Maintaining and strengthening social assistance in conflict settings: Synthesis note

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PREFACE

This study comes at a time of profound change in the global aid architecture. Funding constraints, shifting geopolitical dynamics, and increasing demands for localisation and efficiency are reshaping how international cooperation is pursued. Simultaneously, as highlighted in the OECD's report, *States of Fragility 2025*, fragility is not only deepening but becoming more complex – driven by overlapping political, climate, economic and displacement-related shocks.

Amid this turbulence, social protection has emerged as a critical instrument for coherence, capable of addressing humanitarian needs while contributing to long-term resilience, social cohesion and state–society relations.

These findings build on and reinforce the discussions held during the October 2024 Forum on Social Protection in Fragility and Conflict, co-hosted by FCDO, WFP, UNICEF, the World Bank, USAID and BMZ. The forum's outcome document underscored the urgency of acting differently: of moving beyond short-term fixes to strategically invest in adaptable, inclusive and nationally grounded social protection systems in the most fragile places. It also called for stronger alignment across financing streams, humanitarian and development actors, and multilateral partners.

These insights will inform the Federal Government of Somalia and UK Government's High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-affected Settings in 2025, which is expected to provide guidance on practical ways to sustain delivery, support systems and coordinate actors in politically complex settings. In parallel, global policy guidance continues to evolve – particularly through the SPIAC-B's Nine Common Principles for Linking Humanitarian Assistance and Social Protection and accompanying operational tipsheets, which provide a normative and technical foundation for engagement.

In this context, the findings and recommendations of this study are not simply programmatic – they speak to a larger shift that is underway. Doing things differently is not just about managing risk – it is about maintaining relevance, legitimacy and the ability to deliver where it matters most.

ACRONYMS

DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFA	De Facto Authorities
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
SAGAL	Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (Somalia)
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SSN	Social Safety Net
STAAR	Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources
TPI	Third-Party Implementer
TPM	Third-Party Monitors
WFP	World Food Programme

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale for the study

Over the past decade, fragility and conflict have become central policy concerns for international development and humanitarian actors. There are more violent conflicts ongoing than at any time in the past 30 years, and the world is facing the largest forced displacement crisis ever recorded. Fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS) could host up to 60% of people living in extreme poverty by 2030, despite accounting for only 10% of the world's population. In 2023, 46% of these countries were in conflict. Meanwhile, conflicts are emerging elsewhere in countries that are not typically considered fragile or politically unstable. Conflict threatens to derail development gains in affected countries and create spillovers in the global economy. A 2023 report has highlighted the extent to which conflict is driving the unprecedented scale of forced displacement[1]. Conflicts are also becoming increasingly protracted in nature, and many countries affected by conflict tend to be characterised by multiple other shocks and stresses that overlap and reinforce each other.

Over the last five years, the aid community has called for new approaches to aid provision in protracted crises and countries affected by conflict. While such principles have been enshrined since 2007 in the OECD Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and since 2019 in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus[2], more work is needed to operationalise these effectively. A 2023 report from Chatham House[3] highlights the urgent need to find ways for donors to continue their engagement in situations of conflict and political estrangement, with maintaining basic services recognised as essential to preventing collapse and large population movements. The report criticises the continuing siloing of aid frameworks in these settings as not conducive to the continuity and recovery of basic services. A range of policy initiatives in the humanitarian system such as the Grand Bargain and Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework have also criticised the siloing of aid frameworks, with calls for humanitarian actors to do more to leverage and reinforce national systems. At the same time, there have been calls that the humanitarian system must not reduce or lose its focus on lifesaving, a point also recognised in the DAC Recommendation about the importance of protecting the space for principled humanitarian action. Meanwhile the 2022 OECD *States of Fragility* report[4] urges DAC members to do more to protect and continue support in conflict-affected and fragile contexts, particularly in areas important for recovery such as social sectors and food security. These policy documents recognise the role that public services play, in meeting the needs of populations, but also in narratives of state legitimacy, which can be critical for exiting from or reducing risk of conflict.

One such basic service is social protection[5], which is important to manage risk, support human development and foster resilience among vulnerable populations. Social protection can protect against risks across the lifecycle and help the most vulnerable groups in society cope with shocks. During or following conflict, social protection can support welfare, protect human capital and reduce the incidence of poverty. In protracted crises, social protection systems can reduce dependence on international humanitarian assistance. However, in countries affected by conflict, there can be a disconnect between the social protection ambitions of governments and partners and the realities of reaching the people most in need. Challenges span both operational practicalities and political dimensions. There is still limited documented evidence of ways that donors and practitioners can effectively collaborate, both across the humanitarian-development divide and with governments, to maintain, recover, or build social protection in conflict settings. Difficult questions arise for the actors involved around how to understand and navigate political complexities and trade-offs and how actors should work together to protect space for principled humanitarian action while at the same time supporting a long-term government capacity-building and

[1] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2023)
[2] OECD (2019)
[3] Cliffe, Dwan, Wainaina and Zamore (2023)
[4] OECD (2022)
[5] This report uses the SPIAC-B definition of "policies and programmes aimed at preventing, and protecting people against, poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life [...with] a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups" (SPIAC-B, 2019).

system-strengthening agenda. Financing also continues to be a constraint. In October 2024, a three-day global forum on Building and Protecting Social Protection Systems in Fragile and Conflict Settings further recognised the importance of social protection in conflict-affected contexts and the imperative to strengthen its delivery to reduce the burden on the humanitarian system[6].

This paper seeks to contribute to the urgent global debate with strategic and technical reflections on how social protection can be maintained, adapted and strengthened in contexts of fragility and conflict, and how this can be better supported financially and programmatically.

1.2 About this study

FCDO, the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF are committed to improving ways of working in fragility and conflict. The UK government's White Paper[7] published in November 2023 highlights the importance of refocusing development efforts in countries experiencing fragility and conflict, as well as the role of social protection in addressing poverty and building resilience. Both WFP and UNICEF have a strong programmatic engagement in social protection in fragile and conflict settings. These organisations are proactively working to strengthen sector linkages to enable more effective and efficient humanitarian response and examining the role of social protection in reducing conflict drivers.

In November 2023, FCDO's Social Protection Team and Humanitarian Department, working in collaboration with WFP and UNICEF, commissioned an assignment through FCDO's Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (**STAAR) Facility**. The aim is to contribute to filling this gap in knowledge and inform future efforts of donors, policymakers and practitioners to adapt and maintain, build and strengthen social assistance in conflict contexts. The focus is on social assistance (social transfers) rather than other instruments of social protection (e.g. social insurance, social services).

This assignment has developed a set of practical resources:

1. **A series of six case studies** focusing on experiences of providing social assistance in seven countries affected by conflict. Each case study documents challenges faced in adapting and maintaining, or building and strengthening, social assistance in conflict settings through the lens of that country and how these challenges were managed. They document key lessons learned, including emerging solutions and promising practices, enabling and constraining factors, and critical issues to address.

   'Maintaining social assistance when conflict hits': *Yemen, Ethiopia, Sahel region (focusing on Niger and Burkina Faso), Sudan, Armenia.*

   *'**Building and strengthening emerging social assistance systems with a conflict lens':** Somalia, Sahel region (Niger, Burkina Faso).*

   Method: Each case study is based on a desk review of published and unpublished literature and between 20 and 30 detailed key informant interviews with country-specific organisations including representatives from governments, donors, international financial institutions (IFIs), UN agencies, international NGOs (INGOs), civil society organisations and independent researchers (see each case study for details).

   Limitations: The products developed under this assignment are focused on distilling learning. They do not constitute a detailed evaluation of the programmes or the approaches that are presented. In the time available, the breadth of institutions and number of key informants included is more limited than would be the case in an evaluation. There is clearly a risk that the views presented are not representative of all stakeholders. That said, the pool of interviews conducted across all case studies represents a considerable number of stakeholders and institutions, and the lessons and issues emerging are consistent across countries, adding weight to the findings. In the time available it was not possible to enter into analysis of geopolitical factors that are shaping country conflicts as well as contributing to donor positions on aid to countries and to governments. This is clearly a critical and

[6] This was co-hosted by FCDO, WFP, UNICEF, the World Bank, USAID and BMZ and convened at the WFP headquarters in Rome. The Forum brought together over 150 participants from IFIs, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, researchers and governments.

[7] UK Government (2023)

growing issue for the international aid system (though still not widely discussed). It was also beyond the scope of the assignment to cover the topic of managing cross-border displacement through social protection in the case studies set in Africa.

2. **This synthesis paper:** the paper provides an overarching analysis of the findings and learning from across the six case studies – further substantiated where possible with examples from wider published literature and unpublished material – and sets some forward-looking guidance for policymakers and practitioners. Where possible, the analysis makes use of and builds from pre-existing frameworks on social protection system building in crisis settings. It is intended to contribute to informing decisions on how social protection in conflict is funded and delivered. This paper reinforces some of the critical messages emerging from the Global Conflict Forum[8] and is expected to inform actions taken through the planned High-Level Panel that will run in 2025[9].

2. CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDY COUNTRIES

Table 2.1 provides a short overview of the context for the case study countries. This highlights the country's socioeconomic classification and fragility trends, the state of maturity of its social assistance system at the time of conflict[10], the characteristics of conflict during the last five years, as well as whether reducing conflict drivers in some way is an objective of the social assistance schemes listed. A detailed overview of each country's context can be found in section 2 of the respective case studies.

The table provides a comparison between the countries, which share a range of contextual similarities as well as key diverging factors:

Socioeconomic classification and fragility trends: Six of the countries are classified as low-income. Six are classed as conflict-affected states in the World Bank's 2025 List of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations. For three of these countries (Somalia, Sudan, Yemen), severe fragility and active conflict have been persistent characteristics for years, if not decades. Meanwhile in the Sahel (Niger-Burkina Faso) and Ethiopia, the past five years have seen trends of worsening fragility, violence and conflict in parts or all their territory. In contrast, Armenia is an upper-middle-income country and is not classified as a fragile state despite being affected by the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

State of play of the social assistance system: Across these countries, there are considerable differences in the maturity of national systems (which we broadly understand as the degree of establishment of policy, fiscal, governance, institutional and programmatic frameworks for social protection, including the extent of coverage of the population in need and the adequacy and comprehensiveness of the assistance provided)[11]. While social protection is led by government, in all countries the sector has been supported – to varying degrees – by the international community.

» In Ethiopia, Yemen and Sudan, social assistance can be considered (relative to the other fragile states) to be 'partially developed' (designated amber here). Before the outbreak of conflict, these governments were implementing a flagship national programme, which was financed or co-financed (in the case of Ethiopia) by the state. The World Bank was contributing financially and technically, supported by a multi-donor trust fund in Ethiopia.

» In the other fragile states (Burkina Faso, Niger, Somalia), social assistance system development is at a more nascent stage (shown in red in the table). Here, efforts to date have been official development

[8] Set out in the Forum report and accompanying Charter, published in November 2024 (FCDO 2024)

[9] In 2025 the Federal Government of Somalia and the UK Government are convening a High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings. Amid global aid cuts and a shifting funding landscape, this initiative aims to catalyse global action on advancing more effective and sustainable social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings and recommend changes to the architecture for financing and delivering social protection so that it is fit for purpose. Panel members comprise influential leaders in governments, international organizations, civil society and academia.

[10] In the case of Armenia, Yemen, Sudan and Ethiopia, this represents the situation before the breakout of conflict; in the case of Somalia and the Sahel countries, it details the SSN projects that have emerged and expanded during recent years of conflict.

[11] As typically set out in global social protection frameworks. For further information see Barca and Jaramillo Mejia (2023)

assistance (ODA)- or IFI-financed, focusing on the rollout of safety net projects. In the two Sahel countries, social safety nets (SSNs) have been running for over 10 years, whereas in Somalia they have emerged more recently.

» In comparison, Armenia (shown in green) has a mature social protection system comprising a comprehensive system of social assistance benefits funded by the state. Before the conflict, the World Bank and UNICEF provided technical assistance supporting system reform.

» In Sudan, Somalia, Niger and Burkina Faso, in addition to financing transfers to people, IFI and donor support has been developing the foundational building blocks for a national system. In all these countries, social assistance system-building efforts remain somewhat fragmented, with smaller-scale donor-funded and UN-supported cash transfer projects also linked with the social assistance system, implemented in partnership with the government.

Conflict context: The nature and characteristics of conflict vary significantly across the countries, reflecting the highly context-specific and complex political, social and economic drivers.

» In several countries, conflict reflected a contestation of governance at the national level and while violent conflict was often localised, latent conflict affected the whole country. This includes Sudan, Yemen and Somalia (in the latter, between the Federal Government of Somalia [FGS] and Al-Shabaab). Meanwhile, in some countries, conflict has been concentrated in particular regions. This is the case in Ethiopia and the Sahel countries, while some conflict dynamics in Somalia have a regional focus (conflict between the FGS and Member States in the north, and the disputed territories). Meanwhile, in Armenia, conflict reflected cross-border military escalation concerning the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

» In Yemen, the Sahel countries, Sudan and Ethiopia (Tigray region), a common factor has been military coups, and/or the seizing of power by a de facto authority. In Yemen, Sudan and Ethiopia, this was a precursor for severe and violent conflict. In the Sahel, these events led to civil unrest.

» A diverse range of actors (with different motivations) have been parties to conflict in each country, while the spread of actors also varies across countries. The central government were implicated parties in all countries. Other parties included regional government forces (Ethiopia, Somalia), paramilitary forces (Sudan), government forces of an external country (Armenia – Azerbaijan) and Islamic insurgencies (Sahel countries, Somalia). A plethora of non-state armed groups have been part of the conflict in all countries except Armenia. These militias have aligned with one of the opposing factions. In most cases, historical tensions along tribal, clan or ethnic lines have also contributed to the escalation of localised conflict between these armed groups.

Social assistance to address social cohesion and the social contract: Unsurprisingly, in Ethiopia, Yemen and Armenia, where the design and rollout of these social assistance programmes preceded the conflict, reducing conflict drivers was not an objective of social assistance system development. In contrast, in Sudan and Somalia – countries experiencing protracted and severe fragility and conflict – donor-funded cash transfer programmes have had more explicitly formulated ambitions to improve the social contract between state and citizen. Similar ambitions for social assistance to reinforce the social contract and foster social cohesion are also highlighted in promotional literature on the SSN projects in the Sahel, although these are not included as objectives in the SSN design documents.

***Notes on Table 2**: ASPN-2: Adaptive Social Protection Programme – Phase 2; ESSN: Emergency Safety Net; FCAS: fragile and conflict-affected setting; IDA: International Development Association; IDP: internally displaced person; MCCT: Mother and Child Cash Transfer; MDTF: multi-donor trust fund; PSNP: Productive Safety Net Programme; SAGAL: Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment; SESNP: Sudan Emergency Safety Nets Project; SFSP: Sudan Family Support Programme; SWF: Social Welfare Fund ; TPI: third-party implementer*

Table 2.1. Summary characteristics of the country contexts[12]

	Yemen	Ethiopia	Sahel	Sudan	Somalia	Armenia
Socioeconomic situation, fragility trends[13]	**Low-income country** **Protracted severe fragility.** 2019–2022: most fragile country in the world; recent minor improvement (ranked 6th in 2024). Consistently included in World Bank List of FCAS[14].	**Low-income country** **Increasing fragility.** 12th most fragile state in 2024 (from 15th in 2018). Included in World Bank List of FCAS for first time in 2022.	**Low-income countries** **Niger: more stable but increasing fragility.** 19th most fragile state in 2024 (from 24th in 2022) **Burkina Faso: more stable but increasing fragility.** 21st most fragile state in 2024 (from 47th in 2019). Consistently included in World Bank List of FCAS.	**Low-income country** **Protracted severe and increasing fragility.** 2nd most fragile state in 2024 (from 7th–8th 2018–2023). Consistently included in World Bank List of FCAS.	**Low-income country** **Protracted severe fragility.** Consistently ranked 1st or 2nd most fragile country since 2006. Consistently included in World Bank List of FCAS.	**Upper-middle income country** **Not a fragile state.** Small increase in fragility since 2020 (military hostilities). 89th most fragile state 2024 (+100th 2019). Included in World Bank List of FCAS 2021
Social assistance system – state of play at time of conflict	**Developing** **Social Welfare Fund (SWF) programme (1996–): cash transfer to 1.5 million households (9 million people, 30% population). nationwide. Funded by government with some World Bank support.**	**Developing** **Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) (2008–): cash and food transfers to 2.5 million households (8 million people, 6.5% population) in 408/670 rural districts. Funded by government, World Bank and MDTF.**	**Emerging** **Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme: multi-donor programme financing cash transfers, productive inclusion measures and system-building efforts. Co-financing IDA-funded SSN projects:** • **Niger – ASPN2 (2019–)** • **Burkina Faso – SSNP (2019–2024)** **UN Joint Programme: (2021–) hybrid model for social protection in Sahel (Twin Track approach; UN supports implementation if government capacities exceeded).**	**Emerging** **Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP) (2019–2023): World Bank and multi-donor-funded cash transfer aiming to cover 40 million people (80% population) as part of state-building agenda and to build social protection system foundations; WFP co-deliver.** **Maternal and Child Cash Transfer (MCCT) (2021–) in 2 regions, supported by UNICEF, funded by KfW.**	**Emerging** **Baxnaano (2019–): World Bank-funded cash transfer covering 250,000 households in 21 districts (10% population), with WFP contracted to deliver the programme and UNICEF to support building of social protection system foundations.** **SAGAL (2021–): EU-funded cash transfers reaching 44,000 households, delivered by INGOs.** **Child Sensitive Social Protection Programme (2022–): cash transfer in 3 districts of 3 states. funded by KfW, implemented by UNICEF, government and INGOs.**	**Mature** **Strong social assistance system, with 51 government-funded programmes.** **Family Living Standard Enhancement Benefit (1999–) is the cash transfer with most coverage, reaching 13% of the population.**
Conflict context	**(2015–) civil war** Half the county controlled by de facto government, half by recognised government. Armed clashes pro-government forces versus insurgents. Localised armed clashes between pro-government forces, along historic tribal lines. Attacks by extremists.	**(2020–2022) conflict between federal government and regional authorities** in Tigray region, spilled into Amhara and Afar. Peace Agreement in 2023. **(2023–) escalation in and between regions** along historic ethnic conflict lines, implicating federal government, regional governments, non-state armed groups (NSAGs).	Niger **(2023–) military coup** **(2022–) attacks by extremists** Exposed to jihadist activities, increasing since 2022. Burkina Faso **(2015–) extremist insurgency** Government forces and pro-government militia fighting extremists. Extremist group presence has increased since 2019 (40% territory controlled by NSAGs). **(2022) Two military coups.**	(2019) authoritarian regime overthrown, transitional government formed. **(2021) military coup** **(2023–) power struggle between army and paramilitary** Clashes between opposing military forces. Other NSAGs joined the fighting on both sides. Conflict is reigniting historical tribal and ethnic hostilities.	**(1991–) Somalia War** More than 3 decades of protracted conflict; 2 as a failed state. **(2012) Federal Government of Somalia established.** **Since 2019, dynamics include:** Attacks by militant groups (mainly Al-Shabaab). Armed clashes between FGS and allied forces, and insurgents. Contested governance (FGS versus Member States; disputed territories in the north). Conflict between clan militias (driven by competition for resources and marginalisation of minority clans).	**(2020–) conflict Armenia versus Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh** Clashes between opposing military. Military blockade. Ceding of territory to Azerbaijan, full displacement into Armenia.
Is contributing to social cohesion and state–society contract a stated objective of social assistance?	No	No	While not an objective in SSN design documents, stated in wider published documents on the SSNs. Delivery of social assistance expected to, 'reinforce social contract', 'foster social cohesion', and 'tackle root cause of fragility'.	Yes, on SFSP: Delivery of social assistance expected to help the transitional government 'strengthen the social contract with its citizens and its legitimacy'.	Yes, on Baxnaano: Delivery of social assistance expected to 'build citizen's confidence in national institutions' and 'contribute to a strengthened social contract between the FGS and citizens'.	No
Themes explored in case study	2018 switch to a third-party implementer (UNICEF) to deliver cash transfer programme, preserving SWF design. Since 2021, partial transition to national institutions. Challenges in forging links between social protection and the humanitarian safety nets operating in parallel.	Efforts to maintain/ resume PSNP in Afar, Amhara, Oromia. UNICEF's Cash Transfer for IDPs delivered through government systems. Working through a TPI (WFP) to deliver assistance in Tigray. Efforts to reestablish social protection after Peace Agreement including capacity building.	Efforts to adapt safety nets (Burkina Faso, Niger) and the UN Joint Programme (Niger), to maintain social assistance in the face of insecurity. Pivoting the UN 'Twin Track' approach to maintain social protection since the Niger coup. Conflict sensitivity of system-building efforts to date. Challenges in linking social protection–humanitarian assistance to support system building.	After 2021 coup, pivoting support from SFSP to emergency safety net programme, SESNP, through a third-party implementer (WFP). Efforts to maintain the ESSN and MCCT during conflict. Changes to donor priorities for social assistance since 2023.	Experiences and learning from the above programmes on challenges faced and promising solutions for building social assistance in FCAS. Conflict sensitivity of system-building efforts to date. Challenges in linking social protection–humanitarian assistance to support system building.	Maintaining social protection inside conflict zones. Ensuring social protection for those displaced to Armenia. Humanitarian actors' role in supporting government-led emergency social protection schemes for refugees.

