

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme
Cabinet Division
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Minutes of the 4th Project Steering Committee (PSC) of the Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme

Chair	Md. Mahbub Hossain Cabinet Secretary Cabinet Division
Date & Time	2 November 2023, at 10:00 a.m. on both physical and virtual platforms
Venue	Cabinet Meeting Room (Room No-304, Building No-01, 3rd Floor), Cabinet Division, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka
Attendance	Annex - A

1. The chair opened the meeting with a gracious and welcoming address to all present, which was then followed by a brief round of self-introductions. The distinguished attendees at the meeting prominently included the co-chair, Dr. Md. Kawser Ahmed, Member (Secretary) of the General Economics Division (GED); Mr. Md. Mahmudul Hossain Khan, Secretary, Coordination and Reforms of Cabinet Division; Dr. Md. Mosharraf Hossain, Additional Secretary, Cabinet Division; Mr. Stefan Liller, Resident Representative of the UNDP, Bangladesh Country Office; senior officials from the government of Bangladesh; representatives from DFAT of the Australian High Commission in Bangladesh, and various other distinguished individuals (a comprehensive list of attendees is provided in Annex-A).

2. The chair conveyed heartfelt gratitude for the government's unwavering dedication to elevating social protection as a paramount priority. Furthermore, the chair extended thanks to the SSPS project for their invaluable dedication and substantial contributions to the transformative endeavours aimed at enhancing and reinvigorating the social security programmes within the country. The chair noted that the government has achieved commendable progress in poverty reduction and economic growth over the past few decades, with social protection playing a significant role in these achievements. The chair subsequently requested Mr. Mohammad Khaled Hasan, Joint Secretary of the Civil Registration and Social Security Branch at the Cabinet Division, to proceed with the meeting's agenda.

3. Mr. Hasan proceeded through providing a brief note on the meeting's objectives and present the agenda. In his comprehensive overview of the SSPS Programme, he emphasized that this initiative represents the policy support inaugural policy project within the realm of social protection in Bangladesh. It serves as the flagship project jointly implemented by the Cabinet Division and the General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission, encompassing coordination with 39 ministries/divisions and aligning with the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh. The NSSS is instrumental in steering meaningful

reforms within the social protection landscape of Bangladesh.

4. Furthermore, Mr. Hasan highlighted that the SSPS Programme extends technical assistance across two pivotal areas of reform: the enhancement of the social protection system and the improvement of governance within the social protection domain. These efforts are aligned with the overarching goal of the NSSS, which is to ensure that economic growth is achieved in a more inclusive manner. Consequently, the SSPS Programme has been steadfastly supporting the Government in establishing a fully functional social protection system that is conducive to the adoption of best-practice delivery models.

5. To provide additional insights, Ms. Murshida Sharmin, the Project Director of the SSPS Programme and Joint Secretary of the Social Security Branch at the Cabinet Division, was invited to share the project's key contributions. Ms. Sharmin provided a succinct overview of the project's overarching vision, which centres on assisting the government in reforming the current social security system in alignment with the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) with a vision of ensuring that economic growth is achieved more inclusively by establishing a comprehensive Social Security System that extends its protective reach to all deserving citizens of Bangladesh.

6. She further elucidated that the SSPS Programme is also aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, and 16, underlining its commitment to addressing critical social and economic objectives. Ms. Sharmin also detailed the financial support structure of the programme, encompassing contributions from the Government of Bangladesh, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of the Australian Government, and UNDP Bangladesh. She informed that DFAT's support commenced in 2018 and is set to continue until June 2026 through a Revised TAPP.

7. She conveyed that the extension of the SSPS Programme has been made possible through the acquisition of secured funding from esteemed Development Partners, a measure endorsed by the Project Board. She also apprised the meeting that the proposal for project extension was subsequently recommended by the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) during its latest meeting in October 2023. Ms. Sharmin underscored the programme's financial performance, noting that it has achieved 98.06% of cumulative expenditure as of June 2023, showcasing a strong commitment to its objectives. The physical progress currently stands at 92.80%, signifying effective implementation.

8. Ms. Sharmin emphasized that the remarkable achievements of the SSPS Programme encompassed the development and mid-term review of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), the astute analysis of political economy in the context of social protection and the robust response to the challenges posed by COVID-19. The programme also played a seminal role in formulating the NSSS Action Plans for 2015-2021 and 2021-26, involving the collaborative efforts of 39 ministries, and in establishing a robust and all-encompassing framework for the governance of social protection. Furthermore, it provided instrumental support for government-driven initiatives, including the pivotal areas of pension reform and the

introduction of Universal Private Insurance.

