

## CONNECT

 @Oxfaminternational


 Facebook.com/oxfam

 @oxfam

## CONTACT

 Oxfam.org

 +254 (0) 20 2820000

 Oxfam International  
The Atrium, Chaka Road,  
Kilimani Nairobi, Kenya



# OXFAM'S HUMANITARIAN SOCIAL PROTECTION APPROACHES IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

A learning brief illustrating how responses can strengthen social protection systems

SEPTEMBER 2021



OXFAM

This document was written by Larissa Pelham, Lisa Biblo and Kristin Smart, and includes contributions from Ivan Aguilar (Colombia) and Annie Sloman (Timor-Leste). Many thanks to Sally Abi Khalil, Amjad Ali, Mohammed Ammar, Marianna Anton, Sarah Badju, Fausto Belo Ximenes, Sarah Blinn, Eva Cameros, Matthew Cousins, Xavier Duvachelle, Rachel Eichholz, Gabriella d'Elia, Andres Gonzalez, Muktar Hassan, Navratevy Kek, John Kitui, Joe Mekhael, Joseph Moyo, Raijeli Nicolle and Shane Stevenson for their comments and advice.

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes.

For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email: [Kristin.Smart@oxfam.org](mailto:Kristin.Smart@oxfam.org)

Cover photo: Zibusiso, 28 and his wife Sibongisiwe, 25, do laundry together outside their family home in Bubi District, Ward 23, Zimbabwe. Their 3 year old daughter Charity\* is photographed with them.

Credit: Aurelie Marrier D'Unienville / Oxfam

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 04 INTRODUCTION

## 06 OXFAM'S APPROACH TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

## 08 CASE STUDIES

Kenya: Bringing together gender, protection, and cash

Lebanon: Targeting lessons and emergency response, filling in when social protection is not possible

Vanuatu and the Pacific: Setting the stage for a digital social protection system

Malawi: Minimizing the impact of shocks with informal protection

Nepal: Advocating cash-based social transfers

Morocco: From social protection advocacy to programming

Cambodia: Social accountability and civil society

Iraq: The transition between humanitarian and formal social protection systems

Occupied Palestinian Territory: Civil society and inclusive shock-responsive social protection

Somalia: Foundations for an urban social safety net

Timor-Leste: Influencing through social accountability and civil society networks

Central America: Targeting food security interventions with remote selection

## 38 KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR APPLYING A SOCIAL PROTECTION APPROACH

Social protection beyond cash

Understanding who is excluded

Going digital

Mainstreaming social protection into humanitarian responses

## 40 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# INTRODUCTION

Only around half the world had access to social protection systems before the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Despite it being a key tool for responding to the crisis, many people remain excluded from social protection since the pandemic began. This paper showcases examples of Oxfam’s work on social protection in our humanitarian responses within the context of COVID-19, including piloting and learning, advocacy and influencing, advising and aligning, and working towards inclusive and accountable shock-responsive social protection systems.

Oxfam’s responses to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 comprised water, sanitation and public health interventions along with food security, livelihoods, cash and social protection interventions to overcome socioeconomic impacts.

Across 68 countries, we reached over 14 million people, only a fraction of whom have access to state social protection systems. Working to ensure everyone’s access to social protection is therefore an essential part of Oxfam’s push for a ‘just recovery’. A crisis of such magnitude has exposed the inability of the international humanitarian system to meet needs.<sup>2</sup> This highlights the responsibility of states as primary duty bearers – with the responsibility to protect those at risk within their borders – nor the fact that state-level structures are required

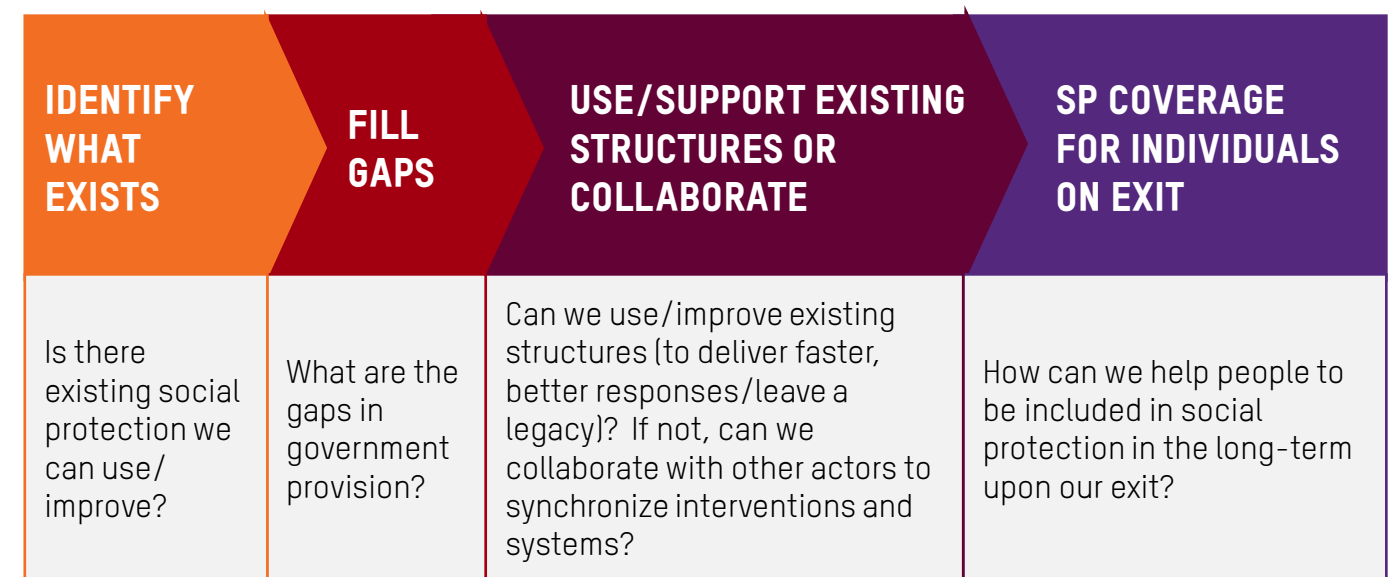
to deliver and sustain the systematic support needed at scale.

## CASE STUDIES FROM OXFAM’S COVID-19 RESPONSE

This learning brief presents 12 Oxfam humanitarian programmes that illustrate how responses can engage with, draw from, and provide future opportunities for strengthening social protection systems.

Oxfam has a simple framework for applying a social protection lens to programming. It aims to ensure humanitarian responses identify what social protection systems exist and then filling gaps in provision, but otherwise support existing mechanisms – and facilitate coverage following the exit of humanitarian support (see **Figure 1**).

**FIGURE 1: THE OXFAM HUMANITARIAN SOCIAL PROTECTION FRAMEWORK**



### BOX 1: WHAT IS SOCIAL PROTECTION?

Social protection aims to manage the socioeconomic shocks and stresses of life. It is a human right. It includes transfers and services from society to ensure everyone is able to meet their most critical needs. Effective social protection interventions provide households with food security, facilitate access to income (including livelihoods), and ensure basic needs can be met by all members of a community. It can be provided formally by the state, and/or informally within communities, such as through remittances, zakat, savings and loan groups. Most often social protection is delivered through a range of non-contributory transfers (such as child support, school-feeding programmes and old-age pensions); contributory social insurance schemes (e.g., health, livestock and crop insurance); access to social services such as refuges for women; and labour market interventions such as skills training, furlough schemes and employment services.



# OXFAM'S APPROACH TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

## SOCIAL PROTECTION REDUCES ACUTE AND CHRONIC POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Providing direct and indirect transfers as cash or in-kind, and access to social services help households manage risk and vulnerability to shocks, as well as improve the social status of the marginalized. Examples of national social protection programmes include the UK welfare state, Brazil's *Bolsa Familia*, the Philippines' *Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Programme* and Ethiopia's *Productive Safety Net Programme*. These provide asset transfers on a regular basis from the government to the poorest people in society.

Oxfam has worked in this area for many years in both our humanitarian programming and policy work. Our framework provides a steer to identify different ways to work with social protection in humanitarian work.

We look to see what existing systems and structures we can either use or improve to deliver humanitarian responses faster and better. This might involve helping governments design and implement a safety net programme, as we have with Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme, or in Lebanon, where we work with the Ministry of Social Affairs through Community Development Centres to identify those Oxfam provide temporary assistance to those who have become unemployed or fall sick. We also identify who should get longer-term access to social protection and how. For example, in Cambodia, we are

identifying who is eligible for additional government support due to COVID-19 and acting as the interlocutor between communities and government to help them access that support. In Iraq, we have worked with the humanitarian cash sector and the government social protection system, to align our targeting methodologies, and identify those that are chronically poor and should be registered for long-term government support once humanitarian support has finished. In the Pacific, we are piloting a multi-donor funding mechanism that can give recipients with acute needs cash in emergencies but also provide longer-term social protection assistance.

