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Study on Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean

Ecuador case study

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We hope that this research will contribute to strengthening the capacity of the Ecuadorian social protection system to respond to emergencies. We also hope that it will provide evidence and inform practice throughout the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region and elsewhere.

Executive summary

Introduction

There is an increasing global recognition within governments and partners on the potential linkages between social protection and disaster risk management (DRM) in responding to and mitigating shocks.

The experience of Ecuador in the use of social protection in shock response is very rich and innovative and is paving the way to understanding better how to use these systems in emergency response. Ecuador was hit by an earthquake on **16 April 2016** with a magnitude of 7.8. At least 671 people were killed, more than one million were affected, around 50,000 dwellings were permanently or severely damaged, and almost 10,000¹ displaced people had to be hosted in official shelters. President Rafael Correa declared a “State of exception” on 17 April.

This case study forms part of a wider ***Study on Shock-Responsive Social Protection in LAC*** commissioned by the WFP and undertaken by Oxford Policy Management (OPM). The objective of the study is to generate evidence and inform practice for improved emergency preparedness and response in LAC linked to more flexible national social protection systems. The main research question for the study is: **What factors enable social protection systems to be more responsive to shocks?**

The role of social protection in the earthquake response

System preparedness

Coordination

A shock of such magnitude required coordinating the engagement of various government and non-government actors at different levels. The coordination efforts undertaken prior to the shock in thematic committees at different levels improved the response capacity, although the preparatory work did not anticipate such a large and sudden shock.

Due to the magnitude of the earthquake and the limited capacity at local level, the response was mostly centralised, something that improved the effectiveness of the support provided. In this sense, the principle of ‘subsidised decentralisation’ was relegated and the national government took the lead, although admittedly with differences from municipality to municipality. Moreover, although it falls within the mandate of the Secretaría Nacional de Gestión de Riesgos (SNGR) to play a leading role in emergency preparedness and response, in practice and as per article 6 of the “declaration of State of exception” the response was led by MICS and the President’s office.

Horizontal coordination strengthened as the response unfolded. At the beginning, line ministries, eager to respond rapidly, developed their own tools, processes and systems, initially with limited coordination. Over the weeks, coordination was enhanced based on a clearer vision of the type of response required and the role of different actors.

Targeting

Substantial preparatory work had been done by the government prior to the earthquake, although this work was designed to respond to other types of smaller scale shocks like floods or volcanic

¹ MICS, November 2016.

activity. The 2016 earthquake represented a huge challenge in terms of targeting, in particular for the cash-based assistance. In this scenario, the government created a registry of affected households (Registro Único de Damnificados, RUD), which was the cornerstone of the cash-based assistance. A registry of this type had not been developed before.

At the onset of the emergency, the government decided to create the RUD rather than using the Social Registry, the backbone of the national social protection system and the most solid targeting mechanism available at that time. Although this type of registry is not designed to target households exposed to sudden shocks, given the absence of any rapid alternatives a decision could have been made to support all the households in the Social Registry living in the most affected areas. 66% of households in the RUD were also in the Registro Social (RS), meaning that the response could have reached two out of three affected households with the RS. This type of dilemma is frequently faced by countries with relatively solid social protection systems which had not been designed or adapted to the needs of emergency response. On the one hand, creating a registry of affected households increases the accuracy of the response although it may also delay the assistance. On the other hand, transferring cash to households already included in the Social Registry immediately after the shock implies maximising the timeliness of the response, although admittedly accepting significant errors of inclusion and this could even be rejected the auditing office if not already included in protocols prior to the response.

Likewise, MIES reported that only 15% of families in the RUD were beneficiaries of the flagship social protection programme Bono de Desarrollo Humano (BDH) in the aftermath of the earthquake. This shows that the vertical expansion of this programme, this is topping up benefits, would have been an inadequate response, reaching only a small proportion of affected households. In this regard, government's decision to search for an alternative response was appropriate.

Delivery

The existence of a solid mechanism for the delivery of cash transfers was one of the factors that contributed the most to responding through the social protection system. The existing bank payment system, used by MIES to deliver the benefits of BDH and other social pensions and disability grants, has a very large coverage, is relatively administratively simple, with costs in line with other systems in the region, user-friendly, and is easy to scale up. Moreover, a large proportion of affected households was already familiar with the payment system since they were or had been beneficiaries of other social assistance schemes.

This system allowed fast cash disbursement in response to the 2016 earthquake. Once beneficiaries had been identified and the IT platform adapted, the process of transferring cash was relatively smooth and fast thanks to the system already in place.

System response

A mix of strategies in the use of social protection in response to the earthquake was implemented:

- **Vertical expansion** – beneficiaries of non-contributory schemes who were affected by the earthquake received additional and temporary benefits.
- **Horizontal expansion** – the non-contributory social protection system expanded its coverage, reaching new beneficiaries.
- **Piggybacking** – WFP channelled its humanitarian response through government social protection systems.

The response to the 2016 earthquake can be described as one with three different stages defined by the type of assistance provided to the affected population: in-kind assistance; shelter and cash assistance; and housing assistance.

Stage one: in-kind assistance

The provision of in-kind assistance in the first days after the earthquake was an appropriate and effective response. MIES, with the support of the armed forces, prepared and distributed kits of food and non-food items. In this sense, protocol was followed since the Risk Management Manual establishes that this is the responsibility of MIES and that the armed forces should provide logistical support.

Both the large demand for assistance and the massive amounts of donations and national stock of food, medicines, clothing, and other supplies imposed a huge challenge on government and civil society. The scale of the earthquake triggered the support of national and international organisations, private firms, NGOs and governments. However, from a logistical point of view, such quantities represented a huge challenge to MIES and the armed forces, who were in charge of the receipt, storage, recording and distribution. This challenge was rightly faced by government and partners, and hence the in-kind assistance reached affected households in the most-hardly hit geographical areas within 72 hours from the earthquake, although with additional challenges and delays in rural areas.

Stage two: shelter and cash assistance

The cash assistance was effective and innovative but delayed due to a combination of factors. MIES provided the cash assistance to affected families through the Bono de Acogida, Alquiler y Alimentación (Bono AAA) and Bono de Alimentación Rural, as described in the box below. Despite the challenges faced, the response through the social protection system was innovative and effective and represents an experience that will contribute to improving future responses in Ecuador, the region, and globally. Both the vertical and horizontal expansions of schemes and the support of WFP (piggybacking type of response), allowed government to offer cash support to a large number of households.

Box 1: Cash assistance

Bono AAA

Requirements

- Only families registered in RUD are eligible.
- Families must apply and sign an agreement with the foster family or the tenant.

Benefits

- Foster families receiving affected families are entitled to USD135 per month for six months plus USD15 for utilities – Bono de Acogida (foster care allowance).
- Tenants receiving affected families are entitled to USD 135 per month for six months – Bono de Alquiler (rental allowance).
- Affected families renting or with a foster family are entitled to USD100 per month for three months – Bono de Alimentación (food allowance).

Bono de Alimentación Rural (rural food allowance)

Requirements

- Only families registered in RUD are eligible.

Benefits

- Eligible families are entitled to USD100 per month for three months.

Around 42,000 affected families were supported with cash transfers. As reported by MIES on March 29th 2017, approximately half received the Bono de Alimentación and the other half the Bono de Alimentación Rural.

The main challenges faced were related to the difficulties with RUD's data collection and processing, the allocation of new financial and administrative responsibilities, and the adaptation of the IT platform. It was a month after the earthquake, on 19 May, until the Bono AAA was designed by MIES and the RUD was fully operationalised towards the end of July. MIES already started transferring the Bono AAA to eligible families towards the end of May, although most transfers were made in July and August once the RUD had been completed.

Stage three: housing assistance

The final stage consisted of government providing a permanent housing solution for affected families. MIDUVI conducted an assessment of approximately 69,000 dwellings and categorised them as 'red', 'yellow' or 'green' depending on the damage level. MIDUVI provided a total of 45,440 permanent housing solutions up to November 2016.

MIDUVI reported not using the RUD for targeting purposes, and as a result there were cases of families receiving housing support and not social benefits; the opposite was also true.

Key lessons learned

- Adequate system preparedness is essential for a prompt and efficient response.
- Social protection processes and systems should be flexible during emergencies and special protocols for emergency response should be developed.
- Emergency response requires a mindset and principles different from those usually behind social protection systems created for poverty reduction and/or support across the life cycle.
- Adapting and using existing strong social protection systems allows government and partners to respond efficiently.

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- Piggybacking on existing social protection systems can allow humanitarian actors increasing both coverage and cost-efficiency of the response, while contributing to strengthening government systems and response capacity.
 - A holistic response may imply, as in the case of Ecuador, combining social protection support with other type of assistance (e.g. housing).

Policy recommendations

- A comprehensive national Emergency Response Plan is underway and is expected that will contribute to improving future responses. We suggest that the development of such a plan should be a participatory process engaging key sectors, including social protection.
- The implementation of responses through social protection would benefit from investment in capacity strengthening at local level.
- There is already an ongoing process to strengthen the capacity and increase responsibilities of the SNGR. The SNGR would need to promote the coordination of different sectors involve in emergency response, in particular DRM and social protection.
- An efficient system will require not only **using** the social protection system but also **adapting** it. When designing social protection systems adaptable to emergency response, it is important to reflect on issues like errors of inclusion vs. response rapidness, accountability vs autonomy, conditionalities, and verification of eligibility, as well as many other aspects embedded in the thinking behind non-contributory schemes that are addressed differently in emergency response.
- A new social protection targeting tool for emergencies could be developed based on the RUD, and linked with the RS and other databases. There are a few important things to consider when developing this tool. First, data collection and processing methods and technologies need to be in place so that the whole process takes no more than a couple of weeks. Secondly, it is recommended that the register becomes a unique targeting tool for the whole response. Every government and partner response should rely on it, though admittedly programmes may need to collect additional data. Thirdly, it is important not to expect that this tool will capture all the data that every programme requires.
- The declaration of an emergency could trigger processes and procedures different from those in place in normal times and which allow quick decision-making while maintaining accountability at all levels. Systems and rules should be flexible during emergencies. Likewise, staff should be training accordingly in order to provide an effective support to the affected population.
- The use of contributory schemes in emergency response could be evaluated as well. Other countries in the region have gone down this route (see Beazley et al, 2016).
- The government can benefit from the support of humanitarian actors in emergency preparedness and response. Not only financial support can be provided by these actors but also technical assistance oriented towards the development of more responsive social protection systems.

