



LINKING SOCIAL PROTECTION AND FORECAST-BASED ACTION

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A summary of lessons and knowledge gaps from SHEAR

Summary

There has been a growing interest in exploring the scope for linking forecast-based action (FbA) and social protection (SP). In this forward looking brief, we have explored the potential questions and areas of exploration that require further research in order to understand the feasibility of integrating FbA and SP.



Cyclone Idai, Mozambique, evacuees in Beira, 21 March 2019 (Denis Onyodi:
IFRC/DRK/Climate Centre)

SHEAR

Science for Humanitarian Emergencies and Resilience (SHEAR)

is a programme that conducts research to inform policy and practice for humanitarian action through monitoring, assessment and prediction of natural hazards and risks across Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

As forecast-based action (FbA) and social protection focus on building evidence to strengthen anticipatory capacity, there is value in researching the question of whether well-designed social protection can be used to enhance the usability, scalability, and sustainability of FbA. While we found limited integration of social protection so far, desk research and interviews with project managers point to potentially interesting areas for further work to better understand the challenges and opportunities in linking FbA and social protection.

Questions for future research in SHEAR and beyond

From interviews and document review, a number of possibly relevant research questions emerge which could help build the evidence base for the applicability of social protection as a tool for scaling up FbA. The questions are grouped in two categories: *urgency* to improve understanding and the potential *impact* of findings.

While 'urgency' is judged by whether building evidence is a prerequisite for linking social protection with FbA, we define 'impact' as the likelihood that research findings will be able to inform decisions and actions that can help the scalability of FbA interventions.

Question 1: What design and operational factors enable or constrain effective scaling up of forecast-based anticipatory action through social protection?

Urgency high, potential high

Rationale: It has been argued that social protection systems can help in anticipating and preparing for climate risks through identification and registration of beneficiaries, as well as selection of intervention areas based on vulnerability which can then be provided with timely cash and other forms of support.

However, there is limited understanding of the extent to which social protection systems, including targeting, registries, etc., are able to easily integrate FbA approaches. For instance, case studies in Kenya and Tanzania have suggested that those most affected by a particular climate shock are not those usually eligible in a social protection programme.

In addition, people who are affected by a shock, irrespective of whether they are already beneficiaries of a social protection programme or not, might at that time need a different type of support; a cash transfer regularly provided by a social protection programme might not be useful if medicines are not available right after a flood, for example.

Research that helps understand factors ensuring integration between national social protection and FbA will be crucial for future programmes.

Subsidiary questions:

- To what extent is the ability of a social protection programme to reach those most likely to be affected by a shock – effective targeting – influenced by the type of climate-related hazard and the particular vulnerability it generates?
- What features of existing social protection programmes – such as coverage and payment modalities, or systems such as registries and management information systems (MIS) – are most important in ensuring successful operational integration with FbA?
- In what contexts and for what hazards are forecast-based triggers most effective in ensuring timely payouts by social protection programmes?
- To what extent are programmes able to deliver early or anticipatory actions that are able to address the anticipated impacts of the shock?
- To what extent might scaling up before a disaster and scaling down after it affect the ability of social protection to function?

Question 2: What political, institutional, and financial factors are key to enabling further integration of social protection?

Urgency medium, potential high

Rationale: While programme design and operational factors are key in ensuring effective integration of social protection and FbA, political, institutional and financial factors might influence the decision of national actors to take integration to scale.

Subsidiary questions:

- To what extent do political will and/or fiscal considerations influence decisions about the integration of social protection and FbA?
- Can the risk of “acting in vain” (when an early action is triggered but the forecast event does not materialize) undermine confidence in social protection?
- What incentives and disincentives exist for agencies on social protection and early action to coordinate anticipatory action efforts at scale?
- To what extent do technical capacity and know-how enable or constrain integrated approaches or systems such as forecast-based triggers, registries, and MIS among national or local actors?

Scoping feasibility and entry points for FbA and social protection at country level

Linkages between FbA and social protection could be beneficial in scaling up pilot projects under review in SHEAR. Thus, in addition to the research questions above, we provide a number of more practical questions that project managers and teams in the pilot countries can use as a starting point to explore the potential for integrating FbA and social protection in their respective countries in the short term.

Conclusion

Research indicates that investment for anticipatory social protection is important and can often be complemented by building strong FbA mechanisms. But important factors like data based on vulnerability assessments, updating existing databases, targeting design, etc., should be considered before linking FbA with social protection.

National actors, humanitarian agencies and other organizations operating in the project countries should set clear precedents and MoUs, including funding sources, responsibilities, implementation roles and accountability mechanisms. Keeping in mind that climate events affect people differently, it is important to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach towards a more context-specific approach that accounts for vulnerabilities and political economy before linking social protection for scaling up FbA.

Clear understanding of finance, a consolidated core fund for social protection, and the possibility for additional layering based on forecast triggers, can help in understanding the scalability potential of FbA using social protection channels.

Scoping objective	Scoping checklist
Understanding the current stage of FbA and its feasibility in the project countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the projects at the pilot stage or have they scaled up? • Are there existing early warning systems? What is their coverage? • Are they generating reliable and timely information? • Are there tested contingency plans in place? • Are there emergency plans? • Can the FbA pilot be extended geographically to cover more people using the same triggers? • How would the FbA project identify beneficiaries? • Are there existing risk profiling and vulnerability and capacity assessments reports? • What are the key impacts that the hazard creates? What actions are most likely to minimize such impacts?
Understanding the social protection in the project countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is responsible for providing social protection? • Which social protection schemes exist? • Do they have an anticipatory or shock-responsive role? Ad hoc or by design? • Do existing programmes address climate vulnerability or risks? • What are the targeting criteria for beneficiaries? • Are there beneficiary lists or databases? What is their coverage and status? • Are there pre-existing ways of transferring funds?
Understanding linkages between social protection and FbA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the same agencies involved in providing social protection and FbA? • Do actors in FbA and social protection communicate? • What are the overlaps in the databases and beneficiary lists being used for FbA and social protection? • Is there the capacity to engage FbA and social protection actors in sharing data on beneficiaries, vulnerability and disasters? • What are the funding sources for social protection and FbA? • Can channels for transferring funds in social protection be leveraged for FbA?