

From fragmentation to policy coordination: Why does it matter?

Nino Gogsadze, Bonn Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences (H-BRS) and German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)

Fragmentation is seldom defined explicitly but can refer to a whole range of design, coverage, financial, targeting and information challenges in social protection programmes and systems. It means having too many programmes that are uncoordinated and thereby miss out on economies of scale in targeting, registration and monitoring. Particularly where social transfers are delivered by different Ministries or departments, there can be substantial dislocation of administrative systems. Different programmes may use different targeting approaches, various payment pathways and grievance mechanisms, and might hold separate lists of beneficiaries in each organisation. This can result in inefficiencies and inequities, as well as overlaps and gaps in beneficiary coverage. These multiple payment systems and grievance mechanisms can be confusing and time-consuming to navigate, especially for the poorest and the most vulnerable populations.

Fragmentation also translates into duplications, with multiple programmes focusing on a single problem while other issues are ignored, resulting in a lack of or uneven coverage. Uneven benefit levels create further inequities where some groups are perceived as more 'deserving' than others. For example, support for people with disabilities lags behind transfers for other groups in many countries.

There are several reasons for fragmentation:

Weak institutional capacity. Social protection Ministries often struggle with this. It can reduce programme effectiveness (leading to leakage and corruption) and promote fragmentation. This in turn diminishes the profile of and reduces allocated resources for the responsible Ministries. For example, it is common for social transfers to be implemented by several Ministries in parallel. Furthermore, weak institutional capacity often results in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) filling the vacuum of government with a plethora of programmes, fuelling fragmentation yet again. Tackling institutional capacity and coordination constraints is thus a key part of the harmonisation agenda.

One of the side effects of decentralised governance systems, where central and local governments operate simultaneously, are fragmented responsibilities regarding the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes.

Focus on rapid-onset shocks. Programmes often emerge in response to climate and environment-related shocks, such as floods and drought. In these situations, both the magnitude and nature of vulnerabilities can change quickly, and existing programmes may

prove inadequate at tackling emerging or expanding vulnerabilities. Thus, new and different responses are put in place that may lack alignment with other existing programmes

Political economy

Fragmentation can indicate underlying structural problems with the design, coordination and delivery of transfer programmes that are inherently political. At the national level, political influence can be strong and lead to uneven or skewed coverage. Governments often choose interventions that provide a path of least resistance, designing programmes that are technically easy or least controversial. In some instances, social transfer programmes are used as a political manipulation tool—i.e., during electoral cycles. In the worst cases, political expediency leads to distinct patterns of exclusion.

Donors also tend to support actions aligned with their own in-house policies and off-the-shelf instruments. Limited government ownership in low-income countries and erratic funding of fledgling programmes often lead to short-term approaches. Fragmented programming by different donors and organisations, favouring funding social protection programmes benefitting one specific group over others, hinders efforts to build integrated and coherent systems.

Fragmentation is thus as much a political issue as a technical one.

Addressing its root causes and symptoms can result in more effective social protection systems.

Table 1. Expert voices in Part 3

Chapter	Page	Expert	Video/Podcast
12	6	Animated video	Rehabilitation
12	17	L. Barhoum and L. Gikandi (Oxfam)	Social Protection in the Gaza Strip
14	46	M. Gavrilovic and J. Waidler (UNICEF Innocenti)	Cash Plus Approaches

Note: The videos can be found in the multimedia version of the Handbook.

References:

- Slater, R. 2021. "Harmonization of Similar Instruments" in *Handbook of Social Protection Systems*, edited by E. Schüring and M. Loewe. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 226-238.
- Schüring, E., and M. Loewe (editors). 2021. *Handbook on Social Protection Systems*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited