilience?

ANTICIPATE

ANTICIPATORY ACTION

*(increasingly
common by
UN/NGOs – rarely
integrated into
national SP)*

There are emerging cases of Anticipatory Action within SP systems





KEY INSIGHT:

ANTICIPATE

ANTICIPATORY ACTION

*(increasingly
common by
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integrated into
national SP)*

Anticipatory Assistance (AA) has very high returns on investment

- Up to \$ 7 in benefits/ avoided losses for each \$1 invested: [FAO's 10-country study](#)
- Over 20 years, could save \$34 for each \$1 invested: [WFP study](#) in Nepal

= Worth finding ways to deliver it

**SP system is an obvious existing delivery
mechanism to use for AA**

**Yet most AA currently delivered through parallel
delivery systems (by NGOs/ UN)**



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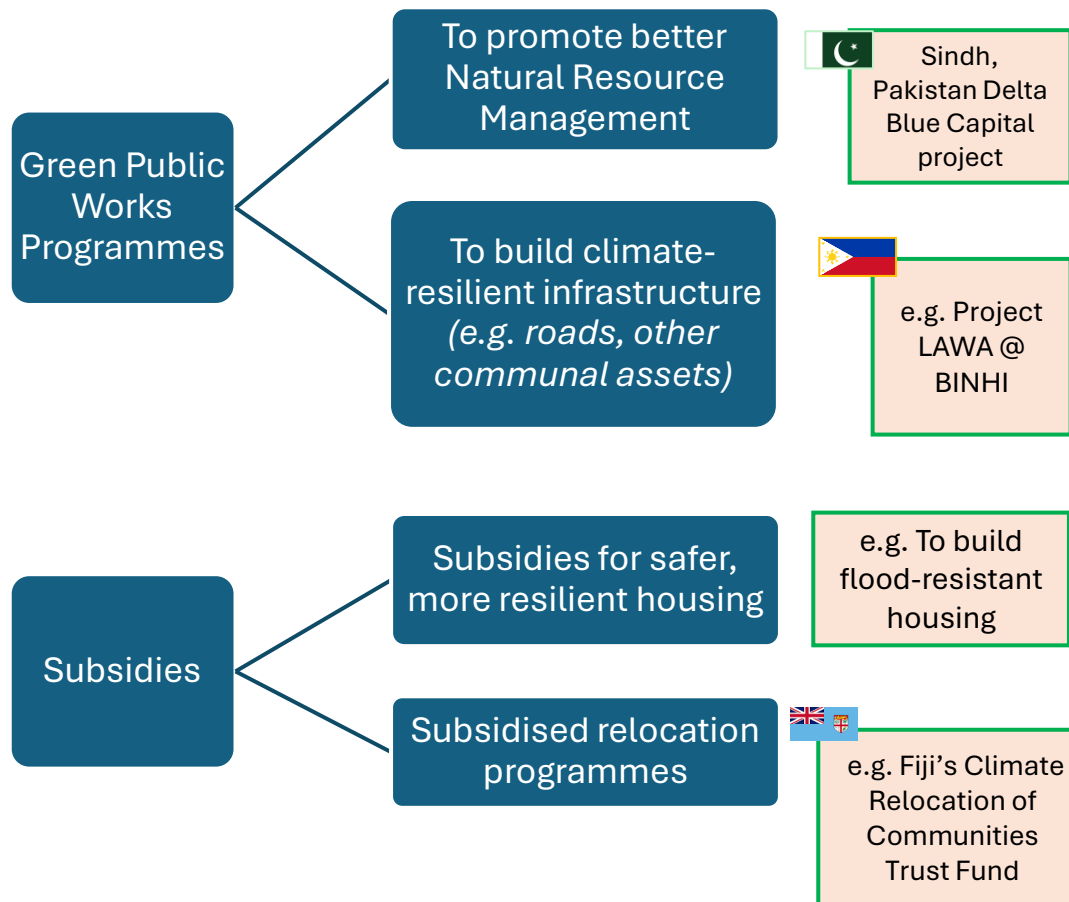
How Can Social Protection Contribute to Building Resilience?