3. MANAGING RISKS AND CONSTRAINTS TO PROVIDING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN CONFLICT SETTINGS

Besides impacting on the need for social protection, in driving new and deepened vulnerability, conflict can present a range of difficulties for actors providing social assistance. A literature review conducted during the conceptualisation of this study identified several possible risks, including operational risks and constraints, political sensitivities and risks arising where states are parties to conflict. These are set out in Box 3.1, and served as a reference for examining the challenges as the case studies were conducted.

Box 3.1 Typical challenges for providing social assistance in conflict settings[12]

Operational risks and constraints

- **Physical impacts:** destruction of or disruptions to social protection institutions and infrastructure, or to infrastructure in other sectors playing a critical role in the delivery chain (e.g. digital communications, banking sector); loss of workforce capacities if staff are affected or displaced.
- **Security and access challenges:** barriers to reaching affected populations or completing programme activities due to active conflict, concerns about the safety of staff and beneficiaries, or restrictions to accessing certain areas.
- **Displacement:** issues arising from the movement of beneficiaries and prospective beneficiaries which complicates delivery and presents challenges for continued access to services.
- **Grievances in targeting:** targeting and registration activities can inadvertently reinforce tensions between groups in society or contribute to social discord if they are not well understood or are perceived to be unfair.
- **Fraud and diversion:** increased susceptibility to corruption, mismanagement or diversion of funds, particularly in less accessible and less monitored environments.
- **Accessibility and inclusion challenges:** the conflict reinforces difficulties that vulnerable groups face when navigating programme administrative rules and processes.
- **Protection and safeguarding risks:** the conflict increases exposure to harm for beneficiaries, including risks of gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).

Political risks and constraints

- **Contestation of state legitimacy:** leading to changes or uncertainty in governance and in the duty bearers for social protection.
- **Funding volatility:** conflict or political fragility cause unpredictable shifts in the funding landscape for social assistance, leading to sudden pauses or cessation of programmes due to reductions in domestic revenues or restrictions in ODA to government.
- Political interference in design and delivery: conflict can influence how national or local authorities seek to use social assistance to bolster their political support and legitimacy, or to finance war economies; conflict may contribute to bias and discrimination in providing social assistance.

Section 3.1 below presents findings on the operational risks and challenges identified in the case study countries, while section 3.2 explores the political risks and sensitivities.

3.1 Managing operational risks and constraints to maintaining social assistance in conflict settings

The table in Annex A sets out the operational risks and challenges to providing social assistance in conflict settings. It illustrates how conflict impacted efforts to maintain the provision of social assistance in the case study countries. It then outlines the actions that were taken to manage these challenges, highlighting where similar measures have been implemented in other countries (based on

[12] Source: author's own framing based on findings of literature review.

global literature). Each action is assigned a traffic light colour code, indicating the strength of the evidence base on its effectiveness. Its ease of implementation is also estimated (i.e. can this be acted on immediately, at no or low cost, or will it require more investment of time or resources?). The table concludes with remarks on which actions can already be considered promising practices to promote in future, and which require further evidence. **Key findings are elaborated below.**

3.1.1 Risks and challenges experienced

There is consistency in the broad categories of risks seen across countries: conflict presents typical operational risks for providing social assistance, which can manifest at all stages of the delivery chain:

- **All stages:** damage to and disruption of existing social protection institutions and infrastructure involved in delivery.
- **Communication with communities:** risk that a lack of understanding about programme objectives and eligibility rules contributes to mistrust, social tensions and community conflict.
- **Registration, eligibility assessment and enrolment of beneficiaries:** including difficulties in verifying the identity of existing social protection beneficiaries and new applicants; challenges in managing safety of beneficiaries and staff; displacement of existing beneficiaries and new applicants; and risks that targeting and registration inflame conflict dynamics due to perceived exclusions.
- **Benefit delivery:** including challenges in managing access, safety and security; difficulties in ensuring portability of assistance for displaced beneficiaries; managing disruptions in the financial sector; and challenges in ensuring that vulnerable groups are included.
- **Monitoring:** managing risks of fraud and diversion.
- **Grievance and redress:** capturing and addressing heightened safeguarding risks for specific groups.

The specific nature of the risks varies across countries, according to context; however, some risks are commonplace, being identified in four or more of the studied countries. These include:

- Loss of personal identification documents.
- Social registries underpinning eligibility for social assistance are not sufficiently dynamic to identify or respond to population movement including for people who are forcibly displaced.
- Physical threat to safety during payments (and registration)[13].
- Difficulties with getting access approved by de facto authorities, non-state armed groups, or government forces.
- Making payments to displaced beneficiaries.
- Heightened accessibility constraints for vulnerable groups.
- Increased motivation for diversion or taxation, and reduced oversight.
- Safeguarding risks (GBV and SEA).

Conflict creates new risks and reinforces other known risks in social assistance delivery. Several of the identified risks are not specific to conflict, they are inherent to providing social assistance in normal times and further exacerbated by conflict (e.g. risk of fraud and diversion, exclusion and SEA). Conflict also contributes new risks – for example, physical damage and disruption to infrastructure, threats to physical safety during distribution. Some of these are not dissimilar to risks caused by other types of shock, such as were seen during COVID-19 or climate- and weather-related shocks. These may manifest differently, but the end effect to providing social assistance is similar. For example, climate- and weather-related shocks also cause power outages and damage to social protection infrastructure and institutions, while the risk of contracting COVID-19 presented a threat to physical safety. This is significant because it shows that while conflict-related risks and challenges can be substantial, mitigation measures that have worked to address risks elsewhere can still be useful.

[13] In several countries (Yemen, Ethiopia, the Sahel countries) new registration activities did not take place during the period under discussion, which accounts for why such risks during the registration phase were not mentioned as frequently.

Conflict exacerbates risks for groups that are already vulnerable. Social assistance programmes can seek to target groups facing specific vulnerabilities due to a range of factors including age, disability, ethnicity, gender and sociocultural norms. Groups that are already marginalised can face further exclusion, while risks of harm can be reinforced. These risks can impact all stages of the programme cycle, so are critical to account for in design and implementation.

There are few common frameworks to understand and assess risks of social protection engagement: While some actors sporadically conducted their own conflict sensitivity and political economy analysis in some countries, few joint conflict sensitivity analyses were conducted, and few risk assessment and mitigation frameworks were adopted by social protection working groups. This meant that there was no commonly formulated understanding of the conflict-specific risks and challenges that national social assistance programmes face. Where international actors significantly supported or sustained delivery of social assistance, they may have used internal conflict analysis and risk mitigation approaches, but these would have focused on their own operations rather than the sector – and its relationship to the conflict – as a whole.

3.1.2 Managing risks and challenges: actions taken and promising solutions

Actions taken by governments and third-party implementers (TPIs) to manage these operational risks tended to be responsive rather than pre-planned: Mitigation measures were typically elaborated in response to the risk, i.e. these challenges were not already anticipated or planned for, and the actions taken were not part of the design of social assistance institutions, programmes or implementation processes. On the one hand, this shows that conflict, while a challenge, can also present opportunities to strengthen underlying systems. On the other, it illustrates limitations in how social assistance systems are being conceived and designed in fragile states, as the occurrence of conflict and associated risks are not systematically integrated.

There is consistency in the actions trialled across countries: Mitigation measures have converged across countries (including in countries beyond the seven focus countries for this study). Practices to manage the risks can be grouped into four broad categories.

1. Small tweaks/modifications to programme design features or implementation processes.
2. Introduction of new processes or strengthening of operational systems and institutions.
3. Partnerships with international and national actors to support and sustain delivery.
4. Risk avoidance measures, such as limiting coverage in conflict zones or pausing activities.

In general, robust evidence on the performance of these measures remains quite limited. This reflects a systemic limitation noted by KIs (see section 4.4). However, this study was at least able to substantiate consistent views among key informants (including across countries) on the usefulness of many of the actions – these are highlighted in amber in Annex A. In some cases, this was further corroborated by evidence from other studies (highlighted in green). Furthermore, in some cases, similar actions have been taken where social assistance programmes were impacted by other types of shock, and the effectiveness of these actions is corroborated in related literature[14]. It can therefore be concluded that some measures can already be considered promising practices for future adoption, while for others, more evidence is needed. It is also clear that some practices can mitigate more than one conflict-related risk. Table 3.1 on the next page presents a summary of promising practices.

[14] Adapting and simplifying design and delivery procedures to enable transfers to continue, despite capacity constraints: the Philippines; Surge in staff from other locations: the Philippines; Attestation by local authorities/tribal leaders to validate identities and confirm proof of life: the Philippines; Universal social registry enabling remote screening for assistance where physical field presence may not be possible: Bangladesh, Uganda, Kenya; Digital social protection registries supporting portability of beneficiary data nationwide: the Philippines, Jordan; Waive conditionalities where these present risks to beneficiaries: the Philippines, Ethiopia (COVID); Reducing number of payment cycles: Ethiopia (COVID), Bangladesh; Use of armed escorts/security personnel: the Philippines; Digital payment solutions enabling remote and less visible delivery of payments: the Philippines, Colombia, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey; E-payments enable beneficiaries to access payments in new locations: the Philippines, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey; Use of manual (cash-in-hand) payments where banking infrastructure is affected: the Philippines; Remote monitoring tools: Bangladesh, Uganda, Kenya.

Table 3.1. Promising practices for managing operational risks and challenges to providing social assistance in conflict settings[15]

KEYS — IS THIS A PROMISING PRACTICE TO CONSIDER IN THE FUTURE?
DE - Yes definitely PO - Yes potentially UC - Unclear/cannot say

RISK	ACTIONS TAKEN	Is this a promising practice to consider in the future?
Damage/stress to institutions	Introducing tools to assess damage to social protection operations and institutions and inform recovery	DE
	Providing surge capacity for staffing	DE
	Simplifying design and delivery procedures to enable transfers to continue e.g. grouping payments, waiving conditionalities	DE
	Establishing central server back up to restore beneficiary records	DE
	Partnering with TPIs to reach areas with limited state institutional capacity	DE
	Providing technical assistance by international organisations to build capacities	DE
Communicating programme rules and eligibility	Running awareness-raising and sensitisation campaigns	DE
	Setting up hotline/call centre for raising queries or complaints	DE
Verifying identity of social protection beneficiaries and new applicants	Engaging local community leaders to validate identities and confirm proof of life	DE
	Ensuring cross-government coordination to fast-track ID replacement	DE
	Crosschecking state civil registries to speed up ID replacement	PO
	Introducing digital solutions for ID verification (biometric registration, QR codes)	UC
Managing the safety of beneficiaries and staff during registration	Scheduling face-to-face registration and assessment activities flexibly	DE
	Investing in social protection registries that can enable remote assessment and identification of beneficiaries	PO
	Engaging local actors (private sector) with strong community presence to negotiate access and lead enumeration	PO
Managing the displacement of beneficiaries and new applicants	Introducing dynamic updating of social protection registries	UC
	Undertaking community outreach to relocate households and update records	DE
	Adapting programme eligibility rules to relax rules on residence status	PO
	Enabling remote registration and assessment through digital platform	PO
	Ensuring digital social protection registries enable country-wide portability of beneficiary records	DE
	Deploying additional social protection workforce by recruiting from the displaced population	DE
	Implementing separate temporary support programmes for IDPs	PO
	Modifying registration processes to capture information on displacement	UC
Risk that targeting caused conflict	Conducting conflict sensitivity analysis of targeting approach	DE
Managing access, safety and security during delivery	Waiving conditionalities	DE
	Screening for ordinances at project sites	DE
	Reducing the number of payments to limit exposure	PO
	Gathering local intelligence through social protection frontline workers/the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement	DE
	Mediating with de facto authorities/armed groups through local actors (social protection frontline workers/the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement)	DE
	Partnering with specialist actors for intelligence gathering	DE
	Diversifying partnerships for managing payments	DE
	Planning flexible locations for payout points	DE
	Moving payment sites to accessible areas	PO
	Pausing payments in insecure areas and making back-payments later	PO
	Partnering with TPIs to reach areas government struggles to access	DE
	Using armed escorts/security personnel	PO
	Adapting communication procedures to reduce exposure for staff and beneficiaries	DE
	Adopting digital payment solutions enabling remote and less visible delivery	DE
	Avoiding the risk by excluding highly insecure areas from programme coverage	PO
Ensuring portability of assistance for displaced beneficiaries	Pausing payments for displaced beneficiaries and providing backdated payments on return	PO
	Bringing payments to IDPs' new location	PO
	Including 'adapting to displacement' in service agreements for financial and other service providers	DE
	Tracking population movements through community leaders or the humanitarian community	DE
	Introducing e-payments, enabling beneficiaries to access payments in new locations	DE
	Establishing regulations that enable portability across borders	DE
Managing disruptions in the financial sector	Pausing payments during periods of disruption and backdating these once services resume operations	PO
	Using online banking and online retail where banks closed	PO
	Developing a foreign exchange strategy	DE
	Switching modalities to in-kind transfers	DE
	Diversifying choice of payment agents outside the formal banking system	DE
	Using manual ('cash in hand') payments	DE
	Increasing circulation of physical currency	DE
	Surging in staff from bank branches in other non-affected regions	DE
Managing inclusion of vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, older people, pregnant women, female-headed households, refugees, minorities)	Allowing collection of benefits by a third party	DE
	Supporting women to use digital payment services	DE
	Bringing services to marginalised communities to reduce distance	DE
	Considering conservative gender norms when designing distribution sites	DE
	Overcoming mobility constraints by paying for transport or providing doorstep payments	DE
	Integrating international disability standards into social protection institutions	PO
	Introducing alternative payment solutions that are more accessible	DE
Managing risk of fraud and diversion	Sub-contracting a TPI to outsource management of fiduciary risks	DE
	Hiring independent third-party monitors	PO
	Building in automated controls into management information systems (MIS)	PO
	Validating identity and eligibility by cross-checking government registries	PO
	Considering risks when contracting service providers and screening contractors against sanctions lists	PO
	Supervising and monitoring payment distributions in real time	DE
	Using remote monitoring tools – phone surveys, satellite-based monitoring, mobile apps	DE
	Conducting audit and spot check exercises	DE
	Setting up hotline/call centre for raising complaints of fraud and corruption	DE
	Using biometric data to reduce risks of leakages (Somalia)	UC

RISK	ACTIONS TAKEN	Is this a promising practice to consider in the future?
Addressing safeguarding risks	Applying the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework to assess and mainstream mitigation of safeguarding risks throughout design and delivery	DE
	Building staff capacity on managing risk of GBV	PO
	Mapping specialised services for GBV for referrals	PO
	Conducting community sensitisation to enhance understanding and use of grievance redress mechanisms (GRM)	DE
	Setting up hotline/call centre to identify and address sensitive complaints of GBV/SEA	UC
	Partnering with international humanitarian actors for complementary GRM services	DE
	Employing additional staff to manage additional workload on the GRM	DE
	Diversifying communication and feedback channels to deal with sensitive issues	DE
	Partnering with community health workers to identify and refer GBV cases	UC

It is important to also consider how easily (quickly, cheaply) the various measures can be applied. The time, effort and investment needed to implement the actions varies considerably. As a rule of thumb, design tweaks and procedural modifications will be relatively quick and cheap to put into practice, whereas introducing new and improved systems and partnerships requires a greater level of effort and investment. Some important changes are substantial and only achievable over the medium term; for example, introducing new e-payment systems – a major system reform. In these cases, the decisions to invest in the system were not made purely in response to the conflict risks. Rather, these were planned and-budgeted-for changes aiming to advance the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation. These investments would have been difficult to make solely in response to the constraints that emerged during conflict. Meanwhile, the case of Ethiopia illustrates the need to be pragmatic and adopt feasible measures now. Here, it was recognised that addressing constraints to the portability of social assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs), while much needed, could not be quickly achieved and would require a medium-term approach to change underlying systems. Since IDPs needed urgent support, FCDO and UNICEF therefore opted for a different, more immediate solution – to design a separate IDP cash transfer programme implemented through social protection institutions.

