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DELIVERING SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION IN
THE SAHEL: LEARNINGS FROM THE COVID-19 RESPONSE



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All the right tracks:

Delivering shock-responsive social protection in the Sahel: learnings from the COVID-19 response

The socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered global momentum for social protection. The multi-faceted, deep, and widespread fallout of the pandemic sparked a focus on the shock-responsive social protection agenda in the Sahel, a region with a complex, multi-layered risk profile. Important lessons have emerged in relation to social protection coverage deficits, programmatic, policy and financing gaps, and greater attention is being paid to coordination challenges. During the pandemic response, innovative solutions were developed to support the continuity and expansion of government programmes in contexts characterized by nascent or developing systems faced with capacity limitations, and with fragile areas which are challenging to reach due to conflict, isolation, or capacity constraints.

This note outlines and analyses a “twin-track approach” to deliver shock-responsive social protection in the Sahel in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. The approach was developed with the governments of Mali, Mauritania, and Niger with UNICEF and WFP providing technical advice and delivery support under a COVID-19 social protection response programme funded by the German development cooperation (BMZ-KFW). This note highlights the details and relevance of the approach in the Sahel context, lessons learned from the first two phases (2020-2022) of implementation of the programme in three countries (Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) and identifies a resulting set of principles to outline a coherent way forward to apprehend shock-responsive social protection delivery more holistically in fragile contexts. The principles are proposed for further discussion with government partners and development stakeholders.

1. Making the case for shock-responsive social protection in the Sahel

Key message: The evolving risk and vulnerability profile in the Sahel calls for a strong social protection response that mitigates chronic vulnerability, minimizes the impact of covariate shocks, and is fit-for-purpose in a complex delivery context.

Setting the Scene

The lives and livelihoods of people in the Sahel have long been affected by chronic vulnerability and recurrent shocks, with increasing frequency and severity in the last decade. Countries in the region have recorded high rates of monetary and multidimensional poverty, increasing inequality, as well as chronic and acute malnutrition, all in a context of steep population growth and high levels of mobility, with migration as a common coping

strategy. At the same time, communities have been exposed to covariate shocks (droughts and floods, political instability and conflict, inflation, and other economic shocks). Recurring shocks have put households at increased risk of falling into poverty, or deepened pre-existing chronic vulnerabilities, trapping millions into a recurring state of crisis. In turn, this has triggered recurring and increasingly broad emergency responses. As needs have grown and shocks intensify, become more complex and overlapping, food insecurity levels have broken record high levels for the past five years. The result is a protracted crisis with limited prospects for resolution in the near-term, and significant deepening of poverty. This points to a need to reassess the sustainability and adequacy of emergency responses, which are short-term in nature and not designed to address chronic vulnerability and deep poverty.

An overview of risk and vulnerability indicators for the Sahel

	Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Mauritania	Niger	Senegal
Population (million)	22	17	22	4.8	24	17
Poverty headcount	31%	31%	15%	6%	50%	9%
Multidimensional poverty headcount	60%	79%	44%	46%	80%	32%
Coverage main safety net programme (# HHs) ¹	150,000	58,000	28,000	98,000	60,000	300,000
Stunting	19.6	31.1	22.1	17.4	44.4	17.9
Wasting	7.7	10.2	9.3	10.1	11.5	8.1

Sources: (1) Estimates.



While emergency responses provide critical life-saving supports in complex emergency conditions and in the immediate aftermath of a shock, governments and partners alike increasingly recognize the potential of social protection policies and programmes, a proven resilience and poverty reduction tool, to respond effectively to dynamic and protracted conditions on the one hand, while addressing the critical drivers of vulnerability on the other.

This note defines a shock-responsive social protection system as having:

- the ability to anticipate shocks (Preparedness)
- the ability to perform its routine function, scale up (horizontally or vertically) and/or flex in an inclusive manner to accommodate new populations and needs because of the shock (Response)
- the ability to contribute to resilience building of individuals, households, communities, and systems to future shocks (Preparedness and Recovery).

