

**Maintains**

Research supporting social services to adapt to shocks

Opportunities of, and obstacles to, the utilisation of the Enhanced Single Registry

Findings from social protection research in Kenya

POLICY BRIEF | January 2021

Introduction

Over the last 10 years, the Kenyan social protection sector has evolved and expanded significantly. The 2011 Social Protection Policy introduced a vision of increasing coverage, improving coordination, and bringing about greater integration of programmes and services. As part of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection's (MLSP) activities to transform the National Safety Net Programme into a responsive, harmonised social protection programme, a social registry – the Enhanced Single Registry (ESR) – is being developed. The ESR will allow other governmental and non-governmental programmes to use its data to target vulnerable and poor Kenyans during normal times as well as during shocks. This policy brief highlights the key findings and recommendations from research undertaken by Maintains and presents those most relevant to the roll-out of the ESR (for more details, see the full report [here](#)).

Box 1: Objectives and approach to this study

In order for the ESR to be used by governmental and non-governmental programmes to deliver social protection programmes during both normal times and during times of shock, it is important to ensure that the views and needs of the potential users of the ESR at the county (and national) level are reflected in its design. While some initial consultations on this had previously taken place, it was felt that Maintains could usefully provide additional insights. As a result, the primary objectives of this research study were to:

- Investigate what opportunities county level stakeholders see for the roll-out of the ESR and its use for delivering programming;
- Assess what obstacles might hinder the successful roll-out and uptake of the ESR by a wide range of stakeholders at the county and national level, including gaps in understanding; and
- Explore perceptions of the role the ESR could play in enabling shock-responsive programming during times of shock.

To gather data against these objectives, this study comprised two research activities. The first was a qualitative exploration of views on the ESR's usability, including as a tool for improving shock-responsiveness. In this vein, the research team engaged with 122 stakeholders, both at the national level and across 12 of the counties prioritised for ESR roll-out. The second research activity was a data quality assessment of the data contained in the Single Registry, focusing on the completeness, relevance, currency, accessibility, and accuracy of the data as well as issues of data protection in relation to shock-responsive social protection.

Opportunities and barriers to utilisation of the ESR'

Overall, stakeholders were enthusiastic about the concept of the ESR. For most, it was a new idea, but the potential value is clear across a range of programmes and departments at national and county levels. Advantage is seen in the ESR contributing to improved coordination, impartial targeting of development and resilience-building efforts, and creating greater transparency on who is benefiting from different initiatives.

At the county level, there is very limited awareness of the Single Registry and no awareness of the plans for the ESR. While the latter is understandable, communication and capacity building needs to be rapidly improved if there is to be wider buy-in and use of the system.

For the ESR to be effective and sustainable, it must become a cross-government system with shared ownership and value; thus, the process of developing the ESR must be inclusive of a range of stakeholders. These stakeholders should have a role in decisions on data collection approaches and sensitisation, which require a whole-of-government approach. No single ministry or agency has the convening power or capacity to do this alone.

Effective data collection is key to the ESR's success. Most interviewees favoured census-style data collection, which will be more expensive but will yield a more comprehensive dataset that could be of more value for shock-responsive social protection as it could include those vulnerable to a range of shocks. If a census-style approach is not followed, there needs to be flexibility in data collection within counties driven by broader considerations than just county-level poverty rate: areas with a high incidence of covariate shocks and vulnerability may require more extensive data collection exercises.

Data management is currently an area of weakness; there needs to be wide ownership and mechanisms for the system to be effectively kept up to date. This requires greater decentralisation alongside investments in capacity building and a digital system that can rapidly capture updates and feedback, with a central independent means of cleaning and verifying data. User access must be linked to user obligations to help maintain data currency, complemented by clear means of oversight.

The quality of the data currently stored in the Single Registry was not found to be sufficient to provide a useful resource for shock response. Most importantly, the Single Registry data currently covers only a small proportion of the vulnerable population in Kenya, with limited coverage of the vulnerable population in urban areas (as the COVID-19 shock has shown). The data accessible through the Single Registry are also not sufficient for planning, targeting, and delivery purposes, with core operational variables missing from the database (including full contact details and sufficiently detailed geo-location data). This is exacerbated by data quality issues, such as missing values, which undermine the utility of the data. Finally, the process for accessing this data is also bureaucratic and slow, further limiting the potential use of the Single Registry for shock response, which often requires swift action.