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List of abbreviations

BDH	Bono de Desarrollo Humano
Bono AAA	Bono de Acogida, Alquiler y Alimentación
CCT	Conditional cash transfer
DRM	Disaster risk management
ECLAC	UN Economic Commission for LAC
INEC	Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
MCDS	Ministerio Coordinador de Desarrollo Social
MICS	Ministerio Coordinador de Seguridad Social
MIDUVI	Ministerio de Desarrollo Urbano y Vivienda
MIES	Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social
MINEDUC	Ministerio de Educación
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
PNBV	Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir
RS	Registro Social
RUD	Registro Único de Damnificados
SNGR	Secretaría Nacional de Gestión de Riesgos
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WFP	World Food Programme

1 Introduction

There is increasing global recognition within governments and partners on the potential linkages between social protection and DRM, in responding to and mitigating shocks. This recognition has been clearly expressed, for example, in the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit by SPIAC-B's² commitment to 'support the further expansion and strengthening of social protection systems to continue to address chronic vulnerabilities and to scale up the utilization of social protection as a means of responding to shocks and protracted crises.' In the same line, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clearly points towards the creation of social protection systems that allow all people to enjoy a basic standards of living.

In LAC, natural disasters have occurred increasingly frequently since the 1960s: 19 disasters per year in the 1960s and 68 per year in the first decade of the twenty-first century (UN Economic Commission for LAC (ECLAC), 2015). For this reason, the adoption of mitigation measures to reduce the population's exposure to natural disasters and to restore infrastructure, together with economic and social measures, is becoming increasingly essential.

Meanwhile, social protection systems in LAC have evolved and expanded substantially in the last few decades, with, for example, the percentage of GDP allocated to public social investment growing from 15% in 2000 to 19.1% in 2012 (ECLAC, 2015). Cash transfers have become part of virtually every social protection system in the developing world (World Bank, 2015b), and LAC was a pioneer in developing sophisticated programmes with multiple objectives, such as conditional cash transfers (CCTs), which have been replicated worldwide. The proportion of the population benefitting from CCTs in LAC, for example, increased from 5.7% to 21.1% between 2000 and 2012 (ECLAC, 2015).

In this light, fairly advanced social protection systems and large-scale safety nets seem to provide a unique opportunity to support shock response in LAC. However, social protection systems can involve conflicting objectives, target populations and operational processes when compared with humanitarian interventions, which can impede their ability to play a role in accommodating additional demand for assistance during an emergency.

The Ecuador case study forms part of a wider ***Study on Shock-Responsive Social Protection in LAC*** commissioned by WFP and undertaken by OPM. The review includes a literature review of experiences in the region (Beazley et al., 2016), three case studies (Ecuador, Guatemala and Haiti) and a final report with recommendations for strengthening the role of social protection in shock response in LAC.

The objective of the study is to generate evidence and inform practice for improved emergency preparedness and response in LAC linked to more flexible national social protection systems. The main research question for the study is: **What factors enable social protection systems to be more responsive to shocks?**

The experience of Ecuador in the use of social protection in shock response is very rich and innovative and is paving the way to understanding better how to use these systems in emergency response. Ecuador was hit by an earthquake on 16 April 2016 with a magnitude of 7.8. At least 671 people were killed, more than one million were affected, around 50,000 dwellings were

² The Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) is an inter-agency coordination mechanism to enhance global coordination and advocacy on social protection issues and to coordinate international cooperation in country demand-driven actions. SPIAC's board is chaired by the World Bank and ILO and includes representatives of ADB, IFAD, IMF, ISSA, FAO, OECD, UN-DESA, UNDP, UNESCO, UN-HABITAT, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO, WFP, and others.

permanently or severely damaged, and almost 10,000³ displaced people had to be hosted in official shelters. President Rafael Correa declared a state of emergency.

This case study focuses on the 2016 earthquake. Although, as is shown in Section 2.1, Ecuador has been exposed to many different shocks in recent years, there are important reasons to focus on the earthquake. First, this study was conducted seven months after the earthquake, while the response was still ongoing. Secondly, the magnitude of the shock was so great that it was undoubtedly the most important natural disaster affecting the country in decades. Third, the social protection system played a key role in the response to the emergency. Finally, it is important to highlight that the study of the earthquake emergency is not an evaluation of the government and partners' response, but instead it aims at assessing whether the social protection system is a good tool for shock-response, feeding into the overall objective of the study stated above.

Following this short introduction, the next section of this case study describes the context in terms of poverty, vulnerability and social protection in Ecuador. Section 3 presents the methodology and theoretical framework employed. Section 4 studies the role of social protection in the earthquake response, from its preparedness to the actual response. Finally, Section 5 provides some recommendations with the aim of making the system more responsive.

³ MICS, November 2016.

2 Poverty, vulnerability and social protection in Ecuador

In this section, we briefly describe first the poverty and vulnerability context in Ecuador, and then the country's social protection system and its evolution in the recent years.

2.1 Poverty and vulnerability

Poverty reduction in Ecuador has been impressive in the last decade. Poverty rates have fallen sharply; the poverty headcount decreased 13.5 percentage points between 2007 and 2015 and extreme poverty was halved in the same period. Within this period of steep poverty decline, two trends can be identified: first, a long period of poverty decline, in which the headcount went down from 36.7% in 2007 to 25.6% in 2013;⁴ secondly, a period of stagnation, in which the indicator remains almost invariant (24.6% in 2014 and 25.4% in 2016⁵). Unsurprisingly, these trends coincide with GDP fluctuations, from rapid growth to mild.

Despite the substantial achievements in terms of poverty reduction, one out of four persons are still poor; 25.4% of people remain poor in March 2016. It is for this reason that the government remains committed to poverty eradication, as clearly envisaged in the 2014 National Strategy for Equality and Poverty Eradication.⁶

In addition to the challenges in terms of poverty, **the country is vulnerable to shocks** which could suddenly and substantially increase the number of people in need. As the table below shows, Ecuador has been affected by a large number of natural shocks in the last decade. In addition to the 2016 earthquake, lava flows and ash falls produced by volcanic activity, droughts, floods and wildfires have hit the country. Moreover, Ecuador is not immune to economic shocks either. Despite the rapid economic growth in the last decade, in 2009 the country was affected by the international crisis and GDP growth was only mild.

⁴ Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INEC). December 2007 and 2013.

⁵ INEC. March 2014 and 2016. The difference is not statically significant.

⁶ Estrategia Nacional para la Igualdad y la Erradicación de la Pobreza. Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo.

Table 1: Natural disasters in Ecuador: 2006–2016

Start month	Disaster type	Disaster subtype	People affected
July 2016	Volcanic activity	Ash fall	300,013
May 2016	Volcanic activity	Ash fall	250
April 2016	Earthquake	Ground movement	N/A
January 2016	Flood	Riverine flood	23,955
January 2016	Flood	N/A	10,000
November 2015	Volcanic activity	N/A	130,042
August 2015	Volcanic activity	Lava flow	800,000
February 2013	Drought	Drought	3,165
January 2013	Flood	Riverine flood	25,567
April 2012	Wildfire	Forest fire	1,945
January 2012	Flood	Riverine flood	71,860
February 2011	Flood	Riverine flood	3,600
May 2010	Volcanic activity	Ash fall	2,500
April 2010	Flood	Riverine flood	6,440
November 2009	Drought	Drought	107,500
January 2009	Flood	Riverine flood	11,807
January 2008	Flood	Riverine flood	289,122
February 2006	Flood	Riverine flood	57,670

Source: EM-DAT. The International Disaster Database. Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters. Université Catholique de Louvain

In sum, despite the very important progress in terms of poverty reduction made in recent years, poverty and inequality levels in Ecuador are still significantly high and hence a policy priority. Moreover, the fact that the country is exposed to frequent shocks increases people's vulnerability. Poverty and vulnerability reduction policies involve a number of different sectors: social, economic, finance, security and DRM, among others. In this report, we focus on social protection policies and also on their link with DRM strategies.

2.2 Social protection

The Constitution of 2008 represented a breakthrough in the conceptualisation of social protection in Ecuador. The new Constitution establishes a **rights-based approach to social policy**, with universal access, inclusiveness and protection through the life cycle as key principles. In this line, the Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir (PNBV) 2013–2017 establishes the objective of achieving the right of universal access to social security and protection through the life cycle and consolidating an inclusive, integral and sustainable system of social protection and security, articulating contributory and non-contributory schemes and creating a social floor. The PNBV also establishes the provision of universal and free-of-charge health services.

In relation to the evolution of social protection policies in recent years, similar trends as in the case of poverty reduction can be identified: an expansion phase from 2008 until 2012, and then a phase of stagnation from 2014 up to date; 2013 represented the transition between the phases.

