



MIS

**SOCIAL PROTECTION
PROGRAMME
MANAGEMENT
INFORMATION
SYSTEMS &
APPROACHES TO
INTEGRATION**

SUMMARY DOCUMENT



TRANSFORM is the result of an iterative process of co-creation involving experts and practitioners from southern and eastern Africa. This manual is based on a document prepared by Andrew Kardan, Valentina Barca, and Andrew Wyatt (Oxford Policy Management) with contributions from Franck Earl (SASSA), Luis Frota, and Thea Westphal (ILO). The revised content on gender-responsive and disability-inclusive administration of social protection was prepared by Tia Palermo, Maja Gavrilovic, Morgon Banks, and Lusajo Kajula from Policy Research Solutions (PRESTO) LLC and reviewed by the TRANSFORM Advisory Group.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MIS	Management Information System
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SSN	Social Safety Net
SP	Social Protection
SP MIS	Social Protection Management Information System
TOR	Terms of Reference

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MIS

1

INTRODUCTION AND SETTING THE SCENE

There is growing recognition that Management Information Systems, or MIS, play a pivotal role in the implementation of social protection (SP) schemes. **Programme MIS** is increasingly viewed as a central plank that holds together social protection schemes' core processes i.e. registration, determination of eligibility, payments, complaints & grievances, and monitoring and evaluation systems

In recent years this interest has expanded to encompass a new focus **on integrated approaches to data and information management**, capable of assisting decision-makers with more harmonized and systematic information across programmes to ensure coordinated responses to the multi-dimensional vulnerabilities of individuals across a life cycle, (UNICEF and World Bank, 2013). It is also important to embed inclusive principles in integrated management information systems to enhance the overall outcomes for marginalized groups, including equitable access to and greater uptake of social protection schemes. This is in line with an increasing number of countries worldwide adopting national social protection strategies and implementing ILO Recommendation 202 (2012) concerning National Floors of Social Protection, seeking to coordinate interventions from different ministries and agencies (ILO 2015, Garcia and Moore, 2012, World Bank, 2015).

However, there is no widely accepted terminology in SP, especially when considering integrated approaches to data and information management. This terminological confusion is exacerbated by inadequate practical and detailed documentation on the subject. Quite often, this leads to: (i) confusion on the purpose, usage, objectives, and evaluation of MIS in the SP sector; and (ii) mis-procurement, for example, because suppliers may be biased towards a technical ICT-based perspective, strictly packaging them in hardware and software terms with insufficient consideration for appropriateness and cost/benefit analysis and institutional matters. Moreover, common data collection and information management tools typically overlook the importance of gender, disability status, and other socio-economic conditions, which exacerbate challenges for vulnerable people to register and access benefits, and to track equity in access and impact. Therefore, integrating gender and disability-inclusive considerations within an MIS (at both programme and integrated levels) is critical to effectively identify a target, respond to different needs these groups face, and enrol them into programmes.

This module's key objectives are therefore to:

- Increase the understanding that national social protection actors have of programme MIS and approaches to integration
- Support SP actors in the preparation of roadmaps for the development of such tools.

DEFINITIONS

There is no generally accepted terminology to describe data and information management in the context of SP. There are two main reasons for this confusion (Barca and Chirchir, 2016). First, the terms 'database', 'registry', and 'MIS' are often used interchangeably by social protection practitioners. However, these have different meanings and functions, as Box 1

clarifies. At both programme and integrated levels, data and information management can only be achieved by combining the static 'data repository' role of a database/registry (effectively synonyms) with the dynamic 'data interrogation' role of an MIS.

Box 1: Database, Registry, MIS, Interoperability: definitions

This paper distinguishes between the following:

- **Database** – a system to organise, store, and retrieve large amounts of data easily
- **Register** (nowadays referred to as **registry**) (a term of pre-ICT origin) – an official written record of names, events and/or transactions
 - In a computerised environment, ‘databases’ and ‘registries’ are overlapping concepts (effectively synonyms); both are for storing and retrieving data.
- **MIS**¹ – a system that transforms retrieved data from a programme’s database/register (or, in some cases, different databases linked to different modules) into information that can be used for efficient and effective programme management.
 - In social protection literature, the term MIS is associated with programme-level information management. When discussing integrated solutions we use the generic term ‘**application software**’ or ‘**integrated MIS**’, referring to the tailored solution that allows for the input, processing and output (e.g. display/presentation) of information.
- **Interoperability**: the ability of two or more systems (or components) to communicate by exchanging data, so the information is understood by the receiving agency and subsequently used for its own business purposes.

Source: Barca and Chirchir (forthcoming)

Second, similar terms are used to refer to programme-specific and integrated approaches. For this paper, we introduce a new term to address this confusion: Integrated System for Information Management refers to the broader system that enables the flow and management of information within the Social Protection sector and sometimes beyond, to other sectors.

This overarching system will encompass:

- a data repository, such as a **registry/database** for storing and retrieving data.
- a **software application** which helps manage, link and process the data, transforming data into information and analysing/ using the information (at the programme level these are referred to as Management Information Systems, MISs at integrated level we can call these **Integrated MIS**).

It will also be sustained by a set of **procedures for data sharing**, most often using Information Communication Technology (ICT) and will ultimately be managed by qualified staff. This is the area with the greatest confusion in the literature, primarily as the integration of information management in the Social Protection sector can be achieved in different ways – influenced by the main objectives pursued with integration, and by a country’s context and trajectory. Details of this are discussed further in Section 4, where further definitions for integrated solutions are clarified.

¹ It should be noted that this term has been borrowed from the business world, where it is defined as a ‘system that provides information that organisations require to manage themselves efficiently and effectively’.

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

3.1. OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS SUPPORTED

A programme MIS enables the flow and management of information to support key processes within social protection schemes including:

- **Identification and registration** of applicants, using either a census or an on-demand method² for data collection, see also Module S&I;
- **Eligibility determination and enrolment** (i.e. determining recipients for the programme) – see also Module S&I;
- **Continuous maintenance of Recipient Lists:** e.g. removal of those who are no longer eligible
Authentication and compliance monitoring (if applicable, e.g. when conditionality imposed) - see also Module S&I
- Managing **payments** (e.g. producing “payrolls”, monitoring payment receipts, amounts paid, etc.) - see also Module S&I
- Managing a grievance/ **appeals and redress system**-see also Module S&I
- Managing ongoing programme **monitoring and evaluation** (e.g. producing lists of recipients who have enrolled, which benefits have been paid, level of payments, characteristics of recipients, etc.) - see also Module S&I
- Supporting **ongoing management and planning** (e.g. notifying managers when a process should or has happened etc.) - see also Module S&I

² A census method means that the programme attempts to visit all households to undertake targeting; an on-demand method means that applicants are expected to visit specific registration points to apply for the programme.

Ultimately, **programme MISs enable harmonized implementation and monitoring of programmes, while ensuring transparency and good governance of Social Protection systems.** Several functionalities of modern social protection programmes – such as e-payments – cannot be set in place in the absence of a programme MIS. Also to be noted in terms of functionality:

- When putting in place MIS, it is important to be clear about the SP programme’s procedures, design parameters, and operational processes from the outset: a programme **MIS is a reflection of the operational manual of the programme**, supported by appropriate technology.
- Conversely, not all programme functions are always supported by programme MIS, depending on programme objectives, set-up and what ‘Modules’ are prioritised during the MIS design. However, MIS can be adapted
- to follow changing programme requirements and are an **important platform to support cost-effective programme expansion and a pre-requisite for cross-programme integration**, as Section 4 further explores.
- MIS depends critically on the quality of data on recipients and requires appropriate quality checks and controls (hence the popular adage ‘garbage in, garbage out’).

A well-designed MIS, which incorporates gender and disability-responsive features from the outset, supports programmes to (i) better identify eligible recipients and improve outreach and targeting to ensure more equitable coverage of schemes; (ii) respond to the specific needs of these groups and provide them with comprehensive support tailored to their evolving circumstances (Barca et al., 2021); and (iii) track programme performance for different populations enrolled in the scheme and support the mid-course design and delivery adjustments to strengthen inclusive outcomes.

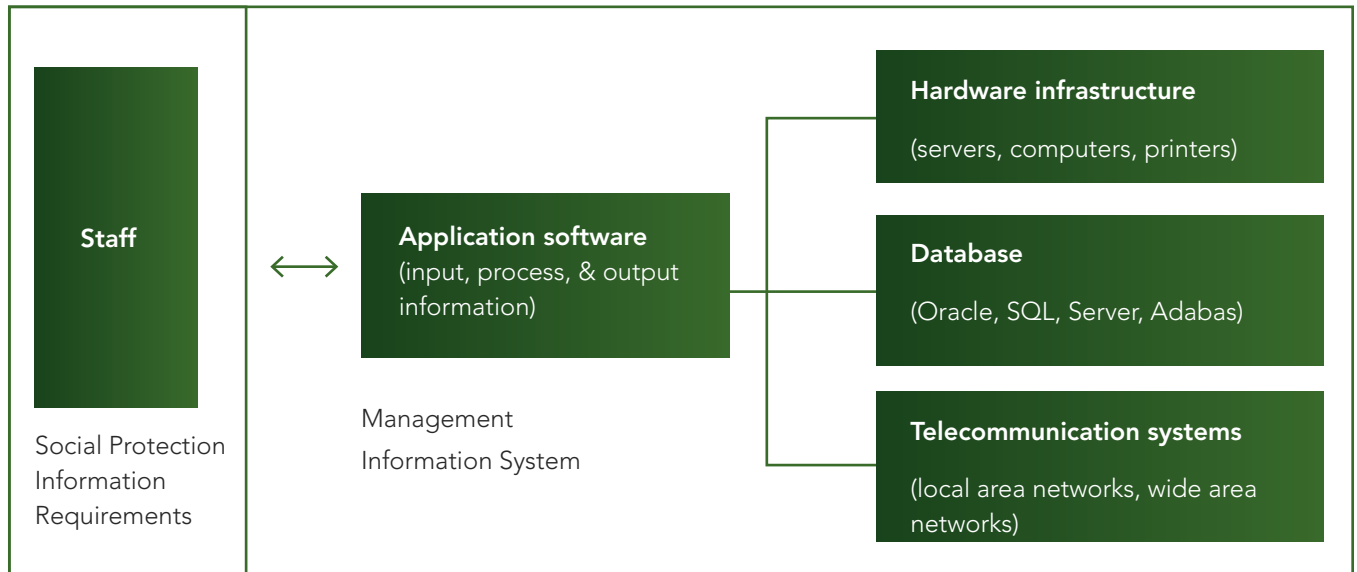
3.2. KEY COMPONENTS OF A FUNCTIONAL PROGRAMME MIS