This dual objective is encompassed under the “shock-responsive social protection”¹ concept which covers both the ability of systems to expand and contract in response to (or prior to) a shock, while also routinely supporting the resilience of populations (through regular, risk-informed social protection). In the Sahel region, shock-responsive social protection has gained momentum over the past years. This attention preceded the COVID-19 outbreak, initially supported by the World Bank, which started the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme over a decade ago.

The WFP-UNICEF joint programme response: major lessons learned

In 2020, WFP and UNICEF launched a joint programme on “*Responding to COVID-19 through social protection systems in the Sahel*” (further referred to as the *Sahel Social Protection Joint Programme or Sahel SP-JP*), supported by BMZ through KfW, to assist governments of Mauritania, Mali, and Niger with the social protection response

¹ The concept of shock responsive social protection is linked to that of Adaptive Social Protection which has been developed by the World Bank and is widely used across the Sahel. While WFP and UNICEF both use the term shock-responsive social protection and recognize some historic differences in the conceptualisation of the different terms, under this note and more generally in our work in the region we use these terms interchangeably as having the same fundamental objectives.

to the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. Having begun as an 18-month programme with a COVID-19 shock response objective, it has evolved into a multi-year, multi-shock response and systems strengthening initiative. While this note addresses the joint programme's experience with delivery of social protection in fragile settings in the Sahel, the following broader lessons learned are highlighted to contextualize this focus.

First, understanding the types, complexity, interaction, and drivers of concurrent shocks is critical to inform the social protection strategy, in terms of anticipating the various resulting needs, as well as appropriate timing, scale, design, and delivery parameters for responses.

In the Sahel, overlapping covariate shocks are of a dynamic nature, characterized by both slow and rapid onset, shocks that are predictable and recurrent, and others that are unpredictable, many of which individually or concurrently lead to protracted crises. The socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 and the recent cost-of-living crisis, fuelled by the war in Ukraine, are prominent examples of that latter category. The overlap, diversity, and protracted nature of shocks are now core features of the Sahel risk profile. This is layered on top of a context where people in the Sahel experience entrenched poverty, together with low availability of and constrained access to basic social services, all of which seriously hamper their capacity to withstand shocks.

Second, a coherent, relevant, and effective social protection response can only be achieved through a holistic approach that builds resilience before, during and after shocks, and supports households with recovery. Social protection is receiving increasing attention from governments and development partners in the Sahel

and investments focus on building shock-responsive systems. However, the coverage of safety net programmes remains inadequate and underinvestment in the sector is chronic. Hence a shift in investments toward the structural and sustainable expansion of routine safety net programmes, as the backbone of social protection systems and shock-responsive social protection approaches, stands out as an urgent priority.

Third, social protection programme design is critical to provide effective and inclusive support to households with varying vulnerability profiles. Beyond horizontal expansion to increase the number of households covered, transfer values can be adjusted upwards in response to price shocks (beyond routine indexation). Further, the range of benefits and complementary services linked to social protection systems needs to be systematically examined and the nature of complementary services offered needs to be designed with risks and vulnerabilities in mind, to ensure programme investments contribute more effectively and efficiently to building resilience in this complex context.

The fourth major lesson refers to programme delivery. In the Sahel, the delivery context is complex and presents significant challenges in terms of access due to conflict, remoteness, or capacity constraints.²

Programme delivery is the focus of this paper, which builds on experiences from the UNICEF-WFP joint programme to analyse the use of a “twin-track” approach to scale up social protection responses and improve the system’s ability to respond at scale to a diverse set of risks.

² An important question for social protection programme design and delivery is about strengthening the linkages with humanitarian cash transfers. Even though the lessons learned about the use of the twin-track approach bear relevance to this discussion, it is not the scope of this note.

