

Minutes of the first meeting of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) of the Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme

Chairperson : Mr. Mohammad Shafiul Alam, Cabinet Secretary
Date & Time : 20 June 2017, 1:00 pm
Place : Cabinet Room (Building-1, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka)
Attendance : **Annexure-A**

The Chairperson opened the meeting with a warm note of welcome to all the participants that was followed by a brief round of self-introduction. At the very outset, he remarked that the government had taken up a huge task of reforming the social security system of the country as envisaged in the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh. The reform initiatives involving multi-sectoral stakeholders are very delicate and time-consuming in nature. Such a systemic reform requires additional intellectual efforts beyond the routine functions of the ministries/divisions. Therefore, the Chair appreciated the activities of the Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme that had been facilitating the activities of the concerned ministries/divisions in creating a congenial atmosphere for the NSSS governance through necessary reforms, intensified coordination, and institutionalization for effective management of social security programme. The Chair then requested the National Project Director (NPD) to brief the meeting on the background, progress, and future plans of the SSPS Programme.

2. The NPD informed that the project was being implemented jointly by the Cabinet Division and the General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission. It had the objective of enhancing overall governance of the existing social security programme and supporting the process of reform in the delivery system. He also informed that the project was funded by the GoB, UNDP, DFID and DFAT/AusAid. He also informed that the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) thoroughly reviewed and appraised the Annual Work Plans of the project very recently.

3. While presenting the progress of the project, the NPD pointed out that, the project had a number of milestones achieved so far. One of the major achievements of the project is the formulation of the NSSS itself which was launched in November 2015. As precursor to the NSSS formulation, a scholarly book titled '*Social Protection in Bangladesh, Building Effective Social Safety Nets and Ladders Out of Poverty*' on the status and reform of Social Protection in Bangladesh was published, and ten background researches and diagnostic studies were conducted and a compendium of those studies was under the process of publication.

4. The NPD also appraised that the project had facilitated in the (a) reformation of the Central Management Committee (CMC) along with its reformed roles; (b) formation and operationalization of five Thematic Clusters containing the existing social security programme; (c) knowledge sharing tour to India; (d) designing ministry as well as cluster-

wise NSSS Action Plans for reform, management and coordination of the existing social security programme; (e) ground work for formulation of a central Grievance Redress System (GRS) platform by taking lessons from GRS situation analysis conducted by SSPS Programme; (f) training and orientation workshops for Members of Parliament, DCs, ADCs, CMC members and focal points; (g) the project also conducted a Union Parishads' Training Needs Assessment (TNA), which gave a base to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Institute of Local Government (NILG), a training module on social security was developed and Training of Trainers (ToTs) had provided to all District and Upazila Training Team members in order to impart training for the Union Parishad (UP) chairmen and members under a partnership modality with NILG; (h) initiative for inclusion of training on social security at the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC) curricula; (i) preparation of a number of research, training and communication materials as well as took initiative to publish several Op-Ed, articles on critical issues related to social protection of Bangladesh in national dailies, and e-library for knowledge sharing and other materials on social protection, etc. in www.socialprotectionbd.org.

5. About the key remaining tasks of the project, the NPD appraised that the project had been working on a number of other issues and those were work-in-progress as well. He mentioned that the NSSS action plans (of 23 Ministries/Divisions) had already been prepared. The project had been helping the process of a series of consultations at the cluster level (by 5 Thematic Clusters, and a cross-cutting plan for the entire NSSS). Some other major initiatives included (a) development of NSSS Gender Policy/Strategy; (b) consultation with BPATC for mainstreaming NSSS in civil servants' training curricula; (c) at least one more orientation workshop for Members of Parliament; (d) orientation training for Upazila and District officials to institutionalize the NSSS within the government system for better governance; (e) continuation of support to the CMC and five Thematic Clusters for ensuring better coordination and consolidation of programme's delivery, incorporating reform issues in ministries' annual plans (APA, SDGs link to Social Security Action Plan), and reporting of the progress; (f) NSSS Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework with link to the agreed indicators of 7th Five-Year Plan and that of the SDGs; and (g) a high-profile conference on the major theme 'Strengthening Government Social Protection' with launch of the NSSS action plans.

6. The Member (GED) enquired about the progress of the publication of the background papers of the NSSS. The NPD informed that the compendium of the background papers went through rigorous editing, and that was at the stage of designing which was required for final print order. He did mention that the compendium would be launched soon. Further, the Member (GED) asked about the progress of incorporating the NSSS at the levels of the existing training courses of the BPATC. The Project Manager informed that on 14 June 2017, a project team had visited the Rector of the BPATC who then instructed the concerned Member Directing Staffs (MDS) to take measures for incorporating NSSS at different courses, including Foundation Training Course (FTC), Advanced Course on Administration and Development (ACAD), and Senior Staff Course (SSC). The Member (GED) asked the SSPS project to provide technical supports in designing related course content.

The Member (GED) also appreciated the idea of organizing a scoping workshop next month on the NSSS at the BPATC. The Member, GED suggested that the major reports and articles prepared under the initiative of the project should be shared with the stakeholders, especially the members of the PSC.

