

The benefits of agile implementation in social protection development interventions: a comparative analysis of social protection information system implementations in Timor-Leste, The Bahamas and Indonesia

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1 Introduction

In this paper, three cases of cash transfer programmes are analysed specifically through the lens of agile programme implementation. These cases are examined from the perspective of funding, planning, procurement, design and overall execution. We identify both controllable and uncontrollable/external variables that impacted the relative success or failure of the programmes, as seen from the perspective of the implementing entity. Specifically, special attention is paid to how the programmes were brought to scale. Programmes that start small, delivering cash to a subset of beneficiaries, and scale incrementally using social protection information systems are defined as 'agile' programmes, reflecting an agile development methodology. These programmes are demonstrated in Timor-Leste and Indonesia. Programmes that sought to complete programme design, introducing or completely overhauling a national-level programme at one time, are defined as 'non-agile' programmes. This was the case in The Bahamas.

Each case is broken down into subsections. A programme description outlines the general social protection context in each country. External/exogenous variables (from the implementing partner's perspective) detail how government changes and directives impacted the overall programme. Controllable/endogenous variables (from the implementing partner's perspective) present specific programme execution approaches and details. Software implementation/features highlight Synergy's specific contributions to the programmes. Finally, lessons learned are presented. The Indonesia case, while less specific on details (our work there started only in 2019), provides a useful example of an innovative approach to agile programme development, which informs our conclusions. This programme will be important to follow in the next few years.

2 Background

Synergy International Systems

Founded in 1997, Synergy International Systems is a privately held company headquartered in Washington, DC, with a Development and Global Learning Center in Yerevan, Armenia, and offices in The Netherlands and Rwanda. It has over 20 years of experience in carrying out the design and development of management information systems for a broad range of development concerns.

Its solutions have been implemented in over 70 countries, in collaboration with government offices, multilateral and bilateral development organisations, non-governmental organisations and private-sector partners. Its core expertise related to conditional and unconditional cash transfer (CCT/UCT) programmes is in the design, development and roll-out of customised management information systems for CCTs, social safety net programmes, monitoring and evaluation processes and public administration. These features make up the core of its Social Protection Information Systems (SPIS).

Agile methodology

The agile methodology is a powerful and widespread approach used in and beyond software development. Its popularity has spread from its origins as a software development approach, and in 2018 it was named the second most popular management tool across industries (Rigby 2018). Agile software development entails design conversations with stakeholders about system needs, then rapid advancement to provide a minimum requirement information system meeting those needs. The initial system is then provided to the stakeholders for review and feedback. This input is rapidly integrated into the next iteration, and the process is repeated until a usable product can be deployed. This allows software clients to quickly receive a system, and then customise it to fit their exact requirements, while also identifying and

addressing issues in the system early in the development process. It also allows the builders of the system to benefit from user feedback in real time, eliminating the guesswork and theorising about beneficiaries' needs. In this paper we superimpose agile methodology informed by our software development onto a case study about programme methodology, thereby highlighting the mechanisms by which the scaling successes or failures of social protection programmes in Timor-Leste, Indonesia and The Bahamas were achieved.

Conditional cash transfer programmes

CCT programmes grant cash to low-income individuals/families as long as those individuals meet certain, varied 'conditionalities', such as school attendance by children, and vaccinations. If these conditions are met under the time-frame defined by the programme, the individuals receive the cash. UCT programmes provide cash grants to eligible beneficiaries without the burden of these conditions. CCTs started in 1997 with the flagship programme PROGRESA in Mexico. PROGRESA was hailed as a resounding success by the developmental economics community after thorough study, causing many other low/middle-income countries to adopt similar programmes—the most famous being *Oportunidades* in Mexico, and *Bolsa Família* in Brazil. From 2000 to 2015, there were around 165 extensive studies on the impact of CCTs (Bastagli 2018). The state of the literature conclusively supports the effectiveness of CCT programmes for alleviating poverty, leading to a further increase in CCT implementation over the past decade. Technological advancements in this decade such as Synergy SPIS have created ways for governments to virtually transfer funds to beneficiaries, creating more efficient and accountable programmes. CCTs have recently started to be implemented using SPIS, built to centrally manage all programme information and processes, including enrolment, eligibility determinations (proxy means tests), payment execution and complaint case management. These systems are still in the early adoption stage in many countries. Approximately 30 countries have some version of SPIS, and 31 more are in the process of developing one (Barca 2017).