2. Description of the “twin-track” approach

The twin-track approach was developed as a methodology under the *Sahel SP-JP*, as a more comprehensive approach to addressing multiple challenges in implementing shock-responsive social protection in the Sahel. Specifically, the approach was designed to enable the delivery of cash assistance and

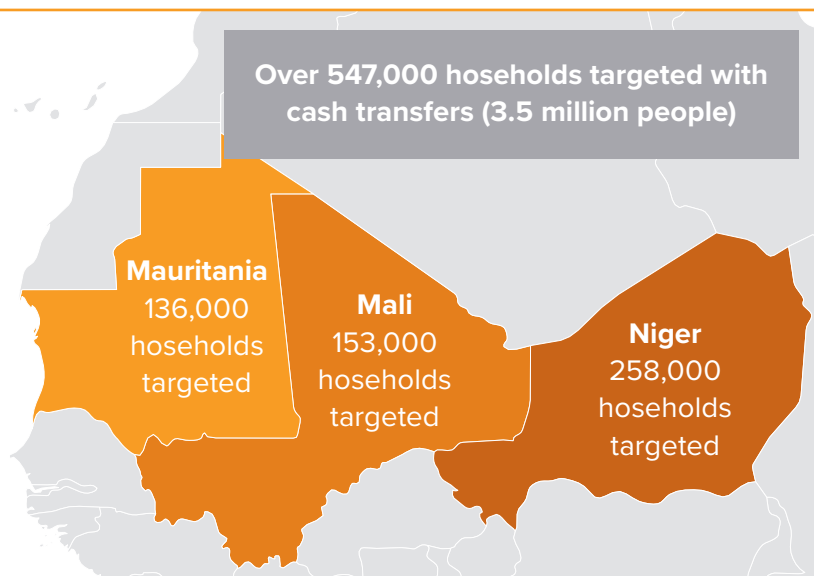
complementary services. As far as possible, cash transfers are delivered through government programmes and delivery systems (Track 1 or ‘government track’). Where government capacities are saturated or government has no access, delivery is aligned to government responses, but using service providers (Track 2 or ‘aligned track’).

Key design parameters for the Sahel Social Protection Joint Programme

The UNICEF-WFP **Sahel Social Protection Joint Programme** (Sahel SP-JP) was launched in 2020 with support from the German development cooperation, to assist governments with the social protection response to the COVID-19 socioeconomic shock. Now in its third phase, the programme has evolved to develop models to respond to multiple layered shocks and vulnerabilities. The joint programme has a dual focus, combining support to delivery of cash transfers with significant technical support targeted at strengthening the shock-responsive, and nutrition- and child-sensitive dimensions of national social protection systems. In line with the social protection systems building blocks, the approach covers institutional support to governments on policy, financing, and coordination, design of social protection programmes, and programme delivery mechanisms.

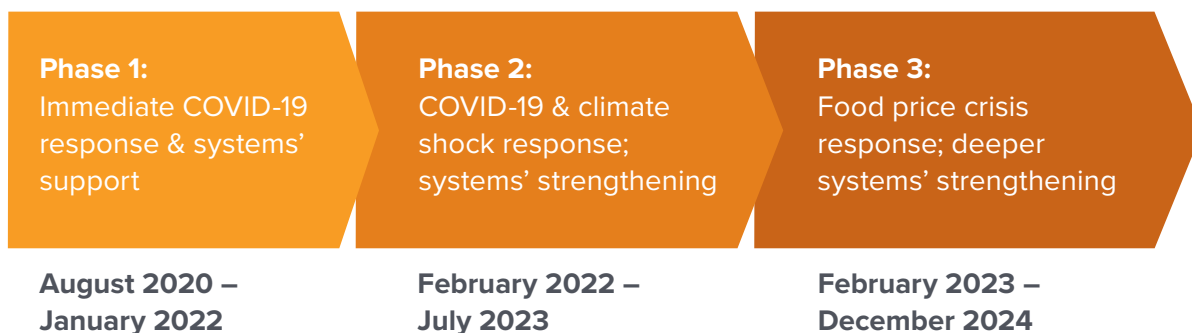
Three outcome areas:

1. Delivery of cash transfers and complementary services
2. Strengthening social protection systems
3. Knowledge, evidence and learning



The overall objective of the programme is to support governments with the implementation of cash transfer measures in response to large scale shocks (including COVID-19, lean season, floods, inflation). Design parameters for the response measures – such as geographical, household, or individual targeting and eligibility, transfer value, payment frequency, and complementary services – are all discussed and agreed with the government and fall in line with those of existing social protection programmes. All parameters are based on needs identified in national response plans or other existing mechanisms that identify vulnerabilities such as the *Cadre Harmonise*, drought triggers, or poverty & vulnerability analysis, and are endorsed by governments.

