



MOVING TO A NEW SCHOOL OF THOUGHT: PRECISE INDIVIDUAL-ORIENTED SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

SOPROEN

SOCIAL PROTECTION ENGINEERING

Committed to people

WORKING PAPER written by:

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASP	Adaptive Social Protection
CASH+	Cash Plus
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ILO	International Labour Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RCT	Randomized Controlled trials
SP	Social Protection
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank

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SOCIAL ASSISTANCE EVOLUTION

Social protection (SP) systems have evolved significantly over the past centuries. Before the twentieth century, people relied on informal arrangements to cope with difficult situations. These arrangements were prevalent in rural and small urban communities, where residents implemented mechanisms to support each other in the absence of formal institutions. The late nineteenth century saw the emergence of formal arrangements, particularly in Europe with the development of the welfare state. Pioneering countries like Great Britain and Germany established welfare systems funded by contributions from workers and employers (Ayala, 2024).

Following World War II, economic growth, industrialization, and technological advancements spurred significant socio-economic changes. These included a rise in poverty and vulnerability. In response, SP systems underwent rapid expansion, particularly in high- and middle-income countries. These systems can be broadly categorized into contributory and non-contributory schemes. Contributory programs were primarily delivered by public and private social insurance agencies, while non-contributory programs encompassed a range of interventions designed to safeguard individuals from adverse events leading to poverty (Merrien, 2013).

The World Bank defines social safety nets, or social assistance programs, as a range of non-contributory interventions targeted towards the poor and vulnerable. These programs include cash transfers, food stamps, child allowances, in-kind transfers, price subsidies, public works programs, and fee waivers.

Examples of less common interventions include unemployment benefits and housing assistance. Social safety nets encompass four primary objectives: to promptly address inequality and extreme poverty, empower households to make more effective investments in their future, aid in risk management for households, and facilitate governmental reforms to support poor and vulnerable population (Grosh, 2008).

In essence, social protection encompasses both public (state) and private (non-state) initiatives aimed at fulfilling various needs, promoting social assistance, mitigating poverty and vulnerability, and addressing inequality (Patel, 2023).

The early 2000s saw a dominance of supply-side oriented social assistance interventions. Policymakers, international development consultants, and officials heavily influenced the design and implementation of various non-contributory programs targeting the poor and vulnerable. This approach rested on the assumption that experts possessed superior knowledge of the beneficiaries' needs.

They employed formal methodologies to identify and select interventions, determine implementation locations and timing, and decide whom to assist. Within this framework, the targeted poor and vulnerable population essentially assumed a passive role. Their involvement was limited to activities like answering questions, participating in focus groups, and interviews to assess their poverty and vulnerability levels. This information was then used by policymakers to determine program design, including eligibility criteria, benefit amounts, and the number of beneficiaries.

The implementation strategies for these supply-side oriented interventions evolved through a process of trial and error. Government agencies, development organizations, as well as specialized consultants and consulting firms, took on the responsibility of executing these programs. With time, substantial knowledge was accumulated concerning the most effective implementation methods. Technical support was offered, and various evaluations were conducted to gauge the programs' effectiveness and efficiency levels. Social assistance agencies gradually gained their expertise in managing these extensive programs and services. It became commonplace to find central and regional governments overseeing dozens, and sometimes even hundreds, of non-contributory supply-side oriented interventions.

Simultaneously, there has been a steady rise in the demand for social services within low- and middle-income countries, eclipsing traditional modes of family and community support. Initially, this demand was met by non-governmental sectors; however, governmental agencies have since stepped in to address and oversee these services. These encompass a wide array of provisions including therapy, counseling, treatment, nursing care, community outreach, and more. By the early 2000s, both national and local governmental bodies had begun to expand their social service offerings in both scope and capacity. Interestingly, despite this expansion, these services were not formally integrated into their respective social protection systems (Rohegger, 2021).

