



# WHY SOPROEN ADDS AGGREGATE VALUE TO THE SOCIAL PROTECTION SECTOR

**SOPROEN**  
SOCIAL PROTECTION ENGINEERING

*Committed to people*

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SOPROEN is a USA-based social consultancy firm that belongs to the Ayala Consulting Group, with offices and/or contact people in fifteen (15) countries in America, Asia, Africa, and Europe. Since 1996, we've collaborated with aid agencies, governments, and UN organizations to help more than 50 million people to have a better life through the design and implementation of social protection programs.

At SOPROEN, we have learned and developed different methodologies to implement social protection programs around the world. After having witnessed the implementation of more than 100 social protection projects in over 40 countries, we are in the position to also share key lessons which we have learned over the years as social development consultants. The objective of this document is to present SOPROEN's solutions, innovations, and impact-based findings.

The World Bank developed a highly influential publication, "Sourcebook on the Foundations of Social Protection (SP) Delivery Systems"<sup>1</sup> that describes how countries deliver social protection benefits and services and the way various elements of delivery systems come together to implement these kinds of programs. Although the pillars of how social protection systems are well established in the WB sourcebook, SOPROEN has evolved these fundamental pillars to: (i) adapt them to the dynamic post-pandemic

world; (ii) adjust to the different specifications of each region/area; and, (iii) tailor SP delivery systems to emergency scenarios.

This document briefly shows some products/services being offered by SOPROEN and delivered in the recent past while providing technical assistance within the social protection sector: (i) a proposed revised social protection delivery chain, (ii) delivery systems supported by dynamic information systems, (iii) target-oriented communication and promotion strategies, (iv) delivery systems adapted to support climate change response actions, (v) SOPROEN's emergency response system (vi) characteristics of dynamic institutional arrangements, and (vii) an example of the SOPROEN's comprehensive solution.

### Revised social protection delivery chain

SOPROEN has progressively made modifications and additions to the social protection delivery chain. Experience in different complex contexts around the world led SOPROEN to include activities to respond to old and new operational challenges in SP programs. Many of these difficulties, which are well described in the Sourcebook, have not been fully resolved. We argue that while the assess, enroll, and provide phases have been developed in detail, the manage phase has not. This phase should not only cover the program's administration but also promote a comprehensive and dynamic interaction between beneficiaries and the program administrator.