Timor-Leste—*Bolsa Mãe* case study

Timor-Leste has a unique history with social protection efforts. It is one of the youngest countries in the world, with independence from Indonesia only occurring in 2002, and *Bolsa Mãe* is one of the first social protection programmes in its history. Following independence in 2002, and an attempted coup resulting in widespread violence in 2006, the National Recovery Strategy introduced the first cash grant programme, targeting veterans of the 2006 conflict and those displaced by the conflict. A significant motivating factor behind this cash transfer programme was to help satiate remaining unease among rebellious veterans in the country. In 2008, following the expansion of the Petroleum Fund due to increased oil prices (80 per cent of Timor's gross domestic product (GDP) is reliant on oil), *Bolsa Mãe* was introduced as the nation's first CCT programme (Umapathi 2013). Modelled after Brazil's *Bolsa Família*, *Bolsa Mãe* was designed to provide grants to vulnerable families with children to offset education expenses, provided the child was consistently attending school.

Synergy worked with Timor-Leste on three cash transfer programmes: *Bolsa Mãe*, *Idosos and Invalidos* (I&I), and Disaster Management, which provides cash grants to those impacted by

disasters. It joined the programme in 2013 to provide the central information system to assist efforts to scale up *Bolsa Mãe*. The system was implemented and rolled out between 2013 and 2017 and has continued to receive ongoing support since 2017.

External/exogenous variables

The following variables were beyond the control of the implementing parties but played a significant role in the overall success of the programmes.

- **Programme funding structure (2008–2019):** Starting in 2008, *Bolsa Mãe* was jointly funded by the Government of Timor-Leste, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the MDG-Spanish Trust Fund (Costa 2012). Around 82 per cent of the initial five-year funding (USD4.8 million) was from Timor's Petroleum Fund. After initial annual expenditure of between USD1 million and USD3 million annually from 2008 to 2012, covering around 15,000 beneficiaries, *Bolsa Mãe* scaled up efforts in 2012–2013, and programme funding increased to USD35 million in 2015 (Government of Timor-Leste 2015), and USD48 million in 2018 (Government of Timor-Leste 2018). All signs point to sustainable funding for *Bolsa Mãe* and I&I despite ongoing risks due to Timor's high economic reliance on petroleum. Both programmes appear highly politically insulated, but not immune from a petroleum economic downturn.
- **Government changes (2012–2019):** Timor-Leste has seen political power shift between the two dominant parties multiple times during the duration of these social programmes. Created under the leadership of FRETILIN (left-leaning, socialist party), *Bolsa Mãe* and I&I were maintained and even increased over time despite CNRT (centre-left party) winning power in 2012. FRETILIN re-established power in 2017 before ceding it again in 2018 to another centre-left party, AMP, a governing coalition of CNRT and two other parties (Av. Jacinto 2019). Despite these numerous leadership changes, *Bolsa Mãe* and I&I have remained a constant social protection policy priority and have received increased funding. While there is less of an ideological divide between parties, with both leaning to the left, it is a demonstration of the effectiveness of the programmes that new leadership did not 'reshape' them following their rise to power, as is common with changes in national leadership.

Controllable/endogenous variables

The following variables were within the control of the implementing parties.

- **Planning/initial pilot programme (2007–2012):** *Bolsa Mãe*'s 2008 pilot programme drew directly from Brazil's *Bolsa Família* programme design. *Bolsa Família* is the largest CCT programme in the world and has operated from 2003 to 2019. *Bolsa Mãe* was planned in 2008, and in 2009 members of the Timor-Leste Ministry of Social Solidarity visited Brazil to study and learn from *Bolsa Família* (International Labour Organization 2019). By 2010, 11,000 vulnerable individuals were receiving benefits, and by 2012, 15,000 were registered. At this point, the programme was deemed a success, and scaling efforts were discussed and finalised.

- **Programme design and scaling (2012–2013):** Prior to the scaling efforts, beneficiary eligibility was limited to single female heads of household with young children. The only metric of conditionality was school attendance. As the programme sought to scale up to include all vulnerable households with children, the eligibility criteria grew in complexity. The new programme introduced in 2012 expanded to all vulnerable families/households with children aged 0–17 and assessed vaccinations (children aged 0–6) and school attendance and performance (those aged 6–17). Conditions would be assessed for each child, and payment increased for each eligible child in the household. The programme started simple, and as it was successfully implemented, it iteratively grew in complexity and number of beneficiaries, in a perfect programme-level example of the agile methodology.

