



Building on social protection systems for effective disaster response: the Mozambique experience

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How can social protection systems be used in disasters, as a complement to, or substitute for, humanitarian assistance? Oxford Policy Management led a two-year research project investigating this question, looking at the role of social protection in both mitigating the impact of large-scale shocks and supporting households after a crisis hits. We identify factors that can help and hinder effective disaster response, and consider how social protection actors can best work together with others working in humanitarian assistance and disaster risk management (DRM). We present findings from fieldwork in Mozambique, conducted between September 2015 and June 2016.

How are disaster-affected households supported in Mozambique?

The main shocks in Mozambique in the last decade have been climatic, with annual flooding and cyclones affecting some 250,000-500,000 people every few years, out of a population of 28 million (under 2% of population). As our research was being carried out in 2016, a drought was affecting 1.5 million people. These risks have a geographical dimension: 2,700 km of coast is exposed to cyclones and flooding, the nine main river basins and deltas are exposed to flooding, and the southern and central areas are vulnerable to drought. This is in a context where poverty rates have remained stagnant since 2003. Over half of the population (55%) was living below the poverty line in 2008-09, improving only slightly to 49% by 2014-15.

The government of Mozambique has developed a robust national disaster management capacity. The National Institute of Disaster Management (INGC) leads the coordination of disaster response and supports actions to prepare for and mitigate the impact of disasters, including an annual disaster contingency planning exercise. The Technical Council for Disaster Management (CTGC), comprised of directors and technicians across ministries and sectors, serves as the government's national platform for disaster management. While the INGC coordinates relief efforts and implements some assistance directly, the majority of financing and implementation of larger disaster responses is through international donors and international humanitarian agencies. This overall approach to DRM has worked relatively well for the small and predictable flooding and cyclone disasters that Mozambique experienced in the last decade. Factors in its favour have been good preparedness (including community disaster preparedness and contingency-planning and effective communication channels for evacuations), leadership from the INGC, good coordination between the government and international agencies, and quick turnaround of international funding for UN agencies. Challenges have been the limited government resources and the need to improve the quality of information and data collection. The severe drought in 2016-17 is testing the model. Moreover, better evidence on the efficiency and effectiveness of flood and cyclone responses – including their impact on households in need – is vital for improving future responses and analysing alternative approaches.

In contrast, Mozambique's social protection system has a limited role in the aftermath of a disaster. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action (MGCAS) – the lead ministry responsible for the implementation of the country's non-contributory social assistance (see Box 1) – participates in the CTGC and has some responsibilities in the national contingency plan, but the support they provide is primarily at the community level where implementers of emergency programmes identify their beneficiaries in consultation with voluntary staff at the community level ('permanentes').

Box 1: Main social protection interventions in Mozambique

MGCAS sets the policy framework and designs programmes that are implemented by the National Institute of Social Action (INAS), through 30 delegations across the country that are present in all provincial capitals and 19 other districts (covering 128 districts).

- the Basic Social Subsidy Programme (PSSB), that provides unconditional cash transfers to labour constrained household, covering 365,726 households in 2015;
- the Direct Social Support Programme (PASD) that provides in-kind benefits to the destitute and those affected by household-level calamities, covering 57,415 households in 2015;
- the Productive Social Action Programme (PASP), a public works programme in urban and rural areas, covering 12,499 households in 2015.

There have been recent attempts to use existing social protection programmes – namely PASD, an in kind-social assistance programme and PASP, a public works programme – to respond to shocks, yet these efforts have faced challenges:

- Bringing forward the start date of PASP as part of the government’s drought response in the province of Gaza. However, the decision was made at province (not central) level and was not extended to cover food insecurity in the following lean season (PASP only covers four months of support);
- Using PASP in flooded areas. The programme was costly and complex to deliver and has been shown to have limited impact on resilience to climate change (McCord, 2016);
- Using PASD as a response to idiosyncratic shocks affecting households (e.g. house fire). The programme is too small to deal with covariate shocks affecting whole communities.

