



SUPPORTING THE LINKAGES BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN CASH AND VOUCHER ASSISTANCE AND NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

TIPSHEET FOR CASH WORKING
GROUPS (CWG) AND INTER-CLUSTER
COORDINATION GROUPS (ICCG)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Tipsheet for Cash Working Groups (CWG) and Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups (ICCG) Supporting the Linkages between Humanitarian Cash and Voucher Assistance and National Social Protection Systems is a collaborative product, led by a core writing team drawn from UNICEF, OCHA and CaLP. Thanks are due to Kathryn Taesch from World Vision and Valentina Barca from the SPACE COVID-19 service (DFID and GIZ) for their comments and inputs.

The tipsheet remains a living document and it is anticipated that feedback and learning from users will inform a review process planned for early 2021. It is hoped that ultimately the contents of this tipsheet will be overtaken by a more formal IASC-led process that all relevant actors can support.

BACKGROUND

The response to COVID-19 has relied heavily on the use of social protection systems for emergency assistance, reinforcing arguments that such linkages may offer promising opportunities to improve impact and sustainability of assistance in responding to humanitarian crises. But contexts vary widely – bringing different sets of challenges, opportunities and caveats – and while there is a growing literature on the subject,¹ it is not always easily accessible or aimed at humanitarian coordination actors, such as cash working group and inter-cluster coordinators.

What are some of the key actions and simple activities that coordination actors might take to support implementing actors on this issue at country level? What kind of information should be collected and shared to support operational programming and decision-making in this area? What considerations should be kept in mind to support, facilitate and ensure that discussions among technical and operational actors occur? Which coordination platforms and key actors should they engage with and involve in those discussions?

OBJECTIVE

This tipsheet aims to support country-level coordination efforts to strengthen the engagement between humanitarian coordination groups that implement cash and voucher assistance (CVA) and existing social protection or disaster risk reduction coordination actors and groups. In particular, it seeks to offer inter-cluster and cash working group coordinators simple practical tips for engaging with social protection coordination mechanisms, in an effort to increase information-sharing, identify potential opportunities for linking systems, and support operational decision-making. As context is critical but varies considerably, this tipsheet focuses on how and where coordination actors might engage and the type of information they may consider collecting and sharing in support of decision-making. It does not intend to provide operational guidance on how cash actors should align or link programmes, as such literature already exists, and, as such, does not seek to replicate or replace agency-specific guidance and policies on this subject.

The larger objective is to improve outcomes for affected populations by ensuring that different humanitarian or development actors and coordination groups are better linked, where this is appropriate, feasible and desirable. Engagement should allow humanitarian and development actors to work and operate together to maximize impact and efficiency, avoid duplication of effort, minimize the waste of resources and learn from each other.

Please note that this tipsheet is a living and informal document and has benefited from inputs from a variety of actors who wished to contribute. Opportunities will remain open and continue to be sought to strengthen it further through increased consultations and learning from practical application in the future.

¹ See, e.g., Oxford Policy Management's work on Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems (SRSP); socialprotection.org and especially the 'Social Protection in Crisis Contexts' community; CaLP's library on cash and voucher assistance linkages with social protection and thematic landing page; the EU's Social Protection across the Nexus (SPAN); the Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 – Expert Advice Helpline, SPACE; WFP for a collection of relevant resources; and [UNICEF's work on Strengthening Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems](#).

HOW TO SUPPORT LINKAGES AND ALIGNMENT

Humanitarian coordination actors should work to support and ensure that operational actors can implement more effective and inclusive cash and voucher assistance that builds on and/or reinforces national mechanisms. Below are some simple actions and activities that inter-cluster and cash working group coordinators might consider to support the important work of operational actors in this area.

GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND COMMIT TO THE RELATIONSHIP

Find out who coordinates social protection programmes, what social protection coordination bodies and/or policies exist in-country, i.e., identify existing coordinators of national social protection schemes or coordinating bodies and platforms. Depending on the country, there may be different social protection programmes, not necessarily integrated, and these may be 'owned' by more than one ministry. The box below offers some possible entry points.

FIND YOUR COUNTRY'S ENTRY POINTS:

- Existing social protection coordination groups, such as social protection technical working groups (led by relevant government ministries), inter-ministerial social protection steering groups/councils, sector advisory groups, NGO social protection platforms – the list is long.
- Government authorities working on social protection, social policy and poverty reduction (at times under the auspices of ministries such as Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Development, Ministry of Social Solidarity, etc. or programmes hosted within those ministries or other government bodies). It may also be useful to engage with the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) agency for preparedness activities, such as Early Warning Systems (EWS), etc.
- While the coordination of social protection is usually led by government actors, UNICEF, the World Bank, International Labour Organisation, multilateral and bilateral donors, or others, may co-chair such coordination groups in some contexts.
- OCHA, UN agencies and NGO actors leading or supporting cash working group coordination and operationally making the links between humanitarian CVA and social protection.
- Social protection donor coordination groups and humanitarian/development donors who work in this area, e.g. DEVCO, ECHO, DFID, USAID, etc.

