

LESSON 12:

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR DROUGHT RESPONSE

Large-scale social protection programmes demonstrate the potential to support millions during drought. They may have systemic weaknesses, but they can be strengthened to become more dynamic and responsive.

Where functional government systems exist, scaling them up during droughts can provide reach, efficiency and sustainability. Linking humanitarian aid with national systems can help strengthen institutions, build trust and leave lasting capacity to respond to future droughts. National systems can be supported to better flex to respond to the impacts of droughts by expanding coverage to meet the needs of newly vulnerable populations and/or by increasing benefit amounts for existing recipients.

In practice, many systems are fragile and underresourced, with weak targeting and static registration lists (out of date, arbitrary rationing, etc.) that exclude people in vulnerable situations and mobile populations. To ensure accountability and fairness, humanitarian actors – with governments – should support strengthening elements of national systems, with a particular focus on identifying people who need support (including mobile populations), implementing digital safeguards and strong accountability measures (such as independent monitoring), and tackling exclusion, elite capture and corruption. Over-emphasis on shock-responsive design without strengthening routine foundations risks creating fragile add-ons. Humanitarian actors should strive to avoid parallel systems; instead (and where possible), they should promote harmonisation and interoperability with national systems.

Droughts often have the most serious humanitarian consequences in situations of fragility, conflict and violence, where it is difficult for international aid actors to work directly with governments. However, lessons from multiple contexts (such as Haiti, Myanmar, the Sahel, Somalia and Yemen) suggest it is still possible to link with, strengthen or build the foundations of national social protection systems.

Number of documents contributing to the lessons: 30

Average evidence scores of all documents contributing to the lessons: 3.9

Median evidence strength of documents contributing to the lessons: 80%

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Governments should strengthen social protection systems in drought-prone areas to enable timely, predictable and scalable support during drought.
- Governments and development actors should work to expand coverage of social protection programmes to include groups commonly excluded, such as pastoralists, mobile populations, women and persons with disabilities.
- Humanitarian and development actors should strengthen linkages between humanitarian assistance and social protection systems, including through shock-responsive approaches that allow programmes to scale both in terms of coverage and increasing the amount of benefits in response to drought.
- Humanitarian actors should, where appropriate, align targeting, delivery mechanisms and registries with existing social protection systems to reduce duplication and improve efficiency.
- Donors should provide predictable, multiyear financing to support the capacity, coverage and adaptability of social-protection systems in drought-prone contexts.
- Governments and partners should invest in the institutional capacity, data systems and coordination mechanisms needed to enable social protection systems to respond effectively to drought.