We lobby hard to realize people's right to inclusive social protection nationally and internationally.

For example, ensuring social protection is addressed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and influencing and helping deliver the agenda of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on social protection.

Oxfam affiliates across the confederation we lobby governments to provide access to social protection, reduce vulnerability and build resilience to shocks for people in crisis. We are working to help other NGOs bring a social protection lens to their humanitarian work. We are looking at ways to further influence change in the humanitarian system.



*Sameeha Shiba, a Public Health Promoter, at a distribution site in Alkoba Internally Displaced Persons Camp in Taiz, Yemen. Credit: Wael Algadi/Oxfam*



## SOCIAL PROTECTION

# CASE STUDIES







Priscilla Ngilla, 47, was a participant in a cash pilot programme in Kibera, Kenya. She is the mother of two young children and has lost her sources of income cleaning schools and washing laundry. Without income, she has had to borrow money for food and rent, and sometimes her family goes hungry. 'If you hadn't sent me that money, I wouldn't be here,' says Ngilla, who had a close brush with homelessness, 'it has helped me a lot.' Credit: Asha Jaffer / Oxfam



# KENYA

## BRINGING TOGETHER GENDER, PROTECTION, AND CASH

With rising food insecurity, sexual and gender-based violence, job losses, poor access to water and sanitation, and a lack of formal safety nets, Kenya's informal sector suffered badly from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Oxfam found less than 10% of people who met vulnerability criteria had access to safety net programmes, especially for those living in informal settlements or working in informal sectors. In response, seven NGOs – funded by the Danish and German governments, and the EU – worked together on unconditional multi-purpose cash transfers as part of the COVID-19 Cash Safety Nets programme, which targeted Kenya's millions of informal workers. The project worked in conjunction with the Kenyan government's flagship social assistance programme, *Inua Jamii*,<sup>5</sup> to support the most vulnerable households in urban informal settlements in Nairobi and Mombasa to manage the impact of COVID-19.

The project reached 140,000 people with three one-monthly payments that could cover half of a basic needs minimum expenditure basket based on local prices of food and other basic needs such as soap, water and mobile communications. It was delivered via Safaricom's M-Pesa mobile money platform, thus minimizing physical contact. The programme also included a sexual and gender-

based violence component that supported almost 4,000 survivors (5% of whom were men). Between March and May 2020, The Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) recorded a 64% increase in the number of women and girls calling their helpline to request assistance. Government statistics also indicated a rise of 42% in domestic and sexual violence cases between March, when Kenya recorded its first COVID-19 case, and mid-April.<sup>6</sup> Within the project, the Wangu Kanja Foundation (WKF) provided a referral service linking survivors to existing services for:

- health, including financial support to pay for medical services;
- legal support with justice system;
- the police; and
- accessing social services and safe shelters.

Where there has been a lack of state service provision or capacity to deliver services, CREAW and WKF also directly provided legal assistance, advice, representation and psychosocial support for over 530 women and men.

Together with the cash transfers, referral and services, the programme aligned with

the formal social protection programmes and utilizes a cash+ approach to address humanitarian needs.

The partners also undertook advocacy and campaigning<sup>7</sup> for an expanded national safety net programme.<sup>8</sup> The Kenyan government has several social assistance programmes in four arid/semi-arid counties in the rural north, and three nationwide programmes for elderly, vulnerable children/orphans and people with disabilities. However, vulnerability is much more widespread, and the registration lists are outdated. Further, the safety nets were not shock-responsive, i.e., they did not expand horizontally (to include more people) or vertically (to provide more money) in line with the vulnerabilities presented during the pandemic.

The programme has had an impact on sexual and gender-based violence survivors, poverty<sup>9</sup> and inequality.<sup>10</sup> The experiences of some women can be seen in a series of YouTube videos.<sup>11</sup>

## LESSONS LEARNED

The Safety Nets programme demonstrated that humanitarian interventions can mirror formal social protection programmes, and that cash transfers are just one of many tools in a 'social protection toolbox.' The importance of ensuring a range of programmes, assistance, services and transfers has long been recognized as a critical approach to amplifying the benefits of cash transfers in social protection.

COVID-19 increased rates of sexual and gender-based violence. The programme's cash transfers helped ease income-related tensions, while other elements of the programme supported survivors through referrals for tailored support.<sup>12</sup> Ideally, the programme could be linked with other cash transfer programmes, including national social protection programmes.

Without sufficient funding, expanding social protection access is not possible. Advocacy strategies have to be adjusted to address fiscal constraints. This remains true even when there is clear evidence that there are significant gaps in coverage of the national social safety net.



*Robina Kwamboka Omari, 60, cares for four children and was a participant in a cash pilot in Kibera. Credit: Asha Jaffer / Oxfam*



# LEBANON

## TARGETING LESSONS AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE, FILLING IN WHEN SOCIAL PROTECTION IS NOT POSSIBLE

On 4 August 2020, a vast explosion rocked Beirut and the surrounding area. Over 200 people died in the blast, and more have died since; over 6,500 people have been injured and over 300,000 lost their homes. Oxfam had not been working directly in Beirut, so its response has been implemented in partnership with local community-based actors.

The design of Oxfam's response was based on Temporary Cash Assistance, a small social protection-related cash transfer project run in Tripoli, North Lebanon. To respond as quickly as possible, we 'transplanted' the Tripoli project to Beirut. We removed the linkages to the formal social protection system due to the paralysis of government social assistance structures. However, we retained the same tried-and-tested fast, effective cash delivery mechanism and community-based targeting through our partners, Basma and Zeitonneh, which have been working with underserved communities in Beirut through their community centres since 2013.

We delivered cash through the postal system, as in Tripoli. We simply adapted the

targeting criteria that identify vulnerable households coping with a shock, as well as vulnerable Syrian refugees. Within hours, we had a response designed, transplanted from our long-term social protection model, that enabled us to support and offer a response model to partners, but also minimized their direct intervention, because the design was embedded in local structures. This was important in a context in which we did not have well-established relations with partners, and where they did not all have experience with cash delivery.

There were delays with transfers while we established relations with Basmeh and Zeitonneh, and because of pandemic-related movement restrictions, which made it impossible to distribute the Liban Post cards for people to collect their cash transfers.<sup>13</sup> However, we were in communication with targeted beneficiaries and worked with Basmeh and Zeitonneh as well as Liban Post to find solutions to get cash entitlements and social assistance referrals to those in need as soon as possible.

In an emergency response that also severely impacted the staff engaged in the response, it was helpful to build upon existing programming and adapt it to the context, so we could move forward quickly instead of creating something new. In addition, while working within government-led social protection structures is a priority for Oxfam in Lebanon, this was not a practical option for the emergency response to get people the help they need. However, we were able to retain the aspects of working with a local partner to support targeting and implementation, and with Liban Post to deliver the cash assistance, to remain grounded within trusted community structures in the affected area.<sup>14</sup>

## LESSONS LEARNED

Even though adaptation from the Tripoli context for the situation in Beirut was required, the idea of the temporary cash assistance project was broadly suitable and gave a head start in the design phase of the response.

The explosion in Beirut had both immediate and longer-term effects on survivors. The social protection-oriented response was designed to meet the latter. It is not always appropriate to or feasible to use a social protection-oriented response in a first-phase emergency, if the structures are not already in place.



*Standing in front of his shop, 63-year-old Michel has quite a grim outlook on the future. Although grateful he and his family were not injured, he did not know what to expect from the future, nine days after the blast of 4 August, 2020. Credit: Oxfam Lebanon*



# VANUATU & THE PACIFIC

## SETTING THE STAGE FOR A DIGITAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

A collaboration by 17 organizations,<sup>15</sup> the Unblocked Cash project in Vanuatu uses blockchain technology to deliver monthly e-vouchers to 6,000 households through 370 vendors, across 11 islands, using a shared digital platform. The blockchain tracks transactions in real time; e-vouchers can be redeemed using a contactless card on a mobile application that runs on Oxfam-issued smartphones. The project has delivered the vouchers faster and at lower cost than previous cash and voucher humanitarian responses in the region. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Tropical Cyclone Harold struck Vanuatu's northern Samna province. Unblocked Cash responded to the acute impact of this storm, which worsened the economic impacts of COVID-19 for many.