Most measures consist of horizontal or vertical expansions of existing routine safety net programmes or scale-ups of lean season responses. They typically link to existing safety net programmes such as *Wadata Talaka* (Niger), *Jigisemejiri* (Mali), or *Tekavoul* and *El Maouna* (Mauritania). Expansions relate to increasing caseloads (using eligibility criteria that reflect vulnerability to shocks), transfer value (top-ups to cover additional expenses as needs increase due to shocks), or complementary services. Delivery mechanisms (e.g., targeting, payment, grievance, or monitoring mechanisms) of existing safety net programmes were fully or partially used (see below). Where possible, social registries were used to identify additional caseloads.



Example of shock-responsive expansions supported by the Sahel SP-JP:

- In **Niger**, the programme supported a one-off payment to assist vulnerable households to cope with the COVID-19 shock, aligning to *Wadata Talaka* safety net parameters.
- In **Mauritania**, the programme supported a temporary increase in the *Tekavoul* safety net transfer value for households with children below age five, and the *El Maouna* programme to provide a lean season response.
- In **Mali**, the programme supported the 'programme gouvernemental de transfert monétaire d'urgence' (PGTMU), put in place in the wake of COVID-19, and *Jigisemejiri*, the flagship social safety net, to expand caseloads.

The twin-track approach for the delivery of cash transfers

In the Sahel, the combination of the currently fragile or developing state of national social protection systems (and related capacity constraints), the scale of the required shock response, and the need for timely delivery, does not allow for channelling all support through the national system. In addition to the capacity constraints, there are areas where government programmes do not have access due to security measures. To alleviate these constraints, **a twin-track approach ensures consistency in delivery through, or in alignment with, government systems.**

Essentially, the twin-track approach is a delivery model for shock-responsive social protection that is guided by *both* leveraging and filling gaps in the capacity and reach of the national social protection system. **Delivery** refers to the critical functions of registration, enrolment, and payment of cash transfer recipients as well as grievance and monitoring mechanisms and programme communication.

Track 1 involves the delivery of cash transfers using most or all of these functions in the national system, i.e., **led by government institutions.** This includes outsourcing by the government of critical functions, for example, through contracts with Financial Service Providers (FSPs), or with companies hired to implement registration and/or enrolment processes, or third-party monitoring functions. At the same time, technical backstopping is provided to strengthen and reinforce existing mechanisms.

Track 2 involves the delivery of cash transfers **led by partners outside the national system** (e.g., UN organizations or NGOs). Under the COVID-19 response

programme, the design parameters of the cash transfers delivered outside the national system were **aligned to the parameters set by the government for the overall response**, specifically in terms of eligibility criteria and transfer value. In addition, as described below, the implementation of Track 2 cash transfers was closely coordinated with the responsible government institutions.