ADAPT

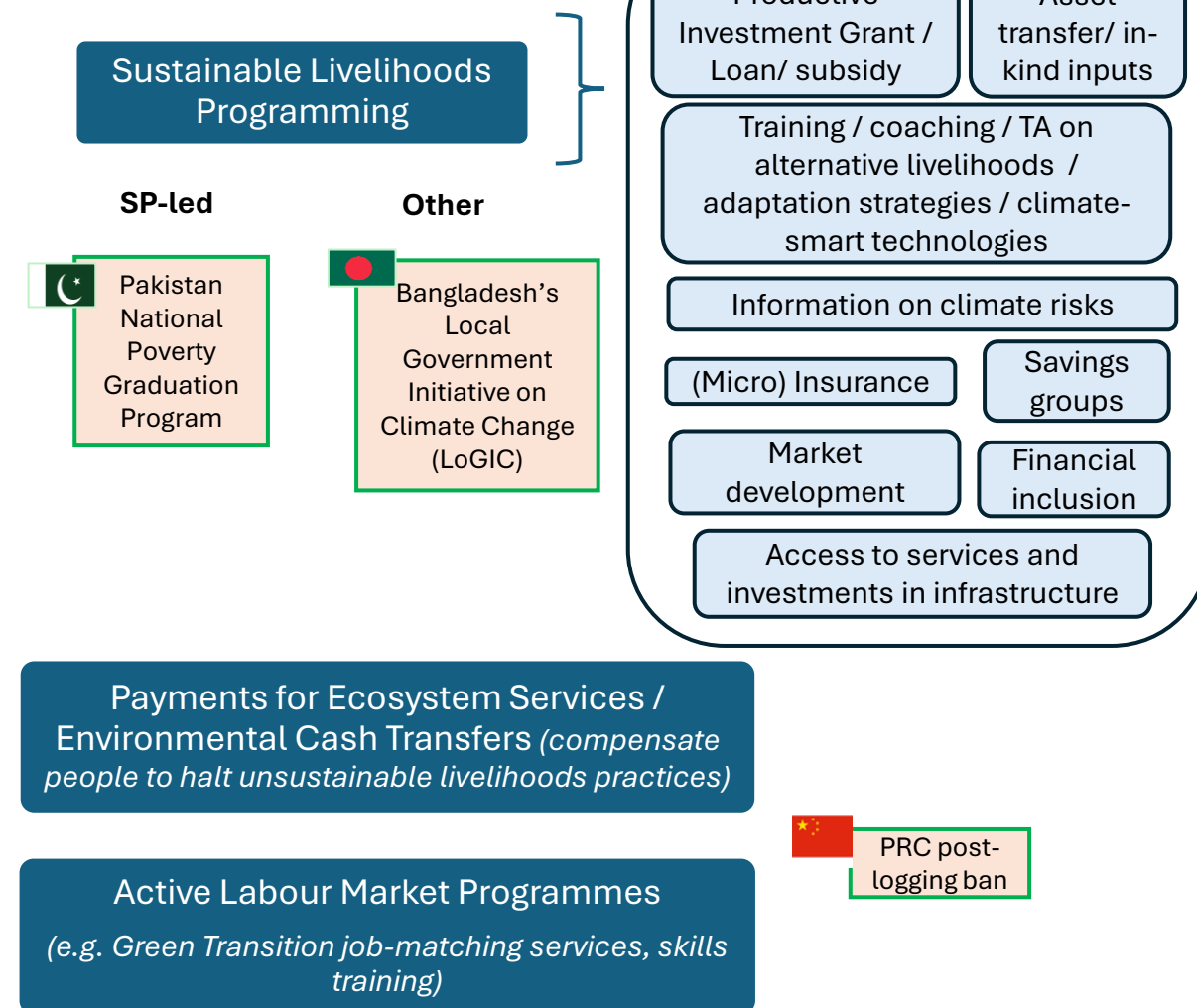
**CLIMATE-
ADAPTIVE
SOCIAL
PROTECTION**
*(much more
needed)*

