

A six-step guide to supporting shock-responsive social protection in response to COVID-19

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This note¹ sets out six steps to guide our decisions on whether and how we may be able to provide an effective and timely response to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 by building on existing government social protection programmes (i.e. shock responsive social protection). It is aimed primarily at staff in country offices that are already engaged with governments on social protection and/ or emergency cash and voucher programming.

Background:

One of the quickest ways of responding to the economic impacts of COVID-19 (both of containment/lockdown measures and broader macroeconomic impacts) is to build on existing social protection programmes and systems where they exist. Social protection refers to three broad areas: **social assistance** (e.g. child benefits, social cash transfers, food aid and school feeding); **social insurance** (e.g. unemployment insurance, health insurance, contributory pensions); and **labour market policies** (e.g. wage subsidies, minimum wage legislation, maternity pay). As of April 17th, [no less than 133 countries had planned, introduced, or adapted at least 564 social protection and jobs measures in response to COVID-19](#).

Cash transfer programmes have so far been the most widely used intervention by governments due to their ability to quickly reach those in need. However, the use of cash transfers (including vouchers) to deliver urgent income support to households also face new challenges in the context of COVID-19, where social distancing and containment measures are in place. Therefore, any cash-based programme will require *extremely careful planning* to ensure it is feasible and appropriate (see the latest [country office guidance on Cash and Voucher Programming here](#)). This remainder of this document aims to help Save the Children staff through key decisions around the various options available for supporting shock-responsive social protection.

Step 1: Quickly get to grips with what government plans exist (if any) to address economic and food security needs

Wherever there is a functioning government, it is critical to ensure SC is well-aligned to its plans and that it can also respond to and complement them. It may be that there are already plans to build on an existing social protection scheme or maybe these decisions have not been well explored yet. Either way, SC could play a number of important roles during the response (e.g. technical advice and delivery), as well as more generally being the voice for children and caregivers.

This is not to say we should wait for government and humanitarian plans to emerge, however, but we must constantly be aware of them. In some countries this will be done through the humanitarian cluster system, in other countries it will be done directly by the government and through various technical working groups. Plans of bilateral donors must also be understood and, where they exist, we must be aware of plans of NGO consortia.

Step 2: Quickly get a sense of which households and individuals (and how many) will be affected economically

In order to know what the response of Save the Children should be and to be able to critically appraise any planned response of government and partners, we must first of all have a good sense of which groups of individuals and households in the country will be affected economically and how. For this, we should seek access to existing analysis where it exists. Where it does not exist, we will need to work with colleagues to quickly work it out to get a rough picture, including some rough figures to know the number of people that may be affected.

As we think about how different households will be affected, we should consider two main channels of impact:

¹ This brief guidance note is informed by two larger guidance documents on shock responsive social protection: [Working with Cash based Safety Nets in Humanitarian Contexts \(2016\)](#) ; [\(Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems Toolkit \(2018\)\)](#).

- (1) Loss of income arising from lockdown/containment measures** - this is likely to be immediate wherever governments take the decision to force people to stay at home and cease income-generating activities. While salaried workers may be saved any major economic impact, millions of informal workers will suddenly lose their income if they are unable to engage in their daily wage activities.
- (2) Economic shocks from drop in global trade, tourism and financial flows** – some of these impacts are already being felt (e.g. those dependent on tourism for their livelihood or those laid off due to the drop in the price of oil and other commodities). Other impacts may take longer to filter through, such as limited access to critical imports and difficulty accessing export markets.

The table below gives some examples of how different groups may be affected in a particular country. Among these groups, ***we must give particular consideration for how we can reach the most marginalised and vulnerable children.***

	Informal workers (e.g. self-employed, wage labourers, farmers, petty traders, etc.)	Those without work (e.g. street children, homeless, socially marginalised and excluded individuals)	Formal (salaried) workers
Economic impacts	Loss of money from daily wages. Increased cost of food/lack of access to food. Loss/reduction in remittances Ongoing rent and utility bills (esp. urban households) Potential reduction in access to agricultural inputs and markets (esp. rural households)	Loss of money from begging or loss of access to previous income support through community-based organisations that are affected. Increased cost of food/lack of access to food.	Loss of income if laid off (especially in particular hard-hit sectors such as tourism and oil, copper etc.) Increased cost of food/lack of access to food Ongoing rent and utility bills (esp. urban households) Loss/ reduction in remittances

