

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Cabinet Division
Social Security Branch
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Subject: Minutes of the Meeting of the Local Consultative Group (LCG) Working Group (WG) on Governance and Social Protection – Social Protection Cluster

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

Co-Chair Dr. Michal Krejza, Minister Counsellor, European Union in Bangladesh

Date and Time 11 November 2024, 10.30 am

Venue Conference Room, Room No 1005, Transport Pool Building, Cabinet Division

- **List of the Participants: Appendix 'A'**
- **Cabinet Division presentation on Strategic Guidelines and Action Plans for Adaptive Social Protection in Bangladesh: Appendix 'B'**
- **Development Partners (DPs) presentation on respective shock-responsive interventions: Appendix 'C'**

1. Mr. Khaled Hasan, Additional Secretary of the Cabinet Division, opened the meeting by expressing his gratitude to Md. Mahmudul Hossain Khan, Secretary of Coordination and Reforms, for presiding over the session. He also extended a warm welcome to the Co-Chair, Michal Krejza, Head of Cooperation (HoC) for the European Union (EU), along with representatives from line ministries and DPs.
2. Mr. Hasan explained that this LCG WG includes two clusters, which are closely interrelated: social protection and governance. He noted that today's discussion would focus on social protection, with two items on the agenda for review. Specifically: the Cabinet Division strategic guidelines and action plan for adaptive social protection and the ILO assessment-based national dialogue on social protection for working-age population. He then invited all participants to introduce themselves.
3. Following the introduction, Mr. Hasan invited the co-Chair to deliver his opening remarks.
4. The EU HoC thanked the Chair for organizing the meeting, noting that it was initially scheduled for July but postponed due to the political upheaval. He emphasized the importance of resuming the work of the LCG working groups, noting that this is among the first to reconvene post-revolution. Acknowledging the challenging times Bangladesh faces—including political changes, macroeconomic instability, and worker unrest—he highlighted the critical role of social protection in mitigating social conflict. As an example, he mentioned that swift disbursement of unemployment benefits could help stabilize workers affected by job losses. Before moving into the agenda, he requested an update from the Chair on social protection priorities under the interim government and inquired whether any specific commission or committee has been established to address this topic.
5. The Chair welcomed attendees to this important LCG WG on governance and social protection, emphasizing that Bangladesh is at a pivotal moment. In the wake of the Great Revolution, the government plans reforms and restructuring in key areas, which are still

ongoing. He noted that the last working group meeting on social protection took place in November 2023, leaving current efforts somewhat behind schedule.

6. The Chair explained that the adaptive social protection guidelines, prepared by the Cabinet Division encompass disaster management, adaptive social protection, and climate change. He then highlighted recent achievements in the social protection sector:
 - Of the 140 active social protection programmes, 104 are non-cash and 36 are cash-based, with 29 cash programmes already disbursed via the Government-to-Person (G2P) payment system.
 - On October 22, the Cabinet Division met with 10 ministries to enhance their social programmes' MISs Interoperability by November, aiming to prevent double-dipping.
 - On October 6, an EU-funded workshop presented a security assessment of the social protection MISs, identifying key challenges such as vendor-controlled MIS, lack of service agreements, insufficient security controls, and weak passwords. Ministries are addressing these issues.
 - For FY 2024-25, a budget of 1 lakh 36 thousand crore taka is allocated for social security, amounting to 2.5% of the GDP and 17.06% of the total budget.
 - Notable progress includes a reduction in stunting rates from 60% in 1997 to 23.6% in 2022. However, the rates of wasting children have risen, from 8.4% to 11% in 2022.
7. He noted that this meeting would focus on identifying challenges and strategies to address them. Concluding, he emphasized Bangladesh's global commitment to achieving zero poverty and zero hunger by 2030. With the current poverty rate at 18.7% and absolute poverty at 5.6%, Bangladesh must accelerate progress to meet these goals.
8. Mr. Hasan requested the participants to approve the minutes of the previous LCG WG meeting held in March 2024. He then delivered a presentation on the adaptive social protection guidelines.

Cabinet Division Presentation on Adaptive Social Protection Guidelines

9. In his presentation, Mr. Hasan briefed that the government has developed a strategic guideline for adaptive social protection, building on practices already established in Bangladesh long before the current framework. Unlike in many countries, disaster management and social protection are closely integrated here, and these concepts are often viewed as one.

The new guidelines introduce an important addition: climate action. By incorporating climate considerations into social protection, Bangladesh aims to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on poverty and vulnerability. This approach prioritizes sustainable, long-term resilience through a synergy of social protection, disaster management, and climate action.