In the **expansion phase**, social spending and coverage grew substantially, following the aspiration for a universal and inclusive system. This expansion of coverage was mostly driven by non-contributory schemes: the BDH, a CCT, already large and a cornerstone of social protection policy

at that point in time, increased the number of beneficiary households from 1,005,967 in 2007 to 1,203,207 in 2012, representing a 20% increase. Beneficiaries of social pensions increased by 141% in the same period, from 243,852 to 588,149, and those receiving disability grants by 426%, from 19,923 to 104,888. Taking the three schemes altogether, the number of beneficiaries increased by 49%.

The coverage and benefit values of social security also grew significantly during the expansion phase. The coverage of contributory social protection has traditionally been low in Ecuador, mostly due to high levels of informal work. The proportion of the labour force with access to social security was 35–40% in the 1990s and then dropped to around 30% in the turn of the century (Rofman, 2013). A series of factors contributed to a very important expansion of coverage and benefit increase during the expansion phase. First, the economic growth of this phase, together with the strengthening of control mechanisms, increased the formalisation of the labour market. Secondly, there was inclusion of self-employed and domestic workers in the social security system. Thirdly, the benefit values increased from USD 272 in 2007 for the average pension to USD 425 in 2014. As a result, the proportion of the labour force covered by social security increased sharply from 27.3% in 2007 to 42.8% in 2012 (MCDS, 2015).

This expansion phase was favoured, as in other countries in the region, by extraordinarily high international oil prices which fostered steady economic growth over nearly a decade. Oil prices dropped drastically in 2014 and 2015, and this, in addition to other factors, led to the stagnation phase. This is not to undermine the importance of the substantial policy reforms undertaken in this period, but to acknowledge that fiscal space and growth can contribute to creating a fertile environment for policy reform and social investment. The opposite is also true.

As expressed by the United Nations Economic Commission for LAC (ECLAC) itself, the direction of these reforms is close to the ECLAC's recommendations, since they imply an integral vision of both contributory and non-contributory social protection. The principles of universality and inclusiveness as well as the expansion of targeted programmes for poverty reduction, like the BDH, are celebrated by the UN commission (Carranza Barona and Cisneros, 2014).

The expansion phase was then followed by a **phase of stagnation**. In this phase, non-contributory social protection schemes were re-designed based on the experience of the expansion phase and the resources available.

This phase entailed two phenomena: a substantial reduction in overall coverage of non-contributory schemes, and a change in the composition of beneficiaries. In relation to the former, taking the three non-contributory schemes together, the number of beneficiaries fell by 45% from 2012 to 2016.

Regarding the composition of beneficiaries of non-contributory schemes, the stagnation phase entailed a change in the target population, which according to the government it was the result of a process of upward social mobility. On the one hand, beneficiaries of the BDH, dropped sharply from 1,203,207 in 2012 to 427,528 in 2016. In fact, the bulk of the reduction took place in 2014. This was the result of the programme adjusting its targeting criteria and aiming to reach the poorest of the poor. On the other hand, the number of recipients of social pensions was reduced by 17% from 2012 to 2016 and those receiving disability grants increased by 21% in the same period. Consequently, during the stagnation phase social assistance was not only characterised by the sharp reduction in coverage, but also by a shift of target population, focusing on the extreme poor, the elderly, and the disabled.

As with non-contributory social protection, the expansion of social security slowed during the stagnation phase. However, it is important to notice that despite the slack economic growth and the

fact that most measures to increase expansion had been taken in the previous phase, coverage kept growing: the proportion of the labour force covered by social security increased from 42.8% in 2012 to 45.7% in 2014 (MCDS, 2015). It remains to be seen what has happened during years of even slower or no economic growth, such as 2015 and 2016.

To conclude, the Constitution of 2008 sets a clear direction towards universal and inclusive social policies. Government policies have followed this direction during the last decade, with important results. Lately, the expansion of social protection schemes has been challenged by low economic growth rates. Moreover, the social, economic, and financial challenges derived from the 2016 earthquake will, on the one hand, tighten national and subnational budgets even further. On the other hand, and as will be shown in the following section, now may be the time to invest in strengthening social protection and DRM systems in order to minimise the effects of future shocks and maximise the response efficiency.

In the box below we describe the Registro Social (Social Registry – RS), which is a key tool for social protection targeting and monitoring.

Box 2: The RS (Social Registry)

The **RS** is a census of poor and vulnerable population which is used to determine the beneficiaries of non-contributory social programmes. The registry is acquired by compiling social, economic and demographic data. The most recent data collection round was carried out between September 2013 and June 2014 in the territories with the highest rate of poverty, as based on data from the 2010 census. **The RS currently includes 2.1 million households.** The MCDS is responsible for the registry.

The **Social Registry Index** estimates the well-being level of the population in the registry. It uses the proxy means test technique, which estimates the consumption level of each household based on demographic and socio-economic variables. As a result, households are categorised into three groups: extremely vulnerable; vulnerable; and not vulnerable. Non-contributory social programmes target their beneficiaries based on this index. The BDH, for example, targets households categorised as 'extremely vulnerable', alongside other demographic criteria.

The government has recently decided to modify the data collection strategy for the RS. No more censuses will be conducted. Although the new approach has not been defined yet, it seems that an on-demand, continuous registration process may be implemented. On-demand registration usually relies on households going to a local welfare office to register and apply for benefits. Modern approaches include the use of online applications or mobile phone apps, as in Argentina, Chile and Australia (see Barca and Chirchir, 2016).

3 Research methodology

In this section, we present a framework that helps us understand the two key dimensions of a shock-responsive social protection scheme: system preparedness and responsiveness. We also present the overarching research questions and describe briefly the tools and fieldwork.

3.1 Theoretical framework

3.1.1 System preparedness

In this study, we assess the level of preparedness of the social protection system based on three aspects that are essential for a prompt and effective response: **targeting**, **delivery**, and **coordination**. Below we describe each of these in turn. Although these are not the only three processes involved in effective preparedness, international experience and literature highlight how crucial they are (Bastagli, 2004; OPM, 2016).

Figure 1: Typology of system preparedness for shock-responsive social protection



Source: Author.

Targeting

Social protection programmes tend to rely on a variety of targeting mechanisms, including demographic, geographic and poverty targeting. Many of these mechanisms are designed to detect well-established conditions – for example, chronic poverty or belonging to a certain age group – and rely on the use of administrative registries and household surveys. Consequently, they are not conceived as tools to detect sudden changes to well-being and livelihoods. In order to be effective in emergency response, it is necessary to engage during the planning and preparation phase in an assessment of existing targeting tools, and then adapting them or creating new complementary systems, to be able to reach beneficiaries affected by different kinds of shock.

Delivery

Rapid delivery of benefits, either cash or in-kind, is of course crucial for effective support. During emergencies, the capacity to deliver faces challenges due to the urgency of the situation, the constraints imposed by the particular shock (such as infrastructure collapse), and the coordination of different actors (Bastagli, 2014).

Delivery mechanisms implemented by social protection schemes typically include manual transfers, delivery through a banking system, mobile money and other types of e-payments. Some of these mechanisms – e-payments, for example – have the potential to be rapidly scaled up during emergencies. However, these systems need to be developed prior to the crisis.

Coordination

Preparedness should also include a significant level of planning and coordination among actors involved in emergency response. This includes not only actors in the social protection field but also those working in DRM and humanitarian aid. This involves international, national and subnational levels, and government and non-government organisations.

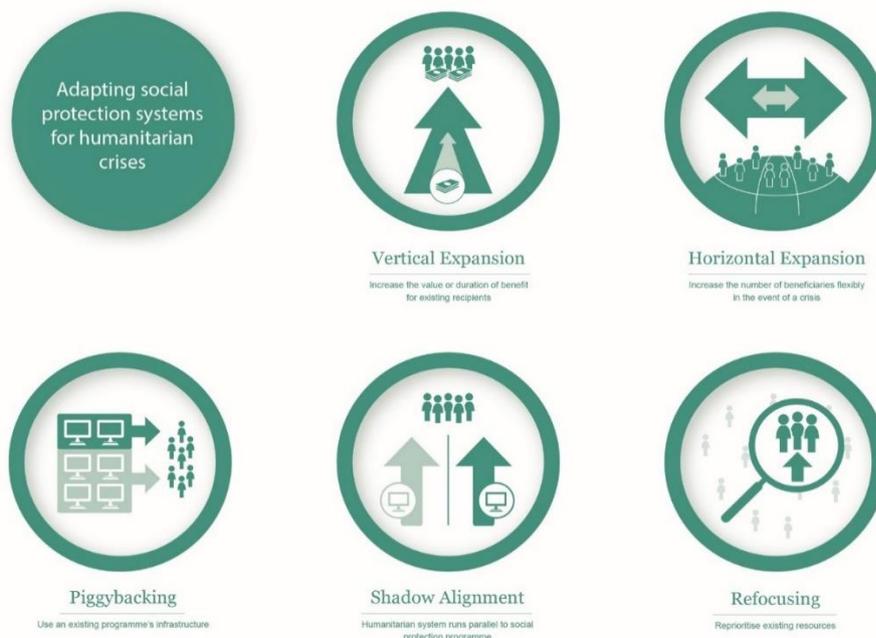
However, the challenge of achieving coordination among these different actors should not be underestimated. Social protection and DRM sectors not only have different objectives and target populations (with some areas of intersection, though not all areas intersect) and different methodologies and traditions, but most importantly they also involve different actors.

