

# National Social Security Strategy: A mission with a vision

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We celebrated a milestone in yesterday's (November 5) launch of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS).

The strategy reflects a vision grounded on rights and centred on the well-being and development of the people of Bangladesh.

It fulfills Article 15d of the Constitution on the citizens' right to social security. It also reaffirms the government's commitment to addressing poverty and inequality in all its forms of deprivation.

The strategy builds on the strong track record of Bangladesh in delivering diverse social safety net schemes.

The government invests nearly 2% of GDP and 13% of the annual budget into programs addressing transient food insecurity, long-term needs of people with special needs, and poverty graduation.

Despite these schemes and significant increase in coverage, the average benefit of such schemes is low, and in many cases has fallen in real terms over the years.

A reformed and more efficient social protection system will assist efforts to take forward a more inclusive growth trajectory and accelerate poverty reduction in Bangladesh. Reforms proposed in the NSSS will be instrumental in eliminating leakages, improving targeting, and increasing the value of transfers.

These reforms will not only diminish the risks faced by the poor and vulnerable population, but will also build social capital and resilience.

How will it do so? The strategy adopts a Life Cycle approach, addressing multi-dimensional needs as well as risks that poor people face throughout their lives.

This includes access to basic needs such as shelter, food, and health care, as well as systems that support the move-out of poverty, including education, employment, and old-age pension.

The strategy in particular recognises and responds to the specific needs of women and children, vulnerable and marginalised groups, and persons with disabilities.

Implementing the strategy will not be without challenges. Correct targeting and effective transfer of benefits need to be in place.

A well-designed government-to-person (G2P) transfer mechanism, with a high quality management information system is required.

Such a system would include a national single registry based on inter-linked schemes, and consequently requires a national poverty database to be established.

Action on this front will reduce duplication in many of the existing schemes which have emerged, many in an ad hoc or supply driven manner, in response to natural disasters and efforts to protect vulnerable populations.

As a result, existing schemes have low individual program budget allocations, often involve multiple implementation agencies, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

The existing M&E mechanisms mainly assess progress in terms of the amount of money disbursed rather than results achieved.

The leadership of the Cabinet Division to install the new social security system of the country is significant.

It chairs the Central Monitoring Committee (CMC), an inter-ministerial committee for Social Protection comprised of 23 ministries and eight divisions, which oversees the implementation of the strategy.

The General Economic Division (GED) of the Planning Commission is one of the divisions involved in the CMC, and has led the process of formulating the NSSS.

The inter-ministerial mechanism facilitates a whole of government approach, bringing different stake-holders together at local and national levels, to effectively take forward this comprehensive social security reform agenda.

Sustained political leadership will also ensure that there is a continued sense of urgency and that sufficient resources are allocated, as well as guarantee integrity of the programs and their implementation.

In rolling out the NSSS, both DFID and UNDP will continue to work together with the Government of Bangladesh in ensuring that, ultimately, the needs of the poor are met, and in turn allow them to participate and benefit from the economic growth of the country.

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