Report:
Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-affected Settings

Wednesday 11 – Friday 13 February 2026

In association with
the Foreign, Commonwealth
and Development Office

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Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

COP	Conference of the Parties
FCAS	Fragile and conflict-affected settings
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IDA	International Development Association
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PFM	Public Financial Management
SoDMA	Somali Disaster Management Agency
UN	United Nations

Summary

In February 2026, following on from the [High-Level Panel on Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings](#) (FCAS), 40 key stakeholders met to take forward some of the Panel's recommendations as set out in the Catalytic Agenda[1], at both global and country levels. Convened by Wilton Park and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), participants included national government representatives, bilateral development and humanitarian partners, International Financial Institution representatives, humanitarian, climate and peace actors, and other key stakeholders. The event focused primarily on financing solutions and humanitarian–development transitions, with particular attention to Somalia (Annex 1) and Syria (Annex 2) to anchor the discussions, alongside the role of global and regional actors (Annex 3).

The dialogue took place at a critical juncture for Somalia, Syria and wider global debates. In Somalia, the social protection system has made significant progress and is being called on to respond to the current drought whilst also needing to be strengthened and sustained. In Syria, the political transition has created an opportunity for social protection to contribute to stability and recovery. Globally, there is growing recognition of the critical role social protection plays in meeting basic needs, strengthening resilience and building state-citizen trust in FCAS. However, so much more can be done to maximise this potential.

Over three days of interactive discussions participants aligned around a shared approach to strengthening social protection in FCAS, identifying strategies, forging partnerships and setting out priority next steps for engagement, to shift from 'using a mop, to fixing the broken pipe'.

Outcomes of the dialogue

There was agreement that social protection in FCAS is both possible and necessary, but it remains marginal in these contexts where it is most needed. Participants discussed how social protection can stabilise societies, protect the most vulnerable people, and reduce reliance on repeated humanitarian surges, yet structural barriers

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-protection-for-stability-a-catalytic-agenda

keep it under-prioritised and under-financed. Key conclusions reached during the discussions were:

- **The central challenge is not technical design alone**, but misaligned incentives, risk aversion, fragmentation of financing, and political sensitivity of working with and through national systems in contested, conflict-affected and low-trust environments.
- **Humanitarian-social protection linkages and transitions need to be designed as two-way 'on and off-ramps' or 'bridges', not one-off handovers**, with explicit pathways to and from nationally led or hybrid arrangements. This includes developing protocols for temporary shifts away from state delivery during acute turbulence and return when conditions allow – agreed at global level but implemented at local level.
- **Both greater investment in social protection and improvements in how finance is structured are required.** Short funding cycles, earmarking, and fragmented instruments produce projectised social protection provision and incoherent systems. The dialogue set out the case for more and better-designed pooled funding approaches – across social protection, transition, and hybrid models – designed from a government perspective and tailored to different FCAS contexts. Stronger links to climate finance, disaster risk financing, and strategies to expand domestic resources were also emphasised.
- **Somalia and Syria have different entry points for investing in the national social protection system, but similar windows of opportunity.** Somalia's trajectory demonstrates that nationally anchored systems can be built amid fragility, while Syria's transition highlights the importance of building legitimacy, trust, and robust data governance. In both contexts, progress depends on sustaining and aligning financing behind national systems. Moreover, building on existing workforce capacity, strengthening accountability to affected populations, and engaging constructively with local solidarity mechanisms are key factors in the foundational building blocks of inclusive and conflict-sensitive social protection.

- **Too much is being asked of FCAS governments, and too little of donors and international institutions.** Participants questioned whether risk frameworks, governance of aid allocations, and institutional incentives are compatible with the stated ambition to back national systems and sustain financing through turbulence. Identifying ways to re-calibrate and develop supportive approaches included investing through pooled funds and joint risk assessments.

The value, limits and overall approach to social protection in FCAS

Participants shared consistent evidence of social protection as a driver of political and economic outcomes. They agreed with the Catalytic Agenda's emphasis on its role in protecting livelihoods, strengthening social cohesion and legitimacy, and reducing reliance on reactive humanitarian responses, including to climate shocks.

The dialogue also set out the limits of social protection, agreeing that while social protection cannot do everything, it can contribute to stability by reducing grievances and harmful coping strategies, support education and livelihoods, and provide predictable support during shocks.

Participants also cautioned against treating social protection as a "container concept" for all expectations – especially as expectations can backfire if mismanaged, stressing the importance of proactive communications (which global actors can support local actors with).

The harder discussion focused on delivery: contexts differ and require sequenced, conflict-sensitive and adaptive approaches, building where possible on existing foundations. Participants explored how to realise the benefits of social protection under real constraints, without worsening conflict dynamics or undermining humanitarian principles. The agreement was that many examples of 'promising practices' exist for this (as the High-Level Panel's Enquiry showed), which should be leveraged and built upon.

Overcoming the barriers to strengthening social protection in FCAS

The dialogue strongly echoed the Catalytic Agenda's diagnosis that social protection remains marginal in FCAS despite evidence of feasibility and necessity. The Catalytic Agenda identifies structural obstacles, including political narrative and buy-in, design and delivery challenges, chronic underinvestment, siloed approaches, and insufficiently resilient systems, reinforced by risk avoidance and weak transition planning. The discussions provided concrete illustrations of these barriers in practice in focus countries, but also others.