9. Moreover, the programme's commitment to capacity building has extended to the thorough assessment of needs and the comprehensive training of Union Parishad officials, district administrators, and sub-district government personnel. It is noteworthy that the programme has also been actively engaged in high-level policy advocacy, particularly with Members of Parliament, on crucial matters related to social protection. In addition, it has contributed to the creation of a diverse array of knowledge products, conducting extensive research on an array of topics vital to social protection, which include mid-term reviews, gender-responsive adaptive social protection, social insurance, perceptual studies involving Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), and background papers on the blue economy.

10. Mr. Mohammad Khaled Hasan, Joint Secretary of the Civil Registration and Social Security Branch within the Cabinet Division, provided an informative update on the recommendations put forth during the recent SSPS Project Implementation Committee (PIC) meeting. This high-level meeting, presided over by the Secretary, Coordination and Reforms of the Cabinet Division and co-chaired by the Member (Secretary) of the General Economics Division within the Planning Commission, has strongly recommended the revision of the SSPS Programme's TAPP from July 2023 to June 2026, and extending the Project Document (ProDoc) duration and cost from December 2025 to June 2026.

11. Furthermore, Mr. Hasan drew attention to the pivotal role of this revision and extension in shaping the forthcoming formulation of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) for the year 2026 and beyond. In a notable development, he referenced a recent communication from the Resident Representative of UNDP Bangladesh, affirming the committed financial support from DFAT and UNDP, which will be instrumental in facilitating the necessary adjustments and the extension of the project.

12. Mr. Hasan underscored the significant objectives of the SSPS Programme's next phase, particularly its overarching aim to exert a more profound influence on Bangladesh's social protection landscape. This influence will be particularly evident in the strategic formulation of the future National Social Protection Strategy.

13. Therefore, the rationale behind the revision and cost extension of the SSPS Programme is compelling, rooted in the potential risks associated with discontinuing the project prematurely. The ongoing adjustments and interventions conducted by the SSPS Project are of paramount importance in shaping the next-generation NSSS. He emphasized that the revision of the project is undeniably essential in response to the urgent need for continuous social security reforms. All necessary preparations, including the required funding, have been meticulously established. As a result, he earnestly implored the PSC meeting to grant their approval for the project's extension through 2026.

14. Mr. Md. Mahmudul Hossain Khan, Secretary of Coordination and Reforms at the Cabinet Division, wholeheartedly endorsed the proposal for the extension of the project. He

emphasised that the project's activities and performances underwent thorough scrutiny during the recent Project Implementation Committee (PIC) meeting last month where the the members unanimously recommended for the extension of the project.

15. The Chair expressed his perspective that the project has played a pivotal role in bolstering social security programmes, leading to substantial advancements across various sectors and the generation of innovative ideas. The revised TAPP, intended to sustain this project, is deemed robust and indispensable to perpetuating the momentum that Bangladesh has achieved in the realm of social protection.

16. The Chair conveyed deep satisfaction in witnessing the involvement of development partners, recognizing their significant support to ensure the continuation of ongoing reforms in the field of social protection. Regarding the extension process, the Chair reassured the participants that it would smoothly progress through the planning commission. He extended gratitude to the development partners for their enduring collaboration and cooperative efforts. Subsequently, the Chair provided an in-depth analysis of the progress achieved within the principal components of the SSPS Programme and invited participants to discuss the matter of extension. The meeting reached a unanimous consensus on the revision of the TAPP, extending it from 2023 to 2026, as well as extending the Project Document (ProDoc) from December 2025 to June 2026.

17. Responding to an inquiry regarding further financing, the Chair stressed that reform is an ongoing process, and social protection policy reform holds a strategic significance for both the Government and development partners. He further acknowledged that in the event of a shortfall in funding, arrangements for government financing may be considered in the interest of project sustainability. In light of the global socio-economic and political challenges, the Chair underscored the critical importance of persisting with reform initiatives to fortify the social protection system in Bangladesh.

Open Discussions:

18. Dr. Fahmida Khanom, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, raised her concerns about the intersection of climate change and social protection. She said climate change issues are becoming increasingly significant, and planning for green and climate-resilient investments is crucial through social security mechanisms. She emphasized the need for incorporating climate change, climate resilience, and environmental health policies into the overall strategy, considering the impacts of global warming and related issues. She also pointed out that the project RTAPP specifically has two crucial elements that should be included. First, an exit plan must outline what will happen after the project concludes. Second, a results framework is important for monitoring the project's progress.