As *Bolsa Mãe* grew, the main goal of scaling efforts was to establish a central information system for assessing new, more complex conditionalities to accurately distribute benefits. In addition, the system assisted in expediting communication and data-sharing between local and national government offices and allowing beneficiaries to communicate directly with the government about service delivery. Alongside the SPIS procured in 2013, funding would significantly increase for social protection efforts.

- **Software features and implementation (2013–2015):** Synergy designed, developed and implemented a system with the following key features enabling *Bolsa Mãe* and I&I to scale up their efforts. Each of these SPIS modules was developed using agile methodology, with a team of developers quickly designing and presenting a version of the system, then quickly responding to changes based on the stakeholder's requests.
 - **Application:** The SPIS allows potential beneficiaries to apply for specific benefits, and can also store their biometric information.
 - **Data entry:** The SPIS provides a secure administration module for government users to manage entries in the application system. Government users have role-based permissions.
 - **Data validation:** The system automatically cross-checks to ensure that each application has all the information needed and validates each application to avoid duplication. It also allows applicants to upload necessary verification forms (medical identification, school certificate, birth certificate etc.) and government officials to review and approve.
 - **Scoring:** The system allows eligibility verification based on programme conditionalities, and alerts applicants which programme they are eligible for.
 - **Enrolment:** Once an applicant's forms have been validated/confirmed, the system alerts relevant users of new enrollees in the programme. These features (Application-Enrolment) drastically increase the speed and efficiency of business processes.

- **Payment:** Once new enrollees are confirmed, the system creates the beneficiary list to distribute to the payment service distributor for cash grant dispersal.
- **Reports and analytics:** This module allows users to study results by creating dashboards and examining key programme performance indicators.
- **Programme grievances:** If beneficiaries fail to receive their grants, they can enter complaints in the system to be responded to by programme officials, or print and send in the grievance form in areas where Internet access is difficult.

Following design and development, the system was rolled out in 2013–2014. As more beneficiaries joined the programme, funding drastically increased, as stated above in the 'Programme funding structure' section. *Bolsa Mãe* has been praised for its continued success, and aid organisations are calling for further scaling efforts (Handayani 2018). The SPIS has remained in agile development to the present, as the government has requested additional features and modules be added to meet different programme goals.

Lessons learned

Timor-Leste is a complicated success story of social protection. An overwhelming majority of social protection efforts are directed to veterans of the 2006 conflict. *Bolsa Mãe* distributes USD5 monthly, and I&I distributes USD30 monthly, while benefits to veterans range from USD276 to USD575 monthly (Handayani 2018). The overall budget for *Bolsa Mãe* in 2015 was USD35 million, compared with USD120 million for veterans, even though the veteran population makes up only 2.6 per cent of Timor's population, while *Bolsa Mãe* covers 25 per cent of all children in the country (ibid.). To significantly reduce the number of vulnerable households, *Bolsa Mãe* will have to receive a larger allocation of social protection efforts. Regardless of this unique circumstance, *Bolsa Mãe* and I&I are perfect examples of agile methodology at work in the social protection space. They started with small annual budgets and few beneficiaries. They took successful aspects from Brazil's CCT efforts and designed and started delivering benefits quickly. This resulted in sustainable scaling from 2013 to the present. *Bolsa Mãe* and I&I have been so successful that the only international criticism of the programmes is the budget imbalance between them and the veterans' benefits programme. *Bolsa Mãe* and I&I are also existentially threatened by Timor's low level of economic complexity and heavy economic reliance on petroleum, as they are funded by Timor's National Petroleum Fund. However, assuming stability on this front, hopes can be high for continued programme scaling, now with a national system for application, tracking, distribution, monitoring and evaluation.