The government has no interest in using the PSSB to cover a portion of an emergency caseload, as it does not wish to provide cash assistance for disaster relief and is concerned that such a step would raise recipients’ expectations for future payments.

What are the future implications for shock-responsive social protection in Mozambique?

Internationally there is continued and growing interest in how to use existing social protection systems to support shock preparedness and response, reducing the need for separate humanitarian interventions. In this section we further explore the limitations and opportunities of Mozambique’s social protection system effectively playing such a role, supporting and complementing existing DRM initiatives.

Institutional issues: policy context, regulatory environment and coordination

Mozambique’s revised Social Protection Strategy (‘ENSSB II’), approved in 2016, aims to expand scope and coverage of social protection – including responsiveness to climate-related shocks. The (limited) role of MGCAS and INAS in emergencies is clearly articulated within existing legislation. There are a number of key political features that shape social protection and its operations in the country, which could potentially undermine the sector’s ability to play a larger role:

- First, the government’s narrative on poverty reduction is centred on job creation and interventions that support livelihoods and asset creation with great interest in public works programmes. Similarly, government’s anti-handout preference means the focus of its cash transfer programmes is on a narrow subset of the population, the economically poor who are not able to work.
- Second, MGCAS is not seen as a powerful enough ministry able to coordinate sectoral activities or hold other line ministries to task.
- Third, the social protection sector is supported by development partners with competing agendas and narrative. Although there is consensus around building social protection systems, there are divergent views on the detail and nature of support to the government.

This is in a context where MGCAS sets policy direction and INAS is responsible for implementing that policy (often with reluctance, given severe capacity constraints – see below), yet where there are no clear oversight mechanisms for assessing INAS’s performance and holding it to account.

Organisational issues: capacity, resources and financing

Organisational capacity within MGCAS and INAS suggests significant barriers to rapid expansion of programmes in response to emergencies either through adding new recipients (horizontal expansion) or top-up payments to recipients (vertical expansion). Specifically:

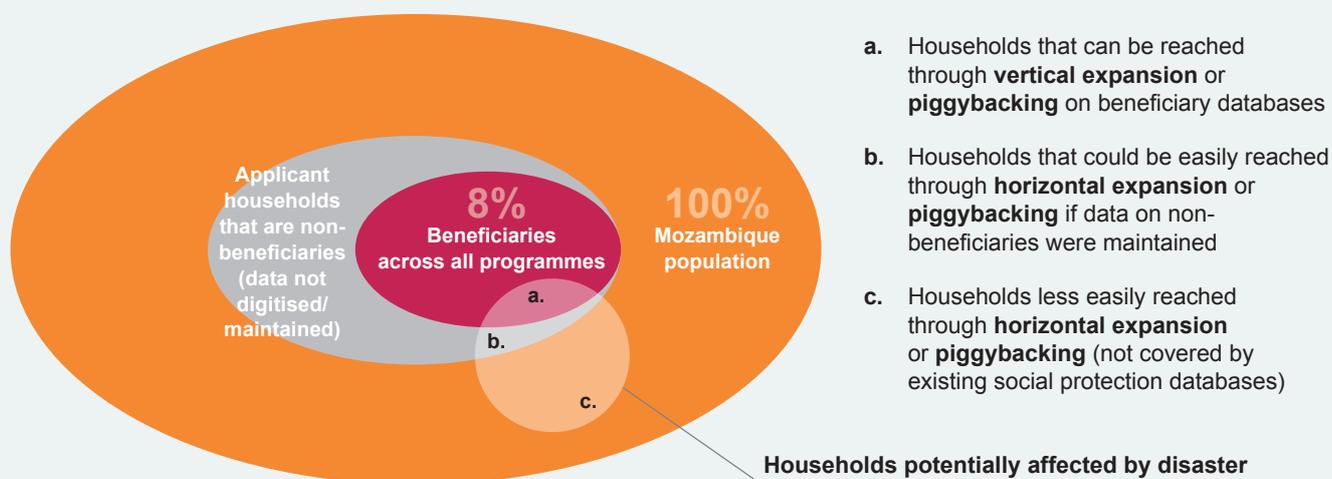
- Most districts – 109 out of a total 128 – do not have an INAS office ('delegation'). Given their limited footprint at the district level, the delegations are normally responsible for a number of districts in their vicinity and report directly to the headquarters in Maputo.
- All social protection programmes are implemented by INAS staff. On average there are 2.6 staff per 1,000 beneficiaries, with wide variations across the country. Human resource constraints are accentuated because of the way the programmes are being implemented, particularly the manual mode of payments to beneficiaries (see below).
- As the number of beneficiaries reached by programmes has increased in the past three years, the relative budget for administering programmes has declined. With a freeze on recruitment of new staff in non-priority sectors imposed by the government as part of its austerity measures, this resource constraint is likely to remain.
- In spite of continuous rise in the budget allocated to basic social security between 2012 and 2015, further increases are necessary to support an expanding system. Moreover, engaging in shock-response demands changes to the current financing architecture that allows the system to draw on contingency funds for programmatic response to shocks. Any contingent financing mechanism needs to be supported by clearly established protocols for activation and use.