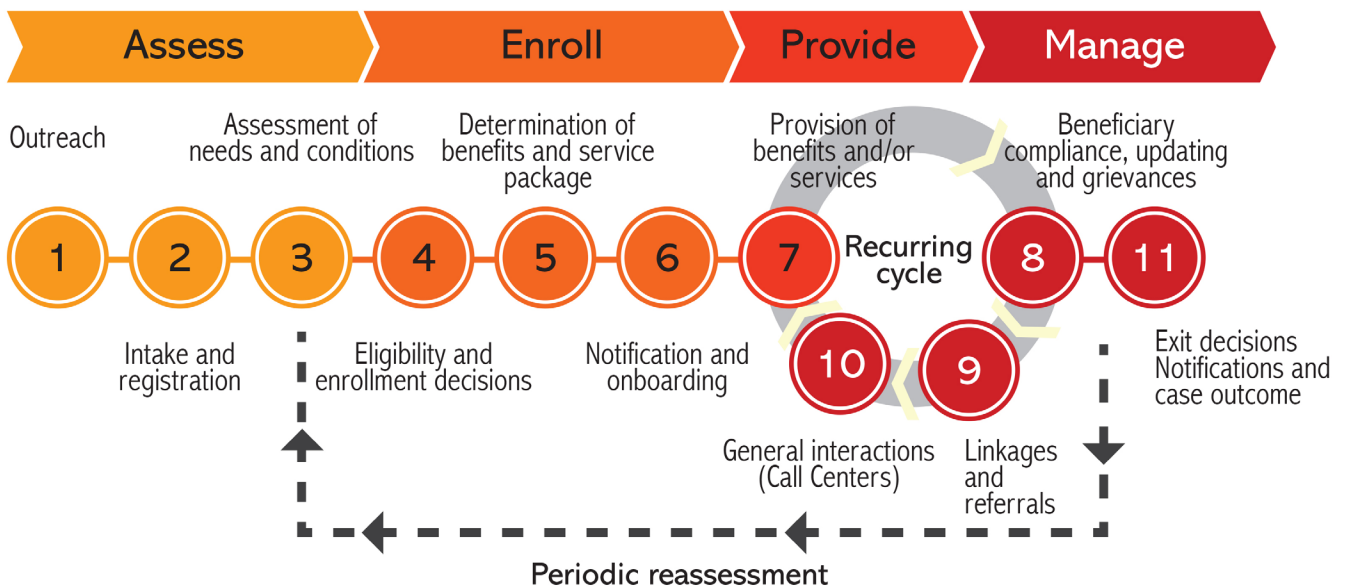


Figure 1: SOPROEN's Emergency Response Delivery Chain

The challenge of having a dynamic interaction between beneficiaries, program administrators, and the public is presented every time a project is implemented. The initial interactions happen during the assess and enroll phases, but they start declining when concurrent activities; like the delivery of benefits begin and grievances are needed to be submitted. Programs are designed for at least 20% of beneficiaries be able to contact administrators at least once per year to update information, submit a grievance or request for information. The results are very disappointing; in practice, less than 3% of beneficiaries actually contact program administrators.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, interactions could be static or dynamic. Dynamic systems make beneficiaries and public communicate with program administrators at any moment. For this to happen, the manage phase must have the needed tools and resolution protocols in place to sustain this interaction in the long run. By contrast, static systems are those in which the administrator contacts the beneficiary for specific activities or to provide some information, beneficiaries are passive actors just waiting for program administrators to contact them.

The challenges come from both sides; on the one hand, program administrators fail to have adequate and/or trained teams visiting beneficiaries, as well as the lack of proper technological tools to facilitate the interaction of beneficiaries. They have mainly poor and ad-hoc protocols to resolve cases and provide the respective feedback or answer to the beneficiary or the public in general. On the other hand, beneficiaries do not feel empowered and get frustrated with the bureaucratic hurdles of contacting program administrators and not obtaining the answers they are looking for.

An incentive for beneficiaries to communicate with administrators is the possibility to obtain complementary assistance or advice, not only to resolve a grievance case or to check for any program information. If beneficiaries know this kind of assistance is there, they would make every effort to contact program administrators to obtain the required answers. The tools developed by SOPROEN to support comprehensive interactions include call centers systems integrated with GRM systems and linkage and referral systems all having clear resolution protocols to make sure every question or request made by a beneficiary has an answer.

## **Social protection delivery systems supported by dynamic information systems**

The challenge of a having an information system supporting a program or a group of programs is faced by each delivery unit. The initial challenge is to have an information system, but that is only the beginning of more issues to come. Information systems can be either static or dynamic. Due to the operational dynamics of a program, the information system must go along and adapt to those dynamics. If the information system fails to do so and

remains the same despite changes in the operation, then it is static. On the other hand, if the information system responds to the changes and modifications defined by the delivery unit upon the needs of the operation, then the system is called dynamic.

The first challenge is to select the right IT consultants. In countries with limited capacity, delivery units outsource the service. Consultants without experience in the sector fail to understand that the information system will require to be flexible and modular, social protection programs dealing with vulnerable populations require many changes and modifications to respond to the dynamics of these beneficiaries. The ideal IT consultants are those who have worked along operational consultants and learned the dynamics of a typical program of this kind. SOPROEN has been doing this for the last 20 years, having consolidating teams working together.