Ultimately, a programme MIS is an application software that functions thanks to the interplay of several components that are tightly related (note that these apply to integrated systems too, see Section 4). We list and discuss them below, visualising their interplay in Figure 1 and further discussing good practices for each in Section 5.2 (Chirchir and Kidd, 2011, Barca and Chirchir, 2016):

- Information requirements:** i.e. what data needs to be stored and managed. These are defined by programme staff based on programme objectives and the core functions that need to be supported. For example, an MIS supporting a complaints and appeals process or a comprehensive M&E system will have additional information requirements compared to a programme that uses an MIS only for registration, enrolment, and payment purposes.
- Software application ('MIS'):** the software application transforms the data that is retrieved from a programme’s database (or in some cases, different databases linked to different ‘modules’) into information that can be used for efficient and effective management. It can take many different forms depending on the information requirements and functions it is designed to perform (each operationalised within a different ‘module’). Such software can either be developed using proprietary applications or Open Source software. Similarly, data on disability, gender and other characteristics are required to track access and equity amongst target groups.
- Database:** this is a system intended to easily organize, store, and retrieve large amounts of data. SP programmes can either use proprietary databases (Microsoft Access or Oracle) or Open Source.
- Hardware infrastructure:** this refers to the necessary infrastructure to securely collect and store large amounts of data (computers, PDAs, servers, etc.). Options for hardware technology vary, depending on the size of schemes, the overall context (remoteness, power supply, etc.), levels of security guaranteed and the particular operations to be undertaken.
- Telecommunications System:** this includes the network infrastructure – local area network and wide area network – that enables the necessary links between the software and the databases that feed into it. The choice of such a system depends on the local context (e.g. availability and reliability of the internet).



Figure 1: Key components of a functional programme MIS



Source: Adapted by authors from Chirchir, R. and Kidd, S. (2011) *Good Practice in the Development of Management Information systems for Social Protection*.

INTEGRATED SYSTEMS FOR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

4.1. ADVANTAGES AND RISKS OF DATA AND INFORMATION INTEGRATION

Integration of information and data within the SP sector can bring policy and operational gains. As discussed by Barca and Chirchir (2016), from a policy perspective, advantages could include the ability to:

- apply a potentially more equitable approach to distributing resources based on objective and comparable information, addressing the uneven and unequal provision of social protection across social groups and administrative jurisdictions
- increase responsiveness and inclusiveness of interventions to serve the chronically poor, serve those structurally vulnerable to poverty and respond to individual shocks, such as job loss, disability, childbearing, old age, or large crises (for example, natural disasters or conflict)
- ensure universal coverage and support implementation of the Social Protection Floor, potentially coordinating social assistance and social insurance
- build a stronger link to complementary institutional frameworks and wider social and economic policies³
- increase transparency and accountability, since programme information can be more easily shared and compared
- improve the “image” of the social protection system, as citizens better understand their entitlements
- increase knowledge on poverty and vulnerability based on access to a large amount of information available.

3. ‘SP systems have the potential for maximizing outcomes and impacts if they are conceived as integral components of national development and poverty reduction strategies, linked with complementary programmes (e.g.: livelihood promotion, labour market and intermediation programmes, food security programmes, etc.) and macro policy determinants (macroeconomic stability, economic growth, etc.)’. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2009.



From an **operational perspective**, advantages include the ability to:

- facilitate oversight of multiple schemes and report to policymakers
- improve budget planning and ability to model and test policy changes
- decrease the burden on staff (e.g. less paperwork, less manual reporting, etc.)
- decrease the burden on potential applicants (e.g. can apply for several programmes at once, fewer documents needed, better/coordinated information on entitlements, etc.)
- avoid duplication of effort (for example, with data collection activities) and potentially establish a 'common entry point' for social protection
- establish common systems across all schemes (e.g. payment system, grievance mechanisms, etc.), increasing efficiency and saving money
- better manage error and fraud and monitor multiple payments (keeping track of who is receiving what)
- further digitalise service delivery, potentially reaching out to citizens in new ways (e.g. mobile phones)
- ensure reinforcing measures and/or complementary interventions to multiple disadvantaged households
- enable recipients to transition between schemes as their circumstances change
- establish more effective emergency responses (for example, by directing additional payments to social protection recipients in areas affected by an emergency for a limited period) and context-based services.

However, **several challenges and risks** can emerge when embarking on such a process of data integration within the social sectors. These include:

- increasing costs and complexity at the initial development stages (and potential 'failure') – calls for high capacity, strong policy leadership, and institutional coordination:
 - Attention: A more gradual and progressive approach is needed in certain cases. It will be difficult to implement an Integrated System for Information Management when the underlying institutions have very rudimentary programme definitions and guidelines, weak programme management systems, and institutions tend to compete in the context of poor leadership over and above the different departments. Developing integrated approaches in those contexts entails costs with negotiation and arbitration, which may be prohibitive. The maturity of ICT development in different institutions, management complexities including maintenance of technology, back-ups and possible coordination problems and escalation of costs must be taken into account.
- increasing risks to data privacy and security – misusing or losing information, potentially exposing households to further vulnerability (e.g. 'surveillance state')
- risks of multiple exclusion from all social sector schemes and systematic exclusion of certain types of households, and potential loss of specificity in the objectives of different social protection interventions (if integrated data is used for determination of eligibility across programmes, especially in census-based poverty determination criteria as a first filter). This is because social policy interventions can address different social objectives beyond the issue of poverty – for example, help improve the inclusion and participation of people with disability, empowering and protecting against bad social practices, abuse or negligence of certain groups.

Moreover, the extent to which the benefits of information integration are felt greatly depends on the practical set-up for integration (e.g. see Section 4.2) and on the ultimate use of the integrated system (e.g. see Section 4.4). To conclude, it is important not to lose sight of the ultimate aim of integrating data and information management systems for social protection: collecting and sharing information to support social objectives, including improving the standards of life of the poorest and most vulnerable citizens, protecting against life risks, empowering them and achieving social transformation.

4. For example, see Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) Phase 2 and Pakistan's CDCP programme. For more discussion on this topic see this comprehensive literature review on Shock Responsive Social Protection (Oxford Policy Management, 2016b).

4.2. TWO APPROACHES TO CREATING AN INTEGRATED DATA REPOSITORY

The word 'single registry' has gradually become the main word used by social protection policy-makers and practitioners to describe integrated approaches to data and information management in the social protection sector. This word is misleading, as box 2 explains, and the challenge of this paper is to unpack its meaning in different contexts.

Box 2 'Single registries' – why is the word misleading?

Countries' approach to integrated data and information management in the social protection sector has often been referred to as '**Single Registries**'. Here, we explicitly choose to avoid the use of this terminology.

Why?

- it was born as a literal translation of Brazil's 'Cadastro Unico'. In recent years Cadastro Unico is no longer translated as a Single Registry but as a 'Unified Registry'.
- it has been used to refer to very different approaches to integration in different countries, so does not ensure clarity. Eg. Kenya's solution is called a 'Single Registry' but has a different set-up and functionality compared to Brazil's Cadastro Unico.
- key stakeholders are rapidly moving away from the term (World Bank, ILO, etc.) – though it has stuck in describing country solutions to integration (e.g. Kenya).
- 'single registries' are not necessarily 'single' since they often do not comprehend all social protection programmes in a country and are not a substitute for individual MISs.
- 'single registries' do not necessarily entail a 'single' process for targeting or unifying operations across programmes.
- the word 'registry' alone does not cover the full functionality of data and information management in the social protection sector

Depending on the country context and objectives pursued (see Section 4), there are **two main approaches to developing a database/registry supporting an Integrated System for Information Management within the Social Protection sector**. As defined by Barca and Chirchir (2016), these are:

1. **Integrated Recipient Registry:** a database/registry which is created by integrating programme MISs of different existing schemes, meaning integration is only achieved across data and information on recipients (programme recipients)⁵. The main objective of such integration is to provide coordination and oversight (e.g. M&E) and integrate selected operations and services across programmes. In practice, Integrated Recipient Registries decentralise the process of data collection (individual programmes are in charge of this) but centralise selected services by consolidating existing data. Examples include Kenya ('Single Registry', see Case Study), Mauritius and Seychelles.

By centralizing data integration, unified registries can address issues around duplication or exclusion errors and reduce gaps in coverage. Second, by keeping track of who is receiving what, they also allow recipients of one programme to be linked to complementary programmes and services, such as health, education, insurance or livelihoods, for which they are eligible. Linkages to additional benefits are particularly important to women and girls and persons with disability as they often experience multidimensional vulnerabilities across the life course and need comprehensive support (Mello, 2017).