Other common systems for cash delivery, such as electronic vouchers and prepaid debit cards, have not been available or are prohibitively expensive in the Pacific region. Blockchain is well-suited to contexts with a limited banking system, low capacity for cash delivery and great complexity in the logistics of registration and monitoring, such as sparsely populated remote-island communities. Households registered in the Unblocked Cash programme receive a unique encrypted digital wallet key, which ensures anonymity between household's details and their transaction numbers.

The project is financed by a pooled fund, which allows different donors to deposit funds and see where they go via the blockchain. This is now being replicated in Papua New Guinea, with the aim of scaling up across the region and beyond. Oxfam in Vanuatu and the World Bank Social Protection Unit (Pacific) are currently advocating with the Government of Vanuatu, which has only a few nascent social protection mechanisms in place.

## LESSONS LEARNED

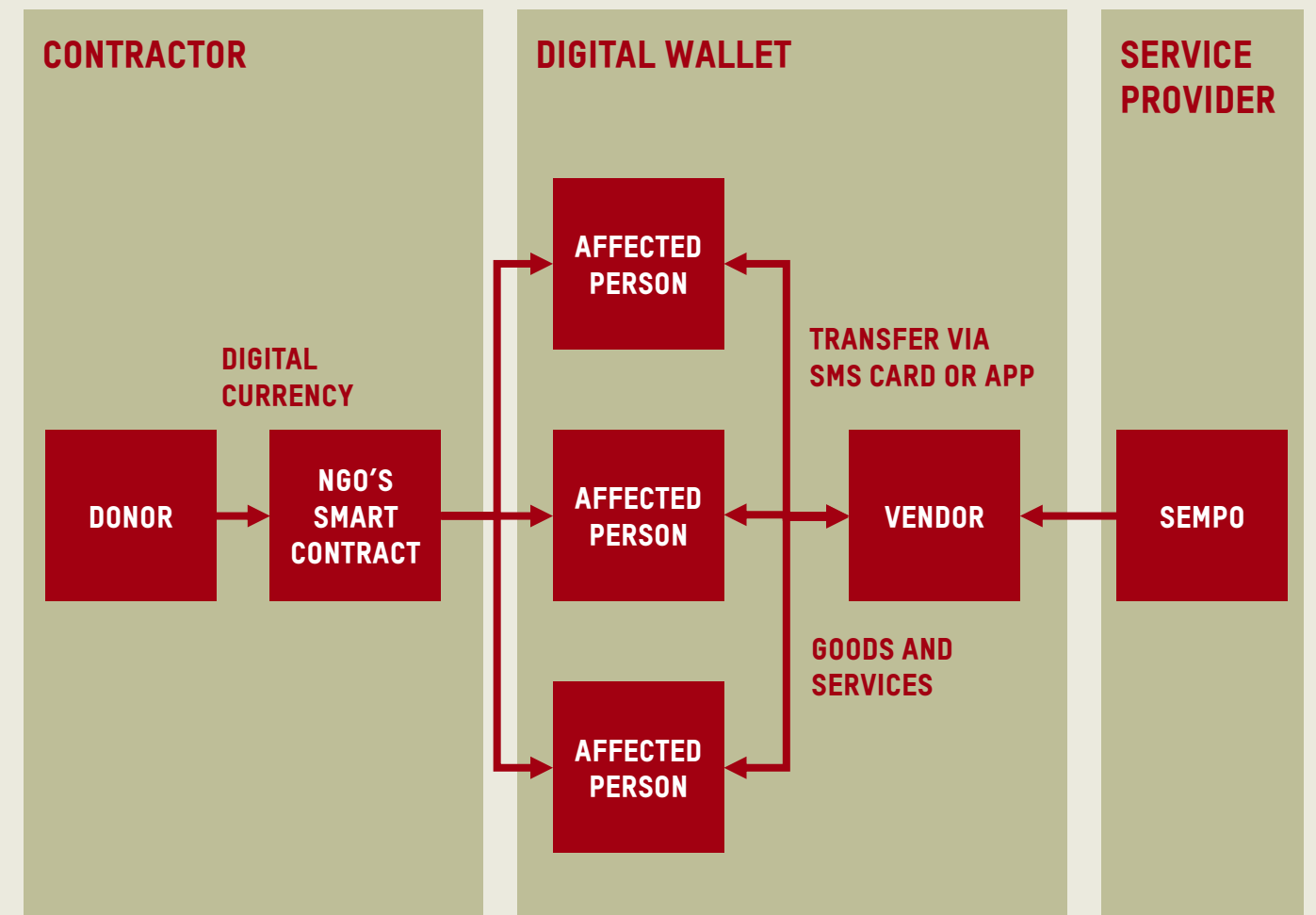
Digital registration and transfer systems can set the stage for functioning, transparent, inclusive and cost-effective social protection systems where traditional mechanisms for social assistance have proved complicated.<sup>16</sup> This could enable social protection in contexts with fluctuating currencies, limited banking infrastructure, or with protection risks to recipients around the handling of cash.

Blockchain and other digital systems can enable multiple actors to deliver money through a common system in a safe and transparent way without sharing identifiable details of recipients. Interoperable systems enable NGOs and governments to collaborate on social registries that can

be adapted to fit future social assistance programmes – and contribute to the goals of the Grand Bargain,<sup>17</sup> particularly under the UN Common Cash System and the NGO-led Collaborative Cash Delivery network.<sup>18</sup>

The pooled fund brings opportunities for a range of different actors – from the humanitarian, development and private sectors – to distribute money to the same recipients at different times. This provides potential for a social protection programme to be resourced by different funders, ready to meet acute or chronic needs, and supporting multi-year programmes or social assistance schemes to operate during and outside times of crisis.

**FIGURE 2: UNBLOCKED CASH PILOT SYSTEM DESIGN**





# MALAWI



Receiving cash transfers during COVID-19 in Machinga District. Credit: Oxfam in Malawi

## MINIMIZING THE IMPACT OF SHOCKS WITH INFORMAL PROTECTION

Oxfam in Malawi was concluding its emergency response to Cyclone Idai when the COVID-19 pandemic began. As part of the cyclone recovery, Oxfam was working with rural village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) in two districts, Nsanje and Phalombe, to build households' resilience. The follow-on project was revised to respond to COVID-19, and consolidate the cyclone recovery gains in Phalombe and support the response in Machinga district. This project funded cash transfers, VSLAs<sup>19</sup> and irrigation schemes

that boosted agricultural production, thus supplementing diets and generating income through sales, supporting food security and livelihoods. VSLA members raise capital, then borrow and repay loans at 5% interest, which is reinvested in the group. With the loans, VSLA members engage in selling biscuits, fish and farm produce sourced in nearby centres and sold in their villages. 98% of members are women.

However, COVID-19 restrictions prevented the VSLAs from meeting, limited movement and reduced participation in the irrigation schemes, because members were not confident that they would be able to sell their produce in markets.

A country-wide lockdown was successfully challenged in court, and essential VSLA support mechanisms were allowed to continue. Recognizing the risk to recovery that a collapse of VSLAs could cause, Oxfam humanitarian programmes supported five groups and five irrigation schemes with cash injections of 500,000 kwacha (\$647) to increase their capital base and material resources as well as protect community investments of time, labour and funds. Injecting cash into the VSLAs meant that there was more capital available to make loans so that members could purchase more at once and reduce the number of their trips, the cost of transportation and risk of exposure to COVID-19.

To limit negative coping mechanisms, the Oxfam team ran awareness campaigns to encourage girls to return to school quickly and worked with local community leaders to dissolve early marriages. In Machinga district, Oxfam supported 2,400 households with 15,000 kwacha in cash to cushion them from the impacts of COVID-19 on food security and livelihoods.

The project is implemented in conjunction with the government, which provides training and technical advice to support the VSLAs, and helps groups open bank accounts and establish operational policies. Oxfam undertakes assessments and develops selection criteria with the government and provides cash injections for the VSLAs. This improves transparency and ensures that operations are conducted in line with government strategies and policies. Upon Oxfam's exit, the government will continue monitoring and supporting through refresher trainings, including advice

on fund management.

## LESSONS LEARNED

In a context of compounded crises, supporting and providing a buffer for informal social protection mechanisms, such as VSLA programmes, minimized the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and helped communities stay on a path towards longer-term resilience and recovery.

A multi-faceted approach can be used to minimize negative coping strategies. VSLA members had access to training, public health messaging and larger loans, which enabled more flexibility and a means to adjust to increases in operating costs.

Supporting informal community-based mechanisms and advocating based on communities' needs raises awareness in government that communities would benefit from inclusion in longer-term social protection programmes and/or shock-responsive programmes based on risk, vulnerability and location. Links established during the project are opportunities for communities and governments to continue exchanging information.