3.2 System response

When policy-makers consider the use of a social protection system to address emergency needs, there are a number of strategies that they may employ to scale up the overall level of support that the system provides to vulnerable people. Based on OPM (2015), we tentatively consider five main types of scale-up. These can be used in combination:

1. **Vertical expansion:** increasing the benefit value or duration of an existing programme or system:
 - adjustment of transfer amounts/values;
 - introduction of extraordinary payments or transfers.
2. **Horizontal expansion:** adding new beneficiaries to an existing programme or system:
 - extension of the geographical coverage of an existing programme or system;
 - extraordinary enrolment campaign;
 - modifications of entitlement rules;
 - relaxation of requirements/conditionality to facilitate participation.
3. **Piggybacking:** using a social protection intervention's administrative framework, but running the shock response programme separately:
 - introduction of a new policy by the government, with or without support from humanitarian actors.
4. **Shadow alignment:** developing a parallel humanitarian system that aligns as well as possible with a current or possible future social protection programme; and
5. **Refocusing:** adjusting the social protection system to refocus assistance on groups most vulnerable to the shock.

Figure 2: Typology of shock-responsive social protection



Source: OPM (2015)

3.3 Overarching research questions

The main research question for the study is: **What factors enable social protection systems to be more responsive to shocks?** With this in mind, we developed a number of overarching questions to guide the analysis.

- What relevant national and local laws and regulations and policies exist in relation to shock-responsive social protection?
- What priorities does the national social protection strategy signal, e.g. for addressing poverty, vulnerability, resilience, etc.? Does it offer a role for shock response?
- What targeting mechanisms are used by the largest social protection programmes? How are beneficiaries identified? How frequently? Does a national database exist? Is it integrated with other databases?
- How are the benefits of the main social protection programmes delivered (both cash and in-kind)?
- What design and implementation features of the social protection system have elements of flexibility and adaptability to facilitate rapid and adequate shock response?
- What is the evidence of the effectiveness – in terms of promptness and adequacy (e.g. coverage, transfer levels) – of social protection support in the event of each of the major shocks identified?
- Has there been any recent experience of coordination between, or integration of, social protection and DRM policies?
- Is there space for dialogue and collaboration between these two sectors? How could this dialogue be promoted?

3.4 Research tools and fieldwork

The research consisted of three phases: a literature review, fieldwork and analysis. In relation to the first phase, we conducted a thorough review of legislation, policy plans and strategies, manuals of operations, periodic reports, and programme reviews, assessments and evaluations. Our theoretical framework and the research questions presented above guided the review. The literature review of experiences in LAC conducted as part of this assignment (Beazley et al., 2016) and the global literature review conducted by OPM (OPM, 2016) informed this review.

Fieldwork was conducted from 7 to 16 November 2016. The research team was led by Rodolfo Beazley (OPM) and integrated by Chiara Dara (WFP) and Ricardo Gutiérrez (WFP). The research was conducted in Quito and two of the most badly affected locations: Manta and Portoviejo, in the province of Manabí. The research tools used were:

- **Direct observation:** Direct observation involves the study of particular events, spaces and behaviours directly and in 'real time', meaning that the researcher becomes part of the environment he or she is studying. In this regard, the research team visited the camp of Portoviejo and a settlement with houses built by MIDUVI and then handed over to affected families.
- **Key informant interviews:** Key informants from MIES, MIDUVI, MCDS, MICS and other government agencies and from the WFP, UNICEF, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, PLAN International, Red Cross and others, were interviewed. Key informant interviews are useful to triangulate findings from other data sources, and to generate questions, since key informants are able to share information not known to most people. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, complemented by selected tools.
- **Household case studies:** Household case studies were conducted using semi-structured interviews with beneficiary households in Manta and Portoviejo to develop a picture of their lives before and after the earthquake, and to understand how the emergency response has supported them.

The list of key informants interviewed can be found in Annex A.

The third phase consisted of analysing the data collected and findings from the literature review and answering the research questions. Preliminary findings were shared with WFP staff from the regional office and other offices in the region in order to gather feedback to help in identifying further areas to be covered. This report, which has been peer-reviewed, is the output of this research.

4 The role of social protection in the earthquake response

4.1 How prepared was the social protection system to respond to the earthquake?

Based on the theoretical framework described in Section 3.1, we focus our analysis of system preparedness on three key aspects: coordination, targeting, and delivery.

4.1.1 Coordination

A shock of such magnitude required coordinating the engagement of various government and non-government actors at different levels. The coordination efforts done prior to the shock in thematic committees at different levels improved the response capacity, although the preparatory work did not anticipate such a large and sudden shock.

The lack of a comprehensive **national Emergency Response Plan**, which is underway, represented a constraint on the country's ability to effectively coordinate a response. The existence of such a plan would have facilitated the coordination of the emergency response. It would have represented a tool for building a consensus with a number of actors involved in DRM and social protection, establishing objectives and goals, mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, assigning roles and responsibilities, identifying strategies for preparation and response based on different scenarios, identifying financing sources, and defining the role of cooperating partners and humanitarian actors, among others.

The Risk Management Manual, developed by the SNGR, 'establishes the actions for coordination that state institutions and cooperating partners must execute to reduce risks, respond to emergencies and recover from their adverse effects' (SNGR, n.d.). This operational manual is based on the **principle of 'subsidiary decentralisation'**, and assigns direct DRM responsibility to the corresponding decentralised jurisdiction. Moreover, the manual establishes that when the capacities are not sufficient, higher levels will bring the support required, without relieving lower levels of their responsibility.

Due to the limited capacity at local level in relation to the magnitude of the earthquake, the response was mostly centralised, something that certainly improved the effectiveness of the support provided. In this sense, the principle of subsidiarity decentralisation was relegated and the national government took the lead, although admittedly with differences from municipality to municipality. Although it is the mandate of the SNGR to play a leading role in emergency preparedness and response, in practice and as per article 6 of "declaration of State of exception" the response was led by the MICS and the President's office. As with the centralisation of the response, the view of most people engaged in this research was that this was a good decision.

According to the Risk Management Manual and processes, the different actors involved in emergency prevention and response are organised in thematic committees ('Mesas'), in charge of the inter-institutional coordination. These committees operate at every level: national, provincial, and cantonal. MIES leads the committee number 4 with the objective of promoting the inclusion of affected people. Prior to the earthquake, the national committee engaged in significant preparedness activities for other types of shocks. During the emergency, the national committee played a crucial role in the coordination of key institutions involved in the response and it was the central mechanism for coordinating the engagement of humanitarian agencies. The large size of the committee and the various objectives challenged the coordination. At local level, the role of the

committees varied significantly. In any case, this type of organisation seems to point in the right direction in terms of enhancing inter-institutional coordination.

Horizontal coordination strengthened as the response unfolded. At the beginning, line ministries, eager to respond rapidly, developed their own tools, processes and systems, initially with limited coordination. For example, MIES relied on RUD for the selection of beneficiaries, a registry of affected households developed by the MCDS (see Box 2), whereas MIDUVI, also under the umbrella of MCDS, did not use it. Similarly, there was limited linkage between the support that MIES and MIDUVI offered to the affected population. Even when the cash and housing support could have been seen as part of a single government strategy to respond to the emergency, in practice these were two separate benefits. Furthermore, both ministries could have benefited from an integrated response by sharing human resources, particularly at local level. Coordination was enhanced over the weeks, based on a clearer vision of the type of response required and the role of different actors.

4.1.2 Targeting

Substantial preparatory work had been done by government prior to the earthquake, although this work was designed to respond to other types of smaller scale shocks like floods and volcanic activity. The 2016 earthquake represented a huge challenge in terms of targeting, in particular for the cash-based assistance. In this scenario, the government created the RUD (see Box below), which was the cornerstone of the cash-based assistance. A registry of this type had not been developed before.

The Bono de Emergencia ('emergency transfer'), a programme that was part of the social protection system until recently, was the only scheme with a targeting mechanism designed for emergency response. This programme within MIES was designed precisely to respond to natural disasters by transferring cash to affected households on temporary basis. It was activated a few times in the past in response to small-scale disasters. The targeting mechanism of the Bono de Emergencia consisted of a selection done by local emergency committees and cleared by MIES. It is a very simple and decentralised mechanism that prioritises rapidness over accuracy. However, in 2016 this programme was no longer functioning and had no budget assigned to it. Possibly due to the magnitude of the emergency and the changes in high-level authorities and staff in MIES (or some other reasons unknown to this research), it was decided not to reactivate this programme in the response to the 2016 earthquake.

At the onset of the emergency, the government decided to create the RUD rather than using the Social Registry, which was the most solid targeting mechanism available at that time and the backbone of the national social protection system. Although this type of registry is not designed to target households exposed to sudden shocks, given the absence of any rapid alternatives a decision could have been made to support all the households in the Social Registry living in the most affected areas. Informants mentioned that this strategy was discarded to avoid large errors of inclusion (leakage) and government decided to develop a registry of affected households, RUD which was a lengthy process (see Section 4.1.2).

However, 66% of households in RUD are also in the RS, meaning that government could have reached two out of three affected households with the RS.⁷ This type of dilemma is frequently faced by countries with relatively solid social protection systems which had not been designed or adapted to the needs of emergency response. On the one hand, creating a registry of affected households increases the accuracy of the response although it may also delay the assistance. On the other hand, transferring cash to households already included in the RS immediately after the

⁷ MCDS – 11 November 2016.

shock implies maximising the timeliness of the response, although admittedly accepting significant levels of inclusion errors. This trade-off between timeliness and accuracy is elaborated on further in Section 4.3.

Asimismo, el MIES reportó que solo 15% de las familias en el RUD eran beneficiarias del BdH al momento del terremoto. Esto muestra que la simple expansión vertical del programa, es decir, el incrementar el valor de los beneficios de las familias del programa, hubiese resultado en una respuesta inadecuada, alcanzando solo un porcentaje muy menor de familias damnificadas. En este sentido, la decisión del gobierno de buscar otro tipo de respuesta fue adecuada.