Operational issues: targeting, data management and payment systems

In order for the social protection programmes to be able to provide an effective alternative to a traditional humanitarian response in a shock, it will be necessary to overcome some features of their operating systems – targeting, data management and payment systems – that present a barrier to their use in that context:

1. **Routine coverage:** Existing social assistance programmes combined cover some 445,000 households (2015): only 8% of the total population and 15% of the poor, but with large variation across provinces and districts (e.g. highest coverage rates in districts with lowest poverty rates) (Figure 1). In most districts this is far below the average population affected by disaster. While nearly all these households (apart from those on the PASP) are labour-constrained, e.g. the elderly and people with disabilities, which potentially means they are among those most affected by disasters, the low coverage still leaves the majority of population unreached.
2. **Data quality:** The beneficiary database of the PSSB, the largest programme, is maintained at district level. It relies fully or partially on community-based targeting run through voluntary structures, the *permanentes*, with little or no verification by INAS staff. Quality of data and effectiveness at covering the poor is therefore questioned by stakeholders.
3. **Data accessibility:** PSSB's list of potential beneficiaries (registered but not enrolled due to quotas) is maintained in paper form. A digitised list might work more effectively in times of emergency for horizontal expansion.
4. **Data comprehensiveness:** Similarly, other programmes do not have an effective database and management information system (MIS), and there is no comprehensive registry and related MIS across programmes.
5. **Payment system:** The transfer values for all social protection programmes are insufficient to help households meet consumption requirements or build resilience to shocks. This has proven particularly problematic after a shock, where social protection beneficiaries are often excluded from disaster assistance (with significantly higher value) based on the assumption that they are already 'covered'. The system suffers from regular delays in the release of even the funds for routine programme operations. Payments of cash and delivery of in-kind benefits of standard social assistance utilise a significant amount of staff time and resources. They are carried out manually every two months (rather than monthly, as planned) and place a strain on limited capacity at district level (10-15 days a month).

Figure 1: Disaster-affected people within the wider population – why reaching the right people is challenging



Source: OPM. Note: The grey circle's size is arbitrary (% unknown).