Developing the narrative and political buy-in

A recurring barrier is that social protection is still too often perceived narrowly as welfare, rather than as a strategic investment in stability, legitimacy, and recovery. The dialogue repeatedly returned to the importance of language and framing in strengthening support for social protection both within governments and more broadly across societies. In some settings, rights-based language was seen as essential and foundational; in others, particularly under constrained fiscal politics, a social investment framing can resonate more effectively with finance actors and sceptical audiences.

Participants emphasised that narrative is not cosmetic: it shapes whether social protection is treated as central to national strategy and whether external actors justify sustained engagement – meaning that global and local alliances to help shape that narrative (and build further evidence for it, where necessary) will matter going forwards.

Investing in design and delivery: people, data, and systems

Design challenges in FCAS are less about missing models than about the gap between idealised designs and the realities of contested governance, weak delivery chains, and under-resourced local actors. Examples include fragmented registries, unreliable payment systems, weak recognition of local solidarity mechanisms, and the risks of digital solutions without safeguards, alongside the frequent absence of transition planning.

The dialogue stressed that technology cannot substitute for people: social protection workers, local governance, and frontline capacity were highlighted as central to system resilience, while digital tools were seen as useful (especially to showcase Public Financial Management (PFM) and accountability-related capacities for future funding and compliance), but insufficient.

Moving away from chronic underinvestment and the "wrong kind" of finance

Underinvestment is not only about inadequate volume; it is also about volatility, short cycles, and risk avoidance that produce stop-start programmes and parallel systems. Participants described a financing environment in which social protection was already chronically underfunded and is now shaped by shrinking humanitarian and development budgets, restructuring within agencies, and high competition for limited resources. These pressures were linked to fragmentation, which ultimately affects outcomes in recipient countries: many small financing packages, each with its own requirements and 'earmarking', and incentives for agencies to compete for visibility while demonstrating 'impact' against narrowly defined objectives such as number of people served, rather than contribution to system strengthening.

Phasing out siloed approaches and weak transition planning

Humanitarian, development, peace and climate actors still too often operate in parallel, even when rhetoric emphasises nexus approaches. Participants emphasised that transition planning is too often late or absent. As an emblematic example, data handovers are disrupted by (generic/vague rather than specific) data protection, privacy and security concerns in the absence of agreed protocols and thorough risk management frameworks.

There were thus calls for humanitarian cash and protection programming to more systematically link with social protection so that this could serve as a 'ramp' or 'bridge' into developing and strengthening national systems. Within this, priorities should be set by national actors from a systems building, comprehensive (across all social protection pillars), medium-term, capacity-informed viewpoint, and not by humanitarian agencies.

Investing in resilient systems and financing through crises

A core FCAS reality is that systems are most needed when they are most likely to fail; contingency planning and shock-response mechanisms can sustain systems during turbulence. This was discussed as both a technical and political conversation, hinging on the importance of 'continuity of support'. When conflict escalates or governance shifts, risk tolerance often decreases precisely when maintaining support is most important. Participants stressed that the goal should be to protect support, including through temporary shifts in delivery modality that keep the same system architecture alive.

Operationalising linkages and transitions

The dialogue placed linkages and transitions at the centre, explicitly focusing on Catalytic Agenda recommendation 3 ("work with and through national systems as the default, where feasible") **and recommendation 4** ("design humanitarian and social protection systems with clear pathways to and from nationally led or hybrid arrangements"). The discussions moved beyond general endorsement and into operational tensions: risk, trust, data, accountability, contested control, and the practical politics of "defaulting" to national systems.

Conflict is not an automatic red line

A key corrective to common practice was the insistence that conflict is not automatically a red line for engaging with national systems. Participants repeatedly challenged the assumption that FCAS lack social protection capacity, describing this as a myth in many contexts – including the hyper-prioritised Humanitarian Reset list. The issue was framed not as absence, but as uneven maturity, fragmentation, and contested legitimacy.

The dialogue also emphasised that "government" (best defined as the 'state' as less political connotation) **should not be treated as a single counterpart**: engaging with national systems requires granular political economy and conflict analysis to identify where capacity, legitimacy, and reach exist (across different Ministries and levels of implementation), and where hybrid or indirect arrangements are necessary.

From linear handovers to two-way transitions

Parallel humanitarian systems were widely recognised as too often being the automatic default. The dialogue stressed that transitions should not be understood as linear "handovers" from humanitarian to government delivery. Instead, systems in FCAS need to enable movement in both directions: humanitarian programmes should have credible pathways into national or hybrid systems, while national systems should allow temporary shifts away from state delivery when conflict, displacement, or contested governance disrupt normal functioning ('on and off-ramps'). This two-way framing helps reconcile humanitarian principles with system-building, avoiding both unsafe reliance on state systems and the entrenchment of parallel structures.

Data interoperability as necessary but political

Data was repeatedly described as foundational, but contested based on who produces and controls it, what it reveals or obscures, and how it can shift power away from affected people. In Somalia and Syria, fragmented registries and limited interoperability were cited as major barriers to coherence and transition. Participants stressed, however, that technical fixes alone cannot resolve the underlying political economy of data. In Syria in particular, concerns about data sharing were seen as a central constraint in moving towards nationally anchored systems. The dialogue reinforced calls for clear and detailed protocols for data sharing and handover between humanitarian and national systems, alongside safeguards against digital exclusion, privacy violations and misuse.

Trust and diversion in design and delivery

Trust and the potential for aid diversion emerged as central factors in whether the commitment to "back national systems" can work. Discussions highlighted that trust is shaped by delivery experience, transparency, and grievance response, and not by rhetoric alone. Participants repeatedly returned to the reality of corruption and diversion. Terminology was also highlighted as important: "corruption" as a blanket label can be damaging and imprecise, while "diversion" may capture specific patterns such as post-delivery extraction by gatekeepers. Diversion was highlighted as both a risk and a potential outcome of design that inadvertently "supports" it, for example when community selection processes or the role of local intermediaries are structured in ways that concentrate power without accountability.

The dialogue stressed the need for greater attention to stronger transparency and accountability in government led systems and for greater dialogue and communication between governments and civil society to build trust in national systems and to connect formal and less formal forms of social protection.

Local capacity sustains systems

Sustainable transitions depend on local governance, frontline workers, and two-way dialogue with communities. Participants emphasised that system resilience in FCAS is maintained by the people who keep programmes running during shocks: local officials, social workers, community intermediaries, and civil society actors. Yet current investments often prioritise central systems over local capacity.

More attention was seen as needed to better support frontline workers and social workers. Existing disaster management and crisis response structures were highlighted as effective channels for communication and feedback, while grievance redress and community-level dialogue were seen as core system functions underpinning trust, legitimacy, and adaptive delivery.

Operationalising sustainable and domestic financing

The dialogue also explicitly focused on Catalytic Agenda recommendation 5 ("invest in long-term financing strategies to support nationally led systems") **and recommendation 6** ("increase domestic contributions by linking social protection to the social contract and demonstrating its value to economic stability and recovery"). Participants highlighted that financing discussions are both technical and political: volumes matter, but governance, incentives and risk frameworks matter just as much.

Fragmentation undermines system-building

A repeated message was that the issue is not only scarcity of financing, but fragmented flows and misaligned incentives that undermine systems. Participants repeatedly noted that funding rarely supports long-term system building, instead flowing through short-term, overlapping initiatives with separate rules and reporting requirements. This fragmentation creates duplication, inefficiency and competition for visibility, reinforcing parallel structures rather than coherence.

Incentives set by and within donor agencies and implementing organisations were seen as a major issue, prioritising rapid delivery and attribution over alignment with national systems, weakening coordination and sustainability – with a call to address these as a matter of urgency.

Constraints to domestic financing

Domestic financing for social protection in FCAS is constrained by fiscal limits and political realities. Participants emphasised that while linking social protection to the social contract is important, expectations must reflect limited fiscal space and uneven revenue capacity. In Syria, discussions stressed the need to match ambition to budget reality, framing domestic financing not only as a technical issue but as a longer-term political project dependent on trust, transparency, and visible delivery. In Somalia, domestic resources were described as severely constrained, with remittances and Zakat playing significant but politically sensitive roles.

There was discussion about opportunities for government to support more formal Zakat structures and to engage more with other forms of community led support but also the need to manage legitimacy risks relating to government playing greater roles in previously local solidarity mechanisms (see crosscutting Section below for details).

Opportunities and challenges of climate finance

Climate finance was repeatedly framed as a major opportunity for social protection to tap into, but one that both the sector and FCAS struggle to access. This was seen as a missed opportunity given the exposure of FCAS to climate risk, and the role well-designed social protection systems can play in building resilience and supporting households to cope with and recover from climate-related shocks.

In the dialogue participants noted that a number of 'hooks' now exist that could be capitalised on, including:

- Social protection indicators, performance metrics and references now appear in global climate frameworks e.g. the Global Goal on Adaptation indicator list was recently expanded to include social protection and the COP30 Belém Declaration has a strong focus on the sector;
- There is increasing evidence of climate-relevant impacts of cash transfers, cash-plus, and public works approaches, especially where these have been designed with these objectives in mind;
- Many countries have included social protection in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0s) and useful guidance has been developed to support this process;
- Climate funds have acknowledged they are channelling insufficient funding to FCAS and are committed to addressing this.

Yet access barriers persist, including accreditation gaps and complex processes that fragile institutions struggle to meet – which participants stressed global actors could more systematically support in addressing, with a focus at country level.

From risk avoidance to controlled risk engagement

Risk avoidance often intensifies precisely when continuity of support is most needed. Participants repeatedly noted that financing and delivery arrangements are most likely to contract or pause during periods of conflict or political turbulence, despite rising needs. Discussions linked this pattern to institutional incentives and rigid risk frameworks that prioritise reputational protection over system continuity.

Participants argued for a shift from risk avoidance to more deliberate risk management frameworks, both at global and country-level, including clearer red lines, shared responsibility across institutions, and financing and delivery models that allow temporary modality shifts without dismantling underlying system architecture. They stressed these risks cannot be held by individuals working at country levels, but need to be pre-defined and pre-agreed, and held institutionally (with country-based staff adapting these to country circumstances).

Structural constrains on financing

Financing patterns reveal structural constraints that go beyond coordination failures. While aggregate social protection financing in FCAS increased in 2024, this growth was driven largely by Ukraine. Excluding Ukraine, financing for other protracted crises remains low and has grown only marginally. At the same time, international financing has become increasingly concentrated, with the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) accounting for most flows. Participants noted that this concentration raises concerns about resilience as bilateral aid budgets tighten and humanitarian funding declines, increasing the risk that social protection financing becomes more volatile precisely where needs are highest.

A strong call for country pooled funds

'What is stopping us from more pooled funding?' was a recurring question whenever financing was discussed. There was a very strong call, especially from national participants, for more and better-designed pooled approaches across social protection, transition, and hybrid models, designed with government leadership at the forefront and tailored to different FCAS contexts.

