



Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems Research

**Working paper 1: Conceptualising Shock-Responsive
Social Protection**

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About the research programme

The Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems study is a two-year, £1 million research programme led by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), in consortium with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) and INASP, and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

Its objective is to strengthen the evidence base as to when and how social protection systems can better scale up in response to shocks in low-income countries and fragile and conflict-affected states, minimising negative shock impacts and reducing the need for humanitarian responses.

About this paper

This is the first in a series of papers from the ongoing research. Together, the set of papers will develop theoretical perspectives about the interface between social protection, humanitarian assistance and disaster risk management (DRM), review the latest literature and generate insights from new case studies across sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

We present in this paper our latest thinking on the concept of 'shock-responsive social protection', and explain how this shapes the direction of our research. We start with an overview of our understanding of shocks in the context of this study. We offer new typologies of the maturity of social protection systems and the different ways in which a social protection system, designed primarily to support households in chronic difficulty, might be able to be used in the event of a humanitarian disaster. We consider how social protection, humanitarian and DRM systems are connected, and the challenges there might be in linking them. We also consider the implications of the context of fragility and conflict for shock-responsive social protection.

Our next working paper will offer a synthesis of the evidence from a comprehensive review of literature. Future papers will attempt to offer new insights using evidence from the case studies.

Stay in touch

Keep up to date with the latest news and findings from the research:

- Follow us on Twitter @OPMGlobal, or using the hashtag #shockresponsiveSP.
- Look out for updates, including publications, on our website at <http://www.opml.co.uk/projects/shock-responsive-social-protection-systems>.
- Contact the project manager, Clare O'Brien, at the address below if you'd like to join the mailing list for the project's quarterly newsletter.

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Abbreviations

CaLP	Cash Learning Partnership
DFID	Department for International Development
DRM	disaster risk management
DRR	disaster risk reduction
EWS	early warning system
HIEP	Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme
NGO	non-governmental organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OPM	Oxford Policy Management

1 Our approach to understanding and analysing shocks

Social protection is intrinsically intended to be shock-responsive in the sense that it should support people in the event of a shock or help to mitigate their susceptibility to shocks. We consider that the concept of a 'shock-responsive social protection system'—one that can respond flexibly in the event of an emergency—refers implicitly to *covariate* shocks, those that affect large numbers of people and/or communities at once, rather than the *idiosyncratic* shocks such as the death of a breadwinner that may affect individual households or household members. The specific challenge presented by covariate shocks is the implication that many individuals fall in need of social protection benefits simultaneously (and/or individuals who already receive support may need additional resources to meet their basic needs), while at the same time the consequences of the shock may limit the capacity of the system to deliver.

Covariate shocks may be natural, economic or political. They include, for instance, drought, floods, typhoons and earthquakes; locust invasions; high food prices and economic downturns; political crises and armed conflict; influxes of refugees; or outbreaks of disease such as the recent Ebola epidemic. For the purpose of this research we give primary attention to the types of covariate shock that affect a substantial share of the population and result in the type of 'crisis situation' that is likely to trigger an international humanitarian response. In the Sahel, for instance, these are often recurrent or cyclical shocks such as regular drought leading to widespread food insecurity; elsewhere the shocks may be less regular but still predictable, such as flooding or typhoons¹.

Covariate shocks are often concurrent. Isolating the effects of specific shocks can be complex and may not be necessary either for programme implementers or for our analysis. However, it can be important to capture what is *perceived* as the main shock causing a given crisis since this matters for defining institutional responsibility, the type of response, financing and targeting. Five characteristics of a shock that are critical for framing an analysis of how a social protection system might be able to respond to it are:

1. **Speed of onset (rapid vs. slow).** Slow-onset shocks bring critical questions as to when a gradually worsening situation can be classified as an emergency, and at what point humanitarian agencies should step in and authorise the disbursement of funds. A social protection system designed to respond to slow-onset crises faces the same question as to when its emergency response mechanism should be triggered. Drought is the main slow-onset shock.
2. **Predictability.** Slow-onset shocks ought always to be predictable to some degree, though it is not always possible to predict whether or not a slowly developing situation, such as rain failures, will turn into a crisis. Rapid-onset shocks may appear to be less predictable but there is still usually some indication where such shocks might be expected, if not always when: the existence of geological faultlines for earthquakes, for example, or regular weather patterns that commonly lead to cyclones. From this perspective one would expect that a shock-responsive social protection system should take note of this predictability and put in place activities that strengthen early warning systems and improve preparedness for a disaster.
3. **Duration (short-, medium-term or protracted).** Protracted crises are often associated with conflict, which will have an effect on the ability of systems to respond.
4. **Geographical distribution.** For example, the response to a shock is likely to need to be different in urban and rural areas.
5. **Political profile.** Considerations might include eg. whether the shock triggers a humanitarian response and/or access to international funding (e.g. related to climate change).

¹ The two particular cases that are not covered by our research programme are, first, influxes of refugees, since this triggers a specific international response and is not solely the responsibility of the host country; and second, disease outbreak, as the primary response has to come from the health system.

Some crises are caused by longer term or recurrent problems which eventually cause a livelihood system to reach breaking point. The term 'shock' is often taken to refer to a single event, or a situation developing in a short period of time, and problems caused by difficulties that build up for people over many years might more properly be classified as stresses rather than shocks. However, once the breaking point is reached, or a crisis is recognised, there is a tendency to think of the problem in terms of a shock. In some cases, breaking point or crisis is reached simply because of the duration of the stress. In other cases, though, it is caused when the stress becomes a little more severe than normal, e.g. a particularly long dry season, and in such cases, the situation will almost always be thought of as a shock.

In some respects the distinction between shock and stress is not clear cut, and it may even be unimportant to worry about the semantic use of the terms. However, from the perspective of social protection, these 'shock-inducing stresses' may have relevant differences from more archetypal shocks. Stress-shocks, such as poorer than normal rains in places which suffer from chronically unreliable yields, may bring more people into a situation of acute poverty or food insecurity, but, in principle, these people may have similar characteristics to those already receiving assistance. It may be possible to use the same or similar targeting criteria for an additional caseload. This contrasts with archetypal shocks (earthquakes, floods, or sudden displacement from an outbreak of war) that may give rise to needs that are unrelated to previous need. The implication is that those seeking assistance in the event of a shock may be very different to the regular caseload of a social protection system. Our research will look at responses to both conditions, since the differences between the two may have consequences for our assessment of when it is appropriate to use social protection systems to respond to humanitarian emergencies. However, since most ongoing discussions tend to use the language of shocks for both types of crisis, the language of stresses and shocks will largely be avoided in order to avoid creating confusion or distracting attention from the real issues.

2 A framework for assessing social protection systems and their response to humanitarian emergencies

Our research focuses on countries that have some kind of social protection system in place, and that are subject to the type of shock that typically leads (or would lead, if DRM systems were not in place) to a humanitarian crisis. Staying within this scope requires the definition of two terms: first, what counts as a social protection system? Second, what counts as a humanitarian crisis?

2.1 A typology of social protection systems

Social protection policy encompasses a range of policy instruments including in-kind (e.g. food, vouchers) and cash transfers, school feeding, active labour market programmes, public works programmes, subsidies and social care. Any exploration of whether social protection systems can be used in the event of a humanitarian crisis does not need to be restricted to one specific instrument, such as cash transfers: there may be opportunities to use several instruments. Box 1 cites examples of the types of social protection instrument that may be analysed in this context.

Box 1 Examples of social protection instruments that may be explored

- Conditional and unconditional cash transfers;
- Food, in-kind transfers (incl. food vouchers and agricultural inputs);
- Subsidies (eg. on food / agricultural inputs / energy)
- Education-specific social protection measures (school feeding, school grants)
- Health-specific social protection measures (health fee waivers, community-based health insurance)
- Active labour market policies incl. public works, unemployment insurance
- Index insurance for smallholder farmers
- Social care services

Source: OPM consortium.