3 Bahamas—RISE programme case study

The Renewing, Inspiring, Sustaining, Empowering (RISE) programme in The Bahamas was created in 2012 and was an aggregation of a variety of separate social protection and cash transfer initiatives in the country (Humes, Bahamas Ministry of Social Services, personal communication 2019). The Bahamas won their independence in 1973, and the Ministry of Social Services, the organiser of RISE, was created in 1979 (Government

of Bahamas 2011). From 1979 to 2012 the Ministry offered a wide-ranging platform of programmes focused on poverty alleviation through social protection. These programmes historically included job search assistance, youth and entrepreneurship training, school feeding and uniform in-kind grants, and food and utility subsidies (Williams 2013). In 2012 the governing Progressive Liberal Party entered into a loan partnership with the Inter-American Developmental Bank (IDB) to fund an ambitious USD15 million social protection venture. RISE would replace other social protection efforts, such as the uniform and food subsidy programmes, and instead would provide a pre-paid VISA card to enrollees in the programme. This VISA card would provide much greater flexibility for the use of the funds and allow for inter-island use. The programme was intended to more efficiently serve underprivileged Bahamians already receiving protection benefits through this VISA card. It would allow previously unserved Bahamians to receive benefits and improve accountability for the distribution of funds through complaint communication channels between beneficiaries and the government.

The conditionality of the programme was based on education and health criteria. The programme had a five-year implementation window from 2012 to 2017, with the goals of: 1) amalgamating previous social protection work into a comprehensive national programme; 2) introducing an innovative CCT delivery method of pre-paid VISA cards; and 3) creating a management information system to facilitate the programme's entire service delivery. Ultimately, RISE was cancelled following a change in political administration, after a delayed pilot programme in 2017. RISE spent most of its life cycle in a design and procurement phase without delivering cash transfers to beneficiaries. Hence, when the government changed, it was politically easy to scapegoat the programme for wasting funds and repurpose social protection funds away from it. While it is unfair to consider RISE a 'failure', as parts of the programme are being repurposed, there are significant lessons to be learned from its implementation process that can be applied to future CCT programmes.

In 2015, Synergy was brought on to the RISE project to provide the management information system. The Conditional Cash Transfer Management Information System (Bahamas CCTMIS) was an automated system implemented for the Ministry of Social Services and Community Development of The Bahamas within the framework of the Social Safety Net Reform Program. The system's overall objective was to support the Ministry in its initiative of introducing safety net reforms to transform the social assistance programmes launched in the country into a CCT programme. The system facilitated processing of social assistance applications to determine programme eligibility and execute payments. The evaluation of beneficiary households was assessed through a proxy means test. The system was also designed to replace the paper-based workflows and static spreadsheets with a fully integrated tracking and reporting tool. The Bahamas CCTMIS served as a unified information hub on the social assistance offered within the framework of the CCT programme and streamlined the verification process, thereby ensuring that benefits were reaching the right people. It also helped produce reports that summarised the full scope of benefits provided to assistance recipients.

In 2017, Synergy's primary involvement in the RISE programme ended, coinciding with the postponing and eventual cancellation of the programme by the government. The reasons for cancellation will be expanded on in following sections.

External/exogenous variables

Here we present a set of variables that were beyond the implementer's control and which ultimately placed limitations on the successful adoption of the system.

- **Programme funding structure (2012–2017):**

The government budget for the RISE programme remained consistent for the duration of the programme's life cycle. The Bahamian government directly funded a very low percentage of the overall budget, as the IDB contributed most of the funds.

The donor funding structure was a loan from the IDB with a semi-in-kind contribution from the government, initially of USD15 million, increasing to USD17 million (Nassau Guardian 2012; 2013) and eventually coming to a total of USD9.75 million spent, of which 77 per cent were IDB funds and 23 per cent directly from the government (Smith 2017). The remaining loan funds were cancelled following review and cancellation of the programme.

Overall, based on our conversations with the Ministry (Humes 2019; Sawyer 2019; Roach 2019), the donor funding structure (loan instead of grant) was not perceived as having a substantial impact on the programme. Funding was there to continue RISE when the government changed; however, the RISE programme's design delays ultimately caused the cancellation. A change of government would have resulted in a restructure of social protection efforts regardless of funding structure. Thus, this variable does not contribute strongly to the ultimate cancellation of the programme.

- **Government changes (2017):** This resulted in the largest uncontrollable impact on the programme. The 2012 elections saw the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) rise to power following defeat in 2007. The PLP controlled 76 per cent of Assembly seats, compared to 24 per cent by the Free National Movement (FNM) (Caribbean Elections 2012). The RISE programme was one of the new initiatives rolled out by the new government. In 2017, power shifted radically, as the FNM won 90 per cent of seats, while the PLP was left with just 10 per cent (Caribbean Elections 2017). This ideological leadership change resulted in a performance review of RISE, and its eventual cancellation. The reasons given for cancellation by the new government included an "inability to meet the deliverables in a timely way" (Jones Jr. 2019).

