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Country reviews of social assistance in crises: A compendium of rapid assessments of the nexus between social protection and humanitarian assistance in crisis settings

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BETTER ASSISTANCE IN CRISES RESEARCH

Country Reviews of Social Assistance in Crises

A compendium of rapid assessments of the nexus between social protection and humanitarian assistance in crisis settings.

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Contents

Acronyms

ACF	Action Contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger)
ASP	adaptive social protection
CBA	cash-based assistance
DFID	(UK) Department for International Development
DG ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DRM	disaster risk management
DRR	disaster risk resilience
EWEA	early warning early action
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCDO	(UK) Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FEWSNET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
GDP	gross domestic product
GESI	gender equality and social inclusion
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDP	internally displaced people/person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KII	key informant interview
MIS	management information systems
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
RRM	rapid response mechanism
SASPP	Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme
SRSN	shock-responsive safety net
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USR	unified social registry
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WMO	World Meteorological Organization

Introduction

This collection brings together brief overviews of the social assistance landscape in eight fragile and conflict-affected settings in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen. These overviews were prepared as part of Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research, a multi-year programme (2020–24) supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the UK government. BASIC Research aims to inform policy and programming on effective social assistance in situations of crisis, including for those who are experiencing climate-related shocks and stressors, protracted conflict and forced displacement.

Social assistance encompasses social transfers (of cash, supplementary food and vouchers), public works programmes, fee waivers, and subsidies with the primary aim of reducing poverty and vulnerability among people affected by crises. Social assistance programmes often incorporate a variety of other secondary objectives: preventing negative coping and risky behaviours; building human capital; strengthening livelihoods as well as adaptive capacities to withstand the impacts of global climate change; building the state–citizen contract; empowering women and girls; and achieving social justice. In crisis-affected settings, social transfers and public works programmes are the most important and prevalent types of social assistance interventions. These are directed, coordinated and delivered through a complex architecture that incorporates state agencies and offices, international and non-governmental organisations, civil society, armed groups and other non-state public authorities. Social assistance is provided alongside, and overlaps with, humanitarian aid, including cash, food, vouchers and other basic assistance. In many places, crises persist, as do conditions that are neither peaceful nor in full-blown conflict, often for long periods. Humanitarian aid can become a perennial feature in such contexts.

Social assistance supports the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations, as they are living through crises. Yet the provision of social assistance is often patchy and thinly spread, inadequately funded, and ill-timed in relation to when shocks occur. Assistance can be denied to specific populations who are made subject to various identity and legal signifiers (such as ethnicity, age or refugee status). It is also susceptible to local-level politics and contestations around public authority. BASIC Research explores these and other related challenges across a number of themes: 'what works' (for routine, effective and efficient delivery); financing and value for money; risk, accountability, and technology; climate vulnerability and resilience; displacement; politics, principles and the role of the state; inclusion; and livelihoods and transformation.

Between December 2020 and February 2021 a research team conducted an initial mapping of social assistance programmes currently being funded in the eight countries explored here. The team implemented a rigorous but rapid review of available published and grey literature, stakeholder consultations with FCDO country offices, key aid agencies, and researchers, and analysis of the applicability and researchability of the main BASIC Research themes. Background reports on each country were prepared to support decisions on where to conduct longer-term research later in 2021.

From the eight countries explored here, the BASIC Research programme selected four focus countries: one that is experiencing protracted conflict and is partly accessible for research activities; another with protracted conflict and more restricted access; one Francophone country; and another that hosts a large forcibly displaced population. Deeper collaborative work with operational and in-country partners will begin this year in these four countries, with the aim of supporting research on thematic priorities and to feed into current debates on social assistance in crises.

This collection of overviews presents the key insights from the earlier background reports. The primary objective was to establish where BASIC Research could add value to other existing work; thus, these overviews should not be interpreted as comprehensive assessments of the situation in any of the eight countries. Nonetheless, they will be of interest to researchers, planners and officials who are involved in finding ways of improving social assistance at the intersection of social protection systems and humanitarian aid.

Iraq

Introduction

The landscape of social assistance in Iraq is affected by a near 'perfect storm' of compounding factors – conflict, ethno-religious tensions, poverty and socioeconomic shocks. Long-standing social assistance programmes exist alongside substantial, shock-responsive humanitarian programming. This prompts key questions about how established programmes can be maintained during periods of instability, and how humanitarian and government-led assistance can be coordinated.

Background

Iraq has been in 'transition', with limited success, for nearly two decades: from dictatorship to 'democracy', from an oil-based to a more diversified economy. The US-led invasion in 2003 was followed by spates of sectarian violence until 2011. More recently, ISIL has occupied parts of Iraq. Beyond ISIL, multiple militias operate outside the state's control, with only limited success in regularising and integrating them into the Iraqi Security Forces. Tensions between the US and Iran are playing out in a proxy war in Iraq. At best, the country is in an unpredictable political, security and economic situation.

Iraq's dependency on oil for income distorts the economy. Oil generates around 96 per cent of government revenues, but relatively few employment opportunities. The public sector is Iraq's main employer, with employment perceived by many to depend on patronage. Iraq has one of the lowest labour force participation rates in the world, especially among women, youth and IDPs (Devereux 2015; OCHA 2020). Unemployment rates are high, particularly in governorates (provinces) where agriculture is the primary source of employment. Nearly 20 per cent of Iraqis live below the poverty line, with a slightly higher percentage among children. Beyond income poverty, 42 per cent of the population experience at least one form of deprivation from the following list: education, health, living conditions or financial security (UNICEF 2020).

The governance of Iraq is also complex. Tensions ran high between the Federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government following a Kurdistan independence referendum in 2017. Relationships have somewhat eased, allowing more travel and commerce, but the situation remains finely balanced.

Humanitarian assistance

To add to the lasting impacts of the 2003 war and subsequent insurgent violence, twin shocks occurred in 2014: a sharp decline in oil prices and ISIL's occupation of Iraq's northern and western governorates. The occupation displaced more than 354,000 households (around 2.1 million individuals) in the second half of the year and cut other households off from the rest of the country.

Since 2014, cash assistance has grown in significance in the response for refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities. Multipurpose cash grants (MPG) allowed humanitarian agencies to play a critical role in responding to the needs of those affected by conflict, allowing them to address a wide range of needs, at least in the short term. Major stakeholders (donors, INGOs, UN agencies and even the Government of Iraq) have worked towards consolidation and harmonisation of cash assistance action in two main ways: the adoption of MPGs to meet the various needs of beneficiaries, with the possibility of additional transfers to respond to specific needs (i.e. Covid-19 response); and increasing collaboration between INGOs working in Iraq to deliver cash assistance. The capacity to deliver using cash is predicated on functional financial services – these, although outdated, are in place throughout the country, except for some areas closer to borders. The Cash Consortium for Iraq and Cash Working Group provide good

case studies of the practicalities of harmonising cash-based responses. The experiences highlight two notable challenges: the difficulty in sharing information about or combining payment systems, and the difficulties in harmonising targeting approaches and criteria.

Initiatives by the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) provide good examples of programmes that are neither solely social assistance nor humanitarian but combine elements of both. International agencies, such as UNHCR and WFP, work through the ministry to provide refugees and IDPs with rations, winter clothing and heating.

Some 4.5 million IDPs have returned home since 2017. However, return has been challenging for many – as camps were closed, some households were further displaced, and others were not accepted on returning to their communities due to perceived but unproven affiliations to extremist groups. Reconstruction proceeds slowly, with limited progress on repairing damaged infrastructure.

In common with other parts of the region, a divided approach persists between assistance provided to Syrian refugees and that given to Iraqi IDPs and host communities. Furthermore, refugees are often overlooked in the humanitarian response in Iraq. There are multiple causes for that: first, their relatively small number (around 280,000 individuals); and, second, their relatively good integration into the Kurdistan region thanks to similar linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Most refugee-focused assistance comes from UNHCR through a vulnerability-based cash transfer programme, which now provides US$250 monthly for 18 months using mobile money transfers. The support to the refugees has been criticised for lacking a clear exit strategy, as most recipients will require long-term support that goes beyond the current cash assistance (Savage 2021).

Social protection assistance

Although social assistance (and wider social protection) programmes in Iraq are long-standing, the government lacks a central strategy for social protection and its actions lack coordination and cooperation across the various institutions mandated to oversee and deliver programmes. Different agencies have conflicting priorities and a limited focus on long-term goals. In turn, this has resulted in fragmentation and exclusion errors where many poor and vulnerable families are left out of programmes.

Despite these challenges, the government has committed between 7 and 12 per cent of public spending to social protection since 2007 (although predominantly in support of public sector pensions), and the Social Protection Law No. 11 of 2014 sought to overcome the shortcomings of the system. The twin shocks of 2014 hindered this but commitments to social protection remain in the National Development Plan and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2028–22, and the path forward was articulated in the Social Protection Roadmap 2015–19.

The main social assistance programmes are a Public Distribution System (PDS) and the Social Safety Net. The PDS – a ration card system – provides in-kind food assistance and subsidies on other basic consumption goods. The PDS reaches almost all Iraqi households although not all households receive the same level of benefits (less than 5 per cent of beneficiary households received the full package in 2011 (Ministry of Planning, Republic of Iraq 2011)). The system was originally designed as a temporary measure to buffer households against the hardships resulting from international actions. It provided a functional safety net even through periods of great upheaval and economic restructuring in the 2000s. In 2014, the PDS was reduced from eight items to four, due to reduced oil revenues. While untargeted subsidies are unpopular among international agencies, the experiences of the PDS in Iraq could provide a good case study of when and how different social assistance instruments can be sustained in periods of violent conflict and upheaval.

The Social Safety Net (SSN) is the largest cash transfer programme in Iraq, benefiting around 8.2 per cent of the population. It provides benefits to specific vulnerable groups (widows, orphans, people with disabilities and/or chronic illness, married students, older people). It is important to note that, through the work of social workers, the SSN seeks to provide a social integration function: by delivering the safety net, the aim is to 'reinstitute trust between citizens and the state', 'integrate the marginalised and

destitute', and 'promulgate a message of social reconciliation and national cohesion' (World Bank 2017: 3).

State pensions are also a central part of the social protection landscape. The (very generous) pension scheme has undergone multiple changes since 2003 given its burden on the national budget. In 2006 the World Bank estimated that pension payments absorbed nearly 5 per cent of GDP and, despite subsequent reforms, reached only a quarter of the population. It was reformed again in 2014, to bring in all formally employed people, with different taxation schemes for public and private sector works. The long-term strategy is to reduce, significantly, the pension that a single family can receive (Savage 2021).

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has a separate legal, administrative and operational framework for social protection although its programmes (pension, PDS and a cash-based SSN) largely mirror the federal system. In 2016, the KRG adopted a new Social Protection Strategy including reforms to pensions and the development of a new SSN addressing the needs of poor households. By 2019, UNDP published a revised SSN blueprint for KRG that draws strongly on the proxy means-testing approaches of the Cash Working Group and Cash Consortium for Iraq. Progress on the pilot was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic (*Ibid.*).

Challenges and opportunities

What works

Delivery systems and modalities

A mapping study conducted by the Cash Working Group in Iraq shows that mobile money service providers, Hawala services (trust-based money transfers outside formal banking systems), e-vouchers such as RedRose and SCOPE, and pre-paid cards such as SWITCH and NassPay, are the most commonly used transfer mechanisms. However, it is worth noting that Hawala dealers and mobile money service providers were unable to distribute cash in a timely manner, due to Covid-19-related curfew measures, bank closures and rapidly drained liquid cash. An electronic cash transfer mechanism called QI card is used by the MoDM to transfer cash to citizens. There is less evidence on the suitability of other mechanisms, such as NassPay, for humanitarian cash assistance. Regarding mobile money, more than 70 per cent of Iraqis have mobile phones. The major challenge is the basic digital literacy required to deal with the system (for example, receiving SMS messages or withdrawing cash).

Overall, these challenges have pushed the government more towards using mobile money transfers for the Covid-19 cash response. Pre-paid cards could provide an electronic and scalable system. If humanitarian agencies start using them, this could pave the way for linking humanitarian assistance and social protection (CWGI 2020). Further assessment is needed of the appropriateness of the options for integrating humanitarian cash assistance with government programmes.

Targeting

Debates about targeting abound in Iraq. The PDS is criticised for being untargeted – although it provides near universal access, not all households receive a full package of benefits. In contrast, the SSN is categorically targeted. This approach raises questions about the effectiveness of the current targeting systems (UNICEF 2018) with estimates suggesting that the poorest quintile received about 25 per cent of total transfers (World Bank 2017). Inclusion and exclusion errors may arise because lists of benefiting households are not regularly updated (Savage 2021). Errors also raise questions about the appropriateness, practicality and effectiveness of different mechanisms for targeting in situations where violent conflict affects operations and where social assistance may be deployed as part of peace-building or reconstruction efforts. Altogether, Iraq's suite of programmes provides useful comparisons between universal, categorical and more targeted approaches. Tracking the development of proxy means-testing systems could offer important insights into the balance of politics (with a small 'p'), effectiveness and efficiency in driving future decisions about targeting.

Coordination

Divisions between the central government in Baghdad and the KRG based in Erbil have resulted in a dual administrative system for social protection programming. This has led to poor engagement and cooperation with humanitarian and development actors across the country (Savage 2021). Other reports also suggest that this lack of coordination between different local governments, the central government in Baghdad and the humanitarian and development actors is not unique to the Kurdistan region, but is quite widespread in other governorates too. The problem tends to disrupt many actors from delivering their programmes, especially in areas most in need and most affected by conflict (OCHA 2020).

Inclusion

Iraq remains subject to social, ethnic, religious and sectarian tensions with multiple dimensions: between Sunni and Shia, and between and among Christians and Yazidis, Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen. Unemployment reaches 35 per cent among youth, and women are routinely under-represented in the labour market. Gender and age intersect in particular with the status of refugee or IDP.

Another inclusion problem is that of families related to 'extremists' or members of ISIL. Families (around 1.5 million people) with perceived but unproven affiliations to extremist groups are socially stigmatised in camps and host communities, unwelcome in their areas of origin, and prone to exclusion from social services due to discrimination – both by communities and government officials. Discrimination in the local job market affects the long-term wellbeing of these households, with female-headed households having even further reduced economic opportunities. Both household types are extremely reliant on their social groups and debt networks to get by, particularly because existing government programmes are not yet absorbing them (OCHA 2020; Savage 2021).

Climate vulnerability and resilience

The focus on the impact of conflict in Iraq tends to mask the impacts of climate change on poor and vulnerable households. Climate change in Iraq manifests in prolonged heatwaves, erratic precipitation, higher temperatures and increased disaster intensity. In 2013, severe flooding damaged approximately 75,000 acres of cropland in southeast Iraq. Heavy seasonal rains during the first few months of 2019 caused flooding and damage in several governorates. The agricultural production of vegetables for 2017 in Basra was 60 per cent less than planned due to drought (Stephen 2016). Several governorates still face potential water shortages. Climate change, specifically extreme weather events in the southern governorates, including the recently recorded high temperatures and flash floods, have further affected the livelihoods of vulnerable households and is forcing their migration to urban areas. Around 53 per cent of the population are estimated to be vulnerable to food insecurity (OCHA 2020) – caused by the increasing number and duration of droughts and more prevalent sand and dust storms that result in significant declines in agricultural yields and livestock production. Between 2007 and 2009, cases of internal displacement in Iraq were mainly due to drought (OCHA 2020). The government refers increasingly to 'climate migrants'. Levels of water and soil salinity, especially in the Euphrates River basin, are high, and expected to increase. Water stress will increase and efficient irrigation techniques are crucial to maintain productivity and food security (Adamo *et al.* 2018). Ageing or war-damaged water infrastructure, pollution, and uncertain agreements with neighbouring countries on the sharing of river water all contribute to a lack of clean water for household use.