The second challenge is the design of the information system. Even though the architecture could be modular, programmers tend to make inflexible systems; they pay more attention to aspects like data privacy and protection. Knowledgeable firms in the sector like SOPROEN understand the importance of making certain functionalities parametric, changes and modifications are made constantly, so better to include that flexibility to let operational officers make changes or alterations without going to systems modifications.

Third, program administrators, and even donors, fail to retain a team for maintenance and provision of regular changes as required throughout the life span of the program. Whether the system is built in-house, or it is outsourced, a permanent team is needed. SOPROEN can provide this support either in-situ or remotely making sure operational process continue smoothly, with no suspensions.

Going through these challenges, SOPROEN built a dynamic platform with a modular architecture that is used to develop proper information systems for social protection programs. The platform is adapted to the specific characteristics of the program in record time. Lessons learned of more than 25 years developing information systems for social protection projects help us to run the social protection delivery chain smoothly. Social protection projects can be developed in shorter periods of time. An example of this was the cash transfer program that was implemented in Yemen in 2017 and whose benefits reached close to 1.5 million beneficiary households.

## **Target-oriented communication and promotion of the social protection program**

At SOPROEN, communication is used as a transversal tool throughout the project cycle. Communicating the right message



at the right time to the right people is key for the success of the project. Beneficiaries are an important stakeholder within the communication ecosystem but also project staff, decision-makers, media, and other key groups.

The communication strategy runs in parallel to the project design and, during implementation, communications are used to inform and receive information, to assess knowledge and find hidden trends and behaviors. Communication is more than reaching out, it is also getting through to key groups.

Interactions between stakeholders occur with different frequency depending on the phase and ongoing implementation activities. Context, media consumption, cultural behavior, and specific circumstances are considered to communicate effectively.

Communication is also used as a knowledge tool to understand how and where to register and navigate the processes for doing so. Our communications approach provides timely information in a comprehensive human-focused form to the beneficiaries.

For programs that are implemented for the first time, interaction must be simple and disseminated a few days before the event to avoid confusion among the households. On the other hand, the communication strategy for concurrent events is very different; it must have options and resolution protocols for each case or type of request. No promotional materials must be in place unless the protocols for resolving each case and providing the respective feedback or answer to beneficiaries are up and running. As such, the promotional strategy must be designed and implemented hand in hand with the operational implementation process, making sure the conditions for the right implementation of each phase and respective activities are met.

SOPROEN has considered these aspects and developed strategies making sure the right approach, messages and means go along and in coordination with the different implementation phases, and specificities of the context always making sure that no campaign is launched unless the operational processes are fully in place. When this coordination does not happen, the beneficiary lose faith and interest in the project and communication between the parties tends to be only one sided, from program administrators to beneficiaries only.

## **Social protection interventions being adapted to support climate change response actions**

Higher temperatures, droughts, flooding, the rising of sea levels and other extreme weather events pose significant challenges to individual livelihoods and national economies. There is a need to develop social protection delivery systems oriented to protect vulnerable people as well as to guide them to modify

ongoing practices to protect their surrounding environments. We understand that it is fundamental to modify social protection interventions with these added objectives and goals, which is not happening presently.

SOPROEN is working and considering the inclusion of the following climate related aspects in program operations: (i) development of effective emergency response systems, (ii) connecting to early warning systems, (iii) adapting individual conditionalities/incentives to modify practices/behaviors of beneficiaries making them more environmental oriented, and (iv) including group conditionalities/incentives, making individual beneficiaries be part of groups executing environmental related activities.

In the first place, SOPROEN has developed an emergency response system with the support of the EMIS platform to support delivery units. This emergency response system can handle both micro-emergencies and large disasters. It is possible to respond with services and benefits in a matter of a few weeks, beneficiaries can start receiving their benefits in less than a month (see next section for additional details).

Second, SOPROEN is developing innovative processes for the social protection delivery chain. Program administrators can alert and inform beneficiaries rapidly about climate-related harmful events. We are in the capacity of developing tools and innovative methods to reach beneficiaries with information produced by Early Warning Systems (EWS). In this way, they can be better prepared, and the negative impact be significantly reduced.