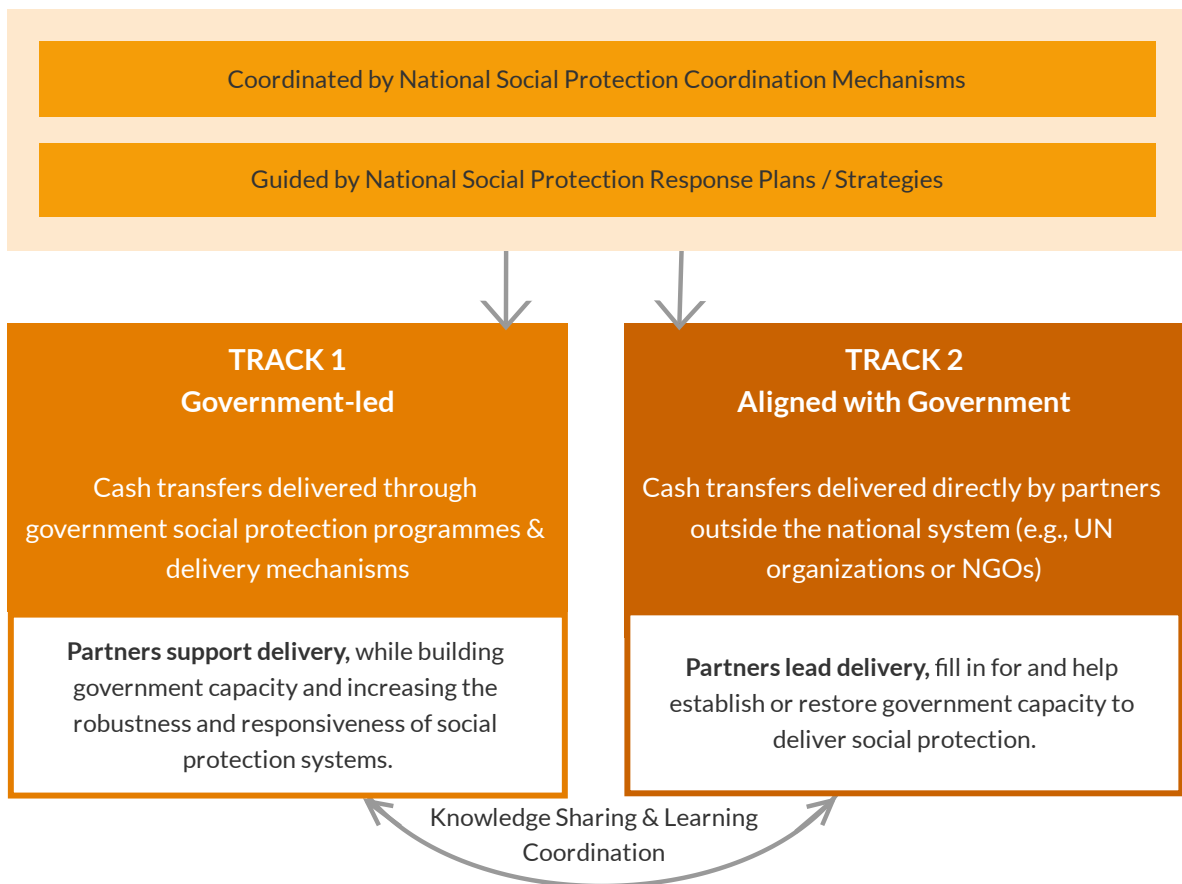
In sum, while delivery mechanisms differ, the two tracks are aligned and follow the parameters of the government-led social protection programme, strategy, or response plan. Eligibility criteria and transfer values are harmonized between tracks. Transfer values are in line with those used under national safety net programmes. In addition, the delivery of cash transfers under both tracks uses the same national coordination mechanisms (i.e., the national Safety Net Unit in Niger, Taazour and the newly created mechanism for the coordination of food and nutrition security crises in Mauritania, and the Social Protection Department in Mali).

The decision to use Track 1 or Track 2 is based on a careful assessment of the capacity and reach of the national social protection delivery system. As addressed in more detail below, these considerations include scale and timing of the response, issues of access to areas affected by a shock, the availability of existing delivery mechanisms, information and protocols for registration and enrolment, staffing at central and subnational level, and the human resource and expertise to scale up the various functions as per needs. The outcome of the assessment is typically geographical delineations in selection of the delivery approach, i.e., Track 2 delivery happens in certain parts of the country, based on both access in terms of security and reach considerations as well as capacity constraints.

Using a twin-track approach can be an effective way to avoid using parallel humanitarian responses to fill social protection gaps, and considerably increase the reach of social protection systems by aligning these types of interventions under the social protection umbrella. In the Sahel, this approach is important to overcome critical coverage gaps in in the short and medium term.

The next section of this note highlights the lessons learned from applying the twin-track approach in three countries under the Sahel SP-JP, with a focus on how the approach can foster the objective of strengthening delivery capacity of national systems.

The Twin Track Approach



3. What have we learned from the twin-track approach?

Key message: Experiences so far under the Sahel social protection joint programme have confirmed the relevance of using a twin-track approach as an operational option to expand social protection responses to shocks.