The characteristics and maturity of the social assistance system affect which actions are possible. Section 4.1 highlights key features in the social assistance system that can enable social assistance provision in settings of fragility and conflict.

Multiple measures may need to be applied simultaneously for the effective management of risk. This is well illustrated, for example, in the case of mitigating risk of fraud and diversion. In all studied countries, a spread of instruments and approaches was applied, and in all cases KIs considered that this was more appropriate than relying solely on a single measure.

3.2 Managing political risks and constraints to social assistance provision in conflict settings

Table 3.2 below sets out the political risks and challenges to providing social assistance in conflict settings. It illustrates the different risks identified in the case study countries and the actions taken to manage these challenges. Each action is assigned a traffic light colour code summarising the strength of the evidence base on the performance of these measures. The table concludes with remarks on which actions can already be considered promising practices to promote in future, compared with those where more evidence is needed. See also Annex B for further details from the specific countries. Key findings are elaborated below.

3.2.1 Risks and challenges experienced

There is consistency and broad commonalities in the risks seen across countries: for almost all categories of political risk identified, multiple (at least three in each case) country case studies provided examples of this risk being realised in practice. This provides some confidence that the findings are illustrative of the typical political risks and sensitivities that need to be borne in mind when designing or implementing social protection in FCAS. The following categories of risk were observed.

[15] Author's own, summarising Annex A.

1. De facto authorities claiming control of central government or part of the territory.
2. Government's conduct as a party to the conflict.
3. Political interference in the provision of social protection, along conflict lines.
4. Political agendas linked to the conflict influencing government decisions on social protection.
5. Risks to TPIs from being associated with government.
6. Political dilemmas for continuing social assistance for refugees.

Government's conduct as a party to conflict, and the influence of political agendas on government's decisions around social protection design (including unwillingness to serve certain populations, or interference in targeting) are among the most sensitive risks. These risks can create difficulties for donors supporting social protection and they are also some of the main concerns of humanitarian actors when linking humanitarian action and social protection, because of potential conflicts with the humanitarian principles (see section 4.5 for a more detailed discussion).

There are critical differences in how political risks manifest between and even within countries, demonstrating the importance of context. Armenia is a notable case in point, being highlighted here as a key outlier, with only one of the political risks identified above being relevant in its context. Social assistance in other, more fragile countries was exposed to a wider range of risks, although there was still variation, and not all risks were prevalent in all fragile states. Finally, the case of Ethiopia highlights how such risks can also manifest differently within a country as parties to conflict and conflict dynamics vary between locations and over time. There are therefore no 'hard rules' about how conflict poses political risks to social protection provision, and it is important to have a grounded appreciation of the context.

The varying drivers of conflict and motivations and agendas of the respective parties present different risks and sensitivities for maintaining social protection and engaging with the government. Broadly, the more a conflict challenges the overall legitimacy and survival of central government, the greater the potential for political risks to social assistance provision. Analysis across countries suggests that sensitivities arise particularly where parts of a territory are violently contested; where there is a proliferation of different parties/actors involved in the conflict including non-state armed groups; and where societal groupings based around clan, tribal and ethnic group are prominent actors driving conflict dynamics (such as in Somalia, Sudan, the Sahel and Ethiopia).

3.2.2 Managing risks and challenges: actions taken and promising solutions

Some convergence around solutions is evident across countries, and promising practices are emerging, though stronger evidence is still needed. A range of approached have been – or are being – tried to manage these risks, with similar actions observed across counties. In general, robust evidence on the performance of these measures, in terms of their efficacy and effectiveness to address the risks, and any wider positive or negative impacts, remains quite limited. However, this study found consistent opinions from KIs across countries to substantiate that several of the practices are promising. These include channelling resources through TPIs, funding social protection institutions that are independently governed, disengaging with political figureheads but continuing to engage with technocrats and decentralised bodies, financing political economy analysis, financing independent monitoring and oversight mechanisms, and conducting social protection institutional capacity assessments to inform recovery and hand over from TPI to government. A summary is provided in Table 3.2.

In contrast, divergence was seen in the actions taken to address the risks of political manipulation and interference in household targeting and beneficiary lists. Some actors adopted data-driven methodologies to reduce human input in decision-making, while others promoted simple categorical criteria to reduce opportunity for manipulation. It is important to generate more learning on the strengths and limitations of these approaches in FCAS – particularly on the use of proxy means testing. See more in section 4.

Table 3.2. Promising practices for managing political risks and challenges to providing social assistance in conflict settings[16]

KEYS — PROMISING PRACTICE TO CONSIDER IN FUTURE?
DE - Yes definitely PO - Yes potentially UC - Unclear/cannot say NY - Unclear/cannot say

ISSUE AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVISION	ACTIONS TAKEN	Is this a promising practice to consider in the future?
De facto authorities claim control of central government or part of the territory • World Bank invoked Operational Policy 7.30, pausing financial support • Donors paused funds to government • Central government remains recognised, so IFI funding continued. But government paused budget support to region controlled by de facto authorities	IFI/donor contracting and financing a TPI to ensure assistance can continue to reach people in need	DE
	Continuing to fund social protection institutions which are independently governed	DE
	Engaging with and financing frontline staff of government institutions	PO retained expertise but did not preserve institution. Incentive payments could be better.
Government's conduct in conflict (protection of civilians) • Ethical/reputational risk concerns for donors; delays to contributions	Planning conflict sensitivity analysis, to examine these (and other) risks and inform donor and partner engagement	NY
	Disengaging with political figureheads but continuing to engage with technocrats and work through decentralised bodies (including through incentive payments for staff)	DE
Political interference in provision of social protection along conflict lines • Conflict dynamics influence decisions on targeting (discrimination and exclusion) • Diversion of assistance to serve the conflict • Attempts by authorities to influence targeting for political patronage	Establishing inclusive targeting committees, representative of all populations	UC
	Facilitating geographical targeting by partners, using evidence-based criteria	PO Still risk of interference at sub-district level.
	Exploring evidence of links to parties to conflict as part of due diligence when selecting and contracting financial service providers	UC
	Donors conducting independent political economy analysis	DE
	Planning conflict sensitivity diagnostic to examine these risks	NY
	Maintaining a pre-existing beneficiary list to reduce opportunity for influencing targeting	PO (short-term)
	Targeting demographic categories of the population using simple and clear criteria to reduce the chance of manipulation	PO
	Moving away from community-based targeting to data-driven household targeting	UC
Political agendas linked to the conflict influence government decisions on social protection • Government reluctant to share information on social protection system functionality or loss of control of territory • Government's political agenda to resume control of social protection delivery from TPI is prioritised over assuring quality of service provision • Government support for social assistance is limited by competing security priorities • Relationships between central and decentralised authorities constrain rollout of federal SSN projects	Financing independent monitoring and oversight mechanisms	DE
	Assessing independent social protection institutional capacity to inform handover from TPI to government	DE
	Seeking real-time information on conflict prevalence and severity from independent specialist actors	PO need more evidence
	Investing in building and sharing evidence to build the case for social protection across government	NY
	Planning for greater involvement and capacity building for decentralised (Member State and district) authorities	NY
TPIs being associated with one or other side of the conflict • Risk that an affiliation with government or with de facto authorities compromises security and access for the TPI • Territory and jurisdiction for service delivery is contested between regional administrations, constraining agreement and access for the TPI	TPI engaging with both sides of the conflict, with clear communication that the programme is to benefit vulnerable populations across territories under the control of both sides	PO
	TPI holding a planning exercise to understand how it is perceived by different groups in the community and inform engagement strategy	NY
	TPI introducing neutral coding for registering beneficiaries in the contested locations, unaffiliated with either region, to maintain neutrality and overcome political impasse	PO
Political dilemmas for continuing social assistance for refugees • Social assistance for refugees cannot be higher than for citizens to avoid tensions, but refugees have greater needs • Constraints on integrating refugees into national social assistance schemes out of concerns about social tensions	Providing additional support to refugees as separate, clearly defined 'emergency assistance' programmes (not as top-ups to routine social protection benefits)	PO (short-term)
	Planning a separate 'transitional' assistance programme for refugees, after 18 months of emergency assistance	NY

[16] Author's own, summarising Annex B.

4. LESSONS LEARNED FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM BUILDING IN FCAS

The study has generated important lessons that can inform system-building efforts in FCAS. Section 4.1 summarises learning on the components and characteristics of social protection systems that are helpful for social protection provision in FCAS. Section 4.2 highlights the learning around engaging – and remaining engaged – with state institutions. Sections 4.3 to 4.5 reflect on the roles of different actors supporting system building in FCAS including international organisations, IFIs, donors and humanitarian actors. Section 4.6 discusses conflict sensitivity or system building and opportunities for social protection to enhance social cohesion and the social contract.

4.1 Strengthening social protection system building blocks in FCAS

Certain characteristics of social protection systems are emerging as key enablers of social protection provision in FCAS. Table 4.1 summarises lessons emerging from case study countries on features of the social protection system that have helped in navigating the difficulties faced in FCAS (indicated by a green box) and gives examples of where the lack of such features has created difficulties (indicated by a red box)[17]. The table presents learning on characteristics across social protection system building blocks at policy, programme and implementation levels[18].

System features that are critical enablers of social protection in conflict and should be prioritised for investment in system-strengthening efforts in FCAS are further highlighted below.

» **A key enabler for delivering social assistance in fragility and conflict is a decentralised social protection workforce.** Learning in Ethiopia and Yemen demonstrated the resilience of these structures during conflict, even when some frontline workers were not paid salaries for prolonged periods. In all cases where it was possible to remain engaged and work through local institutions and frontline workers, this was important for community engagement, execution of essential programmatic functions, and negotiating with gatekeepers for access. It is not only the technical expertise but the wider 'soft skills' of this workforce that are important. Similar findings are emerging from BASIC Research on social protection provision in crises[19] as well as wider studies[20]. In Ethiopia it was found to be more cost-efficient for UNICEF to work through existing government structures than a parallel system of INGOs. It is likely a missed opportunity when, in fragile states, early investments in system building do not prioritise the development of these institutions or their capabilities, focusing instead on centralised data and delivery systems and centralised management through Project Implementation Units (PIUs).

» **Another key enabler is the digitalisation of delivery systems.** Benefits from adopting digital systems are seen at all stages of the delivery chain, while gaps in the penetration of digital communications and e-payment solutions constrained social assistance provision and shock adaptation – especially in situations of displacement. Progress towards digitalisation of social protection systems will, in turn, be influenced by the wider regulatory and policy environment, including support for digital innovations in the banking sector, the penetration of e-money and e-

[17] This is not to say that these are the *only* features that matter, or that other features cannot be influential (whether enabling or limiting). Rather, these are the features that were highlighted in the case study countries and that will be important to strengthen.

[18] The table does not include examples of where the social protection policy or strategy framework has been influential – this is because in the case studies no learning points emerged relating to this, not because these building blocks are not important for system building. It is worth highlighting that in some of the countries these policy frameworks are still lacking/nascent, which partly explains why they did not feature prominently in the analysis.

[19] For details, see https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/researching-capacities-to-sustain-social-protection-in-protracted-crises-part-2-early-findings/.

[20] Van Halsema et al. (2024)

communications services, and the development of digital civil registration services and national ID systems. These wider 'upstream' reforms need to be simultaneously supported in FCAS.

» **A crosscutting enabling feature is system flexibility.** This refers to programme designs, delivery processes and regulations that can be quickly modified and simplified to respond effectively to changes, disruption and uncertainty due to conflict.

Table 4.1. Strengthening social protection systems in FCAS – learning from case studies[21]

SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM BUILDING BLOCKS			HOW THESE FEATURES STRENGTHEN THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN FCAS	YEMEN	ETHIOPIA	SAHEL	SUDAN	SOMALIA	ARMENIA
POLICY LEVEL	Robust and flexible regulatory framework and standard operating procedures	🟩	Clauses in programme regulatory frameworks, or the launch of new government decrees, enable the relaxation of rules governing social protection programme design or implementation following a shock/conflict.		🟩				🟩
		🟩	Procedures set out how implementation processes will be modified in response to the disruption caused by shock/conflict or how to operate in non-government-controlled areas.	🟩	🟩	🟩			
		🟥	Restrictive programme regulations constrain portability and the ability to modify programmes in response to conflict.	🟥	🟥				🟥
	Functioning and resourced structures for the coordination of all involved parties	🟩	Coordination structures bring together government and development and humanitarian partners around a common strategy, enabling development of a common approach.						🟩
		🟥	Unclear lines of coordination for social protection across government constrain the involvement of a wider decentralised social workforce.						🟥
		🟥	Lack of functioning structures that bring together government and all social protection partners, or development and humanitarian partners.	🟥			🟥	🟥	
	Decentralised and capacitated social protection institutions	🟩	Decentralised staff and frontline workers are resilient to impacts of conflict and committed to quickly maintaining and resuming responsibilities even when unpaid.	🟩	🟩	🟩			
		🟩	Decentralised staff have a grounded understanding of the context, are trusted by communities and have personal relationships that enable access.	🟩	🟩	🟩			🟩
		🟩	Decentralised staff and frontline workers play a critical role in many elements of delivery in conflict, including outreach and sensitisation with beneficiaries, securing access and engagement of authorities and communities, registration, improving accessibility of administrative systems for vulnerable groups, GRM and monitoring.	🟩	🟩	🟩			🟩
		🟥	Heavy reliance on centralised PIUs staffed by consultants, at the expense of investment to build the capacity of decentralised public administrations. Challenge for sustainability, especially where donor funds to PIUs are paused.			🟥	🟥	🟥	
	Involvement of community structures	🟩	Grounded understanding of conflict dynamics and trusted by communities.	🟩		🟩	🟩		
		🟩	Critical role in maintaining several elements of delivery including outreach and sensitisation, securing access, verifying ID and eligibility, monitoring, and supervising payment distributions where PIUs could not access.	🟩		🟩	🟩		
	Predictable, sufficient or diversified finance	🟥	Discontinuation or de-prioritisation of domestic investments in social protection is a major constraint to sustainability.		🟥		🟥	🟥	
		🟥	Lack of predictability of donor financing for social protection during fragility and conflict is a major constraint.	🟥		🟥	🟥		
		🟥	Lack of financing means some measures for adapting social protection in conflict cannot be implemented (topping up transfer value following through with predefined contingency measures).	🟥	🟥				
		🟩	Government drawing down on alternative resources (through African Risk Capacity insurance) to continue some SSN transfers when IFI financing was paused.				🟩		
PROGRAMME LEVEL:	Use of unrestricted cash modalities or flexible application of conditionalities[25]	🟩	Unrestricted, unconditional cash modalities can be delivered remotely or with minimal contact with beneficiaries/minimal on-the-ground presence, contributing to continuity in delivery.	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
		🟥	Preparation and execution of public works, economic inclusion measures, and conditional cash transfers linked to basic services require greater stability and more sustained on-the-ground presence. These had to be halted, or their roll out in insecure areas was constrained.	🟥	🟥		🟥	🟥	
		🟩	Temporarily waiving conditionalities to effectively transform the programme into an unconditional cash transfer and ensure the continuation of assistance to beneficiaries.		🟩	🟩			
	Flexibility to change modality when needed	🟩	When the relevance or feasibility of cash modalities was reduced temporarily due to conflict (markets inaccessible, inability to secure liquidity), a switch in modalities was achieved through the TPI's systems.			🟩	🟩		

[21] Author's own

SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM BUILDING BLOCKS			HOW THESE FEATURES STRENGTHEN THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN FCAS	YEMEN	ETHIOPIA	SAHEL	SUDAN	SOMALIA	ARMENIA
	Less frequent delivery cycles	🟩	Adopting or transitioning to quarterly payments offer benefits compared to a more frequent (monthly/bimonthly) payment design – reducing the burden of planning and implementation and limiting exposure to risk.	🟩		🟩	🟩	🟩	
	Broad geographical coverage	🟩	Nationwide coverage in all administrative areas helps to manage the portability of assistance.	🟩					🟩
		🟥	Portability of assistance is constrained where programmes have limited geographic coverage – beneficiaries may be displaced to districts not covered by the programme.		🟥		🟥	🟥	
IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL:	Digitalisation of data and delivery systems	🟩	The reach and agility of digital communication mechanisms help to sensitise beneficiaries on changes/adaptations, and in ways that limit exposure.	🟩					🟩
		🟩	E-payments contribute to strengthening agility to deal with conflict risks in several ways – enhancing fiduciary controls, enabling portability of benefits, enabling remote or more secret payments to beneficiaries, providing greater flexibility for beneficiaries in when and where to redeem, and reducing the burden of labour in planning and distributing.	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
		🟥	Where lacking, the ability to deliver in insecure areas is more challenging.	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥		
		🟩	Digital management of beneficiary data and execution of programme functions improves efficiency, enables portability and provides oversight and control of operational risks.	🟩	🟩		🟩	🟩	🟩
		🟩	Digital registration platforms support the rapid rollout of social assistance in conflict-affected areas.						🟩
		🟩	Digital systems enable the backup and restoration of beneficiary data in the event of damage to infrastructure.		🟩				🟩
		🟥	Gaps in a functional digital MIS create practical difficulties in constraining the portability of benefits.		🟥		🟥		
	Engaging multiple service providers	🟩	Diversifying partnerships with financial service providers contributes to increasing agility and reach to manage conflict uncertainties.	🟩		🟩		🟩	
	Adapting delivery systems to the needs of mobile populations	🟥	Realities of displacement are not sufficiently reflected in SSN registration or payment design, preventing inclusion in SSNs or continuation in social protection for displaced populations.		🟥		🟥	🟥	
		🟩	Flexible locations for payment delivery, based on real-time information of displacement, help to retain access for displaced beneficiaries.	🟩					
	Simple, flexible registration	🟩	Simple registration and eligibility determination processes (few, easily verifiable criteria, avoiding bureaucratic verification) for speedy rollout of registration and avoiding overburdening frontline workers.		🟩			🟩	🟩
		🟥	More complex registration processes, requiring visits for household-level data collection or bureaucratic processes for verifying eligibility, can be more difficult to continue in insecure settings and create a burden on staff.				🟥		🟥

4.2 Engaging – and remaining engaged – with governments in FCAS

Experiences show that there are ways for development partners to engage with government actors and channel support to government systems in conflict settings. Unsurprisingly, findings show that this engagement is not risk free. However, there are ways to mitigate the potential risks. Additional measures and controls can be brought in, certain institutions can be bypassed, and donor funds can be channelled in different ways. In these ways, it has been possible to continue reaching people with social assistance at critically difficult times.