5. Note this is not necessarily the case, as data on applicants or anybody registered could also be integrated. But this case has not been encountered within country practice.



Box 3: Integrated recipient registry – what it is and is not

What it is

- It is a registry of recipients across several programmes; when linked to other types of registries (eg. social registry, disability registry) it enables a reach of vulnerable populations at scale and inclusive coverage.
- It integrates data from the programme, and MISs of several programmes, adopting a ‘service integration’ approach
- It supports integrated M&E and planning and can be designed to support the integration of delivery systems (e.g. payments and grievances)
- It is a building block that helps achieve integration. Its full potential as an ‘Information System’ is only unleashed when used together with a software application (‘Integrated MIS’) which enables dynamic links to other databases, systematically transforms data into information and analyses and uses the information

What it is not⁶

- It is not necessarily comprehensive (i.e. ensuring 100 per cent coverage of the population) as it only includes existing programme recipients⁷
- It cannot be used for ‘targeting’ or determination of (potential) eligibility for programmes, because it only contains information on people or households who have already been deemed eligible by existing programmes (recipients and not potential recipients)
- It does not necessarily include data from all social assistance programmes in a country (some programmes may not have been integrated)
- It does not necessarily include data from social insurance recipients (as this data may not have been linked)
- It is not necessarily highly integrated with other government databases (e.g. civil registry, tax authority, etc).
- It is not necessarily a substitute for individual programme databases and MISs (unless specifically designed to do so, it cannot support programme-specific delivery systems).
- It is not necessarily ‘national’ since social protection programmes (and data collected for registration) are sometimes targeted geographically

2. **Social Registry:** a database/registry which collects and houses comprehensive (i.e. not programme-specific) information on potential recipients within the country. In opposite fashion to integrated recipient registries, front-end and centralise data is integrated by collecting data for a national database/register that is then drawn upon by specific programmes⁸ (see Figure 2). Their primary function is to support and consolidate the initial social protection implementation phases of intake and registration. They can also support the assessment of needs and conditions to determine potential eligibility for enrolment in selected social programmes. An example is Brazil’s ‘Cadastro Unico’ and Indonesia’s ‘Unified Database’.

Designing social registries from a gender or disability perspective can improve the ability of the social protection system to identify, reach, and serve these vulnerable individuals more accurately. For example, many countries have relied on social registries (as well as alternative data sources) to extend the safety nets rapidly to the uncovered populations during the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. In the Dominican Republic, for instance, the “Unique System of Recipients” (SIUBEN) was redesigned to include disability-related questions in routine data collection to enable quick identification of families with children with disability to provide them with cash transfers (Heinneman and Beegle, 2021).

6. For all the statements below where we state ‘not necessarily’ we mean this can be achieved if explicitly pursued.

7. It could be if 100% of the population were recipients (e.g. universal guaranteed minimum income).

Box 4: Continued

What it is

- It is a registry/database of all people and households registered (the percentage of the population registered will depend on the data collection approach and the user programme needs). A social registry, with its wide reach of potential recipients, increases the likelihood that women and girls and people with disability will be captured, particularly if tailored efforts are adopted to identify and register these “hard-to-reach” population groups.
- Its primary function is to support the initial implementation phases of intake and registration, and assessment of needs and conditions to determine potential eligibility for enrolment in selected social programmes (‘targeting’)
- It aims to collect, record and store updated and historical information on individual and household characteristics and circumstances, and verifies and checks information consistency
- It adopts a ‘data integration’ approach (through a shared master data system)
- It is a building block that helps achieve integration. Its full potential as an ‘Information System’ is only unleashed when used together with a software application which enables dynamic links to other databases, systematically transforms data into information and analyses and uses the information.

What it is not⁹

- It is not necessarily comprehensive (i.e. ensuring 100 per cent coverage of the population) unless a national census survey is conducted covering the whole population, which is updated regularly to account for population changes and changes in individual circumstances (e.g. onset of disability).
- It is not just a list of recipients (eligible people who have been selected for social protection programmes) – i.e. it includes data on potential eligible households too
- It does not necessarily enable an integrated overview of who is receiving what across different programmes, as the main data flow is from the social registry to programme MISs, not back again.
- It does not necessarily provide data for all social assistance programmes in a country (some programmes may retain their registration and data collection)
- It is not necessarily highly integrated with other government databases (e.g. civil registry, tax authority, etc).
- It does not necessarily offer a current snapshot of poverty unless data is kept sufficiently up to date
- It does not necessarily entail integrating operations across programmes and is not a substitute for individual programme registries and MISs
- It is not necessarily ‘national’ since social protection programmes (and therefore data collected by the social registry) are sometimes targeted geographically





One technical approach to developing a social registry is to source data through interoperability of existing government databases: i.e. ensuring that these can ‘talk to each other’ (share data) effectively. We define this as a **‘virtual’ social registry**, an approach that can be used by countries wishing to have a comprehensive (100 per cent population), cross-sector and proactive (linked to life-cycle events) overview of their population. The amount of information consolidated based on this virtual integration is sufficient to determine eligibility for universal social assistance programmes for Argentina’s child allowance and Thailand’s health insurance recipient registry schemes, but not for poverty-targeted programmes. When this is the case, information from several sources is consolidated and further data is then collected to determine (targeted) eligibility for social programmes. Moreover, even social registries are unlikely to identify all people with disability in a country or area, if special efforts are not invested to register all people with disability. For example, in Azerbaijan and other countries, official national statistics on disability captures data only from people who have a disability certification, which is likely to only represent a small portion of the country’s population of people with disability. The coverage of people with disability in social registries can be improved by using UNCRPD-aligned, validated questions on disability, such as the Washington Group questions, in data collection methods. National censuses are a good starting point for building social registries, but particularly for disability, additional pathways are needed to add new individuals or update their disability status, including facilitation of interoperability with disability registers and better training of enumerators in disability-inclusive data collection.

4.3. HOW THESE APPROACHES RELATE TO EACH OTHER

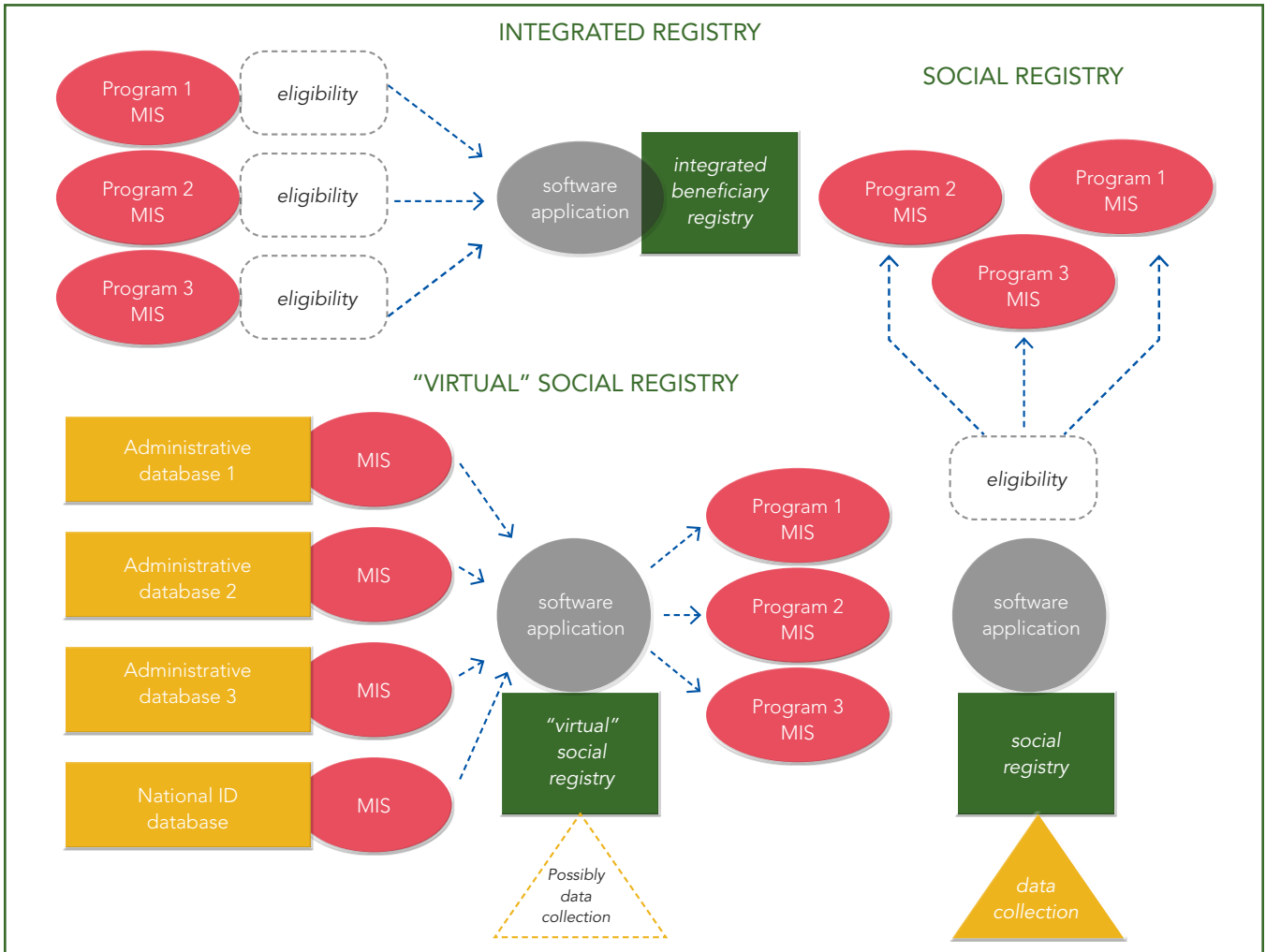
As briefly mentioned above, these approaches to developing an Integrated System for Information Management within the Social Protection sector are **not mutually exclusive, and can evolve over time**. For example, a country consolidating information from existing programmes using an integrated recipient registry approach may decide to coordinate data collection activities and move towards a social registry approach. This approach may then increase its level of interoperability with other government databases and take on features of a virtual social registry, as has been the case in Chile, where the majority of data for the ‘Registro Social de Hogares’ is now sourced through existing administrative databases.