Third, SOPROEN is designing and implementing “environmental incentives” in their information systems. These conditions are not regular, they require verifications at different frequencies and more than one indicator is used to confirm either partial or full compliance. SOPROEN is adapting their modular platform and operational protocols to take care of these new types of conditionalities in which individual beneficiaries, groups of beneficiaries, or even groups of beneficiaries as part of larger groups or communities must comply in addition to others that are regularly applied in health and education.

In short, SOPROEN is working ahead of time, bringing innovations to the social protection sector, making sure programs can be designed to respond to environmental challenges. In fact, more and more countries around the globe are making significant commitments around climate change response actions in different global UN events. Delivery units must adapt their programs rapidly if they want to meet the committed goals and SOPROEN is ready to technically support their efforts.

## **SOPROEN’s emergency response system**

The challenge of having the capacity to react to emergencies in very short periods of time is one that government delivery units face day by day. Countries suffer constant micro-emergencies, while large disasters are rare. Over the years, capacity has been developed to properly answer to these large disasters. Most countries have separate agencies to deal with emergencies. Their

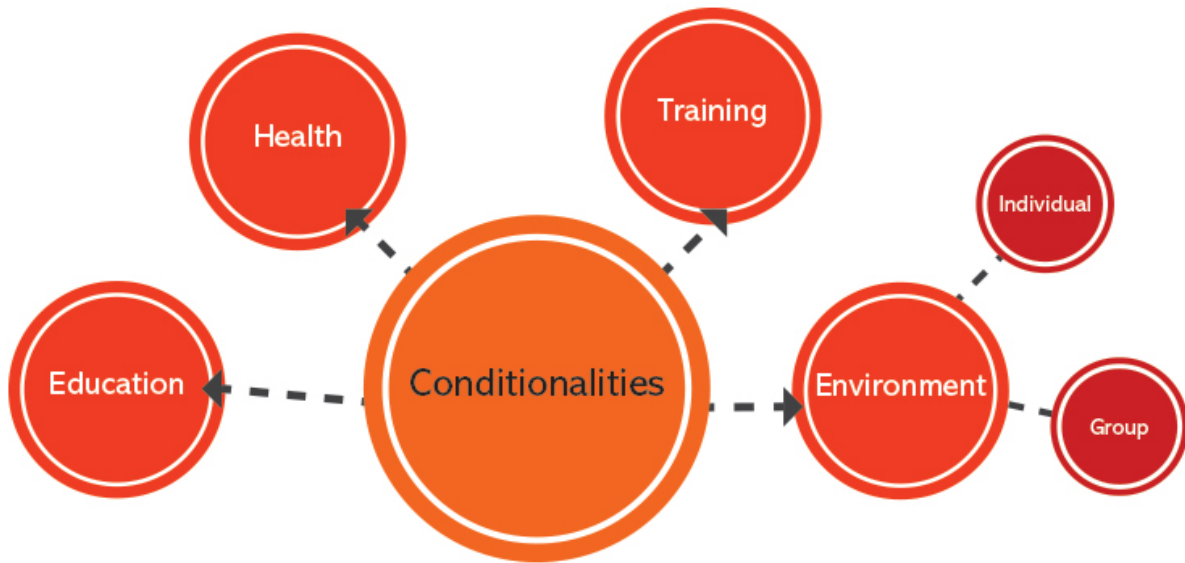


Figure 2: Type of conditionalities

primarily focus is on prevention measures and management of services and benefits for affected population once disaster occurs. The provision of in-kind and cash benefits is done by social protection delivery units. These programs use their installed capacity, experience delivering services and cash, to also reach the affected population.