In relation to the question above as to what counts as a social protection system we have developed a tentative typology of six degrees of maturity of a formal (as opposed to informal, household-level) social protection system (Table 1):

Table 1 Typology: Maturity of a social protection system

	Category of maturity	Description
1	Non-existent	No state interest in developing long-term social protection, and only ad-hoc foreign aid / humanitarian interventions
2	Internationally led	No clear progress in state policy, but emerging foreign aid interventions shaping up towards a system with some elements of harmonisation or coordination
3	State-led interest	Some state interest to expand social protection (to the most vulnerable), with some elements shaping up, eg. scaled-up aid-supported interventions or an outline of what could become a national flagship programme
4	State-led commitment	Commitment to expand social protection (as articulated in eg. national strategy), with some flagship initiatives for the poor (co-)funded by the state
5	State-led expanding	Clear state policies / laws and a growing set of social protection schemes
6	State-led mature	Well established system with high coverage of populations and needs.

Source: OPM consortium.

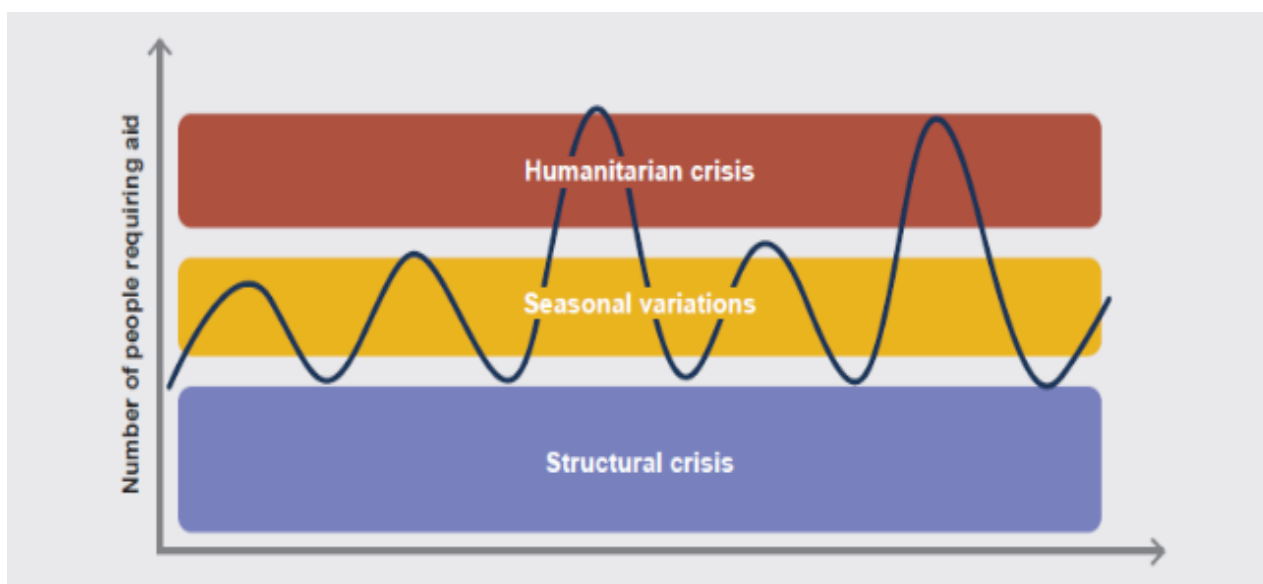
To make the most of understanding opportunities for using state-run social protection systems to respond to these types of shock we are working in countries where some kind of system is in place ('State-led interest / commitment / expanding') though not in the economies with the most highly advanced welfare systems. The emphasis on countries where there is a state-led system or interest rules out countries such as Somalia from the research, since social protection-related activity there is almost entirely run by international actors including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)².

Nonetheless, our study will cover a range of social protection providers, not only state-run initiatives: it may cover, for example, NGO-led interventions in countries that also have a state-led system. This will enable us to look at the partnerships and relationships between international agencies working on social protection and humanitarian issues, and between those and government agencies, as well as between government agencies alone.