Finally, it is notable that **the prevalent interest in the ESR from stakeholders was to use it to avoid 'double dipping'**. While there are instances where this makes sense, there is a danger that spreading social protection support too thinly, and not sequencing, layering, and integrating social assistance and complementary interventions appropriately, might undermine resilience-building efforts and thereby hinder poverty reduction.

Recommendations

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed just how valuable it could be to have a comprehensive single registry to aid the delivery and coordination of a wide range of social protection interventions that are shock-responsive and that target those most in need. The ESR offers great potential to support a more shock-responsive social protection system in Kenya but there

remain several challenges. A number of recommendations follow to address these:

- 1. The Social Protection Secretariat (SPS) should create awareness among government stakeholders** (across ministries and at the county level) on the plans for the ESR, and its potential for facilitating improved shock

response and resilience building, in order to get buy-in at the county level and to provide clarity on governance and operational processes.

2. **The ESR must be a multi-agency effort if it is to succeed**, with genuine consultation with potential users to ensure buy-in and agreement on the design and delivery. No single agency alone can deliver the ambition for the ESR.
3. **Sensitisation campaigns are required to ensure that all vulnerable people are registered**; these should have a specific focus on particularly excluded or marginal groups, and should be developed by each county to ensure that they are tailored to the county's reality. Data collection should involve multi-sectoral and gender-balanced teams, and be inclusive of county governments and potential shock responders.
4. **Data collection methods should not be guided by poverty rates alone** but should also consider the specific vulnerabilities of different individuals (e.g. in relation to sex, age, ability, orientation, socio-economic status, and other sources of marginalisation) to different shocks.
5. **A clear policy directive from the MLSP and subsequent training for those implementing social protection and complementary programmes, including during times of shock, is needed** to ensure a coherent approach to the utilisation of the ESR. This should ensure that the ESR is not used as a tool

to spread resources sub-optimally but rather as a tool to sequence, layer, and integrate initiatives to facilitate the reduction of poverty and to increase resilience to shocks.

6. **Greater decentralisation is required in relation to data management for the ESR.** This will require careful consideration of the structures that are best placed to manage these data, significant capacity investments, and a change in the institutional culture of the MLSP.

Additionally, the following learnings emanate from the Single Registry and have implications for the development of the ESR:

7. **The quality of data stored in the Single Registry, and by implication the ESR, will need to be improved** to maximise the database's utility. A data improvement plan could be put together by the SPS for this purpose.
8. **The process for accessing data through the Single Registry needs to be documented by the SPS and streamlined** to facilitate rapid data access. Data access should be coupled with clear obligations on the user in terms of data protection and their obligations to feed data back to the Single Registry from complementary programmes. The same will apply to the ESR.



About Maintains in Kenya

Research focused on the design and implementation of a social registry in Kenya is topical for both the global debate and programming within Kenya. Under the World Bank's Kenya Social and Economic Inclusion Project (KSEIP), efforts to improve the shock-responsiveness of the social protection sector are a priority. The development of a social registry is a useful condition for building a shock-responsive social protection system, and many factors have to be considered in its design and implementation for it to actually become a viable tool that actors will want to actively use.

The Maintains research on social protection in Kenya focuses on providing operationally relevant insights to the SPS, the World Bank Team working on KSEIP, and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which complement activities conducted as part of the roll-out of the ESR. The research focus for this study was jointly developed and agreed, and the objective of the research is to provide additional information and address gaps in understanding directly linked to

developing and implementing the ESR. In addition to being of relevance to the investment in building a social registry in Kenya, the research findings will also contribute to the global debate on social registries and further our understanding of the impact of design and implementation choices for the roll-out of a social registry and its potential use for delivering shock-responsive social protection.

About Maintains

Maintains is a five-year (2018–2023) operational research programme building a strong evidence base on how health, education, nutrition, and social protection systems can respond more quickly, reliably, and effectively to changing needs during and after shocks, whilst also maintaining existing services. Maintains is working in six focal countries—Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Uganda—undertaking research to build evidence and providing technical assistance to support practical implementation. Lessons from this work will be used to inform policy and practice at both national and global levels.

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