Climate change effects especially impact on women; in a drought situation, women and girls bear the increased burden of going longer distances to fetch water and meet other basic household needs. In 2017, the agriculture sector provided employment for an estimated 44 per cent of the total female workforce. However, limited financial proficiency, poor access to approaches or technologies that promote agricultural productivity, compounded by capacity constraints, all prevent women from diversifying their livelihoods and maintaining the food security of their households (Vilardo and Bittar 2018). Women in rural areas face greater food insecurity as well as more barriers to education, formal employment and access to finance; this hinders their progress out of poverty and limits their adaptation to climate change.

Conclusion

Successive economic, political and security shocks in Iraq have led to a significant increase in the poverty rate since 2014. Support from social assistance is substantial: in 2017, UNICEF found that 10 per cent of people live in a household that was reached by at least one form of social cash transfer (3.3 million people), and 96 per cent received in-kind food assistance from the PDS. The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened poverty and increased the role of social assistance mechanisms. At the same time, declining state revenues and lack of coordination and effectiveness mean that clear changes are necessary. Therein lies the 'Catch-22': any drastic or poorly calculated changes will likely result in further humanitarian and political crises (Savage 2021). A further irony is that numerous efforts to revise and reform social assistance to make it fitter for the shock-prone landscape it is situated in – particularly to make it more crisis-sensitive – have been undermined or disrupted by those very shocks.

It is precisely because of these challenges that Iraq provides an opportunity to understand better the features of humanitarian and social assistance that can be sustained during periods of conflict, displacement and upheaval, across a range of instruments, and with different configurations of operational actors.

Jordan

Introduction

Jordan hosts huge numbers of refugees from Syria and other countries, putting social assistance structures under strain in contexts already affected by climate change and economic vulnerability. Current challenges include finding entry points to integrate humanitarian and development caseloads, especially the longer-term integration of refugees into the labour market and social systems.

Background

Jordan is a resource-poor, middle-income country where agricultural land, food self-sufficiency, energy resources and water supply are all seriously constrained (Zureiqat and Abu Shama 2015). As a net food importer, Jordan is particularly vulnerable to food price shocks. Its small and privatised economy is in a precarious shape directly because of the war in Syria; border crossings were closed for prolonged periods during the violence and insecurity, disrupting trade. The IMF has been pushing the government to make financial reforms. Recession, debt, unemployment, a small market size, fluctuations in agricultural production, lack of capital, and a high presence of refugees cause Jordan to seek and rely on foreign aid (Devereux 2015).

Jordan has the second highest refugee population per capita in the world (UNHCR 2019c). It hosts more than 2 million registered Palestinian refugees (UNRWA 2019); and some 665,000 registered Syrian refugees (mostly in host communities) – rising to an estimated 1.3 million including unregistered Syrians (UNHCR 2021a; UNICEF 2020a). This is in addition to 67,000 Iraqis, 15,000 Yemenis, 6,000 Sudanese and 2,500 refugees from 52 other nationalities (UNHCR 2019b).

High unemployment and very limited formal job opportunities mean that much of the labour market is informal, affecting refugees disproportionally. Labour laws prevent them from accessing formal jobs in specific sectors, despite efforts to mitigate this (Amjad *et al.* 2017; Sahin Mencutek and Nashwan 2020).

Humanitarian assistance

Jordan has received large-scale humanitarian assistance since the Syria crisis began in 2011, in addition to decades-long support to Palestinian refugees through UNRWA. International humanitarian funding to Jordan was consistently above US$900m between 2013 and 2016, but dropped to US$679m in 2018 (Development Initiatives 2019).

A task force of line ministries, donors, UN agencies and NGOs provides financial support to mitigate the impact of Syria through the Jordan Response Plan (JRP), a three-year rolling plan that is updated annually (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 2020). Within this, the Jordan Humanitarian Fund (JHF) provides flexible and timely funding to partners to address urgent humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in Jordan. A provision was added in 2015 for cross-border assistance to vulnerable, conflict-affected people in southern Syria (OCHA 2018). The JRP 2020–2022 commits to building an integrated multi-year framework to respond in a transparent, collaborative and sustainable way in line with the Global Compact on Refugees and the 2030 Agenda.

Humanitarian assistance to refugees, in particular cash-based interventions (CBIs), has been a major component of the international response to the Syria crisis.[1] Local and international NGOs implement most of the CBIs. Although initially fragmented, efforts are increasing to consolidate delivery systems (UNHCR 2017). The Jordanian government requires that 30 per cent of beneficiaries are Jordanian.

The Common Cash Facility (CCF), a donor-funded collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach to the delivery of cash, led by UNHCR, provides humanitarian actors with direct and equal access to a common financial service provider. Two UN and eight other humanitarian agencies use the CCF. Its public–private partnership approach reduces transaction costs (Gilert and Austin 2017).

Food is another common modality of assistance. WFP uses its SCOPE system to manage food assistance for beneficiaries and transfers. The platform registers beneficiaries with biometric technology, and creates distribution lists for partners, among other features. SCOPE provides transfer services when local providers are unavailable (Devereux 2015). However, such consolidation of assistance under large UN-led programmes may limit the entry points for other agencies or NGOs (Smith 2020).

Social protection assistance

The 2019–2025 National Social Protection Strategy is based on three pillars (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 2019): (1) social assistance; (2) social insurance and labour market policies; and, (3) social services run through various ministries and state bodies (UNICEF 2020b). The National Aid Fund (NAF) is the main national non-contributory social protection provider, with monthly cash transfers to approximately 100,000 vulnerable Jordanian families. But NAF assistance reaches only 7 per cent of households earning less than U$S3,500 (JOD2,500) per year – no assistance goes to nearly half of households on less than U$S10,500 (JOD7,500) per year (UNICEF 2020a). The NAF is also under-staffed and relies on external support such as to conduct reform and household verification, performed by UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank (Dürr 2021).

Religious institutions are prominent in social, cultural and political systems. Zakat is one of the oldest Islamic charitable funds in the region and a key institution in Jordan's social protection system. The National Zakat Fund (NZF) is based on private donations, with different programmes for almost 60,000 vulnerable households and individuals, but it has a much smaller budget for cash transfers than the NAF. Non-Jordanians including refugee populations are eligible for Zakat assistance but it is unclear how much is channelled to refugees (Dürr 2020).

Informal social protection is shrinking. Mutual support among tribes, relatives, friends and neighbours is particularly important for poor and vulnerable households, but this support is provided *ad hoc* and for a limited period. In Jordan, only 10 per cent of all households receive regular support in this way (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth 2017).

Previous government action on price subsidies on food and fuel has shifted towards targeted social assistance. School feeding (targeting girls) and public works have increasingly become popular for Jordanians, particularly using cash transfers or food vouchers (Devereux 2015).

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[1] In 2016, UNHCR Jordan's CBIs provided a record US$85m to more than 136,000 Syrian refugees in the country. UNHCR has adopted elements of a social protection approach targeting the most vulnerable (UNHCR 2017). This system is based on complex calculations and formulas, leading to confusion and tension among beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. The system is different to the one used by the NAF, based on consumption and assets (Rai 2021).

Challenges and opportunities

Displacement and refugees

Most refugees in Jordan live in highly populated urban areas, where many local populations already live in precarious conditions. Refugee numbers put additional pressure on fragile urban systems that provide housing and basic services (health, education, water, sanitation, electricity and waste collection) (Rai 2021; te Lintelo *et al.* 2018). Syrian refugees receive no national social protection support and only minimal support from local NGOs (Devereux 2015). Including refugees in the national system is politically sensitive due to concerns about how such support would be sustained if international donor funding stops (Dürr 2020; FCDO Jordan 2021; Rai 2021). INGOs provide most social assistance to refugees, and to vulnerable Jordanians, as per government requirements. This assistance includes cash, vouchers and winterisation schemes, in many cases *ad hoc* and one-off, although some provide more regular and unlimited transfers (e.g. NRC, Oxfam, WFP, Save the Children, UNICEF and UNHCR).

Jordan offers universal education, including to Syrian children, but students need to present a Ministry of Interior service card (an obstacle for refugees), and many schools struggle to cope with the extra children (who are separated into shifts by nationality). International organisations run education and youth programmes, both in schools and camp-based (e.g. NRC and Save the Children UK) (Röth, Nimeh and Hagen-Zanker 2017).

Theoretically, there is commitment to assist Syrian refugees. The Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate government agency, supported by UNHCR, manages and coordinates the Za'atari and Azraq camps to ensure that effective, efficient assistance is provided according to international humanitarian principles (UNHCR 2020b). The UNHCR 2021 Planning Summary includes a commitment to integrating refugees into the national social protection system (UNHCR 2020a). The Jordan Compact has a political commitment to integrate Syrian refugees into the formal labour market (Lenner and Turner 2019).

However, complex, frequently changing policies around borders, legal status, recognised documentation, birth registration and other instruments undermine people's abilities to get access to and claim assistance (UNHCR 2019a). An agreement by government in 2018 to pilot use of the NAF delivery chain to give assistance to refugees never materialised (Dürr 2020). Syrians originally had access to public health care on equal terms with Jordanians, but as this became increasingly unaffordable, entitlements were eroded. In fact, Jordan has no refugee policy and has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. Refugee caseloads are managed by humanitarian actors, particularly agencies such as UNHCR.

The situation causes local frictions. Refugees report being discriminated against by local businesses (in terms of working conditions) and state institutions. Hosts claim that refugees benefit disproportionately from aid and are an economic threat to local communities (te Lintelo *et al.* 2018). To promote social cohesion, UNHCR Jordan together with partners advocate for the 'One Refugee' approach in all sectors and services for all refugees. From July 2020, both Syrians and non-Syrian asylum seekers and refugees can access public health at the non-insured Jordanian rate, by presenting their UNHCR certificates (UNHCR 2020b). Yet, there are reports that UNHCR resources have benefited Syrian refugees (and to some extent Iraqis) over non-Syrians (Somalis, Sudanese, Yemenis), in terms of access to services, livelihoods and support networks (te Lintelo *et al.* 2018; Dürr 2020). It is worth noting that Jordan has extended citizenship rights to Palestinian refugees, unlike those in Lebanon (Human Rights Watch n.d.).

Without better alignment of programmes to national interventions and policy environments, such as on refugees' right to work, these challenges will be difficult to overcome (Hagen-Zanker *et al.* 2017; Smith 2020).

Covid-19

A joint funding mechanism set up in June 2020 to tackle informality in Jordan is looking at Covid-19 related vulnerabilities. Backed by several donors (FCDO, US, Germany, Netherlands), the mechanism

ensures programmes are expanded to households not otherwise eligible for normal payments (FCDO Jordan 2021).

A government-led Social Protection Response Committee (SPRC) was also organised and funded through the 'Himmat Watan' Fund. Key actions include expanding the NAF, implementing the National Unified Registry and digital payments (involving citizens only), and establishing a temporary cash assistance programme. Almost 450,000 households benefited through new and existing cash assistance programmes and in-kind transfers (parcels and vouchers) implemented by the NAF and the NZF throughout the pandemic (UNICEF 2020b).

Other measures are free treatment to Covid-19 patients; a medicine delivery service; two new delivery methods for distance learning through television and an online portal (UNICEF 2020b). Refugees are included in the National Health Response Plan on Covid-19 (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 2020). Refugees and asylum seekers get Covid-19 vaccinations free of charge, following pushes from the COVAX Facility and UNHCR (UNHCR 2021b).

Livelihoods and transformation

With high unemployment and low labour demand, the Jordanian government recently launched its economic empowerment plan or 'graduation strategy', with job placements as the entry point (Dürr 2021). It aims to expand support through labour intermediation services to reach job seekers beyond those households benefiting from cash assistance. The EU Madad fund initiated a graduation project led by UNICEF and ILO, for 3,000 Jordanian households (NAF beneficiaries) and 4,000 Syrian refugee households (UNHCR basic needs cash beneficiaries) (Dürr 2020).

Informal employment (based on the contract type, duration, social security coverage) is common in Jordan, particularly among Syrian refugees, despite government initiatives to promote formalisation of workers and businesses. Structural constraints in the labour market, such as regulations and work permits, push refugees towards occupations and sectors characterised by a high degree of informality, such as construction, agriculture and services (ILO and FAFO 2020). The ILO Labour Force Survey, which now includes migrant workers and refugees, paid specific attention to working conditions including in the informal economy (ILO 2017). The 2019 Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) data collection tool[2] includes a new section on livelihoods, debt, income and expenditure to ensure that assistance is efficient, effective and targeted for the most vulnerable households and regions.

Much of the government's social transfers, health and public pensions only covered Jordanians in the formal sector. Therefore, since 2016, foreign donors (such as GIZ) and INGOs (for example, Oxfam) have run broader cash-for-work (CFW) programmes, to support Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians; strengthen social cohesion between them; reduce labour market competition; and promote the integration of women into economic life (Loewe *et al.* 2020). An impact evaluation of Oxfam's CFW activities in the Za'atari camp shows positive and significant impact on household wealth, income, technical skills and women's economic inclusion. However, beneficiary households were less likely to engage in income opportunities other than CFW (Lombardini and Mager 2018).

In the absence of full social and economic rights for refugees, the problem of livelihoods has in some cases been addressed through assumptions of self-reliance, creativity and innovation, such as coding boot camps for refugees (Pascucci 2019). These have limitations; for example, coding requires education and language skills that not all beneficiaries possess (Schuettler and Caron 2020).

Technology, risks and accountability

Digital technology can support the coordination of aid efforts, prevent duplication and improve access to support. UN OCHA's 'Who does what where' contact management directory and UNHCR's Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal and Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS) allow partner agencies to

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2 VAF population studies explore different types of vulnerability dimensions across multiple sectors from a representative sample of registered Syrian refugees in Jordan. It contributes to reflection within UNHCR on how to interpret their multisectoral home visit assessments (Brown *et al.* 2019).

access and update information on refugees (Favell 2015). Mobile money pilots for Syrian refugees allow them to own an account (Dürr 2021); UNHCR beneficiaries access cash and services via a biometric iris-scanning system installed at bank ATMs, which also aids registration (UNHCR 2020b).

The National Unified Registry (NUR), implemented in 2019 and funded by the World Bank, is an electronic database and management system of citizens' information designed to improve the efficiency and accuracy of targeting mechanisms for vulnerable households (UNICEF 2020b). The NUR is used in the state-run 'Takaful' social protection programme that is projected to assist up to 185,000 households in the coming years (Dürr 2020).

Fragmentation around the design (and targeting) of social assistance systems for locals and refugees is a problem. Further research on any harmonisation should look at efficiency gains from hybrid models that keep eligibility criteria and funding separate but that integrate beneficiaries into one system (Rai 2021).