Participants noted that levels of familiarity with different pooled fund models varied widely, and that views on their advantages and drawbacks often reflected which models individuals had experienced in practice. Some reservations were expressed towards the OCHA-managed pooled funds, and a request was made to systematically map the characteristics of 'successful pooled fund models' – particularly those that are risk taking and transition focused - to inform decision-making and experimentation, including through early adopters providing proof of concept.

Cross-cutting issues that shaped the dialogue

"Are we asking too much of social protection?" reframed as "are we asking too little of ourselves?"

The "too much" question served as a proxy for deeper concerns about institutional behaviour. Participants acknowledged that social protection is being asked to deliver across multiple agendas but argued that the more uncomfortable reality is that international actors often demand unrealistic reforms from FCAS governments while maintaining rigid, fragmented and risk-averse practices themselves.

Accountability to affected populations as a system function

Discussions repeatedly criticised system designs that prioritise donor accountability while neglecting accountability to people in crises, highlighting the tendency to treat people as passive recipients of aid rather than actors with agency in their own development.

How to engage with local solidarity mechanisms

Local mechanisms are central to how households in FCAS manage risk and survive shocks. Participants highlighted remittances, Zakat, and kinship networks as key sources of support, cautioning that formal social protection systems which ignore or displace them risk undermining trust and social cohesion. The dialogue emphasised that the challenge is not whether to engage with these mechanisms, but how. Rapid or coercive formalisation was seen as counterproductive, given that legitimacy rests on autonomy and community control. Instead, participants favoured gradual, transparent approaches that strengthen linkages where appropriate, including careful engagement with community-based systems, strong data protection, and donor support that reinforces rather than crowds out local solidarity.

Geopolitics shape funding and feasibility

Geopolitics shapes funding flows, risk tolerance, and what is feasible in practice. Participants repeatedly noted that global geopolitics, in particular political incentives in donor countries influence how much and where resources flow, how risk is perceived, and the willingness to engage with national systems. Shifts in the international environment were seen to affect both financing levels and the space for country-led approaches.

What would "success" look like in practice?

Success was consistently defined in practical terms: coherence and continuity. Participants described success as coherent incentives, financing, data systems, roles, and accountability, aligned around national systems rather than undermining them under delivery pressure. Success was also framed as financing and delivery that remain engaged through turbulence, shifting from risk avoidance to shared risk management. Finally, participants emphasised continuity of protection: ensuring people do not fall through gaps created by transitions, fragmented systems, or institutional disruption.

Strategies for taking forward the Catalytic Agenda recommendations

The concluding plenary discussion identified government leadership and coordinated international actors in service of national agendas as key strategies to take forward the recommendations on humanitarian-social protection linkages and financing for social protection in FCAS. Participants identified that donors hold a lot of the power and strongly encouraged them to act to support national social protection plans. There were calls for donors and international actors to be more 'sheep like' and show greater willingness to act as a collective in support of government leadership. With some donors prioritising contexts where the most impact is considered possible, countries need to make strong investment cases. Governments need to take greater ownership of directing social protection policy and make the case for donors to coalesce around national systems.

Other actors should be more systematically included in the social protection conversations, including climate finance, peacebuilding actors and civil society actors in crisis affected countries. For Somalia, there were calls for a national dialogue to strengthen engagement with civil society and to build greater support at sub-national levels for investing in social protection systems. In Syria, there was a strong call to stop hesitating and 'just do it', to urgently find ways to start supporting national systems. Too much time has already been lost since the fall of Assad and investments urgently need to get started building on and supporting the political will and capacities within the new government.

A critical factor is recalibrating risk appetites by understanding risk in all its (sub) dimensions and developing shared risk assessments and mitigating

strategies. Participants recognised the tension between commitments to support government leadership on social protection and donors' approaches to risk. Participants discussed that where good local systems exist, international support should build on them. However, examples show donors sometimes avoid national systems for political reasons, not technical limitations, while humanitarian actors may still tend to resist government engagement.

Participants were clear that while there are risks in implementation, inaction carries risk too, given that stability following political transition requires moving forward and delivering a peace dividend. Appropriate mitigating strategies can be developed through undertaking more detailed, joint risk assessment and analysis, to identify common concerns, specific and detailed issues, and mitigating strategies. This should be informed by an appreciation that accountability and risk frameworks vary by context: categories of risk are standard but local dynamics differ.

While reiterating that funding through government systems should be prioritised, the discussion highlighted government-led social protection pooled funds as a useful and realistic interim mechanism. Participants noted that pooled funds are sometimes conflated with humanitarian models, whereas this discussion centred on nationally owned approaches. Participants stressed that government must stay central to pooled fund discussions, including how the risks with such funds are perceived and managed.

Participants also linked pooled fund design to transition windows of opportunity, noting that delays in mobilising finance can undermine citizen trust and stability, particularly where governments are new and under pressure to deliver for their population whilst navigating multiple offers of external support. This reinforced the case for developing more transitionready pooled options, alongside clearer and more accessible information for new governments on what effective, nationally driven pooled funds can look like. While ideal government-led funds require time to establish, early 'just do it' experimentation was seen as an important step towards building evidence and trust in these approaches. These funds can also help mitigate the risks of donor funding itself, and agency interests, fragmenting the response.

Next steps: To conclude the event, participants shared their intended actions to take this agenda forward. These included sharing knowledge with teams and wider stakeholders, supporting legal frameworks, advocating for donor risk appetite shifts, engaging with a wider group of donors including the Gulf states, and fostering government-led social protection agendas and platforms. Participants expressed their intent to strengthen understanding of how external support can engage sustainably with local solidarity mechanisms; how to support frontline workers and other local capacities; and how to integrate social protection with peace and climate agendas.