Controllable/endogenous variables

The following analysis looks at factors within the control of the implementers, the Ministry of Social Services, and various partners through the life cycle of RISE. The slowdowns in procurement and design made it politically easy for FNM leadership to cancel RISE in 2017.

- **Planning (2004–2013):** RISE was incredibly well planned by the government and the Ministry of Social Services and had

almost a decade of preparation. As previously mentioned, Bahamian social protection efforts began in 1979 and had a variety of programmes offering mostly education and food grants. In 2004 an IDB research study revealed that social protection efforts in operation at the time had no digital tracking—and were thus highly labour-intensive (Martin 2004)—and had a lack of accountability within the distribution of funds (Turnquest 2017). Shortly after the 2004 study was published, the Ministry began conversations about what would eventually become RISE in 2012.

- **Procurement (2012–2015):** The RISE program launched in 2012 following a year of programme design coordination with the IDB and the government. The IDB and the Government of The Bahamas agreed on a USD15 million loan to launch the programme. The procurement goal was to improve the monitoring of the portfolio of social protection programmes to ensure transparent service delivery, consolidate all social protection efforts, create an information system to support tracking of the programme and digitisation of social protection, and ensure that those most needing grants would not be crowded out by those less at risk (Nassau Guardian 2012). The window of the loan was 2012–2017.

The programme never truly got off the ground until August 2015 (Best 2015). While details are somewhat scarce, given the scale and ambition of the programme, we conclude that there were significant delays in the design phase of the programme because the management information system was not procured until 2015. RISE remained in programme design phase from 2012 to 2014, and funding from the IDB increased to USD17 million following positive reports on the programme's goals (Nassau Guardian 2013). The government also had to determine the metrics of conditionality used to judge eligibility, and it seems these metrics evolved during the initial stages of the programme. In 2013 there were plans for eligibility conditionality to be based on attendance at a 'healthy weight clinic' for individuals with 'at-risk weights' (ibid.), and education attendance. However, by the pilot phase of the programme in early 2017, conditionality was based on education attendance and attainment (90 per cent attendance and 2.0 Grade Point Average) and health clinic attendance, but also parenting classes and attendance at prenatal clinics.

- **Design (2015–2016):** Many aspects of the design were hailed by the academic community as highly innovative, especially the at-risk weight conditionality (ibid.). However, there is an argument to be made that the programme was overdesigned, which led to its cancellation. Some 60 per cent of the loan's five-year time period was spent in the design phase, delaying pilot implementation, thus perhaps a focus on ambitious design was detrimental to the programme.
- **Software features and implementation (2015–2016):** A variety of software services were provided to the Ministry to execute service delivery. Based on interviews with members of the Ministry of Social Services (Humes, Sawyer and Roach), all features were fully operational by the time of pilot implementation in 2016. Major system features were:

- **Data migration:** This module allows the Ministry to transfer previously collected data on 1,500–2,000 eligible households into a new system.
- **Application:** The system allows individuals to apply for benefits and manage the registry of applications.
- **Targeting:** The SPIS allows eligibility calculations based on pre-defined parameters (proxy means test) and can be entered by a case aide visiting the applicant's house for verification.
- **Enrolment:** The system tracks eligible and pending households and transfers those eligible households into the 'active household' database to receive benefits.
- **Compliance:** This feature allows continued monitoring of active households based on monthly conditionality checks such as school or health clinic attendance.
- **Case management:** This module allows tracking of a variety of features, including changes in eligibility of households (graduation, lack of compliance, re-certification), complaints, appeals and referrals.
- **Payment:** The SPIS transfers the necessary information to the bank to distribute funds to the VISA cards.
- **Administration:** This module manages the permissions of the system to ensure data security.
- **Reports and analytics:** This module allows users to study results by creating dashboards and examining key programme performance indicators.
- **Documentation:** The system allows the storage and management of programme documents.
- **Schedule tracking:** To ensure households remained complaint, verification meetings were required. The system allows the tracking and management of these meeting schedules.
- **Implementation approach and roll-out (2016–2017):** By mid-2016, full programme design had been completed, and a functional system was in place to execute the programme. The pilot programme ran successfully from 2016 to early 2017, with enrollees receiving benefits via VISA cards, and the system tracking conditionality requirements. The programme was just in the process of scaling up when it was reviewed and cancelled in mid to late 2017. Government analysis reported that RISE was not meeting its goals by the necessary timelines. The cancellation was so drastic that some beneficiaries had already received VISA cards, but money had not yet been loaded, and no transfers were executed (Smith 2017).