A major pitfall of digital technologies is that often the most poor and vulnerable are excluded, thus increasing the digital (educational and financial) gap, especially for the most destitute and the illiterate. Women are more affected than men (Dürr 2020; UNICEF 2020b). Failure to protect people's identity properly is another problem. A balance is needed between sharing people's details and keeping highly sensitive personal information secure (Favell 2015). A lack of internet connection or data causes difficulties with opening and retrieving cash from e-wallets.

Climate vulnerability and resilience

Jordan's natural aridity and droughts have exacerbated water and resource availability, and increased variability and intensity of weather events. Climate change particularly affects vulnerable communities due to water scarcity, land and air pollution, energy insecurity and associated costs. The Syria crisis and the presence of refugees in different parts of Jordan, along with increased human activities, have had significant environmental impacts, namely deforestation, land degradation, poor air quality, and deteriorating water supply and quality (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 2020). The payment structure of government electricity subsidies complicates the picture further by incentivising inefficient use of energy, and consequently, increasing pressure on supply in highly populated areas such as the north, which has most of the refugees. Indeed this region reportedly has higher concentrations of air pollutants directly proportional to the population size.

Jordan's major policy, the National Climate Change Policy and Sector Strategic Guidance Framework, has now been extended to 2030. It emphasises adaptation rather than mitigation, with the aim of achieving both socioeconomic development and environmental resilience, particularly focusing on water, agriculture, energy, land use, and desertification. Internationally, Jordan remains highly dependent on regional and global exchanges, especially for water, food and energy.

Yet, Jordan's efforts have so far been limited. Most policymakers do not see climate change as a priority (compared to employment, for example). There is a lack of understanding about its implications and costs, and the benefits of action. Policymaking on climate change is not unified; plans and institutions lack consistency, comprehensiveness, links, and common purpose. Most initiatives and projects are driven by donors. Financing climate action requires substantial financial support from international sources. Jordan has sought and received funding, from international climate funds and bilateral and multilateral aid sources. However, this assistance is still not integrated into the national social protection system (Combaz 2019).

Conclusion

Government politics on managing the displacement caseload and its unwillingness to fund parts of the humanitarian agenda are the main barriers to research in Jordan (FCDO Jordan 2021). However, how to include refugees in discussion and planning to build synergies between humanitarian and social protection sectors and how to integrate humanitarian and development caseloads are areas worth

exploring – not least because technical integration could produce entry points, such as on targeting, enrolment and registration. The government will not absorb funding for the refugee caseload however.

Research should also explore leveraging social protection to promote livelihoods in contexts of high unemployment and informality in Jordan. International donors and agencies continue to lead livelihoods programming (like graduation programmes) for refugees but these can demonstrate approaches on integration (into economic life) to be replicated and scaled. The high fragmentation of social assistance provision, particularly for refugees, is another area to assess regarding the extent of inefficient spending or duplicated efforts (potentially undermining transparency and accountability).

Attention is also needed to improve use of technology, particularly in assistance for refugees with biometric systems, albeit mindful of the high risks that technology brings of exclusion, increased digital, financial, educational, and health gaps, and threats to identity and person protection.

Lebanon

Introduction

Lebanon has the largest per-capita number of refugees in the world, and is currently seriously affected by the impacts of recent economic crises, Covid-19, and the Beirut port explosion. Its social assistance landscape is complicated, with patchy coverage for Lebanese citizens and fragmented humanitarian support for refugees. This web of issues makes Lebanon a highly relevant case study on linking social protection and humanitarian response.

Background

Lebanon is a middle-income country with complex, overlapping crises. It has a long history of conflict, including civil war from 1975 to 1990, and wars with Israel. Lebanon has one of the most unequal distributions of wealth in the region. Poverty was expected to jump from 28 per cent in 2019 to 55 per cent in May 2020, with the rate of extreme poverty rising from 8 to 23 per cent among the Lebanese population, according to UN ESCWA (Abdallah 2020). Yet the country has one of the highest concentrations of billionaires per capita (70.6 per cent of the wealth is owned by 10 per cent of the adult population) (*Ibid.*).

Lebanon hosts more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees, equivalent to a quarter of the Lebanese population (Hariri 2017). The latest vulnerability assessment for Syrian refugees (VASyR) for 2019 states that the extreme poverty rate among Syrian refugees has increased from 51 per cent in 2018 to 55 per cent in 2019 (UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF 2019).

The country is also home to 503,070 Palestinian refugees, 14,000 Iraqi and 2,000 Sudanese refugees (Lafleur and Vintila 2020). Most Palestinian refugees are extremely poor with no regular source of income, low wages, living in small flats in ill-serviced neighbourhoods, and with a near-total dependency on the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for their survival (Kukrety 2016).

An already deep recession has worsened due to the combination of the Syrian crisis, a burst real-estate bubble, and the gradual decline in tourism and private investment from Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Households are facing severe inflation, especially in food prices, because of currency devaluation and Covid-19 impacts on economic activity. The Beirut port explosion in August 2020 wrecked this key trade and shipping hub, and the neighbouring residential, industrial and business areas. Lebanese imports, exports and other economic activity were heavily affected and substantial resources for reconstruction and humanitarian assistance are needed (Abdallah 2020).

Humanitarian assistance

A long list of non-governmental actors, both local and international, provides humanitarian assistance to the refugee population in Lebanon. Central among these is UNHCR, which ensures many services (food assistance, health care, education, and child protection), in collaboration with agencies like WFP, FAO, UNICEF and UNDP. UNRWA provides basic services to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and more recently also to Palestinians from Syria who fled the crisis there. UNRWA's Social Safety Net programme provides basic food supplies and cash subsidies to extremely poor households. It also offers selective cash assistance in emergencies (i.e. flood, fire, death of the main breadwinner) (Kukrety 2016).

Syrian refugees face limited access to health care and deteriorating living conditions. WFP provides assistance to approximately 70 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon registered by the UNHCR, through a range of modalities such as e-food, cash cards and multipurpose cash.

As cash and voucher programmes have grown, so have concerns among some donors about fragmentation and duplication. DG ECHO and DFID began driving efforts to improve coordination and coherence in approaches to cash transfers. In 2016, efforts intensified to develop more joined-up approaches to payments, information management, vulnerability analysis, targeting, monitoring and accountability. The Lebanon One Unified Inter-Organisation System for E-Cards (LOUISE) Memorandum of Understanding was signed in December 2016, to support the design, delivery and monitoring of cash transfers. The ambitions for it rapidly evolved from only being a joint delivery mechanism to becoming an operational model with collaboration across the various actors involved, (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and the former Lebanon Cash Consortium). As of June 2019, the modalities of assistance transferred through the LOUISE Common Card include e-vouchers for food, multipurpose cash assistance (MPCA), and conditional or unconditional cash assistance for specific objectives (including but not limited to food, livelihoods, protection, education, weather-proofing, winterisation, and school transportation). In terms of systems development and functionality, WFP acts as a Card Administrator responsible for coordinating card management (Pelly and Juillard 2020).

Social protection assistance

Lebanon has a confusing web of social protection programmes provided by government, UN agencies and other international actors, albeit patchily and with duplication (Kukrety 2016). Plugging the gaps in state provision for many Lebanese citizens are a range of politically affiliated charities that operate and manage access to assistance according to religious identity and sectarianism. State-backed programmes to date have tended to be weakly coordinated and have failed to cover those in need. Significant gaps exist in targeting and data management (Devereux 2015). The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) is chiefly responsible for state implementation.

The main social assistance programme that targets poverty in Lebanon is the Emergency National Poverty Targeting Programme (ENPTP). This programme, jointly launched in 2014 by the World Bank, UNHCR and the Lebanese government, is an update of an earlier (2011) programme, the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP). The ENPTP is in response to the Syrian refugee crisis and builds on the previous programme aimed at extremely poor Lebanese citizens. However, it only covers a small number of Lebanese households due to funding shortages (Kukrety 2016). Other barriers to its effective implementation include: low awareness among poor communities about the programme; no follow-up or case management strategy; no links to training or livelihoods support; negative perceptions and stigma about the programme among potential beneficiaries (*Ibid.*).

In the framework of its Emergency Crisis and COVID-19 Response Social Safety Nets Project (ESSN), the World Bank recently approved a new emergency project of US$246m to provide cash transfers and social services for vulnerable and poor Lebanese households in response to both the Lebanese economic crisis and the pandemic. If ratified by the government, that fund will provide 147,000 extremely poor Lebanese households (approximately 786,000 individuals) with cash assistance for one year. It will also give top-up cash transfers to fund schooling for 87,000 children aged 13 to 18.

One of the largest and most under-acknowledged support mechanisms provided by the government are price subsidies on key commodities, such as bread, electricity and fuel. Yet only 25 per cent of the subsidies on bread reached the poorest quintile of the population in 2011 (Devereux 2015).

Two other major state social assistance plans – the Social Action Plan (SAP), launched after the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, and the National Social Development Strategy (NSDSL), launched in 2010 with UNDP – are still not fully implemented (Devereux 2015). The MoSA provides social safety net programmes for the most vulnerable groups such as older people, orphans and people with disabilities.

All employers are mandated to register employees in the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), created in 1963.

Sectarian and religious identities in Lebanon are highly politicised, and constitute an important modality of social organisation. Charities and civil society organisations, often linked to political movements, provide basic social services to the most vulnerable, almost always in exchange for recipients' political support (Cammett 2011).

The Hariri Foundation and Hezbollah are two organisations working in such a way. Hezbollah works to fill gaps left by the state by providing housing, education, reconstruction, and health-care services for its supporters among Shi'a communities. However, it accepts people from other religious communities in its welfare institutions, depending on the political climate and resources available (Karaki 2013). The Hariri Foundation was created in the 1980s by the wealthy Sunni businessman and political leader, Rafik Al-Hariri (who went on to become one of the most influential Lebanese prime ministers, before his assassination in 2005), to provide educational and health services to all Lebanese citizens. It later became an influential instrument of the Future Movement, the biggest and most influential Sunni political party in Lebanon, created in 2007 and led by the former Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri (Rafik Al-Hariri's son). In addition to providing services through the Hariri Foundation, the Future Movement has key figures in different municipalities, and a number of ministerial portfolios in government. All of these instruments are used to provide welfare services, but it is noticeable how the movement's supporters are prioritised over others (Jawad 2009).

Challenges and opportunities

Refugees

On arriving in Lebanon, Syrian refugees are expected to pay for all their living costs – housing, food, communications, and health services. The government does not allow formal refugee camps (under a 'no camp' policy), therefore most Syrian refugees live in informal tent camps in the Bekaa Valley, the poorest region of Lebanon, or inside the Palestinian refugee camps that already exist.[3] With rising living costs and high official registration fees, many Syrian families work in the informal sector in poorly paid jobs. Government also restricts their movements. Most Syrian refugees live in fear of being arrested and deported by Lebanese security forces, because they cannot afford the high cost of registering with the government to obtain a formal residency permit. Syrians have long worked in Lebanon's informal sector (they form the bulk of construction workers). Nonetheless, their presence in that sector is a clear indication of how many Syrian refugees suffer poverty, marginalisation, and a severe lack of access to basic services – despite the humanitarian aid provided by international donors (UNHCR and WFP 2017).

Sharp inequalities exist among refugees depending on the area where they settle (UNHCR, WFP, and UNICEF 2019). Social Development Centres (SDCs) are run by the MoSA throughout Lebanon but are inconsistent in terms of financial and human resources. Central government has lacked effective and unified policies to handle the Syrian refugee crisis. This has led to a proliferation of local actors providing assistance and services to Syrian refugees, alongside international donors and UN agencies (van Vliet and Hourani 2014).

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, by comparison, see themselves as somehow forgotten, while experiencing a decrease in the services provided to them by UNRWA (Erslev Andersen 2016). A widespread unpleasant rhetoric regarding Palestinian refugees exists in Lebanon. Many Lebanese still accuse the Palestinians of causing the 1975 civil war in Lebanon and perceive them as a potential source of unrest.

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[3] The Palestinian refugee camps are part of the urban fabric now; most are not too isolated from the cities or towns in which they exist. However, in terms of infrastructure, conditions in these camps are poor. Flooding, drains, lack of electricity, water, garbage collection and other basic services are far worse in the camps than in the neighbouring urban areas.

Politics and inclusion

Lebanon's welfare regime is highly fragmented and unregulated, providing ample opportunities for private actors to supply social services and take credit for state-sponsored benefits. Non-state actors, including political organisations and religious charities, profit from and sustain the underdevelopment of public welfare functions. Religious charities and sectarian parties particularly play a critical role in providing primary health care and education. Many of these organisations are linked to and/or controlled by different political factions. Political parties also run food assistance, especially during elections. There are claims that they also give out direct cash for votes.

In effect, political factions and politicians act as 'gatekeepers' to accessing formal benefits or entitlements given by the state as well as access to jobs. Citizens look to the political/sectarian leaders of their communities for social protection. Without their help, most Lebanese citizens cannot access these benefits on their own (Cammett 2011). Parties tend to distribute different levels of social assistance to their communities, depending on the kind of support given to the party: the most loyal supporters receive higher levels of social assistance and benefits. Hezbollah's martyrs programme provides a high degree of assistance (health care, schooling, material benefits) to the families of their 'martyrs' – those core activists (or rather members of Hezbollah's militia), who were killed in action. The Hariri Foundation similarly provides high-quality medical services and educational aid to all communities, but its core supporters receive subsidised and free care (*Ibid.*).

Religious or sectarian identities, rather than universal notions of human rights, influence the provision of social welfare in Lebanon (Jawad 2009). There is a gap in literature about the impact of sectarianism on the distribution of public expenditure, especially in social policy decision-making. An analysis of public expenditure on poverty alleviation, education and public health of the country by administrative region, using electoral records in those regions, reflected that public funds and social spending was distributed in a way that mirrors the sectarian distribution of the country; it was completely blind to socioeconomic objectives and was determined by a rule of sectarian balance, regardless of need or sound economic logic (Salti and Chaaban 2010).

Covid-19 response

The pandemic, the Beirut explosion, and the pre-existing economic crisis are expected to push one-third of Lebanese people into poverty. Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are expected to become even more vulnerable. Since the pandemic began, it is estimated that Lebanon has lost almost 25 per cent of its GDP and is experiencing an inflation rate of almost 100 per cent, largely due to its import dependence and currency depreciation (Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, World Bank, and UNHCR 2020).

Movement restrictions due to Covid-19 and economic pressures have exacerbated pre-existing protection risks and social friction. Incidents of discrimination, stigmatisation or xenophobia against refugees are reportedly rising. Tensions with local communities have worsened with fierce competition over jobs and resources (*Ibid.*). The impact of the pandemic on informal markets is also marked. Lebanon has large informal markets, with poorer workers in precarious employment, with limited financial cushioning.

Social safety nets and humanitarian cash assistance programmes have been expanded to mitigate the impact of Covid-19. This has been aided by the substantial funds that civil society organisations have raised, for example, Relief Lebanon in the UK. Lebanon's parliament approved extra funds from the 2020 budget for social safety nets. The government established a national solidarity fund to accept monetary and in-kind donations. The MoSA, in collaboration with other ministries, began distributing cash assistance to families most affected by the pandemic in coordination with municipalities and SDCs.