The execution of this emergency response actions by SP delivery units can be static or dynamic. Immediately after the event, these SP delivery units enter into action with the delivery of top-ups or extra benefits to current beneficiaries who also are part of the affected population. But if this is the only thing that these programs can do, then they are static-confronting emergencies. These units have a much harder time trying to reach the affected people who are not their beneficiaries. They make immense efforts to develop complementary or parallel delivery chains that are not part of the regular program. As a result, the delivery timeframe of benefits tends to be long, chaotic, and unfair for the affected population who are not beneficiaries of regular SP programs.

Dynamic capacity for emergency response interventions is to establish the emergency response delivery chain in a matter of days or few weeks and deliver benefits or services at the same time as social protection programs do with their own beneficiaries. Only then the response for the affected population, regardless of whether they belong to ongoing social protection programs or not, is effective, fast, and fair for all. SOPROEN has developed an emergency response system to make possible all affected people receive assistance regardless they are part or not of ongoing SP programs.

SOPROEN has an emergency platform called Emergency Management Information System (EMIS) that support immediate

emergency response actions that facilitates the delivery of assistance in less than a month whether the disaster is small or large. This system is flexible and can be used either for a single or regular payments while policy makers decide the best course of action: either transferring affected population to ongoing SP programs or if they are to be placed with a newly created program, or just terminate the emergency support. If government authorities decide to implement a tailor-made intervention for this population, SOPROEN can take the process in record time and smoothly using their modular architecture platform.

EMIS has the same four phases as the social protection delivery chain with its activities ready to be implemented. The platform has parametric functionalities or option to configure the proposed emergency response parameters. Once the emergency event happens, relevant EMIS modules are selected and configured in a matter of hours. As a result, tools and protocols for emergency response events are not the cause of bottlenecking anymore.

SOPROEN is applying its emergency response systems in Malawi. That country has suffered three emergencies between 2020 and 2022, COVID19, floods and droughts. The Malawi experience has shown us that emergency response interventions can be implemented in record times; the model is scalable and can either reach a few hundred affected people or many thousands of them.

### Revised design of institutional arrangements

Trying to have proper institutional arrangements for social protection programs may lead to mistakes in the design and implementation of them. Arrangements are not the same when