- High levels of interoperability can be achieved within all three approaches.

The different development of integrated recipients’ registries, social registries and virtual social registries are represented visually in Figure 2, while Box 4 shows the comparison of each to a country’s population.

MIS

Figure 2: Integrated recipient registry, social registry and virtual social registry



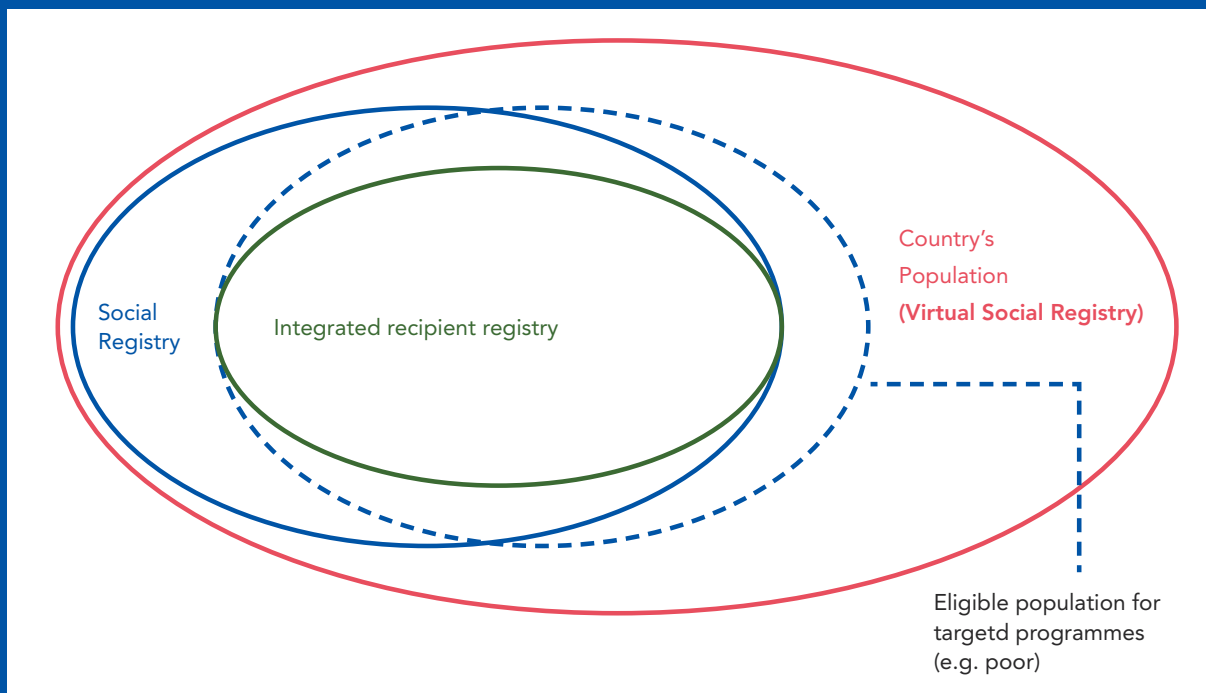
Source: Barca, 2017 Note: Boxes indicate databases; circles indicate MIS. All arrows have been portrayed as monidirectional here (one-way data flow), though this is not necessarily the case.



Box 5: Comparison of a country's population

- To better understand the relationship between social registries, integrated recipient registries and virtual social registries, it can be useful to represent them against the wider population (which can be potentially reached by virtual social registries). In Figure 4:
- The widest red circle is a country's whole population (rich and poor). Any interoperable system ensuring the creation of a virtual social registry could potentially reach 100 per cent of this population by linking to a country's national ID and/or civil registry
- The next blue circle is the population included in a country's social registry. This is 100 per cent of the total population in a few cases (red and blue circles overlap) – notably where comprehensive census surveys are completed – but most often focuses on the sub-population of those who are relatively poorer and primarily eligible for means-tested social assistance programmes
- The smallest green circle represents the population included in a country's integrated recipient registry: the sum of all the recipients of the social protection programmes whose MISs have been integrated
- The grey dotted circle represents a country's eligible population (those who are entitled to receive some form of social assistance benefit based on the targeting criteria of any of the existing programmes).¹⁰ The area that does not overlap with the green or the blue line represents households that should be included but are not (exclusion errors). The area within the blue circle that does not overlap with the grey one represents households who are included in the social registry but not eligible based on existing eligibility criteria (they could be if these changed). All recipient households (green circle) are eligible (unless there are inclusion errors, not figured here).

Figure 4: How social registries and integrated recipient registries compare to a country's total



10. In cases of universal coverage, this grey dotted line would correspond to the outer red circle.

4.4. SET-UP FOR 'FULL' INTEGRATION

Potentially, the greater the interconnectivity, the greater the gains in efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.

For example, the extent and type of integration ultimately achieved depends on the number and type of linkages established with other databases through the software application (integrated MIS) – see Table below for important examples.

Table 1: What type of integration can be achieved? Comparing Social Registries, Integrated Recipient Registries and Virtual Social Registries

	INTEGRATED RECIPIENT REGISTRIES	SOCIAL REGISTRIES	VIRTUAL SOCIAL REGISTRIES
Overview of recipients across programmes and integrated M&E	Yes	Only if the Registry receives data from programme MISs	Only if the Virtual Social Registry also receives data from programme MISs
Integrated process for eligibility determination across programmes	No (eligibility is determined at the programme level, then integrated)	Yes	Yes for universal programmes. Additional info needed for means testing
Integrating operations and services across existing programmes (e.g. payments, grievances)	Yes (if pursued as a policy objective)	Only if Registry receives data from programme MISs	Only if Registry also receives data from programme MISs
Integrating policy across the Social Protection sector	Only if the Registry is linked to all social assistance programmes and Social Insurance registries, etc.	Only if the Registry is linked to all social assistance programmes and Social Insurance, etc.	Only if the Registry is linked to all social assistance programmes and Social Insurance, etc.
Integration with other sector MISs	Only if Integrated MIS enables this	Only if Integrated MIS enables this	Yes (depth will depend on what MISs are made interoperable)
Integration for achieving inclusive outcomes	Yes, only if programme MIS collects gender and disability-relevant data.	Yes, only if women, girls and people with disability are accurately registered and enrolled into social registries.	Yes, only if it allows the integration of hard-to-reach populations in other databases (eg. girls may be not registered at birth).

Source: Barca, 2017



The key issue is therefore the level of coordination and interoperability¹¹ achieved, not the creation of a super-sized system or database that serves all purposes.¹² It does not matter whether the system is set up as a 'Social Registry', 'Integrated Recipient Registry' or 'Virtual Social Registry', what matters is that the approach chosen:

- responds to a **country's needs** (see Section 4.5),
- is **appropriate to its context** (see Section 4.6) and
- is inclusive, **affordable and sustainable**

A system that guarantees full integration within the Social Protection sector and beyond, following the right to privacy, would ensure its application software establishes a **direct (e.g. web service) link to:**

- **All Social Assistance Programme MISs and related databases:** to keep track of who is receiving what, potentially harmonize targeting procedures, integrate selected services, and enable adequate M&E and planning
- **Social Insurance MISs and related databases:** to integrate social assistance and social insurance and ensure a life-cycle and comprehensive approach to Social Protection
- **Any other relevant Government MISs and related databases** (e.g. Civil Registry, Tax Authority, etc.): to collect and crosscheck data, enhance accountability, and enable a comprehensive approach to Social Policy planning.

This can most robustly be achieved using each citizen's National ID number as a unique identifier (see Section 4.6.1 for more details and critique), allowing for instant access to up-to-date data, with information flowing in both directions – conditional on the permission level of each user.

4.5. POLICY OBJECTIVES: INTEGRATING WHAT AND WHY?

Integration is mainly a policy issue requiring political and institutional arrangements before technical considerations, meaning that effective systems for data and information management cannot operate in a policy /institutional and programmatic vacuum. In this section we outline the three main and overlapping objectives pursued by policy-makers aiming to achieve integration, and the approaches to integration that can support these (Barca and Chirchir, 2016):

1. **Providing oversight:** Integrating to have an **overview** of who is receiving what, coordinating interventions, facilitating planning and more generally providing combined monitoring and evaluation (M&E) across programmes. Ex. Kenya National Safety Net Single Registry
 - Achievable through a) An Integrated Recipient Registry; b) a Social Registry or Virtual Social Registry which exchanges data with Programme MISs (often not the case)
2. **Consolidation of targeting processes so they serve multiple social programmes.** The rationale here is to avoid the use of different and possibly conflicting targeting methods, increasing the scale and cost efficiency of targeting tools. The aim is to create and maintain a database of poor households, which can be used for targeting new programmes.
 - Achievable through:
 - a) A Social Registry
 - b) A Virtual Social Registry with no additional data collection (only universal non-means-tested programmes)
 - c) A Virtual Social Registry with additional data collection
3. Integrating data management to **integrate operations and services.** This is in line with the concept of Single Window Services within the social protection sector and beyond.
 - Achievable through (when this is a policy objective): a) An Integrated Recipient Registry; b) a Social Registry or Virtual Social Registry which exchanges data with Programme MISs (often not the case)

On the next page, we briefly outline **key considerations** that need to be made when attempting to achieve either or multiple of these objectives.