2.2 Distinguishing social protection from humanitarian needs

As for the second question above—what counts as a humanitarian crisis—we divide social protection needs into three groups in accordance with Cherrier (2014): chronic, structural crisis needs; seasonal variations; and exceptional needs that give rise to a humanitarian crisis (Figure 1)³.

Figure 1 Fluctuations in the need for food assistance



Source: Cherrier, C. (2014)

'Structural crisis needs' refer to the type of chronic poverty commonly addressed by long-term social protection programmes. 'Seasonal variations' refer to cyclical crises whereby every year or so, poor weather or other conditions push an additional number of households into requiring short-term assistance. The 'humanitarian crisis' at the top of the graph refers to the occasional exceptional year or event when communities that usually manage without any assistance find themselves in need of support.

² Research on countries with little state interest or leadership in social protection is covered in part by ECHO. The literature review to be published after this concept paper contains a review of some of the other major studies in this field.

³ Cherrier, C. (2014), 'Cash transfers and resilience: strengthening linkages between emergency cash transfers and national social protection programmes in the Sahel'. Discussion paper for CaLP / UNICEF / European Union regional workshop, 'Linkages between emergency cash transfers and social safety nets in the Sahel', Dakar, July,

2.3 Combining the needs and the typology of the system: scope of the research

Combining these, Table 2 indicates where we will focus the attention of our research. Since structural crisis needs—the first column—are those already addressed by social protection systems they fall outside the present research. We will look at the response of social protection systems to the demands provoked by both seasonal and exceptional shocks.

Table 2 Scope of the research

Type of needs System maturity	Structural crisis needs	Seasonal crisis needs	Humanitarian crisis needs
Non-existent			
Internationally led			
State-led interest		✓	✓
State-led commitment		✓	✓
State-led expanding		✓	✓
State-led mature			

Source: OPM consortium. Notes: The areas marked with a tick are the focus of this research; The two dimensions may operate in a context of fragility, armed conflict, violence, or uncooperative state.

3 How to define scale-up in response to shocks

When policymakers consider the use of a social protection system to address these seasonal or humanitarian crisis needs, there are a number of strategies that they may employ to scale up the overall level of support that the system provides to vulnerable people. It is not the case that a social protection system must only provide extra support to the households it already assists, or provide the same type of support to new households. There are many more ways in which it might be used flexibly. For example, policymakers could graft an entirely new emergency response programme onto existing social protection administrative systems, such that the targeted households and the support provided are completely different but the delivery channels are the same, thereby offering improvements in efficiency.

Building on Bastagli (2014) and Cherrier (2014), we offer a typology of five main options for scale-up in response to covariate shocks (Table 3)^{4,5}. These may be used in combination.

Table 3 Typology: Options for scaling up in response to covariate shocks

Name of option	Description
Vertical expansion	Increasing the benefit value or duration of an existing programme. May include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustment of transfer amounts • Introduction of extraordinary payments or transfers
Horizontal expansion	Adding new beneficiaries to an existing programme. May include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of the geographical coverage of an existing programme • Extraordinary enrolment campaign • Modifications of entitlement rules • Relaxation of requirements / conditionality to facilitate participation
Piggybacking	Using a social protection intervention's administrative framework, but running the shock-response programme separately. May include the introduction of a new policy
Shadow alignment	Developing a parallel humanitarian system that aligns as best as possible with a current or possible future social protection programme
Refocusing	In case of a budget cut, adjusting the social protection system to refocus assistance on groups most vulnerable to the shock

Source: OPM consortium.

Each of these options is likely to have phases of preparedness, response and recovery:

- **Preparedness.** It is widely accepted that preparedness greatly improves prospects of a timely and effective shock response. In the humanitarian sphere, with the growing interest for cash transfers, there is a paradigm shift from prepositioning essential goods (such as food) to prepositioning data, such as a registry of vulnerable households, or an inventory of possible payment networks.
- **Response.** When a crisis occurs, there will be a trigger that activates the 'response' phase.
- **Recovery.** At a certain time the crisis will be deemed to have moved into a 'recovery' phase, at which point the assistance may be terminated or adjusted.