Get to know each other. Create the space, platform or events to invite social protection coordination and operational actors and attend each other's coordination meetings (and agree to meet separately) to understand the programmes that operational actors are trying to deliver. Discuss the objectives and possible ways of working or coordinating with each other and what is needed in order to do so.

Find common ground, benefits and the right incentives to coordinate. Discuss openly and frankly key challenges and opportunities for coordination between humanitarian cash actors and social protection actors (e.g. what failed, what worked, why, political dynamics, etc.). Find out what social protection coordination actors need from humanitarian coordination actors and what humanitarian actors can bring to the table to technically and operationally support social protection efforts.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION ON COORDINATION OF THE GROUPS INTERESTING AND ONGOING

Develop a joint coordination mechanism between social protection and humanitarian actors and keep 'linking social protection and cash and voucher assistance' as a common or frequent agenda item for regular meetings and updates on cash and vouchers and other forms of assistance. Ensure there is space for presentations on the existing social protection scheme by national actors or local stakeholders, be they government, NGO or others.

Ask for support and engagement by social protection actors in humanitarian coordination platforms, e.g., bring them in to attend, co-chair, facilitate or contribute agenda items to support information-sharing and identification of opportunities for collaboration.

Support and reinforce the work of national social protection coordination leads, reminding or highlighting to operational actors attending humanitarian cash and voucher coordination meetings of the existence, efforts and coordination of ongoing social protection schemes by local and national actors and bodies.

Don't assume that social protection coordination systems are less sophisticated than ours (or that 'we' must build 'their' capacity). The coordination of humanitarian cash and voucher assistance and of social protection cash transfers function in very similar ways. Government approaches to coordination and technical and operational aspects, such as targeting, delivery, etc., develop over many years to respond to contextual needs and constraints, often building on regional or international best practice, lessons learned and aligning with a national vision/plan.

Find ways to share information systematically, e.g.:

- set up a mutual focal point system between both coordination groups;
- include interested and relevant social protection coordination and operational parties in ICCG and CWG mailing lists;
- invite them to present their coordination systems, programmes and opportunities for collaboration;
- regularly hold joint meetings to build the relationship and ensure mutual understanding of priorities and gaps;
- create events that enhance networking and entry points between coordination and operational actors;
- propose/coordinate/support opportunities for field visits for operational actors from both sides to see each other's programmes.

Enter the 'playing field' with humility, recognizing that everyone is doing their best and that some people were there long before we arrived. There are a range of dynamics within existing social protection coordination groups and ongoing programmes that have developed over time, so do not assume we can 'fix' anything instantly or that others have not thought about or tried some of our innovative proposals before.

WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD YOU COLLECT AND SHARE?

Coordination Systems

- Existing SP coordination structures, including chairmanship and engaged actors
- System/policy information
- SP policy/strategy/legislation and vision
- Range of programmes and how they work together
- Funding of programmes and plans for scale-up

Programme information

(do not limit yourselves to cash programmes only, as humanitarian cash can be linked to in kind programmes too)

- Programme objectives
- Coverage: eligibility criteria, target groups, transfer rates and duration, registration and enrolment approaches, resulting coverage, approach to address inclusion/exclusion errors
- Delivery mechanisms and financial service providers
- Monitoring/community feedback and accountability mechanisms

Structure of implementation

- National counterparts: Government department and ministries, local government authorities involved in delivery, especially cash plus programmes
- Programme implementation levels and capacity – national, regional, municipal, other
- Role of social service workforce
- Maturity: In pilot phase, nascent, developed, in expansion, etc.
- Beneficiary communication systems
- Flexibility, shock responsiveness and adaptability of system to emergencies

Existing linkages

- Linkages/alignments between national programmes/systems with humanitarian CVA or response programmes

TURN IT INTO A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP BUILT ON DEEP UNDERSTANDING

Understand the social protection coordination system better. Collect and share relevant information on the national social protection programmes, systems and mechanisms (and/or from operational humanitarian/development actors already working in this area) with humanitarian cash and voucher actors for their information and decision-making (see box below for potential information)

Make it a two-way coordination, information exchange, knowledge sharing and harmonization/alignment flow. Create the space and platforms for operational actors to voice, share and explain their work with humanitarian cash transfers to Social Protection and Disaster Risk Response operational and technical actors, along with their challenges and opportunities. Why, who, what, where and how each can practically benefit from the other's work, find common solutions and genuinely contribute using each other's comparative advantages.

