

Sustainable Development Goals and Social Protection

Sustainable development requires integrated action across a range of sectors with actions taken on a very broad front: social, economic, environmental, governance. Social protection can serve as a driver and enabler to achieve basically all of the SDGs. Social protection is by its very nature inter-sectoral and can well serve the purpose of being a strategic integrator that harnesses synergies for enhanced impact by simultaneously addressing several of the SDG targets.



End poverty in all its forms everywhere

The role of social protection in the goal of ending poverty is self-evident. This goal also has as an explicit target to “implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all” (target 1.3). Social protection programmes can reduce the incidence, depth and severity of poverty and mitigate multi-dimensional deprivations. They can protect those who face hardship and prevent vulnerable people from sliding into poverty; they can assist recovery from disasters and other shocks; they can promote pathways out of poverty, substituting erosive coping strategies that keep households in poverty traps. Social protection can have long-term effects on productivity and earnings – promotion of livelihoods to reduce poverty; protection of livelihoods to reduce vulnerability.



End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Households receiving social allowances invariably spend more on quantity and quality of food items, improving their food security and nutrition status. Social protection programmes smooth consumption during economic downturns and give protection against food price volatility. This is done by either food transfers or food purchase at subsidized prices (Open Market Sales) on the one hand and cash transfers that improve poor households’ access to food on the other hand. For improved nutrition outcomes, transfers should be combined with behaviour change communication. In food programmes like Vulnerable Group Development and school feeding, it is essential to include micronutrient and protein fortified food items, looking beyond mere calorie intake. Asset transfer programmes typically focus on livestock and poultry, which are rich protein sources. Cash transfer programmes enable beneficiaries to invest some of the money in farm assets, and also generate increased demand for local smallholders’ produce, thereby stimulating sustainable agriculture.



Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Poor health is a symptom of poverty and social protection contributes to better health outcomes by reducing poverty. Social protection built on the life cycle approach has a strong potential to promote healthy lives and wellbeing at all ages, which in turn serves to reduce poverty since poor health is a very dominant driver of poverty. However, there is a need for an integrated approach that combines social protection measures with provision of improved health care services; such inter-sectoral linkages of social protection can result in substantially higher returns. There is also a very strong interface of the health sector and social protection; the UN Social Protection Floor includes universal access to health care. Bangladesh has borderline health/social protection schemes that provide incentive payments for women to attend pre-natal care and give birth in clinics. Conditional cash transfers can also be used to increase demand for and utilization of health care services, in particular child health care.



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Social protection can promote behaviour that improves human capital accumulation. In Bangladesh, this is done chiefly through a range of school stipend programmes, from primary school to tertiary education for girls and with special stipends for students with disabilities. Improved education advances not only lifelong outcomes, but can also contribute to breaking intergenerational transmission of poverty. Social protection can build life skills, confidence and empowerment. Social protection also offers opportunities to link unemployed people with vocational skills training and subsequently the employment route out of poverty, based on skills demanded by the labour market.



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Social protection programmes that are designed to be gender responsive can meet both short-term practical gender needs and long-term strategic needs. An often mentioned objective of social protection in Bangladesh is women's empowerment. The transformative dimension of social protection includes breaking down barriers and restrictive social conventions on what a woman can do and be. Bangladesh has a range of programmes that specifically address women's needs. The most vulnerable women are covered by Vulnerable Group Development and a programme for Widowed, Deserted and Destitute Women; working lactating mothers are covered by a special scheme; women employed in the formal sector enjoy maternity allowance and childcare facilities.



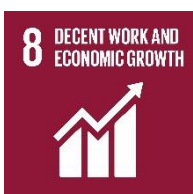
Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Households receiving social protection allowances use these for improved family welfare, which includes hygienic latrines and access to safe drinking water.



Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Social protection contributes to improved household economy, which generates energy demands at the base of the social pyramid. This in turn creates new commercial opportunities for business interests that can be guided towards green energy products such as solar home systems and energy efficient devices such as improved cook stoves.



Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Social protection can mitigate consequences of uninsured risks that keep people in poverty traps of low-risk low-return livelihoods and create opportunities of productive investment combined with safety nets that enable risk taking livelihood strategies. It can assist poor people to accumulate assets that make them less vulnerable to shocks and stresses and that provide a conduit out of poverty. It can boost the bargaining capacity of socially excluded people to negotiate the labour market for decent work. It can give disadvantaged groups protection to mediate new vulnerabilities resulting from a globalized economy with necessary economic transformation. Social protection also has a multiplier effect on growth through increasing poor households' consumption, with stimulating effects on local markets.



Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Public works programmes can help to build, repair and maintain infrastructure of critical importance for the economic and social life of local communities, at the same time as they serve the intended primary purpose of providing employment and income to seasonally unemployed men and women.



Reduce inequality within and among countries

Social protection can create a more level playing field, break down structural barriers and social norms that prevent disadvantaged people from taking advantage of opportunities provided by economic growth, redress discrimination and in other ways be the means to ensure inclusive growth and facilitate the SDG vision of leaving no one behind. Social protection systems can contribute to both equality of opportunity through inclusive growth and better equity of outcome through redistributive measures.



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Social protection programmes in Bangladesh have been designed for a predominantly rural population, but there is growing realization that also the urban poor need support. While rural-urban migration has by and large been a successful household strategy to move out of poverty, rapid and unplanned urbanization is causing special problems that afflict low-income people living in unhealthy urban settlements. Urban social protection programmes need to be tailor-made to meet specific needs in cities and in secondary towns. Without causing an uncontrolled inflow of poor people to urban areas, social protection entitlements can be made portable, making the move and starting up in an unfamiliar area more trouble-free.



Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Social protection allowances are used for basic needs consumption, which stimulates production of essential goods and services in local markets. Countercyclical implementation of programmes has a stabilizing effect on markets, by boosting the aggregate demand during times of low demand.



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Adaptive social protection combines disaster risk reduction for areas and populations exposed to weather induced hazards, measures to build climate adaptive capacity and welfare measures for vulnerable households. This can be applied through interventions targeting geographical areas and households vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather events; by tailor-made public works programmes that build community resilience to natural disasters and climate change or facilitate recovery after disasters; by promoting diversified livelihoods opportunities that improve resilience to climate change and are inherently more “climate-proof”.



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Marine resources contribute to improved nutrition and dietary diversity and are crucial livelihoods sources for many poor people. It is essential to stem overexploitation of these resources, while not compromising on livelihood opportunities. Social protection can help to negotiate these conflicting interests. Fishermen communities in Bangladesh face seasonal

unemployment due to seasonal variation in the availability of fish and also because of a two-month ban on the catch of young hilsha fish every year, to avoid depletion of the hilsha stock. Social protection can serve as a tool to avoid overfishing. Poor fishermen are entitled to compensation support from the Vulnerable Group Feeding programme during slack seasons and the government also runs the scheme of Alternative Employment of Hilsha Fishermen.



Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Cash-for-work programmes have often been used for roadside plantation, and also for various social forestry activities. There is scope for public works programmes to do much more in environment protection, including co-management of ecologically protected areas and improved sustainable productivity of Common Property Resources. Reversing ongoing degradation of forest areas in Bangladesh should be an issue close to heart for social protection, since forests are often referred to as the poor man's safety net.



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Social protection can help to reintegrate conflict-affected populations into socio-economic life and promote participatory citizenship. Social protection contributes to greater cohesion in the social fabric of a society, which invests in nation building. In Bangladesh, this includes the vision of peaceful and prosperous Chittagong Hill Tracts, following up the peace accord with various social welfare programmes that meet specific needs of the ethnic population in the area.



Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Social protection has become a central policy in developing countries, with social protection systems built up in almost all countries over the past two decades. Stronger South-South and triangular cooperation can contribute to better alignment of social protection programmes with sustainable development goals through sharing of successful experiences and lessons learned.