By the late 2000s, the limitations of the supply-side approach became evident. These interventions operated in silos, managed by separate teams with minimal communication. This led to significant inefficiencies. Project

cycle processes, like beneficiary selection and payments, were duplicated across programs, creating a cumbersome and inefficient SP system, particularly for the non-contributory component. While each program had its own specific welfare provisions (coverage and benefit levels), the underlying social infrastructure and delivery mechanisms remained largely the same. This redundancy wasted resources and limited the system's overall effectiveness (Leisering, 2023).

The early 2010s marked a turning point. Leading development agencies like the World Bank, UNICEF, and the ILO, along with other UN entities, advocated for coordinated SP strategies. Their focus was on expanding social assistance coverage while ensuring efficiency and cost-effectiveness. This new approach called for building robust SP systems across three key levels: policy, program, and administration. At the policy level, a coherent national vision for social protection in general and social assistance in particular was essential. At the program level, social assistance programs needed to be meticulously designed to ensure comprehensive coverage. Administratively, policymakers had to ensure sufficient capacity, appropriate management information systems, and implement social accountability mechanisms. Coordination across all three levels—policy, program, and administrative—was imperative, both horizontally and vertically (Devereux, 2023).

Paralleling the initiatives of UN and development agencies, social protection researchers like Duflo (2012) and Easterly (2013) raised concerns about the effectiveness of existing systems. They argued that assistance often fell short of the needs of the poor and vulnerable, failing to address the complexities of their situations. These researchers critiqued the "benevolent

technocratic solutions" that didn't consider non-national factors, such as technology's impact on livelihoods or migration patterns. Additionally, they emphasized that technocrats neglected the importance of informal coping mechanisms and the resourcefulness of the poor and vulnerable in finding their own solutions.

As a result, there was a growing call for exploring alternative approaches. While supply-side interventions remained important, they needed to be complemented by strategies that empower beneficiaries. This shift necessitates incorporating the voices and perspectives of the poor and vulnerable in designing solutions that address their long-term challenges and urgent needs.

Supply-side interventions were necessary but insufficient. It was imperative to introduce and cultivate what I refer to as '*demand-side-oriented interventions*'.

These alerts, as highlighted by scholars, stem from recent initiatives in the developed world, particularly in Europe. Social protection traditionally involved targeted social assistance measures, often means-tested, alongside social services with a focus on long-term care for the elderly and other vulnerable populations (Rohegger, 2021). However, some governments have begun to make significant strides in streamlining access to services and programs for all citizens.

Using an old concept implemented in other sectors, but not used in social assistance, the OECD initiated the development of decentralized '*one-stop shops*', or also called '*single window services (SWC)*', aimed at simplifying citizen interaction with governments. The objective was to facilitate individuals in accessing assistance and resolving both urgent and long-term idiosyncratic needs (OECD, 2020).

During the 2010s, development partners and consulting firms worldwide, spanning both developed and developing nations, initiated the design of approaches and mechanisms to empower active participation among individuals facing both urgent and long-term needs, particularly those who are poor and vulnerable. The '*Referrals and Linkages*' mechanism aims to streamline the process for individuals to connect with service providers relevant to their requirements (Ebken, 2014).

A comprehensive '*Grievance and Redressal*' mechanism has been devised for the entire SP system to effectively address people's complaints and guide them through structured resolution processes. Additionally, the establishment of a '*One-stop shop for citizens*' seeks to enhance and streamline operational interactions between citizens and both public and private service providers and programs. Across all these interventions, the overarching goal is to bridge the gap between potential beneficiaries of the SP system and ensure improved communication, understanding, and provision of suitable services.

Various approaches aimed at promoting the active participation of the poor and vulnerable in identifying optimal solutions to their needs are currently executed while others undergoing pilot testing in diverse formats before being scaled up nationwide. The overarching objective of these approaches is to empower individuals to voice their concerns, enabling them to lodge complaints, seek assistance, streamline interactions with programs and service providers, and choose the most suitable options to address their concerns and requirements. Two approaches have gained particular attention: graduation, and cash plus (Sabates, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the efforts of various stakeholders operating concurrently within the field of SP systems, particularly the social assistance component, have produced significant advancements and diverse perspectives on the direction these systems should take. Governments and policymakers found themselves grappling with the task of not only coordinating their SP interventions but also integrating both supply-side-oriented and demand-side-oriented interventions. By the mid-2010s, policymakers, consultants, and development agencies were advocating for comprehensive or integrated SP systems.