In contexts where social protection systems are still nascent, capacity constrained, or the operating environment is fragile, the systematized use of a twin-track approach may be needed during a transition period to ensure that programmes expand and contract in response to shocks, while leaving enough time for the system to become robust enough to operate this expansion through its own delivery systems. The twin-track approach requires strong government oversight and alignment, as well as a clear plan for a gradual move towards increasing the proportion of social protection services delivered through the national system (Track 1). While Track 1 is an essential and preferred approach for building government capacity and increasing the robustness and responsiveness of social protection systems, Track 2 can both fill in for, and help establish or restore the government’s capacity to deliver social protection.

During implementation of the Sahel SP-JP, insufficiencies in reach and capacity of existing systems necessitated reliance on a parallel and aligned delivery approach. Experience with implementing timely responses to shocks through social

protection programmes was lacking in national systems, and capacities were quickly stretched when it came to organizing programme expansions while at the same time ensuring continuity of regular programme operation. Furthermore, deploying delivery capacity that is complementary to the national system facilitated a response at scale and generated significant learnings for the required arrangements that enhance the capacity of the national system to deliver in the future.

This section highlights what has been learned about drivers of success across the three countries and highlights the challenges encountered.

Drivers of success

- **Government leadership** is essential for shock-responsive social protection, and to ensure the alignment of a twin-track approach, avoiding uncoordinated and scattered interventions:
 - Government led the **coordination** of the responses (across Track 1 and 2), with government coordinating bodies playing a central role in the decision-making process.
 - **National response plans** provided the overall framework for decision-making on design features (i.e., transfer amounts, entry points for the identification of vulnerable groups and selection criteria) and operational implementation.



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- Leveraging **pre-established tools** to guide decisions on delivery were important in ensuring the integrity of programme implementation:
 - In all three countries, the *Cadre Harmonise*, a **widely accepted methodology** for classification and prioritization of vulnerability, facilitated geographical prioritization for expansions under the programme, across Tracks 1 and 2.
 - In some countries, a pre-existing and adequately populated **social registry** facilitated the use of a common tool and methodology to select recipient households for both tracks. In Mauritania, for example, the social registry is fully run by the government and partners were already familiar with the tool and ready to use it prior to the start of the joint programme.
 - **National safety net programmes** in Mali (*Jigisemejiri*), Mauritania (*Tekavoul* and *El Maouna*) and Niger (*Wadata Talaka*) facilitated the Track 1 response, as existing delivery mechanisms for selection, enrolment, payment, or grievances could be leveraged. In all three countries, government had contracts with Financial Service Providers in place, which were used for the programme responses.

Challenges and areas for development

The twin-track approach has facilitated a process of learning around different delivery options, enabling the identification of roadblocks and challenges that need to be tackled for improved delivery by the social protection system across geographical contexts. The following

challenges were identified through the twin track approach. Through cross-country learning, the programme has equally drawn up proposed recommendations to address these barriers to ensure a well-coordinated shock response that progressively moves towards delivery through the national system:

- In Mali and Niger, the response to shocks and in particular the lean season response is well established but currently implemented outside the social protection system. These responses are managed by well-equipped government structures, often with considerable budget. The government responses are then complemented by humanitarian actors, through national coordination efforts under the leadership of government. As social protection systems become more shock-responsive, the coordination of the ‘conventional’, typically annual, lean season responses with social protection becomes increasingly critical to avoid creating two parallel and potentially competing pathways. In contrast, in Mauritania the lean season response is well coordinated under the umbrella of social protection, with humanitarian actors mostly aligning with and potentially piggybacking on the government system. The role of social protection in addressing risks and shocks should be integrated, harmonized, and resourced across the social protection and disaster risk management sectors to fully address the needs. This is typically a challenge in contexts where responses to covariate shocks dominate the agenda in comparison with resources allocated to address underlying vulnerabilities.
- Coordination structures are often not sufficiently cross-sectoral. Cash working groups for instance are mostly focused

on humanitarian interventions and in most instances not linked with the social protection sector. On the other hand, social protection coordinating bodies do not include humanitarian or emergency actors. The “*dispositifs nationaux*”³ should address these coordination gaps and leverage these bodies to establish a broader and cohesive government vision and leadership on the role of social protection in addressing shocks.