Technology and accountability

Mobile phone technology has increased the ability of refugees in Lebanon to cope with an environment of precarity, where they are economically excluded and face legal threats. The 2017 UN vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon indicated that 86 per cent of Syrian refugee households in

Lebanon own a mobile phone. In fact, not owning a mobile phone was interpreted as a clear sign of vulnerability among refugee households. Syrian refugees use smartphones, especially internet-enabled, in different ways: rebuilding or reviving their old social networks, sharing information on housing and jobs, helping to build solidarity networks, and obtaining official support from aid workers and health-care professionals. Smartphones enable refugees, particularly men, to look for work from within their locality, reducing their risk of being detained by the Lebanese army (Göransson 2018). A number of NGOs have been working to provide Syrian refugees with free online educational services – a need heightened by the pandemic.

Most of the research on technology and accountability in Lebanon relates to the increasing use of technology in delivering humanitarian assistance to Syrian and Palestinian refugees. Both WFP and UNHCR use electronic payment card (e-card) systems to deliver assistance to their beneficiaries. Aid agencies increasingly use digital instruments, including SMS and messaging programmes like WhatsApp to interact with their beneficiaries (UNHCR and WFP 2017).

Yet many Palestinians associate the shift towards using more technology to deliver assistance with noticeable budgetary constraints placed on UNRWA. Beneficiaries particularly saw the introduction of e-cards to use in normal grocery stores instead of direct food distributions as a cut to their food supply; this resulted in social unrest and protests, sometimes even organising small protests in front of UNRWA offices in 2016 (Erslev Andersen 2016).

Some researchers believe that more use of e-government transactions could help combat problems of corruption and bribery in Lebanon (Fakhoury 2015). According to Transparency International (n.d.), Lebanon ranked 137/180 on their Corruption Perceptions Index. Lebanese people rely on connections to facilitate trust-based transactions, including accessing social protection benefits. Many citizens bribe government employees and intermediaries to complete transactions with agencies or ministries.

Conclusion

Despite its middle-income status, Lebanon struggles to provide its own citizens with consistent social assistance for multiple reasons – both entrenched and related to recent crises. Humanitarian assistance for the disproportionately large refugee population in Lebanon is left mainly to a patchwork of UN agencies, international donors and local actors.

The complexity of issues that Lebanon faces in providing assistance makes the country a pertinent case study for exploring the implications of linking social protection and humanitarian response. Substantial challenges and opportunities exist for building systems in such a politically fragmented environment. Any attempts to do so must consider how best to provide long-term support to refugees, how to relate such provision to other national systems for citizens, how to manage the nuances of this provision in terms of politics and technical programming – these are all critically relevant matters for how the country makes progress on tackling poverty and vulnerability.

Key research and data gaps exist regarding the poverty profile and vulnerability characteristics of Lebanese households, their living conditions and ability to cope with overlapping layers of economic crises. With huge gaps in state services, the substantial provision of social assistance through non-state channels, such as Hezbollah, need to be much better understood in terms of how they mediate the social contract between the state and citizens; and how this affects whether to build national systems of social provision. Relatedly, it is worth exploring the 'geo-political marketplace' and the impact of sectarianism on the distribution of social spending across different regions and population groups in Lebanon.

Mali

Introduction

Mali is one of the world's poorest countries, with an assistance context that is shaped by conflict, food insecurity and climate shocks. High reliance on international actors and mistrust in government point to a need for better, context-appropriate coordination mechanisms and more locally embedded research.

Background

Mali has a highly volatile economy due to its many political, economic and natural shocks (World Bank 2019c). Rural farmers and herders depend on low-productivity agricultural and livestock production systems, and account for most of Mali's poor population. Most of the urban poor are informal sector workers, also engaged in low-productivity activities (Dembele 2020). The population is fast urbanising, including in the capital Bamako which is ten times larger than in the 1960s (World Population Review 2020). Yet most international partner-supported social protection initiatives focus on rural areas. Covid-19 has highlighted how limiting this focus can be for social protection systems when responding to shocks.

A *coup d'etat* and the onset of violent conflict in 2012 have severely reduced the government's capacity to provide and ensure access to essential services in much of the country (SPaN 2020). The conflict, which started in the north (where a number of armed groups continue to operate), has impacted 3 million people and displaced around 200,000 (half internally and half abroad).[4] Despite a peace deal signed in 2015, the conflict has expanded to the centre and south of Mali, and significantly intensified since 2018 (EU 2019; O'Brien, Congrave and Barca 2018).

Years of conflict have produced two aid landscapes. In the militarised north and centre, aid comes predominantly from donors towards anti-terrorism and stabilisation-focused initiatives. In the south, aid is directed through and alongside state programmes (Moseley 2017). The south accounts for one-third of Mali's landmass and is where 90 per cent of Mali's population live. In the north, aid generally only reaches the most accessible areas. In the centre, armed actors continuously target state authorities, who, like aid agencies, frequently depend on military protection. Most social assistance is funded by the World Bank and is concentrated in the main regions of Kaye, Sikasso, Koulikoro, Segou, Mopti, Gao, and Bamako (World Bank 2013, 2018, 2019b, 2019a, 2020). In the north, actors often rely on non-state political platforms (e.g. the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad) as intermediaries.

Humanitarian assistance

Mali has one of the highest humanitarian caseloads in the Sahel. The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2019 identified 3.2 million people in need, and 2.3 million to be targeted at a cost of US$296m. The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2017 highlights the nexus between chronic and emergency needs, focusing food assistance on areas in 'crisis', 'emergency' and 'under stress' (O'Brien *et al.* 2018). Despite such high needs, Mali's response plans are chronically underfunded. On average, over the past five years, only 48 per cent of the funding appeal was covered (Financial Tracking Service 2021).

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[4] In 2016, the majority who fled went to neighbouring Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania. In terms of asylum applications, first is France and Spain, then Mauritania, which has the highest number of accepted applications (Warren 2016).

The humanitarian community in Mali relies on many international actors. Multiple humanitarian interventions coexist, such as AGIR,[5] UN Plan for Sahel, G5 Sahel, and the Alliance Sahel; each bilateral or multilateral has its Sahel or Mali plan. Relatively weak and ineffective coordination between these stakeholders has led to incoherent coverage, duplication and competition. Their alignment with Mali's national objectives also varies (Grünewald 2018).

Humanitarian coordination efforts in the north since the 2014/15 lean season have illustrated the potential for harmonised approaches that aim to extend the provision of social assistance to hard-to-reach areas through a consortium of international NGOs (funded by DG ECHO). The network has common objectives, design features and administrative processes to address needs, and each member targeted a different geographic area. This harmonised approach seeks to mirror the provision of social protection through state-directed programmes in the south of the country. This approach aims to lay the groundwork for government-led interventions; it is also easier for the state to coordinate with a single harmonised approach rather than a panoply of agency-specific projects. As a result, this approach enables a potential shift from humanitarian aid to longer-term social protection once security conditions permit (EU 2019).

ECHO's Rapid Response Mechanism, also supported by international partners, consists of a pre-financed, permanent and flexible team of humanitarian actors to provide emergency response capacity to handle a crisis or sudden emergency. Its objective is to assess the needs of newly displaced populations and to provide for essential needs, such as food security, nutrition, shelter and non-food items, WASH and protection (World Bank 2017a; KII discussions).

Many agencies are working on the humanitarian–development nexus approach. A New Way of Working, or *La Nouvelle Façon de Travailler* (2017), involves a commitment from humanitarian and development actors to seek synergies between both sectors' stakeholders to address the causes of crisis and reduce vulnerability (Grünewald 2018; World Bank 2017a; KII discussions). The EU's 'Linking Relief to Recovery and Development' funding envelope aims to reduce funding uncertainty related to humanitarian responses and to enable a transition until state services are restored. WFP's 2020–2024 Country Strategic Plan focuses on emergency response through humanitarian interventions and scaling up longer-term resilience. The strategic plan intends to bring together all WFP objectives, programmes and activities, in a context-based and pragmatic manner (WFP 2019). Tripartite collaboration between the state-run Jigisèmèjiri social assistance programme, WFP and the *Food Security Commissariat* is designed to allow scaling up of rapid-response cash transfers and food distribution in at-risk zones. Jigisèmèjiri and WFP are collaborating beyond emergencies in support of capacity-building for local governments and the Zero Hunger Initiative in Jigisèmèjiri areas (World Bank 2019c).[6] More research is needed to examine what is actually being implemented.

Social protection assistance

The National Social Protection Policy (2015) frames social protection in Mali under the Ministry of Solidarity and Humanitarian Affairs. At the national level, it is managed by the National Council for Strategic Orientation for Social Protection, and at the technical level by the sub-committee on social safety nets, which includes humanitarian actors (World Bank 2017a; KII discussions). The ministry is responsible for social transfers (an addition to its mandate), though is still without a dedicated budget line. Jigisèmèjiri is the main national social assistance programme implemented by the government and funded by the World Bank, which provides cash transfers and accompanying measures to approximately 90,000 poor households, mainly in the south (O'Brien *et al*. 2018; World Bank 2017b). The Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme (SASPP), working through Jigisèmèjiri, provides adaptive components such as lean season top-up cash transfers that target 30,000 households. The National

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[5] AGIR is the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative, a regional initiative to help build resilience to the recurrent food and nutrition crises that affect the countries of the Sahel and West Africa.
[6] WFP and the World Bank are designing an MoU that covers a number of these areas (KII discussions).

Social Protection Policy and Mali's National Resilience Priorities document mention the political intention to use social protection to tackle shocks, ex-ante and ex-post. Some commitments in these point to an overall expansion of social protection; others highlight scaling up in a crisis and enabling complementarity among programmes (EU 2019; O'Brien *et al.* 2018).

Social protection responses in Mali include school feeding programmes, universal subsidies (tax and duty exemptions), and transfer programmes for nutrition, cash and food. The most common programmes are school feeding and food transfers, many of which are implemented by NGOs. Geographical and demographic impact of these responses can be undermined through crowding out, meaning that some areas are left out (Grünewald 2018).

Social protection and humanitarian assistance are a contested space, not solely the purview of state, international or NGO actors, but also one of the stated objectives of jihadist armed factions. The Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' (JNIM), a coalition of jihadist armed factions formed in 2017, has been actively seeking to provide assistance to local populations in order to garner popular support. In the centre of Mali, the JNIM's main affiliate group, the Katiba Macina, has cultivated a form of 'pastoralist populism'. Building on long-standing grievances against the Malian state's ineffectiveness and disregard for Fulani pastoralists, the group has provided protection, regulation, and various forms of assistance to pastoralists (Benjaminsen and Ba 2019).

Challenges and opportunities

Humanitarian principles and the role of the state

In fragile contexts, it is difficult to uphold the humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence, and impartiality. The *coup d'etat*, consequent transitional governments, changing alliances and struggles for power (including by jihadist groups) have reduced the role of the state in conflict areas (north and centre) and restricted access to public services for local populations. Social relationships, networks and partnerships are consequently highly important at the national, regional and local levels, as is the quality of dialogue and consultation activities between stakeholders. Working with non-state authorities linked to armed actors may help to reduce conflict intensity. New funding tries to enhance links with state institutions (for example, by allowing certain state services to reach the population despite the crisis), while understanding the required operational modalities to work in these dangerous zones (Sidi Diarra and Marchais 2020).

The political economy of social protection plays an essential role in Mali, especially in conflict zones, and presents challenges for turning short-term humanitarian response into more sustained transfer programmes. The absence and contested nature of the state in the north and centre of Mali lead actors such as international NGOs to play a more prominent role. Communities there rely on humanitarian and civil society assistance programmes. Broad mistrust of the central government in these contexts signals a need for better, context-appropriate coordination mechanisms between the state, humanitarian agencies and civil society groups (SPaN 2020).

The Alliance Sahel, launched in 2017 by France, Germany and the EU, was created to tackle security and stabilisation challenges in the G5 countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger), and now comprises 12 donors. Although in theory it is an international cooperation platform, in reality, understanding and responses towards sensitive issues differ greatly among the G5 countries (Alliance Sahel 2021). Some donors aim to use education programmes to prevent youth from joining jihadist groups, a security-based approach that may undermine humanitarian principles. Others have active military forces in-country (such as French forces in Mali), so they are parties to the conflict.

Climate vulnerability and resilience

The Sahel region is highly vulnerable to environmental fluctuations. Recurring droughts have made food insecurity the main humanitarian and development issue. Floods occur more often than droughts but on a smaller scale (EU 2019; O'Brien *et al.* 2018; World Bank 2019c). Most food-insecure people are

located in the south (O'Brien *et al.* 2018). The Liptako-Gourma area straddles southern Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and half the food-insecure people in these countries live there; many need humanitarian food assistance particularly during the lean season. The area has now become chronically food-insecure, and in need of longer-term structural investment to protect the most vulnerable (SWAC/OECD 2020). International donors support SASPP, which seeks to enhance the role of the state, as well as improve the scope and effectiveness of social assistance to address shocks including climate (FCDO Sahel 2020).

Long-standing tensions related to climate change affect relations among local populations, and between local people and state actors. Mali's Forest Service, tasked with curtailing desertification, is widely perceived as corrupt due to its heavy-handed approach and history of power abuses (Benjaminsen and Ba 2019). Pastoralists and farmers increasingly compete for natural resources (including access to land). Tensions between sedentary and pastoralist groups have always existed but are now manipulated by international terror groups such as AQIM and JNIM.

Wider plans exist to modernise Mali's hydrological and meteorological services including the Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) four-year project, launched in 2018. It brings together national institutions responsible for meteorology, hydrology, food security and civil protection. The project provides technical assistance for leveraging resources from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) (US$22.75m) and the International Development Association (IDA) (WMO 2018). Unlike the World Bank, not all agencies prioritise disaster risk management (DRM), so DRM funds and efforts still require expansion and integration with social protection programming (Oxfam 2017).

Technology, datafication and risks

Technology is being pushed as a way to access and work in insecure contexts, and to reach pastoral areas, where populations are dispersed (World Bank 2019c). For example, WFP Mali used high-resolution satellite imagery to scan the area of interest every six days. By detecting physical impacts of the conflict, such as cropland abandonment, this data source provides a comprehensive overview of the Mopti region, allowing identification of vulnerability patterns and hotspots (WFP 2020a). Despite the potential of digital technology for improving effectiveness, there is not yet a large-scale shift towards digital technologies or datafication.

The expansion of mobile banking and mobile phone coverage has made cash-based financing increasingly common among humanitarian agencies, alongside the use of vouchers. Limitations of this modality include a weak banking infrastructure and risks linked to money transportation in challenging settings.

The Unified Social Registry (USR) has helped to centralise information management of beneficiary data by integrating contributory and non-contributory schemes. Each person registered on the USR has a unique personal identifier to be used by all social welfare organisations. The USR supports identification, management, de-duplication, cost reduction, fraud minimisation, quick scale-up and coordination during shocks. Data providers include ANAM, social security agencies, Jigisèmèjiri, ARC, ACF[7] and Solidarity International (World Bank 2017a; KII discussions). Concerns exist about how the USR was created, and whether humanitarian actors are comfortable sharing data with it. More broadly, there is no national ID or unique identifier that has been rolled out to all the population, no updated data protection policy, and potential questions over data accuracy, given only limited funds to update the USR. USR identifiers are mainly for social protection sectors, with no link to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and its civil identity numbers. More information is needed to improve the functionality of social registries, including data collection, management, sharing, interoperability and accuracy. Linking actors to knowledge on who receives what is essential to building a robust database and an efficient integrated system.