Box 3: The RUD

As a first response to the earthquake, different line ministries quickly developed different tools for identifying those affected by the shock and assessing the effect and damage, enabling them to prioritise support.

It was then decided that the targeting of affected households should be centralised and that there should be a single register – the RUD.

The RUD is a tool to register households affected by the disaster. It was originally designed by the statistics office (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, INEC) and tested in Manabí and Esmeraldas; later on it was officially adopted by the MCDs through the Ministerial Agreement 11-2016, as a targeting tool for social programmes aiming to foster the social and economic recovery of the affected population. In principle, all government agencies should use this database for targeting; thus, the information related to programmes and interventions could be integrated for monitoring, following-up and evaluation purposes. However in the end this was not the case, and for example MIDUVI collected its own data because RUD did not provide the information they required.

As of 28 October 2016, 112,035 households (387,202 people) had been registered in the RUD; 65.9% of them were also in the Social Registry.

Data collection for RUD was done in three stages:

- Registration in shelters – May 2016;
- Surveys in most affected areas – June 2016;
- On-demand – June and July 2016.

The RS and the RUD are not two mutually exclusive targeting methods but complementary. A two-stage targeting process could have been implemented with the existing resources and mechanisms. First, the RS could have been used as an immediate response, in the absence of other alternatives. The objective would have been to reach as many affected households as quickly as possible. Secondly, once the RUD was ready, it could have improved the accuracy of the first-stage targeting by including affected households that were not in the Registro and ceasing payments to those who were in fact not eligible.

To conclude, limited preparedness actions in terms of developing or adapting ex-ante a social protection targeting system to respond to emergencies of this magnitude affected the timeliness of the reaction. The RUD is a potentially appealing tool and mirrors those used in other countries in the region, such as Chile with its Ficha Basica de Emergencia. However, without proper planning and preparedness, designing a tool like the RUD ex-post imposes a number of challenges and may delay the overall response, as described in Section 4.2.

4.1.3 Delivery

The existence of a **solid mechanism for the delivery of cash transfers** was one of the factors that contributed most to responding through the social protection system. The existing payment system, used by MIES to deliver the benefits of the flagship social protection programme BDH and other social pensions and disability grants, has a very large coverage, is relatively administratively

simple, with costs in line with other systems in the region, user-friendly, and is easy to scale up⁸. Moreover, a large proportion of affected households was already familiar with the payment system since they were or had been beneficiaries of other social assistance schemes. Confidence in and familiarity with the system was important for beneficiaries in a context of uncertainty and need.

MIES cash payments are transferred through public and private banks and cooperatives. The ministry holds a payment database to which the corresponding banks and cooperatives are linked. The financial agents are the ones transferring the cash to beneficiaries based on the payment database, and they are then reimbursed by MIES. This upfront payment by the financial agents is an innovative feature of the Ecuadorian case, one not so common elsewhere. Moreover, the cost per transfer was USD 0.35 in 2013 and similar if not lower to other countries in the region (World Bank and BANRED, 2013). Financial agents do not require beneficiaries to open bank accounts with them. Beneficiaries simply collect the cash at the bank or cooperative once a month on predefined days.

This system allowed fast cash disbursement in response to the 2016 earthquake. Once beneficiaries had been identified and the IT platform adapted, the process of transferring cash was relatively smooth and rapid thanks to the system already in place.

In relation to other forms of cash based transfers, like paper vouchers or e-vouchers for example, regular social protection programmes in Ecuador do not use these methodologies on a large scale, and were therefore not prepared for an emergency. Government and cooperating partners assessed the possibility of utilising vouchers rather than cash, and some organisations, for example Plan International, did use this methodology in their own programmes, but in the end government's social protection response relied on cash and in-kind distribution. In addition to the advantages in terms of logistics, one of the key reasons for this kind of response was the desire to reactivate local markets.

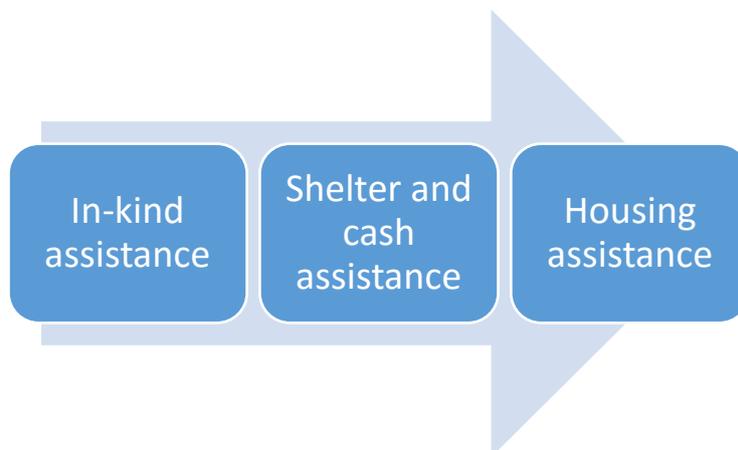
Regarding the transfer of in-kind support, the department of risk management within MIES engaged in significant preparatory work. For example, and with the support of WFP, MIES defined the content of emergency food kits. As in other cases, a shock of the magnitude of the 2016 earthquake had not been anticipated, and the preparatory work was conceived for emergencies produced by the smaller scale shocks more frequent in the country. However, as it is shown in next section, the transfer of in-kind support was largely effective.

4.2 How has the social protection system contributed to the earthquake response?

The response to the 2016 earthquake can be described as one with three stages. Although in practice some of these stages overlapped, the overall response was clearly characterised by three different stages defined by the type of assistance provided to the affected population, as shown in the figure below.

⁸ MIES payment platform delivers its services through seven private companies and is available 24 hours per day, every day of the year. For the payment process, MIES coordinates with the Finance Ministry, the Central Bank, and the network of private and public banks, and cooperatives. More than 400 payments points were activated in the aftermath of the earthquake in the areas affected.

Figure 3: Stages of the response to the earthquake



Before describing each stage, it is important to go back to our theoretical framework. The different types of responses through social protection systems guided our assessment of this case study. In this response, in particular, **a mix of strategies was implemented**, which makes this case very interesting:

- **Vertical expansion** – beneficiaries of non-contributory schemes who were affected by the earthquake received additional and temporary benefits.
- **Horizontal expansion** – the non-contributory social protection system expanded its coverage, reaching new beneficiaries.
- **Piggybacking** – WFP channelled its humanitarian response through government social protection systems.

The vertical and horizontal expansions and the piggybacking entailed the expansion and use of systems and programmes developed for cash-based social assistance schemes. Since Ecuador's social protection system consists largely of cash transfer schemes and government and partners rightly decided to respond based on existing systems and schemes, the social protection response entailed the delivery of cash benefits, as opposed to other alternatives such as school meals, vouchers, or employment-related support for example.

It is also important to highlight that there is no data available to link beneficiaries of Stage 1 with the subsequent stages. However, based on the interviews conducted for this research, it seems fair to assume that most households that received cash assistance in Stage 2 had been previously assisted with in-kind support. This may have been more challenging in the case of affected families living in rural areas.

4.2.1 Stage one: in-kind assistance

The earthquake hit Ecuador on 16 April and the following day the government declared a state of emergency in six provinces: Esmeraldas, Manabí, Santo Domingo, Guayas, Los Ríos and Santa Elena.⁹ On 18 April, the state of emergency was scaled up nationally.¹⁰ Due to the magnitude of the shock, the response was immediately centralised: President Correa assigned one minister to each of the most affected cities, in charge of leading the response, and created a committee for the reconstruction (Comité de Reconstrucción y Reactivación Productiva).¹¹ This committee was

⁹ Presidential decree 1001.

¹⁰ Presidential decree 1002.

¹¹ Presidential decree 1004.

headed by the Vice-president and put the Ministry Coordinator of Internal and External Security in charge of the emergency response.

Immediately after the earthquake, government and civil society organisations made a huge effort to provide affected households with basic supplies and assistance. Due to the magnitude of the shock the number of people needing immediate support was massive in some areas. To show the magnitude of the disaster in the worst affected locations, in the municipalities of Pedernales, Jaramijo, San Vicente and Jama, more than 70% of families were registered in the RUD. This means that in the first days after the shock virtually every family required assistance in these areas. In other places like Portoviejo and Manta, although the percentage of families registered in the RUD was much lower (close to 30%), the scale was very large: approximately 20,000 households from each of these two locations were included in the register.¹²

Both the large demand for assistance and the massive amounts of donations and national stocks of food, medicines, clothing and other supplies imposed a huge challenge on the government and civil society. The scale of the earthquake triggered the support of national and international organisations, private firms, NGOs, civil society, and governments. However, from a logistical point of view, such quantities represented a huge challenge to MIES and the armed forces, who were in charge of the receipt, storage, recording and distribution. This challenge was rightly faced by government and partners, and hence the in-kind assistance reached affected households in the most-hardly hit geographical areas within 72 hours from the earthquake, although with additional challenges and delays in rural areas.

Government efforts in the aftermath of the earthquake focused on the distribution of in-kind support, in addition to rescue activities and health assistance, which are not covered in this assignment. **The provision of in-kind assistance in the first days after the earthquake appears to have been the most appropriate response given the shortage of food and basic supplies, the disruption of markets and the accessibility problems.** MIES, with the support of the armed forces, prepared and distributed kits of food and non-food items. In this sense, protocol was followed since the Risk Management Manual establishes that this is the responsibility of MIES and that the armed forces should provide logistical support.