Both types of interventions and services play crucial roles, with the former addressing long-term needs and the latter handling short-term needs. Striving for a balanced integration of these components is recommended, necessitating cutting-edge technology, specialized technical assistance, the engagement of skilled administrators, effective coordination between agencies, and, of course, efficient interventions and mechanisms. Nevertheless, comprehensive SP systems of this nature are still not widespread in most countries.

'Cash plus' programs emerged as the initial stride toward crafting comprehensive SP systems. While cash transfer programs encouraged the purchasing power of recipients, their restrained long-term effects on human capital accumulation prompted low- and middle-income nations to supplement them with additional programs or services. These 'cash plus' initiatives amalgamated cash transfers with supplementary benefits such as facilitating access to services, systematically addressing grievances, or offering psychosocial support (Handa, 2023).

Adding further complexity, by the late 2010s, the United Nations, the World Bank, and other development agencies introduced a new dimension to SP systems, incorporating the ongoing crises stemming from climate change. The contemporary world faces a multitude of interconnected shocks, including natural disasters, climate emergencies, economic meltdowns, pandemics, and armed conflicts. These realities place immense strain on existing SP systems, originally designed to address poverty and vulnerability through supply-side interventions and demand-side services. The growing consensus is that these systems, in their current form, are inadequate in the face of these contemporary shocks.

In response to the growing complexity of contemporary challenges, development agencies are advocating for a new approach: '*Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) systems*'. ASP aims to build the resilience of households against a wider range of shocks, including those related to climate change.

This approach emphasizes a strengthened and coordinated system. Different institutions, particularly social protection and disaster response agencies, must work together to adapt their actions, interventions, and management processes. Effective coordination is crucial for a swift and comprehensive response to the current and ever-evolving threats faced by vulnerable populations (Bowen, 2020).

The primary goal during idiosyncratic emergencies and covariate disasters is to deliver social protection assistance efficiently and inclusively. This means reaching all affected people, both those already enrolled in the SP system (vertical expansion) and those who are not currently beneficiaries (horizontal expansion).

The early 2020s witnessed a renewed emphasis on inclusive SP systems. Development agencies are urging countries to adopt systems based on core principles like universality, equity, solidarity, non-discrimination, and participation.

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has taken a significant step by formulating a regional Action Plan for its member countries (ESCAP, 2022). This plan outlines 12 milestones to guide the establishment of integrated and sustainable social protection.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

There's no doubt that development partners and agencies, through loans and technical assistance, significantly influence countries' SP systems (Ulriksen, 2023). Recognizing this influence, these partners are currently reorienting their approach, moving towards the proposed paradigms. Development partners advocate for the integration of supply-side interventions and demand-side interventions within SP systems. They emphasize the importance of coordinating tools with other agencies to enable effective responses to shocks. This also entails facilitating the active participation of non-public programs and services, with the goal of advancing towards an inclusive SP system.

Transitioning to a comprehensive and well-coordinated SP system presents a significant challenge. Sophisticated interventions, mechanisms, and coordination tools require a deep well of expertise to design and implement effectively. Navigating the complexities of involving multiple institutions further adds to this challenge. While policymakers and development partners have ambitious aspirations, achieving them necessitates a clear-eyed

understanding of the significant hurdles involved.

'Cash Plus' programs represent a significant step forward, expanding traditional cash transfers to include additional benefits like information sharing, integrated social services, skills training, and service linkages. However, even the most advanced SP systems employing 'Cash Plus' interventions face important challenges (Huijbregts, 2023).

Chile's conditional cash transfer program called *Bono Chile Grow together*, offers a unique element – psychosocial support services for families. This component, present for over 15 years, aims to equip families with the tools they need to escape poverty. Family support professionals or social workers provide information, skills training, and motivation.

However, recent evaluations highlight a key limitation: the program's rigid methodology. Critics argue that it fails to account for the diverse needs of beneficiary families. Each family faces unique vulnerabilities and requires not only tailored interventions but also a flexible approach.

Recommendations include increasing the number of social workers and granting them greater flexibility in delivering services (Reininger, 2023). This would allow for a more individualized approach that better addresses the specific challenges faced by each family.

In the case mentioned, namely the cash plus model, the outcomes might not meet expectations, as exemplified by the situation in Chile. One significant hurdle arises when attempting to provide assistance to individual families using standardized methodologies developed centrally and executed by social workers in the field. Equipped with these

tools, social workers strive to support and assist each family, each with its own distinct identity and unique characteristics. The recommendations proposed for the Chilean program entailed even higher administrative costs to enhance impact levels.

Another interesting case is the Colombian model known as ‘*Centers of Family Attention*’. These centers were established with the aim of enhancing the well-being of impoverished families. Operated by municipalities, they serve a dual purpose. Firstly, they offer services such as psychosocial support, training, health promotion, among others. Secondly, they act as referral hubs, directing individuals to partner services when necessary. These centers receive funding from municipalities, the central government, and generate income from the services they provide. Depending on their location, they focus on providing services and social assistance tailored to the specific needs of the region. However, they face several challenges including insufficient resources, inadequate infrastructure, ad-hoc procedures, lack of coordination among centers, and lack of standardization, among others. Consequently, their coverage tends to be limited, resulting in constrained support for individuals (DANE, 2023).

The examples of Chile and Colombia are not viable options for many low- and middle-income countries. Low-income nations encounter significant challenges across all levels, which would severely impede their transition to comprehensive systems in the near future. These challenges can be summarized as follows:

- Demand-side mechanisms aimed at assisting impoverished and vulnerable populations in addressing their immediate needs (such as idiosyncratic emergencies) by interacting with programs and services are in their early stages. Most countries are just embarking on the development of these mechanisms, with the World Bank and other development agencies actively encouraging their implementation through loans, grants, and technical assistance to foster the development of comprehensive SP systems.
- The shock response sector typically focuses on preparatory measures prior to covariate disasters, prioritizing the mitigation of immediate casualties. However, there is a notable absence of coordinated responses addressing the assistance required in the aftermath of such events. In reality, the social protection sector should provide support to victims and affected individuals in the weeks and months following the event through both vertical and horizontal expansion until they are able to return to normality. Unfortunately, this is not occurring as effectively as it should.
- SP systems are geared towards aiding individuals affected by natural and climate-related disasters (covariate emergencies) who were already receiving benefits, indicating they had been previously identified as poor or vulnerable (vertical expansion). However, these systems are ill-equipped to assist individuals who have lost everything due to the disaster, were financially stable prior to its occurrence, and may have been categorized above the poverty line. It is common to see, weeks after the disaster, media reports featuring thousands of individuals lamenting the absence of help or assistance, despite repeated assurances from the government. There remains a significant distance to traverse before reaching adaptive SP systems.

- Institutions are currently not prepared to collaborate effectively; existing national laws, operational guidelines, budget constraints, and a lack of experienced personnel present significant barriers that hinder government agencies from developing and implementing coordinated actions across policy, operational, and administrative levels simultaneously. Both institutional commitment and legal reforms are imperative to initiate the transition towards the types of SP systems advocated by development partners.

Despite the challenges outlined above, various approaches seeking to render SP systems more responsive to the needs of the impoverished and vulnerable population share a common objective: extending assistance to the widest possible audience. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022), the majority of SP systems fail to adequately cover the entire population, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals.

The report indicates that only 47% of the world's population has effective access to at least one social protection benefit, while the remaining 53%, equivalent to 4.1 billion people, have no social protection or only partial protection. Furthermore, only 29% of the world's population has access to comprehensive social protection, meaning they can access a full range of benefits that cover various life contingencies, such as old age, illness, unemployment, maternity, disability or poverty.

The ILO advocates for a transformative vision: inclusive, adaptive, and resilient SP systems. This ideal guarantees universal access to healthcare and income security, empowering individuals throughout their

lives and during unforeseen circumstances. Achieving this goal demands enhanced political commitment, heightened financial investment, strengthened international cooperation, and increased engagement of social actors. However, in my view, achieving this aspiration is daunting, both in the short and long term. It necessitates immense effort and would require time to coordinate across policy, operational, and administrative levels.

Indeed, development partners and SP agencies are deeply committed to constructing coordinated and effective organizational structures and institutional arrangements, enhancing current operations, and optimizing the utilization of personnel within the SP system. However, it appears that they may be losing sight of the primary objective: addressing the genuine needs of the poor and vulnerable. As part of this trend, many concerned agencies seem hesitant to explore innovative approaches, mechanisms, and interventions for proposed SP systems. Development partners are not vigorously advocating for the implementation of mechanisms that would streamline interactions between the impoverished and the SP system. Presently, the primary focus is on allocating additional resources to this sector and empowering experienced professionals to spearhead and take responsibility for advancing these systems to a higher standard.

Perhaps these goals are unfeasible even in the long term. Meanwhile, the world is undergoing rapid and unprecedented change. We are witnessing the disastrous effects of climate change, a demographic crisis unfolding in the developed world, the increasing influence of artificial intelligence, shifts in democratic values, and the emergence of new and intense armed conflicts, among other challenges.

Policymakers are grappling with daily challenges, and each government has its own set of priorities that may not align with recommendations from development partners. My point is that the world is evolving at an extraordinary pace, and the conditions of the poor are changing rapidly as well. What may be appropriate and advisable today may not hold true tomorrow. We need to find alternative and more expedient paths to better assist the poor and vulnerable without waiting for the realization of an ideal comprehensive, adaptive, inclusive, and resilient SP system.

In less than a decade, the concept of an ideal SP system has undergone a radical transformation. This rapid evolution is expected to continue, driven by emerging challenges and innovative solutions. However, operational hurdles rooted in outdated structures remain a significant obstacle.

This dynamic landscape demands a collective effort from all stakeholders. We must embrace change and actively work towards a paradigm shift in social protection. Let's join forces to design a future where SP systems are not just effective, but also adaptable, inclusive, and responsive to the ever-changing needs of individuals and communities.

BEYOND COMPLEXITY: A NEW PARADIGM FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION

In light of this rapidly evolving and dynamic world, the question arises: what should be done about social assistance? I propose a shift in focus. Rather than striving for increased levels of policy, operational, and administrative sophistication within SP systems, policymakers, consultants, scholars,

and development agency officials should revisit a fundamental question: how can we enable the poor and vulnerable to address their short- and long-term needs more effectively and efficiently through simple interactions with the SP system?

To address this question, it is essential to maintain and continually reassess the concept of poverty, as Duflo suggests (Duflo, 2012). Individuals grappling with poverty often face challenges when interacting with employers, navigating bureaucratic agencies, maintaining small formal and informal businesses, and addressing their own psychosocial difficulties. Consequently, they may resort to palliative coping mechanisms such as experiencing depressive feelings, turning to substance abuse, or suppressing thoughts. While these strategies may offer temporary relief, they ultimately exacerbate stress, perpetuate poverty, and heighten vulnerability levels (Belle, 2023). These challenges are likely to intensify in the coming years due to rapid global changes, which disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable.

Hence, tackling poverty and vulnerability through agencies overseeing the SP system necessitates the development of psychosocial interventions. These interventions aim to bridge the gap for individuals lacking the resources to access such support. Merely implementing efficient mechanisms and interventions on both the supply and demand sides of the SP system is insufficient. There is a pressing need for the rapid development of these new interventions, ideally incorporating innovative approaches.

Two crucial aspects must be considered. Firstly, individuals or households must actively engage as participants, ready to seek their own solutions. Secondly, SP system administrators must strive to bring individuals and households closer to services

and programs, maintaining improved and more frequent communication, and promptly addressing grievances. In essence, the SP system needs to prioritize focusing on the poor and vulnerable individually, recognizing their unique characteristics and needs. Essentially, in this new paradigm, the SP system should adopt a client-oriented approach. This entails assuming active participation from both parties, and developing and implementing innovative mechanisms and interventions tailored to finding solutions according to the specific needs of each individual or household.