'Government' is not a single, homogeneous body and any decisions to disengage with the state, where required, do not need to apply to all social protection institutions. A range of institutions and levels of government are involved in the administration and management of a social assistance system, from senior bureaucrats in central government to technical staff, as well as regional and district officers and frontline workers. Not all these public sector staff and institutions will be parties to the conflict or implicated in the conflict in the same way. While political figureheads may need to be disengaged with, experiences in Ethiopia (UNICEF's IDP programme), Sudan (UNICEF's Mother and Child Cash Transfer Plus (MCCT+) programme), Yemen (UNICEF's engagement of Social Fund for Development [SFD] and Social Welfare Fund [SWF] frontline staff) and the Sahel (UN Joint Programme) show that it is possible to continue partnerships and engage with or work through technical units of government, district administrations, or frontline workers such as social workers. Furthermore, as highlighted in section 4.1, it is proving important to do so – **the local workforce is emerging as a key enabler of effective and sustainable systems in fragile settings.**

Engagement with government institutions needs to be meaningful (meaning resources and investment) to retain capacities and enable recovery. In Yemen, the SWF institutions were not allowed to be an official partner in the Emergency Cash Transfer Programme under the terms of the financing. UNICEF did everything possible to retain a role for SWF staff in the programme, by recruiting its frontline staff to work with its implementing partners and by engaging senior SWF officials in a consultative group to support planning and monitoring. However, the lack of sustained institutional investment led, inevitably, to deterioration in institutional capabilities. The need for greater focus on institutional preservation was subsequently highlighted in the World Bank's country engagement note for 2022–2023, and UNICEF has led a capacity assessment and capacity-building activities to support the recovery of national institutions. Meanwhile, in Ethiopia, the importance of investing in workforce salaries, strengthening technical capacities, and providing administrative budgets for recovering or maintaining social protection infrastructure was highlighted in Tigray. Limited investment risks loss of institutional capacities, which is detrimental to system recovery and development. In Sudan, UNICEF provided incentive payments to the local workforce to retain capacities when salaries were affected.

The occurrence of 'conflict' alone is not a 'red line' for engaging with or remaining engaged with government in supporting social protection systems, and it is important to understand the political economy context. As mentioned above, the fact that the underlying politics of a conflict and parties to the conflict and their motivations can vary means different conflicts present different risks. Some de facto authorities have a strong interest in public and social service provision, while others prioritise this less. Some conflicts have led to the destruction of government services, others less so. The case of Armenia provides an excellent illustration. Here, the conflict did not create sensitivities or concerns about actions by the government against civilians, or about diversion of funds, or about how conflict dynamics could influence targeting. Of course, there may be situations where risks – particularly the most sensitive risks outlined in section 3.2 – are too severe or not possible to mitigate and this paper is not advocating for engagement in all contexts. But, by examining the context and the motivations of the parties to conflict and assessing the actual risks involved, it *can* be possible to identify ways forward that are appropriate, safe and effective and these should be explored.

4.3 Reflections on the roles for international actors in building social protection systems in FCAS

Partnerships with international organisations offer promise for supporting system building in FCAS. In many cases these organisations have played an operational role, as a TPI managing delivery of social assistance. These arrangements have helped to fill day-to-day gaps in government institutional capacities and reach; they have also been leveraged to help donors and government manage risk and uncertainty caused by fragility and conflict, preventing a cessation of assistance to people:

- Where institutional fragility (and the impacts of conflict) limits government's capacity to deliver or to manage fiduciary risks – TPIs engaged as service providers 'on behalf of' government (as seen in Sudan, Somalia and Niger).
- Where conflict restricts access and government ability to deliver services in part of its territory – TPIs engaged as service providers 'on behalf of' government (as seen in Ethiopia and Niger).
- When political sensitivities mean donors or IFIs cannot continue channelling funds through a recognised central government – TPIs engaged by donors 'in place of' government (as seen in Sudan, Niger and Yemen).

In the studied countries, such partnerships have contributed to overcoming political and operational challenges and enabled people to be reached with assistance at difficult times[22]. Partners have also actively contributed to strengthening capacities of state institutions and systems.

4.3.1 Learning from the use of international partners as TPIs

Several benefits from the involvement of international organisations (UN and also INGOs in Somalia's case) in TPI arrangements have been highlighted, though robust evidence is still lacking. Benefits highlighted by KIs include the ability of these actors to negotiate access and maintain neutrality; their expertise in cash delivery, digital innovations and manging risks[23]; their ability to work at scale (in some cases); their effective systems and processes to manage risks; and their flexibility to find solutions to frequent challenges and unpredictability. It is not possible to make stronger statements than this about the added value of international agencies because there is still a lack of robust and independently generated evidence on the performance of these models to date. There is a lack of evaluation studies or concrete data on the efficiency and effectiveness of these partnership models.

There were delays to rolling out TPI arrangements 'in place of government' and where TPIs were newly contracted in response to political fragility, meaning delays in assistance for people.

» **Delays in triggering TPI arrangements 'in place of government' in countries where the World Bank and other donors paused funds to the government.** This decision took several months in Sudan – even though WFP was already engaged as a TPI on behalf of the government on the routine Sudan Family Support Programme (SFSP). It took over 12 months in Yemen. In Niger, funds for the Adaptive Safety Net Project were paused for over a year, and this TPI option

[22] It is worth noting an additional 'typology' of TPI engagement – in contexts where it is not possible for donors to work with government, but where there is no national social assistance system to maintain. This is the case in Afghanistan and Myanmar, where the intention is that programmes and systems established through TPIs can inform the direction of and set foundations for national system building at some point in the future. Work in these countries is in the early stages, and they were not part of this study. However, this introduces difficult questions around, for example, who can have the mandate to lead on such SSN system design and implementation, and whether externally conceived designs will pose a constraint in future efforts to generate buy in and government ownership.

[23] For example, the UN Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers emerged as a promising mechanism to jointly understand and address risks to social assistance delivery in fragile contexts. Its potential to support social protection systems could be further explored by donors.

was never introduced. In Ethiopia, delays were also paired with broader diversion and trust challenges in the aid sector. See also section 4.4.

- **Delays due to contractual negotiations with UN agencies.** Negotiations between the World Bank and the UN took months to finalise in Sudan and Yemen; there were similar delays to the contracting of WFP by the government of Ethiopia. This is partly because these partnership arrangements are relatively new for all parties, so some negotiation is inevitable – however, the same questions and negotiations have been repeated in country after country. Particularly challenging points included reaching basic agreement on targeting, transfer values and realistic overhead costs; complying with the World Bank's risk management standards; agreeing on the levels of oversight and auditing acceptable to the UN; and deciding what beneficiary data can be shared with the World Bank or the government. In contrast, in Niger on the UN Joint Programme, TPI arrangements were established relatively quickly between the donor and the UN. Here the UN-led channel was already part of the programme design (to fill capacity gaps) for which all due diligence and contracting was already completed. So, when the political sensitives to financing government arose after the coup, the donor immediately agreed to pivot more funds through this pre-arranged channel.
- **Delays in some places due to the TPI's readiness to implement.** In Niger, UNICEF was not immediately prepared to deliver cash at the scale needed and required time to strengthen its systems, which delayed the rollout of the safety net. Delivery in Ethiopia also faced delays due to the programme coinciding with a large aid diversion scandal.

In Ethiopia, where the TPI was contracted by the government, donors faced difficulties in maintaining sufficient oversight of the TPI arrangements. In cases where TPI arrangements are brought in through – rather than in place of – government, KIs highlighted the need for greater assurances that TPI performance will be effectively managed and upwards and downwards accountability assured.

The use of TPIs must not undermine national system-building efforts. There is a risk that switching from government to a TPI arrangement and bypassing the social protection institutions and workforce will erode their capacities over time. As mentioned in section 4.2, this happened in Yemen. UNICEF had requested that these actors should be included in the institutional arrangements for the Emergency Cash Transfer Project (ECTP) from the beginning. Similar concerns are evident in other countries. KIs highlighted that any pivot to delivering social protection through a TPI should be a temporary arrangement. They also had concerns that criteria and indicators guiding a 'pivot back' to government-led ways of working when appropriate are yet to be clearly defined. When contracting a TPI in place of government, learning suggests it is possible and important to find ways to remain engaged with government institutions where feasible. Activating alternative arrangements with TPIs does not have to mean reverting to a fully parallel system. Learning from Yemen and Niger shows it is still possible to involve decentralised social protection institutions and frontline workers. In Yemen, UNICEF engaged frontline workers by hiring them as community facilitators, and these staff played a crucial role. In Niger, UNICEF retained engagement with safety net project committees and local governors.

There is a need for more data on the cost efficiency of UN-led TPI models, and for consideration of a wider diversity of TPI partnership arrangements. In most TPI examples to date, a UN organisation was the contracted agency and then subcontracted others (INGOs or national organisations) to manage parts of implementation. This raises questions about the value for money of this type of TPI arrangement, which generates multiple layers of overheads. Evidence from studies in humanitarian aid demonstrates the massive potential efficiency gains if this aid were to shift from an international sub-contracting model to contracting national organisations directly[24]. No cost-efficiency

[24] The ShareTrust has recently published a study on cost efficiency of such sub-contracting arrangements in humanitarian aid. This estimates that contracting national organisations directly could be over 30% more cost efficient than delivering

data from the TPI arrangements in the case studies was made available, which is one of the gaps in evidence that needs to be filled. KIs highlighted that it is important to measure and consider the costs as well as the benefits of UN-led TPI arrangements. For this same reason, in Sudan, the World Bank now plans to move the third-party monitoring function outside the contracts of UN TPIs and will contract this function directly to reduce overhead costs. Meanwhile, a concern among KIs in all countries was that the comparative advantages of all involved parties (such as the UN, INGOs, national NGOs, decentralised government departments, financial service providers) should be critically and honestly reflected on, to understand what TPI partnership arrangements and contracting models can make best use of limited resources. For example, some KIs maintained that channelling financing through these subcontracting arrangements with international actors appears to reflect more the legal and administrative restrictions in donor/IFI partnership instruments and related due diligence than any inherent comparative advantages of this way of working.

4.3.2 Reflections on international partners' role in strengthening national systems

- **In fragile contexts where international partners are implementing 'on behalf' of government to fill gaps in capacities, they are also providing technical assistance and support to system building.** This was the case in Sudan, Somalia and the Sahel. On the one hand, KIs highlighted the advantages that such partnerships can bring, noting that the expertise of these agencies (including relevant humanitarian expertise, technological and digital capacities, and expertise on inclusion and accountability) has the potential to improve and strengthen social assistance design and delivery, and to support the building of systems, expertise and capabilities in national institutions. On the other hand, KIs also perceived a conflict of interest in these arrangements that could present a barrier to national system building in the fullest sense, since organisations are receiving significant IFI or donor resources. This conflict of interest is likely to be greatest where organisations are assuming a dual implementation and capacity-strengthening role. Meanwhile, KIs noted that there can also be incentives for governments to maintain the status quo rather than assume the responsibilities of managing (and starting to finance) social assistance. KIs highlighted the importance of ensuring that such partnerships do not come at the expense of meaningful investments in developing strong and sustainable national institutions and government-implemented systems. They highlighted the need for clear and timebound plans guiding the transition to government-led, government-managed social protection over time.
- **A common challenge facing these operational partners has been the difficulty of supporting a transition to a fully government-owned system because of barriers to transferring data to government.** While using international organisations to handle registration and manage beneficiary data has been helpful from an operational perspective, actors have faced challenges sharing this data with government registries in a way that complies with corporate legal and risk management policies.
- **In the case of Somalia, systems and policies have now been set up to overcome these obstacles.** The government passed a public data protection law enabling UNICEF to develop protocols for social protection data sharing in line with GDPR practices. A Common Registration Form used to collect household data has an inbuilt informed consent field where households can consent for data collected by a third party to be transferred to government. WFP has signed a data-sharing agreement with the government and new data collected via WFP can be responsibly handed over to government to strengthen the universal social registry. The same procedures are intended to be used on the other SSN projects being implemented through partners. It will be important to generate and share learning and document processes from these experiences to inform solutions elsewhere.

humanitarian programmes through the usual ways of working arguments would surely apply with localisation through government since it is reducing the international overheads (The ShareTrust 2024).

» **A final point is that using international partners to fill capacity gaps in delivery in such contexts risks undermining national system building in other ways.** This was noted by KIs in Somalia and the Sahel. Here the role of international actors in social assistance delivery has created confusion among local authorities and communities, who did not understand that it was part of a government programme. This is important if programmes are to contribute to fostering a social contract and to build support for social protection.

4.4 Reflections on IFI and donor engagement in social protection system building

The World Bank's and some bilateral donors' engagement in FCAS and focus on maintaining and strengthening social protection despite political fragility and conflict is widely welcomed. KIs commended the efforts of World Bank country teams to navigate operational challenges, including fiduciary and safeguarding risks in conflict settings, and to find new ways of working, including adapting delivery processes and collaborating with the UN on third-party implementation. Of the bilateral donors, Germany was widely commended for financing innovative approaches to system building in fragility and conflict (the Sahel Twin Track, Somalia and Sudan) and for seeking solutions to overcome political constraints to financing social assistance in Niger and Sudan. Meanwhile, FCDO's role in convening multi-donor trust funds (MDTF) partners in the Sahel and Ethiopia was commended, as were the Ethiopia Donor Working Group's introduction and financing of additional monitoring activities to enhance oversight in conflict settings. In Somalia, FCDO has also made considerable investments in World Bank-supported social protection models, with a focus on shock responsiveness.

FCDO, which commissioned this piece, was keen to draw out learning on how this engagement can be strengthened. To inform and improve future engagement in conflict settings, KIs within the World Bank, donors and external actors shared reflections on perceived limitations and areas to improve going forward.

Approaches to financing social protection systems in FCAS need to be improved.

» **Pausing international funds for social assistance in response to political regime changes is problematic and should be carefully navigated.** KIs accepted the rationale for the World Bank's Operational Policy 7.30 on de facto governments but argued that lengthy pauses without any alternatives in place for sustaining social assistance as a basic service were counterproductive. Meanwhile, KIs were critical of the 'low-risk appetite' of bilateral donors to remain engaged with the government in FCAS. In Niger and Ethiopia, this included the decision by some social assistance donors to pause funds or even temporarily channel funding through the humanitarian system. KIs emphasised that the risks of engagement need to be weighed against the risks of non-engagement. While there may be valid political and diplomatic reasons to suspend financing, this impacts people in poverty and vulnerable situations who rely on the transfers, while also disrupting system-building efforts and undermining investments in system building made thus far. It is imperative that alternatives are found.

» **In Somalia, KIs were critical of some bilateral donors' decisions to continue working through parallel systems of third parties rather than working through and strengthening government systems.** KIs highlighted that this creates something of a circular logic, where limited investment in national systems and capabilities contributes to a continued narrative of weakness and risk, which then justifies more of the same.

» **In Sudan, there was heavy criticism of donor decisions to discontinue funding for SSNs following the outbreak of conflict because of concerns about retaining a focus on developmental rather than humanitarian objectives.** KIs perceived this as an illustration of the continuing lack of joined up thinking and practice among donors on humanitarian and development issues in FCAS, and of how artificial divisions in funding instruments within the aid architecture are constraining the provision of more flexible and relevant support in these dynamic environments.

Frustration was expressed at the constraints to sharing information and evidence which could help to build donor (and government) confidence in social assistance systems. Bilateral donors financing social assistance in Ethiopia, Sahel, Somalia and Sudan commented that they have limited visibility on the performance of social assistance delivery systems, or the results of risk assessments managed by the World Bank. This included limited visibility on the realisation of fiduciary risks, the performance of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) measures and grievance redress mechanisms, results of third-party monitoring, or the success of efforts to mitigate SEA/GBV risks. Donors would like to see more efforts from the World Bank to hold governments to account and more sharing of information with bilateral counterparts in FCAS, given the higher risks involved. In Somalia there was frustration at the lack of investment to build the evidence base on the performance and impact of SSN-building efforts to date. In Ethiopia, some donor working group members expressed frustration with the transparency of information published by the World Bank and WFP on the TPI experiences, which did not sufficiently reflect the challenges faced. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that information sharing in conflict-affected settings can be sensitive and collection of evidence or dissemination of findings may be restricted by authorities that are tightly managing a public narrative or image.

IFIs and donors need agile and relevant tools to monitor and assess the risks of engaging in FCAS, to manage these effectively.

- **KIs in Sudan and the Sahel felt that the standard risk management approaches employed by the World Bank are not undertaken or updated frequently enough to be useful in dynamic FCAS.** Meanwhile, the World Bank's Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework was welcomed and considered a strength, but KIs in Yemen and Sudan perceived this could be further enhanced if more flexibly applied to consider country specificities. KIs felt that the framework applied in its entirety had overly onerous transaction costs, and they questioned the benefits gained from this compared to focusing energy and resources on mitigating and monitoring specific critical (high likelihood, high impact) risks.
- **While the employment of additional monitoring and oversight mechanisms (third-party monitors, spot checks, traffic light assessment) by donors is considered important, lessons highlight that these need to be made more relevant and support agile decision-making.** KIs in Ethiopia suggested that to be useful, such exercises need to provide results more quickly and need to be repeated more frequently in dynamic and evolving contexts. Meanwhile, KIs highlighted the importance of independently generated evidence on social assistance system functionality to validate or triangulate government sources. Striking the balance between frequency or agility on the one hand, and sufficient depth on the other, is not straightforward, particularly in a context where information can be tightly controlled.
- **Institutional damage and capacity assessment tools were considered to have been useful in post-conflict settings** but less so where conflict is still active and fluid.
- **There is insufficient consideration or assessment of political risks.** The World Bank's approach to managing risks related to conflict, insecurity and due diligence for re-engagement after pauses to funding focuses primarily on operational aspects. It was the resounding view of KIs, including several within the World Bank, that there is a need to better understand the political dimensions of conflict and how these can shape risks to SSN provision. While KIs appreciate that the World Bank is not a political actor and engages with governments as a lender, several felt strongly that political dynamics, which influence *how* government engages in service provision, where the government is a party to the conflict, need to be systematically assessed, discussed and acted on. There is insufficient consideration of such risks by donors in general. Only in Ethiopia has a political economy analysis of maintaining social assistance in conflict been undertaken (commissioned by FCDO) and much of this was not acted on. Bilateral donors are

making decisions to pause or pull funds for social assistance in conflict based on generalised assumptions about risks and concerns about reputations rather than any firm assessment.