4.2.2 Stage two: shelter and cash assistance

The first official shelters were opened days after the earthquake. At the beginning, MIES was in charge of managing these camps, as clearly indicated in the Risk Management Manual. However, this responsibility was then transferred to the armed forces, who proved to have strong capacity in this regard. MIES and the Ministry of Health were still responsible for social and health services in the shelters. The number of shelters and people in shelters increased quickly, reaching a maximum of 27 camps and 9,621 people in June 2016. With the housing and social assistance provided to the affected ones, the number of camps and people in shelters fell to 23 and 5,792 until 23 November.¹³

¹² 21,158 families in Portoviejo and 19,787 in Manta (MCDS – report of 11 November).

¹³ Ministry Coordinator of Internal and External Security. <http://cifras.seguridad.gob.ec/albergues/index.php>

Figure 4: Shelter in Portoviejo



The cash assistance was effective and innovative but delayed due to a combination of factors. Government provided cash assistance to affected families through the Bono AAA and Bono de Alimentación Rural, which are described below. Despite the challenges faced, the response through the social protection system was innovative and effective and represents an experience that will contribute to improving future responses in Ecuador and other countries in the region. Both the vertical and horizontal expansions of schemes and the support of WFP (piggybacking type of response), allowed government to offer cash support to a large number of households.

Box 4: Cash assistance

Bono AAA

Requirements

- Only families registered in RUD are eligible.
- Families must apply and sign an agreement with the foster family or the tenant.

Benefits

- Foster families receiving affected families are entitled to USD135 per month for six months plus USD15 for utilities – Bono de Acogida (foster care allowance).
- Tenants receiving affected families are entitled to USD135 per month for six months – Bono de Alquiler (rental allowance).
- Affected families renting or with a foster family are entitled to USD100 per month for three months – Bono de Alimentación (food allowance).

Bono de Alimentación Rural (rural food allowance)

Requirements

- Only families registered in RUD are eligible.

Benefits

- Eligible families are entitled to USD100 per month for three months.

Cash support was delayed due to a number of issues, as described below, but most importantly the limited preparedness for a response of this type and the difficulties associated with RUD's data collection and processing. It was not until a month after the earthquake, on 19 May, that the Bono

AAA was designed by MIES.¹⁴ The lack of preparedness in relation to the design of a cash support for emergency response, the overwhelming efforts involved in stage one of the response, which stretched MIES capacity, and the changes of high-level staff within MIES, including the minister,¹⁵ contributed to the delay in the design of this tool. Moreover, in this first design of the cash response the Bono de Alimentación was tied to the Bono AAA, and therefore only those hosted by foster families or renting could be eligible to food allowances, excluding many affected families.

It is important to mention that the motivation behind the Bono AAA was not only to provide support to both affected and foster families but also to incentivise people to leave the camps and start recovering their livelihoods. This is why at an initial stage the cash support was associated with people in the camps finding a foster family or renting accommodation. Moreover, cash support was preferred to other types of support due to its potential to reactivate local markets.

The implementation of the cash support was delayed by the data collection and processing for the RUD. Only families in RUD could apply for cash support. However, the RUD data was only fully collected towards the end of July. MIES already started transferring the Bono AAA to eligible families in late May, although the bulk of the transfers was made in July and August once the RUD had been completed and the IT platform had been adapted.

There are a number of reasons why RUD's data collection and processing was a very long process and lasted more than three months. First, as with the Bonos and other responses, the RUD was completely designed after the earthquake, during the emergency. Secondly, as with any untested tool, the form that collects data for the RUD had to be improved a few times. Thirdly, the personnel collecting the data had to be identified and trained and despite INEC being in charge of this task in the end, it has been reported that at least in Manta and Portoviejo it was MIES registering most families. This imposed an additional burden on MIES, which was already stretched. Fourthly, at the beginning, data was collected with paper forms, and these very same forms were posted to Quito for data entry. With time, the MCDS developed processes and software that allowed for more efficient registration.

¹⁴ Acuerdo Ministerial 001.

¹⁵ During this response stage, President Correa decided to change a few ministers, including two critically engaged in the emergency response: MIES and SNGR. The newly appointed ministers were native from Manabí, the worst affected province.

Box 5: WFP support

Immediately after the earthquake, the government called on the United Nations to provide assistance through its Humanitarian Country Team. On 19 April, the government requested WFP to contribute to the response by providing food assistance to affected people in the provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas.

From the first 72 hours after the disaster and for the first month, WFP provided food kits to the most affected families in hospitals, shelters and schools, reaching a total of 105,710 people in the provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas. As part of the emergency preparedness processes, WFP and the government had agreed on a nutritionally balanced list of products to be delivered in emergencies. In addition, WFP had already signed an agreement with a supermarket chain. These preparatory actions conducted prior to the earthquake allowed a quick response.

On 22 April, WFP launched an emergency operation of the value of USD 11.3 million (April–December 2016) to contribute to supporting the adequate access to food and prevent a deterioration of the nutritional status of the people affected by the earthquake. In addition, the WFP launched a USD 2 million Special Logistics Operation over a three-month period (April–July 2016) to increase logistics capacity in terms of staff and equipment and to support the government and other partners in receiving and deploying humanitarian aid.

At the end of May, WFP signed a Memorandum of Understanding and an Operational Plan with the government to complement government assistance with a monthly monetary transfer of USD 100 per family called Bono de Alimentación – within the Bono AAA – and Bono de Alimentación Rural. Thanks to WFP corporate preparedness system (an Immediate Response for Preparedness project had been launched at the beginning of 2016) all the processes for the implementation of cash-based transfers for emergency response were already in place. WFP's cash transfers were carried out through the Governmental Safety Net Platform (Social Protection) in cooperation with MIES, as part of the Ecuador Reconstruction Plan.

The government platform uses seven networks of financial services coordinated by the Ecuadorian Central Bank, which includes more than 400 distribution points in the affected provinces, increasing national coverage. Together with cash transfers, families received nutritional recommendations to encourage the purchase of healthy and nutritious food, through informational materials distributed in MIES helpdesks and a messaging system through mobile phones.

Finally, WFP supported the government in expanding the coverage of the feedback mechanism for beneficiaries of the Bono by making available call lines served by the offices in Manta, Pedernales and Esmeraldas.

As of November 9, WFP had supported 37,300 families through the Bono de Alimentación, for a total of USD 8.1 million. This represented an innovative response from the WFP in the region, by piggybacking on a national social protection system.

In early July¹⁶ MIES decided to implement the Bono de Alimentación Rural, which meant in fact delinking the cash support for food from the support to rent or foster care. Beneficiaries of the Bono de Alimentación Rural started receiving the payments in August, four months after the earthquake. WFP financed both Bonos de Alimentación (Rural and AAA) with USD 8.1 million (see above) and, more importantly, supported MIES in their conceptualisation and design.

Around 42,000 affected families were supported with cash transfers. As reported by MIES on March 29th 2017, approximately half received the Bono de Alimentación and the other half the Bono de Alimentación Rural.

As mentioned in Section 4.1.3, the mechanism to deliver cash transfers was already in place and was strong and had a large coverage. This allowed MIES to reach people even in rural and remote areas. Beneficiaries claimed their benefits at the bank counters.

There were other operational aspects that created delays in the cash response.

- **Communication** – MIES established a series of communication channels like the helpdesks in the local offices, a phone landline for assistance, a call centre and sending text messages to

¹⁶ 7 July, according to the WFP.

beneficiaries. Despite these strategies, communication with beneficiaries was often limited, particularly in rural areas. Despite MIES sending a text message to beneficiaries with information about, for example, the payment dates, connectivity was scarce. The beneficiaries interviewed were in general not aware of when they should collect their benefits and, in many cases, they went more than once to the bank and payments were not available. In the case of beneficiaries of other schemes like the BDH, there was also confusion between the payment dates of the Bono AAA or Bono de Alimentación Rural and the other cash transfers.

- **Verification** – In the case of the Bono AAA, MIES established a verification process in line with auditing processes and standards. A social worker of MIES was required to verify that the beneficiary family was living with a foster family or renting for the third payment to be released. When we conducted the fieldwork for this assignment, during the first half of November, it was widely reported that the third batch of payments was delayed because of MIES limited availability to conduct such a huge amount of visits.
- **Management information system** – The existing management information system set for regular social protection programmes also caused delays with payments. For example, the system would only allow one payment per month per beneficiary. Therefore, the system did not allow some beneficiaries to be paid twice in a month, when the payment dates of the regular schemes (e.g. BDH) did not coincide with the Bono AAA or Bono de Alimentación Rural. This problem was fixed promptly.
- **Administrative barriers** – Beneficiaries had to present documentation when applying for the cash support and had to sign agreements with tenants or foster families. This process was in some cases cumbersome for families who could not get hold of the documentation that was in their houses, which were severely damaged or destroyed, and for MIES as well. The case of the agreements was particularly cumbersome, since in many instances MIES had to send back the agreements to the local offices because information was missing. The process improved over the weeks but was still regarded as cumbersome by the national and local authorities interviewed for this study.

4.2.3 Stage three: housing assistance

The final stage consisted of government providing a permanent housing solution to affected families. MIDUVI conducted an assessment of approximately 69,000 dwellings and categorised them as 'red', 'yellow' or 'green' depending on the damage level.

