



IMPLEMENTING SOPROEN'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEMS (ERS)

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SOCIAL PROTECTION ENGINEERING

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According to the World Bank (2017), catastrophes and disasters can lead affected people to poverty, physical health and even, mental health problems. The impacts of disasters often fall most heavily on those who are poor and vulnerable. However, not only

disasters are affecting the poor, but also catastrophes and emergencies, since they have become more frequent due to climate change. Therefore, it is important first to understand the difference between these three events.

Table 1: How catastrophes, disasters and emergencies differ (Tierney 2019)

Emergencies	Disasters	Catastrophes
Impacts localized	Impacts widespread, severe	Devastating physical and societal impacts
Standard operating procedures sufficient to handle event	Response requires activation of disaster plans	Response challenges far exceed those envisioned in disaster plans
No significant recovery challenges	Major recovery challenges	Massive recovery challenges and very slow recovery process

The table shows that emergencies are less destructive in comparison to disasters and catastrophes, but they are becoming more common and frequent due to climate change. The potential for a disruptive event, such an emergency, to occur will only continue (hazard). In the last few years, the world has learned that hazards are not another mystery to unravel, it is suspected that more and more emergencies, including floods, droughts, and wildfires have to do with climate change. Certainly, climate change is a hazard that is affecting communities around the world through its interaction with other hazards. Predictions also show that these emergencies

will only increase, although slowly, but steadily in the future (Wilson, 2022).

In general, the *hazards cycle* consists of four parts: *mitigation*, *preparedness*, *response*, and *recovery*. *Mitigation* refers to measures and actions taken in advance of a disaster event with the view to reducing their impacts. In the case of emergencies, such simple measures include learning how to store food for droughts, how to adapt the house on the first floor to avoid damage due to flooding, among others. Although emergencies are common and becoming repetitive, neither authorities nor households take these simple measures to get prepared for the next event.

Preparedness consists of activities taken in advance of a disaster or emergency by both authorities and communities to respond effectively when an emergency or disaster strikes. However, the problem with emergencies is that these events may not be as visible as disasters. It may be the case that a drought period began, but authorities and communities fail to recognize that is happening and only realize what is occurring when the raining period does not begin as expected. In short, it is difficult to prepare for a drought emergency unless the emergency becomes repetitive over the years. In the case of floods, these events are also difficult to identify at the beginning, authorities and communities realize it is happening when the raining level crosses a threshold point.

The measures taken during *Preparedness* include the development of an emergency plan at various governmental levels, ranging from local to national. In addition, it requires the purchase and/or preparation of technological and physical instruments to be available for the *Response* and *Recovery* stages. *Response*, the third stage of the hazards cycle, takes place during or immediately after the event. This stage is typically designed to cope with the impacts of the event including rescuing persons, evacuation, moving to shelters, providing food and others. *Recovery*, the last stage, includes short-medium term actions to overcome disaster disruptions that affected households. Governments implement cash transfer interventions via vertical expansion using ongoing programs and horizontal expansions implementing temporal interventions. In addition, other actions are carried out like public infrastructure repairs and reconstruction.

However, these two stages, *response* and *recovery* typically merge for an emergency event. The reason for that is that the emergency event does not take minutes or even hours as it happens with a typical natural disaster. A drought may take months even years, a flooding may last days and even a few weeks until water recedes. Therefore, the third and fourth stages, which are *response and recovery*, can begin even before the emergency event ends. In the case of drought, the *response* certainly must begin well before the event ends, the assistance provided to affected communities consists in cash and in-kind support oriented to cover food needs while the event lasts. In the case of a flooding, the assistance also consists in cash and in-kind support to cover food needs and basic and personal infrastructure losses that require to be reinstated. In case the flooding also devastates public infrastructure such as roads, bridges and others, then the event is not anymore, an emergency but it is a disaster and *response*, and *recovery* stages are treated separately.

The sooner the *response/recovery* happens in an emergency event, the better for affected populations, prioritizing the vulnerable and the poor. In countries with very good and established national cash transfer programs, beneficiaries who are affected by the emergency can get cash top-ups (vertical expansion) but affected people who are not part of this program tend to be left out. Whatever assistance they might receive, tends to reach them much later. This is due to lack of appropriate ERS systems to respond and assist these affected population (horizontal expansion).

Because of these characteristics of emergencies, SOPROEN has developed an

emergency response system (ERS) that includes operational processes and protocols supported by an emergency information system (EMIS) which is parametric and flexible to configure in a matter of hours. This system can be set up during the *Preparedness* stage and then activated while the emergency event is ongoing. With the experience gained in the field over the years, SOPROEN has made important contributions to this sector, has developed a very effective ERS to make possible to reach affected populations with in-kind or cash assistance in a matter of days, making vertical and horizontal expansions possible at the same time.

Once governments and/or donor agencies decide to acquire the ERS, SOPROEN offers three options, total knowledge and instruments transfer with the required training, partial transfer with permanent technical support, or technical and instruments support only when the emergency happens. SOPROEN adapts to the needs and requirements of the client nation.

After the above acquisition ends, SOPROEN begins the implementation of the ERS. First, SOPROEN adapts the operational procedures and technological instruments upon the conditions and needs of the country. This process can take days or at the most a few weeks. Then local officials are trained to manage ERS with the support of SOPROEN personnel. In short, the *Preparedness* stage is to make the ERS ready to respond to upcoming emergencies.

Each time authorities declare an emergency, ERS is activated, and the implementation of the response takes place in a matter of a few weeks. In fact, the *Response* and *Recovery* stages can begin while the emergency event

is still ongoing. SOPROEN offers technical support to make possible a hands-on training to local officers. The ERS activation process has the following steps:

1. Emergency assessment. The area and population affected is identified by government and donor authorities. At this stage it is key to define the financial resources available for this emergency.
2. Operational design. Upon assessment, design parameters (eligibility criteria, transfer levels, frequency, and exit policy) and project cycle (registration, enrolment, payments, grievances, and monitoring) are agreed. SOPROEN provides support to be able to complete it in a matter of days.
3. Configuration of EMIS upon operational design in a matter of hours done by SOPROEN.
4. Implementation of the project cycle starting with the registration process. (data collection if needed)
5. Payment distribution among beneficiaries generally happens a few weeks (less than a month) after the declaration of the emergency and ERS is activated.
6. Financial reconciliation and closing intervention.

Experience in Malawi between 2020 and 2023 shows that more than 12 emergency interventions were activated and implemented with SOPROEN technical assistance. These interventions were funded by the Government and different international development organizations. With the support of the Ministry of Gender in charge of managing emergencies, ERS was activated for the COVID emergency with about 150,000 beneficiary households,

several drought emergencies in rural and urban areas with about 100,000 beneficiary households and several flooding emergencies in rural areas with about 50,000 beneficiary households. As we speak, the Ministry of

Gender has gained significant experience and the response period for these emergencies is done in less time every time, making the work of that Ministry very effective to respond to emergencies in Malawi.

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