# NEPAL

## ADVOCATING CASH-BASED SOCIAL TRANSFERS

Humanitarian cash transfers have been inhibited within Nepal's COVID-19 response. The national government required agencies to provide in-kind assistance to households based on concerns that the distribution of cash would be unsustainable after agencies exit.<sup>20</sup> Attempts to engage and influence the government were hindered by a lack of opportunities to meet in person due to pandemic restrictions. However, recognizing the additional struggles of people who normally live in difficult conditions, Oxfam strengthened advocacy efforts targeting the national government and local authorities on social protection and the use of cash transfers as a tool for social transfers.

Formal social protection programmes in Nepal are wide-ranging but limited in coverage. They include:

- labour market interventions;
- employment programmes;
- vocational training;
- social security and pension funds; and
- grants to children.

Informal workers represent 84% of Nepal's workforce and are among the country's most vulnerable people.<sup>21</sup> Despite social

protection being guaranteed by the national constitution – and supported by policies and laws including the Social Protection Act 2074, Social Protection Act 2075, Social Protection Procedure 2075, Child Act 2075 and the 15th National Plan – informal workers are not covered by Nepal's formal social protection systems.

Oxfam Nepal's strategy was to enable the government's social protection programme to scale up efficiently with a modality that was timely and appropriate. Cash meets those criteria, and it can achieve the objective by increasing its value and/or coverage. In this context, Oxfam Nepal has taken a two-pronged approach:

1. In advocacy, Oxfam represents NGOs on the Social Protection Task Team,<sup>22</sup> supports the Social Protection Civil Society Network<sup>23</sup> and aims to pursue a joint strategy with the national Cash Coordination Group<sup>24</sup> to support the scaling up of social assistance during shocks.

2. In its COVID-19 response programming, Oxfam has demonstrated that it is feasible to deliver cash transfers through a partnership with a local bank and network of agricultural cooperatives in one district. The lessons learned were shared with the government to improve their own capacity to deliver cash to the most remote areas.

Although the government has not changed its attitude towards humanitarian cash transfers, it has temporarily expanded social protection to informal sector workers who lost their jobs, offering minimum-wage positions in public employment programmes, or 25% of the local minimum wage if they choose not to participate in employment.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Oxfam has been able to influence local social assistance programmes in communities Oxfam and partners have been supporting for years.

## LESSONS LEARNED

It is important to consider how to respond to a government approach that does not align with the desired humanitarian approach. In Nepal, we had to consider whether the government's cash-for-work expansion

would be more appropriate than direct cash transfers in a pandemic. Then we had to align Oxfam's response while upholding our own principles: to save lives and livelihoods, while doing no harm, in the fastest and most effective way possible.

The relationships between Oxfam, partners, local stakeholders and government representatives are important for influencing, collaborating and gaining acceptance on social protection programmes.

Advocacy for social transfers, such as cash, and shock-responsive social protection systems has meant identifying existing systems, and barriers to their expansion and the use of cash. This allows the creation of advocacy strategies focusing on government actors to move Oxfam's initiative forward.



*Receiving e-voucher assistance, Sarlahi Municipality Nepal. Credit: Oxfam in Nepal*



# MOROCCO

## FROM SOCIAL PROTECTION ADVOCACY TO PROGRAMMING

Morocco's social protection law provides basic coverage for all Moroccan citizens; however, it denies social insurance to informal workers, who account for two thirds of households, and immigrants, who are not registered in the public system. Half of households lack access to public hospitals and the health system is wracked by delays. Many families fell into precariousness and extreme poverty when they lost their incomes due to the pandemic; markets function poorly; and a recent drought has compounded these problems. Despite the state response to COVID-19's impacts (e.g., compensation for job losses, and temporary tax arrangements), many people have lacked sufficient support.

Prior to the pandemic, Oxfam in Morocco had been advocating for universal social protection, including employment-related social protection for informal workers, and greater budget allocations for health. In 2020, Oxfam's advocacy approach to social protection expanded to include response programming. The latter facilitates access to basic needs where there are gaps in the government's social protection support. Oxfam worked with partners in nine areas – Jerada, Fez, Oujda, Tangiers, Azrou, Larache, Casablanca, Marrakech and Rabat – to

distribute cash, food parcels and protection kits to migrants, elderly people and people with disabilities. Maintaining a strong partnership with everyone was a priority for the team; however, this required addressing gaps in experience related to implementing direct humanitarian responses and cash transfers.

Alongside the cash and food transfers, the response provided:

- internet-enabled tablets to aid distance learning for children in isolated areas;
- voice and leadership facilitation for women within their communities; and
- remote protection assistance for women affected by domestic violence.

By providing transfers and complementary activities, the response emulates a basic package of social protection, including transfers, access to education and social services.

On the advocacy side, Oxfam continued to contribute to publications advocating the inclusion of vulnerable households in public assistance programmes. For example, we reported that a lack of identification documents for vulnerable households has been a challenge to individuals' ability

to access social assistance. In the medium term, Oxfam in Morocco and partners are focusing on access to sustainable livelihoods, particularly for young people and women. This includes advocating for income and services for all, and monitoring violations of workers' rights. Following measures taken by the Moroccan government to realize social protection as part of a long-term commitment, we will continue working with partners to reduce inequality by influencing the 'levers' that affect inequality, such as the right to public services, social protection for all, and access to economic opportunities such as decent work. Within the context of the pandemic, it means mobilizing all funding to support those currently excluded from the social protection system in meeting their basic needs and advocating for the government to provide universal social protection.

## LESSONS LEARNED

A strong advocacy base for social protection provides an entry point to initiate or expand humanitarian responses during crises periods and fill gaps in formal systems.

Partnership approaches are critical to smooth programming, for example switching from advocacy to humanitarian responses; however, it can be challenging to ensure that the necessary range of skills are available within a partnership when doing so. Working to better link humanitarian responses with longer-term advocacy in social protection reduces the risks of limited capacities when changing focus in response to a crisis.

Oxfam in Morocco's work illustrates the

fluidity of the 'humanitarian-development nexus approach' and how to switch between social protection influencing and humanitarian response. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the team combined a short-term multi-sector humanitarian response with their long-term vision to help realize the right to social protection for everyone.

Oxfam's expertise in humanitarian action and links with donors have strengthened the ability to mobilize to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on Morocco's most vulnerable people. Working with civil society actors and partners close to citizens made it possible to quickly identify needs and risks, and provide the necessary support, and assistance while further refining our approach.



*Solidarity project, Oxfam in Morocco. Credit: Oxfam in Morocco.*



# CAMBODIA

## SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Across the Mekong region, Oxfam has been working in partnership with local actors in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam on a regional programme of social protection for informal and marginalized workers. This involves mobilizing and organizing workers' groups and building awareness of their rights to social protection. It also requires supporting workers to build stronger leadership representing their rights, particularly for women. At the national level, Oxfam and partners work to empower marginalized workers and ensure opportunities to share needs and concerns by creating platforms and strengthening coalitions. At the regional level, the programme is a collaboration with three partners,<sup>26</sup> strengthening networks and jointly monitoring the roll out of the ASEAN Action Plan for Social Protection.<sup>27</sup>

In Cambodia, this led to the inclusion of domestic workers and small business owners – such as tuk-tuk drivers and street-food sellers – in Cambodia's revised social security law, allowing them to access social protection benefits. Advocacy also includes efforts to link social protection and unpaid care work, particularly in the context of COVID-19, and prioritize this in on ASEAN's agenda. In the future, Oxfam teams in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam plan to expand

the focus on the right to social protection by exploring how workers in food supply chains – such as small-scale farmers, producers and waged workers – can access social protection.

To support its advocacy, Oxfam also works on sustainable financing for social protection, representing civil society organizations (CSOs) from Cambodia as part of the Global Coalition of Social Protection Floors,<sup>28</sup> a nine-country project coordinated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF to engage with the government on public finance management, and ensure sustained, social protection.<sup>29</sup> This involves building collaborative platforms and spaces for CSOs to increase their understanding of public finance management, by providing trainings and facilitating dialogues with the government.

Under a project to deliver an EU-funded COVID-19 response in Cambodia, Oxfam supports CSOs' role in ensuring government accountability. Oxfam is bringing together groups representing the full range of society – including the elderly, people with disabilities, young people, marginalized urban groups and urban/rural workers' groups – to increase representation in social dialogue with policy makers and improve access to the government's social protection benefits under its COVID-19 recovery response.