While RISE may have been cancelled, the system was and is being repurposed for other social protection efforts. Minister of Social Services Peter Turnquest stated in 2019 that there were significant lessons learned from RISE that would be applied

to current and future social protection work, also noting that funding for an overall portfolio of social protection had increased by USD1.6 million (Jones Jr. 2019). “This administration saw the value in the program, which was centered on alleviating poverty in The Bahamas by changing behavior to bring about improvements in education and health of those in the lower income class. To this end, we took away some of the positive lessons from the RISE program and integrated them into our core service offerings, so that those that would have been assisted by the program initially would not lose their net benefit” (Turnquest 2019).

Lessons learned

The major lessons learned on this project surround the variables outlined above pertaining to procurement, design and government changes.

Ultimately, it was due to the 2017 elections that RISE was cancelled. However, there is a real possibility that if procurement and pilot implementation had happened earlier in the programme life cycle, RISE could have survived massive political overhaul. Once the pilot programme began delivering benefits, it was successful, and if it had scaled up earlier, cancelling it could have been a political minefield for the newly elected government.

Our experience in The Bahamas has taught us the need for a design process that is rapid, iterative and constantly evolving. While we use that approach in our software development for our systems, those methods often struggle to apply in non-software contexts. It is difficult for new government leaders to start their political careers by removing benefits from people who have become comfortable receiving them. However, it is extremely easy for new government officials to construct a very different narrative about a programme that spent years being designed before starting to transfer benefits to individuals. While RISE had incredible ambitions and innovative ideas about conditionally, ultimately there was a need to just start small, work out the bugs and scale up iteratively alongside programme partners. Overdesigning ambitious projects is a real danger, and RISE would have benefited from awareness of this pitfall during its early stages. All was not lost, however: Synergy is currently in communication with partners in the Bahamian government to use the system for post-Hurricane Dorian social protection efforts. As Peter Turnquest (2019) stated, The Bahamas is evolving its social protection efforts using lessons learned from RISE.

In future work in this sector, organisations can learn from this case that a good implementation model for ambitious social protection ventures such as RISE is to implement in stages and not all at once. A simple information system and service delivery could be tested on a small population in a few villages, gradually expanding the scope of eligibility and regional coverage. Governments, funders and development organisations can work together to shape proposals and programme plans that take these factors into consideration on future projects.

4 Indonesia—*Geunaseh Sabang* case study

Modern Indonesian social protection efforts began in 1998, following the Asian financial crisis of 1997. The financial crisis resulted in a threefold food/commodity price spike. This led to Indonesia’s national poverty rate jumping from 15 per cent to 33 per cent in just two years (Sumarto 2011). The Government

of Indonesia, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank responded quickly in 1998, with a large social protection initiative encompassing multiple programmes across education, health, rice delivery, CCTs and UCTs. Overall, USD1 million was allocated to these efforts in 1998, the first time such an effort was undertaken in the country (ibid.). Over time, these efforts scaled up, and in 2010 the Indonesian government established the National Team for Accelerating Poverty Reduction (TNP2K) to oversee all social protection efforts.

Following the establishment of the TNP2K, there have been marginal but steady increases in social protection efforts, with the 2015–2019 TNP2K focusing on improving the national targeting system, scaling up and unifying local programmes into more national ones, and improving monitoring and evaluation (TNP2K 2019). In 2018 UNICEF and the Government of Aceh entered into an agreement to scale up eight local initiatives of similar mission throughout eight districts of Aceh. All such programmes were unconditional cash grants based on the number/age of children (child cash grant programmes).