11. *Interoperability is a characteristic of a product or system, whose interfaces are completely understood, to work with other products or systems, present or future, in either implementation or access, without any restrictions.*

12. *A large whole-of-government information and communications technology system is unrealistic and risks being too complex to be useful. Instead, e-government, for the purposes of this paper, means a set of policies and frameworks that ensure the interoperability of multiple government sector systems and the use of IT to provide services to citizens*

4.5.1. Integration for oversight, coordination and planning and M&E

As shown above, only when data is shared back from individual programme MIS to the national Registry (always the case for Integrated Recipient Registries, but often not the case for Social Registries or Virtual Registries) it is possible to provide an integrated overview of the programme recipients to understand who is receiving what and feed into Social Protection policy planning.

However, this requirement alone is not sufficient. Even complete, high-quality data have no value unless they can be converted into information that is useful for making decisions and improving programmes (Villalobos et al, 2010) and policy. Whatever the integration setup, **effective systems for the ongoing analysis and use of existing data also need to be developed.** Good practices to ensure adequate reporting and use of data across the government include (OPM, 2015):

- Clearly identifying data needs and reporting requirements of each actor and catering to those within an overarching M&E framework. Data needs and reporting requirements should incorporate and reflect the priorities of the most disadvantaged groups and data is managed to build support for inclusive policymaking.
- Developing a relevant and timely reporting system (e.g. Module within the integrated MIS software), informed by constant testing by data users. See for example Kenya's online Single Registry
- Providing adequately disaggregated data, including on programme implementation and performance catering to the planning needs of local governments and other data users and informing a re-design of programmes to enhance results. This is critical if we want local governments to be supportive of the system, which means analysis of the data needs at the local level.
- Presenting reports in easy-to-read formats e.g. dashboards, charts and graphs
- Using GIS and geo-referenced data where possible (e.g. Uruguay, Indonesia, Chile, Brazil, etc.)
- Publishing aggregate key data trends on a relevant institutional website, to engage citizenship more widely (e.g. Indonesia, Kenya) and trends for specific groups (e.g. women and girls, people with disability)
- Encouraging data-sharing with a wide range of actors, including research institutions and universities as well as civil society organizations championing the rights and needs of marginalised social groups.

4.5.2. Integration for consolidated targeting

To achieve consolidated targeting, a solution for scoring and ranking households based on their levels of poverty and vulnerability needs to be implemented at central level (applying some form of a 'unified household or individual targeting system'), to avoid political interference.

The output, a list of eligible households can then be shared with individual programme implementers or decentralised counterparts who use the national list as a basis and often adapt it to their purposes by:

- adding further criteria: for example, pregnant women, presence of disability or age (eg. people aged 65 years and over)
- validating lists provided: for example, publicizing the list in the community and giving 30 days for people to object, calling a community meeting or conducting household visits
- choosing what percentage of households ranked nationally is to be included: for example, only the poorest 10 per cent

This two-tiered targeting approach enables a common methodology to be developed across programmes while maintaining the flexibility needed by individual programmes or decentralised units of government to target specific household types.

However, the risks this national and integrated approach to determining eligibility poses go beyond those faced by individual social protection programmes, **as any 'mistake' can lead to the systematic exclusion of some groups or individuals** and exclusion from multiple social sector schemes as one error can affect eligibility to multiple programmes.

Social programmes can also have different objectives and targeting criteria, which do not have to pass the same filters. Moreover, a national approach to determining eligibility may not **adequately reflect local poverty or social and risk circumstances** – a big challenge in large and diverse countries (e.g. Indonesia, Brazil). Approaches used to mitigate these risks have included (OPM, 2015):

- Adapting eligibility formulas to enhance inclusive targeting and coverage outcomes (eg. giving increased scoring/weight to women and girls and people with disability and other vulnerable categories when profiling needs through poverty-targeting methods.



- b. Institutionalising a validation process within communities, including “hard-to-reach” groups at registration. However, this is time-consuming and can be counterproductive if validation results are not integrated into the system.
- c. Enabling two decision-making layers. In Turkey, for example, data determines eligibility, but the human decision (following household visit) prevails. The central level then validates local decisions, performing spot-checks on discrepancies with the central targeting index. It can also lead to discrimination and stigma amongst recipients, particularly if social attitudes differ from eligibility criteria (e.g. understanding of what constitutes a disability).
- d. Having in place a functional grievance mechanism for complaints and appeals e.g. toll-free line (problematic if this does not translate into changes in eligibility decisions which are more difficult in supply/census-based targeting systems). This is currently being extended for Kenya’s Single Registry.
- e. Ensuring people understand targeting through tailored communication strategies (e.g. to increase take-up and registration).
- f. Including parameters relating to the local context (e.g. urban/ rural, services available, etc.) e.g. this is done by the SISBEN Social Registry in Colombia
- g. Including mechanisms for routine and ad hoc updating of registries to account for changing circumstances (e.g. onset of disability, unemployment).

4.5.3. Integrated management of selected operations and services

One of the ultimate aims of integrating data and information management should be to **improve citizens' experience and access to social protection programmes**. Programmes can leverage the existing data from the social registry and other databases (eg. Disability Registry – if this registry goes beyond people with official certifications) to reach marginalized segments of the population at scale through carefully designed communication and outreach campaigns. Tech-based features of the information system (eg. mass SMS campaigns) can be used to assist the process of outreach and deliver tailored messages to target populations. However, integrating operations and services across the social protection spectrum requires very high levels of capacity and institutional coordination – and may not always be feasible. For example, individual programmes may be reluctant to relinquish control over their operations.

A great example of a legacy system being used to manage a wide variety of grants through an integrated system for data and information management is South Africa's SOCPEN system (see Box 9).

4.6. COUNTRY CONTEXT: INTEGRATING HOW?

Beyond policy objectives, it is clear that certain set-ups for integration will only be achievable in certain contexts: a country's historical trajectory and ultimate 'endowment' has a great weight in determining choices. We discuss key enablers below (noting that recommendations in Section 3.2 also apply and that the key questions for a needs and feasibility assessment are set out in Section 5.1).

Table 2: Key enablers for the development of an Integrated System for Information Management

DIMENSION	WHEN IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION FEASIBLE? KEY ISSUES
Policy environment and budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National policy focused on developing a systems approach to social protection (aiming to achieve coordination and harmonisation to fill coverage gaps and address the fragmentation that limits the effectiveness and impact of social protection policies and programmes) • Integration of data and information management clearly articulated in National Development Plans, National Social Protection Policies and Strategies, and other strategic documents • Strong political leadership advocating for reform and coordinating institutional actors • Focus on ensuring political buy-in and ownership of all actors, including social partners and representatives of recipients, by addressing advantages for each (e.g. through social dialogue, participatory planning process and stakeholder mapping) • Existence of Programme operational rules and guidelines (often ICTs prompt the need to clarify this prerequisite) • Sufficient capacity to identify cost policy options, assess affordability and identify available financing options • Budget availability (and policy support) to back the vision • Acceptance of slow, iterative processes and failures
Staff availability and capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly trained and qualified staff, motivated through a performance management system, and sufficiently high salary to guarantee retention – both at the central and local level • Sufficient budget for continuous staff training and retention • Culture of sharing and problem solving, e.g. no resistance and complacency of staff to want to keep the system as it is • Presence of 'hybrid' staff that understand both context, organization, and work processes of their sector and the role of information system • Staff sufficiently trained in inclusive data collection and management



Table 2: Key enablers for the development of an Integrated System for Information Management

DIMENSION	WHEN IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION FEASIBLE? KEY ISSUES
Governance and institutional structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence or easy creation of an independent unit that is in charge of managing and maintaining the new system at a sufficiently high government level to effectively coordinate with all stakeholders and update new regulations etc. • Role of the Integrated System for Information Management and its managing unit embedded in legislation (example Brazil) • Potential for strong institutional ties with other government bodies • Absence of parallel or competing structures for oversight of social protection policy • (no power struggles), levels of agreement on basic issues regarding payment systems/contracts and compensation of administration costs between agencies, etc. • Stakeholders are clearly identified and their roles are formalised through legally binding agreements, carefully designed incentives, and mutually agreed terms of reference • Decentralisation is approached as a resource rather than an impediment: providing added value to decentralised government (tailored functionality and data sharing), involving local government and creating performance incentives
Wider country context	<p>Hardware (for example, computers and servers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate hardware is available at local levels (these can be purchased, but this increases costs significantly). • Adequate servers—high-capacity computers—that can be scaled up to accommodate potential growth (for example, a designated server room with reasonable physical and logical security that conforms to ISO 27001). • Stable provision of electricity at the local level <p>Application software and database</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (If needed) potential to create a large database that is scalable, flexible, and performs well. • Clarity of functional requirements and technical specifications at the policy level. Key questions—such as purpose, benefits, hosting and nature of users—should be addressed at the feasibility stage and agreed upon by all stakeholders. • Availability of capacity to support and administer the relevant software, database, and network <p>Transfer of data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate legislation and procedures ensuring data privacy and security • Existence of a solid system for a unique ID for social protection (National ID or social security number) that can be used as a backbone to integrate data across sources • Ideally, internet access at all levels of implementation, including local (to build web-service access that greatly improves information flow)—preferable use of government internal network and hosting • Clearly documented protocols enabling quality controls on information before it is submitted over the internet or transferred by batch process

Source: Barca, 2017

4.6.1. Lack of National unique number identifier (Eg. ID)

When attempting to integrate programmes across and outside the social protection sector, a **unique ID number for individuals is needed to link Registry information with other systems and programmes.** The easiest and most effective solution for this – though not free of controversy – is the use of a country's National ID number.