This includes building awareness of, and promoting mechanisms for, CSOs' participation in the design and delivery of an inclusive, rights-based and shock-responsive social protection system, supporting access to social protection benefits, as well as establishing a social accountability mechanism for social protection. While there has been some social accountability in other basic services (health and education), this is a first for social protection in Cambodia.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Strengthening the growing social protection movement in the Mekong region requires Oxfam and other stakeholders supporting the capacity of CSOs, workers' groups, unions and associations to improve their policy analysis, gender analysis and use of new technologies – and to develop

influencing strategies for social protection.

Oxfam plays an important role in supporting this capacity building, the development of long-term strategies, and in influencing.

Increasing inclusion of social protection in government narratives through advocacy requires building strong coalitions with wider constituencies of workers' groups from various sectors. This takes time and requires a long-term commitment.

Using what we have learned to develop strategies to make social protection more inclusive links Oxfam's role as an intermediary to our broader social protection objectives.



*Nep Soeun is a street vendor selling fruit in Psar Demkor Market in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. She is a local leader of a street workers group, supported by Oxfam's partner, the Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association promoting the rights of informal economy workers to social protection. Credit: Oxfam in Cambodia*



# TIMOR-LESTE

## INFLUENCING THROUGH SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS

In 2020, an unexpected coalition government in Timor-Leste formed after the previous coalition collapsed. The new government proposed a defamation law during the COVID-19 state of emergency that threatened to curb the freedom of civil society; however, it was shelved after a public outcry.<sup>38</sup> Contrarily, a greater appreciation emerged for civil society's role in delivery and social accountability in response to the pandemic.<sup>39</sup>

Initially, the government focused on COVID-19's health implications. Recognizing the unaddressed economic impact on individuals, households and communities, CSOs started to fill gaps, delivering food and COVID-19 prevention equipment to households, and supported wider measures. The government recognized civil society's important role during this time. Many CSOs gained exposure as key actors in national and municipal COVID-19 taskforces, influencing future response packages.

Oxfam's social protection work in Timor-Leste recognized the space for civil society and focused primarily on advocacy over delivery. Oxfam supported CSOs to organize, monitor and influence government

stakeholders on social protection. CSOs rapidly coordinated into a united front to deliver services, establish dialogue with government counterparts, increase spaces for alternative voices on COVID-19 and build community cohesion. Civil society actors in coalition, supported by Oxfam, established a COVID-19 Impact Information Centre,<sup>40</sup> to share information and discuss issues related to the response. This gave space to diverse voices including women, people with disabilities, farmers and informal sector workers. This united front held the government to account on its promise to deliver social protection during the crisis, with a former prime minister and leader of the government's response outlining that the role the Centre played was of importance.

Opportunities for civil society to engage with the government and play a formal and influential role in COVID-19 planning and response emerged as the state of emergency progressed. One example was monitoring social protection household payments and consultation on the COVID-19 economic recovery plan.<sup>41</sup> CSOs were also part of successful efforts to influence the government to change their approach in the provision of a second round of social protection support to cover the many households missed by its economic support plan – and moving from cash transfers

to formally registered heads of households to the provision of food baskets to individual people within households.<sup>42</sup> The new system, *Cesta Basiku*, is imperfect, but nonetheless more inclusive.

## LESSONS LEARNED

CSOs can play an important role in helping governments deliver to the last mile, or in filling gaps when social protection systems are inadequate, especially during crises.

It is important to collaborate with other NGOs and to hold governments to account for delivering social protection. This makes their voices difficult to suppress, even in the face of attempts to silence them.

It is imperative for Oxfam and others to work on social protection as a right, so that it is accessible – and budgets are maintained – for vulnerable groups, so that no-one is left behind in a just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social accountability and healthy collaboration between citizens, civil society and government to deliver, support and preserve people's rights is deeply valuable.<sup>43</sup>



*Olga Godinho Moniz, a vegetable seller at Taibesi market who benefited from expanded social protection scheme for informal workers during COVID-19, Timor-Leste. Credit: Oxfam in Timor-Leste/Zevonia Viera*



# IRAQ

## THE TRANSITION BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AND FORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Iraq is still in a period of recovery from conflict, ethnic and religious sectarian violence, and large-scale displacement. Underfunded humanitarian assistance cannot substitute for the stable, sustainable provision of services. So, while humanitarian actors continue meeting humanitarian needs, they are also exploring how to transition those with chronic needs to the shaky state social protection system.<sup>30</sup> Cash transfers became essential during the COVID-19 pandemic due to its socioeconomic impact on vulnerable households, and the government's limited ability to respond. An Oxfam reassessment of 9,124 households found that household vulnerability had increased significantly, including significant losses to incomes and the ability to meet basic needs. As local markets remained open and functional during the pandemic, this suggests that the latter was not due to the unavailability of products, but a lack of financial resources. To this extent, cash transfers provided a much-needed resource to protect households from the worst effects of COVID-19, while supporting local economies.

Iraq's social protection network is a web of government contributory and non-

contributory programmes and policies run by a plethora of ministries,<sup>31</sup> covering:

- universal food subsidies;
- poverty-targeted quarterly cash transfers;
- unemployment assistance;
- disability allowance for caregivers;
- food, cash and non-food items for displaced people and returnees; and
- free healthcare and vaccinations for pregnant women and new mothers.

Across these programmes, there are high levels of exclusion due to substantial waiting lists, insufficient funding and registration lists that are rarely updated.

Oxfam joined the Cash Consortium of Iraq (CCI)<sup>32</sup> in 2016. The CCI aims to build a harmonized approach among Cash Working Group members to improve impact, encourage closer operational procedures, and coordinate and expand geographic reach. It provides monthly transfers to households based on a survival minimum expenditure basket reviewed annually, and legal assistance to help recover documents necessary for free movement and to access basic services and social protection.

Its targeting model combines a proxy means test and a coping strategies index that was adopted in 2017 by all humanitarian cash actors in Iraq (and revised in 2018).<sup>33</sup>

In 2018, the CCI began work to transition humanitarian recipients onto the government's Social Protection Network. The CCI first identified overlaps in targeting methods between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' (MoLSA) social safety net and non-governmental humanitarian cash transfers. They redesigned their targeting methodology to focus more on the consumption of goods and services, and a revised their vulnerability profile to identify whether a case was eligible to refer from humanitarian cash programmes to government assistance. This was used to advocate for an expansion of government social assistance and the coordination of information management, legal assistance and referral pathways between NGOs and the government, as well as capacity building to enable this. Subsequently the CCI worked towards a replica of the MoLSA application form, in order to enable interoperability of the humanitarian and social protection databases.

However, a lack of political will, the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors have delayed the referral and transition process coming to fruition. Iraq's economy has suffered significantly due to the pandemic, which has put additional pressure on government budgets. In addition, even attention was diverted from referral discussions.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Aligning humanitarian cohorts with

government social assistance is critically important for transitioning out of humanitarian support, particularly in fragile contexts with high levels of vulnerability that are liable to increase at the slightest shock.

Such alignment requires a committed action plan, time and early consideration of how government and humanitarian systems can work together (e.g., interoperability and targeting); consideration of a government's capacity and political will; and sufficient funding for the social protection system. This needs coordination between humanitarian and development donors, which is happening gradually in Iraq.

The delays experienced in transitioning eligible households from humanitarian support to social protection highlights the need to be realistic with expectations and acknowledging the time needed to build necessary political will.

**Figure 3: Ministries responsible for elements of social assistance in Iraq**

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME	RESPONSIBLE MINISTRY
Public distribution system	Ministry of Trade
Social Safety Net	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
Displacement allowance	Ministry of Displacement and Migration
Women's Health Card	Ministry of Health



# OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY



*Dima is a university student at Birzeit University. As a Palestinian, Dima is forbidden to travel or to move from one city to another. Credit: Samar Hazboun.*

## CIVIL SOCIETY, INCLUSIVE, AND SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip is in a state of chronic crisis. The prolonged and deep vulnerability of OPT is due to the ongoing Israeli blockade, conflict and deteriorated economy, and has resulted in high levels of poverty, unemployment and the inability of many to meet their immediate needs. The already severe lack of access to quality food, healthcare, education and protection has been further constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Oxfam's 2020 research<sup>34</sup> in Gaza revealed a 'new poor' group that includes previously salaried workers and businesspeople. Those in this group are typically ineligible or on long waiting lists for national social protection support due to a lack of data; non-responsive targeting mechanisms; a lack of financial resources and limited fiscal space; and limited capacity and resources to support social protection with all its complexities, especially with administration related to the ongoing political division between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Raising the voice of people in this group is a first step to overcoming their exclusion from services. Oxfam has been working with civil society partners to advocate, develop policy recommendations and facilitate an inclusive, accountable and shock-responsive social protection approach. Currently a EU-funded project is being delivered by ILO, UNICEF and Oxfam will focus on coherence across the range of formal social protection interventions and capacity to be responsive to shocks. Oxfam's role is in part to act as a facilitator for CSOs and local communities that otherwise may not have equal space to engage in the discussions.