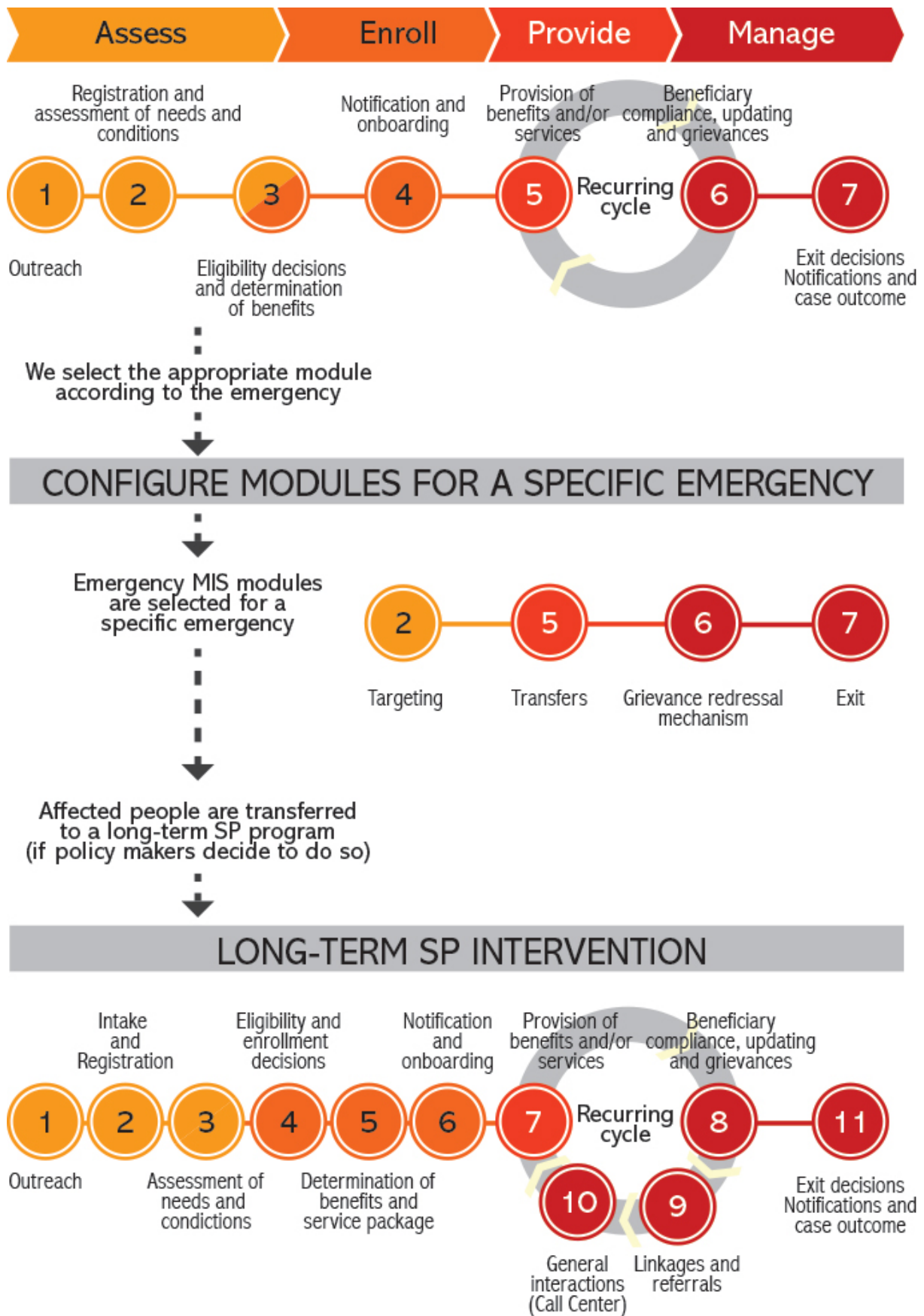


Figure 3: SOPROEN'S Emergency Response Delivery Chain

dealing with one-off or concurrent activities. It does not matter whether the institutional arrangements are centralized or not, whether the program is an on-demand or an administrator-driven approach, having separate or integrated delivery systems; initial implementation activities tend to be massive and one-off for assess and enroll phases while concurrent for delivery and manage phases.

The design and implementation of institutional arrangements could be also either static or dynamic. If government policy-making officials and consultants propose and create a fixed institutional arrangement and organizational structure, then it is called static. But if the institutional arrangement and organizational structure is designed to support each phase making them flexible, then it is called dynamic.

Personnel with fixed roles throughout the phase make harder the implementation of SP programs. Static institutional arrangements and organizational structures do not distinguish between one-off and concurrent processes. Delivery units face challenges from the beginning. On the contrary, when officials adjust their roles to different tasks, both at national and local level making possible to move fast in the massive and one-off processes at the beginning and later into concurrent activities, the implementation process becomes smooth.

Both national and local officials of the cash transfer program in Malawi change roles depending on the activity to be executed, they take roles of enumerators, enrollment officers, payment agents or case management workers when the process calls for it. SOPROEN proposed this dynamic arrangement to make possible that national and local personnel can take different roles, not only for different activities in the social protection delivery chain, but also for emergency response interventions.

## **SOPROEN's comprehensive solution**

SOPROEN has been in the development field since 1996, we have grown ever since, improving our procedures and our personnel's technical capacity to continue finding the best ways to help the most impoverished and vulnerable. In this process of global change, faced with the urgency of offering a product that manages to comprehensively address these new needs, we have come to understand that one way to help people is through the implementation of a modern and state of the art social protection delivery systems.

SOPROEN can design, implement, and support a comprehensive social protection program or parts of it. In the next sections, we briefly describe a total solution for which we describe a hypothetical case.