7. The NPD then informed that the SSPS project was going to be concluded in December 2017. Meantime, a number of activities of the project, which were at the final phases, would remain unfinished. Further, he mentioned that the preparation of an NSSS Action Plan would necessitate a series of consultation with stakeholders on reform issues. The consultation was a lengthy process which might involve more time than expected. He urged that, in order to achieve expected outputs, the project might need extension for a whole year in 2018 (January- December 2018). He informed that the PIC meeting held on 1st March 2017 also recommended for one-year extension of the project. He recapitulated that the project was approved one year later than it was stipulated, and thus there had been a gap in implementation from the very beginning. On the other hand, the major donor DFID fund will come to end in August 2017 as per agreement, and some amount will be left unutilised due to time limitation. At the same time the project also lost money due to increasing losing conversion value between US Dollar and British Pound. On the other hand, the UNDP fund constraint is an issue to take over the remaining tasks forward. Moreover, the Project Document (ProDoc) mentioned 1.3 million dollars as unfunded amount, which would require funding support from some potential donors. He further informed that under these critical situations the TPP cost of denominator is seemed to be high for the project. As a result, the project financial progress shows currently 48% of the total budget, though progress against yearly allocation was around 100%. He pointed out that if the UNDP's portion of fund as per approved TPP is made available or any potential donor support is obtained, then the project could easily serve for another year and fulfil all its major deliverables. He further informed that some potential donors like, European Union, AusAid and others are showing keen interest in this policy project. However, their fund support may be obtainable only from 2019. He then placed proposal before PSC that the project could be extended for at least one year after December 2017 with no-cost or some further cost-involvement.

8. The Chair suggested that the project should be continued for the sake of the NSSS implementation without interruption. In absence of supportive projects like the SSPS, the reform agenda of social protection might be hampered. The routine work of the ministries/divisions might not be sufficient to take forward the reform activities as that would certainly necessitate continued intellectual inputs. UNDP Assistant Country Director in this regard took the floor and assured that, as per the agreement, the UNDP would continue funding the project until December 2017. UNDP will finance the project for rest of 2017 in case of DFID fund is not being utilised beyond August 2017. He further informed that UNDP considers SSPS Programme to be one of the most valuable investments in making Bangladesh welfare state. He informed the meeting that UNDP will look into the matter and arrange funding support for taking this project beyond 2017. Therefore, the meeting unanimously agreed that the project should continue unfettered until December 2017 as stipulated in the approved TPP, and there should be a 'Second Phase' of the project starting from the year 2018.

9. The NPD mentioned that the NSSS Action Plan was almost ready to be placed before the CMC for finalization and approval. Then it could be officially launched in the presence of senior political leaderships, preferably the Hon'ble Prime Minister, since she was the key instrumental for approving NSSS. The main objectives of the event would include advocacy for greater participation in social security programme and informing policy makers about progress of social security reforms, NSSS action plan, and better social security programming in Bangladesh that could help achieving Vision 2021. A fair on social security implementation could be added with the event mentioned above. The tentative date for launching the action plan might be any time in between August and September 2017. The launching ceremony might be accompanied by a two or three-day event in the form of social security fair and seminar to be attended by 33 CMC ministries/divisions and concerned departments; Members of the Parliament; representatives of the city corporations; representatives of the leading national and international NGOs; academics; members of the civil society; representatives of the UN Agencies; representatives of the Development Partners etc. The meeting emphatically supported the idea for arranging launching of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) Action Plan along with a social security fair.

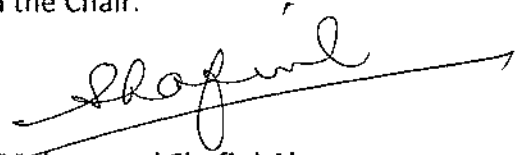
10. The meeting discussed the progress of the NSSS Action Plan which was spearheaded by a CMC Sub-Committee chaired by the Secretary, Coordination and Reforms, Cabinet Division. It was informed that the Sub-Committee organized a series of workshops with participation of the relevant line ministries/divisions. The draft was shared with all the ministries/divisions for their feedback or comments. Later on, the action plan was updated according to the feedback of the line ministries/divisions. Presently, this action plan is under further process of consultation at the levels of the five thematic clusters. So far, two clusters had held their coordination meetings while the others would do so shortly. The members of PSC appreciated the progress of the preparation of the NSSS action plan which was viewed as an enormous job involving all the stakeholders. The Chair pointed out that the Action Plan should be finalized as early as possible which would require endorsement from the CMC. The meeting was of the opinion that, before placing the NSSS action plan to the next CMC, it should be placed before the next PSC meeting to inform the PSC members for their understanding, which can be organized soon. Then the Chair fixed the date for the next PSC meeting on 30 July 2017.

11. After elaborate discussion the meeting decided as follows:

- a) The major reports and research works of the project will be shared with the members of the PSC by e-mail as early as possible;
- b) As per the TPP provision, the UNDP will continue the SSPS Programme by its own fund until December 2017 and will sort out remaining fund commitment and unfunded issue;

- c) The UNDP will look for the possibility of extending support to the SSPS Programme for its second phase starting from January 2018 and communicate with ERD and other concerned agencies;
- d) A high level National Social Security Conference will be organized in presence of senior political leaderships and stakeholders of social security implementation in Bangladesh. The Hon'ble Finance and Planning Minister would be requested to chair the conference;
- e) The progress of the NSSS Action Plan will be informed in next meeting of the PSC; and
- f) A special meeting of the PSC will be organized on 30 July 2017 to review the progress of the project activities, especially the formulation of the NSSS Action Plans.

12. The meeting concluded with vote of thanks from the Chair.



Mohammad Shafiu Alam

Cabinet Secretary

&

Chairperson of the PSC

Social Security Policy Support Programme