There are growing examples of climate-adaptive SP to:

ADAPT LIVING ENVIRONMENTS



ADAPT LIVELIHOODS





KEY INSIGHT:

**ASP ≠ Social Protection-led /
fully Social Protection-implemented**

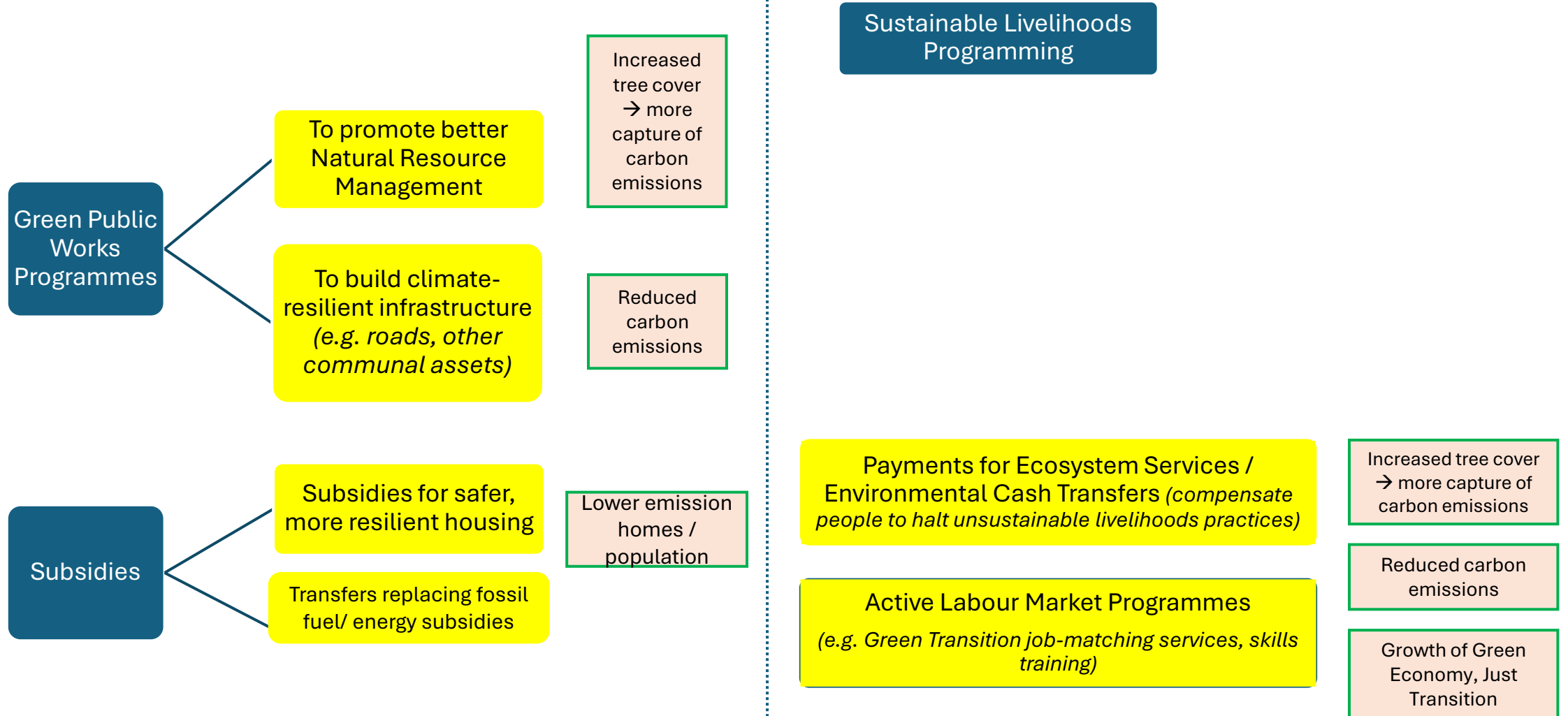
**ASP = Linking SP with Climate Adaptation &
Disaster Resilience Agencies'
Programming**

