

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme
Cabinet Division
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Minutes of the 5th meeting of the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) of the Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme.

Chair : Md. Mahmudul Hossain Khan
Secretary, Coordination and Reforms,
Cabinet Division

Co-Chair : Dr. Md. Kawser Ahmed,
Member (Secretary)
General Economics Division (GED)
Planning Commission

Date & Time : 20 June 2024, 10.30 AM

Place : Zoom Platform

Participants : Annexure-A

Agenda of the Meeting

- 1) Progress review of the last PIC meeting decisions held in October 2023.
- 2) Brief on the SSPS Programme and implementation progress.
- 3) Social protection programmes' efficiency and effectiveness pilot - Conceptual Framework.
- 4) Miscellaneous.

The Chairperson initiated the proceedings by extending a cordial welcome to all attendees, followed by a brief round of self-introductions. Subsequently, both the Chair and the Co-Chair conveyed their satisfaction regarding the timely approval of the Revised Technical Assistance Project Proposal (RTAPP) of the Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme. They underscored the significance of convening the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) meetings regularly to ensure the successful implementation of its entire agenda.

2. Then the chair requested Mr. Mohammad Khaled Hasan, Additional Secretary (Coordination) of Cabinet Division to present the agenda of the meeting. Mr. Hasan briefed the meeting that the meeting has 4 agenda items including miscellaneous discussion. He mentioned that the agenda encompasses the review of the progress of the last meeting decisions, the overview of the SSPS Programme along with remarkable progress, and a proposed pilot testing of a model of effective social protection having higher impacts on poverty reduction. Then Mr. Hasan requested Ms. Murshida Sharmin, Joint Secretary, Civil

Registration and Social Protection, Cabinet Division and National Project Director (NPD) of SSPS Programme to make a presentation on the agenda.

3. Ms. Murshida Sharmin informed that the first agenda of the meeting is follow-up on the progress of the last PIC meeting which was held on 08 October 2023 where three main decisions were taken. The first decision was to expedite the procedure of expediting the revision process of the RTAPP. In this regard, she apprised the meeting that the Social Security Branch of the Cabinet Division undertook the requisite measures to process the RTAPP and subsequently presented it to the Programme Steering Committee (PSC) to obtain consent for submission to the relevant Sector Division of the Planning Commission. The RTAPP received approval from the Planning Commission on March 5, 2024, which was followed by the issuance of an administrative order from the Cabinet Division.

4. She also informed that the SSPS Programme is maintaining close coordination with the relevant ministries to complete the key activities of the project as outlined in the RTAPP. A high-level consultation meeting has already been organized, involving senior officials from various ministries, including the Cabinet Secretary, Secretaries of different ministries, and other senior officials. Such collaborative efforts would be further strengthened in the coming days.

5. About the progress of the second decision she informed that the PIC's words of appreciation were conveyed to the relevant authority within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of the Australian Government and the UNDP for their support in extending the project. She also informed that the DFAT and UNDP reaffirmed their commitment to continuing their support for Bangladesh's social protection reform initiatives beyond 2026.

6. The third and last decision of the PIC was that the SSPS Programme would regularly organize meetings, workshops, dialogues, communication activities for social protection reform visibilities and consultations to track the progress of the NSSS Action Plan and to share the experience of NSSS implementation within ministries and divisions. She pointed out that the relevant wing of the Cabinet Division and GED took necessary support from the project for organizing and conducting meetings, workshops, dialogues, strategy and plan development and contributing to key policy-level discussions. National conference, integrated support to other conferences, seminars related to social protection reform, international webinars, audio-video podcasts on policy, reform, and evidence-based learning, and policy briefs were currently in the execution process.

7. Concerning the second agenda of the meeting she presented the current fiscal and physical progress of the project which was 62.10% and 63.48% respectively. The chairs urged upon the NPD to expedite the progress of the project so that 100% progress can be achieved within the project period which will end in 2026.

8. Moving forward to agenda 3 she informed the meeting that it is about pilot testing a project model of social protection programme efficiency in leading to a high rate of poverty reduction. She further elaborated that social protection programmes play a significant role in alleviating poverty, and therefore, the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh aims to utilize social protection to tackle inequality and marginalization. However, one of the inherent drawbacks of social protection programmes is the presence of significant inclusion and exclusion errors in beneficiary selection. To address this issue, leveraging modern digital targeting and delivery mechanisms could potentially enhance the effectiveness of social protection in reducing poverty.

9. To test this proposition in a real-world setting, a pilot research project has been designed. The project aims to gain further insights into how digital and scientific selection and delivery modalities can improve the impact of social protection programmes in Bangladesh. The pilot will focus on implementing advanced data analytics and digital tools to refine beneficiary selection processes, ensuring that the right individuals receive the benefits. Additionally, it will explore efficient delivery mechanisms to minimize errors and maximize the reach and impact of social protection initiatives. She also informed that initially, it would be pilot-tested in two upazilas of the country namely Ulipur and Nageshwari. This research will provide valuable evidence on the effectiveness of digital targeting in social protection and inform future policy decisions. By enhancing accuracy and efficiency, the project aims to make social protection more impactful in reducing poverty and fostering equitable development in Bangladesh.

10. In the miscellaneous agenda Mr. Khaled Hasan commented that the PSC meeting of the project needs to be organized as soon as possible. The meeting agreed that measures will be taken to organize it soon. However, in resonance with the chairs, the meeting highlighted the importance of organizing both the PIS and PSC meetings of the project according to the approved TOR.

11. The chairperson, while appreciating some of the remarkable progress of the project, pointed out that the issue of programme consolidation has not been properly prioritized. He expressed his surprise that the number of programmes has increased from 115 to 140 which is contrary to the consolidation policy. Some of the participants pointed out that the consolidation is linked with several loans and grant agreements and also with the main principle of the NSSS. The representative of the Finance Division argued that for the sake of fiscal management, the number has been increased though in reality, programmes did not increase at that scale. Mr. Hasan tried to argue that the Ibas++ code may be maintained separately, but the programs should be reported under the broader heading, each containing a group of programmes. He requested to consider the example of PKH model of Indonesia which has separate programmes run within a single branding.

12. Mr. Sarwar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare reiterated the importance of consolidation. He pointed out that partner organizations have highlighted a concern where there is only a 50-taka difference between the Old Age Allowance and Widow Allowance programs. This small difference has led women to prefer enrollment in the Widow Allowance program. Mr. Sarwar emphasized the need for merging and streamlining programs, urging the committee to take action on this matter.

13. Focusing on the speaker's remarks, Mr. Khaled stated that the SSPS programme has developed comprehensive guidelines on consolidation, which are highly detailed. He acknowledged that merging programs is challenging due to the involvement of different ministries and their respective responsibilities. However, he proposed that while programs can remain separate, they could offer the same benefit amounts and be grouped under the same heading. He suggested aligning beneficiary selection criteria as another form of consolidation.

14. Mr. Aminul Arifeen, project manager of the SSPS programme, addressed several critical issues: Firstly, he highlighted coordination challenges in Bangladesh, where 39 ministries are involved in achieving common goals, drawing comparisons with Brazil, Kenya, and India's approaches to streamline programs. Secondly, Mr. Arifeen stressed the importance of adopting a uniform methodology for selecting beneficiaries to standardize systems and

reduce program overlaps. Thirdly, he mentioned criticisms faced regarding the inclusion of pensions and freedom fighter allowances in social protection budgets. He proposed consolidating larger programs, noting that 20 major programs consume 90% of the total budget.

15. Mr. Arifeen also discussed GO-NGO collaboration issue, mentioning the preparation of a Non-State actor report and the pending GO that would facilitate SSPS initiatives. Furthermore, he advocated for a national dialogue to address the specific needs of children aged 4-6 years. Lastly, Arifeen highlighted the conceptual framework prepared for a pilot test, emphasizing studies showing that improving efficiency in social protection could significantly reduce poverty. He mentioned ongoing collaborations with the World Bank and BBS on a Single Registry MIS based on the National Household Database in Kurigram and Magura, aiming to identify intervention points effectively.

16. Mr. Md Razibul Ahsan representative from Ministry of Finance, provided an explanation why there was an expansion on the number of programmes. He stated that a new classification has been devised as a condition from World Bank for following international standards. He mentioned that In FY2023-24, there were 115 programs as shown in the summary report published by Finance Division in official website. Some of these programs had multiple Operational Codes and hence the iBAS++ was unable to generate Social Security Expenditure Report. In FY2024-25, in order to accommodate Operational and Economic codes in iBAS++ for different programs, some of the programs have been drilled down to the next lower level. As a result, the number of programs has gone up.