Investments are needed to bolster the in-country presence and conflict expertise of IFI and donor country teams. KIs in the Sahel, Sudan and Yemen felt that, in such complex environments, it would be helpful for the World Bank to invest in dedicated (country or programme-specific) conflict advisers to increase oversight of the realities of programming and the challenges for social assistance provision. Such an investment has been made in Somalia. KIs also commented that other bilateral donors have limited country presence.

The World Bank does not currently engage directly in TPI contracts with national civil society entities or the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (only the UN and INGOs). On the one hand, some KIs thought that such partnership arrangements were not the Bank's comparative advantage. On the other hand, KIs argued that the Bank is effectively doing just this (albeit inefficiently) by working through UN TPIs that then subcontract other parties. IFI and donor procedures and legal requirements around fiduciary risk management and due diligence in contracting currently limit the avenues for localisation of TPIs.

Limited strategic coordination and diverging donor priorities are contributing to fragmentation in approaches to system building. The lack of a coherent view and approach among donors to engaging on social protection, or with government system strengthening was noted in the Sahel, where bilateral donors continue to provide financial support to SSNs through varied instruments and programmes, including contributions to the International Development Association (IDA), financing the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme (SASPP) MDTF, and financing separate bilateral programmes (the UN Joint Programme and others). In Somalia, not only do donors and IFIs lack a common position on fundamental aspects of social protection system building, but there is major diversion in these views and approaches across development partners, influenced by diverging ideological perspectives on social protection design, which impact collaboration and coordination. KIs argued that this separation of funding channels and approaches was contributing to the persistent fragmentation of SSNs and acted as an impediment to system building.

Financing through MDTFs presents both benefits and challenges. On the one hand, social assistance programmes and system building in Ethiopia, the Sahel and Sudan benefited from strong partnerships among donors, and the pooling of contributions through the MDTF was perceived to be a more efficient approach than donors seeking multiple bilateral partnerships. Meanwhile, KIs considered that the MDTF instrument offers some potential for donors to have a steer on World Bank-funded development programmes in comparison to IDA. However, KIs in all countries noted that it has been challenging and time consuming in practice to reach agreements between members, given their different interests, opinions and capacities. In the Sahel, the level of effort required meant bilateral donors were unable to have as much influence on the World Bank's approach to SSN development as some members had anticipated. Meanwhile, evidence from Sudan suggests that the breadth of an MDTF's objectives can also have an impact. Here, the main priority of the MDTF was economic reform. The Fund did not have a core 'social protection' focus, which was also reflected in the diverging understanding of and commitment to social protection among its members. There was also a concern among some members that the Fund needed to maintain a focus on economic development rather than emergency handouts. These were contributory factors behind the change in focus of the MDTF away from SSNs in 2023.

Concerns were raised about some perceived limitations in the model for system building that is being rolled out in FCAS. KIs in the Sahel, Sudan and Somalia noted aspects of the World Bank's technical support to system building that is being replicated across countries. This includes the development of highly centralised, technical systems for implementation with limited roles for decentralised bodies; limited engagement of decentralised authorities in decision-making on programming or implementation; investments in only a PIU, without concurrently strengthening the administrative institutions or building of the social workforce; and limited cross-government engagement. KIs did acknowledge that such centralised systems bring certain benefits, and understood the intention behind them, such as to manage fiduciary risks associated with operating in a fragile environment. They also acknowledged the difficulties of investing in a decentralised workforce when resources are so constrained. However, they expressed concerns that the limited or siloed institutional engagement could undermine the building of long-term political support for social protection and securing of long-term sustainability.

4.5 Linking humanitarian action and social protection in FCAS and the role of humanitarian actors in social protection system building

The studies highlighted a range of important roles that humanitarian agencies can play in complementing and supporting system-building efforts, directly or indirectly. This includes working as TPIs; supporting the transfer of systems and expertise and providing technical assistance to build national capabilities; providing monitoring and intelligence on access, security constraints and service functionality in hard-to-reach areas; and coordinating humanitarian assistance provided through the humanitarian system with shock responsive social protection to enhance coverage and adequacy and fill gaps. For example, in the case of Ethiopia, social protection and humanitarian actors have coordinated to collectively meet the needs of populations through a combination of instruments, supporting IDPs with humanitarian assistance while supporting host communities through the regular PSNP[25].

Linking social protection and humanitarian action has many permutations. It is ultimately about finding the best ways to leverage the comparative advantages of both sectors, to make best use of resources and meet people's needs. Both sectors have comparative advantages that together can improve overall outcomes for people by sharing responsibilities and bolstering capacities. Where it makes sense to do so (i.e. where social protection programmes or data systems have coverage of areas and populations in need of humanitarian assistance) linkages can involve channelling humanitarian resources through a social protection system. Strengthening social protection systems to enable this can ensure more cost-effective channelling of scarce humanitarian resources in future. Experience is also showing that coordinating, aligning and layering humanitarian and social protection programming is important to enhance coverage and adequacy and fill gaps.

Humanitarians having a role in strengthening social protection systems does not need to imply using or diverting precious humanitarian resources away from their core purpose. One of the key system investments with potential to improve the efficient and effective coordination of social protection with humanitarian action is a shared registry. Where risks to data sharing are effectively managed, making collective contributions to strengthening registries is a key and low cost action. Humanitarian actors can also be instrumental in sharing good practices to transform design and better manage risks in government systems, and to ensure these systems are well designed for humanitarian purposes.

However, the case studies highlight that linking social protection and humanitarian action faces challenges. In several countries there is still reluctance among humanitarian actors (donors and implementers) to engage with government, make use of or finance government systems, share data, or align on transfer design. This was an issue in Somalia, Yemen, the Sahel and Armenia. The studies identify several factors contributing to this.

- **Perceived (but not necessarily assessed) risks around undermining the humanitarian principles.** Humanitarian actors can be understandably concerned that engaging with government and government system could compromise the humanitarian principles. It is important to acknowledge these concerns. Engaging with governments and national systems in FCAS is not risk free. Governments in conflict settings face pressures and constraints that can

[25] Sabates-Wheeler, et al. (2024)

influence decisions on the design and delivery of emergency assistance as well as creating risks of harm. However, the case studies find that where such concerns have been stated, they are not always based on assessment or evidence, but rather on highly generalised assumptions. Similarly, the risks to delivering through a parallel humanitarian system are also not sufficiently examined and acknowledged. KIs drew attention to the persistent narrative that delivering assistance outside government institutions, through international humanitarian organisations, will better protect aid from interference and enable it to be delivered in a neutral or impartial way. However, in several countries, humanitarian aid diversion scandals have shown that delivery through the humanitarian system is not immune from government interference and diversion pressures, and adherence to humanitarian principles cannot be inherently guaranteed. Furthermore, the findings of this study highlight that:

- firstly, risks vary substantially from place to place and while linkages may not be appropriate in all contexts, the same risks do not apply everywhere
- secondly, there are ways to address these risks
- thirdly, humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence *are not automatically and inherently compromised* when working with governments or making use of government systems. Neutrality and independence do not have to equate to disengagement with state structures[26], and *principled engagement* with these structures can effectively uphold these (just as adherence to these principles *is not inherently guaranteed* when aid is delivered through the humanitarian system).

» **Inflexibility in humanitarian funding instruments.** The lack of flexibility in humanitarian donor instruments, narrow interpretation of mandates, and lack of understanding or exposure among humanitarian actors to social protection and government systems were identified as influencing factors. For example, in Somalia, KIs were critical that limitations in humanitarian donor financing instruments and interpretation of mandate are preventing bridge financing in the early phase of national system development. A fiscal space study recommended that just 10% of the humanitarian assistance budget directed to supporting emerging safety nets could still contribute to addressing humanitarian needs but simultaneously help to fill the funding deficit for nationwide implementation of social assistance interventions in the medium term while more sustainable fiscal space is created. KIs argued that this was a context with significant scope for humanitarian and development donors to invest collectively in a common good. The case studies also found examples of where humanitarian donors' policies are constraining TPIs' work across the nexus and limiting their contributions of data to strengthen national registries.

» **Organisational self-interest.** Another main perceived reason for the continued reluctance among implementing humanitarian agencies to consider linking is due to concerns about maintaining their organisation's operational footprint, funding and legitimacy. Many KIs talked about organisations 'hiding behind' the humanitarian principles.

These problems are best illustrated by the case of Armenia. This is one of the most enabling environments possible for maintaining government-led ways of working for social assistance delivery during conflict. There is no historical long-term humanitarian presence in the country or history of international partners assuming a lead role in the delivery of services. There is a strong government that is not classified as fragile, a strong social assistance system to work with, and no protection concerns or sensitivities about government's conduct in the conflict towards civilians or refugees or

[26] As per UN resolution 46/182 of 1992 which, alongside neutrality and independence, also highlights the primary role of the state in humanitarian response: "Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of climate- and weather-related shocks and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the State has the primary role in the initiation, organisation, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory". The role of the state – and the important role of social protection in complementing it – is also reinforced within a range of global legal and policy frameworks relating to humanitarian action and work in FCAS (see Smith and Barca 2025).

concerns about diversion or discrimination in aid provision. Yet still, humanitarian donors and implementers stated that they were unable to put humanitarian funds through the government; humanitarian implementing agencies were still reluctant to share data on social assistance beneficiaries back with the government (even though it originated from government); and there were still concerns from some humanitarian donors about using government data for targeting. These barriers led to the creation of a costly parallel system.

In other countries, a further constraint has been the limited alignment of programme designs to support vulnerable groups across the nexus. Humanitarian actors have been reluctant to more closely align cash transfer designs (such as transfer values) out of concerns of undermining humanitarian outcomes for beneficiaries (for example, if it does not permit the consumption of a minimum food and nutrient basket). But this has been done despite knowing that continuing with widely diverging approaches can also do harm to long-term fiscal sustainability and acceptance of social protection programmes. Humanitarian evaluations in Somalia have shown that divergent approaches to targeting and transfer values can contribute to community tensions and undermine the adoption of SSNs since households favour the larger amounts provided in humanitarian aid.

There are also limitations in the approaches of social protection actors which contribute to these constraints. There was criticism that IFIs and other social protection donors are not doing enough to encourage collaboration or coordination with humanitarian counterparts. KIs commented that IFIs and other social protection donors are not sufficiently acknowledging or drawing on humanitarian actors' experience in conflict settings or engaging them when designing approaches to system building. KIs also highlighted the gaps in understanding among humanitarian actors of social protection, or existing government systems, and that there is a need for greater sharing of information and evidence on SSN system-building activities and system performance to build understanding, confidence and buy-in among humanitarian actors.

Coordination and cooperation between social protection and humanitarian donors remain limited yet are necessary to overcome the above issues. In Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel, there were perceived missed opportunities for developing a continuum of care between development-financed social protection support and humanitarian action. Constraints noted include:

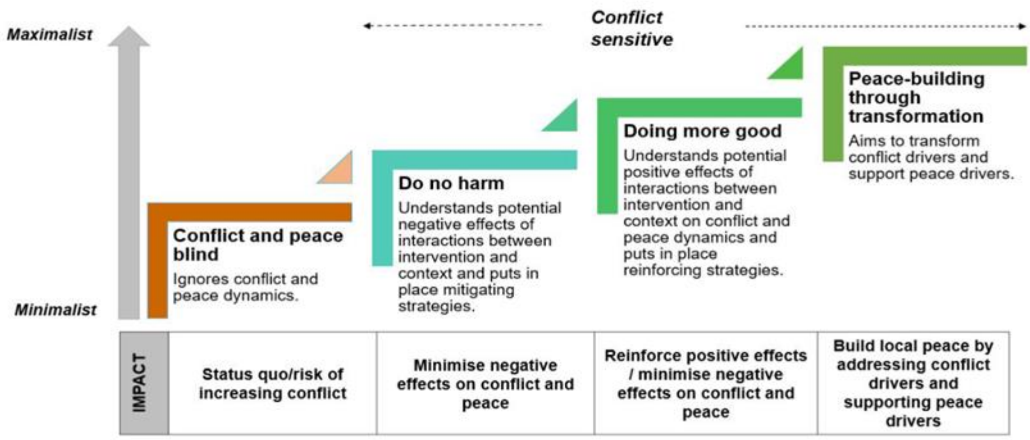
- Humanitarian and development donors are not joining up their strategies to align social protection–humanitarian assistance or strengthen the provision of social protection across the nexus.
- There is no common understanding or shared vision among humanitarian and development donors on how to work together on this. There are particular gaps in the support being provided to address protracted humanitarian needs, where some humanitarian donors are increasingly aiming to use humanitarian funds to support 'new acute' needs, but development support is not yet joining up to transition the protracted humanitarian caseload.
- There are limited forums bringing together humanitarian and development counterparts for strategic discussions, and a lack of dedicated resources for mobilising such coordination. When dedicated resources for coordination were made available for a period in Yemen and Somalia, some progress was made, but this ended when the funding for a coordinator came to an end.

This study clearly demonstrates that there are opportunities to work together in FCAS in ways that manage risks and ultimately bring benefits to people experiencing fragility and conflict. To move forward, actions are needed to assess and manage risks, align humanitarian with development principles, and forge truly joint ways of working.

4.6 Lessons on building and strengthening social assistance with a conflict lens

It is increasingly recognised that in settings vulnerable to fragility and conflict, aid provision must be conflict sensitive. This means "acting with the understanding that any initiative conducted in a conflict-affected environment will interact with that conflict and will have consequences that may have positive or negative effects”[27]. A recent review of nascent social protection systems in conflict-affected regions proposed a framework for conflict sensitivity in social protection system building, envisaged along a spectrum of increasing ambition. As a minimum, all designs should employ a do-no-harm perspective, to consider the potential negative impacts from interaction of the programme and the conflict context and find ways to mitigate these risks. Programme and system-building objectives can also aim to go further and be designed to positively influence conflict dynamics and contribute to improving social cohesion and stability.

Figure 4.1 Conflict sensitivity in social protection[28]



More can be done to consider conflict sensitivity in social protection system building in protracted crises. On the one hand, in the Sahel, Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia, considerable efforts were made to think through and mitigate risks to implementation posed by conflict and insecurity – such as the access, safety and protection risks (as illustrated in section 3.1). Here, the World Bank’s Environmental and Social Standards were helpful in balancing the protection of beneficiaries with state-building needs. On the other hand, KIs agreed that not enough attention is being paid to how SSN designs and their implementation, in turn, can influence and reinforce drivers of conflict, which are varied and complex in these settings. KIs commented on the lack of detailed conflict sensitivity analysis to inform designs to date. In recognition of this, WFP is undertaking conflict sensitivity diagnostics of social protection in Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan. In the Sahel, the UN Joint Programme will finance the design and piloting of a conflict sensitivity diagnostic tool.

Stakeholders do not share a common understanding or consistent views on how social protection design and implementation features can influence the drivers of conflict. There is no clear or consistent definition of concepts such as ‘conflict sensitivity’ or ‘social contract’ informing approaches to social assistance system building in FCAS, or methodological framework to guide this. Social protection working groups lack frameworks for framing conflict risks. Meanwhile, different actors have inconsistent, even diverging, views of how features of social assistance design or implementation can influence the drivers of conflict. A key illustration is the divergence in viewpoints on how targeting methods (poverty targeting versus categorical lifecycle approach) can contribute to either reinforcing or reducing conflict drivers.

Efforts are weakest around the provision of social assistance to reduce conflict drivers. In Somalia and Sudan, safety net projects included a specific objective to reduce conflict drivers. In the Sahel, while not an explicit project objective, various statements have nevertheless been published about the expected impacts of the adaptive social protection projects on reducing conflict drivers.

[27] FCDO (2016)
[28] Source: Birch, Carter and Satti (2024)

However, in all cases, these statements are not informed by a theory of change, and indicators for success are not being set or measured.

The evidence base for if and how social protection can contribute to reducing conflict drivers remains limited. This is particularly true when looking beyond improvements to localised social cohesion between populations to consider how social protection can contribute to building state legitimacy and the social contract. One of the main sources of evidence on this topic remains research conducted by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC)[29]. This study highlighted that, in strengthening the social contract with the state, it is important to set realistic expectations of the changes that social assistance provision can meaningfully contribute towards. Building trust or confidence in government is based on many factors beyond the delivery of basic services, and which of these matter for building a social contract may differ between Western and other societies in FCAS. It is also important to acknowledge that the state–citizen contract is only one of many social contracts, with community, clan and religious ties (and any related mechanism for reciprocal support or informal social protection) often weighing stronger where there is a weak or contested central authority.

Many KIs shared perceptions that certain features of social assistance design and implementation in these fragile states were not conducive to building state legitimacy and a social contract. Factors mentioned included the high degree of centralisation of programme implementation, limited consultation with or involvement of decentralised authorities, lack of involvement of institutions trusted by or representing communities, gaps in understanding among local authorities and communities that the assistance is being provided by government, and the risk of excluding and further reinforcing grievances among historically marginalised groups. In Sudan, an additional factor mentioned was that the geographical rollout began in areas that had historically been the centre of wealth and power. While these are people's perceptions rather than firm evidence, the convergence of views on this across countries is striking. Furthermore, some of these views are substantiated in the above-mentioned SLRC research, which found that a social contract may be possible to establish between citizens and local government/decentralised institutions but is increasingly unlikely to be achieved the further away the centre of government is from people. As noted in section 4.4, this raised questions among KIs about the limitations of the donor engagement model for social protection system building being applied in FCAS.

While there is no single perfect targeting method for FCAS, and all methods will have some limitations, demographic categorical approaches do appear to bring benefits from a conflict-sensitivity perspective compared with more narrow data-driven poverty targeting. The importance of working with targeting criteria that are well understood and that align with communities' own notions of who is most vulnerable and what is fair are points that are made in the wider literature on conflict-sensitive social protection[30]. In this study, many KIs in Yemen, Somalia, Sudan and the Sahel shared the view that demographic categorical vulnerability targeting brought these benefits compared to more data-driven methods. They argued that such criteria provide a clear focus on a readily visible social group (or groups), match local understanding of who is in need based on well-embedded social norms for providing informal social support, capture vulnerabilities defined by gender and age, and can reduce potential risks of discrimination or tensions along ethnic or tribal lines since categories are represented across all population sub-groups. In contrast, most KIs perceived that data-driven methods (use of proxy means tests) brought certain disadvantages in these settings, including being more opaque and less easy for communities to understand; in countries facing high levels of poverty, contributing to a lack of clarity about why particular communities or households are included and others in similar circumstances excluded; and requiring regular updating of household data to remain relevant, which is difficult and expensive to manage. These are the reasons behind the adoption of categorical targeting approaches on the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGAL) and MCCT programmes in Somalia, the MCCT+

[29] Nixon and Mallett (2017)
[30] Humphrey, Krishnan, and Krystalli (2019), in Birch, Carter and Satti (2024)

programme in Sudan and the new disability grant in the Sahel and is the rationale for UNICEF pushing for a move to categorical targeting in Yemen. It is worth highlighting that the evidence base still needs to be built. However, evidence emerging from the evaluation of the SAGAL programme suggests that in Somalia, at least some of these benefits are being realised[31]. Furthermore, specific research in 2024–2025 by FCDO's BASIC Research programme has examined the strengths and limitations of different targeting methodologies in fragile settings, and similar findings are emerging. This is concluding that, where regular collection of accurate data will be a challenge, opting for more simple, visible, hard-to-manipulate and well-understood criteria appears to be a logical and appropriate approach[32]. KIs in the World Bank reported that for these reasons, in the planned future safety net support in Sudan[33] to be financed under Sudan Transition and Recovery Support (STARS), a similar categorical approach to targeting is also being discussed. Nevertheless, each context requires its own assessment of targeting policy and implementation strategies based on local needs and realities, and a range of factors need to be brought to bear in any decision, including affordability and political considerations[34].

