

A SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM: ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK*

Marine Yarmaloyan , ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1158-7246>
PhD in Sociology, Assistant Professor of the Department of Social Work and Social
Technologies, Yerevan State University. Email: marine.yarmaloyan@ysu.am

Abstract. The paper discusses the concept of a "shock-responsive social protection system", the main options for shock-responsive social protection: including design tweaks, piggybacking, horizontal and vertical expansions, and alignment. Some key criteria are discussed in terms of evaluating the ability of social protection system to respond to emergencies. Some conclusions are presented as offers in terms of preparing for an effective response to shocks as well.

Key words: *social protection, social protection and shock-responsive social protection system, emergency situation*

ՑՆՑՈՒՄՆԵՐԻՆ ԱՐՉԱԳԱՆՔՈՂ ՍՈՑԻԱԼԱԿԱՆ ՊԱՇՏՊԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԿԱՐԳԸ ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾԱԿԱՆ ՇՐՋԱՆԱԿ

Մարինե Յարմալոյան, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1158-7246>
ու.գ.թ., ԵՊՀ սոցիալական աշխատանքի և սոցիալական տեխնոլոգիաների ամբիոնի
ասիստենտ
Էլ. փոստ՝ marine.yarmaloyan@ysu.am

Ամփոփում: Հոդվածում քննարկվում են «ցնցումներին արձագանքող սոցիալական պաշտպանության համակարգ» հասկացությունը, սոցիալական պաշտպանության արձագանքման տարբեր ձևերը արտակարգ իրավիճակներում: Հոդվածում քննարկվում են որոշ չափանիշներ, որոնք հնարավորություն են տալիս գնահատելու սոցիալական պաշտպանության համակարգի կարողությունը արտակարգ իրավիճակներին արձագանքելու տեսանկյունից: Ներկայացված են նաև որոշ առաջարկություններ՝ ցնցումներին արդյունավետ արձագանք նախապատրաստելու առումով:

Բանալի բառեր - *սոցիալական պաշտպանություն, սոցիալական պաշտպանության և ցնցումներին արձագանքող սոցիալական պաշտպանության համակարգ, արտակարգ իրավիճակ*

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СИСТЕМА СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ ЗАЩИТЫ, РЕАГИРУЮЩАЯ НА ПОТЯСАНИЯ: ПОДХОДЫ К АНАЛИЗУ

Маринэ Ярмаляян, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1158-7246>

кандидат социологических наук, ассистент кафедры Социальной работы и социальных технологий ЕГУ.

Эл. почта: marine.yarmalyan@ysu.am

Аннотация. В статье обсуждается концепция «системы социальной защиты, реагирующей на шок», включая основные варианты социальной защиты, реагирующей на шок - корректировки конструкции, комбинирование, горизонтальное и вертикальное расширение, а также выравнивание. Некоторые ключевые критерии обсуждаются с точки зрения оценки способности системы социальной защиты реагировать на чрезвычайные ситуации. В статье также представлены предложения по подготовке к эффективному реагированию на потрясения.

Ключевые слова: социальная защита, система социальной защиты и защиты, реагирующая на потрясения, чрезвычайная ситуация

For various reasons, wars, epidemics and natural disasters have become more frequent in the modern world. From this point of view, it is very important that social protection systems are able to respond to emergency situations in a timely and adequate manner. Emergencies arise as a result of natural and man-made disasters. Brathwaite defines disaster as “*an event which seriously disrupts the normal functioning of the affected society causing widespread human, material or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected society to cope, using its own resources*” (Rock & Corbin, 2007, p. 386).

A disaster has seven elements that distinguish it from other tragedies. Those elements are: a disaster

- “involves the destruction of property, injury or loss of life”;
- “has an identifiable beginning and end”;
- “is sudden and time-limited”;
- “affects a relatively large group of people”;
- “is “public” and affects more than one family;
- “is out of the realm of ordinary experience”;
- “is psychologically traumatic enough to induce stress in almost anyone”

(Rosenfeld, Caye, Ayalon, & Lahad, 2005, p. 11).

