

Conceptualising shock-responsive social protection¹

Valentina Barca, Oxford Policy Management

Defining shock-responsiveness

Social protection is intrinsically intended to be shock-responsive in 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 existing system to deliver relief (e.g. following disaster or conflict). These shocks will primarily be triggered by cyclical, weather-related seasonal variations or exceptional circumstances (e.g. earthquake) that give rise to a humanitarian crisis. They will also pose different challenges to existing social protection systems depending on their speed of onset (rapid or slow), predictability, duration (short- or medium-term or protracted), geographical distribution and political profile.

Existing strategies for shock-responsive social protection

When policymakers consider the use of a social protection system to address the needs of seasonal or humanitarian crises, there are a number of strategies they may employ to scale up the system's overall level of support to vulnerable people.

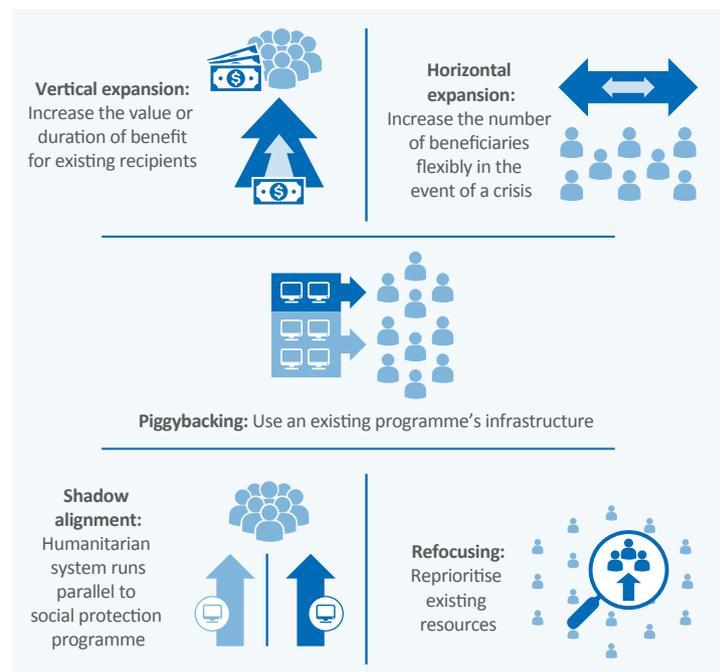
Building on Bastagli (2014) and Cherrier (2014), we offer a typology of five main options for scale-up in response to covariate shock (also see Figure 1). These may be used in any combination:

- **Vertical expansion:** Increasing the benefit value or duration of an existing programme. This may include adjustment of transfer amounts and/or the introduction of extraordinary payments or transfers.
- **Horizontal expansion:** Adding new beneficiaries to an existing programme. This may include extension of the geographical coverage of an existing programme, extraordinary enrolment campaigns, modifications of entitlement rules or relaxation of requirements/conditionalities to facilitate participation.
- **Piggybacking:** Using an existing social protection intervention's administrative framework, but running the shock-response programme separately. This may include the introduction of a new policy.
- **Shadow alignment:** Developing a parallel humanitarian system that aligns as well as possible with an existing 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.

Each of these options is likely to incorporate three phases, building on disaster risk management mechanisms:

- **Preparedness** improves prospects of a timely and effective shock response. In the humanitarian sphere, with the growing interest in cash transfers, there is a paradigm shift from prepositioning essential goods (such as food) to data, such as a unified 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. For example, this could be an early warning system.
- **Recovery:** At a certain time, the crisis will be deemed to have moved into a 'recovery' phase, when the assistance may be terminated or adjusted following an adequate post-disaster assessment. For example, reconstruction programmes could be run using a public works approach.

Figure 1. Adapting social protection systems for humanitarian crises



Source: Oxford Policy Management (2016).

References:

- Bastagli, Francesca. 2014. "Responding to a crisis: the design and delivery of social protection." *ODI Working Paper No.394*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Cherrier, Cecile. 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.
- Oxford Policy Management. 2016. "Conceptualising Shock-Responsive Social Protection." *Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems, Working Paper 1*. Oxford: Oxford Policy Management.

Note:

1. This One-pager was based on work by Francesca Bastagli, Clare O'Brien and Cécile Cherrier as part of the 'Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems' study funded by UK Aid and implemented by OPM in partnership with ODI, CaLP and INASP.

This One Pager is a partnership between the IPC-IG and Oxford Policy Management.