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

5.1 Key takeaways from this study

Fragility and conflict are on the rise and increasingly becoming protracted[35], leading to large-scale displacement and massively increased humanitarian needs. At the same time, economic slowdown and the shrinking of fiscal space in impacted countries significantly threaten long-term development objectives. Meanwhile, international aid is sharply dropping and traditional approaches to development cooperation are being rethought. The key takeaways from this study are therefore particularly relevant and urgent today.

- **This study highlights that social protection is essential in FCAS:** not only is it feasible, but it is also a policy and programme measure that offers a way to simultaneously meet urgent needs and support a development agenda. There may also be potential for social protection measures to contribute to improving stability.
- **Social protection systems already exist, and programmes can and are being delivered in many FCAS at scale.** Governments can and are assuming leadership roles. Experience across multiple contexts shows that it is possible to work with state institutions to initiate, sustain and strengthen social protection, even amid instability and contested governance.
- **Crisis and fragility must drive innovation, not paralysis.** Fragile settings present risks but also opportunities to innovate, pushing actors to do things differently and contributing to and improving procedures, systems and ways of working. Promising practices are emerging to manage these risks in ways that make it possible to sustain donor investments. These include important roles for partners in third-party implementation and system strengthening, adapting rules of engagement with state institutions, introducing checks and balances, and channelling ODA in different ways.
- **In FCAS, we need social protection models that are fit for purpose and designed for fragility.** The traditional siloed models of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding assistance are not equipped for the complex, volatile and protracted nature of crisis contexts. Social protection can offer an integrated, systems-oriented approach to addressing needs across

[31] Somalia Cash Consortium and Axiom (2023); Somalia Cash Consortium and KasmoDev (2023)
[32] This includes research at country level (see for example Merttens, F., Hodey, L. and Doyle, A. (2024), with a review of global practices and a synthesis paper forthcoming in 2025.
[33] Sudan SANAD - Emergency Crisis Response Safety Net Project.
[34] As seen in Somalia, universal categorical approaches are likely to present greater challenges from a financing perspective.
[35] The Humanitarian Needs Overview 2025 indicates that the average duration of humanitarian appeals is 10 years: https://www.unocha.org/events/global-humanitarian-overview-2025

the humanitarian–development–peace Nexus, if systems are designed: i) to serve both acute and long-term needs, ii) in ways that do not compromise either humanitarian principles or the development of social protection as a sustainable, nationally owned basic service, and iii) in ways that are better prepared for the eventuality of certain risks and systematically and consistently adopt good practices.

- **Building effective systems requires investing in the right capabilities.** Key features of an effective social assistance system in FCAS include adaptive and flexible procedures, fit-for-purpose digital systems, and a decentralised workforce capable of delivering in volatile contexts. These findings should inform the next generation of social protection systems in FCAS, and these elements must be prioritised as part of any serious system-building investments.
- **Sustained progress depends on bold and long-term investment paired with smarter risk-taking.** Delivering social protection in FCAS demands long-term commitment, not just technical solutions. This means strengthening and sustaining sector engagement even amid uncertainty, ensuring predictable financing, maximising effective use of partnerships for third-party implementation and capacity building, improving coordination with humanitarian actors, and deliberately integrating conflict sensitivity and exploring opportunities for peacebuilding in social protection design and delivery.

5.2 Core recommendations for enhancing investments in social protection system building in FCAS

This section sets out forward-looking recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. It presents a series of questions on how to address key challenges emerging around social protection provision in conflict settings and recommends ways to strengthen engagement on social protection in FCAS – including, where relevant, actions for particular stakeholders.

In FCAS, investing in social protection system building is a pre-requisite for multiple humanitarian–development–peace outcomes. Beyond meeting immediate needs, these investments lay the groundwork for achieving development goals and longer-term resilience, and for supporting a state and societal transition from fragility towards greater stability. But to be effective in such volatile contexts, system-building efforts must be designed for uncertainty, driven by governments – including their local-level capacities – and supported through flexible, sustained and risk-informed financing.

5.2.1 Build and finance for uncertainty

A flexible and adaptive approach to system building is critical as FCAS constantly evolve. The dynamics of fragility and conflict must not be treated as exceptional but rather should be expected. These will vary over time and across locations, and variation in programme design, delivery processes and institutional roles may be required in line with the evolving state of governance, capacities and risks.

- **Effective system building in FCAS requires long-term and sustained engagement.** Continuity of donor support to social protection is essential to prevent collapse of social protection structures and capacities at critical moments and avoid erosion of investments. It is important to find ways that donors can more directly support continuity of social protection services. Political disengagement with government, when necessary, does not need to extend to full disengagement from all social protection institutions.
- **Donors, IFIs and government can develop a joint, flexible strategy for system building that is grounded in evidence and a shared understanding of the context.** This should anticipate potential financial, operational or political disruptions and setbacks. This strategy should include contingency plans and clearly defined pathways to adjust approaches to social protection programme delivery and system building when needed.

- **Embed adaptation, from the outset, in programme design, institutional frameworks and delivery systems and processes.** This can provide the necessary flexibility to modify approaches, ensuring that social protection remains operational, portable and responsive under stress. This could be managed by thinking through potential adaptive approaches along the delivery chain, along with the fragility and conflict scenarios in which such adaptations may be useful, to guide when adaptations should be triggered as the situation evolves. This may be met with some understandable reluctance from governments and will require close dialogue to build appreciation on the advantages of building in such provisions.
- **Plan early for flexible financing mechanisms and delivery partnerships in highly fragile settings**. In FCAS, where appropriate based on assessment, actors should anticipate that conflict and fragility dynamics may require a (temporary) switch from government delivery to alternative delivery mechanisms (e.g. international TPIs or local actors), or the expansion of an existing TPI role. Such partnerships could be intentionally 'designed in' and incorporated as an integral part of social protection programme design and donor financing packages. The activation triggers that will be used, the institutions that will be involved in authorisation, and the timeframe for activation should all be agreed in advance of a crisis. IFIs and donors should also procure and contract these arrangements in advance. This will expedite timely activation or scaling up at first signs of crisis. This requires developing global or regional TPI frameworks, adaptable at the country level, to avoid delays during crisis transitions.
- **As part of contingency planning, identify and plan for how to prevent funding pauses, remain partially engaged with and protect state institutions and the social protection workforce.** Donors should articulate and discuss any concerns (real or perceived) with other donors and with governments, so that risk assurance mechanisms can be put in place. For example, if it becomes necessary to disengage at a political level, donors should have already considered how they can remain engaged at a technical level, to continue to leverage systems and avoid erosion of existing expertise. When channelling financing through central government is not possible, donors can consider options for redirecting programme funds – for example, through partnerships with local authorities and decentralised institutions, or by channelling funds directly to service providers. Donors can also plan for and contribute to maintaining key positions within the social protection workforce, through contributing to salaries (fully or partially, directly or indirectly via incentives), while ensuring adequate safeguards.
- **Where any (temporary) switch from government delivery to delivery through a TPI is required, take steps to minimise negative impacts on national institutions.** When procuring services of delivery partners to handle any (temporary) switch from government delivery to delivery through a TPI, IFIs and donors can incentivise TPIs to leverage the existing capacity of social protection institutions and frontline workers where possible, to sustain capacities. This could be a selection criterion during procurement. Pre-defining clear processes and measurable indicators that will inform pivoting back to government-led implementation is also important. It could include results from post-conflict institutional capacity assessments, cessation of hostilities and lifting of sanctions.

5.2.2 Innovate in financing to strengthen long-term sustainability

Given shrinking global aid budgets and increasing demands in FCAS, there is an urgent need to reduce long-term reliance on ODA for social protection. While external financing remains vital in the short to medium term, countries must be supported to gradually diversify and strengthen domestic and alternative financing sources for social protection.

- **Map and leverage untapped financing opportunities.** Governments, with support from IFIs and technical partners, should assess fiscal space, identify realistic pathways for gradually increasing domestic contributions, and explore how contributory and non-contributory schemes can be developed in tandem. The priority should be exploring ways to unlock greater fiscal financing including through opportunities afforded by debt restructuring.

- **Explore options for innovative financing.** Governments and their partners can proactively engage with innovative financing partners (e.g. climate funds, diaspora engagement platforms, development finance institutions) to test and pilot context-specific mechanisms, such as climate-linked social protection financing or bonds tied to resilience outcomes. They should be mindful that the scope of opportunity here may be relatively small in practice given the still-limited investment of climate financing in FCAS or in social protection, and the lack of evidence on successful application of impact bonds to date.

5.2.3 Invest in the people as well as digital systems

This study highlights the importance of digital systems in FCAS for managing data, enabling flexible, remote and discrete delivery of payments and enhancing mechanisms for communication and feedback. Investments that help to fully embed these in social protection systems in FCAS are a clear priority. However, digital systems alone cannot deliver trust, accountability or conflict sensitivity – these require people, relationships and contextual understanding.

This must be complemented with investments in the local social protection workforce. In many settings, local institutions – whether formal or informal – are not only service providers, but critical to building state–society relations. Where these exist, they are emerging as a key enabler of social protection provision in FCAS. Centralised donor-financed PIUs may be useful in situations of limited government capacity, especially if a rapid scale-up of support is required but overall may lack legitimacy and sustainability. Such investments should not be at expense of wider institution building at central and local level.

- **Incorporate measures to systematically build and strengthen sub-national institutions and a local frontline workforce in FCAS as a fundamental foundation of system building.** Where the workforce does not exist, prioritise these investments. In some very fragile contexts this may require wider policy and institutional engagement to establish or strengthen decentralisation frameworks and define institutional roles. Where such structures are still emerging, identifying and building from existing local structures that people trust could also provide a way forward. This might include local civil society organisations or community help groups in the absence of formal governance structures. These actors often hold deep knowledge of local power dynamics and are vital to navigating conflict sensitivities and perceptions of fairness in service delivery.
- **Where the workforce exists, bolster its capacities.** This includes at a technical level with training and on-the-job learning but also nurturing wider skillsets that are so important for service delivery in complex emergencies – such as negotiation and mediation skills, and the ability to adapt, troubleshoot and plan for change as contexts evolve. Capacity strengthening should also incorporate measures to build institutional resilience (e.g. recovery planning, surge capacity planning). Peer-to-peer learning and tapping into the daily experience of local social protection institutions should be central to any workforce strategy, recognising that proximity often translates into legitimacy and trust. Post-conflict capacity assessments are important to support rapid and effective institutional and service recovery.
- **Ramp up investments in digital solutions to enhance social protection system functionality in FCAS.** This may require wider policy and institutional engagement to influence or stay abreast of necessary improvements in the enabling environment (for example, financial regulations, digital infrastructure). Digitalisation must be inclusive and conflict sensitive, ensuring that vulnerable groups are not left behind or further marginalised, and that systems are resilient to disruption and misuse in fragile settings.

5.2.4 Reduce donor fragmentation in system building

In FCAS, better donor alignment in financing, programming and approaches to system building is not just desirable, it is essential for building coherent, resilient and sustainable

social protection systems. Fragmentation in donor financing and programming is creating parallel systems, duplicating efforts and costs, increasing transaction costs for national actors, and at times leading to donors working at cross purposes. Joint approaches enable not only greater strategic coherence and more cost-effective use of limited resources but also allow for risk pooling, reducing exposure for individual actors and helping to overcome risk thresholds that might otherwise block engagement. Donors must take steps to reduce fragmentation and strengthen collective impact.

- **Advance joint financing and programming models.** Co-financing national systems allows for a stronger collective donor voice, aligns incentives, reduces silos, and helps shift the focus from project-based to system-based approaches aligned with government priorities. Donors should explore how to better align funding instruments (including humanitarian, development and peace instruments) to support more joined-up and coherent financing strategies for system building across the nexus. A mix of financing approaches and instruments may be needed, bearing in mind the context specificities. Crucially, all funding should respond to a budgeted national social protection financing plan, rather than to donor supply-driven imperatives.
- **Promote and reform the use of MDTFs.** MDTFs can be one such model to support joint financing. A recent FCDO analysis highlights that while the MDTF model offers potential, there remains limited robust evidence on performance, and plenty of anecdotal concerns about factors that could limit effectiveness36. These include challenges around procedural rigidity, which limits agility to respond to change, opacity of management fees, and divergent positions and interests across members. It is important to improve the transparency of MDTF operations and to evaluate performance. MDTF members should be encouraged to develop shared positions on aspects such as approaches to system building, risk sharing, transition planning and localisation.
- **Make shared investments in delivery infrastructure.** Donors should collectively support governments to develop and strengthen essential building blocks for social protection system delivery.
- **Embed shared accountability and risk management frameworks.** Agree on joint thresholds for engagement, mitigation strategies and transition benchmarks to improve collective confidence and enable sustained donor presence in volatile settings.
- **Collectively provide more timely and transparent data on financing flows.** Global data sources on DAC funding for social protection are untransparent and outdated. Having sight of the clear and up-to-date financing picture is key, so that even if joint donor cooperation is not possible, respective donor strategies can be more informed and achieve greater complementarity. Given that a large proportion of social protection financing in many FCAS is in the form of loans – which cannot be incorporated into a joint fund – greater transparency and complementarity around loan financing is essential.

5.2.5 Where social protection is delivered outside government systems, clearly plan from the outset for a transition to full government ownership

While development partners can support social protection system building through technical assistance and by managing underlying systems or delivery functions, government-led provision must be the end goal. In FCAS, this transition may take time but deferring the conversation risks entrenching parallel structures and undermining long-term sustainability. It is also important that any temporary activation or scaling up of a TPI has a clear purpose and does not impact negatively on national system-building efforts.

- **Employ a risk management approach that considers both the advantages and the risks to national system building when defining TPI arrangements.** This can support decision making to ensure that TPI arrangements are only put in place for those parts of the delivery chain that

[36] Swithern et al. (2025)

absolutely need support, not automatically for the entire delivery chain, and that arrangements do not create confusion or reduce visibility of government as social protection provider.

- **Plan clear, realistic and timebound transition and exit strategies from the outset.** These should include structured and transparent indicators or milestones that signal when feasible and appropriate transition points are reached. Transition can be managed incrementally through phased approaches, starting with lower-risk functions, to manage expectations and mitigate operational or political disruption. In dynamic FCAS, plans should be periodically reviewed and adapted to reflect changing realities.
- **Incorporate transition planning into contractual arrangements with TPIs, to avoid perverse incentives that prolong the use of these external arrangements.** Clear capacity building outputs can be built into TPI output agreements and scope of work, informed by capacity assessments such as seen in Yemen and Ethiopia. Performance-based conditions can be used to incentivise organisations to maintain effective progress towards transitioning, even if flexibility is needed due to events beyond their control. In some cases, separating out direct delivery and capacity-building functions across different partners – with tailored incentive and coordination structures – may help to improve focus and accountability.

5.2.6 Invest in evidence generation to build support for social protection in FCAS

In FCAS, donor and humanitarian actors' confidence to engage with social protection systems often hinges on perceptions of feasibility and risk. Generating and sharing robust evidence is essential to counter persistent misconceptions about the role of social protection in these contexts and perceived risks about engaging with government systems. It is important to move away from the status quo, where decisions not to engage are frequently based on assumptions rather than evidence. Social protection donors, IFIs and dual-mandate organisations have a responsibility to build understanding among humanitarian actors about the social protection system. Humanitarian actors must have confidence in its robustness and relevance. This can be built by sharing transparent information on system features, checks and balances. Demonstrating that such investments can be both impactful and responsible and that risks can be managed can foster trust among donors and encourage greater coordination with humanitarian actors.

Generating credible, context-specific evidence on the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of social protection measures is important to build political momentum within governments to invest. This includes evidence on how social protection contributes to household wellbeing, maintains institutional continuity during crises, and – where appropriate – reinforces social cohesion and stability.

- **Develop joint research and learning agendas across actors working on social protection in FCAS.** This could include:
  - Developing common methodologies and tools for measuring process and outcomes, including unintended negative impacts, and considering the dynamic and uncertain environment.
  - Prioritising timely, operationally useful evidence that can inform real-time decision-making, and increased holistic and complementary programming.
  - Synthesising transferable lessons for future system building and national programme design that is conflict sensitive and risk informed.
  - Disseminating findings strategically, targeting policy influencers, humanitarian actors and national decision-makers.
  - Investing in comparative studies and cost-benefit analyses, providing a comparison of the risks and costs of not engaging, of engaging though a TPI, or of remaining engaged to influence donor positioning and long-term financing commitments.
- **Invest in joint risk assessments, including political analysis, and in regular risk monitoring.** This will enable more evidence-based consideration of risks by donors and humanitarian actors,

for which mitigation measures can then be explored. Meanwhile, investing in light-touch regular monitoring can build confidence in social protection service functionality in conflict-affected areas and that risks are being adequately managed. Since risks are greater in FCAS settings, IFIs should reasonably expect to transparently share full details of risk management processes and detailed information on how risks are being managed with other contributing donors.

- **Conduct cross-sectoral analysis and comparison of approaches in other basic services.** In the health and education sectors, donors routinely make efforts to sustain institutions, staff and services, and humanitarian actors more routinely engage with state institutions. Learning what works for risk management and engagement in these sectors could inform future approaches to social protection system building in FCAS.
- **Invest in independent monitoring and evaluation of the roles of TPIs,** to build firm evidence of whether targets are reached, and on efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Test and research the costs and benefits of additional TPI partnership models.** Contracting an international organisation that then subcontracts others creates layers of overheads and is unlikely to be the most efficient use of scarce resources. It is important to explore alternative partnership arrangements, beyond the sole contracting of a UN agency. This might include, for example, working through INGO consortia; separately contracting more than one third party based on comparative advantages to fulfil delivery functions; and considering ways that national organisations (such as national NGOs, quasi-governmental organisations, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) can be more directly involved, in line with localisation commitments. The forthcoming Rapid Social Response fragility and conflict window that FCDO will fund, which includes funding for piloting and testing innovations, provides an opportunity to think through, test and learn from some of these alternative arrangements. The latter option might require looking critically at whether IFI/donor due diligence and contracting arrangements present barriers to achieving greater localisation and exploring how these could be overcome in FCAS.