Box 6: Housing assistance

Three types of housing assistance were provided by MIDUVI:

- **Allowance for damage reparation** (Bono de Reparación de Vivienda): A maximum of USD 4,000 based on a technical assessment of the damage. Mostly dwellings categorised as yellow fall in this scheme. Beneficiaries need to repay 10% of the cost in instalments, starting one year after receiving the support. MIDUVI links families with approved contractors to carry out the repairs. Until the end of November, a total of 19,477 benefits have been provided (MIDUVI, 2016).
- **Allowance for the construction of new dwellings on the beneficiary's own land** (Construcción de vivienda nueva en terreno propio): A maximum of USD 10,000 is given for reconstruction on the beneficiary's own land. Mostly dwellings categorised as red fall in this scheme. Beneficiaries need to repay 10% of the cost in instalments, starting one year after receiving the support. MIDUVI links families with approved contractors to carry out the construction work. Until the end of November, a total of 21,326 benefits have been provided (MIDUVI, 2016).
- **Construction of new dwellings on government land** (Construcción de vivienda nueva en terreno urbanizado por el Estado): A dwelling of a value of USD 10,000 on government land is given to beneficiaries who do not own land or who have land in areas identified as being of high risk. Mostly dwellings categorised as red fall in this scheme. Beneficiaries need to repay 10% of the cost in instalments, starting one year after receiving the support, and should bear the costs of utilities from the moment of receiving the new dwelling. Until the end of November, a total of 4,637 benefits have been provided (MIDUVI, 2016).

MIDUVI provided a total of 45,440 permanent housing solutions up to November 2016. This is an impressive achievement considering that almost no preparation had been done. The different types of support and the associated processes and tools were designed in the aftermath of the earthquake. Although there is room for improvements, particularly in relation to communication and clarity regarding when the solution would be provided, the response was effective once in place.

Figure 5: Housing assistance: Houses built by the government in Manta and handed over to affected families



MIDUVI reported not using the RUD for targeting purposes, and as a result there were cases of families receiving housing support and not social benefits; the opposite was also true¹⁷. Although it is understandable that a self-declared tool like RUD is not sufficient to assess dwelling damage

¹⁷ The differences between the population assisted by MIES and MIDUVI were the result of not only the targeting mechanisms used but also the differences in household characteristics and the way they were affected (for example, affected families who were not homeowners).

and, if used, would need to be complemented with other assessments, the fact that MIDUVI did not use it at all reflects the challenges in terms of both coordination and developing a comprehensive targeting mechanism. 60.6% of families that received the allowance for reparation were in RUD; 70.6% in the case of construction on the beneficiary's own land and 83.3 in construction with land provided by the government (MCDS, 2016).

Linkages between benefits provided by MIES and benefits provided by MIDUVI were limited. In practice the two lines of support, in terms of targeting, verification, payments and other processes, operated separately. This created confusion at some points, with some families receiving the support of both institutions while others of only one, with similar dwelling damage and family conditions.

4.2.4 Crosscutting issues

In this subsection, we briefly study the following crosscutting aspects of the response: gender, nutrition, the principle of subsidised decentralisation, and accountability to the affected population.

In relation to gender issues, further research is required in order to understand how the earthquake affected both genders and to assess government response in this regard. While natural disasters often impact communities very broadly, residents are not equally at risk of loss and harm nor are equally able to recover. Poor households are well-known to be especially vulnerable but they are not the only ones. International evidence shows that women, boys and girls are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster and that, following a disaster, it is more likely that women will be victims of domestic and sexual violence (UNDP, 2010).

This important dimension could not be covered in depth given the limited scope of the assignment. However, there are a few issues worth highlighting:

- 51.6% of people in RUD are female; since this is a register of households, this does not mean that they have been affected in almost the same proportion as men. This ratio implies that slightly more of half the people living in affected households are women.
- While in BDH women are the main recipients of the benefits, in the emergency response around 60% of the recipients of the Bono AAA and Bono de Alimentación were female.
- Special measures were adopted in camps to increase the safety of women. Except for the military in charge of the camps, it has been reported by MICS that security forces within camp premises were exclusively women. This is not the focus of the study and therefore further research in this regard is recommended.
- It seems that the livelihoods of women could have been more affected, in many cases because these related to domestic work and businesses, according to what was reported by interviewees. However, this aspect needs to be studied with more depth.
- It seems that in the recovery phase it will be easier for men to get employment, since construction activities will demand manual labour. From this viewpoint, women may find more difficult to re-enter the labour market.

In relation to nutrition, as part of the preparations for emergencies MIES had engaged with the WFP and other actors in the design of nutritionally balanced food baskets. MIES officials in Portoviejo mentioned that the preparatory work and training helped them when putting together food kits. Moreover, MIES, with the support of the WFP, produced and distributed leaflets and signs with messages about what food items to buy and where, how to store them, and how to combine items for more nutritious meals; it also provided advice in terms of hygiene and other aspects. Similar messages were also sent through text message, although network coverage

seems to have been limited. It will be important that WFP and the government assess the effects of this support. It is also evident that the preparatory work makes a huge difference.

Figure 6: Leaflets with nutritional advice

BONO DE ALIMENTACIÓN

Para que las familias damnificadas consuman productos nutritivos




¿Qué es el Bono de Alimentación?

Es un Bono de \$100 en efectivo para que compres alimentos sanos y nutritivos. Se entregará mensualmente, durante tres meses.

¿Para qué sirve el Bono de Alimentación?

Con el Bono se pueden comprar alimentos variados y nutritivos para toda la familia, durante tres meses, contribuyendo a la buena nutrición de todos sus miembros; en especial de las niñas y niños menores de 5 años.

¿Quiénes reciben el bono de alimentación?

Las familias damnificadas que constan en el Registro Único de Damnificados - RUD y que se benefician del Programa Bono de Acogida, Alquiler y Alimentación.

Tres pasos clave para obtener el Bono de Alimentación

1. Inscribirse en el Registro Único de Damnificados.
2. Ser parte del Programa Bono de Acogida, Alquiler y Alimentación.
3. Acudir con la cédula a los bancos o cooperativas autorizadas y retirar el Bono de Alimentación. En caso de perder este documento, acercarse a las brigadas de cedulación.

El Bono de Alimentación incentiva una buena compra

- Únete con otras familias para comprar al por mayor y compartir una diversidad de productos. ¡Así se abaratan costos!
- Los alimentos de temporada son una buena opción: además de estar más frescos, ¡cuestan menos!
- Familias, si planifican bien cómo gastar su Bono, pueden comprar alimentos para cuatro semanas.
- ¡Es el momento de recordar los platos tradicionales nutritivos y las buenas recetas de la familia!



Consejos para alimentarse bien

- Recuerden combinar cereales como el arroz con leguminosas como el fréjol y la lenteja para que su comida sea muy nutritiva y económica. Preparen también bebidas de avena y frutas.
- Incluyan verduras en todos sus platos.
- Recuerden comer frutas por lo menos una vez al día.

Infórmate, llámanos: MIES: 1800-002002
 PMA Manta: 0993770574 · PMA Pedernales: 0993770541 · PMA Esmeraldas: 0989483916





It is also important to highlight that, although this is not part of the focus of this research, the Ministry of Health was in charge of ensuring the nutritious balance of the meals provided in camps.

Moreover, the ministry had a permanent presence in most camps and monitored and provided clinical support to children and adults who were malnourished or who had other nutrition-related problems. Pregnant women and lactating mothers were also assisted accordingly.

In relation to the principle of subsidised decentralisation in emergency response, it has already been mentioned that the response to the earthquake, given its magnitude, was centralised. It is, however, important to mention the heterogeneity in the responses, particularly at the onset of the emergency. In some cases, the local committees were actively engaged in the response, as indicated in the Risk Management Manual, while in others they were not. This depended on a variety of issues, ranging from the type of leadership exercised by the minister designated to a particular location to the work done in terms of emergency preparedness and the capacity at local level. There was also heterogeneity within each locality, since some sectors were more prepared to respond than others. In any case, most of the informants interviewed believed that the centralisation of the response was positive.

Finally, in terms of accountability to the affected population, the main mechanism established by MIES was a hotline. This mechanism was driven by an important desire to increase accountability and improving the assistance provided. The hotline, combined with other strategies like sending text messages, sharing contact details through posters and leaflets and the assistance provided at MIES offices, enhanced the accountability of the response. However, as already mentioned, the communication with beneficiaries was often limited given the nature of the shock and the lack of connectivity.

4.3 Key lessons learned

An experience of this magnitude provides many lessons on various fronts. However, we focus here on the ones specifically related to the topic of this research, this is, how to make social protection systems more responsive.

Adequate system preparedness is essential for rapid and efficient response. Since the preparatory work did not envisage a shock of this magnitude, government and partners had to design new programmes and mechanisms with the associated delays. This includes the targeting mechanism (in this case the RUD), the design of benefits, the coordination with other sectors, the development of processes, IT systems, forms, etc., and the staff training, among others.

Social protection processes and systems should be flexible during emergencies and special protocols for emergency response should be developed. Administrative procedures hindered the timeliness of the response and increased the burden on government officials at different levels. Moreover, although it is important that civil servants follow processes and procedures for accountability purposes, such processes need to be adapted to the emergency context so that administrative procedures allow for a timely response, while ensuring accountability.

Emergency response requires a mindset and principles different from those usually behind social protection systems created for poverty reduction and/or support across the life cycle. It resembles the dichotomy 'development vs. humanitarian aid'. A few examples will help clarify the importance of this issue.

- First, over recent years MIES has strengthened the verification of conditionalities under the BDH. The principle of verification was transferred to the emergency response, and MIES established that the eligibility of each family receiving the Bono AAA must be verified. During the design stage, MIES proposed conducting the verification before the second payment was

done, but this was then changed to prior to the third payment. In any case, MIES capacity to visit every household has been challenged and important delays with the third payment have been experienced. Though verification can be important when a family will be receiving benefits for a long period and when there is an established capacity to conduct such large-scale verifications, in an emergency context and in the provision of short-term temporary benefits, this is debatable.