Our research will explore options and experiences under these various phases. We discuss next how these phases are aligned with DRM mechanisms.

⁴ Bastagli, F. (2014), 'Responding to a crisis: the design and delivery of social protection'. ODI Working Paper.

⁵ Cherrier, C. (2014), *op. cit.*

4 The contribution of DRM mechanisms and systems

DRM is often viewed as having five focal areas: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Establishing a shock-responsive social protection system clearly relates to preparedness, response and recovery from a disaster, and therefore potentially overlaps with a number of different DRM activities and mechanisms⁶. Social protection systems have been linked with DRM systems and approaches in several countries. For example, the Productive Safety Nets Programme in Ethiopia is linked with an early warning system (EWS), and a post-earthquake public works programme in Haiti was linked with the disaster recovery efforts. During the research we will investigate different DRM institutional mechanisms and administrative processes that could effectively dovetail with a social protection system to make it respond more effectively to covariate shocks. Table 4 below details these mechanisms, with observations on their potential relevance.

Table 4 Typology of DRM mechanisms

Aspect of DRM	Examples of DRM mechanisms	Potential relevance to social protection
Preparedness and response	EWS and established criteria for different levels of alert	EWS have been linked to social protection programmes in several countries. For example, in Kenya the Hunger Safety Net Programme is linked to a vegetation index. It is vital to ensure that EWSs are linked up to people-centred networks so that action is taken at pre-determined points. The main aim of an EWS is to trigger action prior to an emergency to reduce the likelihood of losses. If an EWS is working effectively then, the ideal scenario is that a disaster is averted e.g. through timely evacuation. For some types of disasters, therefore, EWSs may not be the best trigger point for cash transfers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk assessments and hazard risk mapping • Vulnerability assessments and mapping • Mechanisms in place for regular monitoring and updating of risk information 	Processes and systems for conducting and updating risk assessments and vulnerability assessments could be useful entry points for the design of social protection systems, at national, regional and local levels. This is particularly true if systems are in place to ensure that assessments are kept up to date.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingency plans • Sector preparedness plans 	Contingency planning and sectoral disaster planning could incorporate planned social protection emergency interventions.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public information and awareness-raising • Emergency communication systems 	These could be useful communication channels for social protection programmes.
	Provision of practical support / supplies, e.g. clean water, warehouses, medical support, shelter	Distribution of cash transfers can potentially be—and, in some cases, is—linked with the distribution of relief supplies.
Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-disaster needs assessments • Damage and loss assessments (sectoral and cross-sectoral) • Standardised reporting 	Post-disaster assessments may be useful for targeting social protection programmes, depending on the speed with which they can be conducted and the content.

⁶ We are using the UNISDR definitions which can be found here: <http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/7817>

Aspect of DRM	Examples of DRM mechanisms	Potential relevance to social protection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconstruction programmes Resettlement programmes and rehabilitation plans Adaptive livelihoods programmes 	<p>Reconstruction programmes have been linked with public works programmes in some countries. It may be possible to link resettlement programmes and initiatives to encourage the adaptation of livelihoods to social protection programmes, although political economy analysis would be necessary to fully understand incentives and obstacles to change.</p>
	Local coordination mechanisms for recovery with links to the national level	Local coordination mechanisms for the recovery phase could potentially be useful mechanisms to assist in the distribution of cash transfers.
General	DRM committees at regional, local and community levels	DRM committees may be able to play an important role in planning, targeting and implementing social protection initiatives.
	Mainstreaming efforts e.g. linking in with development plans, cross-sectoral working arrangements etc. at all levels	DRM mainstreaming efforts may provide an opportunity for social protection and DRM staff to work together. This could involve a conceptual linking of the two areas, as well as identifying practical opportunities for co-working and planning.
	DRM legal frameworks	Laws relating to DRM and social protection may potentially inter-relate.
	Institutional framework: DRM policies, national platforms for disaster risk reduction (DRR), codes, mandates, agencies etc.	The DRM institutional framework within a country may be able to formally incorporate attention to social protection, eg. in technical working groups or in the development of national policy. Coordination between social protection and DRM professionals may depend largely on coordination between the ministries concerned with each area, although there may be opportunities to bring both together.
	DRR / DRM financing mechanisms, disaster funds, resource mobilisation systems, insurance mechanisms	DRM financing mechanisms, insurance and funds could potentially be linked to social protection interventions
	DRR plans at all levels, and mechanisms to ensure effective implementation	DRR plans at national, regional, local and community level could incorporate social protection.