Alongside efforts to tackle exclusion, partners are exploring concrete steps to address issues in the national social protection system's targeting, searching for practical ways to bridge the gap between humanitarian short-term social assistance-like cash transfers provided by the UN, INGOS, and NGOs - and longer-term formal social protection systems.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic response in Gaza is an example of how a government in a fragile context may not be able to expand social protection coverage to meet the economic and social impacts of a crisis.

Oxfam and other actors must prioritize a two-pronged approach; (1) meeting the needs of newly vulnerable people excluded from the existing systems, and (2) advocating for better and more inclusive shock-responsive systems in the future.

Working on humanitarian responses alone is

not enough. This case highlights the invisible line between humanitarian and development work, particularly in protracted crises. Project design requires a long-term approach that addresses systemic issues, like social protection systems, as well as flexible funding pipelines that both humanitarian and development donors can use to support a mix of responses, advocacy and longer-term programming. In OPT this has been possible: humanitarian donors have funded a response applying a more 'developmental' approach to social protection.



# SOMALIA

## FOUNDATIONS FOR AN URBAN SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Like other parts of East Africa, COVID-19 intensified a pre-existing multi-causal crisis in Somalia, where 5.2 million people were already in need of humanitarian support due to decades of drought, prolonged conflict and locust infestations. Oxfam Somalia and partners worked quickly to identify a gap in the social protection system for individuals in urban areas and implemented the first safety net programme for urban households in Somalia in September 2020.

The aim of the project was to provide households with regular cash transfers to support them during the first five months of the COVID-19 crisis. As time passed, an additional goal evolved – to support the governments of Somaliland and Puntland to develop their social protection systems. What distinguishes this humanitarian social protection project from conventional humanitarian cash transfers is that its objective was to be the basis for a future permanent government social assistance scheme targeting urban vulnerable communities. The project was delivered through the Somaliland and Puntland governments' Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs (MOSLA), with technical support from Oxfam. MOSLA led the entire process, including community engagement,

targeting, registration, and management of complaints. Oxfam validated the selection of affected people managed the delivery of was in partnership with local mobile phone network Telesom. The accountability mechanism for the programme was led by local partners.

Across seven urban areas in Somaliland and Puntland, 2,320 households received five rounds of \$30.<sup>35</sup> In a recent learning event, recipients expressed the importance of urban social protection programmes for providing a cushion during crises, and the importance of expanding similar programmes to include longer-term assistance to address livelihoods crises.

Although the cash transfer value in this pilot was insufficient to meet the full range of needs vulnerable urban households face, it supported urban areas that were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It partially covered their basic food needs for affected people that were previously overlooked by social assistance programmes in Somalia.

Accountability for the project is run by a team of local partners using Oxfam's 'Your Word Counts' methodology.<sup>36</sup> The team manages a toll-free hotline to receive complaints and feedback, then reviews and addresses issues raised by communities.

The responsiveness of this system is measured on an accountability dashboard, and the aggregated data is shared internally and in monthly reports to recipients and donors. The system can also help with safeguarding,<sup>37</sup> which has been particularly important during the pandemic because there was less direct contact with affected people.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Crises provide opportunities to improve existing systems. In Somalia, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that social protection for previously overlooked urban areas became a critical issue because of impacts on livelihoods and food sources. Programmes addressing the urban gap in social assistance were able to set the stage for future safety net programmes that include urban areas.

The limited value and number of transfers fell short of the needs faced by urban communities, highlighting the importance of advocacy and policy efforts aimed at generating a longer-term commitment to urban social assistance and shock responsiveness in Somaliland and Puntland. This is particularly relevant as compounded crises in Somaliland are spurring urbanization.

Sustainable social safety net programmes require government collaboration. The openness of the government is essential for us to engage, co-design and embed programmes. Linking humanitarian responses to longer-term social protection in this way supports the development of social protection systems and establishes accountability mechanisms.



*Somali program participant. Credit: Oxfam/Abdiaziz*



# CENTRAL AMERICA

## TARGETING FOOD SECURITY INTERVENTIONS WITH REMOTE SELECTION

In 2019, about 2 million people were food insecure in Central America.<sup>44</sup> In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and two category-5 hurricanes (Eta and Iota) pushed this number up to 4.4 million.<sup>45</sup> In response, Oxfam launched short-term social protection projects in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, funded by ECHO, SIDA, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies and Oxfam itself.

The programme combined in-kind and cash based food assistance with a acute malnutrition referral program referring cases

to Government ministries within the social protection systems. Oxfam, its local partner organizations and international NGOs<sup>46</sup> jointly selected the households most vulnerable to food insecurity by prioritizing indicators (food consumption scores, coping strategies, etc.), and using standardized information- collection methodologies for all countries.

To ensure safety in the context of the pandemic, a remote household selection methodology was used. A specific protocol was used to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission for households that could not be remotely assessed.

The remote selection of households was carried out in coordination with local partners, who installed COVID-secure telephone booths so that a representative from each prioritized household could respond to the survey.

After selecting the households, the modality for food assistance was defined: in some countries this was in-kind (i.e., food rations) due to mobility restrictions, fluctuations in the availability and prices of food in local markets and the risk of COVID-19.<sup>47</sup> In other countries, cash transfers were used.

In total, 22,144 people received \$16 per person per month (or its equivalent in kind) for the four months of the seasonal hunger period.<sup>48</sup> This assistance was accompanied by the provision of COVID-19 prevention kits (bath soap, masks, bleach and alcohol gel) and nutritional monitoring for children under five years. Government ministries were supported in the identification and referral of cases of acute malnutrition, promoting timely care.

The humanitarian assistance model implemented in Oxfam's programmes in Central America has proven to be effective in reducing acute malnutrition in under-fives in populations constantly affected by disasters.<sup>49</sup> Oxfam has been promoting this model<sup>50</sup> as an option to adapt state social protection programmes so that they are able to effectively cover the food gap.

In Central America, state social protection programmes have focused on conditional cash transfers. Although these programmes have been implemented for more than a decade design deficiencies, clientelism, corruption and a lack of political will have undermined their potential to reduce poverty.

In this context, a social audit process was launched in Guatemala in collaboration with CSOs to assess the quality and effectiveness of government social protection measures intended to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 restrictions. The audit revealed an increase in food insecurity and barriers faced by the most vulnerable households to access the social protection programmes,<sup>51</sup> and problems related to their design.<sup>52</sup>

The social protection programmes promoted by the government were directly linked to energy consumption, leaving out the most vulnerable households in the country who mostly lack access to electricity; in addition, registration depended directly on having access to internet or telephone services.

This evidence supported a debate in political and technical spaces on the need to restructure state social protection programmes to improve their targeting, and review the amount, periodicity and predictability of cash transfers, among other key aspects.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The success of reducing malnutrition in children under five years old through limited interventions in the hunger season during the COVID-19 pandemic increased trust in Oxfam and lent credibility to social audits. This in turn provided an opportunity for discussion on the potential for improved service delivery with governments and other key stakeholders.

Using the stories of everyday people as a means of illustrating data was a powerful tool for presenting evidence. This human touch shows why and how the expansion of social protection is essential and generates momentum for dialogue.



Covid-19 prevention workshops and food assistance distribution in the communities of the municipality of Jocotán, Guatemala. Photo: 2020 European Union (S.Billy)



**LVI**  
Rifil  
long ples ia

**BANK SOUTH PACIFIC**

**DO! AD!**

Tanna, Vanuatu: Iato Sandrina works at Bill Lapsen store, one of Lenekels unblocked cash vendors. Credit: Oxfam in Vanuatu/Arlene Bax

NEW ZEALAND  
AUSTRALIAN  
OXFAM

**UNBLOCKED CASH**  
POWERED BY VENDOR

**VENDOR**  
for COVID-19 & TC Harold Response

Digital





# KEY CONSIDERATIONS: APPLYING A SOCIAL PROTECTION APPROACH



*Oxfam in Vanuatu partners for the UnBlocked Cash TC Harold and Covid-19 response.  
Credit: Arlene Bax/Oxfam in Vanuatu*

## UNDERSTANDING WHO IS EXCLUDED

Understanding who is excluded from assistance- as opposed to who is wrongly included- is an important approach to targeting. As Oxfam's work in OPT showed, the pandemic has pushed people into poverty that were not previously included in social protection systems under existing targeting criteria. At the same time, as Oxfam experienced in Kenya, accurate targeting is costly and can delay implementation. We must plan for design targeting in ways that reach the excluded. Finally, we must identify and advocate for those requiring long-term state social assistance after humanitarian support leaves, as in Iraq.