17. The Co-chair Dr. Md. Kawser Ahmed, Member (Secretary) of the General Economics Division (GED), Bangladesh Planning Commission, concluded the meeting with several key issues. He fully supported the discussions on consolidation and emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts among ministries. Dr. Ahmed proposed organizing a presentation to invite all ministries, led by the Cabinet Secretary, to streamline programmes. He suggested establishing a framework for introducing new programmes with the goal of reducing their number within the next one or two years. In this regard, he endorsed the idea of taking lessons from the experience of PKH (Program Keluar Harpan) of Indonesia.

18. Dr. Ahmed emphasized organizing more PIC meetings. He then mentioned that social protection programme consolidation is mandated by the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) and the Action Plan as well, which needs to be considered. He said that we should monitor the programme design so that existing programmes may not increase in number. To materialise the programme consolidation, he proposed to ask all secretaries to develop a social protection programme consolidation framework. About the proposed 'Conceptual Framework for Social Protection Efficiency' he remarked that the model is supposed to enhance poverty reduction in Bangladesh. He also informed the model may be piloted in Nageshwari Upazila as it had been recommended by the Honorable Prime Minister. He also emphasised the importance of carrying out the mid-term review of the NSSS and the implementation of the National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS) accordingly.

19. Addressing concerns raised by Mr. Arifeen, Dr. Ahmed recognized the need for a high-level discussion to determine allowances for freedom fighters and pensions. He emphasized the importance of regular PIC meetings to maintain consistent dialogue on these issues. Dr. Ahmed expressed strong endorsement for the pilot study presented by Ms. Sharmin. He highlighted that the Honorable Prime Minister has directed him to focus on implementing NSSS and SDG localization in Nageshwar, Kurigram, for a pilot study.



20. He also announced plans for organizing an International Social Security Conference later in the year. Additionally, Dr. Ahmed underscored the significance of conducting a review of NSSS, recommending the initiation of a study for this purpose. In conclusion, Dr. Ahmed thanked all participants for their valuable contributions and active participation in the discussion.

21. **Decisions**

- a) The National Project Director will ensure that regular meetings of the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) and Project Steering Committee (PSC) are convened in accordance with their respective terms of reference.
- b) The PIC has granted in-principle approval for the proposed pilot testing of the social protection model aimed at accelerating the rate of poverty reduction. However, the committee has advised the preparation of a detailed plan for the pilot testing.
- c) A workshop will be arranged with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) to elaborate on the aforementioned pilot study.
- d) The SSPS Programme will facilitate a consultative dialogue on the consolidation of social protection programmes in order to build up consensus as well as the capacity of relevant officials to comply with the NSSS provisions in this regard.
- e) The debate concerning the continued inclusion of government pensions and freedom fighters' allowances in the social protection budget may not be an agenda item for the PIC. Instead, it was suggested that this issue be discussed in the Central Management Committee (CMC), if required.
- f) The project shall take measures to organize the Bangladesh Social Security Conference and, to that end, formulate the programme leaflet/flyer by August, 2024.
- g) The SSPS Programme will organize a consultative dialogues on the National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS) in order to strengthen the contributory social protection programme.

22. There being no other agenda item for discussion, the meeting was concluded with a vote of thanks.



20/4/2028

Dr. Md. Kawser Ahmed
Member (Secretary)
General Economics Division (GED)
Planning Commission



20/6/2024

Md. Mahmudul Hossain Khan
Secretary
Coordination and Reforms
Cabinet Division

Participants of the Meeting
(Annexure – A)

Name	Designation	Ministry/Division
Md. Mahmudul Hossain Khan	Secretary, Coordination & Reforms	Cabinet Division
Dr. Md. Kawser Ahmed	Member (Secretary)	General Economics Division (GED)
Mr. Zahir Raihan	Additional Secretary, DG	Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED)
Mr. Mohammad Khaled Hasan	Additional Secretary	Cabinet Division
Ms. Murshida Sharmin	Joint Secretary	Cabinet Division
Mr. Abdul Zalil	Joint Secretary	Economic Relations Division (ERD)
Ms. Hoor E Jannat	Deputy Secretary	Planning Division
Dr. Md Ashraful Alam	Deputy Secretary	Cabinet Division
Mr. Anwoarul Haque	Assistant Resident Representative	Democratic Governance, UNDP Bangladesh