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[7] ANAM is Mali's Agence Nationale d'Assistance Médicale; ARC is African Risk Capacity, a specialised agency of the African Union designed to improve the efficiency of emergency responses in member countries in the event of drought; ACF is Action Contre la Faim/ Action Against Hunger.

What works

One way to understand what works in social assistance programming in Mali is to consider how the key stakeholders are organised to provide effective delivery. An interesting case study is the 'web of support' that international NGOs provided in northern Mali, copying features of national social assistance to extend reach to conflict areas. In the right context, alignment with government policies and systems is useful to ensure future ownership and sustainability, but in other contexts could jeopardise programme success or safety. Guidance and procedures should clearly define the nature, levels, and extent of joint engagement or cooperation between stakeholders, and amend these to reflect local social dynamics (SPaN 2020). Community dynamics, the legitimacy of state and non-state actors and governance systems, and variations in these across Mali should be considered. Social assistance by non-state armed groups is under-researched because aid agencies and donor programmes are usually monitored and evaluated.

Another angle to consider is exploring the type of programming that works more effectively. The World Bank-supported Jigisèmèjiri is an interesting cash-plus-programming example, as it layers accompanying measures and health insurance (through Le Régime d'Assistance Médicale, RAMED). Midline evaluation results of this programme show that it significantly improved household food security, dietary diversity, savings and investments among the beneficiaries, but had limited impact on child nutrition (Hidrobo *et al.* 2020). The evaluation formulated recommendations to increase impact on household welfare and child nutrition – for example, involving women in decisions on using the transfer, increasing mothers' participation in child nutrition and health, and increasing the size and frequency of transfers. The recommendations informed the government's design of the next phase of the programme, begun in 2019, which added lean season top-ups to humanitarian assistance. These reforms provide a potentially interesting case of shock-responsive social protection and of linking humanitarian and development measures (*Ibid.*).

Conclusion

Social protection and humanitarian assistance in Mali take place in a highly polarised context, where the state has limited reach, and frequently relies on intermediaries to deliver. Because the state and international actors are often perceived as parties to the conflict, any organisation associated with them is at risk, which affects the behaviour of local intermediaries and stakeholders. Various factors constrain collaboration between elements of the state, civil society and humanitarian actors: the politicisation of targeting within an already divided society, limited oversight in many areas inaccessible to the state or development partners, capacity challenges in local implementers, conflict mediation and negotiation with intermediaries, and concerns over safety and beneficiary data protection (SPaN 2020).

Despite the significant challenges, there is momentum – albeit still mostly among donors – to find ways to link humanitarian assistance to social protection in Mali. Further research is needed around continuing efforts to pursue adaptive social protection in the Sahel, including Mali, and the possibilities and options for advancing this in contexts where government presence, capacity and legitimacy may be weak or compromised.

Research needs to be embedded in the local context and respond to these questions: what tools can incorporate a contextual understanding of social protection, and how does that relate to what is known about how social protection operates in these societies? On-the-ground forms of social assistance in Mali might involve navigating the 'context of social protection'; this offers an avenue for research – for example, looking at the support provided through social networks or by non-state actors, and the effects of conflict and social polarisation on delivery.

Niger

Introduction

Situated at the centre of the Sahel, Niger is relatively stable politically. However, the country experiences chronic poverty and food insecurity, and is buffeted by regular climate shocks and insurgent violence. With many international actors operating in Niger, more research is needed to coordinate approaches and deepen contextual understanding.

Background

Niger ranks at the bottom of the 2020 Human Development Index, at 189th position. The overwhelming majority (90.5 per cent) of its 22.4 million people experience multidimensional poverty, and 44.5 per cent live below the global income poverty line of US$1.90 a day (UNDP n.d.). Close to 80 per cent of the population rely on pastoralism and/or agriculture for their livelihood, often in combination with labour migration, artisanal mining or trade.

Environmental fluctuations and acute shocks are common. Major Sahelian droughts (in 2009–10 and 2012), floods (in 2010, 2012–13 and 2019–20), and locust invasions (in 2012 and 2017), are among recent events with devastating consequences in terms of deepening poverty, malnutrition and loss of property, particularly in rural areas. Small and predictable fluctuations in rainfall can lead to annual lean seasons, creating serious food deficits for vulnerable populations.

Conflict shapes contemporary Niger. Disputes between al-Qaeda-linked groups (AQIM) and Islamic State-linked groups (ISGS) increasingly stoke violence. Since 2017, ISGS has exploited conflicts between different groups of pastoralists to recruit Fulani fighters. It is challenging both the Nigerien army and, since 2018, the Tuareg authorities and local populations who sided with the government of Niger to defend the border areas (Armstrong 2019). Often the line between conflict and international terrorist-supported activity is blurred.

Cross-border violence from Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria has displaced many people, and ruined assets and livelihood activities. In the southeast, the Diffa region is affected by Boko Haram militants. The government declared a state of emergency in response to protect the population but in the process destabilised livelihoods due to bans on cultivating and marketing peppers, and on fishing and marketing fish. The region of Maradi has been affected by conflict in Nigeria with more than 35,000 refugees arriving since May 2019 (OCHA 2020: 11). Niger also hosts a community of migrants from West and Central Africa linked to the trans-Saharan routes towards North Africa (Brachet 2012).

Humanitarian assistance

An increasing number of people in Niger are affected by multiple and complex emergencies – notably environmentally induced emergencies, disease outbreaks and epidemics, and violence. In 2020, some 2.9 million people needed humanitarian assistance (OCHA 2020), about 13 per cent of the population. Half of those in need are estimated to live in the border regions of Tillabéri, Tahoua, and Diffa (UNICEF 2020), including both displaced people and 'host populations'. UNICEF works closely with the Nigerien government, providing technical leadership and centralising the procurement of essential household items and access to water, hygiene and sanitation (*Ibid.*). WFP also implements a multi-agency regional emergency operation in Diffa, with flexible assistance through unconditional and conditional food and cash distributions, nutritional supplements for children under two, and emergency school meals to encourage school attendance.

The agricultural lean season dominates Niger's humanitarian planning and response architecture through the Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Crises Alimentaires (DNPGCA), a risk management system that has been in place since 1998. In 2017 the Cadre Harmonisé (a monitoring initiative based on the Integrated Phase Classification system) was introduced, coordinated by the Government of Niger, the regional Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET). Based on the Cadre, the National Support Plan (Plan de soutien) is released in January each year, then updated in April/May. On the back of this, the government and UN system releases the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) to address humanitarian needs.

While the National Support Plan covers all risks and programmatic responses in Niger, the timing of its final release means that the HRP focuses on the agricultural lean season – and less so on the lean season for pastoralists that runs from March to July and generates significant yearly needs. FAO has used Early Warning Early Action (EWEA) funding to cover some of this gap in recent years and the DNPGCA is acutely aware of the issues posed by the two lean seasons (KII communication). This complexity has prompted the development of evidence-based programming. Integrated context analysis has been used in Niger since 2015 to plan and implement programmes that aim to build resilience, develop safety nets, increase preparedness for shocks and reduce risks (WFP 2018).

Satellite imagery is used to detect and map significant changes in vulnerability and food insecurity, and to monitor longer-term interventions focusing on environmental conservation as a means to address chronic and recurrent food insecurity (KII communication). The bridging of different types of responses to produce long-term changes seems increasingly common. The Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme (SASPP), for example, aims to bridge together social protection through its cash transfer component and humanitarian assistance through its scalability pilots, though these are still experimental and small-scale. WFP links humanitarian assistance and environmental conservation assistance through its resilience programmes (KII communication).

Social protection assistance

In recent years, Niger's government has intensified efforts around social protection planning. The 2011 National Social Protection Strategy (PNPS) underpins current strategies and implementation, with a new version in the pipeline. A 2018 social protection law included a push for core budgetary support for social protection from 2020. The Strategy for Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth (SDDCI) Niger 2035 is a complementary policy framework on overall sustainable and inclusive development. The first plan for implementation is the 2017–2021 Plan de Développement Économique et Social (PDES), covering a broad spectrum of development goals, including social protection.

Safety net programmes in the PNPS involve conditional and unconditional cash transfers alongside medium and long-term complementary support measures. These are targeted at vulnerable groups suffering chronic food insecurity and/or chronic malnutrition, and households susceptible to agro-pastoral risks and crises (République du Niger 2011). The PDES aims to strengthen access of vulnerable groups to social services with a focus on children, integrating youth, and improving humanitarian support to aid recovery from shocks. It works to strengthen the social protection floor through incentives for job creation, promoting labour standards, economic empowerment and minimum income security for households in poverty, and an institutional framework for implementation (Ministère du Plan 2017).

The DNPGCA in large part handles the PDES goals. It has an early warning monitoring unit; a food crisis unit which responds with food assistance; and a social nets unit, working with partners for long-term planning (Cabinet du Premier Ministre 2019). This architecture is well adapted to the so-called nexus agenda (of responding to climate shocks and seasonal vulnerabilities, and more broadly linking up the humanitarian, development and peace-building agendas). Yet the different units sometimes work separately, and information flow between the DNPGCA and other organisations could be improved.

The World Bank has worked with the DNPGCA since 2011 to establish safety net programmes as well as to improve information management and M&E processes. The work began with a cash transfer scheme targeted at poor rural women, gradually adding social and income-generating dimensions. The Niger Adaptive Safety Nets Project offers cash transfers of 10,000 CFA francs (about US$20) per month over a 24-month period to 98,747 beneficiaries in 1,500 villages across Niger. In 2017–18 the programme also offered cash-for-work microprojects to highly vulnerable communities, reaching some 50,000 households who were paid US$2.50 a day (World Bank 2019).

The Alliance for Food Security, a network of NGOs consisting of Action Contre la Faim (ACF), Oxfam, SOS Sahel, Save the Children and Concern Worldwide, has worked with WFP around the lean-season response, and to support the social protection system, from policy and legislation to developing multi-year and seasonal safety nets. The Alliance backed a trial at the end of the 2018 lean season of a harmonised targeting tool for the social registry developed by the government, with World Bank support.

Challenges and opportunities

Climate vulnerability and resilience

Niger's high vulnerability to climate shocks is a major influence on social assistance actions. Government ministries oversee both emergency responses and annual lean season responses. The latter involve a nationwide vulnerability and food insecurity assessment at household level, followed by distribution of assistance, primarily in the form of cereal stocks – these are central to the national response mechanism (Longhurst 2019).

Climate forecasting is increasingly used within social protection by international actors. The Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre, with the World Bank, conducted a scoping study as part of the SASPP to assess a more timely approach to addressing the lean season through scalable safety nets. This type of approach could support the shift from costly cyclical lean season responses to longer-term programmes.

At least three initiatives base their actions on early warning systems. The World Bank with the Nigerien government developed a mechanism for immediate response to floods and displacement; ECHO and a consortium of international NGOs[8] developed a Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) to conflicts and floods, supported by WFP and UNICEF; and another consortium of international NGOs worked at grass-roots level to enhance people's ability to cope with shocks (Longhurst 2019; Oxfam, Save the Children and ACF 2018). Targeted technical assistance, awareness-raising and stakeholder engagement are used to encourage uptake of early warning information and to scale up early action through social protection before the onset of shocks. A pilot project is increasing cash transfers to vulnerable households in shock-affected areas in order to reduce short- and long-term humanitarian impacts linked with reducing consumption, using up savings and selling assets (World Bank 2019).

Niger hosts the two largest climate institutions in the region – ACMAD (a WMO Regional Climate Centre), which provides climate analysis and services for all of Africa, and AGHRYMET, responsible for West Africa. Yet producing accurate climate forecasts is challenging due to high geographic and seasonal variability. In addition, the government's National Meteorological Service does not have capacity to provide relevant information and services to end-users (from policymakers to farmers). Most critically, products such as the seasonal forecast are not downscaled by administrative region, month or sector. ACF has invested in developing a surveillance system of pastoral areas to forecast vulnerabilities and crises. It combines remote sensing/satellite imagery with qualitative data from pastoralist communities to gauge the impacts of climate change and local adaptation strategies on the risk of food insecurity (ACF n.d.). It includes a newly created online atlas of biomass for the Sahel, to monitor and target vulnerable (especially pastoral) communities with EWEA activities, and is used by FAO/CILSS.

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[8] Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development.

Various partners in Niger are using adaptive social protection (ASP) to explore ways to improve and institutionalise short- and longer-term programming on climate change through social protection systems. Key international partners including the World Bank, WFP and UNICEF aim to harmonise their engagement with government on aligning resilience with social protection programming, building a social registry, reviewing the national social protection policy, and enhancing decentralised capacity – all with a view to addressing climate- and weather-related shocks as a core component. However, ASP is a predominantly international agenda driven through regional frameworks and partnerships. Nigerien government attitudes towards ASP are not sufficiently understood, potentially causing dissonance across international, regional and national objectives.

Displacement, refugees and migration

Population movements vary in the different conflict areas of Niger. The areas bordering Mali and Burkina Faso experience internal displacement rather than arrivals of refugees; the conflict in northwest Nigeria created an influx of refugees. In south-central Niger, most of the refugees had some ties to the local population or family ties. They were hosted within local communities rather than camp settings. Such variation may require differentiated rapid as well as longer-term responses, reaching out to IDPs as well as host communities (KII communication).

The assistance provided in the conflict zones is primarily humanitarian although some of the prolonged border conflicts require medium- and long-term solutions. The DNPGCA leads a technical food security working group which coordinates with humanitarian actors to ensure optimal use of scarce resources. The RRM is the main initiative responding to new displacement situations and assessing the needs of the displaced population. Further research could explore what kind of long-term strategies different actors envision. These are often premised on IDPs and refugees 'going home' or, if that is not possible, on their integration into the local community. In the latter case, livelihood opportunities either involve some redistribution of land, through different mechanisms, or a shift into on-farm occupations for part of the population.

No attention seems to have been paid to onwards movements. Niger is a nodal point on the trans-Saharan trade routes along which migrants, including refugees, from various countries in West and Central Africa travel to North Africa to work, seek refuge and/or to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Many migrants live in Agadez for a prolonged period of time before crossing the Sahara. Since the government of Niger passed legislation to criminalise migration brokers at all levels in 2015, more people, including Nigeriens, are travelling via alternative routes and in more fragmented ways (Boyer 2019). Given the high level of mobility, it would be worth exploring IDPs' and refugees' portability of rights to assistance if they move within Nigerien territory and their ability to support themselves.

In addition, not enough is known about the journeys, decisions and risks faced by migrants and those forcibly displaced across the Sahel, nor about the opportunities, challenges and lessons learned from different responses in Niger, Mali and Mauritania, which all differ substantially. As international actors invest more in regional approaches to the Sahel, further research could consider the role of ASP programmes in the contexts of migrants and forced displacement, including comparisons of cross-border migrant management.

Humanitarian principles, politics and the role of the state

How Nigeriens regard concepts such as social protection and the social contract, and how their views underpin their interaction with the state, is often unclear or not reflected in international thinking. Concepts such as ASP are broadly welcomed as attempts to institutionalise more coherent approaches to risk management through government. But little has so far been studied on the implications of such approaches in areas where government control, legitimacy or influence is limited or non-existent, and in places where other actors, including militia, take on various roles otherwise provided by the state. Little is known at policy level of the possible interconnections between, on the one hand, investments in state-building and livelihood support programmes backed by international partners and, on the other, Nigerien government–donor agreements made to tighten control on migration flows.