- Second, conditionalities are at the centre of the BDH. As the name of the cash transfer (human development allowance) implies, the support does not only aim to smooth consumption but also to promote human capital investment. Moreover, behind the notions of the conditionalities there is also the principle of asking beneficiaries to give something in return for the benefit they are receiving. The conditionalities are often referred to as co-responsibilities, implying that benefits require commitments. Moreover, the value of work as a means of living is strongly promoted by the government, with social and economic inclusion as central goals. This notion of co-responsibility has also been transferred to the emergency response, at least to some extent. Beneficiaries receiving housing assistance need to pay back 10% of the value received. Moreover, families provided with new dwellings are responsible for paying the utility bills from the day they move in. However, many of them have lost their jobs and livelihoods, assets, clothing, furniture, and so on, and paying the bills could compromise other important expenditures. According to MIDUVI, this approach promotes the value of work. However, this approach could be questioned in an emergency context and in cases in which families have been so severely hit.
- Third, leakage is always a key concern in social protection schemes. Leakage means that there are errors of inclusion, that is, non-eligible households/individuals receive benefits. Leakage is a failure of the targeting process. However, there is usually a trade-off between reducing errors of inclusion and the cost of doing so – a cost both for the programme and for the beneficiaries. At some point, the marginal cost of reducing exclusion is so high that it may not be efficient. When it comes to emergency response, timeliness is usually more important than full targeting accuracy. This does not mean that the latter is not important, but there may need to be a compromise, particularly when facing sudden onset and large shocks.

Adapting and using existing strong social protection systems allows government and partners to respond efficiently. This is in fact what happened with the Bono AAA and Bono de Alimentación Rural, which adapted the systems and processes used by MIES in the other non-contributory schemes. In the same line, both the RS and the programme Bono de Emergencia could have been adapted and used in the earthquake response.

Piggybacking on existing social protection systems can allow humanitarian actors increasing both coverage and cost-efficiency of the response, while contributing to strengthening government systems and response capacity. The use of existing systems allowed WFP reaching a very large number of affected families efficiently, something that would have not been possible with a parallel response.

A holistic response may imply, as in the case of Ecuador, combining social protection support with other type of assistance. The three-stage response implemented by the government resulted appropriate to this type of shock. The immediate in-kind assistance alongside rescue activities and health assistance, followed by cash-support once markets are functioning and then by housing assistance to provide permanent solutions, is certainly a model to consider in future planning and responses.

5 Policy recommendations

It is important to start this section by highlighting that despite the challenges **the response through the social protection system was innovative and effective** and represents an experience that will contribute to improving future responses in Ecuador, the region, and globally. Government and partners like WFP relied on existing systems and processes to reach a large number of affected people.

A **national Emergency Response Plan** is underway and is expected that will contribute to improving future responses. We suggest that the development of such a plan should be a participatory process engaging all relevant actors at different levels, including DRM and social protection. This methodology would not only create consensus and ownership but would also show the importance of such a plan.

The response through social protection would benefit from investment in **capacity strengthening at local level**. Enhancing the capacity of local governments, risk management committees and MIES, particularly in aspects like data collection, eligibility verification, and the rules and processes of emergency programmes.

There is already an ongoing process to strengthen the capacity and increase responsibilities of the SNGR. A stronger SNGR would need to commit to improving coordination, in particular between social protection and DRM sectors.

It is recommended that strategies for responding through the social protection system to future shocks are built on the experiences of the Bono AAA, Bono de Alimentación and Bono de Emergencia. An efficient system will require not only **using** the social protection system but also **adapting** it. People or institutions with experience in humanitarian assistance will need to support this process, to ensure that the key principles behind emergency response are considered. When designing these processes, it will be important to reflect on issues such as accuracy vs. timeliness, conditionalities, verification of eligibility and many other aspects embedded in the thinking behind non-contributory schemes that are addressed differently in emergency response.

A new social protection targeting tool for emergencies could be developed based on the RUD, linked to the RS and other databases. It could be worth learning from experiences in countries in the region (for example, the Ficha Unica de Beneficiarios in Chile). There are a few important things to consider when developing this tool. First, data collection and processing methods and technologies need to be in place so that the whole process does not take more than a couple of weeks. Secondly, it is recommended that the register becomes a unique targeting tool for emergency response. Every government and partner response should rely on it, though admittedly programmes will need to collect additional data. Thirdly, and linked to the previous point, it is important not expect that this tool will capture all the data that every programme requires. Only the most basic data to determine eligibility for first responses would need to be collected.

Relying on the payment modality used in the BDH and other non-contributory schemes proved to be one of the best aspects of the response. The programme BDH is currently testing the use of mobile phones, which could be even better than the current method for both emergency response and regular programming. We encourage testing this approach, which many other countries have been doing.

The use of contributory schemes in emergency response could be evaluated as well. Other countries in the region have gone down this route (e.g. Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, for example – see Beazley et al., 2016). It is true that despite the substantial expansion of coverage in

recent times, overall coverage is still relatively low. However, vertical expansion of contributory payments to beneficiaries in affected areas could represent a fast way of responding. Consequently, it is important to keep an open view of the social protection system when thinking about shock response and not only to focus on non-contributory schemes.

The declaration of an emergency would need to trigger processes and procedures different from normal times and which allow quick-decision making by all relevant stakeholders. Emergency protocols should be part of the national emergency response plan. Moreover, systems and rules would need to be **flexible** during emergencies, while maintaining accountability at all levels. Likewise, staff should be training accordingly in order to provide an effective support to the affected population.

The response to the 2016 earthquake is a valuable learning experience for international humanitarian organisations. In contrast to other regions in the world, in LAC responses are mostly led by governments. This does not mean that there is no room for international support. On the contrary, organisations can not only provide financial but also technical assistance before, during and after the shock. This may probably imply adapting the way they work to provide more support to governments rather than responding in parallel.

This experience has created a momentum for investing in DRM and shock-responsive social protection systems since awareness about the importance of proper preparation has increased. It is important to take full advantage of this opportunity and continue building a solid system that will protect people in Ecuador.

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Annex A List of interviewees

Name	Position	Institution	Interview date
Franklin Robles	Subsecretario de Aseguramiento No Contributivo	MIES	08 November 2016
Alexandra Guillén	Subsecretaría de Familia	MIES	08 November 2016
Frenzel Apolo	Asesor Viceministro de Inclusión Económica	MIES	08 November 2016
Cristina Rosero	Directora de Acompañamiento Familiar	MIES	08 November 2016
Reinaldo Cervantes	Subsecretario de Gestión de la Información	MCDS	08 November 2016
Santiago Albuja	Director de Estadística y Análisis	MCDS	08 November 2016
Ana Garcés	Directora del Registro Interconectado de Programas Sociales	MCDS	08 November 2016
Vladimir Proaño	Asesor Subsecretaría de Gestión de la Información	MCDS	08 November 2016
Alexandra Ron	Directora de Gestión de Riesgos	MIES	08 November 2016
Denys Maigua	Analista de Riesgos y Emergencias	MIES	08 November 2016
Nelson Gutiérrez	Especialista Senior en Protección Social	Banco Mundial	08 November 2016
Mauricio León	Consultor experto en Política y Protección Social	Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos	09 November 2016
Mauricio Carvajal	Director de Asistencia Humanitaria	Secretaría de Gestión de Riesgos	09 November 2016
David Alomía	Consultor Experto en Protección Social	Independiente	09 November 2016
Verónica Zambrano	Gerente de Programas	Plan Internacional	10 November 2016
Jorge Zaldumbide	Asesor de Gerencia de Programas	Plan Internacional	10 November 2016
Hugo Piedra	Director de Administración de Datos	MIES	10 November 2016
María Antonieta Naranjo	Directora de Aseguramiento No Contributivo	MIES	10 November 2016
Adriana Salgado	Subsecretaría de Vivienda	MIDUVI	14 November 2016
María Augusta Montalvo	Subsecretaría de Gestión y Eficiencia Institucional	MCDS	15 November 2016
María Fernanda Franco	Asesora Despacho Coop. Internacional	MCDS	15 November 2016
Ana Villalva	Gerente Acción Nutrición	MCDS	15 November 2016
Ramiro Morejón	Coordinador	MCDS	15 November 2016
Leonora Chamorro	Directora de Operaciones y Logística	MINEDUC	15 November 2016
Diana Salazar	Especialista de Riesgos	MICS	15 November 2016
Jessica Carrillo	Servidor Público	MICS	15 November 2016

Paola López	Técnico Nacional de Respuesta	Cruz Roja Ecuatoriana	15 November 2016
Michel Guinand	Oficial de Inclusión Social	UNICEF	15 November 2016
Julieta Arboleda	Coordinadora zonal	MIES – Zona 4	11 November 2016
Fabrizio Díaz	Director Distrital Manta	MIES – Zona 4	11 November 2016
Gabriela Molina	Directora Distrital Portoviejo	MIES – Zona 4	11 November 2016
Carolina Quimes	Analista zonal de Acompañamiento Familiar	MIES – Zona 4	11 November 2016
Yefferson Alexander Sánchez	Analista Senior de TIC	MIES – Zona 4	11 November 2016
Varinio Sabando	Analista zonal	MIES – Zona 4	11 November 2016
Omar Reyes	Técnico de Riesgos	MIES – Zona 4	11 November 2016
Heleodoro Pilay	Técnico de Gestión de Riesgos	MIES – Zona 4	11 November 2016
Antonio Toro	Técnico de Gestión de Riesgos	MIES – Zona 4	11 November 2016
Carmina Pinargote	Coordinadora Zonal	Ministerio de Salud Pública – Zona 4	11 November 2016
María Elena Enríquez	Asesora Técnica	PNUD	11 November 2016
Carmen Reina	Técnica MIDUVI	MIDUVI – Zona 4	12 November 2016