The adaptive social protection framework operates across three areas with various development partners contributing to different components based on their specific areas of focus.

However, no single partner addresses all components, which reinforces the importance of synergy across sectors. The goal is to ensure that "one plus one plus one" amounts to more than three—creating a collective impact that strengthens shock response, enhances resilience, improves environmental protection, and fosters social empowerment. Social empowerment, especially for marginalized groups, helps prevent environmental degradation and promotes gender development.

This framework marks a significant evolution from welfare-based approaches to adaptive social protection, reflecting years of refinement. While discussions and workshops on adaptive social protection have taken place since 2016, a visible outcome emerged only in 2023 with the release of the current guideline, which, although impactful, is still a work in progress.

The adaptive social protection guidelines set a strategic direction, but ministries and development partners are responsible for developing detailed plans. Some already have plans in place, and the development partners were invited to share them in their presentation.

The framework emphasizes the importance of a three-part approach to disaster response: *before, during, and after* shocks. Traditionally, interventions in Bangladesh and other countries have focused mainly on post-disaster relief, with some limited response efforts during crises, such as delivering food to flood-affected areas. However, anticipatory action—preparing before a disaster occurs—offers a significantly higher impact, reducing the need for later interventions. Shifting to this proactive approach requires a mindset change.

Mr. Hasan encouraged both government and development partners to invest in preparedness for natural and economic shocks or health crises like COVID-19. Moreover, he added, adaptive social protection also calls for multi-sectoral coordination across social protection, disaster management, and climate response sectors, as a single ministry or partner cannot achieve these objectives alone. Key priorities include building capacity, improving readiness, conducting studies to understand ground realities, and developing data-driven strategies to support effective beneficiary selection.

Mr. Hasan highlighted the role of novel data strategies for beneficiaries' selection, successfully implemented during COVID-19, to identify people at hidden risk. This approach involves spotting "blind spots" in the population—individuals who appear stable but are facing serious, often unseen challenges. He referenced South Korea's development of AI-driven systems to detect individuals at potential risk, such as those who cease routine activities like mobile usage or bill payments. This data-driven approach aims to identify those in silent crisis, including people who may avoid seeking help due to social stigma.

Special emphasis was placed on supporting vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, and people with disabilities. These groups face heightened risks during disasters, requiring focused interventions that go beyond standard allowances to ensure safety and resilience.

For climate action, Mr. Hasan suggested that workfare programmes be conditional on reforestation and tree cultivation efforts, involving communities to strengthen social capital. Additionally, food and nutrition security were noted as critical focus areas.

He concluded by expressing confidence that development partners and ministries are aligned with these adaptive strategies and prepared to contribute toward a coordinated and impactful approach.

10. Concluding the presentation, Mr. Hasan requested Iole Valentina Lucchese, EU Programme Manager to coordinate the DPs presentation on their respective shock-responsive and adaptive social protection interventions. Ms. Lucchese explained that each DP would present their respective intervention within 5 minutes.

DPs Presentation on their Respective Adaptive/Shock Responsive Social Protection Interventions

11. Avirup Sarkar, Social Protection Specialist, Social Protection & Jobs presented the work of the World Bank (WB). He emphasized that the WB adopts a multi-dimensional approach to adaptive social protection, working across three main areas: policy support, delivery system enhancement, and financing. Mr Sarkar explained that the WB main implementing partners are the Department of Social Services (DSS) under the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and the Department of Disaster Management (DDM), under Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR).

He then started explaining the WB work with DSS. In terms of policy support, through the Recovery and Resilience DPC, the WB supported DSS to develop guidelines to provide emergency supplementary social assistance in response to shocks, allowing vertical top-ups and horizontal expansion during crises, such as providing cash transfers to highly affected groups (e.g., street vendors and rickshaw pullers during COVID-19). In terms of delivery systems, support has been provided to improve administrative systems and institutional capacity of the government agencies responsible for delivering social protection, including upgrading the MIS for the Department of Social Services (DSS) to streamline the implementation of the guidelines on emergency supplementary social assistance in case of shocks.

In terms of financing, the WB provided contingent emergency response support during COVID-19 pandemic and that involved \$165 million of financing delivered to 4.36 million beneficiaries.

He moved on explaining that the WB currently has two active programmes with the Department of Disaster Management: the Safety Net Systems for the Poorest, scheduled to conclude in December this year, and a new one, the Inclusive Services and Opportunities Project.

Through the Safety Net Systems for the Poorest programme, the WB has provided substantial policy support, notably in assisting the government with implementing a new economic code for the EGPP+ programme, which serves as the shock-responsive window of the flagship EGPP programme. A key improvement has been the shift from semi-annual to annual budget allocations for the EGPP, significantly increasing efficiency in implementing projects and delivering social assistance.