Gender and inclusion

Detailed explorations of gender dynamics and their intersections with other markers of difference such as ethnicity, caste, class, age, migrant status (including IDPs and refugees) help to refine targeting criteria used in regular and shock-responsive cash transfers, cash-for-work (CFW) and accompanying measures. Yet the design and implementation of food/CFW components of social protection is often gender-neutral or gender-blind. In the current SASPP, women are targeted but the criteria are not gender-sensitive; they are based on normative assumptions rather than facts and different needs of women and men (Pereznieto and Holmes 2020).

As examples, CFW components frequently involve building infrastructure to prepare for or mitigate disaster – usually considered male work in Niger. Inflexible working hours and lack of childcare facilities make it difficult for women to balance care work and project work on programmes. Better understanding of gendered needs and the gender/age dynamics within households would help avoid unintended barriers affecting women (*Ibid.*).

What works

Unlike Mali or Burkina Faso, Niger currently benefits from a relatively stable political situation. Niger has been building up an important intervention capacity. It implements or coordinates many of the responses to seasonal needs, especially in the lean season, and to recurrent environmental shocks. Two entities placed under the President's Office have transformative powers – the DNPGCA and the 3N Initiative (i3N), created in 2012. The i3N pushes for reform and strengthening of ministries and Nigerien partners (KII communication). The DNPGCA leads the coordination of internationally financed interventions and responses; much political effort is aimed at ensuring this work leads to complementary actions on social protection, food security, nutrition and agricultural development, humanitarian crises, and seasonal and more long-term environmental vulnerabilities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought together donors and international actors from the social and humanitarian assistance fields in Niger to discuss a different vision for complementing each other's interventions, pooling resources and effecting change. There are hopes that the convergence of development and humanitarian responses to the pandemic will transform ways of joining up other interventions in the longer term – for instance, in the inter-related areas of ASP. Scalability pilots, joint resilience interventions, and data-driven development could all be considered, with a focus on insecure areas and the 'leave no one behind' agenda.

Conclusion

Climate change, conflict and terrorism, changing demographics, forced displacement, and the customary high levels of seasonal mobilities, have profound effects on Niger and its neighbours. Niger benefits from a plethora of international actors investing in improving integrated and government-led approaches to multidimensional risks and vulnerability, such as resilience-building and ASP programmes. It hosts regional climate science and food security monitoring institutions and has a strong organisational presence in the DNPGCA.

Yet attitudes towards the government in areas it only nominally controls, and the Nigerien view of the state in general, are insufficiently understood. The dynamics of non-state actors and their role as service and security providers (as opposed to being viewed only as instigators of insecurity and terrorism) are similarly under-explored. More could be understood about the various measures that international and national partners are supporting to stem migration flows and control population movements in a region known for constant flux and cross-border flows. While the current focus of international attention is on ASP and resilience programmes, alongside an extensive humanitarian architecture, this poses questions about what works and can be learned to improve coordinated approaches across the myriad actors in Niger, and how cross-border operations contrast and compare – for instance, in refugee and IDP response.

Northern Nigeria

Introduction

Northern Nigeria is characterised by high poverty levels and violence stemming from multiple causes. Humanitarian actors play a major role in supporting social assistance in the north, as state provision is weak, fragmented and often politicised. Research is needed to plug knowledge gaps on how local, state and federal assistance interact, and the effects of local community dynamics.

Background

Though Nigeria is a middle-income country, its 13 northern states have a worse multidimensional poverty index than the rest of the country (World Bank 2019). In 2016, 87 per cent of the poor were concentrated in the north (*Ibid.*). In 2018–19, more than 60 per cent of the population in the northern states were below the poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics 2019). Only 25 to 28 per cent of people in the northwest and northeast have access to water, sanitation and electricity services (World Bank 2019).

Most people in the north are involved in agriculture and livestock husbandry. Monomodal rainfall patterns make agriculture a seasonal occupation. Climate-related factors, particularly drought, contribute to low food security and incomes in the north. Low resource endowments and weak development of off-farm employment opportunities mean that livelihoods in the north are not particularly resilient to climatic variation.

Violence and conflict are not unique to the north but contribute to accelerating poverty and humanitarian crises. In the northeast, Boko Haram has led an insurgency for a decade as part of its actions across the whole Lake Chad basin. The insecurity is centred in Borno state, spilling into Yobe and Adamawa states. There are 1.8 million displaced people in those states (Ground Truth Solutions 2020), with many more displaced into Niger and Chad. Insecurity in the northwest is linked to conflict over land and natural resources between largely Fulani herders and farmers of other ethnicities.

Humanitarian assistance

Humanitarian assistance in the north is long-standing and overlaps with federal and state-level social protection initiatives. Humanitarian actors provide much of the assistance in the northeast particularly, and this resembles humanitarian or emergency more than social assistance. This is partly because state provision is weak – notwithstanding the creation of the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development[9] in 2019 – and partly because the protracted conflicts make humanitarian actors better placed to act. By 2018, 17 donors had contributed to a state-organised humanitarian fund for the northeast, for short-term emergency projects. Donors also committed money to other humanitarian work in the northeast and some actions are not delivered with or through the government. In Borno state, for example, there are more than 50 different humanitarian cash transfer programmes (Sterk and Issaka 2019: 75). A national emergency management agency coordinates the large number of schemes run by humanitarian actors and, to some extent, their interactions with government emergency responses and social assistance efforts.

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[9] Hereafter referred to as the Humanitarian Affairs Ministry.

Financial inputs are substantial with US$848m dedicated to the government's Humanitarian Response Strategy in 2019, of which 70 per cent was delivered though UN agencies. An additional US$775m was programmed by the World Bank, with further support from other bilateral and development funders.

In terms of specific programmes, the Buhari Plan (2016–21) is a presidential plan to end the insurgency and restore livelihoods in the northeast. Its security component includes a disarmament, demobilisation and reconciliation programme. A separate humanitarian and social component includes cash transfers; and an entrepreneurship and job creation component includes business grants (Presidential Committee on the North East Initiative 2016). A collaboration between the government and the International Committee of the Red Cross is the Youth Employment and Social Support Operation. It runs a 'North East Humanitarian Hub' in Adamawa state, where beneficiaries are supposed to develop technology-related humanitarian innovations (NSIO 2018).

Efforts exist to integrate humanitarian assistance with social protection, notably through cash working groups at federal and state levels, which provide a coordinating function for different cash transfer programmes. The humanitarian grant management system monitors and facilitates this. An 'Abuja cash working group' team of donors and government agencies first met in May 2018 to focus on the northeast. Nigeria is also a focus country for the EU's nexus approach, suggesting external interest in the outcomes of the cash working groups.

Social protection assistance

Nigeria has structures whose remits cover social protection at federal, state and local levels. Social protection policy at federal level, although accelerating, remains weak, and this constrains it at state level. There is no single lead agency for social protection programmes. However, the Humanitarian Affairs Ministry and the National Social Investment Office (NSIO) are expected to work towards this. Coordination between social protection and other sectors at local, state and federal government levels is therefore fragmented (World Bank 2019). States have autonomy and responsibility to develop state-level social protection and assistance, but not always the funds to do so. Many development partners choose to work with state governments rather than through the federal structure, so some states are relatively well served compared to others.

The federal structure comprises the 2016 National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), which established the NSIO to coordinate all social programmes (NSIO 2018) and the National Social Safety Net (NSSN) programme, funded by the World Bank. Within the NSSN is the National Cash Transfer programme, also called the Household Uplifting Programme (HUP) (National Cash Transfer Office Nigeria 2018). The HUP provides a fixed payment of ₦10,000 (US$26 at the time of writing) every two months, and an additional conditional ₦5,000 a month for school attendance and participation in vaccination programmes. The programme involves complementary activities: capacity-building in life skills, savings group mobilisation and micro business development. The Youth Employment and Social Support Operation, the Community Social Development project and the Home-grown School Feeding Programme are all federal activities (UNHCR 2019; World Bank 2019).

The National Social Register (NSR) is used to manage HUP beneficiaries and contained more than 3 million people by 2020. State cash transfer units develop registers at the state level, and feed the data into the NSR, although several states are still collecting data. When complete, the register will be updated every three years. In some states, including Borno, the NSR is complemented by the Unified Registry for Beneficiaries (URB) for IDPs (Sterk and Issaka 2019). The registers are hard to harmonise because people may use different names to register on each and due to difficulties using biometrics. Humanitarian organisations do not always use the national registers to locate beneficiaries, but aim to supplement these at a later date with names they collect.

Within the NSSN, much attention has focused on developing a grievance redress mechanism to increase trust. It uses mobile money operators to transfer cash in the last transaction in the chain because network coverage is too weak for full electronic operation in many areas. In addition to the

National Cash Transfer programme, there is a patchwork of state-led and often donor-funded (sometimes donor-led) policies and programmes in each state, with few clear distinctions between state and donor initiatives.

Challenges and opportunities

What works

Routine, effective and efficient delivery

Different targeting approaches have had mixed results. The National Cash Transfer programme (HUP) uses the NSR as the basis for community-based targeting (CBT), augmented by a proxy means test (PMT) (Akinola 2017). Combining CBT and PMT approaches, especially across humanitarian and social assistance domains, can create challenges. The FCDO is exploring options for a new consumption-based PMT to more effectively target cash transfers, particularly unconditional cash transfers, at the large number of displaced people who are not in camps. This would also contribute to aligning humanitarian and social protection systems.

Some targeting approaches did not mesh well with programme objectives. The government pilot Care of the People scheme was often targeted to households with limited labour capacity who would struggle to take advantage of the scheme's productivity-enhancing aspects (Holmes and Akinrimisi 2012) and to graduate within a year (Holmes *et al.* 2011). Its successor programme, the HUP, changed the graduation review point to two years, but beneficiaries can remain on the programme if they stay on the NSR (Umezurike and Adam 2020).

The implications of service supply-side constraints for conditional cash transfers (CCTs) also raise concerns. In some communities, a lack of functioning schools and health-care facilities prevented families from meeting conditions in the Care of the People scheme (Akinola 2017). There are also concerns that CCTs may increase access to services but poor service quality will undermine outcomes such as education attainment or child and maternal health. Ultimately, the conditions used may be less important for outcomes than the cash itself; and unconditional cash transfer (UCT) programmes also have lower administrative and monitoring requirements (Holmes and Akinrimisi 2012).

Transfer amounts are sometimes too small. Surveys of IDPs in Borno showed that 69 per cent of respondents said they did not receive enough to cover their needs, including their full food needs (Ground Truth Solutions 2020).

Technology and risks

Different operations technologies are used in programmes, particularly for cash disbursement. These include paper vouchers, e-cards, e-vouchers, biometric cards, ATM cards, bank accounts and mobile money alongside physical cash. Different 'platforms' used for making payments include *red rose*, *nagish* and *scope*, while some banks and mobile providers work together. Mobile telephone numbers are registered and linked to a user's ID to facilitate cash transfers. But doing so also has had negative consequences: for instance, Nigeria's military captured Boko Haram members in 2012 after tracking registered numbers, prompting reprisal attacks on local communities (Jacob and Akpan 2015).

Attempts are made to prevent people from registering with multiple names. Paper vouchers, e-vouchers and biometric e-cards have all been used in Borno, to avoid double registration. Biometrics are envisaged as useful for avoiding this problem and harmonising registers. In Borno and Jigawa, however, biometrics were found to be problematic for farmers whose manual work makes it difficult to read fingerprints, for multiple reasons (e-pact 2018; Sterk and Issaka 2019).

In areas with insufficient mobile money outlets or phone coverage, some programmes (such as the Child Development Grant) have reverted to manual cash payments; this raises costs because the agent's fees are higher and there are few trained agents (Sterk and Issaka 2019). ATMs frequently run out of money, meaning beneficiaries must travel long distances to get cash. With no saving options for payments,

beneficiaries must withdraw amounts in full each month (e-pact 2018). Where banking infrastructure is limited, vouchers provide an alternative.

The role of the state and the politics of social assistance

Social protection has historically been politicised in Nigeria. Programmes linked to specific administrations have been replaced when leadership changes at state or federal level (Holmes and Akinrimisi 2012). Promises of cash transfers have been used to buy votes in elections (Aiyede *et al.* 2015; Shadare 2019).

Coordination between donors and different levels of government has been weak. For social assistance to work, the roles of federal, state and local government in relation to providing infrastructure, co-financing and front-line services must all be performed well. States may lack motivation to deliver programmes that federal government has instituted, preferring greater control and ownership. That reluctance may change as these federal schemes become normalised and a consensus emerges about their desirability – but probably only where long-term federal funding is provided (Aiyede *et al.* 2015).

State governments may lack the financial or administrative capacity to contribute to social protection. UNICEF paid the costs of actual transfers in its Girls Education Programme 3 while states were encouraged to cover implementation and administration costs – although some states could not manage this.

Humanitarian actors often route programmes through state governments because they see federal government as cumbersome to work with. This approach may be problematic as it does little to improve provision and coordination of more effective basic services, such as health-care services that CCT beneficiaries may access (Holmes *et al.* 2011).

Financing, value for money and accountability

The uncertainty of income sources strongly influences how social assistance is financed. For example, the HUP is funded from federal funds that are dependent on volatile oil income and from returned funds stolen by the former Head of State Sani Abacha (Umezurike and Adam 2020). Establishing value for money is challenging as there are few comparisons to be drawn (UNICEF 2017).

The National Social Investment Programme, which runs several programmes including the HUP, has been accused of corruption of multiple types at multiple levels (Agbakwuru 2019), including the federal level (Olawoyin 2018). A monitoring system in collaboration with the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission was set up in 2019, including a Toll-Free Whistleblower Hotline. In many places in the northeast, people trust international NGOs more than the government, based on their experience of receiving more assistance from NGOs.

Beneficiaries' lack of knowledge about how banking works also creates opportunities for corruption – for example, by state-level and local officials. ActionAid provided third-party monitors for NSIO schemes to track corruption and improve citizens' engagement (NSIO 2018). Citizens' perceptions of the state as corrupt can also damage state attempts to tackle violence, and has been blamed as a partial reason for the rise of Boko Haram since 2009 (Herbert and Husain 2018).

Conflict, violence and instability

Violence affects both the northeast – chiefly due to Boko Haram – and the northwest, where 'herder–farmer conflict' spills into criminality. The situation in the northwest is not so widely recognised as a humanitarian crisis as that in the northeast. Yet the number of deaths from criminal activity is now greater than those due to Boko Haram, making such criminality a more serious issue than the insurgency (ACAPS 2020). There is also substantial displacement, with more than 33,000 people displaced from Katsina state alone (ACAPS 2020; Amnesty International 2020).

Explanations for the herder–farmer tensions include climate change, expanded cropland, blocking of transhumance routes, rises in population putting pressure on resources, and breakdown of traditional cooperation between herders and farmers as all diversify (Amnesty International 2018). Over time,

different groups have become armed and associated with vigilantes (Akinwotu 2020). Revenge attacks and banditry – living off raiding, cattle-rustling, blocking trade routes and capturing goods, kidnapping and crime generally – have become common (Ladan and Mutawalli 2020). The deteriorating security situation and weakened traditional and administrative governance has helped to embolden groups already involved in criminality. These various groups are not clearly co-affiliated, so the situation is complex, intractable and not attributable to a single set of causes.