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Wilton Park | March 2026

ANNEX 1: Somalia

The discussion on Somalia highlighted that nationally anchored social protection is possible even in contexts of high fragility, but it is politically and operationally demanding. Participants describe a shift from having no system in place to a government-anchored national programme amid ongoing conflict, climate shocks, and humanitarian crises. The Somalia case was repeatedly referenced as evidence that fragility is not a binary condition, and that system-building can occur even in highly constrained contexts. Key features of this shift involve embedding social protection within national development and planning frameworks; establishing a national social registry; aligning humanitarian cash transfers with government standards; and developing standard operating procedures across institutions. The transition was driven by strong political commitment as much as technical design, external financing aligned with national priorities, and willingness from humanitarian actors to adapt their modalities.

The Somalia discussion was notably candid about the challenges of squeezed aid budgets; issues of diversion; and workforce constraints. Fiscal space was described as extremely limited, with continuing heavy reliance on external funding and limited domestic revenue. Declining humanitarian funding amid increasing climate shocks and rising needs was highlighted as a severe risk, especially for households already facing food insecurity and malnutrition. Discussions emphasised that transparency, regulatory measures and accountability to affected populations are essential, and that terminology and communication matter. Participants stressed the importance of distinguishing between corruption, diversion, and survival strategies, and avoiding narratives that undermine trust. On the workforce, there is a shortage of trained social protection workers, with high expectations placed on thinly staffed ministries. There is the risk of overinvesting in systems while underinvesting in people.

Moreover, in Somalia political fragmentation adds complexity to social protection, with challenges in coordination between the Federal State and the Federal Member States. These challenges include divergent priorities across regions and managing expectations in a context of limited resources. Transparency and communication were repeatedly highlighted as critical to maintaining trust, both with citizens and between institutions. It was emphasised that there is a need for investments in systems to reach beyond the central level and to focus on sub-national levels. It was also stressed that there is a need to anchor progress on systems for social protection in a legislative framework.

The dialogue also focussed on the need to build trust in national social protection systems within civil society and at the community level. Building greater popular engagement with and support for social protection through a greater focus on dialogue, communication and engagement at local levels was identified as a priority and there was a call for initiating a national dialogue on social protection.

At the same time, participants identified operational strengths in progress on the alignment of humanitarian and social protection systems, institutional coordination, and digital platforms. On the first point, the discussion mentioned harmonised transfer values, shared targeting approaches and increased use on government systems during shocks. On the second point, there was discussion of cross-government coordination mechanisms and engagement between ministries responsible for labour, social affairs, and finance. And on the third, the discussion highlighted digital platforms support to scale and accountability.

The discussion also highlighted enabling mechanisms – mobile money and private sector actors– that are often overlooked in generic FCAS narratives. Mobile money and private sector delivery capacity were described as practical assets supporting reach and traceability.

Somalia's non-state support systems were a major focus of discussion, considered as potential contributors to sustainability if approached carefully. Zakat, diaspora remittances and community solidarity provide significant support to households. These systems are trusted precisely because they are non-formal, and attempts to formalise them risk undermining their legitimacy. Participants argued for hybrid approaches, where formal social protection systems recognise solidarity mechanisms; align objectives without direct control; and avoid crowding out community solidarity. But there was interest in setting up more formal state structures for Zakat contributions and learning from how this has been approached in other countries such as Malaysia and Singapore.

In sum, Somalia's trajectory supports the Catalytic Agenda's claim that existing foundations can be preserved and scaled. It also illustrates the need for hybrid approaches that recognise local solidarity mechanisms, invest in workforce capacity, and build trust through transparency and accountability, while managing risks rather than avoiding them. Key takeaways from the discussion include:

- Investing in national social protection systems is possible even in extreme fragility

- Alignment between humanitarian and social protection matters more than perfection
- Solidarity systems are assets, not obstacles
- Trust, transparency, and communication are as important as financing
- System-building is incremental and politically negotiated.

An overarching message was the need for further efforts to align donor support around a government led system and for the government to take charge and show leadership in catalysing donor support around an agreed approach.

Session on linkages and transitions

The participants discussed their vision of "good" if the Catalytic Agenda recommendation 3 ("work with and through national systems as the default, where feasible") and recommendation 4 ("design humanitarian and social protection systems with clear pathways to and from nationally led or hybrid arrangements") are taken forward successfully for Somalia.

Their vision is: **A better coordinated, sustainably financed system delivered by a more professional workforce across the country including conflict areas**.

They identified the following **top three factors would have been addressed to arrive at this vision**:

1. Better coordinated systems at national and subnational levels, with stronger coordination between formal social protection and local solidarity system, including to prepare for and tackle all shocks.
2. More focus on sustainable financing mobilisation including for example climate finance, domestic resources, layering with remittances.
3. Improved governance to build trust including efforts to tackle risks of diversion.

Session on financing and political will

The participants discussed their vision of "good" if the Catalytic Agenda recommendation 5 ("diversify and sustain financing"), recommendation 6 ("expand domestic financing") and recommendation 7 ("maintain system during turbulence") are taken forward successfully for Somalia.

Their vision is: **More money, better money. Diverse funding for social protection flows through national system via a government-led financing mechanism – initially pooling money from international actors and gradually increasingly from**

domestic revenues – whilst in parallel the absorption capacity of the national system is built and a bottom-up culture of social protection is built in the population, towards collective financing and solidarity in financing.