19. In response to this, Mr. Aminul Arifeen, Project Manager, SSPS Programme, UNDP, clarified that these two components have already been incorporated in the 2nd revision of the TAPP and cost extension of the Project Document (ProDoc). He further added that the result-

based log frame, project planning, and monitoring the progress are regular phenomena of the SSPS Programme both from the development partner, UNDP, and GoB perspective. He reiterated that the SSPS Programme's ProDoc is valid until December 2025 and needs a cost extension for an additional six months (June 2026). Regarding the issue of capacity building, he argued the importance of the sector and programme-specific participatory strength and fragility analysis, which will build the case for future investment in sustainable capacity building and leadership in effective and harmonized social protection programming, building the case for NSSS 2026 and beyond.

20. Ms. Azizun Nahar, Deputy Secretary, Economic Relations Division (ERD), shared that they had received a letter from UNDP, dated September 18, 2023, stating the commitment of the Australian Government (DFAT) to provide 5 million Australian dollars to the SSPS Programme. Ms. Nahar emphasized the importance of revising the TAPP and ProDoc, inviting dialogues and dissemination of the results to update the ERD on a regular basis, and yearly arrangements for PIC and PSC meetings due to the project's flagship status. Ms. Nahar emphasized the DFAT's strategic investment and commitment to helping Bangladesh enroll in the NSSS 2026 and beyond.

21. Mr. Stephan Liller, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh, highlighted the results and achievements of the SSPS programme and expressed optimism about raising funds for such a programme, especially considering Australia's commitment. He also appreciated the collaboration between UNDP and the Bangladesh government, acknowledging the significant progress made in social protection, climate adaptation, and leadership shown by Bangladesh.

22. Mr. Asif Kashem, Senior Program Manager (Gender Focal and Social Protection Lead), DFAT and Australian High Commission, Bangladesh, expressed DFAT's commitment to supporting the SSPS programme continuation and the partnership with UNDP and the government beyond 2026. Building the new social protection and social cohesion strategy development for Asia and the Pacific region, the DFAT's interest in strengthening Bangladesh's social protection system, building evidence on priority issues, and continuing to be a partner with this programme is a priority, he added.

23. Mr. Siranjun Noor Chowdhury, Additional Secretary, Finance Division (FD) took the opportunity to raise an inquiry concerning social protection and its specific definition considering the Bangladesh perspective. He suggested that the definition of social protection should be tailored to the country's unique characteristics, encompassing economic institutions, social status, vulnerability, and other contextual factors. He highlighted the distinction between social protection, social security, and social safety nets and identified three key issues to be addressed. In response to his concerns, Mr. Hasan addressed the issue of defining social protection, addressed by the SSPS Programme through a knowledge book 'ABCD of Social Protection,' and remolding the poverty curricula of Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC). He further clarified that in Bangladesh, the terms social security and social protection are used interchangeably, although this perspective might not be universally accepted. He noted that the International Labour Organization (ILO) had justified considering

social protection and safety nets as synonymous terms. Furthermore, the development of knowledge products, including the NSSS background papers, has enriched the ongoing discourse on social protection, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject, he opined.

24. Ms. Nurun Nahar, Joint Secretary of the Programming Division at the Planning Commission, provided insights into the Annual Development Programme (ADP) allocation for the current year and its availability for the next fiscal year. She assured the meeting that, within the Planning Commission's concerned division, efforts would be made to expedite the approval of the SSPS Programme RTAPP. She also emphasized that the project's focus should extend beyond social inclusion and encompass environmental and economic aspects.

25. Md. Kawser Ahmed, Member (Secretary), GED, Planning Commission, expressed his gratitude to the Cabinet Secretary, Mr. Stefan Liller, Resident Representative UNDP Bangladesh, the representative from DFAT, and relevant officials of Cabinet Division and GED. He extended special thanks to DFAT for continued support to the SSPS Programme, helping continuation and augmenting the social protection reform. He appreciated that all participants acknowledged the significance of continuing the project, gave special value to this project, and provided important guidance, which will help build Bangladesh into a welfare state as dreamt by the Father of Nations. He highly appreciated the government's invaluable efforts in establishing a poverty and hunger-free society, where social protection is one of the significant adherences.

26. He also praised the contribution of the SSPS Programme in five-year plans and SDG localization and emphasized the future scope of work of the SSPS Programme in the area of climate-induced shock-responsive adaptive social protection, National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS), national employment and wage policy, and pilot study linked to the SDG localization and gender equality. He also emphasized the issue and reform-focused regular dialogues, conferences, webinars, and knowledge-sharing programmes, which will give the SSPS programme a new shape of a think tank in the areas of social protection.