## GOING DIGITAL

Humanitarian assistance is increasingly drawing on digital technology as a tool to improve responses, as seen in Vanuatu. When it is safe to do so, we should share our knowledge of digital advances with governments, so that they can improve their social protection systems. We should also work to strengthen the capacities of governments, partner organizations, and other stakeholders on data rights and protection. We must also focus on people currently outside of digital reach and work on the digital inclusion of marginalized communities.

## SOCIAL PROTECTION BEYOND CASH

Cash is one of many potential entry points for linking humanitarian responses to social protection systems. By thinking beyond cash, humanitarian actors can engage in multiple areas of social protection. For example, in Kenya we supported those affected by the 'shadow pandemic' of sexual and gender-based violence to access essential services<sup>53</sup> and in Central America facilitated access for cases of severe malnutrition to specialized services. Our work on food assistance, water and sanitation, and livelihoods are all essential to people's rights to Social protection and provide an opportunity to connect and build synergies between programs. Oxfam's social protection framework can help explore such entry points for social protection in humanitarian work.

## MAINSTREAMING SOCIAL PROTECTION INTO HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES

The cases of Kenya, Cambodia, Somalia, Lebanon and Morocco illustrate how social protection can contribute local humanitarian leadership by strengthening the capacity of local mechanisms to respond to crises. These examples also show how social protection can contribute to improving issues related to gender and inequality, the delivery of basic services, and a humanitarian-development nexus approach. Social protection therefore must be integrated into the way that we plan and deliver humanitarian responses. This does not mean that we can or should always engage with social protection systems directly, but we must assess whether they can improve the assistance to people in

crisis. This does not necessarily demand big changes; it could for example involve tweaking existing program designs, such as in Somalia.

## THE CYCLE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES AND ADVOCACY

Oxfam's work on social protection in humanitarian contexts highlights the mutually supportive relationship between policy, advocacy, and programming. This includes:

- ✿ Recognizing informal social protection systems. Build and ensure social reciprocity system are not undermined in face of formal social protection. To harness community self-resilience. Foster inclusive informal social protection.
- ✿ Engaging with formal social protection systems in programs. Improve existing social protection systems: accountability, targeting, registration. Deliver through existing systems to speed responses. Share learning and consider where humanitarian responses can be a foundation for future social protection structures.
- ✿ Advocating for inclusive shock-responsive social protection. The right to social protection for all even in crisis, including refugees and other displaced people. Strengthening the capacity of individuals to realize their rights to and demand for social protection. Advocating for sustainable funding: progressive taxation, committed budgets, global funds to support shock-responsive social protection.



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Engaging with social protection takes time and can be complex. It requires relationships with governments, civil society and communities. As these case studies illustrate, social protection programmes in humanitarian responses are diverse in their approaches and objectives.

Effectively working with a social protection lens<sup>54</sup> means thinking about social protection in all phases of a response; collaborating with stakeholders from civil society, to government, to private sector partners; and sustainability of in programme design and implementation.

Social protection has been a more accessible tool in Oxfam's COVID-19 responses where Oxfam has established relations with relevant authorities, such as in Cambodia, Kenya, OPT and Timor-Leste. Recognizing the role pre-existing relationships play suggests that development colleagues and local partners should continue to share their existing relationships with humanitarian colleagues in order to facilitate smoother responses.

Social protection contributes to meeting people's needs and building their resilience to shocks. Having access to social protection when and where it is part of crisis prevention and anticipatory action. For example livelihood and income losses are a critical component of social protection systems and enable people to absorb economic shocks. Shock-responsive social

protection should be considered pre-emptively, and not just reactive, allowing people to better prepare for and withstand crises.

Providing more effective, appropriate and sustainable assistance means connecting humanitarian programmes with social protection systems. In support of this humanitarian, development, and advocacy teams should continue to:

- Design programs in consideration of social protection and a 'cash+' approach.<sup>54</sup> Especially in countries where government social protection programmes exist or are feasible. Aiming to ensure people receive more than one benefit is part of a comprehensive social protection package.
- Advocate for more sustainable global funding for shock-responsive social protection, and the Global Fund for Social Protection.<sup>55</sup>
- Embrace the principle that refugees and migrants must receive their universal right to social protection, regardless of where they are and who funds it.
- Advocate for and fill gaps in social protection packages for children, people with disabilities, informal workers, care providers, and older persons.



*Assessing health centers in Diyala, Iraq - Covid-19 response*

- Ensure space for civil society to advocate for, design, and monitor social protection. This is essential for the longevity, public support, trust and effectiveness of social protection interventions.<sup>56</sup>
- Include social accountability mechanisms and facilitate participation by civil society.
- Promote gender aware and transformative approaches to social protection which allow women and other marginalized groups to cope during economic and social crises. This includes recognizing the burden of unpaid care work<sup>57</sup>.

provide life-saving support faster than the conventional humanitarian system, facilitate scale and inclusion, bridge immediate with longer-term needs and over-time shape accountable rights based systems.

As humanitarian non-state actors, we can ask questions about how to engage in social protection and about what systems are already in place. Working closely with and in support of social protection can