For centuries, various scientific fields, including medicine, have advanced through a process of trial and error, determining whether strategies effective for some individuals could also benefit others. Similarly, the social sector has followed an evolutionary path, with pilot programs demonstrating the effectiveness of certain actions and their suitability for diverse populations. This approach was refined with the introduction of ‘*randomized controlled trials*’ (RCTs) to evaluate the impact of interventions. Development partners played a key role in introducing rigorous evaluation methodologies to assess whether observed impacts were indeed attributable to the interventions implemented (Glennister, 2013).

Moreover, in recent decades, substantial scientific progress across various disciplines has facilitated personalized and tailored solutions, often termed “precise solutions”. In the field of medicine, for example, it is recognized that diseases stem from cellular and genetic mechanisms, paving the way for personalized treatments tailored to individual genetic profiles. As Estupinya articulates: “now each case is a different world, and it is no longer an excuse but a reason for investigation” (Estupinya, 2016). Similarly,

the social sector should evolve towards a more individual or household-oriented approach.

Individual-oriented social assistance entails implementing mechanisms, services and programs customized to address the particular needs of individuals, rather than adopting a uniform approach. This type of assistance recognizes the unique circumstances of each individual or household and strives to offer support that is tailored to their specific requirements, thereby maximizing relevance and effectiveness.

In fact, this precision social protection approach can be defined as “*the process by which, firstly, it is necessary to understand the limiting factors of the poor and vulnerable in economic, social, and psychological terms. Subsequently, through active participation and collaboration with the individual or household, a personalized-oriented path is constructed to address their urgent and long-term needs, aiming to improve their current situation*”.

The healthcare sector has pioneered a powerful concept: ‘*personalized medicine*’, where treatment plans are tailored to individual genomes. This same approach holds immense promise for SP systems. Imagine a world where individuals can break free from poverty traps and address their unique needs through active participation in the SP system.

The key lies in understanding their unique circumstances from the outset. By acknowledging their specific limitations and challenges, the system can then construct a personalized path forward. This path would be paved with adequate and effective assistance, facilitated by the SP system itself.

Below are several key aspects of individual-oriented social assistance:

- **Personalization:** Programs are no longer one-size-fits-all. Instead, they are designed to address the specific needs of each individual, considering factors like age, health status, employment background, and family situation.
- **Flexibility:** Life circumstances are dynamic. Individualized assistance can adapt over time as an individual's situation evolves, ensuring continued relevance and effectiveness of the support provided.
- **Empowerment:** The ultimate goal is to equip individuals with the tools and resources they need to achieve self-sufficiency, fostering a sense of agency and moving beyond dependence on social programs.
- **Integration:** A holistic approach is essential. Services are integrated to provide comprehensive support that addresses various aspects of an individual's life.
- **Efficiency:** By targeting resources effectively, individualized assistance can become more efficient and cost-effective, maximizing the impact of available resources.

This paradigm shifts towards personalized social protection holds the potential to transform the way we approach poverty and vulnerability. By placing the individual at the center, we can create a system that is not only more effective but also empowers people to build a brighter future for themselves.

The argument here could be that cash plus interventions are progressing in that direction, as seen in programs like those in Chile, South Africa, and others with similar approaches. One limiting factor in accelerating this progress is the higher

administrative costs associated with providing individualized assistance to families. However, the emphasis here is on the necessity of active participation from beneficiary families in seeking their own solutions, the role of the SP system in becoming client-oriented to facilitate this process, and the introduction of innovative mechanisms and interventions to foster closer collaboration between individuals and the SP system at reduced costs.