The effect of violence contributes to northern Nigeria's high poverty rates. Agriculture and trade-based livelihoods are disrupted for those who are displaced and those who remain in their homes. Households may have lost productive members and be unable to travel to farms and markets to work and trade due to insecurity (Ladan and Mutawalli 2020). Delivery of services and assistance is disrupted. There is a common discourse that the relationship between poverty and violence is multidirectional, with poverty making joining a violent group – whether jihadists or 'bandits' – a relatively attractive livelihood option (World Bank 2019; Al-Jazeera English 2020).

Displacement and refugees

International refugees can access farmland and national education and health systems. Yet, they experience barriers to gaining IDs and can only partially access financial services (UNHCR 2019). Previously, IDPs' lack of an address meant that they could not be included on the national register and be means-tested, which made them ineligible for social protection. Instead, they were included on the Unified Registry for Beneficiaries. The Rapid Response Register set up in response to Covid-19 has since made it possible for these households to access funds. Targeting of IDPs nevertheless remains both urgent and problematic.

Moving forward, supporting returnees through more predictable long-term social assistance rather than humanitarian assistance will be important. In Adamawa state, a move from humanitarian to social protection is in process because of the return of some IDPs. The return of IDPs to some parts of Borno was also planned in 2020 (Maina 2020).

Climate vulnerability and resilience

Few of the social protection and assistance programmes are specifically linked to climate change. Several claim to be about developing resilience, though not always specifically climate change. The EU-Oxfam ProAct project is about developing resilience to conflict and climate change, among other aims, and encourages cash transfers and social assistance as a resilience-building mechanism. Few social assistance programmes address pastoral livelihoods in transition.

Harsh climate events, largely drought, and increasingly floods, have affected all northern livelihoods. Climate change has been simplistically blamed for herder movements southwards, which in turn is framed as the root cause of much of the non-insurgent violence. Some researchers comment that climate change does play a role in the movement of people from the Lake Chad region into Nigeria, alongside Boko Haram's activity there. Coping mechanisms where herders and pastoralists cooperated to be resilient to these shocks are reportedly becoming weaker (Al-Jazeera English 2020).

Conclusion

Several avenues offer useful future research in northern Nigeria. Some are relatively technical – for example, the ways in which targeting systems for refugees and IDPs might be aligned better with national social assistance programmes, or the disjuncture between how programmes that include digital and other technologies are designed, and the real possibilities for using such technologies in the beneficiaries' contexts.

Another track could focus on local perceptions and trust of the state at different levels, and how these facilitate or impede successful social assistance. A knowledge gap exists about social assistance provided by communities and even violent groups, especially in contexts of displacement, and the

interaction of such provision with social assistance from government and NGOs. The nature of local dynamics – specifically how herder–farmer relations in Nigeria relate to other international elements of insecurity and movement – is poorly understood. So too is how local and transnational social assistance would better support resilience of herders and mixed farmers within Nigeria and across borders. Research on mobile and pastoral livelihoods could be combined with research on how to provide humanitarian and social protection assistance to non-herding people who have moved across national and state borders. This could include how to manage the overlaps between these, and how to address and possibly harmonise targeting.

Somalia

Introduction

Humanitarian aid has provided social assistance in Somalia since civil war wrecked the state in 1991. Although there are hopes of greater stability and a move towards longer-term social protection, climate shocks and ongoing conflict still pose huge challenges for getting assistance to those who need it in Somalia and in building national systems – both areas where rigorous research is required.

Background

After 25 years of state collapse, civil war and political unrest, Somalia is showing signs of slow recovery. Yet the country remains highly exposed to poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity. Efforts in the 1990s and 2000s to restore peace were undermined by ongoing insecurity and the rise of a militia-based opposition, known now as Al-Shabaab. Humanitarian crises were particularly severe in 2008, 2011 and 2017, with a major famine in 2011, and another narrowly averted in 2017. Humanitarian cash (and voucher) programming reached a peak in 2017, worth at least US$300m a year, covering 2.5 million people. This caseload has reduced substantially as the effects of drought declined but many people remain chronically vulnerable.

A long period of revolving transitional governments ended in 2011 with an agreement on a provisional constitution and the establishment of the Federal Republic of Somalia. The Federal Government of Somalia came to power in 2012, bringing the prospect of greater stability. The federal process of governance is complex, presenting both a significant development opportunity and uncertainties over representation and power- and resource-sharing. Conflict and insecurity remain a concern, as demonstrated by recent Al-Shabaab attacks. Beyond urban areas and key towns and cities, the government has only limited control. Somalia also faces drought, floods and other natural shocks and the accelerating impacts of climate change. The nature of Somaliland's relationship with Somalia remains unresolved.

With hopes for more stable government have come efforts to move from recurrent humanitarian aid to more social protection-type approaches to providing assistance. Somalia has developed a national social protection policy, and a new World Bank and WFP programme is under way.

Humanitarian assistance

The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2020 appealed for US$1.05bn and was 82 per cent funded – one of the best-funded appeals in recent history. Some 5.2 million people were considered to be in need (42 per cent of the population); the operational target is 3 million people, of whom 2.1 million are non-IDPs and 1.4 million IDPs.

Food assistance (cash, food and vouchers) makes up a significant proportion of the overall response. WFP appealed for nearly US$240m in 2020 to run what is the biggest social assistance programme in Somalia, and this was more than met with a total of US$255m (Financial Tracking Service 2020). The programme assisted a reported 1.9 million people with in-kind food (4,333 metric tonnes of food) and cash-based transfers (cash and vouchers were not differentiated) (WFP 2020).

In terms of delivery modalities, a 2018 joint evaluation of cash-based assistance (CBA) recommended *inter alia* expanding the use of multipurpose (unrestricted) integrated cash transfers; reducing the restrictions on transfers by limiting the use of vouchers for specific purposes; expanding use of mobile

money (MM) where possible; linking cash to social protection; and working towards interoperable or common registries (Daniels and Anderson 2018).

Humanitarian cash has been delivered since 2017 by two large NGO consortia: the Somalia Cash Consortium, and Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS). Donors (ECHO, FCDO and USAID) have coordinated to harmonise transfer values according to a contribution to the minimum expenditure basket, which was a major step towards more harmonised cash programming in the country. More than 3 million people were targeted for humanitarian cash transfers through the consortia during the 2017 drought.

Social protection assistance

Large-scale social protection programmes are being rolled out, in close coordination with well-established and funded humanitarian social assistance, and several small-scale safety nets are being piloted. The EU established a Donor Working Group (DWG) in 2017–18 to initiate the process of bringing the donor community together and moving humanitarian cash programming to a longer-term safety net approach. In 2019, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) developed a landmark Social Protection Policy (SSPP) (MoLSA 2019). A Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) was set up to help develop systems with the FGS and DWG, funded by the EU.

The largest safety net project by far in Somalia is a World Bank-supported programme called Baxnaano. It is a US$65m grant over three years targeting 1.2 million chronically poor people in rural areas across 21 districts with monthly cash transfers worth US$20 per household. Baxnaano (meaning 'uplift' in Somali), launched in April 2020 (Admin 2020). The programme is designed to be shock-responsive and scalable. It was scaled up to respond to a desert locust infestation (although not for Covid-19).

The EU's Inclusive Local and Economic Development (ILED) is an €83m investment from the EU Trust Fund for Africa. Its overall objective is to contribute to stability in Somalia by extending state authority and services, promoting local reconciliation and peace-building, creating inclusive economic opportunities, and protecting the most vulnerable. This involves provision of social safety nets to vulnerable people to help to strengthen their recovery and resilience. It is being slowly rolled out in Jubaland State (Juba river corridor) in southern Somalia, in collaboration with Baxnaano to avoid any overlaps.

The BRCiS consortium is implementing pilots of approaches to more shock-responsive cash programming, aiming to link to and support government systems. The Shock Responsive Safety Net (SRSN) pilot works with three members (Concern Worldwide, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Save the Children) to target 1,326 households and to test agreed localised indicators, triggers and thresholds. The regular monthly transfers are set at US$20 per household for 24 months, with a top-up to US$40/month in the case of a shock (vertical expansion).

Another pilot project focuses on IDPs and vulnerable people in Mogadishu. It operates in a similar way to those of BRCiS and was the only shock-responsive project to scale up to assist people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Challenges and opportunities

What works

Delivery mechanisms and modalities

The first unrestricted cash transfers took place in 2003 in northern Somalia (Sool Plateau). Cash has since become the default humanitarian modality for food assistance through the FCDO and ECHO-funded NGO consortia, and more recently for meeting multiple basic needs through multipurpose cash. (WFP continues to deliver most humanitarian assistance in the form of in-kind food, with cash in Mogadishu and vouchers elsewhere: partly through old programming habits and partly due to constraints

applied by its biggest donor, USAID.) Since the 2017 drought crisis, cash has been mostly delivered using mobile money (MM), a highly innovative system at the time. It has proved an efficient and effective way of reaching people in need, often in volatile and hard-to-reach areas. Person-to-person and business (P2P/P2B) technology has made Somalia practically cashless with most beneficiary transactions (and receipts of remittances) occurring without physical cash changing hands. The relative 'invisibility' of transfers reduces protection risks associated with distribution centres or queuing at banks or MM agents. Mobile money was rolled out largely by the Somalia Cash Consortium and BRCiS as humanitarian assistance, and is now standard practice for social protection transfers under Baxnaano and the SRSN pilots.

Transfer values

As in other countries, there are marked disparities between agreed humanitarian and social protection transfer values. This reflects different ways of calculating need and differing objectives but creates potential problems when the target populations are similar.

The key humanitarian donors (DG ECHO, FCDO and USAID) have harmonised humanitarian cash transfer values based on a percentage contribution to a minimum expenditure basket (MEB). The transfer value for the main social protection programmes is calculated based on regional 'norms' (Yemen, Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia) and fiscal sustainability, rather than based on need. As a result, the transfer value for the social protection system is only about 30 per cent of the agreed humanitarian value. (This varies to some extent across regions due to differences in prices used to calculate the MEB.) The Food Economy Group is due to carry out a study on transfer values based on the Household Economy Approach. This should provide some basis for transfer values both in regular times and during a particular shock.

Targeting

Targeting for humanitarian cash follows community-based targeting norms, with guidance set by the Cash Working Group (Mackey and Gol 2018). Baxnaano follows a three-stage system at district, community and individual levels. It includes considerations of access for aid agencies, capacities to implement, and the vulnerability of households as assessed by assets, debt burdens, family size and coping strategies. Additional filters in case of over-subscription include factors such as disability and nutrition status.

Vulnerability, particularly to economic crisis, is closely linked to clan or group affiliations. Minority groups lack the extended social network in the diaspora that often forms an informal safety net for the majority tribes. Minorities include non-ethnic Somali groups such as the Jareer Bantu, the Banadir groups, and low-status groups like the Midgan. Communities from regions most affected by the 2011 famine, the Rahanweyn and Bantu, were particularly vulnerable (Dunn and Brewin 2014). Clan and community dynamics are important to incorporate into targeting, such as Inclusive Community Based Targeting (ICBI) approaches developed by Adeso, a regional NGO (Mackey and Gol 2018). More categorical targeting methods could be researched in the Somali context and considered in operations.

Technology, risks and accountability

UNICEF has been tasked to develop a management information system (MIS) and a Unified Social Registry (USR). The USR will serve as a tool for identifying beneficiaries for Baxnaano and potentially all future social protection programmes. WFP's SCOPE, as a proprietary database, cannot be transferred to the USR wholesale, and will need either to be modified or the data downloaded in a format that the USR can incorporate (at time of publication, it is unclear what will happen). When fully functioning, the USR should be instrumental for SRSN scale-up in its ability to:

1. identify potential beneficiaries for social protection programmes;
2. report and track assistance to beneficiaries across programmes;
3. allow scale-up: when there is a shock, partners can identify people most affected, including for horizontal scale-up if all vulnerable people can be included in the long term.

The USR or interoperable databases with common unique identifiers can technically enable de-duplication of lists to avoid multiple registrations, as well as improve the coordination of programming. The USR is being developed alongside the national ID programme which is also World Bank-funded. A common data registration form has been designed to help to standardise information fields for interoperability and will require agreement by users.

Opportunities for the USR to become *the* single registry for social protection programmes in the future clearly exist. So too do data protection concerns regarding interoperability, data-sharing and adoption of common unique identifiers (especially for humanitarian actors sharing with government-held databases), and around proprietary systems. These will need to be overcome if interoperability is to become a medium-term reality.

Humanitarian principles and the politics of social assistance

While generally glossed over in the literature and project documents, the continued presence of Al-Shabaab in south and central Somalia poses several important dilemmas regarding the political economy of social assistance in those areas, as well as operational issues of access to displaced people. Most of the productive areas in southern Somalia are under Al-Shabaab control, including the rural areas of Bay and Bakool, and along the Juba and Shebelle rivers. Many of the most marginalised populations live in these areas: social protection systems are unable to operate there and humanitarian assistance is limited.

Counter-terrorism laws and other measures are having a significant impact on humanitarian action in Somalia. Research by the Humanitarian Policy Group suggests that the restrictions have increased operating costs, slowed down administrative functions and operational response, curtailed funding and undermined humanitarian partnerships (Pantuliano and Metcalfe 2012). They have also prevented access and altered the quality and coordination of assistance. As a result, it is more difficult for humanitarian actors to operate according to the principles of neutrality and impartiality.

Social assistance – including the more recent modality of cash and the rise of social protection – has become an important and entrenched element in the politics of Somalia in the years since the state's collapse. Jaspars *et al.* (2020) point out that apparent improvements in technical systems for delivery are masking issues connected to power, politics and the importance of aid diversion. Large displaced populations in urban areas serve as justifications for maintaining aid, which acts as a political tool to maintain clan loyalties. Gatekeepers or entrepreneurs set up IDP camps to attract aid and thereby increase the value of land.

Somalia ranks as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, bottom of the 2015 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index. Such corruption closely links to the more political dynamics described above (Transparency International n.d.). A 2016 study by Transparency International found that corruption risks exist across the programme cycle, particularly in: the identification of local 'partners', the awarding of contracts, the pricing of contracts, the negotiation of conditions for access, staff recruitment, selection and targeting of aid recipients, selection of monitoring mechanisms, and the approach to monitoring programmes (Majid *et al.* 2016).

Climate vulnerability and resilience

Multiple recurrent hazards, including drought, floods and conflict, affect Somalia – and climate change is exacerbating these. The impact of climate change is becoming more acknowledged and integrated into policy. Somalia developed a National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) in 2013 in consultation with UNDP (Ministry of National Resources 2013). Its three major programmatic areas are: (1) Sustainable Land Management to protect forests and improve land use; (2) Water Resources Management to develop a national water resources management plan; and (3) Disaster Management to strengthen the disaster management agency.

Following the 2016–17 drought, the federal government of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Farmajo) – with the support of the EU, UN and World Bank – created a recovery and resilience framework to guide future policy. The framework was informed by the Somalia Drought Impact and Needs Assessment, whose principle finding was that Somalia is undergoing a climate emergency in which droughts, floods and desertification are wreaking havoc on the country's livestock and farming sectors (Santur 2019).

In August 2020, the government and UNDP launched a programme to 'Strengthen Climate Change Adaptation Planning'. The new programme supports Somalia in advancing the ambition of its nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement (ratified in 2016), and in reaching the targets outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals. A National Adaptation Plan process will be overseen at top levels of government, and implemented by UNDP. Somalia submitted its first National Communication in January 2019 to the UNFCCC and is participating in the NDC enhancement process through the UNDP Climate Promise initiative (UNDP 2020).