## FOOTNOTES

1. [International Labour Organization \(ILO\). \(2017\). World Social Protection Report 2017–19.](#)
2. ALNAP (2018) The State of the Humanitarian System: Summary. London: ALNAP/ODI. P.14-15. For additional information on social protection. See also: Liliana Marcos Barba, Hilde van Regenmortel and Ellen Ehmke. (2020). Shelter from the storm: The global need for universal social protection in times of COVID-19, Summary. Oxfam. P 6.
3. [L. Gikandi. \(2020\). COVID-19 and Vulnerable, Hardworking Kenyans: Why it’s time for a social protection plan. Oxfam.](#)
4. The seven NGO partners were ACTED, Concern, the Center for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), IMPACT initiatives, the Kenya Red Cross Society, Oxfam and the Wangu Kanja Foundation (WKF).
5. [See: Republic of Kenya, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection / State Department of Social Protection FAQs online](#)
6. [L. Gikandi. \(2020\). COVID-19 and Vulnerable, Hardworking Kenyans: Why it’s time for a strong social protection plan. Oxfam. p. 8. For more on SGBV in Kenya during the pandemic](#)
7. [Oxfam. \(2021\). ‘Raising the Social Protection Floor’ Conference Report.](#)
8. [N. Rugene. \(2020, September 23\). Expand social protection to cushion vulnerable groups of post-Covid-19. Daily Nation.](#)
9. [N. Rugene. \(2020, October 6\). Release statistics on the COVID-19 sexual and gender-based violence. Daily Nation](#)
10. [L. Gikandi. \(2020, October 28\). The unspoken inequality of the COVID-19 pandemic. Citizen Digital.](#)
11. [Oxfam in Kenya. \(2020a\). Surviving the Pandemic: Sarah’s Story. \[video content\]. Surviving the Pandemic: Anne’s Story. \[video content\]. Surviving the Pandemic: Amina’s Story. \[video content\].](#)
12. [Gikandi, Levi. \(2018\). COVID-19 and Vulnerable, Hardworking Kenyans: Why it’s time for a strong social protection plan. Kenya: ACTED, Concern Worldwide, IMPACT initiatives, Kenya Red Cross, Oxfam, The Centre for Rights, Education and Awareness \(CREAW\), Wa](#)
13. Oxfam in Lebanon. (2021). Beirut Sitrep. 5 February 2021. Internal document.
14. [See also: D. Abed, M. Baroud and F. Moussawi. \(2020\). Inequality in Lebanon: Questioning labor, social spending, and taxation. Oxfam and Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs.](#)
15. Vanuatu Christian Council, ADRA, World Vision, Save the Children, Vanuatu Red Cross, Vanuatu Society for People with Disabilities, Vanuatu Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association, ViewPX, Vanuatu Business Resilience Council, Digicel, Barrett & Partners and National Bank of Vanuatu, with funding from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the New Zealand government.
16. Documents supporting Vanuatu case study include:  
[Consensys. \(n.d.\). Project Unblocked Cash: Blockchain Case Study for NGOs.](#)  
[B. Rust. \(2019\). Unblocked Cash: Piloting Accelerated Cash Transfer Delivery in Vanuatu. Oxfam](#)  
[S. Uwantege Hart. \(2019\). Betting on blockchain to deliver cash in the Pacific. Oxfam blog.](#)  
[ConsenSysMedia. \(2019\). Blockchain and How It Can Transform Humanitarian Cash Transfers in Vanuatu. \[video content\]. VCCI Vanuatu. \(2020\). OXFAM Unblocked Cash – VANUATU. \[video content\]](#)
17. [V. Metcalfe-Hough, W. Fenton, B. Willitts-King and A. Spencer. \(2020\). Grand Bargain annual independent report 2020. Humanitarian Policy Group.](#)
18. [UNOCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. \(2020\). UN Common Cash Statement \(UNCCS\): Questions & Answers.](#)
19. Village savings and loans associations and rotating savings and credit associations – VSLAs, and rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs) are community mechanisms in which members contribute small regular cash deposits to a shared ‘pot’, from which they can take out loans to manage household-level shocks and/or invest in small-scale assets or income-generating opportunities when needed. Commonly used in development programmes, VSLAs and ROSCAs are one form of community-based social protection – and an example of an informal (i.e. non-state) social insurance mechanism.
20. Based on conversations with Government of Nepal authorities.
21. [International Labour Organization \(ILO\). \(n.d.\). Social Protection: Nepal.](#)
22. First initiated in 2009, the Social Protection Task Team is a group of development agencies – including UNICEF, ILO, Asian Development Bank, DFID/FCDO, World Bank, UN Capital Development Fund, WHO, GIZ and WFP – responsible for the initial drafting of the National Social Protection Framework for Nepal.
23. The Social Protection Civil Society Network is a forum comprising of NGOs and CSOs dedicated to improving social protection programmes in Nepal, established in February 2012.
24. The Cash Coordination Group (CCG) in Nepal was set up after the earthquake in 2015, under a UNOCHA cash coordinator, without any pre-existing coordination structure or mechanism for emergency cash transfers. CCG membership included UN agencies, the Red Cross, and international and national NGOs.
25. [International Labour Organization \(ILO\). \(n.d.\). Social Protection: Nepal.](#)
26. Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC), Street Network International and the Mekong Migration Network.
27. [ASEAN. \(2016\). Regional Framework and Action Plan to Implement the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection.](#)
28. [The Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors website](#)
29. [The Social Protection & Public Finance Management website](#)
30. Oxfam in Iraq. (2018). Social Protection and Humanitarian Cash in Iraq: Towards Responsible Transition.
31. [E. Savage. \(2020\). Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection in Iraq. Cash Learning Partnership.](#)
32. The CCI members are Mercy Corps as the lead agency, Oxfam, the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the International Rescue Committee
33. Ibid. p. 16.
34. [M. Barghouti, N. Said-Fogahaa, S. Said and B. Thue. \(2020\). Responsiveness of the Palestinian National Cash Programme to Shifting Vulnerabilities in the Gaza Strip. Oxfam.](#)
35. Five cash transfer rounds over five months using the government standard value of thirty dollars per month.
36. [A. Swairjo. \(2019\). Listening to Gaza’s farmers: Keeping Oxfam accountable to communities. Elhra blog. & Elrha. \(2019\). Responsive listening through improved feedback mechanisms.](#)
37. [E. Tomkys Valteri. \(N.D.\). Safeguarding: Communities trust in our ability to listen, react and respond is key. Elhra blog.](#)
38. [C. Brazil Bautista. \(2021, January 9\). Timor-Leste shelves controversial draft defamation law. What came before and what comes next? Asia Democracy Chronicles.](#)
39. [Adapted from: A. Sloman. \(2021, February 8\). Civic space in Timor-Leste during COVID-19 Part 1: Governance and civil society. New Mandala.](#)
40. Comprising members the NGO forum, the social accountability network Core Group Transparency, the education network Rede Edukasau, the national organization for people with disabilities, Ra’es Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO), and a local NGO, Lao Hamutuk
41. [A. Sloman. \(2021, February 8\). Civic space in Timor-Leste during COVID-19 Part 1. Governance and civil society. New Mandala](#)
42. Exclusion errors were mostly a result of failures to capture diverse or hidden circumstances, such as women who had left their husbands due to violence, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, or large households.
43. [A. Sloman. \(2021, February 10\). Civic space in Timor-Leste during COVID-19 Part 2: Access and equity. New Mandala.](#)
44. [Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises \(2019\). Global Report on Food Crisis](#)
45. [Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises \(2020\). Global Report on Food Crisis](#)
46. Accion contra el Hambre (ACH), Gruppo di Volontariato Civile (GVC), Médecins du Monde (Mdm), Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), Save the Children and Trocaire
47. [I. Aguilar. \(2020a\). Primer Informe de Monitoreo de Mercados. \[First Market Monitoring Report\]. Oxfam. Spanish](#)
48. The seasonal hunger period corresponds to the time of the year when rural households in a situation of greater food vulnerability have depleted their annual reserves of food for self-consumption and experience a substantial reduction in income due to the seasonal decrease in the supply of employment in agricultural work; in other words, it is a period of food stress suffered annually by households living in poverty or extreme poverty. This period is extended and exacerbated either when food production for self-consumption is affected by floods or droughts, by the increase in food prices, by the reduction in the supply of temporary employment in the agricultural sector or by a combination of these factors, as has happened during the last 10 years in the dry corridor of Central America.
49. [I. Aguilar and J. Pernillo. \(2019\). Las intermitencias del hambre: Tendencias de la Desnutrición Crónica y Aguda en el Corredor Seco de Guatemala \[The Intermittences of Hunger: Trends in chronic and acute malnutrition in the Dry Corridor of Guatemala\].](#)
50. The model used consists of covering the food gap in the critical period of food shortage with unconditional cash transfers, the supply of complementary food (fortified flour) for children under 5 years and pregnant or lactating women. The humanitarian assistance package focuses on households in CIF3 or more and/or households with children with acute malnutrition or at high risk of suffering it. This process is complemented by strengthening the capacity of local public health services for the identification, referral and treatment of acutely malnourished children.
51. [I. Aguilar. \(2020b\). El hambre es la medida del COVID-19: Incremento de la población que requiere asistencia alimentaria en el Corredor Seco de Guatemala. \[Hunger is the measure of COVID-19: Increase in the population that requires food assistance in the](#)
52. [Nómada and Oxfam. \(2020\). Cómo come mamá \[How mama eats\]. Spanish.](#)
53. [UN Women. \(n.d.\). The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19.](#)
54. Cash first refers to a policy that considers cash as a primary response modality, if appropriate, feasible and a cost effective option for the context.
55. [Markus 2021, Global Fund for Social Protection: Social security for all.](#)
56. Adapted from [Oxfam. \(2020\). Shelter from the Storm. The global need for universal social protection in times of COVID-19](#)
57. Ibid.



Oxfam is an international confederation of 20 organizations networked together in 67 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty. Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit: [www.Oxfam.org](http://www.Oxfam.org)

Oxfam America ([www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org))  
Oxfam Australia ([www.oxfam.org.au](http://www.oxfam.org.au))  
Oxfam-in-Belgium ([www.oxfamsol.be](http://www.oxfamsol.be))  
Oxfam Brazil ([www.oxfam.org.br](http://www.oxfam.org.br))  
Oxfam Canada ([www.oxfam.ca](http://www.oxfam.ca))  
Oxfam France ([www.oxfamfrance.org](http://www.oxfamfrance.org))  
Oxfam Germany ([www.oxfam.de](http://www.oxfam.de))

Oxfam GB ([www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk))  
Oxfam Hong Kong ([www.oxfam.org.hk](http://www.oxfam.org.hk))  
Oxfam IBIS (Denmark) ([www.oxfamibis.dk](http://www.oxfamibis.dk))  
Oxfam India ([www.oxfamindia.org](http://www.oxfamindia.org))  
Oxfam Intermón (Spain) ([www.oxfamintermon.org](http://www.oxfamintermon.org))  
Oxfam Ireland ([www.oxfamireland.org](http://www.oxfamireland.org))  
Oxfam Italy ([www.oxfamitalia.org](http://www.oxfamitalia.org))  
Oxfam Mexico ([www.oxfammexico.org](http://www.oxfammexico.org))  
Oxfam New Zealand ([www.oxfam.org.nz](http://www.oxfam.org.nz))  
Oxfam Novib (Netherlands) ([www.oxfamnovib.nl](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl))  
Oxfam Québec ([www.oxfam.qc.ca](http://www.oxfam.qc.ca))  
Oxfam South Africa ([www.oxfam.org.za](http://www.oxfam.org.za))  
KEDV ([www.kedv.org.tr](http://www.kedv.org.tr))