One could argue that individual-oriented social assistance shares similarities with policymakers' objectives concerning graduation strategies, which seek to gradually transition social protection beneficiaries away from reliance on social assistance. Graduation strategies aim to enhance the capabilities and livelihoods of individuals experiencing extreme poverty or vulnerability, empowering them to break free from these circumstances and access sustainable development opportunities. These strategies typically involve a combination of components, including monetary transfers, training, savings programs, access to credit, and assistance with technological resources, all tailored to the specific needs and preferences of each individual or group (Montesquiou, 2017). However, despite their potential success, graduation strategies also present significant operational and administrative challenges:

Operational challenges:

- Insufficient coordination among different actors and institutions involved may result in duplications, contradictions, or gaps in the provision of services and benefits.
- Limited financial, human, and technical resources may constrain the coverage, quality, and sustainability of interventions, as well as monitoring and evaluation capacities.

- The heterogeneous outcomes and effects of graduation strategies may be influenced by factors such as context, design, implementation, beneficiary profiles, and participation.
- Overemphasis on addressing long-term needs while overlooking the daily short-term needs individuals may face, potentially diverting them from the graduation path.

Administrative challenges:

- The difficulty of monitoring and accompanying participants may impact their motivation, commitment, and their progress towards graduation, as well as the identification of their needs and preferences.
- The limitation of the scale and replicability of graduation strategies may prevent their integration into SP systems and adaptation to different vulnerable groups and situations.

A precise-oriented social protection approach goes beyond graduation strategies. It emphasizes that individuals and households should be able to effectively address both short-term and long-term needs, rather than just dealing with them temporarily. Graduation strategies, on the other hand, only focus on long-term needs. Precise-oriented social assistance treats individuals as unique and actively involves them in addressing their needs, with support from the SP system. This approach aims to tackle both short-term and long-term needs simultaneously. Essentially, if SP systems, particularly the social assistance component, adopt this approach, they become precision-oriented.

To transition SP systems into precision-oriented frameworks, policymakers should integrate the following characteristics:

- Broaden the scope of the SP system to encompass a wide array of programs and service providers. This expansion should include not only public interventions but also initiatives from private, non-profit, religious, and other sectors (third-party entities) that citizens can access for support.
- Enable households that may not be traditionally considered poor or vulnerable to participate. Idiosyncratic and covariate disasters can suddenly thrust households into poverty and desperation, even if they were not previously in such circumstances.
- Streamline the interaction between citizens and the administration of the SP system by simplifying business relationships. Accessing available programs and service providers should be straightforward through a client-oriented process, such as a *'one-stop shop'*.
- Encourage active participation from the demand side, empowering citizens to identify their issues and challenges, which may extend beyond economic concerns to include psychological and sociological aspects. With the support of the SP system, individuals can then seek suitable and tailored solutions.
- Acknowledge and foster the active involvement of regional and local governments within a precise-oriented SP system. These entities can play a pivotal role as they are closer to potential beneficiaries, facilitating more effective implementation at the grassroots level.

An SP system can be considered precision-oriented if it meets several key criteria. First, it must offer a variety of accessible programs and service providers for those in need. Second, clear and easy-to-understand communication is essential. This empowers citizens to understand their limitations and choose the right programs for their specific

needs. Finally, the system should have smooth and efficient mechanisms in place to ensure a seamless experience for users. When all these elements come together, the SP system becomes more precise and user-focused.

How can the state-citizen relationship be improved more rapidly than transitioning to complex SP systems? Low- and middle-income countries stand to gain valuable insights from the welfare and social systems of developed nations. The message from these systems is clear: simplify processes and make citizens' lives easier, provided they actively seek their own solutions. European countries have been progressively implementing three strategies to streamline service access for citizens. Firstly, they are decentralizing services, bringing them closer to communities. Secondly, they are establishing one-stop shops for citizens and businesses. Thirdly, governments are heavily investing in digital technology, developing user-friendly applications that allow citizens to navigate and select services and programs from a vast array of options. For those less familiar with technology, particularly the elderly, officials are available in local offices to provide assistance and support.

Additionally, it's crucial to study the initiatives undertaken by regional and local governments to support their constituents. Despite having limited resources, these governments tailor their assistance to meet the unique characteristics and needs of their communities. Therefore, drawing insights from both international and local experiences is essential for developing new and innovative interventions aimed at transitioning the existing SP system towards precision orientation.