They identified the following **top three factors would have been addressed to arrive at this vision**:

1. National debate, dialogue and consensus on social protection, down to the local level, communicating successes, and discussing what collective action would look like – ultimately building trust, credibility and transparency for the national system
2. Government in driving seat with a national social protection vision and programme (not just donor projects), embedded in legal frameworks and macroeconomic government projections, towards which external financing can converge
3. Establishing a pooled financing mechanism, with agreed principles and rules for the fund, as well as safeguards required by donors, to channel funds directly to the national social protection programmes.

Session on strategies for taking forward the High-Level Panel's recommendations

The Somalia breakout group identified the following actions, actors and task for addressing the key barriers that had been identified to taking forward the recommendations for Somalia:

Action	Actor	Task
1. Putting the government in the driving seat	Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister; Ministry of Finance; cross-government; Parliament; Donors	• Legal regulatory framework for social protection defining clear mandates for different actors. • Cross-governmental platform and strategy for comprehensive social protection (at least quarterly meetings). • Establish forum where government engages with social protection donors. • Revive aid coordination unit and strengthen national/subnational coordination, capitalising on existing initiatives such as the Somali Disaster Management Agency (SoDMA) and

		States efforts on Disaster Risk Management and Social Protection guidelines. • Donors to pool resources and transition from parallel systems to one social protection system. • Develop new governance structures to engage with zakat.
2. Two-way comprehensive national dialogue	Deputy Prime Minister and national government in lead	• National dialogue bringing together Office of the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, government, international partners and sub-national level (Federal Member States) and communities. • Harnessing existing SoDMA mechanism running from Commissioner down to communities for 2-way communication. • Building on sub-national dialogues to harness community voices. Citizen engagement and community voices through harnessing call centres, citizens engagement spaces. • Clear comms plan so national dialogue decisions are communicated back to communities. • Revive aid coordination unit and working groups to support ongoing/routine national engagement in the aftermath.
3. Linking formal and informal social protection	Government – through the Prime Minister, the interministerial body, Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; Communities; Donors; Humanitarian; partners	• Formalising informal zakat and zakat committees and local pooled funds (with diverse representation) for transparent and fair administration of zakat – potentially first at local level and building up to national structures and building on national dialogue with communities on how to formalise. • Improve digitalisation to make policies and budget information/contributions transparent – but consider data protection issues w/r individual contributions. • Learn and amplify best practices on zakat administration – including drawing on examples from Somaliland and Malaysia. • Sustained learning across social protection and humanitarian efforts on opportunities to

		strengthen transparency and accountability including system-wide platforms. • Donor matching of zakat funding to support community-led efforts.

ANNEX 2: Syria

In Syria, social protection is politically central as it is explicitly linked to state legitimacy and national recovery and reform. Participants described the current Syrian context, post-Assad: extremely high poverty rates; large numbers of displaced people and returnees, and the need for support mechanisms to enable return to their communities; weak or absent national social protection infrastructure; changes to or removal of pre-existing subsidies/benefits; and high public expectations following political transition. The discussions framed social protection as a core responsibility of the state.

The discussion repeatedly linked social protection to Syria's broader recovery. Social protection was seen as a platform for supporting returnees; supporting school re-enrolment; linking households to livelihoods to support recovery and shock-responsiveness; and strengthening vertical and horizontal cohesion. The participants noted that visibility matters in this context: citizens need to see tangible benefits delivered through national systems, and quickly.

Years of crisis have produced a highly fragmented assistance landscape, shaped by political separation, with the absence of a social protection system limiting the ability of humanitarian assistance to evolve and respond to shocks. Participants described a context with extensive humanitarian cash experience but a lack of comprehensive national social protection architecture, including gaps in child benefits, unemployment insurance and disability coverage, as well as equity and data systems challenges. Participants framed humanitarian cash as life-saving but insufficient for sustainable system building, highlighting repeated crises in which coordination, access and delivery are not able to operate at scale, and a national system could have offered a stabilising platform. Participants repeatedly asked: "What if a national social protection system had existed during recent shocks?"

Solidarity support systems remain central to survival in Syria. These include family and community networks, remittances, and religious giving. Participants warned against designing social protection systems that ignore or displace these mechanisms, arguing instead for complementarity.

Trust and data sharing were described as major constraints shaping feasibility. Challenges include low trust in government institutions with new officials lacking experience of national roles, alongside experienced civil servants and committed local staff. The discussion highlighted the scale of the data challenge: fragmented registries, weak civil registry information, and legacy of weak population data in a fluid post-conflict environment. Participants noted that in post-conflict settings, populations may also be reluctant to share data with government. Participants stressed that transitions must be phased, with humanitarian intermediaries playing a temporary bridging role.

A contentious but important discussion concerned subsidies, with the dialogue reflecting a pushback against treating subsidies as a policy taboo. Participants argued that subsidies can be effective in protecting the poorest and stabilising prices if designed correctly and may have political salience in protecting vulnerable populations, as well as playing a potential bridging function in the short-term. This illustrates a broader workshop theme: imported norms and narrow definitions of social protection can be unhelpful, and context-specific political economy analysis is essential.

Participants emphasised the importance of investment in trust-building and credible governance arrangements with realistic financing plans.

The discussion also talked about the importance of building core foundational systems and investing in social protection workers. This includes investing in a unified social registry; payment systems anchored in national institutions; clear eligibility and transfer mechanisms; linkages between social protection and education, health, and nutrition; and the national and local workforce.

Session on linkages and transitions

The participants discussed their vision of "good" if the Catalytic Agenda recommendation 3 (“work with and through national systems as the default, where feasible”) and recommendation 4 (“design humanitarian and social protection systems with clear pathways to and from nationally led or hybrid arrangements”) had been taken forward successfully for Syria.