**= Challenging since often requires new
institutional partnerships/
coordination**

ADAPT

**CLIMATE-
ADAPTIVE
SOCIAL
PROTECTION**
*(much more
needed)*

SP can also contribute to climate change mitigation



Based on: Costella et al. (2023, 2024), Bhalla et al. (2024), Györi et al. (2021), Bagolle et al. (2023), Malerba (2021), Costella and McCord (2023)

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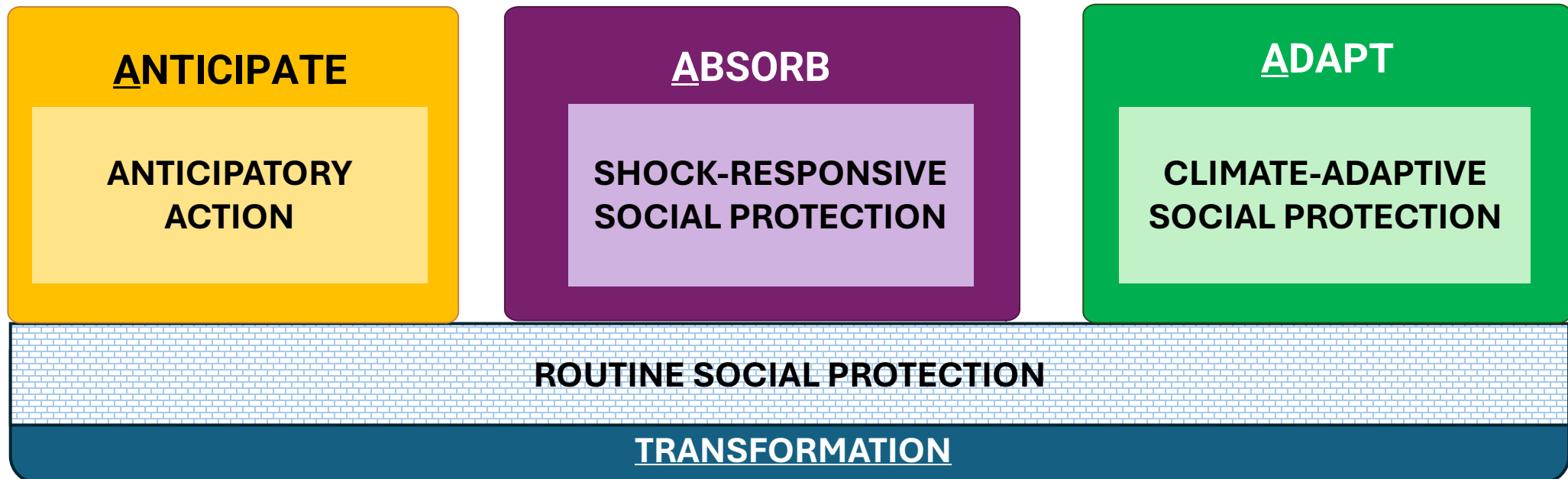


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FINAL TAKEAWAY: Important to work towards a holistic approach

- 1) Develop ASP **Policy & Systems**, to be successfully implement **Programming**
- 2) Strengthen across **all 3 As** – otherwise gaps in one may undermine another
- 3) Continue to strengthen **Routine SP** – to support transformative change + to ensure they are trusted / robust for climate/disaster programming



Thank You!



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