EXAMPLES OF DEMAND-ORIENTED INTERVENTIONS

Several interventions have been developed and implemented by SOPROEN that align with the new paradigm of transitioning towards a precise social assistance system. Some of these interventions include:

- **Cross-sectional grievance and redressal mechanism:** This mechanism aims to streamline and simplify the process of submitting and resolving claims and complaints from all participants in SP programs. Beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of cash transfer, cash for work, cash plus and other participating interventions can contact a designated SP responsible to submit a grievance. Established protocols ensure the prompt resolution of various types and categories of grievances, with complainants receiving a resolution (Ayala, October 2022).
- **Emergency shock response interventions** are tailored to assist individuals and families affected by covariate disasters. These interventions employ both vertical expansion, such as top-ups for cash transfer beneficiaries, and horizontal expansion (individuals not being part of the SP system) at once in extraordinary short periods of time. SOPROEN has developed a parametric platform for this purpose, which can be configured within hours and adapted to various types of disasters by adjusting design parameters (Ayala, March and August 2023).
- **Dynamic social registries** are designed to assist supply-side interventions and emergency shock responses with a dynamic database that can be updated in real-time. During disasters, information about affected individuals not already included in the social registry database can be swiftly uploaded (Ayala, September 2023).

- One-stop shops to attend citizens are designed to facilitate individuals looking for assistance and help. These service points offer to individuals with urgent needs, providing them with guidance and referrals to specific services. Upon selection by the individual, an official at the point facilitates the link to the required service (Ayala, December 2023).

To transition towards a precision-oriented SP system, it's crucial to initially draw insights from the experiences of Europe and other developed nations, and subsequently tailor interventions to address the specific needs of the poor and vulnerable.

The main characteristics of *'one stop shops'*, one of the mechanisms developed by SOPROEN are the following:

- Central government social protection agencies, local government social assistance departments, and social registry agencies should serve as the primary collaborators for this intervention.
- Establish one or more points per district, county, or community to ensure broad coverage of the population, with an emphasis on proximity to residents.
- Each point should be staffed by at least one operational officer, who may or may not be a social worker. Their role is to facilitate rather than advise, mentor, or coach.
- Implement a user-friendly digital software application to support the entire project cycle transactions, prioritizing ease of use and client orientation.
- Initially, invite a select few national and local programs to participate, with plans to expand participation over time. Service providers may be both public and private.

- Introduce protocols for identifying and assessing the barriers faced by poor and vulnerable individuals and households, while allowing users flexibility in determining the types of assistance they require.
- Integrate social registries into the one-stop shops to streamline registration and access to national social protection programs for eligible individuals or households.
- Implement systematic referral and linkage systems to streamline access to preferred services and programs.
- Establish an efficient grievance and redressal mechanism for individuals, ensuring prompt resolution of claims and complaints.
- Consider setting up a call center to handle inquiries, claims submissions, and assistance in locating the nearest one-stop shop.

This intervention exemplifies the new proposed paradigm, wherein individuals and households take charge of seeking their own solutions, with the SP system facilitating their identification of needs and access to suitable services.

For a demand-oriented SP system to succeed, strong political commitment is essential, both nationally and locally. This commitment fosters close coordination at the policy level, ensuring national goals align with local realities. Once this collaborative foundation is established, the focus shifts to implementation.

Mechanisms like one-stop shops can be designed and implemented, taking existing national and local interventions into account. This "operational coordination" ensures a seamless integration of the new system with existing support structures. Shared responsibility between national and local

agencies for managing these one-stop shops is crucial for effective delivery.

Continuous improvement is vital. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation are necessary to confirm the effectiveness of these mechanisms and interventions. Based on the results, operational and administrative adjustments can be made, allowing the system to adapt and better meet evolving needs.

Committed to people

The future of social protection lies in a precision-oriented approach. By keeping the client at the center and recognizing individual circumstances, we can develop innovative mechanisms and interventions that deliver more effective support to the poor and vulnerable. This transformation has the potential to empower individuals, significantly increasing their chances of breaking free from the cycle of poverty.

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SOCIAL PROTECTION ENGINEERING

We take ethics seriously and our work is aligned with the following SDGs