A flooding disaster occurs in a given region of a country affecting many thousands of households. The SOPROEN team makes a quick assessment of the situation and propose the design parameters for an emergency response intervention (feasibility

study). Government delivery unit and donor officials review the proposal and approves it after providing comments which are adjusted by the SOPROEN team making sure those adjustments can be easily configured in the SOPROEN platform EMIS. These activities should last only one week.

Once the feasibility proposal is ready, the SOPROEN team organizes the logistics for data field data collection. In parallel it also configures the EMIS, prepares guidelines, communication tools, and protocols. These activities are completed in a week.

Immediately the tools are ready, training is organized for enumerators who would identify affected people to intake the information using the EMIS offline data collection application. By the end of the second week, teams are out doing massive data collection.

While data collection is done, the payment delivery system is put in place, either using payment agencies or through the offline EMIS payment application. Since, data collected from affected people are entered every day into the EMIS system, the eligibility criteria is applied (for example, selecting only affected people not enrolled in ongoing social protection programs). Groups of beneficiaries can start receiving their benefits towards the fourth week.

The delivery of payments or in-kind benefits can be of different modalities. If needed, payments can go on in case policy makers decide to provide them more than once. While this process happens, policy makers decide to move affected people into a more structural and recovery kind of social protection intervention.

As such, SOPROEN team works in the detailed operational design of the intervention taking into consideration all design parameters proposed by the delivery unit and donors. This process would also include environmental related processes like climate alerts and group environmental related activities/conditions. If the decision is to build a separate program, the team decides to adapt the SPMS modular platform.

The solution would also include a call center system, integrated with a grievance redress mechanism, guidelines with resolution processes for each possible case. In addition, even general calls would have protocols to provide the required feedback to the beneficiary. The solution will have a module for linkage are referral system allowing beneficiaries to be referred to other complementary services when they face specific and personal issues. The design will be completed in a record time of four months.

SOPROEN dedicates time for innovations to improve effectiveness of the program. Through tools such as machine learning, it is possible to perform in-depth information analysis on the behavior of the beneficiaries, and even anticipate what kind of needs may arise to take them into account in the operational aspects of the project. In parallel, artificial intelligence tools and Robot Process Automation will be used to better undertake repetitive activities, classify cases, and other related actions.



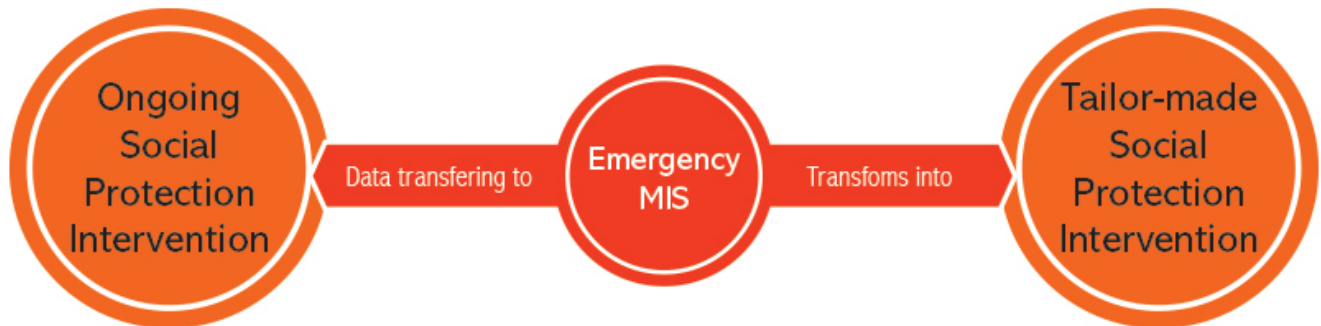


Figure 4: Using the EMIS to transition to other SP interventions

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2. Progress reports prepared by Ayala Consulting Corp in Pakistan, Nigeria, Niger, Malawi and Yemen cash transfer programs between 2010 and 2020.