Their vision was**: A system that is ready for transition, and in which international actors have been doing things to enable (rather than disable) that transition**. They identified three factors would have been addressed to arrive at this vision:

1. Found some way of achieving coherence across the former areas of political control (North West, North East and former regime-controlled) (even if delivery was separate to begin with).

2. Invested more in transition plans and not only on immediate delivery, with pilot or small-scale vulnerability initiatives useful as systems evolved.
3. Data is key to all of this – how to protect but also have a better and more consistent understanding.

Session on financing and political will

The participants discussed their vision of "good" if the Catalytic Agenda recommendation 5 (“diversify and sustain financing”), recommendation 6 (“expand domestic financing”) and recommendation 7 (“maintain system during turbulence”) are taken forward successfully at the global level.

Their vision is:

- Coherent, de-politicised funding. Establish Social Protection Fund – global and country level – could be pooled, mitigate some of these tensions e.g. funding from oppositional global powers.
- Social protection financed by government. Capacity within civil service including workforce systems and digitalisation. Revenue streams and process to manage, prioritise and allocate funds. Social protection ‘culture’.
- Social protection strategy owned by country. Domestic resources for social protection.

They identified the following top three factors would have been addressed to arrive at this vision:

1. Fragmentation within government to articulate needs, and need for alignment. Fragmented funding streams, and a lack of transparency and flexibility in funds. Competition for funding by agencies.
2. National revenues slow to come online including oil, taxation and need to increase transparency on revenues and spend. Blend of humanitarian and development financing needed. Capacity building needed including digitalisation. Need to build trust across society. Equalise salaries of government workers across territories.
3. Strategic framework with climate integrated to seek funding. Accreditation for Ministry of Finance to access funding. Climate and early warning system for anticipatory social protection. Labour guarantee schemes – provides employment in difficult times – public works with climate angle, e.g. more days when shock anticipated.

Session on strategies for taking forward the High-Level Panel's recommendations

Participants agreed that taking forward social protection in Syria requires starting from a national agenda based on a national discourse – to this end the discussion focused on higher level considerations, leaving national actors to identify concrete actions.

The discussion highlighted that communicating the 'why' of social protection would benefit from articulating how social protection is a national priority that goes beyond the objectives of one ministry and sector. This national agenda needs to understand from the local level upwards what the needs and priorities are, to build a national dialogue and ownership of the social protection agenda, from within communities to the national level. This is essential to support the rebuilding of a social contract.

Participants also discussed that there are existing local social safety nets but these are not being consulted, funded or supported. The local civil society organisations and other initiatives know who is most in need and what actions will destroy the social fabric, yet international efforts are not engaging with them.

The participants thought about possible cross-cutting principles for the social protection agenda in Syria, including the need to:

- Identify the low-lying fruit to deliver the peace dividend to conflict-affected populations.
- Recognise the existing inequality in conflict impacts.
- 'Tip not build' in this context, meaning that it is important to recognise the existing capacity in Syria, while taking the legacies of conflict seriously and recognising the extent and depth of these.
- Broaden the discussions beyond the humanitarian-social protection bubble to consider the wider context and important activities for communities for example in agriculture and in local social care mechanisms.

Four key starting points for future dialogue in Syria with Syrian stakeholders were offered as suggestions: fiscal space; scenario planning; data needs; and pooled funding:

- **Fiscal space**: Plans for social protection in Syria require an understanding of the fiscal space, noting that inevitably some financial support will be required from international sources.

- **Scenario planning**: With Syria's transition in an 'inter-regnum' phase, the government is establishing rule of law and trust. Social protection planning will need to consider possible pathways, and the interim steps for each scenario. This planning requires conflict sensitive analysis to understand both potential conflict dynamics and how social protection interventions may interact with those dynamics.
- **Data needs**: Each pathway will have data requirements that need to be considered to build an informed, evidenced-based approach. This requires a bottom-up approach to understanding communities' needs and priorities.
- **Pooled funding**: There is an opportunity to introduce a pooled fund for social protection at the national level, to engender a more cooperative approach from social protection donors and aid international agencies that follows the demands of the government.

The discussion ended by summarising overall guiding ideas for engagement taking forward the social protection recommendations in Syria:

1. Start local, build bottom up along with top-down.
2. Understand and support the existing capacity and activity in Syria; it is important that external support and interventions do not undermine them.
3. Agree a protocol for international agency behaviour: for example, listen to the government, think about pooled funds.

ANNEX 3: Global level

Global actors shape the rules of the game within which social protection in FCAS succeeds or fails. Many of the barriers faced at country level are not technical or contextual, but structural: embedded in global financing instruments, institutional incentives, accountability frameworks, and risk management approaches.

International actors are not neutral observers of FCAS systems; they are active system designers. Global actors were described as: setting funding conditionalities and timelines; defining what constitutes "acceptable" risk; driving fragmentation through mandates and competition; and shaping narratives around humanitarian neutrality and state engagement.

Risk aversion emerged as one of the most powerful blockers to system-building. Participants noted that:

- Engagement with national systems in FCAS is often framed primarily through reputational and fiduciary risk
- Institutional incentives reward avoiding failure rather than managing complexity
- Individuals at country level often feel personally exposed for institutionally driven decisions.

This has concrete consequences. Key risks are that parallel humanitarian systems persist even where national systems exist, transitions may be delayed indefinitely, and innovation can be discouraged.