- Most of the national programmes such as *Jigisemejiri* or *Wadata Talaka* are project structures and hence conditioned by rigid rules and regulations in terms of enrolment timeline (cohort-based, not continuous enrolment), fund flows (cannot always accommodate different funding streams for expansions and shock-responses), procurement, and other procedures. There is little focus on preparedness of delivery systems to expand when needed. For instance, defining pre-established agreements with financial service providers allowing space for piggy backing of different funding streams would facilitate timely delivery of assistance to affected households. Finally, project structures are not always adequately embedded institutionally, i.e., strongly anchored in the institutions that have policy, programme, and oversight responsibilities for social assistance and social protection.
- Social registries, while greatly supporting an aligned shock response in some cases, also revealed limitations. In some countries, the social registries, which collect considerable amounts of information on potential beneficiaries, were completely outdated and large portions of the target population

3 High level government bodies, set up in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, to coordinate, oversee, and sometimes partly implement national responses to food (and sometimes nutrition) security crises.

could not be located despite being in the database. These costly tools require considerable resources to be maintained up to date. One of the envisaged strategies to address the challenge of outdated data is to rely on “users” to collect data for their own programmatic purposes and then transfer the data into the social registry. In countries where data privacy is not adequately ensured, and beneficiary information could be manipulated, data sharing poses a real concern. In response, the Sahel SP-JP adapted its strategy to focus on supporting the government to directly collect new data when needed and then requested access to the registry data for beneficiary selection purposes.

- The absence of nationally-approved and multisectoral standard operating procedures (SOPs) describing how social protection programme and delivery mechanisms will be leveraged in case of emergencies, is a major challenge. Such SOPs can define triggers for expansion, based for instance on the information provided through early warning systems; agreement on the programme(s) to be scaled up or adapted in case of a shock; amounts to be provided in the case of transfers; transfer modalities; targeting methodology and tools (e.g., building on *Cadre Harmonise* and early warning system data, or, at household level, on the social registry); overview of roles and responsibilities; and ways to scale up human resource capacity where needed, among others. Establishing these SOPs should be a focus for reinforcing shock-responsive social protection systems, as they can ensure a more agile, efficient, and coordinated response and avoid the initial delays that were encountered in some of the country experiences.

- Existing structures and delivery mechanisms within the social protection systems need various levels of reinforcement to improve efficiency and accountability and the experiences of programme participants. Best practices can be drawn from both tracks to strengthen national delivery systems. For example, during the implementation of Track 1 cash transfers through the government system, points for improvement in capacity and standards of the national delivery system were identified, e.g., in relation to grievance mechanisms, monitoring mechanisms and frameworks, risk management arrangements, communications, or feedback mechanisms. For shock responses, there are best practices and standards from humanitarian or other indirect delivery experiences which may be used as a reference to strengthen national delivery chains in each of these areas.

These operational findings provide valuable lessons, which should guide further system strengthening efforts. Beyond those more operational considerations, one of our main findings is the observation of a proliferation of fragmented and often short-term interventions seeking to respond to impact of shocks, in a context where very few programmes address at scale the underlying vulnerability and poverty which so greatly hamper households’ ability to withstand any type of shock. Typical emergency responses alone will inevitably leave households struggling with the same deprivations they encountered before the shock, which left them so vulnerable and unable to withstand the shock in the first place. The strong focus on “the efficiency of short-term responses”, overlooks the need to consider evidence that addressing underlying needs and vulnerabilities may be an even more cost-effective and transformational strategy.

4. Principles for a twin-track approach

The implementation of the Sahel SP-JP was a proof of concept for the relevance of using a twin-track approach for the delivery of shock-responsive social protection to have the greatest reach for the most vulnerable. Considering wider implementation of this approach through the coordination of multiple actors will be key to operationalizing shock-responsive social



protection in the Sahel, until the national systems can fully absorb the shock response function. The use of the twin-track approach is therefore an option with strong potential to support the iterative process of strengthening shock-responsive social protection systems. The principles below are a proposed way forward to guide “twin track” implementation as a modality for implementing more inclusive shock responsive social protection in the Sahel.