Many countries, however, do not have a National ID number or have insufficient coverage of the poorest and most vulnerable population groups. The lack of national IDs is particularly prevalent among women and girls, whereby as many as 45 per cent of women in low-income countries, particularly in Africa, do not have access to foundational IDs (Barca and Chirchir, 2014). How is linkage to the database ensured without an existing ID system and unique identifier? Country experience suggests the following avenues (Barca and Chirchir, 2016; Castaneda and Lindert 2005; Gelb and Clark 2012; Gelb 2014):

- **Building a business case for a National ID System** as an important pillar for the delivery of social services, **working alongside national registry offices** on a common effort to register individuals, particularly in remote or poor areas where lack of identity documentation and numbers is prevalent. For example, this could include:
 - Assessing the effectiveness of a National ID system, evaluating pros and cons (see for example Table 3) and investing in a feasibility study as part of data and information integration planning.¹³ Estimates on costs of large ID programmes run from \$3 to \$15 per head.¹⁴
 - Incorporating civil registration as a key objective of a social protection programme. Examples include Kenya's Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children cash transfer, Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme and Uganda's Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment programme, where recipient households are given easy/free access to national ID.¹⁵
 - Registering households for National ID during registration for the Social Registry. In Lesotho, for example, this was done during registration for the Child Grant Programme.
- 1. Incorporating social protection as a key objective of civil registration and National ID efforts. This is the case in Pakistan and India. **Partner with Home affairs for national campaign and extension of ID registration**
 - Taking advantage of national events such as elections to register all citizens. This has been done in Bangladesh, Benin and DRC, for example;
 - Sharing costs of setting up an ID system among government agencies to justify investment;
 - Linking the ID to other desirable services. For example, as part of the rollout of a comprehensive ID system called "Adhaar",¹⁶ India's government is opening bank accounts. In Pakistan, NADRA achieved registration by promoting a wide range of wider benefits (ability to perform haj pilgrimage, access to bank accounts and other services).
- Considering the relative effectiveness of other existing functional ID systems e.g. Voter Registration, Birth Registration, etc. In some countries like Tanzania, registration for National IDs has only been possible for some individuals who have other identifying documents.
- Generating **another functional 'unique number'** to substitute a national ID number and complement existing functional IDs. The most famous is the US's Social Security Number, a strategy adopted in Brazil,¹⁷ Mauritius, and Mexico, for example. However, the common practice of assigning new numbers as people apply (new number for each questionnaire) could lead to potential problems with duplication, as in Colombia.
- **Designing formulae or "algorithms"** that combine many variables to create a comparable identifier across databases in the government sector. For example, Brazil's "match key" variables consist of name, mother's name, birth and codes from selected documents,¹⁷ while in the Philippines probability models for matching data are based on birth dates and other identifying data;
- **Rejecting those who do not have an ID number**, as Brazil did, for example, in the early phases of the Cadastro Único. However, this is not a viable strategy for an inclusive Registry.

13. Such a study would clarify objectives, benefits, costs, contextual constraints and set forth a clear road map.

14. See "Unique ID in Development and Social Programmes" PPT (Gelb, 2014) for more details.

15. A controversial example comes from the Dominican Republic, where a programme aiming to register poor citizens de facto stripped citizenship rights from many residents of Haitian extraction

16 See for example Brazil's 'Social identification number' (a unique number for each registered person).

17. Note that cross-checks across databases using these algorithms as a Unique ID are not 100% accurate.



4.6.2. Lack of appropriate safeguards to ensure data security and privacy

Eligibility into social protection programmes requires substantial amounts of personal information to be gathered from potential recipients, including sensitive data on health, income, assets, and housing. This poses the risk of misusing or losing such information,¹⁸ potentially exposing households to further vulnerability (CALP 2013; Hosein and Nyst 2013; APSP 2015). In integrated systems, this risk increases, especially as data is shared across multiple actors. Importantly, the right to information privacy is also embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights¹⁹ and the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), which explicitly calls on States to “establish a legal framework to secure and protect private individual information in their social security data systems” (para, 23).²⁰

Best practice shows that – where Social Registries or any level of Interoperability is being developed – country laws **should adhere to international data transfer and information privacy protocols**, which legislate the collection, transfer and storage of information. This becomes even more important when data is shared across a public network and several institutions. Key laws that should be adhered to include: the Council of Europe’s Convention for the Protection of Individuals about Automatic Processing of Personal Data; United Nations Guidelines for the Regulation of Computerized Personal Data Files; and OECD Guidelines on the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data. Such practice is common, for example, in all Latin American countries.

In particular, some of the most important principles and actions for the secure use of personal data within social protection programmes are summarised below (CALP, 2013; Barca and Chirchir, 2016):

- ensure informed consent of those who are sharing their data, explaining the nature of the data being collected, the purpose of collection, with whom it will be shared, and who is responsible for the secure use of their data.²¹ This process needs to be adapted to the specific communication needs of respondents (eg. sign language, screen-reader accessible web pages and forms, easy-to-read formats for persons with disability);
- establish a mechanism to respond to any complaints or concerns citizens may have about the use of their personal data, but keeping in mind that very vulnerable and marginalised groups may need extra support to enable them to safely submit complaints;
- regularly undergo information system audits to analyse, document and understand the flow of data and develop risk mitigation strategies for potential risks arising from these flows;
- implement appropriate technical and operational security standards for each stage of the collection, use and transfer of recipient data to prevent unauthorised access, disclosure or loss. This is particularly pertinent to systems using biometric modes of authentication (eg. ensuring authentication sites are accessible to people with disability and support to use these devices is provided to them by trained frontline staff);
- implement appropriate mechanisms to provide individuals with the right to access their personal data and correct it
- enforce data back-up and protection protocols and guidelines, for example by:
 - ensuring data users are trained and aware of these issues,
 - implementing user profiles on information system access, allowing for an audit trail
 - sharing data in anonymised and summary format except when needed
 - establishing non-disclosure agreements for anyone who is granted access to data;

18. For example, data could be illicitly used for blackmail, identity theft, or marketing purposes.

19 Article 17 of the ICCPR, which reinforces Article 12 of the UDHR, provides that “no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation”

20. States that are party to other United Nations or regional instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, or the African Union Principles on Freedom of Expression should also take into account their international obligations in the implementation of the national social protection floors.

21. Recent research in Kenya showed that this was often not the case (APSP 2015).

Specifically, backup and security should conform to ISO 27001²²—an approach to managing confidential or sensitive information—so it remains secure, confidential and with its integrity intact. In some pilot transfer programmes (for example, the Hunger Safety Net Programme Kenya and Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment in Uganda) backup and security systems are hosted in physically and logically secured servers at the programme level. But national programmes sometimes outsource this security and hosting function. In Pakistan, for example, the Benazir Income Support Programme database is hosted by the National Database and Registration Authority. In South Africa, SOCPEN is hosted by the South African State Information Technology Agency (SITA).

A trade-off emerges when the need for data privacy conflicts with transparency and accountability. Several countries have solved this by making certain aggregate and anonymised datasets and data visualisations available to the general public. In Indonesia, for example, 16 of the 40 core indicators in the Social Registry are available online in aggregate format.

4.7. COUNTRY EXPERIENCES TO DATE

Support for integrated data and information management for social protection has grown considerably in the last 20 years especially. The early wave goes back to the late 70s and early 80s when Chile and South Africa were starting to set up their systems (see Box 9 for South Africa’s legacy system). Following some further experiences in Costa Rica and Argentina, since the turn of the century, this process has notably accelerated – in Latin America primarily and then expanding internationally. For example, Brazil started the set-up of its systems in 2001, Uruguay in 2006, Malaysia in 2007, the Philippines in 2009, Turkey in 2010, and Indonesia and Kenya in 2011. Each of these countries – as well as many others not listed here – has gone through several iterations during this process, adjusting their system depending on the constraints and opportunities they were facing at that time, and on the overarching policy objectives pursued. For example, Brazil’s Cadastro Único has gone through several iterations of the cadastro software and set-up, and – despite being a world-renowned case study in this field – in 2016 is starting a new round of discussions to further integrate the system (World Without Poverty, 2016b).

Based on data from the World Bank’s State of Social Safety Nets 2015 (Honorati, Gentilini and Yemtsov, 2015) and our updated assessment, **integrated data and information management for social protection are already fully institutionalised in 30 low and middle-income countries worldwide** (15 in Latin America, 6 in Africa, 5 in Europe and the Middle East and 4 in the Asia-Pacific).²³ Many of these systems are set up as social registries. Currently, the number of countries considering and developing options for integration in this sector is expanding rapidly, with an additional 31 countries – 18 of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa – in the process of developing an integrated system for information management.