At a more political level, it is argued that increasing climate shocks are creating conditions that Al-Shabaab is using strategically to win around local populations. Generally, Al-Shabaab collects the Islamic Zakat – a religious tax – at roadblocks and in the form of alms that every person must provide during events like Ramadan. During humanitarian disasters, Al-Shabaab collects food and money through its distribution centres to provide disaster relief to those affected, especially the poor. In areas under its control, the insurgent group functions as a service and relief provider during floods and droughts – a notable change from its previous strategy of preventing people from seeking aid in state-controlled territory (Eklöw and Krampe 2019).

Fluctuating demographics and population movements related to climate shocks are potentially undermining clan-based power-sharing arrangements and rural livelihoods while also intensifying urbanisation, according to Eklöw and Krampe (2019). Mogadishu is now Africa's most densely populated city. Temporary, inadequate and often illegal shelters and settlements at the fringes of cities are common. Socioeconomic tensions in these settlements are also fed by pressures among clans and land disputes, as noted by the NRC (Harris 2015).

Conclusion

The development of a national social protection policy and the roll-out of large-scale programmes more focused on social protection mean that there is finally real momentum in long-running discussions about moving away from relying on humanitarian aid for social assistance in Somalia. How these programmes unfold, how tensions around approaches to targeting and transfer values are resolved, and how, in practice, they work in the complex political economy of Somalia are all areas where further rigorous research is needed.

Yemen

Introduction

More than six years of civil war, compounded by climate change vulnerability, have left most of Yemen's population in acute humanitarian need and at risk of famine. The country's complex mix of humanitarian and social protection programming has a relatively wide reach but would benefit enormously from research-based interventions to improve harmonisation and to transition to longer-term systems.

Background

Yemen is one of the worst crises in the world in terms of levels of suffering, humanitarian need and growing risks of famine. Intense civil war since 2014 has devastated the national economy and left more than 80 per cent of the population (24 million people) in need of humanitarian assistance. GDP is estimated to be half of pre-war levels, and revenues from oil and gas on which the economy largely depends have collapsed. Risks arising from the conflict are compounded by the growing effects of climate change and related natural shocks.

Donor support for social assistance in Yemen is alarmingly low, however. WFP is warning that it may soon have to reduce assistance due to funding shortfalls; the UN humanitarian appeal remains badly under-funded. Given the growing risks of famine, it is clear that even current levels of support provided are inadequate.

International agencies use the pre-war government social protection systems to provide some of the social assistance that still reaches people. Yemen is often cited as an example of a context where it has been possible to link social protection and humanitarian approaches by building on and maintaining government systems even amid conflict. However, there is little rigorous evaluation, evidence and research on the effectiveness of these approaches.

Humanitarian assistance

The Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP), managed by UN OCHA, is the central planning and funding tool for humanitarian assistance. The 2020 YHRP appealed for US$3.38bn of which 55.9 per cent (US$1.49bn) was funded. This contrasts with 89 per cent of the 2019 appeal being met (Financial Tracking Service n.d.a).[10] Donor fatigue has left aid agencies struggling to maintain support for a huge operation to meet mounting needs.

Within the overall humanitarian response, basic food assistance accounted for 44 per cent of YHRP funding in 2019. WFP distributes emergency food assistance to an average of 11.7 million individuals each month. The UK's FCDO in its 2020 annual review of WFP funding reported 1.9 million people receiving monthly food vouchers, 600,000 receiving monthly cash transfers, and the rest receiving monthly in-kind food rations. Due to the reduced funding levels, WFP halved food assistance rations and warned that without further funding, these may be halved again in the near future. Although humanitarian in nature, WFP's programme with its large coverage and consistency over several years essentially functions as a safety net.

The smaller-scale Cash Consortium of Yemen (CCY) provides emergency assistance in the form of multipurpose cash and protection services through a rapid response mechanism (RRM) supported by USAID and the EU's DG ECHO. This particularly helps people who are forcibly displaced by the conflict.

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[10] The 2019 appeal totalled US$4.1bn of which US$3.5bn was funded (89 per cent).

Assistance is usually limited to three months, which may be sufficient if IDPs are able and willing to return home. For those who cannot, moving to another source of assistance is difficult. During 2020, RRM partners reached more than 200,000 IDPs across 12 governorates (Cash Consortium of Yemen 2020c).

Social protection assistance

Yemen's social protection landscape is shaped by two quasi-governmental systems: the Social Fund for Development (SFD) and the Social Welfare Fund (SWF). Pre-2014 these were the main national protection programmes; since 2014, they have been the vehicles through which most social protection assistance is delivered under the management, coordination and funding of international agencies.

The infrastructure of the SWF is used to deliver social protection transfers – namely, UNICEF's Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) programme, which is a component of the World Bank-funded Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Programme (ECRP) (Al-Ahmadi and de Silva 2018).

The ECT programme has nationwide operations, covering almost 1.5 million households (9.35 million individuals). Payments are made via fixed sites (banks) and mobile payment mechanisms on a quarterly basis to a recipient list that has remained unchanged since 2014 (UNICEF 2020).

Another objective of the ECT is to maintain and strengthen the SWF's pre-2014 operations and functions, with the aim of handing the programme operations back to the government and the SWF when possible (*Ibid.*).

The SFD implements local development or community resilience programmes at district and village levels through conditional cash-based support. Aims include: boosting access to basic services (e.g. health centres, schools, water points); capacity-building for local planning and service delivery; and providing economic opportunities such as through access to microfinance and support to small and medium enterprises. The SFD is funded by the World Bank, FCDO, UNDP, EU, German and Dutch governments, and other donors (Social Fund for Development 2019).

Remittance inflows provide informal social protection and constitute a large share of Yemen's economy (Azaki 2015; Devereux 2015). According to World Bank data, remittance inflows in 2018 were estimated at US$3.35bn, or about 12 per cent of GDP.[11] Migrant workers predominantly in Gulf Cooperation Council countries (mostly Saudi Arabia) send on average US$200–500 per month, a major contribution to recipients' household incomes. As in Islamic societies across the region, religious institutions provide social protection through redistributive mechanisms such as the Zakat[12] (Devereux 2015).

Challenges and opportunities

What works

Resilience of government systems

The SFD is seen as a resilient structure, partly due to its decentralised way of working at district and local levels, bypassing divided central ministries. International actors are endeavouring to build SFD capacity to outlive the current conflict. World Bank and FCDO-funded programmes include components for strengthening SFD institutions (FCDO 2020a; World Bank 2019, 2020a).

The SWF was judged by the World Bank and UNICEF as the institution best placed to handle future social transfers delivery (World Bank 2020a). However, Yemeni authorities and civil society will need to help revive the networks of field workers as well as reinstate central government functions such as the

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[11] GDP in 2018 was estimated to be US$27.6bn; see Knoema (n.d.).
[12] The Zakat is payment made annually under Islamic law on certain kinds of property, and used for charitable and religious purposes, as one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the Central Statistics Office and the Civil Registration Authority. Reviving these networks and leadership may be more difficult the longer that the SWF remains under the management of the UNICEF ECT programme, precisely because previous networks are 'ebbing away' (Goodman *et al.* 2019a).

Further research should consider how resilient these government systems are: how effective they are for providing assistance in the conflict and whether they offer a firm basis for greater government involvement in social assistance.

Targeting

Although SWF beneficiaries were checked in the early years of the conflict, that list has remained unchanged since 2015. This lack of change prompts concerns, both around likely inclusion or exclusion errors and the potential for diversion and abuse. UNICEF has defended maintaining the unchanged list and transfer amounts in the interests of fiscal sustainability so that the government can take it over in due course (Goodman *et al.* 2019a).

WFP similarly based its general food distribution on pre-conflict government beneficiary lists. But it has since been updating these based on humanitarian targeting criteria. It is known that there is a large overlap between the SWF, the SFD and WFP beneficiary lists but as there is no interoperability between the databases, there is no way of knowing how large the overlaps are, and equally no possibility to either de-duplicate lists or more strategically layer programming to enhance outcomes. For example, the World Bank has noted that the cash-for-nutrition programme of the SFD achieves nutrition outcomes when a family is also receiving WFP food assistance (in-kind or cash).

Transfer values

The amount being provided to people through humanitarian programmes is currently much larger than that provided through UNICEF's ECT programme. The ECT transfers an average of US$1.50 per person per month (YER833). The WFP programme provides YER6,450 per person per month. Yet even this is still far below the poverty line of YER13,425 a month (equivalent to US$1.90 per day). The already small ECT transfers are also being held static and so continue to lose value as the Yemeni rial depreciates. The large difference between humanitarian and social protection transfer values complicates discussions about harmonisation and any potential transition to more government-led systems.

Coordination and interoperability

Despite attempts to map the humanitarian and social assistance landscape in Yemen, it remains a confusing mix of unevenly coordinated interventions and actors (Goodman *et al.* 2019b; Rimkar 2021). Institutional mechanisms and coverage overlap across the different humanitarian and social protection programmes – although the degree to which this occurs is unknown. According to Goodman *et al.* some local coordination is assumed, but no alignment at national level is obvious. A prime example of the lack of interoperability between assistance systems concerns the RRM whereby after the initial three months of assistance, no mechanisms exist to transfer recipients to longer-term beneficiary lists (Mclean 2020a).

DG ECHO and FCDO are co-chairing a donor working group (DWG) to address the poor coordination by harmonising cash programming and forging linkages with social protection programmes. The DWG agenda prioritises harmonising transfer values; using common assessment, targeting and inclusion criteria and common outcome monitoring indicators; database interoperability; improving accountability to those affected; and increased sustainability of approaches.

UNICEF has commissioned a consultancy to explore the potential and barriers to creating interoperable systems – at least between UN agencies – as part of wider work under the UN's Common Cash Statement being rolled out in pilot countries (including Yemen).

Technology, risks and accountability

WFP uses biometrics in Yemen and elsewhere to verify the identity of beneficiaries. This was suspended temporarily in 2019 after the Houthi administration in Sana'a claimed it contravened Yemeni law.

Although the administration relented, the incident demonstrated the sensitivity of data and data protection in a context of civil war in which the authorities are parties to the conflict.

In challenging contexts, mobile money is potentially advantageous and is being piloted (FCDO 2020b), although with limited results due to bureaucratic and administrative hurdles (Rimkar 2021). In the north, for example, it was reported that mobile operators found it difficult to gain permission to distribute cash transfers and to work with humanitarian systems. UNICEF's mobile money pilot had very low uptake rates due to general poor phone coverage in Yemen and low levels of phone ownership, particularly among extremely poor communities. The current system only allows for bank-led e-payments. Despite these challenges, UNICEF found aspects of its pilot to be a success and is considering a wider roll-out (Ibid.).

Efforts to improve data collection for monitoring and evaluation are hampered by limited access in zones of active conflict. Similarly to other agencies, Save the Children and UNICEF are integrating complaints and feedback mechanisms to improve accountability and to feed into better operations.

Several organisations, including FCDO, WFP and UNICEF, use third-party monitoring to assess implementation especially in areas of poor humanitarian access. For example, the WFP third-party monitoring system launched in 2019 has conducted 973 monitoring visits in 20 governorates and an in-house call centre has conducted more than 9,000 calls to verify receipt of assistance and food delivery to distribution sites.

Counter-terrorism

Individual Yemenis, Yemeni non-profit organisations and businesses have been adversely affected by bank de-risking regulations related to terrorism and money laundering, thus weakening Yemen's banking sector and contributing to its financial exclusion. The situation affects the degree of financial access that humanitarian organisations enjoy, including Yemeni NGOs.

Governments' counter-terrorism measures also affect aid agencies' ability to operate. A short-lived decision by the US in January 2021 to assign the De-facto Authorities (DFA – Houthi/ Ansar Allah) a terrorist designation (US Department of State 2021) raised concerns about how aid would reach the DFA-controlled north, where up to 80 per cent of the population live (International Rescue Committee 2021). The Biden administration has since reversed the designation, but challenges for aid agencies posed by counter-terror approaches remain.

Livelihoods and transformation

Nearly two-thirds of Yemen's population live in rural areas: of those 19 million people, 12 million are deemed to be poor and food-insecure. Food production in well-watered areas has to some extent been replaced by cash crops (primarily *qat* and citrus). Terraces in the highlands have been neglected, as people have turned to urban-based incomes. However, the Covid-19 outbreak caused those incomes and remittances to fall steeply while basic commodities prices are rising.

The SFD uses a livelihoods and community development approach to reduce vulnerabilities in what was an already poor food and nutrition security situation. This involves cash-for-work, labour-intensive public works programmes and a Smallholder Agricultural Productivity Enhancement Programme (SAPREP), with a focus on natural resource management mechanisms like water and soil preservation, terrace agriculture, water harvesting tanks, and horticulture and livestock development (Social Fund for Development 2019).

The INGO-run Multisectoral Humanitarian Response Programme (MHRP) provides agricultural inputs to complement cash transfers. It seeks to identify and reduce vulnerabilities of 253,352 people by reducing malnutrition in conflict-affected communities in Saadah, Aldhale'e and Al-Jawf governorates. The project's community-based approach works to increase financial access to food through conditional and unconditional cash assistance; improve access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene environments; and increase access to health and nutrition services.

Climate vulnerability and resilience

Yemen is highly vulnerable to climate change-related impacts including drought, extreme flooding, pests, sudden disease outbreaks, changes of rainfall patterns, increased storm frequency/severity and sea-level rise. Climate change is expected to cause increased temperatures, variability of rainfall and heavy precipitation events. These may lead to shorter growing seasons, threatening already very food-insecure populations. The conflict seriously hinders Yemen's ability to address current and future climate change impacts.

Water scarcity is a real concern. Groundwater is over-exploited, especially in *qat* production, leading to salt-water intrusion in coastal areas. Sana'a is the world's most water-stressed city and draws water from the world's most water-stressed aquifer. Aden is among the cities most at risk from sea-level rise and storm surges.

There is little evidence of links between social assistance and climate policy. The conflict has prevented any action beyond developing planning documents (MFA 2018; USAID 2016). Yemen has developed a National Adaptation Programme of Action and submitted 12 projects to the UNFCCC in 2013; it submitted its intended nationally determined contribution in 2015.

Conclusion

Yemen raises the questions of how best to balance humanitarian and social protection approaches; how to balance meeting acute immediate needs and support to longer-term systems in an ongoing conflict; and how to maintain support in the face of donor fatigue and complex, shifting politics.

Its main social protection systems have, to a degree, survived the conflict and provide a thin blanket of social assistance with a relatively wide coverage. Despite their problems, this demonstrates the resilience both of the systems and the local organisations (SWF and SFD) that are still playing a role in delivery of programmes. The humanitarian provision meanwhile spans from rapid short-term cash responses to what is effectively the country's biggest social assistance programme run by WFP. Coordination across the humanitarian to social protection spectrum is poor. Yet signs of change exist – such as the newly formed DWG's agenda for harmonisation, interoperability, and commitment (on paper at least) to link humanitarian cash assistance with social protection efforts.

This agenda could benefit from research into technical issues such as transfer values and interoperable databases, and on more substantive areas like the development of shock-responsive safety nets as part of overall response design. Further lines of research might include strategic layering of programmes to achieve specific outcomes such as nutrition, and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI).

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