5.2.7 Strengthen the engagement of humanitarian actors in social protection system building in FCAS

Linking social protection and humanitarian action is ultimately about leveraging the comparative advantages of both sectors, to make best use of resources and meet people's needs. Both sectors have distinct strengths that together can improve overall outcomes for people by sharing responsibilities and bolstering capacities.

This study clearly demonstrates that there are opportunities for these actors to work together in FCAS in ways that manage risks and bring benefits to people experiencing fragility and conflict. To move forward, actions are needed to forge truly joint ways of working.

- **Encourage more systematic consideration of social protection systems and ways to engage with these in humanitarian response planning.** This would mean that partners build from an understanding of what already exists and what it is important to preserve (just as in health and education). Humanitarian partners should also be encouraged to think through how decisions not to engage with social protection could 'do harm' from a system-building perspective. Humanitarian donors can incentivise this by requiring implementing partners to demonstrate that this has been considered as part of funding decisions, or by promoting a 'social-protection-first' approach and starting from the premise of supporting the national system. Doing this systematically in response planning for other types of (non-conflict related) emergencies would also help to build familiarity of humanitarian partners with social protection systems.
- **Establish a joint, common strategy for linking social protection and humanitarian action.** This should include clearly formulated joint objectives and expected results, emphasise mutual accountability and define roles for all actors with a comparative advantage and interest to

contribute. Humanitarian donors and IFIs can create an enabling environment by linking financing to such joint strategies.

- **Establish forums bringing together government, social protection and humanitarian actors to action these strategies.** Such forums provide a way for actors to come together in a shared space to identify and then work towards common objectives. Context will determine the appropriate positioning and membership; however, learning emerging from this and other studies[37] highlights that these should occupy a strategic position rather than being subsumed under clusters and working groups in the humanitarian architecture. Donors and IFIs can create an enabling environment by encouraging implementing partners and government to participate and providing the necessary sustained and dedicated resourcing.

5.2.8 Embed conflict sensitivity in social protection system building

In FCAS, conflict sensitivity must be central to how social protection systems are designed, delivered and governed. In this context, conflict sensitivity is not an add-on, it is essential for ensuring that social protection systems promote stability and not division. Embedding a conflict lens is necessary to anticipate and manage the ways that conflict impacts on social protection delivery, avoid unintentionally exacerbating tensions, and maximise the chance that social protection reinforces trust, inclusion and social cohesion. Conflict sensitivity must go beyond programme-level mitigation. Social protection actors should work together to develop a shared understanding of conflict risks and opportunities and apply this strategically across the system.

While there are limits to framing social protection as a tool for peacebuilding, it nevertheless has some potential – as a system-enabling resource distribution – to influence (positively or negatively) the social contract between the state and groups within society or foster social cohesion between groups. There may therefore be opportunities for social protection to be designed in ways that reduce conflict drivers, if done well.

- **Undertake joint conflict analysis through social protection coordination bodies, including government, humanitarian and development partners.** This can develop a shared understanding of the risks and opportunities and guide engagement strategies. Actors globally can also work together to develop a consistent methodology for examining conflict sensitivity in system design.
- **Include conflict and peace experts in analyses and decision-making on system building.** The World Bank should recruit conflict specialists to provide dedicated, in-country support, including to the design and implementation of social protection operations. Social protection actors can also consult with conflict specialist organisations in country and make space for conflict and peace actors in social protection coordination forums. It is also important to upskill existing staff in government and social protection partners to better mainstream a conflict lens in system building.
- **Consider conflict sensitivity of targeting approaches.** Targeting approaches are a key flashpoint, with the potential to contribute to conflict. In FCAS, all actors should examine the strengths and limitations of proposed targeting models not only in terms of cost efficiency, affordability and accuracy but also their potential to influence conflict drivers. This should incorporate local perceptions of vulnerability, fairness and inclusion.
- **Integrate conflict sensitivity into monitoring and evaluation frameworks,** tracking effects on trust, cohesion and perceptions of equity – not just technical performance.
- **Promote inclusive models for system building that are conceived from the bottom up.** If building a social contract is the aim, then system building in FCAS should be based on broad

[37] Phelps and Chandaria (2025)

stakeholder participation from those who are expected to be contract holders. This includes communities and the trusted institutions that represent them. Where there may be distrust of central government and political elites, grassroots civil society organisations or community development committees may have stronger legitimacy with communities while also having an intimate understanding of people’s needs. It is important to define a clear theory of change for how social protection can realistically contribute to enhancing the social contract or social cohesion, and the changes expected.

ANNEX A: MANAGING OPERATIONAL RISKS AND CHALLENGES FOR PROVIDING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN CONFLICT SETTINGS[38]

The table below highlights the risks and challenges that the study identified along the delivery chain in the case study countries. This is not exhaustive; some of these risks could have manifest elsewhere besides the listed countries but were not highlighted during data collection for this study[39].

For each risk, the table highlights actions taken to address it. This includes examples of activities in the seven focal countries, plus where such actions also took place in other conflict-affected states (based on global literature).

For each listed action, the table then presents some qualitative scoring, which is the authors' own judgement based on insights from this study (and wider literature where relevant). This includes:

Evidence on the utility of the action: this provides a three-point score of the level of evidence that exists on how useful/effective the action was in addressing the risks and challenges, where:

- 3 = strong evidence (where there is reference to this in other independent reviews/evaluations /analyses).
- 2 = medium evidence (where this study found consistent views emerging across key informants, and/or across counties, and/or from other internal studies).
- 1 = poor evidence (where no firm evidence on functionality or success was made available, which can include examples of where the action is very recent or still being planned and no learning is yet available).

Ease of implementing the action: this provides a three-point score of how easy it is to implement the action, in terms of the cost and the time needed:

- 'Low-cost quick win' = an action that can be undertaken immediately and at no or little extra cost.
- 'Some investment/time needed' = an action that is relatively straightforward but that implies some additional workload and an additional cost to implement.
- 'Medium term (complex/ costly) solution' = this action requires a more fundamental change to existing ways of working, requiring more considerable time and investment to implement.

Is this a promising practice to replicate in the future? this provides a three-point score of how confident we can be that this action is a promising practice that should be replicated in FCAS:

- Yes definitely.
- Yes potentially (where the action might make sense in some but not all contexts, or where there are trade-offs to consider).
- Unclear/cannot say where the action is very recent and no learning is yet available, or where the evidence on the utility of the action is limited.

[38] Source: author's own

[39] Concerning the registration stage, "managing safety of beneficiaries and staff during registration" – it is worth noting that in several countries (Yemen, Ethiopia, the Sahel countries) new registration activities did not take place during the period under discussion, which accounts for why such risks were not reported.

KEYS

EVIDENCE ON THE UTILITY OF THE ACTION
- STRONG (independent reviews/evaluations)
- MEDIUM (consistent views in KIIs; internal studies)
- POOR (no firm evidence available)
- Not yet happened

EASE OF ACTION (TIME/INVESTMENT)
- Lc - Low-cost quick win
- Si - Some investment/time needed
- Mt - Medium term (complex/ costly) solution

IS THIS A PROMISING PRACTICE TO CONSIDER IN THE FUTURE?
- De - Yes definitely
- Po - Yes potentially
- Uc - Unclear/cannot say

RISK	ACTIONS TAKEN	Evidence on the utility of the action	Ease of action (time/investment)	Is this a promising practice to consider in the future?
ALL STAGES				
Damage/stress to institutions Armed conflict damages SP infrastructure, data systems and institutions (Ethiopia, Armenia) Social protection workforce is affected or displaced (Ethiopia) Conflict and fragility create further burden on capacities of already-weak SP institutions (Sahel, Somalia, Yemen)	**Introducing tools to assess damage to SP operations and institutions and inform recovery:** traffic light assessment, capacity assessment (Ethiopia)	STRONG	Si	De
	Adapting and simplifying design and delivery procedures to enable transfers to continue, despite capacity constraints: including grouping payments into fewer cycles; allowing delivery of payments by hand where e-payment infrastructure not functioning; allowing manual completion of payroll records where digital MIS not functioning; waiving conditionalities (Ethiopia)	MEDIUM	Lc	De
	Provide surge capacity for staffing: surge in SP staff from other unaffected locations to ensure minimum staffing for core functions (Ethiopia, Armenia)	STRONG	Lc	De
	Central server backup: to restore digital beneficiary records where data systems are damaged (Ethiopia, Armenia)	MEDIUM	Mt	De
	Partnerships with TPIs: to ensure programme reach in areas where there is limited state institutional capacity (Sahel, Somalia, Sudan, Occupied Palestine Territories, Haiti)	MEDIUM	Si	De
	Technical assistance by international organisations to build capacities: including through training, job shadowing and secondment (Yemen, Somalia).	MEDIUM	Mt	De
COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES				
Communicating programme rules and eligibility Lack of understanding about eligibility rules contributes to mistrust, social tensions and risks of community conflict (Sudan, Somalia)	**Awareness-raising and sensitisation campaigns:** to ensure community understanding of programme objectives and eligibility rules, especially in conflict hotspot areas (Sudan, Somalia).	MEDIUM	Si	De
	Hotline/call centre for raising queries or complaints: strengthening the GRM to identify grievances about perceived exclusion (Sudan, Somalia).	MEDIUM	Mt	De
REGISTRATION, ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT AND ENROLMENT				
Verifying identity of SP beneficiaries/ applicants Beneficiary list needs updating to adjust for deaths or register other household members as named beneficiary (Yemen, Ethiopia) Loss of personal identification documents (Yemen, Ethiopia, Sudan, Armenia) Conflict means the process to access the state ID required to be eligible for social assistance was no longer available (Sudan)	**Engaging local community leaders:** attestation by local authorities/tribal leaders to validate identities and confirm proof of life (Ethiopia, Yemen, Sudan, Libya)	STRONG	Si	De
	Cross-government coordination to fast-track ID replacement: SP institutions engage with security officials to fast-track the process for issuing new IDs for beneficiaries (Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan)	MEDIUM	Lc	De
	Crosschecking state civil registries to speed up ID replacement: checking online registries for birth certificates, passports to confirm identity of SP beneficiaries (Armenia).	MEDIUM	Lc	Po where e-gov systems and civil record keeping are sufficiently mature and beneficiaries have basic documents
	Introducing digital solutions for ID verification: introducing biometric registration, and temporary Identity Management solution with unique QR code for every household (Sudan, Somalia).	POOR	Mt	Uc too early in the process to generate learning on effectiveness.
Managing safety of beneficiaries and staff during registration Presence of NSAGs and incidence of active conflict presents physical threat to safety (Somalia)	**Flexible scheduling of face-to-face registration and assessment activities: temporarily** pausing planned community-based consultations and registration exercises where needed; revisiting communities multiple times where necessary, to complete the exercise when security conditions allow (Somalia)	MEDIUM	Si	De
	Investing in digital registries that can enable remote assessment and identification of beneficiaries: investing in a universal social registry of the population, which can enable remote screening of eligibility in future in places where a physical field presence may not be possible (Somalia, also Ukraine).	POOR	Mt	Po too early in the process in Somalia for learning about effectiveness. In other countries, pre-emptive registration has supported remote screening and assessment during other types of shock, but it depends on data being accurate and continually updated which is proving challenging in practice.
	Engaging local actors: contracting local private sector company with strong community presence to negotiate access to communities for USR rollout (Somalia)	MEDIUM	Si	Po due diligence must be done to understand linkages of private sector with parties to conflict.
Managing displacement of existing beneficiaries/new applicants Challenges to relocate and update registration data for displaced beneficiaries (Yemen, Ethiopia, Sudan) Social registries determining eligibility for SSNs are not sufficiently dynamic to identify or respond to population movement for migrants/ nomads, or the forcibly displaced (Sudan, Sahel, Somalia) Inflexible qualifying conditions in SP eligibility criteria (on proof of residence status) constrain access to SP for IDPs	**Dynamic updating of social protection registries:** introducing mechanisms enabling proactive updating of any changes to personal data in social registries by households (Sahel, Somalia)	POOR	Mt	Uc Not yet rolled out; too early in the process to generate learning on effectiveness.
	Community outreach to relocate households and update records: working through local actors (SP frontline workers/ Red Cross movement staff and volunteers) to identify current locations of households and update lists before each payment cycle (Yemen, Sudan); outreach through social workers and humanitarian partners, sensitising refugees to update their place of residence in civil registries (Armenia).	STRONG	Si	De
	Adapting programme eligibility rules to make more flexible: relaxing required length of residence from 3 years to 2 years (Ethiopia).	STRONG	Lc	Po Good idea, but in Ethiopia, the change brought in was not sufficient to address the problem (still 2 years).
	Enabling remote registration and assessment: set up a digital platform allowing refugees to apply for assistance online rather than at SP offices (Armenia). Also used eligibility criteria that can be quickly verified through cross-checking government databases.	STRONG	Si	Po digital environment and digital literacy need to be sufficient.

RISK	ACTIONS TAKEN	Evidence on the utility of the action	Ease of action (time/investment)	Is this a promising practice to consider in the future?
(Ethiopia, Sudan) and for refugees who are frequently moving (Armenia)	**Integrated management information systems:** digital SP registries enable country-wide portability of beneficiary records and identifying information (Armenia, Ukraine).		MT	DE
Handling mass registration for the displaced population overburdens social protection institutions (Armenia)	**Bolstering SP workforce from the displaced population:** Surging in additional SP workforce capacity to manage the registration by hiring social workers from the displaced communities (Armenia).		SI	DE
Unclear procedures guiding the inclusion of IDPs in SSNs	**Implementing separate support for IDPs:** since addressing portability challenges for IDPs in the SP programme will take time, supporting IDPs through funding a separate temporary Cash Transfer programme (Ethiopia)		SI	PO Pragmatic solution, ensuring assistance can still reach displaced households where barriers would otherwise have taken time to address.
	Modifying registration processes to capture information on displacement: Modifying registration form to capture displacement status and duration of displacement, as a first step to inform policy decisions on how IDPs should be included in SSNs.		LC	UC too early in the process to generate learning on effectiveness.
Targeting and registration risks inflaming conflict dynamics due to perceived exclusions (Sudan)	**Conflict sensitivity analysis of targeting approach:** in contexts where social tensions are high and social differences are a driver of conflict (Sudan, Somalia).		SI	DE
DELIVERY OF ASSISTANCE				
Managing access, safety and security Presence of NSAGs and incidence of active conflict presents physical threat to safety (Yemen, Ethiopia, Sahel, Somalia, Armenia) Unexploded ordinances in public works sites (Ethiopia, Sahel) Difficulties with getting access approved by DFAs, NSAGs, or Government forces (Yemen, Ethiopia, Sahel)	**Waive conditionalities:** remove the condition that beneficiaries need to attend public work sites or complete other activities that could put their safety at risk (Ethiopia)		LC	DE
	Screening for ordinances at project sites: introducing a protocol for assessing public work sites for unexploded ordinances and monitoring its application (Ethiopia).		SI	DE
	Reducing number of payments: grouping payments into fewer cycles to limit exposure (Ethiopia, Sudan, Sahel, Yemen).		LC	PO Trade off that if grouping payments leads to delays, then this can cause negative impacts for beneficiaries. Ideally grouping payments should involve frontloading this payment.
	Local intelligence gathering: working through local actors (SP frontline workers/ Red Cross movement) to provide localised intelligence on the security situation and inform risk assessments for payment plans (Yemen, Sudan).		SI	DE
	Mediating with local authorities, including DFAs/armed groups: working through local actors (SP frontline workers/ Red Cross movement) to engage community leaders/tribal chiefs and armed groups, to negotiate safe access to communities (Yemen, Sudan, Sahel).		SI	DE
	Partnerships with specialist actors for intelligence gathering: staying abreast of evolving security and access risks through partnerships with organisations involved in conflict monitoring (Sahel, Ethiopia).		LC	DE
	Diversifying partnerships for managing payments: diversifying choice of and increasing the number of payment agents (e.g., banks, traders and retailers, mobile vans) to increase the options for dealing with uncertainty and reduce distance that beneficiaries need to travel (Yemen, Sudan).		SI	DE
	Flexible payment planning: setting locations of payout points to reduce exposure for staff and beneficiaries in high-risk areas and avoid movement across conflict lines/tribal tensions (Yemen, Sudan, Sahel, OPT).		LC	DE
	Moving payment sites to accessible areas: for beneficiaries residing in inaccessible areas, including them in distribution plans for neighbouring accessible areas that beneficiaries are able to travel to (Ethiopia).		LC	PO Will depend on the distances involved and how easily beneficiaries are able to reach neighbouring localities.
	Pause payments: in locations considered too risky for beneficiary/staff or where access not possible, with make back-payments once situation changes (Armenia, Ethiopia, Sahel, Sudan, Yemen).		LC	PO Trade off that delays in assistance can cause negative impacts for beneficiaries. Risk should be rigorously assessed (not assumed). Measure of 'last resort'.
	Partnerships with TPIs: to ensure programme reach in areas where government struggles to access (Sahel, Ethiopia)		SI	DE
	Use of armed escorts/security personnel: Police, army or private security accompany programme staff (TPIs and government) or have a presence at distribution sites (Sahel, Somalia, Sudan).		SI	PO Need to also consider ethical aspects of associating with armed actors, as well as reputational risk.
	Adapting communication procedures to reduce exposure for staff and beneficiaries: minimising public gatherings; limiting the channels, for and timing of communication on planned distributions (Sahel, Yemen, Sudan)		LC	DE
	Adopting digital payment solutions: digital payments enabling remote and less visible delivery of payments (Sahel, Somalia, Ethiopia, Armenia, Yemen, Ukraine, Afghanistan)		MT	DE
	Avoiding the risk: by excluding NSAG-held territories or highly insecure areas from SSN coverage (Somalia).		LC	PO Be mindful of risks of creating tensions/ reinforcing conflict drivers (see 3.2)