Source: OPM consortium.

We have observed during our inception phase research that the current discussion on implementing social protection in emergency situations is not as well covered in DRM circles and literature as it is in the social protection field. The team's impression at this stage is that social protection systems have been adapted for use post-disaster, but they have not necessarily been linked in an on-going fashion with DRM institutions, mechanisms, systems and administrative procedures (with the exception of EWSs in drought situations). This will be investigated further during the fieldwork, to ascertain where and how links with DRM mechanisms and systems have successfully been made. We will also seek to identify underutilised opportunities for linkages with DRM mechanisms and systems, and investigate likely barriers and disincentives. We will also need to consider that opportunities may be different for different types of disaster, paying particular attention to rapid- versus slow-onset emergencies.

5 Our approach to analysing shock-responsive social protection

5.1 Shock-responsive social protection systems and their enablers

Crises are rarely the result of shocks alone: the shock may be the touchpaper that prompts an underlying chronic situation—relating to, say, poverty, or marginalisation—to flare up. Similar shocks or long-term stresses can give rise to humanitarian crises of radically different scales depending on the nature of the underlying situation and a country's preparedness to deal with both that situation and the immediate crisis⁷.

Social protection in its regular form attempts to contribute to resolving underlying situations of poverty and vulnerability among households and communities: if this is effective, households may be able to accumulate enough assets or support systems that they are not devastated when a crisis hits. In turn, DRM systems with a prevention or preparedness focus can contribute to a reduction in the size and impact of a shock, such that humanitarian assistance or long-term social protection may not be required in the event of a disaster; while those dealing with response and recovery can assist the speed and effectiveness of a social protection or humanitarian response as described above. Climate change is an underlying driver of weather-related disasters, and low-income countries continue to experience the impacts of climate change in irreversible ways. International funding for climate change presents an opportunity for scalable social protection systems to operate in the aftermath of a disaster.

We see, then, how closely these sectors are interlinked. A good social protection system may reduce the demands on humanitarian aid; DRM systems may reduce the demand for either humanitarian aid or social protection; and so on. In the light of this we consider a shock-responsive social protection system to encompass both the social protection system itself, as well as 'enablers', that is, the complementary preparedness and response systems, such as DRM systems. Our research will cover this broader spectrum of systems and actors.

5.2 Considering a hybrid system

We intend to analyse factors enabling a given system of social protection, humanitarian assistance and DRM systems to provide (extra) benefits to shock-affected populations. We will not evaluate the effectiveness of regular social protection interventions in mitigating risk and reducing chronic poverty.

As part of our research into normative questions surrounding shock-responsive social protection we will solicit views on whether social protection systems *ought* to be shock-responsive and for what purpose. This will include understanding whether social protection can perform as well as, or better than, humanitarian responses on key criteria such as timeliness, coverage of the affected population and adequacy of the support provided, and taking into account, where reliable data are already available, cost-effectiveness as well as impact.

Since investment in one sector may have a considerable knock-on effect on the need for interventions in a different sector, and since resources are finite, we should not automatically assume that investing in shock-responsive social protection systems is always efficient or cost-effective. When we look at the challenges and opportunities for using social protection to scale up in response to shocks, then, we will consider whether the systems should be scaled up at all,

⁷ The term 'resilience' attempts to capture this concept of the ability to resist collapse when an external shock occurs.

taking into account issues such as political economy and financing. For instance, we may find that in some circumstances the cost of maintaining a flexible social protection system outweighs the cost of setting up a humanitarian response at short notice to achieve the same level of benefit, and/or the social protection system may not be able to ensure adequate timeliness and effectiveness of the response.