Develop opportunities for operational actors from both sides to work through the most important strategic, technical and operational issues together, in support of an eventual action plan. Key issues may include:²

- What are the current critical gaps within relevant social protection programmes? Can they be supported? May include strategic gaps, such as on coverage, adequacy, comprehensiveness of support, timeliness, response and adaptation to humanitarian emergencies and needs etc., or technical and operational gaps, such functions that may lack capacity and/or be missing along the delivery chain.
- Can humanitarians use existing SP systems to deliver assistance better for improved or longer-term outcomes? If so, how? What are the points for linkages and alignment? E.g., cash top-ups to existing amounts, including more recipients, using or combining registries, delivering through the same payment mechanisms, sharing feedback mechanisms and beneficiary hotlines, etc.
- What critical preparation is needed? E.g., linking to early warning systems, Financial Service Provision contracts? Standard Operating Procedures? Pre-identification of target groups?
- What (digital) data protection and privacy concerns need to be addressed?
- Where can humanitarian response complement social protection?
- What about non-nationals? Can they be included? Or could complementary or parallel mechanisms be established and aligned?³
- Where are the real challenges, e.g., different targeting groups, payment levels that are incompatible?
- Are there legal implications to linking?
- Where can humanitarian actors help strengthen national programmes?
- Are there particular systems where support is necessary, e.g., registration, data management, community engagement and mobilization?
- Might humanitarian actors support a scale-up or a strengthening of the flex mechanisms of existing social protection systems/programmes to make them more shock responsive?

Support planning efforts, e.g., integrate relevant information from the abovementioned technical and operational or strategic discussions into Humanitarian Response Planning (HRPs) processes and products,⁴ to support discussions and operational decisions by humanitarian actors.

Keep information flowing, e.g., update and raise relevant issues for discussion by the Inter-Sector/Cluster Coordination Groups and Humanitarian Country Teams.

² See, e.g., SPACE strategy decision matrix for a comprehensive list of potential issue to consider.

³ For more information on CVA alignment in refugee contexts, please see UNHCR's Aligning Humanitarian Cash Assistance with National Social Safety Nets in Refugee Settings – Key Considerations and Learning,

⁴ See IASC Guidance on the Humanitarian Response Planning Process for further information on how to include social protection considerations.

Advocate to get buy-in and support, e.g., with the support of operational actors within the group, advocate for a range of issues to more senior humanitarian or development coordination groups in-country: where SP systems do not exist, make sure humanitarian efforts contribute to the building blocks for SP systems, strengthening systems' shock responsiveness and emergency adaptability, including the use of cash transfers, and expand this to relevant funding support – identifying, coordinating and sharing appropriate opportunities and/or processes that are inclusive of all actors.

Remember 'it's a marathon, not a sprint' Linking these different coordination structures or even the operational systems is likely to be challenging and frustrating at times. It could take months, more likely years, to see major developments/success or to measure impact, and may need significant coordination resources from a range of stakeholders in the longer term than humanitarian actors are used to.

Have the right people Linking these coordination groups and programmes requires a different combination of technical and interpersonal skills or previous experience in both areas. Invest in the right mix of human resources, ensuring that community voices (with a different range of gender, age, disability, socially excluded groups) are well represented to adequately incorporate the needs of end users and affected populations, and that these can effectively inform coordination and advise.

LOOK AROUND FOR HELP

Talk to the experts in this area, e.g., national or local coordination consultants, academic institutions, government ministries and NGO experts involved in social protection, humanitarian development nexus and the linkages between humanitarian CVA and social protection.

Look for easy ways to learn from each other, e.g., ask organizations attending your coordination groups with technical experience to support and leverage expertise relating to social protection capacities, tools and systems with events/workshops, developing advocacy messages for relevant audiences (government entities, UN/NGOs, donors and people receiving assistance), sharing research or evidence, conducting in-country research, mobilizing resources, deploying to government offices or humanitarian organizations.

Seek engagement with other CWGs and other social protection/development coordination groups regionally or globally to share, learn and replicate experiences and lessons.

Encourage government-to-government peer support and country-to-country exchanges, e.g., through online sharing of best practices, challenges, information, presentations or programme visits.

Consult agency-specific guidance (see respective websites for further information) **or other global level resources** to inform discussions, such as:

- Grand Bargain sub-working group on Linking Humanitarian CVA and social protection
- Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board
- World Bank economist Ugo Gentilini's blog
- Overseas Development Institute
- Oxford Policy Management
- The Transfer Project
- The CaLP Network
- The EU's Social Protection across the Nexus (SPAN)



The Cash Learning Partnership

The aim of this tipsheet is to support collaboration opportunities between humanitarian and social protection actors to strengthen links between humanitarian cash with national social protection systems – where appropriate. The main audience is expected to be Cash Working Groups and Inter-Cluster Coordinators. The tipsheet will remain a living document, to be updated based on continued learning and feedback until January 2021 when it will be reviewed. This short document does not substitute for a more formal IASC-led process.

Front cover photo: In Burundi, a member of a focus group shows his mobile phone. The focus group was organised by GSMA and brought together recipients of IRC's CVA programme.

Credit: Jenny Casswell/GSMA. Makamba, Burundi, September 2019.