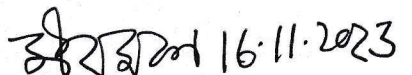
27. The Chair appreciated the participants' vital role in Bangladesh's social security reform through the SSPS Programme. He emphasized the programme's objectives in enhancing stability and resilience. The Chair then proposed the endorsement of the recommendations of the PIC, of revision of the SSPS Programme TAPP June 2014 -June 2026, and cost extension of ProDoc from December 2025 to June 2026 to support the social security reforms endeavors. The meeting unanimously agreed with the proposal placed by the Chair with following decisions.

Key Decisions

28. Following an exhaustive and comprehensive deliberation, the following decisions were duly reached and solidified:

- a. The SSPS Programme will be extended from June 2023 to June 2026 for which the project director will take measures for submitting the TAPP as early as possible.

- b. Measures will be taken to extend the relevant Project Document (ProDoc) from December 2025 to June 2026. The ERD and UNDP are requested to take necessary measures in this regard.
 - c. The meeting appreciated the firm commitment of the Department of Foreign Aid and Trade (DFAT) of the Australian Government to continue supporting the SSPS Programme with a broader goal of enrolling the next generation NSSS beyond 2026.
 - d. Additional funds may be explored from the GoB sources in addition to the development partners, if required, in order for the SSPS Programme to sustainably continue the lengthy and rigorous process of social protection reforms.
 - e. The SSPS Programme will devise a suitable framework for conducting analysis of strengths and weaknesses of specific sectors, ministries, and programmes in implementation of reforms agenda of social protection.
 - f. The SSPS Programme will incorporate the gender equality, climate change, and disaster issues in project activities for strengthening gender and marginalization inclusive, shock responsive and adaptive social protection model for Bangladesh.
 - g. The SSPS Programme will regularly organize meetings, workshops, dialogues, and communication activities ensuring the visibility of social protection reform, and tracking the progress of the NSSS action plan implementation by the ministries and divisions.
 - h. The project director will take measures to convene the PSC meetings regularly as per the requirements of the TAPP.
29. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to and from the Chair.


Md. Mahbub Hossain

Cabinet Secretary
Cabinet Division

&

Chairperson
Project Steering Committee (PSC)
SSPS Programme

Participants List (not according to seniority)

1. Md. Mahmudul Hossain Khan, Secretary, Coordination and Reforms, Cabinet Division
2. Fahmida Khanam, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
3. Dr. Md. Mosharraf Hossain, Additional Secretary, Cabinet Division
4. Nurun Nahar, Additional Secretary, Programming Division, Planning Commission
5. Jahir Raihan, Additional Secretary, Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED)
6. Siranjun Noor Chowdhury, Additional Secretary, Finance Division, Ministry of Finance (MoF)
7. Mofizuddin Ahmed, Additional Secretary, Financial Institutions Division (FID), Ministry of Finance (MoF)
8. Md. Khaled Hasan, Joint Secretary, Civil Registration and Social Security Branch, Cabinet Division
9. Stefan Liller, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh, IDB Bhaban, Agargaon, Dhaka
10. Murshida Sharmin Joint Secretary, Project Director, SSPS Programme, Cabinet Division
11. Lutfun Nahar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
12. Kazi Shajahan, PS to Cabinet Secretary (Joint Secretary), Cabinet Division
13. Nahid Monjura Afroj, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and children Affairs
14. Dilip Krishna Debnath, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare
15. Madhuri Yasmin, Joint Secretary, Planning Division
16. Dipankar Roy, Joint Secretary, Statistics and Informatics Division
17. Forhad Siddique, Joint Chief, General Economics Division (GED)
18. Md.Kamal Hossain, Joint Secretary, Local Government Division
19. Azizun Nahar, Deputy Secretary, Economic Relations Division
20. Rebeca Sultana, Deputy Secretary, Cabinet Division
21. Md. Ashraful Alam, Deputy Secretary, Cabinet Division
22. Md. Jalal Habibur Rahman General Secretary, Cabinet Division
23. Afia Akhter Chowdhury, Deputy Chief, SEID, Planning Commission
24. Asif Kashem, Senior Programme Manager, (Social Protection and Gender) and Consular Officer at Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian High Commission, Bangladesh
25. Aminul Arifeen, Project Manager, SSPS Programme, UNDP Bangladesh