It should be noted that the existence of a shock-responsive social protection system is also very necessary for the Republic of Armenia, taking into account a number of factors. Armenia is located in a high-risk zone for natural hazards. The country is susceptible to strong earthquakes, and is also vulnerable to weather-related shocks. Escalation of tensions and active conflict in 2016, 2020, and 2023 has contributed to cross-border displacement of thousands of ethnic Armenians from Artsakh, many of whom are struggling to meet their basic needs.

Thus, it is important to develop a common analysis framework which will provide an opportunity to understand if a social-protection system in any country is a shock-responsive or not. The development of above mentioned framework considers discussing a number of questions:

- What is a social protection?
- What are the main levels of social protection system?
- What is a shock-responsive social protection system?
- What are the main criteria of a shock-responsive social protection?
- What are the main options for shock-responsive adaption?

Social protection is the set of certain actions “*aimed at preventing social risks, as well as mitigating and eliminating their consequences through ensuring the social security of the population*” (Yarmaloyan M., 2016, 2 (20), p.26). Those actions can be governmental or non-governmental.

Social protection is implemented through different mechanisms such as “social assistance”, “social insurance”, “labor market policies”. (Yarmaloyan M., 2018, 2(26), p. 43). Those mechanisms can serve four different broad functions: protection (providing relief from deprivation); prevention (averting deprivation); promotion (enhancing real income and capabilities); and transformation (addressing social inequity and exclusion) (Devereux, Sabates-Wheeler, 2004).

It is important to mention that social assistance is the most prevalent and most often considered for shock response in the low- and middle-income countries¹.

Social protection as a system can be considered at three levels:

- The sector;
- Individual programs;
- Delivery systems (See O'Brien, C., et al., 2018, p. 6).

The highest level includes the ministries and other agencies and their mandates, their coordination bodies, their policies and strategies, the laws and regulations they issue, the sector budget and the way its distribution is prioritized.

Individual programs are the visible face of social protection for households in a country, for example cash transfer programs, school feeding programs etc.

The delivery systems underpin the programs: their registration processes, databases, payment mechanisms, frameworks for monitoring and evaluation and so on.

A shock responsive social protection (SRSP) is defined as “*the ability of the social protection system to anticipate shocks to maintain its regular program/s, to scale up and/or flex to accommodate new populations and needs as a result of the shocks and to contribute to resilience building of individuals, households, communities and systems against future shocks*” (Preparing social protection systems for shock response. A case study of UNICEF’s experiences in Armenia, p.3).

In order to know whether shock-responsive social protection or not it is important to determine the criteria by which a judgment can be made about it. Here are some criteria (See e.g. O'Brien, C. et al., 2018, pp.12-13):

- *meeting needs;*
- *coverage;*
- *timeliness;*

¹ Countries are grouped in terms of economic criteria. Gross national income (GNI) per capita is widely used to group countries in terms of their level of economic development. The World Bank uses this approach in its annual *World Development Report*. According to the World Bank’s 2024 report, low-income countries are those which have GNI per capita of \$ 1,135 or less. Upper middle income countries are those with GNI per capita of \$4,466 to \$13,845.

- *predictability;*
- *elimination of duplicated delivery systems,*
- *sustainability.*

1. **Meeting needs.** Better meeting the needs of any group of people might be received through a response that is better targeted, provides a more adequate level of support, or provides support of a more appropriate nature. (See e.g. White et al., 2013).

2. **Coverage of the population.** Some policy and decision makers use social protection programs to increase the absolute number of people reached. Coverage of the population can be improved by reducing the number of people who need assistance in the first place, as well as by supporting people after a disaster occurs.

3. **Timeliness.** According to some studies an early and adequate response generally provides a better outcome than the same response delivered later (see e.g. Cabot Venton et al., 2012).