All tracks must build government capacity to deliver

Sustainable expansion and institutional strengthening of the national social protection system – including the capacity to reduce chronic vulnerabilities as well as coherent responses to shocks – need to be explicit overarching objectives contained in national policies and strategies. The intention of using a twin-track approach, which entails coordinated delivery and capacity strengthening, is to gradually reduce reliance on parallel delivery structures. Timely delivery by and through government is an essential end goal to support the social contract.

Both tracks take direction from government leadership

A twin-track approach for delivery of social protection needs to be guided by government leadership and coordination, building on existing platforms within the national social protection system, in communication with related coordinating bodies (e.g., the cash working group). Government leadership reflected in national policies, strategies, and plans which provide strategic direction for (shock-responsive) social protection programmes and in the systems that support them. Coordination is critical for a successful use of the twin-track approach and applies to central as well as sub-national levels. Additionally, the twin-track approach to delivery should be accompanied by an aligned/ harmonized approach to programme design.

All tracks should build government systems

Where delivery is necessary outside of, but aligned with, the national system, there is always a contribution or dividend to the strengthening of that national system. This also applies when the delivery is conducted through the existing system. This contribution can take several forms:

- development or strengthening of programmatic and delivery tools and processes under the national system (payment platforms; outreach and communication, grievance & redress mechanisms, etc.; evaluation, and learning activities).
- development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) that guide the use of national programmes and mechanisms for the delivery of a shock response and to inform decision making on the spectrum of options – between full parallel delivery and full government delivery – which should be employed for a response
- capacity assessments to inform capacity building needs for progressively moving towards Track 1 delivery
- data exchange, including programme monitoring data that inform programme design and delivery, provided this does not affect data privacy and protection standards.

Continuous assessment of government capacity to deliver

The contribution to national system strengthening needs to rely on a continuous and standardised approach to the assessment of national system capacity regarding the state of routine programmes, the state of information systems, the state of systems for targeting/ payments/ grievance and use under expansions, the existence of SOPs, the overall level of preparedness, human resource capacity, etc. Promoting continuous learning and readily identifying improved capacity of the system for direct delivery are key principles underlying the flexible use of the twin-track approach with a system strengthening objective in mind.

Progressive expansion of ‘regular’ social protection can reduce the need for responses outside the system

Reliance on Track 2 shock responses can be reduced potentially through expansion of routine programme coverage, supported by predictable medium- to long-term financing frameworks for social protection. The expansion of routine safety net programmes builds resilience – which should, in turn, reduce the vulnerability of households to be adversely affected by external shocks – and comes with enhanced delivery capacity for shock response.

Remain flexible in delivery approach for inclusive responses

Continuous flexibility in the application of a twin-track approach ensures broader, more inclusive coverage, with maximizing delivery through the national systems as an overarching goal. While the reduction of reliance on parallel delivery is an objective, the process of systems building in fragile contexts is not linear. Depending on the evolving risk and shock environment, the use of Track 2 can expand or contract in the short run. Response protocols should accommodate use of Track 2 at any time, as necessary, for a range of reasons highlighted earlier. It is therefore important not to interpret a twin-track approach as a static delivery model, but more as a spectrum of options where the balance between Track 1 and Track 2 is determined by what best reaches the vulnerable in an inclusive manner and is continuously adjusted according to the circumstances.

5. Moving forward

The Sahel Social Protection Joint Programme will continue the strengthening of social protection systems to become more shock-responsive, while also supporting the expansion of social protection responses to shocks through delivery using the twin-track approach. Lessons from this approach are applicable beyond the project and for the progressive development of social protection systems in the region.

Looking at the larger context of increasing complexity of crises and expanding needs in the Sahel, over the long term, it is critical that national systems not only absorb most of the shock response, but most importantly, that governments

turn toward more effectively addressing underlying vulnerabilities. An essential element to achieving reduced reliance on shock responses is ***ensuring routine programmes reach sufficient coverage to address chronic needs in a more effective manner***. Further, linking social protection interventions with complementary programming to strengthen resilience should reduce the likelihood shocks turn into crises.

Thus, investment in building system capacity and coverage for routine social protection systems should underpin any strategy for holistically approaching shock and crisis response in the Sahel.



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