RISK	ACTIONS TAKEN	Evidence on the utility of the action	Ease of action (time/investment)	Is this a promising practice to consider in the future?
Ensuring portability of assistance Locating and providing social assistance to beneficiaries following displacement (Yemen, Ethiopia, Sudan, Sahel, Somalia) Regulatory barriers to paying beneficiaries outside of their place of residence (Ethiopia, Somalia) or when displaced across border (Armenia)	**Pause payments:** provide backdated payments to displaced beneficiaries upon their return (Sahel, Ethiopia).		Lc	Po Trade off, that delays to assistance can cause negative impacts for beneficiaries. Measure of 'last resort'.
	Bring payments to IDPs: staff travel to IDP camps/host communities to facilitate transfers (Ethiopia).		Si	Po Will depend on distances involved and how dispersed beneficiaries are. Where moving as a community, more potential.
	Include 'adapting to displacement' in service agreements: include clauses for FSPs to respond to displacement by moving or opening new payout points, if displacement reaches a critical mass (Sahel, Yemen); sensitising training providers on new locations of beneficiaries and updating service agreements (Sahel).		Si	De
	Tracking population movements: engage with community leaders and village elders to track IDP movements and inform distribution plans (Yemen, Sahel); use data provided by the humanitarian community (OCHA) on new waves of IDP movements and 'hotspot' locations (Yemen).		Si	De
	Introducing e-payments: enabling beneficiaries to access payments in different locations (Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Sahel, Armenia, Ukraine, OPT).		Mt	De
	Establishing regulations enabling portability across borders: agreements and SOPs enabling administration of existing social benefits for displaced populations across borders (Armenia, Colombia) or in occupied territory (Ukraine).		Si	De
Managing disruptions in the financial sector Post offices or bank branches closed, ATMs affected by power outages (Ethiopia, Sudan, Armenia) Conflict created dual currency and dual exchange rate (Yemen) Banking systems infrastructure under control of DFA/NSAGs, temporarily disrupting services (Sudan) Liquidity constraints in the formal financial system (Sudan, Armenia) Overburdened staff - overcrowding and queues at FSP branches (Ethiopia, Armenia) Banks freeze accounts of those with outstanding debts (Armenia)	**Pausing payments:** and back-dating these once services resume operations (Ethiopia, Armenia).		Lc	Po Delays to assistance can cause negative impacts for beneficiaries. Measure of 'last resort'.
	Use of online banking and online retail: Social protection payments continue to be made as deposits into bank accounts, despite bank closures, and beneficiaries conduct online banking and online purchases to access some goods and services (Armenia).		Lc	Po Only in contexts where such services are well established.
	Develop a foreign exchange strategy: Work with specialists (World Bank) on a foreign exchange strategy to prevent divergence of benefit value in different locations (Yemen).		Si	De
	Switch modalities: WFP switching around 25% of planned social assistance to in-kind transfers (Sudan).		Si	Po worked because WFP was TPI; government ministries unlikely to be set up to handle such a logistical challenge. Useful only where managing challenges with cash are insurmountable for a period.
	Diversify choice of payment agents outside the formal banking system: including traders and retailers (Sudan, OPT).		Si	Po depends on the context and the options available.
	Use of manual ('cash in hand') payments: where banking infrastructure affected (Sudan).		Lc	De
	Increasing circulation of physical currency: bringing in currency by helicopter and appeal for the public and businesses to circulate currency (Armenia, Sudan, OPT).		Si	De
	Surging in additional capacity: bringing in staff from bank branches in other non-affected regions (Ethiopia).		Lc	De
	Government decrees: to waive the blocking of accounts for conflict-affected and displaced (Armenia).		Lc	De
Managing inclusion of vulnerable groups (PWDs, elderly, pregnant women, female-headed households, refugees, minorities) The abovementioned challenges to continuity of social assistance during conflict impact on vulnerable groups (all countries) Conflict contributes to further restrictions on women's mobility (Yemen Risk of marginalisation of minority clans (Somalia Ensuring inclusion of unbanked refugees (Armenia)	**Allowing collection by a third party:** procedure for delegation of authority to a nominated person to collect money on the beneficiary's behalf (Ethiopia, Yemen, Sahel, Armenia, Somalia).		Lc	De
	Supporting women to use digital payment services: adopting mobile money for delivery and providing women with their own phones and training (Sahel, Somalia).		Mt	De
	Taking services to marginalised communities: introduction of mobile clinics to enhance inclusion of minority clans that are historically marginalised from and live long distances from health services (Somalia).		Si	De
	Considering conservative gender norms when designing distribution sites: ensuring 'women-friendly' sites for payment collection (Yemen, Sudan).		Si	De
	Overcoming mobility constraints: Including lump sums to allow vulnerable beneficiaries to pay for transport to reach payout points (Sudan); doorstep payments for those with limited mobility (Armenia).		Si	De
	Integrating international disability standards into social protection institutions: investing in renovation of district SP offices to international disability standards to enhance accessibility (Armenia).		Mt	Po Hugely important though for many low income or fragile states such changes will take time.
	Introducing alternative payment solutions that are more accessible: Government decree allowing refugees without a bank account to be able to receive assistance through the post office (Armenia).		Si	De

RISK	ACTIONS TAKEN	Evidence on the utility of the action	Ease of action (time/investment)	Is this a promising practice to consider in the future?
MONITORING				
Managing risk of fraud and diversion Heightened risks due to conflict - increased motivation for diversion/ taxation; reduced oversight (Yemen, Ethiopia, Sudan, Sahel, Somalia) Difficulties in verifying beneficiary identity due to weaknesses in state systems for civil registration and lack of common system of national ID (Somalia)	**Sub-contracting a TPI:** outsource the risks to an organisation skilled in managing cash transfers and associated fiduciary risks (Yemen, Somalia, Sudan).		SI	DE
	Hiring independent third-party monitors (TPM): for tasks such as confirming operational functionality of SP; overseeing distribution according to SOPs; PDM with beneficiary to confirm receipt, and identifying instances of fraud (Sahel, Somalia, Yemen, Ethiopia, Sudan, OPT).		SI	PO needs to be truly independent and needs to consider the costs.
	Build in automated controls into MIS: controls that 'red flag' those records where further action is needed to confirm a beneficiary's identity (Yemen, Sudan).		SI	PO Where data management systems can allow for this
	Validating beneficiary identity and eligibility: cross-checking eligibility through data in other government registries (Armenia).		LC	PO where such civil registries exist
	Considering risks as part of due diligence when contracting service providers: screening of contractors, including senior management, against sanctions lists (Somalia, Yemen).		LC	PO In contexts with sanctions lists
	Real-time supervision and monitoring of payment distributions: led by social protection workforce, partner organisations, or community committees (Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Sahel).		SI	DE
	Introduce remote monitoring tools: phone surveys of beneficiaries, satellite-based monitoring, mobile apps for grievance collection (Sahel, Armenia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Ukraine, OPT).		SI	DE
	Audit and spot check exercises: to monitor adherence to programme processes (Armenia, Sahel, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia)		SI	DE
	Hotline/call centre for raising complaints of fraud and corruption: introducing or strengthening this in the GRM (Sahel, Sudan, Yemen, Armenia, Somalia)		MT	DE
	Use of biometric data: planned addition of biometric identification to reduce risks of leakages (Somalia).		MT	UC too early to learn about effectiveness
GRIEVANCE REDRESS				
Addressing safeguarding risks Conflict increases safeguarding risks for groups who are already vulnerable, particularly women and girls, including heightened risks of GBV and SEA (Yemen, Ethiopia, Sudan, Sahel, Somalia) Conflict reinforces risk of taxation of beneficiaries (Yemen, Sahel, Somalia) Conflict creates new safeguarding risks due to activities of NSAGs or military forces (Ethiopia, Sudan) Conflict disrupts or overburdens existing GRM channels (Armenia)	**World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework:** to assess and mainstream mitigation of safeguarding risks throughout design and delivery (Ethiopia, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Sahel).		SI	DE
	Capacity building of staff: introducing a GBV code of conduct for staff and training in its implementation (Ethiopia).		SI	PO where GBV risk is a concern.
	Mapping of specialised services for victims: mapping GBV and other related social services, for referral of cases (Ethiopia).		SI	PO Mapping alone is insufficient where such services are not well functioning.
	Community sensitisation and outreach: efforts to enhance understanding and use of the GRM through extensive community sensitisation and video animations shared through WhatsApp (Yemen, Sudan).		SI	DE
	Hotline/call centre to identify and address sensitive complaints: introducing or strengthening this in the GRM to manage risk of GBV/SEA (Armenia, Ethiopia, Sahel, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia); or risk of taxation (Somalia).		MT	UC Provides anonymous channels but alone is not enough to overcome demand-side barriers to reporting sensitive issues, where cultural dynamics are barriers to reporting.
	Partnerships with international humanitarian actors: provide complementary GRM services to bolster capacities (Armenia, Sudan).		SI	DE
	Employ additional staff: recruit workers from the refugee community to manage additional workload on the GRM (Armenia).		SI	DE
	Diversify communication and feedback channels: to maintain accessibility and deal with sensitive issues (Sudan, Sahel, Yemen, Somalia, Armenia).		SI	DE
	Partnerships with frontline workers across government: proposal to develop links between the social protection programmes and community health workers, to enhance identification and referral of GBV cases (Somalia)		SI	UC too early for learning on effectiveness

ANNEX B: MANAGING POLITICAL RISKS FOR PROVIDING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN CONFLICT SETTINGS[40]

The table below highlights the political risks that the study identified and elaborates on how these impacted on social assistance provisioning in the case study countries.

For each risk, the table highlights actions taken to address these in the focal countries.

For each listed action, the table then presents some qualitative scoring. This is the authors' own judgement based on insights from this study (and wider literature where relevant). This includes:

Evidence on the utility of the action: this provides a three-point score of the level of evidence that exists on how useful/effective the action was in addressing the risks and challenges, where:

- 3 = strong evidence (where there is reference to this in other independent reviews/evaluations/analyses).
- 2 = medium evidence (where this study found consistent views emerging across key informants, and/or across counties, and/or from other internal studies).
- 1 = poor evidence (where no firm evidence on functionality or success was made available, which can include examples of where the action is very recent or still being planned and no learning is yet available).

Is this a promising practice to replicate in future? This provides a three-point score of how confident we can be that this action is a promising practice that should be replicated in FCAS:

- Yes definitely.
- Yes potentially (where the action might make sense in some but not all contexts, or where there are trade-offs to consider).
- Unclear/cannot say where the action is very recent and no learning is yet available, or where the evidence on the utility of the action is limited.

[40] Source: author's own

KEYS

EVIDENCE ON THE UTILITY OF THE ACTION

- **STRONG** (independent reviews/evaluations)
- **MEDIUM** (consistent views in KIIs; internal studies)
- **POOR** (no firm evidence available)
- Not yet happened

IS THIS A PROMISING PRACTICE TO CONSIDER IN THE FUTURE?

- **DE** - Yes definitely
- **Po** - Yes potentially
- **Uc** - Unclear/cannot say

ISSUE, AND HOW THIS IMPACTED ON SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVISIONING	ACTIONS TAKEN	Evidence on the utility of the action	Is this a promising practice to consider in the future?
De facto authorities claim control of central government or part of territory • Where de facto authorities claimed control of government, World Bank invoked Operational Policy 7.30 Dealing with de Facto Governments, pausing financial support including for social protection (Yemen, Sudan, Niger, Burkina Faso) • Bilateral donors supporting SP paused their engagement with and funds to government (Niger, Sudan) • Central Government lost control of a region but remained recognised elsewhere, so IFI funding to government for social protection continued. But government paused budget support to the DFA-controlled region, and financing social protection through regular channels was no longer possible (Ethiopia).	• IFI/donor contract and finance a third-party implementer (TPI) to ensure assistance could continue to reach people in need: • Directly contracting a TPI: World Bank contracted the TPI directly, in place of government (Yemen - UNICEF, new arrangement; Sudan WFP, new arrangement). • Indirectly contracting a TPI: government with World Bank support contracted a TPI to provide services in the affected region (Ethiopia - WFP, new arrangement). • Modifying existing third-party delivery arrangement: donor already funding a 'Twin Track' model for social protection delivery, incorporating government-led and third-party-led channels. Pivoted all funds to the partner-led channel (Niger - UNICEF-WFP Joint Programme, modifying existing arrangement).	MEDIUM	**DE** improvements needed (see 4.3)
	• Continue working through and funding social protection institutions that are independently governed, operating with autonomy from government (Yemen - SFD, subcontracted as an implementing partner of the TPI UNICEF).	STRONG	**DE** need to explore models for direct engagement (see 4.xx)
	• Engage with and indirectly finance frontline staff of government institutions (Yemen - SWF staff engaged as independent contractors, recruited through implementing partners).	STRONG	**Po** Retained expertise for the programme, but did not preserve formal institutional capacities (see 4.XX).
Government's conduct as a party to conflict (concerns around rules of engagement regarding protection of civilians; allegations of atrocities) • Ethical/reputational risk concerns for social protection donors if engaging with government (Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Sudan) • Temporary delays to bilateral donor contributions to social protection (Ethiopia); decision of one donor to temporarily channel funds through humanitarian actors rather than social protection system (Ethiopia); reluctance of donors to fund government (Sudan MCCT+).	Conflict sensitivity analysis being planned to examine these (and other) risks to inform donor and partner engagement (Sahel – UN Joint Programme)	Not yet happened	
	Disengage with political figureheads in central gov. but continue to engage with technocrats and work through decentralised bodies, to maintain support to people (Ethiopia – UNICEF cash transfer for IDPs; Sudan - UNICEF MCCT+, including incentive payments to cover loss of salaries; Niger – UN Joint Programme).	MEDIUM	**DE** (see 4.xx)
Government's conduct as a party to conflict (concerns around rules of engagement regarding protection of civilians; allegations of atrocities) • Ethical/reputational risk concerns for social protection donors if engaging with government (Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Sudan) • Temporary delays to bilateral donor contributions to social protection (Ethiopia); decision of one donor to temporarily channel funds through humanitarian actors rather than social protection system (Ethiopia); reluctance of donors to fund government (Sudan MCCT+).	Establish inclusive targeting committees, representative of all populations (Ethiopia - UNICEF IDP programme, Sudan - WFP SESNP)	POOR	**Uc**
	Strong facilitation of geographical targeting by partners, using evidence-based criteria (Somalia – partners and government jointly selecting districts, using a district fragility index, Sudan - MCCT+ geographical selection heavily facilitated by UNICEF, using clear criteria).	MEDIUM	**Po** May still require extensive negotiation with government to gain acceptance of the decisions. Does not remove risk of manipulation and elite capture at the sub-district level (selection of communities).
	Explore evidence of linkages to political parties to conflict as part of the due diligence when selecting and contacting FSPs (Sudan - WFP).	POOR	**Uc**
	Independent political economy analysis by donors to examine these risks (Ethiopia)	STRONG	**DE** But need to be acted on (see 4.xx)
	Conflict sensitivity diagnostic being planned to examine these (and other) risks (Burkina Faso - UN Joint Programme)	Not yet happened	
	Maintaining a pre-existing beneficiary list to reduce opportunity for influencing targeting (Ethiopia, Yemen).	STRONG	**Po** short-term solution as maintaining a static list over time also brings risks (see 4.xx)
	Targeting demographic categories of the population on the basis of simple and clear criteria to reduce opportunity for manipulation (Somalia - CSSP and SAGAL).	STRONG	**Po**
	Move away from community-based targeting to data-driven household targeting (Somalia – Baxnaano)	POOR	**Uc** several potential additional risks to consider (see 4.xx)
Political agendas linked to the conflict influence government decisions on social protection • Government is reluctant to share information with donors on social protection system functionality in conflict-affected regions it was still officially in control of, because doing so might undermine its legitimacy (Ethiopia). • Military government has incentive to underreport loss of control of territory to NSAGs, since this was the justification for the military coups (Sahel). • After conflict, government sought to resume immediate control of delivery of social protection from the TPI, to bolster legitimacy and regain control of donor funds. Prioritising a political agenda over assuring quality of service provision (Ethiopia). • Government support for and investment in social assistance is limited, in part because of competing security priorities (Sahel, Somalia). • Relationships between central and decentralised authorities are contested, creating challenges for regional rollout of centrally managed SSN projects (Somalia).	Donor financing of independent monitoring and oversight mechanisms (Ethiopia – third-party monitoring (TPM); spot check exercises).	STRONG	**Po** but need improving (see 4.xx).
	Independent social protection institutional capacity assessment to inform handover back from TPI to government-led delivery (Ethiopia – WFP; Yemen – UNICEF).	STRONG	**DE**
	Seeking real-time information on conflict prevalence and severity from independent specialist actors (Sahel; also recommended in Ethiopia).	POOR	**Po** need more evidence
	Invest in building and sharing evidence to build the case for social protection across government (Somalia, Sahel)	Not yet happened	
	Planning for greater involvement and capacity strengthening for decentralised (Member State and district) authorities (Somalia)	Not yet happened	

ISSUE, AND HOW THIS IMPACTED ON SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVISIONING	ACTIONS TAKEN	Evidence on the utility of the action	Is this a promising practice to consider in the future?
Third-Party Implementers being associated with one or other side of the conflict • Risk that an affiliation - perceived or actual – with de facto authorities could restrict access for the TPI agency by government (Yemen). • Risk that an affiliation - perceived or actual - with government could compromise security and access for the TPI agency in areas with a presence of non-state armed groups (Sudan, also a recognised possible risk in Burkina Faso, Somalia) • Where territory is contested between regions, with each regional authority claiming jurisdiction for service delivery, this constrained political agreement and access for the TPI to provide social protection (Ethiopia).	TPI engages with both sides of the conflict as a neutral broker, with clear communication that the programme is to benefit vulnerable populations across territories under the control of both sides (Yemen).	■	Po
	TPI planning a community perception exercise to understand how it is perceived by different groups and inform a community engagement strategy (Burkina Faso - proposed expansion of the UN Joint Programme's 'Twin Track approach')	□	
	TPI introduced new neutral coding for digital registration of beneficiaries in the contested locations, unaffiliated with either region, to maintain neutrality and overcome political impasse (Ethiopia).	■	Po Helpful as a short-term temporary measure
Political dilemmas for continuing social assistance for refugees • Government concerns that social assistance to refugees should not be perceived to be larger than support for host communities, to avoid social tensions, but refugees have greater needs (Armenia). • Political constraints to integrating refugees into national social assistance schemes out of concerns for avoiding social tensions (coming at a time when social assistance coverage for citizens was being reformed and reduced) (Armenia).	Additional support to refugees was provided by government as separate, clearly defined 'emergency assistance' programmes (not as top-ups to routine social protection benefits) (Armenia).	■	Po Helpful as a short-term temporary measure
	Planning for a separate 'transitional' assistance for refugees, after 18 months of emergency assistance (Armenia).	□	

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