4. **Predictability.** This has two aspects: predictability of funding for implementing agencies and predictability of support for families or households. In terms of predictability is emphasized if the supported is delivered regularly and predictable.

5. **Elimination of duplicated delivery systems and processes,** such as multiple organizations realizing similar targeting programs in the same communities. Duplication can be reduced by increasing coordination between program implementers, or by harmonizing aspects of program delivery. The aim of doing so may be to reduce costs, to improve coverage of those in need, to improve timeliness, or to achieve a greater consensus among agencies as to how to tackle a policy problem.

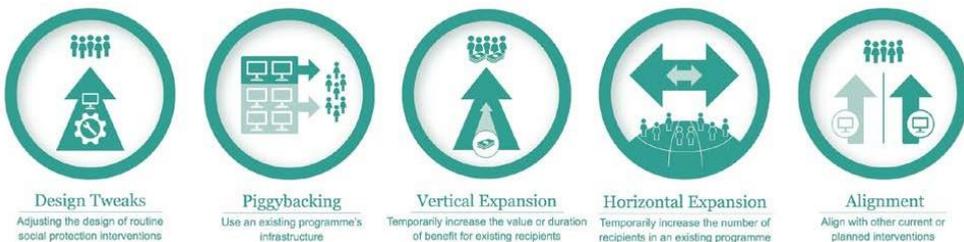
6. **Sustainability.** In terms of delivering a response to emergency situations, the sustainability of an intervention could be perceived as a function which could strengthen organizational capacity.

Beyond these above mentioned factors, others may also exist.

The social protection systems of different countries could respond to emergencies differently. According to some studies there are five key options for shock-responsive adaptation (See e.g. O'Brien, C. et al., 2018).

- “Design tweaks;
- “Piggybacking;
- “Vertical expansion”;
- “Horizontal expansion”;
- Alignment.

Typology of options for shock-responsive adaptation



Design tweaks

The design of social protection programs takes into account the type of shocks expected in a country. This will be made before a shock, or it could be after. The social protection programs can be designed in a manner to reduce the vulnerabilities of disaster-affected populations. The opportunity for design tweaks can exist for all programs.

Piggybacking

Piggybacking is a program response to the emergency situation using part of an established system or program. This option can be more cost-effective if some actors are already connected.

“Vertical expansion”

The vertical expansion of social programs refers to the benefit value or duration of the program which is temporarily increased for some or all beneficiaries. This can be done via an adjustment of transfer amounts or values, or through the introduction of extraordinary payments or transfers.

“Horizontal expansion”

The “horizontal expansion” of a social protection program means that new beneficiaries from disaster-affected areas are temporarily included in social protection program. This could be done in three ways:

- To extend the program's geographical coverage;
- To enroll additional beneficiaries in geographical areas already covered, who meet the program's usual criteria,
- To involve additional beneficiaries by modifying the eligibility criteria.

Alignment

The term “alignment” describes the development of one or more elements of a parallel humanitarian response that align as best as possible with those used in a current or possible future social protection program. For instance, this could be an alignment of objectives, targeting method, and transfer value or delivery mechanism.

It is important to mention that alignment is distinct from piggybacking as it uses a parallel infrastructure rather than the same system.

Conclusions

Different countries can use different options for shock-responsive adaptation or they can use the combination of these options. Countries will benefit from taking the time to consider whether these shock-responsive social protection programs are a priority and the most appropriate way of responding to emergency situations, besides, if they are implemented—what needs to be done in order to maximize their effectiveness at the moment they are needed.

It is important to mention that vulnerability and needs assessments are a crucial element of decision-making about whether social protection is an appropriate vehicle for addressing a shock. Moreover, shock-responsive social protection programs can never meet the needs of all people who need support. But shock responses to emergencies can be more effective if they are planned in advance, through early decision-making, active planning and early delivery of assistance.

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