Table 1: Summary of enabling and constraining factors for the development of shock-responsiveness of social protection in Mozambique

Institutional issues	
Policy context and regulatory environment	✓ Policies/strategies: Recently approved Social Protection Strategy ('ENSSB II') aims to expand scope and coverage of social protection – including responsiveness to climate related shocks.
	✗ Political economy (government): Government's anti-handout narrative on poverty reduction and emergency response.
	✗ Political economy (partners): Competing agendas and divergent views amongst social protection development partners.
	✓ Legislation/regulations: Role of MGCAS and INAS in emergencies is clearly articulated within existing legislation (though limited).
Coordination	✓ MGCAS participates in the effective Technical Council for Disaster Management (CTGC).
	✗ MGCAS has low convening power.
	✗ Lack of clarity on way that existing beneficiary lists should be used by humanitarian actors. This has led to inconsistent use.
Organisational issues	
Financing	✓ 2012-2015 the social protection sector has witnessed a continuous rise in the budget allocated to basic social security. The sector is also largely domestically funded, testifying to national ownership.
	✗ While the number of beneficiaries reached by social protection programmes has increased in the past three years, there is a consensus that greater investment in staffing and other infrastructure is needed if INAS is to expand its reach.
	✗ Under current contingency financing, INAS receives no budget for programmatic response to shocks.
Capacity and resources	✓ DRM capacity: Robust disaster management capacity led by INGC.
	✗ Social protection capacity: Insufficient INAS staff per beneficiary. Staff overburdened with payment/delivery tasks (see below).
	✗ Local capacity: The vast majority of the country's districts do not have an INAS office.

Table 1: Summary of enabling and constraining factors for the development of shock-responsiveness of social protection in Mozambique (continued)

Operational issues	
Data management and targeting	✓ Programmes' focus mainly on labour-constrained categories (e.g. elderly, disabled) potentially means these are the most affected by disaster – yet other categories also affected.
	✗ Very low and uneven coverage of existing programmes (vs potential population affected).
	✗ Data on existing beneficiaries only easily available for PSSB and data on potential beneficiaries not digitised.
	✗ Quality of data and effectiveness at covering the poor is questioned by stakeholders because of current approach to data collection and targeting.
	✗ High risks of data being out of date.
Payments/delivery	✗ Regular delays in the release of funds: affects delivery of existing programmes.
	✗ Manual payment system utilises a significant amount of staff time and resources to implement, placing significant strain on limited capacity at district level.
	✗ Payment amount of all existing transfers is low and insufficient to help households meet consumption requirements or build resilience to shocks.

Source: OPM. Note: ✓ = aspects that could be conducive to shock-responsive social protection. ✗ = aspects that may pose a risk, but could be mitigated.

Lessons learned from Mozambique: how can social protection best complement and enhance disaster response?

Mozambique is a country with national commitment to social protection, yet with a range of programmes covering low percentages of the population, and issues with organisational capacity. Given the frequency and relative predictability of shocks, it has a strong DRM system in place, but the social protection sector currently plays a limited role in this. What are the broad lessons for Mozambique that may potentially apply to countries with similar contexts?

Before becoming shock-responsive, social protection systems need to be able to meet their core objectives

Capacity and resource constraints implementing existing social protection programmes do not bode well for implementation of emergency response under considerable stress and constraints. Lack of capacity at district/local level, especially, will need addressing through increases or changes to staffing structures. Capacity can also be addressed via improvements to existing processes – for example consolidation across programmes or digitisation of manual tasks. A programme that has good population coverage, and that is managed through sound administrative systems for identifying beneficiaries, managing data, delivering payments/goods and monitoring activities, lends itself more easily to use in an emergency. In Mozambique, this would imply improving programme operations and prioritising the actions and activities within the recently approved social protection strategy (ENSSB II), before expecting social protection to have a major role to play in disaster response.

Existing social protection programmes can be 'tinkered with' to increase their role across the DRM cycle

First of all, flagship social protection programmes such as PSSB could pursue higher beneficiary coverage (and higher capacity) in areas which are most chronically food insecure and/or disaster prone. This could mean incorporating the analysis of risks and vulnerability carried out by DRM actors into geographical targeting, or at least prioritising expansion plans to vulnerable areas.

Second, it could be useful to re-think the most appropriate social protection programmes for increasing household resilience versus responding to shocks.