22. *ISO/IEC 27001:2013 is an information security standard that was published in September 2013. It is published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC). Organizations which meet the standard may be certified compliant by an independent and accredited certification body on successful completion of a formal compliance audit.*

23. *The World Bank’s full list includes 21 countries. We have added further ones based on an updated assessment.*

KEY STEPS WHEN SETTING UP A PROGRAMME MIS OR AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Setting up a programme MIS is a challenging undertaking, which is compounded by a lack of standards and guidelines. Consequently, many countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have been experimenting with several pilot programmes that implement programme MIS. Unfortunately, some of these experiments have been costly. For example, some countries have procured MIS software without accompanying source codes, while others have been forced to pay expensive licenses in instances where source codes were not supplied alongside other MIS deliverables. In other cases, vendors have over-sold expensive customized MIS solutions where standard off-the-shelf products would have been sufficient for the needs of the particular programme. Very often, the underlying problem has been the lack of sufficient capacity of the commissioning body.

These risks are even larger for Integrated Systems for Information Management – which require significant levels of policy coordination to fulfil their objectives in full. Of course, these challenges are not insurmountable. In fact, with a better understanding of the key factors and risks, improved systems can be set up to best address the needs of SP schemes and systems.

Broadly speaking, we focus on three key steps:

1. conducting a needs assessment and agreeing on broad design parameters;
2. conducting a feasibility study; and
3. developing and implementing the selected solution.

A gender-responsive and disability-inclusive lens needs to be incorporated into each of the key steps during the planning process.

5.1. NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND AGREEMENT ON BROAD DESIGN PARAMETERS

Design choices need to be defined through evidence, carefully analysing gaps in service provision and separating desire from need. To achieve this, a broad consensus needs to be built among all key stakeholders. This can be based on a comprehensive needs assessment and ongoing participatory planning, to agree on broad design parameters. It is important to involve all potential stakeholders, including civil society groups representing vulnerable groups such as people with disability, future programme recipients and local leaders, in the design process, and continuous user testing.

Using the creation of an Integrated System for Information Management as an example (this can be broadly applicable to programme MIS too), this will include:

- Taking stock of the broader Social Protection and E-Government context, to define objectives and understand opportunities and constraints
- Taking stock of existing programmes and their potential for integration, including the quality of existing programme business processes and whether/how to redesign/integrate these;
- Understanding specific information requirements for different levels of users (primary, secondary and tertiary), including policymakers from other sectors;

Table 3: Needs assessment – what questions need to be asked to inform design?

COMPONENT	EXAMPLE QUESTIONS (UNDERLYING QUESTION FOR EACH: HOW DOES THIS AFFECT DESIGN CHOICES?)
Broad Social Protection context ²⁴ (policy & legislation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the National SP policy? Priorities? Does this reflect plans for integration? How? What are the policy priorities in terms of integration (see Section 4.5)? • (Stakeholder mapping) Who is in charge of delivering social assistance and social security in the country, at both central and decentralised levels (primary users)? What other stakeholders are involved (secondary users)? Which further actors may have a stake (tertiary users)? What are these actors’ interests? What are their (information and management) needs that integration can help address? What resistance could be encountered? • What are the legislative foundations for Social Protection and for integration? What are the gaps? • What is the current degree of fragmentation or integration within Social Assistance and between Social Assistance and Social Insurance? What are the existing mechanisms for horizontal and vertical coordination? • What is the level of decentralization? What capacity is there at the local level?



COMPONENT	EXAMPLE QUESTIONS (UNDERLYING QUESTION FOR EACH: HOW DOES THIS AFFECT DESIGN CHOICES?)
Broad e-governance context ²⁵	<p>Does a broader e-governance platform exist? Status? Institutional arrangements? Is there a government framework for ICT and interoperability? What is the main government ICT infrastructure?</p> <p>What are the existing legal and regulatory provisions for information access, cyber-security, data security, data confidentiality, privacy standards, personal data protection, etc.? Are these sufficient?</p> <p>What other government information systems could usefully share data (depending on objectives)? E.g. National ID, Civil Registry, employment and labour, tax system, social security, health, education, land titling, housing and other property, etc. Are links with each desirable and why?</p> <p>Can the National ID be used as a Unique Identifier? E.g. What % of the population has National ID; what info is collected; characteristics of those with no ID; other forms of ID; most common ID for low-income households; charges or fees for ID; accessibility of registry, etc.? Advantages and disadvantages? If not, what alternative solution?</p>
Existing programmes and their business processes	<p>What programmes exist in the country (objectives, budget, implementing agency, targeting criteria, coverage and plans for scaling up, benefits, key features, business processes, information management approach)?</p> <p>Which of these can usefully be integrated? Along which dimensions (e.g. integration of registration/data collection, eligibility determination, or other systems too – payments, grievances, etc.)?</p> <p>Do programmes' current business processes need redesigning and integrating? How?</p>
Information requirements	<p>What are the specific information needs of all key actors (primary, secondary and tertiary, national and local, government and civil society, implementation and policy, etc.)? Why are these needs important? How will this information be used? What is the order in terms of priority?</p> <p>What data will be needed to feed into the core business processes supported?</p> <p>Has the amount of data collected been limited by keeping data focused on core objectives and processes</p>

Source: Lindert et al (2016),²⁶ adapted by Barca (2017)

25. Primarily drawn from Lindert et al (2016)

26. Specifically, elements of this table are adapted from the World Bank's draft 'Assessment Tool for Social Registry Information Systems'.



However, not all developing countries have put in place social protection policies with clear agendas on MIS or integration. To avoid potential pitfalls, developing countries should therefore invest in feasibility studies. Such a study would address the following issues (see Table 4 below):

Table 4: Key feasibility parameters and questions

COMPONENT	QUESTION
Institutional capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does existing legislation and policy adequately reflect the rationale and main objective pursued? If not, is there space for shifting policy in this direction? How? Is there strong enough political leadership advocating for reform and coordinating institutional actors across the board? If not, how can this be garnered? What other institutions will back the process? Who will oppose it? How can each be influenced and brought on board? Is there sufficient capacity to identify and cost potential options for integration, assess affordability and identify available financing options? If not, how could this technical support be achieved? Is the existing governance structure strong enough to ensure vertical and horizontal coordination and lead development and management phases? If not, how could this be strengthened?
Implementation capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What capacity is there at all levels of Social Protection governance to implement such a project including management of inclusive information systems? What are the gaps that need addressing (number and qualifications of staff)? Is there in-house IT capacity that can be leveraged? If so, how will this be used? If not, how will external providers be managed? Is there a network of staff at the local level (e.g. social assistants) that can be called upon? How can these most effectively be used? What is their capacity in terms of data collection (either through a census survey or on-demand) including gender-responsive and disability-inclusive approaches? Overall, what are the proposed roles and responsibilities of various actors involved in setting up, managing and using the system?
Infrastructure requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the hardware requirements of the proposed model? Do these respond to country constraints (durability, etc.)? Are these already available at all levels of governance or will they need to be procured? If so, how? Expected costs? What are the telecommunication systems/network requirements? Do these respond to country constraints (availability of internet, power, etc.)? What backup options exist?
Financial costs & sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the estimated start-up costs of the proposed model (including hardware and training costs)? What are the estimated costs of operating the proposed model (including staff requirements)? Is an adequate source of funding guaranteed and sustainable over time?
Intended users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will the system ultimately be used? How will the MIS be assessed to determine if it is adequately meeting programme and policy objectives, including for greater disability and gender inclusion? How can use be most effectively enhanced?
Potential positive impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the expected positive impacts of the proposed system? How could these best be achieved? See the list in Section 4.4 as an example.



Table 4: Key feasibility parameters and questions

COMPONENT	QUESTION
Potential negative impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the negative impacts and how can these be mitigated? E.g. privacy and security risks, excessive costs, unsustainability, etc.
Conclusions and Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the conclusions? What are key recommendations?

Source: authors

The feasibility study would provide essential guidance as to how to implement the proposed project effectively – or could provide the basis for deciding whether the overarching project is not feasible.

5.2. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT SELECTED SOLUTION

As discussed extensively above, the ‘road map’ set out by the Feasibility Study should primarily focus on how the overarching strategy for implementing the selected solution (e.g. programme MIS or specific approach to developing an Integrated System for Information Management) will be effectively pursued. How this can be achieved in practice is beyond the scope of this Module, but is discussed in Module COO and Module GOV.

In this section, we focus on the ‘IT components’: the development (and implementation) of the MIS or Integrated MIS software, the database/register creation, the hardware procurement and the choice of a telecommunications system.

5.2.1. Software development

There are two main options for this: develop the MIS software in-house (if there is sufficient capacity) or tender it out to an external provider. For example:

- Mozambique opted to develop and locate its MIS at the Ministry of Finance because it had sufficient resources to develop, host, and maintain it;
- Kenya outsourced the development of its ‘Single Registry’ (Integrated Recipient Registry) and the modernization of its cash transfer MIS to an external software firm that had a local presence (important because it enables the supplier to provide ‘handholding’ throughout implementation and fix any potential software glitches within a minimum guarantee period, e.g. a year).

Outsourcing is essential where capacity is not available in-house, but requires careful contracting and management. For example, during the development of the software, it is necessary to support the supplier by internally establishing two teams:

- Steering: to ensure that the MIS is delivered within scope and on time.
- Technical: responsible for monitoring the tasks and deliverables of the project

Further best practice (to be incorporated in ToRs if managed externally) is to:

- Adopt iterative prototyping,²⁷ whereby the system is designed and used to iteratively customise and incorporate feedback from users (one module at a time)
- Use open-source software, acknowledging the high costs of making changes to proprietary software. For any other proprietary third-party software used, the suppliers should be asked to provide a perpetual and valid license for at least five years and ensure the software is procured with accompanying source codes

27. Based on the design–divisibility concept, meaning staff can learn from early, relatively small, failures and not be overwhelmed by a single, whole-system design. ‘Where design comes as this single whole, “big bang” implementation, opportunities for local improvisation are reduced and risks of failure correspondingly increase’ (Heeks, 2002).