Participants agreed on the need to shift from risk avoidance to risk management. This includes:

- Explicitly defining red lines (rather than assuming everything is a red line)
- Defining risk in a much more granular fashion and sharing risk across institutions instead of pushing it downwards to staff taking decisions at country levels (and thus responsibility)
- Accepting that some degree of failure is inevitable in FCAS, and learning from it.

Participants were explicit that current incentive structures undermine the Catalytic Agenda. Commonly cited misalignments included:

- Short funding cycles incompatible with system-building
- Performance metrics focused on outputs rather than institutional outcomes

- Competition for visibility between agencies
- Contracting and reporting requirements that prioritise control over collaboration.

These incentives encourage projectisation of social protection; fragmentation of registries and payment systems; duplication of targeting and delivery mechanisms. Several participants noted that even when policies support national systems "by default," incentives pull behaviour in the opposite direction.

Fragmented financing was described not as an accident, but as an outcome of current architectures. Key issues raised included the separation of humanitarian, development, climate, and peace financing; heavy earmarking limiting flexibility; misalignment between trust funds, pooled funds, and country systems; and the lack of predictable, multi-year financing. While funding levels matter, participants stressed that how money flows is as important as how much flows.

Pooled and trust funds were repeatedly highlighted as potential enablers, but not silver bullets. Key insights included:

- Design and governance matter more than the modality itself
- Country ownership and alignment with national priorities are critical
- Excessive complexity can undermine accessibility and trust
- Transparency is essential for both donors and citizens.

There was cautious optimism about transition-focused nexus funds that explicitly support movement between humanitarian assistance and national systems.

Climate finance was widely seen as an under-used opportunity for social protection in FCAS. Participants highlighted:

- Growing recognition of social protection in climate frameworks
- Evidence that social protection supports adaptation and shock response
- Inclusion of social protection in some national climate commitments.

However, major barriers remain. These include accreditation processes that exclude fragile settings and a perception of social protection as "social" rather than "climate-relevant". Consequently, ministries responsible for social protection often lack access to climate finance pipelines (see Climate section above).

The key operational message was alignment, not substitution: climate finance should complement, not replace, core social protection financing, particularly for shock-responsive systems.

Transitions from humanitarian assistance to national systems were described as both necessary and politically sensitive. Participants agreed that transitions must be planned from the outset. “Exit” framing is unhelpful; “rescaling and re-entry” is more realistic. Humanitarian actors need institutionalised pathways to hand over; and back again when needed. A recurring concern was that transitions often fail because global actors do not align internally, leaving countries to navigate contradictory expectations.

Participants identified a set of concrete shifts required to operationalise the Catalytic Agenda globally:

- Align incentives across humanitarian, development, climate, and peace actors
- Reward collaboration and system outcomes, not just delivery
- Simplify and harmonise financing instruments in FCAS
- Invest in country-level coordination capacity
- Accept political engagement as unavoidable in social protection

The overarching message: global actors must change how they work if they expect countries to change how they deliver.

Session on linkages and transitions

The participants discussed their vision of "good" if the Catalytic Agenda recommendation 3 (“work with and through national systems as the default, where feasible”) and recommendation 4 (“design humanitarian and social protection systems with clear pathways to and from nationally led or hybrid arrangements”) are taken forward successfully at the global level.

Their vision is: **Coherence within international responses to crises that protect, complement, and build national systems, with clear criteria for right-sizing humanitarian role.**

They identified the following **top four factors would have been addressed to arrive at this vision**:

1. Shift from risk avoidance to risk management. How to build trust in national systems. Grievance response mechanisms, accountability, public financial management.
2. Incentives – within and between agencies – to promote and reward. Coherent support for overstretched governments.
3. Coherence amongst financing including links to agency incentives.
4. Institutionalise and develop criteria for humanitarian scale down/exit. Agreed at global level but implemented at field level.

Session on financing and political will

The participants discussed their vision of "good" if the Catalytic Agenda recommendation 5 ("diversify and sustain financing"), recommendation 6 ("expand domestic financing") and recommendation 7 ("maintain system during turbulence") are taken forward successfully at the global level.

Their vision is: **Social protection which is more efficient, predictable and resilient to shocks and political change, which is meeting public expectations. With more domestic and (hopefully) more diversified external financing, including climate finance.**

They identified the following **top three factors would have been addressed to arrive at this vision**:

1. Domestic financing: global actors can play an enabling role directly (e.g. domestic financing plans attaching to social protection programmes) and indirectly (e.g. tax and public financial management capacity) including how social protection is framed and communicated.
2. External financing: prioritise scarce resources to the most fragile contexts which have least fiscal space and simplify processes or provide more support to access finance.
3. Transitions: explore 'nexus' funds and other pooled funds which are multi-sector and multi-year.

Session on strategies for taking forward the High-Level Panel's recommendations

The global level breakout group identified the following actions, actors and task for addressing the key barriers that had been identified to taking forward the recommendations at the global level:

Action	Actor	Task
1. Country driven, risk taking, transition focused, co-funded pooled funds	Bilaterals, IFIs/multilateral development banks, national governments, climate funds, philanthropy	Baseline understanding of different pooled funds and what countries want them to look like. Social protection – humanitarian – nexus funds. Roundtable of who is financing.
2. Prioritisation and facilitation of funding to FCAS	Bilateral, IMF, foundations, climate funds, national governments – especially to make the case	Narrative, accreditation, timely data to inform decisions
3. Incentivise transitions, particular focus on humanitarian actors	Bilateral donors, IFIs/ multilateral development banks, foundations, UN agencies	Parallel approaches in humanitarian response justified in proposals. Incentivise inter-agency plans

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