A particular challenge that merits examination is the prospect for social protection systems and humanitarian response systems to work side by side, sharing the caseload of households requiring additional support. Specific processes would be needed for identifying which needs were being met by the regular social protection system and which were not, and for then targeting humanitarian aid at the needs unmet by social protection. In addition, humanitarian aid uses very different principles from long-term social protection programmes in setting the amount of support that it considers sufficient, which might result in different population groups receiving very different levels of support, based on identity, politics or some other non-humanitarian principle; or it might result in pressure on humanitarian actors to change the level of support that would be given had they used humanitarian principles alone. This combination of segregation in targeting and differentiation in the level of support might place a difficult political burden on humanitarian actors, who might find themselves having to assist certain population groups predominantly, and especially those disfavoured by, or inaccessible to, state governments. This could undermine the perception of humanitarian aid as neutral and even jeopardise the safety of humanitarian organisations and their personnel. Engaging with humanitarian and social protection actors to disentangle this issue will be a key focus of the research.

5.3 State and non-state actors

Recognising that building effective national social protection systems takes years or decades, we adopt a practical approach and consider a 'social protection system' as the system of country-level providers of social protection. We approach country-level social protection systems in a broad sense, that is, not strictly limited to state-led interventions. In low-income and fragile countries, state-led social protection interventions and foreign aid (humanitarian and development) assistance will continue to co-exist for years to come to assist vulnerable populations affected by shocks.

The prospect of increasingly delivering humanitarian assistance through state-led social protection systems may give rise to practical obstacles and political / institutional reticence. National policymakers may be reluctant to support such a process for fear of losing an important part of foreign aid support, and having to support additional costs. Globally, this may pose a challenge to the current aid architecture and its cluster approach (as does already, in some way, the 'multi-purpose cash transfer' model). Reticence may also come from traditional providers of humanitarian assistance (such as UN agencies, bilateral donors and NGOs) who may see in such an initiative a threat to their own existence, or a risk of losing visibility. This research will pay attention to the various political economy factors that this question raises at national and international levels.

5.4 Implications of conflict and country fragility

While the definition of 'fragile and conflict-affected states' (FCAS) lacks consensus, most development agencies use the term to describe a fundamental failure of the state to perform functions necessary to meet citizens' basic needs and expectations. This includes the assurance of basic security, maintenance of law and justice, and provision of basic services and economic opportunities. DFID defines fragile states as 'those where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor'. The reality is that fragility exists on a

spectrum of which violent conflict is only one part. Other forms of fragility can arise from divisions between national, ethnic or religious groups and the absence of political consensus.

Whilst recognising that conflict-related crisis is a type of covariate shock, our research will focus rather on defining how features of fragility (at the national and regional level) impact on successful shock-response programming. This means that we are not addressing shock response programming in response to conflict and fragility alone but rather how the ability to deal with other types of covariate shocks is affected by vulnerability to conflict and fragility. We will be using political economy analysis to understand the political and other contextual factors that affect social protection policy.

Social protection interventions in fragile states are seen as a way of protecting vulnerable populations during conflict, in situations of fragility where a government is unable to fulfil its core functions, and as a way of facilitating rehabilitation after conflict ceases. In fragile settings in particular, social protection often has a dual and simultaneous role of contributing to state building and to reducing social inequalities and exclusion.