One such local programme being scaled up is *Geunaseh Sabang* on the island of Sabang (Nurdin 2019). Aceh has received special assistance from the Indonesian government since the devastating tsunami of 2004 which killed almost 200,000 people in the province. Sabang, an island with around 34,000 inhabitants, provided unconditional education transfers for all children under the age of 17 from 2016 to 2018 (Martha, UNICEF Indonesia, personal communication 2019). The scaling efforts will include this programme plus additional UCTs to parents for all children aged 0–6 years on the island. The goal of this scaling effort is to increase children’s consumption of nutritious food in addition to their school attendance. To date, 4,000 additional beneficiaries have been added to the programme under these new conditions (ibid.).

Synergy joined the scaling of the Aceh social protection efforts in early 2019. Fitting under the TNP2K’s national goal of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of national targeting, and improved monitoring and evaluation, a system is being built to integrate with the national population administration system (SIAK), manage, enrol and verify all current and new programme beneficiaries and evaluate ongoing progress. This system assists the scaling efforts of the similar child cash grant programmes in eight districts of Aceh.

Lessons learned

The *Geunaseh Sabang* programme is a perfect example of the agile development methodology being applied outside software development and at programme design level. In The Bahamas, political instability impacted the RISE programme. However, while RISE was a ‘top-down’ programme, fundamentally changing the country-wide social protection structure, the efforts in Indonesia are ‘bottom-up’, iteratively scaling up local efforts.

The TNP2K was founded in 2010 with the main goal to “integrate and harmonize poverty reduction programs”, and it survived political instability from the outset. It was created shortly after the 2009 Indonesian elections, which saw the Demokrat party (centre-right) rise to power. In the 2014 and 2019 elections, the Democratic Party of Struggle (centre-left) won the majority and maintained and even increased the TNP2K’s funding both

times (Prokurat 2016). This is probably because the TNP2K does not have a specific set of political objectives that it is seeking to carry out. At the programme level, it simply seeks to optimise and scale up efforts working well at the local level.

Thus, Indonesia seems to be seeking a social protection model of standardising how beneficiaries are identified and determined eligible, and modernising service delivery and evaluation, but it does not seek to issue national-level direction for programmes. This allows for local and organic efforts to take shape, and the successful ones to scale up iteratively, as is currently occurring in eight districts of Aceh. In 2016–2018, *Geunaseh Sabang* distributed solely education grants. In 2018, data were released documenting how 26.5 per cent of toddlers had stunted growth (Sabang City Government 2019). This resulted in a quick reshaping of the programme by UNICEF and the government to add a nutrition grant, thus efficiently scaling up the programme's efforts. Time will tell if this specific model is successful in Indonesia; however, even if programmes come and go, this ability to shift the structure of specific social protection efforts as new needs are identified will enable Indonesia to respond quickly to the needs of its people.

5 Conclusion

Agile methodology is a commonly used process spanning from project management to software development, and the applications to social protection work are demonstrated in these cases. Social protection efforts are fundamentally dependent on political stability and government funding. Thus, for efforts to be sustainable, programmes must be able to quickly roll out a minimally viable programme and deliver to beneficiaries, or risk being delayed by administrative processes, with a high risk of cancellation if the government changes. Timor-Leste and

Indonesia demonstrate smaller CCT/UCT programmes achieving agile success with bi-partisan support, and thus have been able to scale up efforts. The Bahamas demonstrates the opposite case, where an attempt to restructure all social protection efforts under one overarching programme, which was technically complicated, resulted in eventual cancellation of the programme and re-allocation of funding. Policymakers should be cautious of grand restructuring ambitions and should focus instead on identifying what is already most efficiently delivering benefits to vulnerable populations, and using emerging technology to scale up these efforts.

Social protection efforts should aim to deliver maximum benefits to those in need, as quickly and efficiently as possible, with minimum funds spent on administrative costs. Technological advancements over the past decade have allowed some countries, with the assistance of Synergy and other technology-focused international development firms, to build information systems allowing for fast, efficient and easily monitored distribution of funds, enabling rapid service delivery and accountability. These systems have also enabled countries to deliver benefits to populations previously difficult to serve, such as indigenous, homeless or disabled populations. The efficiency of these social protection efforts, however, depends on the structure of the programme itself. We have found that agile programmes, focused on scaling up successful pilot programmes, have been durable to political instability and provide more efficient delivery to beneficiaries. While programmes that seek top-down reform and national-level change can still be successful, they also face high administrative design and execution risks. The best way to protect and insulate social protection programmes from political instability and harmful external variables is to prove that they work at a local level and grow them iteratively over time.

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