Step 3: Get a quick overview of the existing social protection system

Whatever actions we take involving social protection programmes or systems, we will need to have a clear picture of what programmes and systems exist. Armed with this information, we can then move onto Steps 4, 5 and 6. To work out what may or may not be possible, it is important to first of all find answers to the following questions:

Programmes:

- What are the main social protection programmes that exist at some level of scale (e.g. reaching entire districts or more)?
- Who do they target (eligibility criteria) and what is the geographic coverage?
- What form of support is delivered (e.g. cash, vouchers, in-kind transfers such as food) and what is the delivery mechanism (e.g. manual cash, mobile cash through e-wallet)?
- What level of support is delivered (e.g. transfer sizes or composition of the food basket) and how frequently?
- How long do people receive the support for?

Systems

- What are the main related beneficiary identification systems involved (e.g. are there just beneficiary registries or is there a bigger social or national social registry?) and who do these capture?
- Who are the key stakeholders (e.g. the ministries in charge, any development partners involved, etc.)?
- What are the main governance structures (e.g. technical working groups and coordinating committees, etc.)?

Based on the answers to the above questions you will be able to get a sense of whether the social protection system is Basic, Intermediate or Advanced (see Table 1 below). If it is Basic, you may need to move straight to Step 6 and consider alternative options. However, even if some small social protection programmes exist, you should proceed to Step 4.

Table 1: Three categories of social protection system

Basic	Non-existent or weak; where humanitarian agencies implement cash-based safety nets
Intermediate	At least one social assistance programme exists at some scale (i.e. not just a small pilot), but they have not yet been specifically designed or well tested for use in shock-response; they may have been used a few times to respond to shocks
Advanced	A range of social protection programmes exist with good coverage of different groups and comprehensive and reliable systems (e.g. national registries, payment mechanisms) are in place to aid the scale up of social protection in the event of a shock.

Step 4: Consider how Save the Children can help ensure that beneficiaries of any existing social protection schemes continue to receive support in a safe and secure way

In most low- and middle-income countries, social assistance programmes are typically targeted to the poorest and most vulnerable individuals and households. It is therefore critical that, as a first step, we work with governments and its partners (including humanitarian actors) to ensure the continuity of that support. Global experience has shown that many programmes have been affected, with potentially large negative impacts on children. As SC, we clearly have a particular mandate to ensure that the needs of children and their caregivers continue to be met.

During COVID, two existing programmes are likely to need to adapt. For example,

- **School feeding programmes** will need to adapt to ensure all children, and certainly the most nutritionally an economically vulnerable (e.g. child-headed households and orphans) continue to receive the benefit. Adaptations could include either evolving to take-home rations or, where appropriate and food markets are functioning, as cash alternatives.
- **Manual cash transfer payments** will need to adopt new [standard operating procedures \(draft example here\)](#) to avoid further transmission of COVID-19. New measures will be needed to account for things such as: “front-loading” (paying in advance to minimise human interactions); staggering payments to reduce crowding; health screening at payment points; hygiene measures at payment points; social distancing during the payment process; improved crowd control, etc.

Think about what role SC may be able to play in maintaining access to these existing social protection programmes that exist, for example, through supporting service delivery (through programmes), through technical advice, supporting the adaptation of procedures (to ensure child-sensitivity and child-safeguarding), and/or through advocacy to ensure that the needs of children and caregivers are being met.

Step 5: If the social protection system is “Intermediate” or “Advanced”

If you decided in Step 3 that you have an Intermediate or Advanced social protection system in the country, you should think through the various options that are open to SC (see Table 2 below) in terms of helping the government and its partners to quickly build on existing social protection programmes and systems to provide timely income and food security support to households. The main options available are described below with ideas of how SC could support. In deciding these options, we should be referring back to our assessment in Step 2 about who will be impacted.

Table 2: Three ways in which social protection schemes and systems can be adapted

<p>(1) Vertical Expansion</p>	<p>Temporarily increasing the value or duration of benefits for existing recipients. This could also include “front loading” (i.e. giving beneficiaries multiple payments up-front). Vertical expansion may be needed if it is decided that existing beneficiaries will face extra needs or if we need to limit the amount of contact between people due to COVID-19 containment measures.</p> <p>Here, SC could provide support/ influence in determining transfer values based on our knowledge of cost of nutritious diet, changes in payment schedule (e.g. “front-loading” multiple payments if we need to minimise physical contact), extending duration of support, targeting for special needs, setting up accountability and communication mechanisms, or the M&E system for the programme.</p>
<p>(2) Horizontal Expansion</p>	<p>Temporarily expanding the reach of an existing social protection scheme to include new individuals or households. This may be needed if it is identified that more households are in need of support than the existing beneficiaries of a given programme and that we have some means of identifying new households who can benefit from the programme (e.g. through use of a social registry). This can be done in three ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) enrolling additional recipients in areas already covered; (ii) bringing in additional recipients by modifying the eligibility criteria; and (iii) extending geographical coverage. <p>Here SC could be supporting the registration of new households, targeting of new areas, verification, registration, and other functions as in vertical expansion.</p>
<p>(3) Design Tweaks</p>	<p>Making small adjustments to the design of existing social protection programmes (e.g. waiving conditionalities that will be hard or harmful to keep during a shock, changing the timing of transfers or the delivery mechanism to better meet needs or operate within containment measures).</p> <p>SC’s role here would be primarily to provide support to government as requested based on our comparative strengths and capacity.</p>

Having considered each of these three options, we should write down the options that appear most feasible to deliver shock-responsive social protection. Note: these options should obviously be responding to the categories of households identified as being in need (from Step 2).

When writing down the options, we should be noting down answers to the following key questions:

- *What are the main broad options available to reach the most vulnerable groups fast?*
- *Do we know how many households could be reached (based on the available databases on households that need to be reached)?*
- *What are the advantages of each option you identify over alternative options?*
- *What may be some of the challenges to delivering that option (e.g. ensuring consistency with COVID-19 containment measures, the additional government capacity to assist in registration, payments, etc.) and how may we overcome them?*
- *What role could the SCI office play in each of the options based on its capacity?*

Once these options have been identified they should be written up and shared with relevant stakeholders in the relevant forums to discuss whether they can be explored and what role Save the Children might play if any.

IMPORTANT NOTE: When adapting or expanding any social protection programmes or using their systems to reach more households, we must stick to the following principles:

- (i) Avoid harm or any unintended negative consequences, especially for children and their caregivers, including any potential for sexual and gender-based violence
- (ii) Consider the experience and special needs of children that may be involved
- (iii) Consider the experience and special needs of marginalised groups (e.g. those with disabilities or the elderly)
- (iv) Consider how gender-inequalities may limit the benefits to women and girls (and in turn, wider family units)

Step 6: If the social protection system is “Basic”

If there is little scope to build on existing social protection programmes we will need to urgently look at how we can best deliver humanitarian assistance in the form of cash, vouchers or direct assistance such as food aid. For further information on this, contact Francesca Battistin (co-Chair of the Cash and Markets Humanitarian Technical Working Group) at: f.battistin@savethechildren.org.uk

However, as far as possible, the following two options should be considered

Piggybacking	<p>This would use elements of an existing social protection programme or a system (e.g. beneficiary lists, national household database, or payment/ delivery mechanisms) while delivering an entirely <u>separate</u> emergency response. This works well in situations where we already have a relationship with a programme. It would be led by NGOs or UN agencies such as WFP, for example.</p> <p>(Note: The difference between piggy backing and vertical expansion is that the extra support given in piggy backing is separate to the existing programme, while in vertical expansion the additional support is provided through the existing programme, using the same implementers and systems).</p>
Alignment	<p>This option is a light-touch one and should be considered even if there is only a Basic social protection system in place. It simply involves aligning any humanitarian interventions with social protection programmes and systems (and vice-versa). Some level of alignment and coordination is essential and can help avoid situations such as social protection beneficiaries missing out on humanitarian response package, for example.</p> <p>Development of one or more elements of a parallel humanitarian response that align as best as possible with those in the current or possible future social protection programme. This could be an alignment of objectives, targeting methods, transfer value or delivery mechanism.</p> <p>(Note: The difference with piggybacking is that it uses a parallel <u>infrastructure</u>, whereas in piggybacking we are using the social protection programme’s infrastructure.) This would be led by NGOs or UN agencies with engagement of government ministries in all stages of programme cycle.</p>

For more help with Shock-Responsive Social Protection decisions and implementation, please reach out to Save the Children’s Child Sensitive Social Protection Technical Working Group (TWG) co-lead:

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