However, the context can be problematic. Ovadiya et al (2015), whose work aims to develop operational guidance to teams on the likely determinants of effective social protection programming and policy making in fragile and conflict-affected settings, highlight that there can be weak or destroyed infrastructure (physical, financial, etc.); a lack of social cohesion (for example, quite a number of fragile countries may have longstanding, politically difficult-to-revoke social protection policies that are ineffective, regressive, and benefit very small and/or fairly well off populations, while others may have unstable populations with high rates of displacement and migration); acute poverty and vulnerability to shocks; an implicit need for developing citizen trust in the state; and an implicit need for conflict management among special groups⁸. Moreover, the state may experience a weak bureaucracy, limited resources and a pressure to focus attention on other issues such as the military or security policy.

A key point is that humanitarian principles mean that assistance must be given to all on the basis of need alone, regardless of politics, identity, ease of access, etc. If state-run social protection systems are to replace humanitarian action, the state must be capable of delivering aid to all, targeting purely on need; and it must have both the political will and the credibility to do so. The context of fragility just described mean that these factors cannot be taken as given. The state is often a party to the conflict; and regimes in power have a long history of using aid as a political tool, using their control of aid as patronage or using it to build political capital by taking credit for international assistance. If humanitarian aid were to become subsumed under a state social protection system it would be much harder—or even impossible—for donors to be seen to remain politically neutral. At the same time this in itself should not preclude any efforts to consider whether the humanitarian sector might benefit from closer cooperation with the social protection sector, since international donors are committed to both fragile states principles, which have state-building as a central objective, and Paris Declaration principles of ownership and alignment with national governments.

Our research aims to add to the body of learning on social protection in fragile states by further exploring the specific contextual factors such as these, which enable or prevent effective shock-responsive social protection. This will be grounded in specific contexts explored as part of the case studies.

⁸ Ovadiya, M., Kryeziu, A., Masood, S. and Zapatero Larrío, E. (2015). '[Social protection in fragile and conflict-affected countries: trends and challenges](#)'. Social protection and labor discussion paper; no. 1502. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.

6 A note on our research design

Following on from this conceptualisation of shock-responsive social protection, our research programme will be exploring the following overarching question:

What factors enable social protection systems to be responsive to shocks and to deliver effective shock response?

The two main sub-questions within this look respectively at the design and implementation of social protection systems, and the prospects for the social protection sector to collaborate more effectively with related sectors:

1. What features in the design and implementation of social protection systems facilitate an effective response to shocks?

First, we will look in detail at specific systems, programmes and policies and assess how both their design features and their implementation arrangements shape the extent to which they provide effective shock response. Second, more broadly, we aim to shed light on the role of contextual factors such as governance and political contexts, the budget process, levels of fragility and conflict, poverty and inequality and demographic structures in determining the success of any shock-responsive social protection system.

2. How can humanitarian, disaster-risk management and social protection systems best work together for more effective responses to shocks?

This includes an analysis of the way in which humanitarian and social protection objectives overlap and intersect and/or do not, and examples of these in practice. It will identify where there is scope for greater coordination and perhaps even integration of humanitarian and social protection interventions, review experience in practice and identify the policy options and trade-offs associated with linking these two sectors, taking into account differences in purpose and scope of these different sectors, and their tools, and critically discussing related opportunities and limitations (including political economy factors that support or constrain this, and the challenges of reconciling humanitarian and development principles).

We will carry out the research through three in-depth case studies, in **Mali, Mozambique and Pakistan**, and three lighter case studies, in the **Philippines, Lesotho** and a regional study of the **Sahel**, together with desk-based documentary analysis and interviews. Our research will take four aspects:

- **Normative:** What do policymakers consider to be the hallmarks of a 'shock-responsive' social protection system?
- **Diagnostic:** What systems and policies are in place to respond to shocks, and how effective are they?
- **Explanatory:** Why is the current system the way it is? What are the enabling factors for improvement, and what blocks further advances?
- **Forward-looking:** In the light of the analysis, what can be done next to improve the shock-responsiveness of social protection systems and their links with DRM and humanitarian assistance?

We will carry out analyses of poverty and vulnerability; a mapping and analysis of stakeholders, power relations and governance; and a mapping and analysis of budgets, policies and systems for social protection, humanitarian assistance and DRM. Results for each case study will be released during 2016, and a synthesis report produced in early 2017.



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