- Public works programmes (such as PASP in Mozambique) can be used as climate-sensitive social protection instruments with the aim of building resilience to future shocks if they provide sufficient wage/income/food, have sufficient coverage and have a sound process for asset selection and monitoring of quality. However, their use after an emergency can pose an operational challenge in contexts with low organisational capacity. Such programmes would also require very simple design features to be rapidly scaled up to identify new beneficiaries and support affected populations in line with existing NGO practice. In the context of slow-onset crisis response, the extension of programme duration – as experimented for PASP – could be an effective shock response mechanism, provided the system is clearly set up to channel additional financing.
- Cash transfers (such as PSSB) can be more suited for fast scale-up after a disaster, especially if they have higher coverage.

Third, preparedness for shocks within social protection programmes could include a focus on ensuring standard operations continue running smoothly after a shock – especially where these are recurrent. In Mozambique, for example, a simple (and cost-neutral) change in PSSB payment schedules – setting a double payment in the month of December, the period of heightened exposure to climatic shocks – could help address the consequences of regular delays in budgetary release during the first quarter of the financial year.

Social protection databases can be instrumental in a shock, but not if they are nascent or under-developed

The databases of beneficiary households from existing social protection programmes – managed through their MIS – can be used in an emergency for topping up benefits to their recipients (vertical expansion), or to support targeting by humanitarian actors (piggybacking). However, in Mozambique, such strategies cannot be easily pursued in the short term because programmes (e.g PSSB, which has the greatest potential):

- often have low *coverage* of the population in disaster-affected geographical areas
- do not systematically cover *target populations* that are most likely to be affected by disaster (acknowledging disasters affect the poor and non-poor indiscriminately and no programme would cover 100% of affected population)
- do not have data that are considered to be of sufficient *quality* and sufficiently *up-to-date*.

Moreover, the fact that PSSB does not retain data in digital format on households who were registered for social protection but never enrolled (because of quotas or because they did not fulfil eligibility criteria, i.e. non-beneficiaries) means it will not be able to easily pursue ‘horizontal expansion’ strategies: increasing the caseload of beneficiaries in times of emergency.

The Mozambique experience has clearly shown that sharing such data with external actors will require:

- clear directives on how existing social protection recipients should be included in disaster response programmes (rather than being excluded on the grounds that they already receive some assistance) – taking into consideration the value, duration, frequency and type of benefit they already receive;
- protocols for maintaining the integrity of data and confidentiality of recipients;
- systems for sharing data and information swiftly and effectively.

Availability of financing and a well established contingency financing mechanism is necessary for effective disaster response

An effective emergency response requires adequate resources, regardless of whether it is channelled through the humanitarian or social protection system. So far a large part of financing for emergency response is provided through the international community that is often slow in coming and inadequate in meeting the response needs. This calls for exploration of alternative financing sources and mechanisms to respond to emergencies. In addition to availability of resources, protocols need to be in place to determine how and when funds can be disbursed and utilised for emergencies.

About the project

The Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems study is a two-year research programme (2015 to 2017) led by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), in consortium with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) and INASP. Its aim is to strengthen the evidence base as to when and how existing government social protection systems can better respond to shocks in low-income countries and fragile and conflict-affected states, thus minimising negative shock impacts and reducing the need for separate humanitarian responses. The research is funded by UK Aid as part of the UK Department for International Development's (DFID's) Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme (HIEP).

Further information

This policy brief builds on work by Andrew Kardan, Sarah Bailey, Ana Solorzano and Lourdes Fidalgo. The Mozambique research draws on both quantitative and qualitative data gathered through a combination of literature review, document review and consultations with key informants and stakeholders at the national and sub-national levels. Our method builds on insights offered by the literature and summarised in our overarching conceptual framework for Shock-Responsive Social Protection. These are all accessible on our project webpage, where the full Mozambique case study can also be found.

Suggested citation: : Kardan A., Bailey S. and Barca, V. (2017) 'Building on social protection systems for effective disaster response: the Mozambique experience'. Policy Brief. Oxford Policy Management, Oxford, UK.



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