- Ensuring the MIS software includes all standard data checks such as format masks, drop-down menus, data value parameters, warnings of repeating names, and cross-reference checks
- Ensure that gender-responsive and disability-inclusive data architecture is supported by a tailored software application (eg. design all routine tabulations and dashboards to be automatically calculated by the information system to enable disaggregation by sex, age, disability status, etc. beyond generic categories)
- Ensuring 'segregation of functions': pre-defining roles and privileges of each user of the MIS system to prevent violations of security and any misuse of the MIS application
- Build in-house capacity to develop and update the MIS, for example by ensuring that contracts have clear provisions to allow suppliers to hand over all the source code and technical documentation of the system without any preconditions.

5.2.2. Database/registry creation

An MIS can only function if it is fed by a database/registry that contains accurate, up-to-date data (garbage in, garbage out). This requires:

- Ensuring a strong approach to data collection and validation (see Modules S&I and ADM) including ensuring data collection is inclusive.
- Ensuring contents and formats such as names and identification numbers conform to those contained in the MIS data dictionary. The length of fields and content structure should be standardized for aggregation and reporting.

5.2.3. Hardware procurement

As discussed in Section 3.2, MISs need to be supported by adequate hardware. Best practice in ensuring this is the case includes:

- Choosing hardware resources based on the application software requirements of the MIS
- Carefully defining hardware specifications to ensure adequate memory, disc space and processing capacity; sufficient resilience to extreme conditions (high or low temperatures, rain, dust, etc.)
- Ensuring availability and appropriateness for local levels of administration, considering cost-effective technology (e.g. use of tablets, smartphones, etc.)

5.2.4. Telecommunications System (data-sharing) set-up

Data collected through an MIS, whether programme specific or integrated, is useless if it is not accessible by a wide variety of actors – and ultimately used. Best practices in setting such systems up include:

- Ensuring data is accessible and functional at the sub-national level using the most cost-effective and appropriate telecommunication technologies available in-country, where possible sharing data through web-service access (not batch processes, using CDs or email).
- Investing in network infrastructure readiness
- Where possible, automating data sharing through pre-defined formats/templates/applications
- Ensuring adequate measures for data security and privacy tailored to the specific needs of different users (see also Section 4.6.2)
- Clearly documenting protocols for quality controls on the information before it is submitted over the internet or transferred by batch process

CONCLUSIONS

This Module has clearly shown that – when made a priority – programme MISs are a powerful tool to efficiently implement, manage and monitor social protection programmes and are designed in an inclusive and rights-based way. Developing an Integrated System for Information Management – that enables the flow and management of information within the Social Protection sector and sometimes beyond – can have a further policy and operational advantages.

The extent to which these advantages are achieved greatly depends on the approach to the integration selected (developing a Social Registry, Integrated Recipient Registry or Virtual Social Registry) and the overarching objectives pursued. It is clear that, whereas many stakeholders understand MISs and their registries/databases from an Information Technology (e.g. software and hardware) perspective, they are primarily a policy tool. This has several implications:

- Social Protection stakeholders need to set the policy, legal and operational framework for the establishment of their MISs or Integrated Systems for Information. This also includes setting clear obligations to ensure gender responsiveness and disability inclusiveness within the overall information system (both at the programme and integrated levels).
- In determining the model to set up, developing countries should not (even though it is natural to look to existing examples) be casually seduced by models arising from middle-income countries (e.g. Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia). Instead, the choice must be carefully made in light of country-specific purpose, needs, and context (including existing opportunities and capacity/financial constraints).
- Given the overarching objective of data and information management in the Social Protection field – collecting and sharing information to take action to improve the standards of life of the poorest and most vulnerable citizens – it is important to involve all potential stakeholders in the design and development process. This can be done through an in-depth Needs Assessment (see Section 5.1) and Feasibility Study (Section 5) and by keeping key actors continuously involved (e.g. Steering Committee, continuous user-testing, etc.);
- The development of a high-quality programme MIS – and to a greater extent, the development of an Integrated System for Information Management – requires a complex, costly, lengthy, and iterative process which requires very high capacity. The risk of failure is high, and not for IT-related reasons. Governments lacking sufficient capacity will need to be advised/guided in the development process, while investing in capacity development.

Proposed solutions for inclusive design need to be staged, adequately resourced and realistic to avoid making systems too hard to implement and risk creating disincentives among staff to implement changes.

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6.1. IMPLICATIONS FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The implications for Sub-Saharan Africa are extensive, given the importance of country needs and the context in determining the 'right' solution to data and information management. Six main considerations should be noted.

First of all, from a policy perspective, a wide range of countries in the region are swiftly striving towards the creation of a **comprehensive vision of Social Protection policy** (in line with the ILO Social Protection Floor Recommendation). This is reflected in country strategy documents and regional efforts and has already been translated into practice.

Secondly, countries across Sub-Saharan Africa have **great opportunities to adopt leapfrog technology** when it comes to setting up MIS solutions. This has already been the case in countries pioneering the use of programme and integrated MISs, addressing challenges unique to the region: for example, biometric identification can overcome traditional difficulties in identifying recipients without appropriate documentation; point-of-sale devices or mobile phones can be used to transfer cash to nomadic or hard-to-reach recipients electronically (allowing for instant integration with MIS); and mobile phones or hand-held devices may be used for data collection (Garcia and Moore, 2012).

Third, **capacity constraints will need serious tackling** – at the central and local levels. While the Ministries and Agencies in charge of implementing Social Protection across the region have been strengthening their role and cadre of staff, there is still a significant lack of: a) technical staff at the central level, capable of leading the MIS development process while also understanding policy and implementation requirements as well as key principles and elements of inclusive programming; b) field-staff at the local level (e.g. a cadre of social assistants), capable of acting as liaisons with programme applicants and recipients. Countries that have recently succeeded in their process of data integration, such as Kenya, have undertaken rigorous Capacity Needs Assessments to tackle this issue. They have also adapted their systems to existing capacity constraints, for example by a) gradually building on existing systems rather than adopting a 'big-bang' approach, b) outsourcing development tasks to external companies and/or receiving donor technical assistance, and c) adapting business processes to capacity constraints (e.g. impossibility of on-demand data collection in the short term given lack of local staff).

Fourth, the sustainability of any MIS project – and especially a large project involving the creation of an integrated system – is largely reliant on a **sustainable source of funding** allowing for ongoing operations (including training and technical support for staff), maintenance and potential changes/tweaks. This is problematic in contexts where Social Protection is still struggling to garner sufficient domestic financing and commitments to gender-responsive and disability-inclusive social protection are still relatively underdeveloped – as is often the case in Sub-Saharan Africa (Garcia and Moore, 2012). An MIS project's Feasibility Study should realistically assess the cost implications of different models of MIS development and rollout, and base ultimate choices on the availability of adequate financing.

Fifth, MIS projects in the region need **extensive tailoring to the specific objectives and characteristics of social assistance programmes**, as extensively described by Garcia and Moore (2012). For example, given most programmes' strong focus on targeting vulnerable groups rather than 'the poor', a unified approach to poverty targeting across different programmes could be more difficult to implement. Similarly, given the high level of community involvement in all of the 'gateway' phases of programme implementation, any proposed MIS solution would have to find a way to accommodate this.



Sixth, **the wider 'enabling' (or 'disabling') context** also needs to be accounted for, possibly at the early design stages (Feasibility Study). From an IT standpoint, the lack of reliable mobile phones, network coverage and electricity, or lack of basic hardware infrastructure could seriously undermine the success of an MIS programme in the region (e.g. rural areas) – especially where one of the core objectives is improved management and coordination across central and decentralised levels of government. From a wider country-context perspective, it is essential to understand whether existing data privacy and security legislation in the region is strong enough to protect already-vulnerable groups from further vulnerability.

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CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The TRANSFORM Learning Package is organized in a modular structure, and reflects the key building blocks of a holistic & interdependent social protection system.

The TRANSFORM modules that are currently available are listed below. Other modules are under development and will be added to the curriculum.

 LEG	Legal Frameworks
 S&I	Selection & Identification
 ADM	Administration and Delivery Systems
 COO	Coordination
 GOV	Governance, Institutions & Organizational Structure
 MIS	Management Information Systems & Approaches to Data Integration
 FIN	Financing & Financial Management
 M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation

All TRANSFORM materials are available at:

www.transformsp.org

WHAT IS TRANSFORM?

TRANSFORM is an innovative learning package on the administration of national social protection floors in Africa. The prime objective of TRANSFORM is to build critical thinking and capacities of policy makers and practitioners at national and decentralized levels to improve the design, effectiveness and efficiency of social protection systems. TRANSFORM aims not only at imparting state-of-the-art knowledge that is appropriate for the challenges faced by countries in the region, but also to encourage learners to take leadership on the change and transformation of nationally defined social protection systems.

WHY TRANSFORM?

Many training curricula exist in the field of social protection and thus fundamental ideas, concepts, approaches and techniques are accessible. And yet, institutions and individuals struggle with the complexity of developing a broad, encompassing social protection system.

This complexity requires a transformational approach to teaching and knowledge sharing. It is far from enough to impart knowledge, to fill heads. It requires learners to grapple with the features of complexity, to stimulate creativity, to appreciate diversity and uniqueness, to be involved as a key element of ownership –elements which are at least as important as the factual knowledge itself. This learning package aims at just that: TRANSFORM!

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