In terms of delivery systems, WB has supported the development and operationalization of an MIS for EGPP+ and another comprehensive MIS is currently under development that will include all social protection programmes delivered through the Department of Disaster Management. On the financing side, WB has co-financed EGPP+ payments alongside the government, with a particular focus on Cox's Bazar, in response to COVID-19 and other economic shocks affecting the region.

Additionally, in FY 2022-23, after the EGPP+ programme was introduced in five flood-affected districts, the initiative provided work opportunities and essential financial support to communities impacted by these floods.

12. Ms. Iole Valentina Lucchese, Programme Manager (PM) Social Protection, started the EU presentation sharing about the EU social protection budget support operation of €247 million, including €20 million contributed by BMZ, Germany, specifically to support the social security of workers.

In the context of adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, the EU's budget support included the Technical Assistance to Support Social Security Reforms (TA-SSSR). This initiative featured a team of experts assisting the Finance Division and the iBAS++ team in further developing the Single Registry (SR) MIS.

The SR MIS, an end-to-end digital solution hosted in the Finance Division, serves as a data repository for beneficiaries of cash and non-cash transfer programmes, including almost 30 million individuals. Key features include NID verification of beneficiaries; direct disbursement of cash transfers to beneficiaries via the G2P system; a Monitoring & Evaluation module, which provides data on the overall social protection system and prevention of double dipping through interoperability with other IT systems. Looking ahead, she explained, the SR MIS could leverage AI to identify poverty-stricken or disaster-prone areas for better targeting in adaptive and shock-responsive social protection. Additionally, the system could become more inclusive by onboarding NGOs and development partner data and enabling self-registration to ensure no eligible individuals are left behind. She moved on and explained that the EU TA has also supported the iBAS++ team in developing an MIS for the EGPP. Currently, EGPP relies on manual registration, selection, and payments, which leads to inefficiencies in targeting and payment delivery. The MIS developed for EGPP aims to address these challenges. The Finance Division has presented the MIS to the MoDMR. Training and piloting of the MIS are planned during the upcoming lean season, with the potential for expansion to other social protection programmes implemented by the same Ministry. She concluded explaining that a key budget support target under negotiation between the EU and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) is the integration of MIS systems for at least 20 major cash transfer programmes, including EGPP, into both the G2P system and the Single Registry MIS as part of the budget support operation.

13. The Chair inquired if the EU was suggesting that all social protection programmes implemented by the MoDMR be integrated under a single MIS. The EU PM responded that this approach is feasible if MoDMR opts for a unified MIS instead of maintaining multiple systems.
14. The Chair further clarified that, from the Cabinet Division's perspective, all MIS systems across ministries should adhere to a standardized data structure format. This includes mandatory fields, and directives have been issued to all ministries to ensure compliance. A unified format would not only facilitate consistency across MIS systems but also simplify their integration with iBAS++.
15. The EU PM concurred, noting that the EGPP MIS was developed by the iBAS++ team, and the suggestions provided by the Cabinet Division had been carefully incorporated.
16. Mr. Stanley Gwavuya, Social Policy Officer at UNICEF, presented UNICEF's work in adaptive and shock-responsive social protection. He began by outlining UNICEF's three main objectives in this area: 1. Extending the coverage of existing social protection programmes; 2. Increasing the level of financial support provided through these programmes; 3. Expanding the range of services available to those affected by disasters. As a humanitarian agency, UNICEF is uniquely positioned to respond across multiple sectors, including health, nutrition, education, and water and sanitation. The focus is on ensuring that the most vulnerable, who are typically the primary beneficiaries of existing social protection programmes, are also included in humanitarian responses across these sectors. Among key initiatives he mentioned that UNICEF has been collaborating with the MoDMR to strengthen the capacity of Disaster Management Committees (DMCs), which are the government's main response arm. Recently, training programmes for DMCs have been initiated across sub-districts to enhance their effectiveness. Moreover, a pilot intervention, modeled after the Maternal and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP), was implemented to extend coverage to beneficiaries not typically included in MCBP but affected by disasters. This initiative has already reached approximately 7,000 households impacted by recent cyclones and floods. UNICEF has used these pilots to gather insights

on improving rapid response mechanisms and positioning for faster, more effective action during crises. Future plans foresee scaling up efforts to reach 30,000 MCBP recipients in 23 flood- and cyclone-prone districts.

17. Then, it was WFP's turn to present. Mr. Riccardo Suppo, WFP Head of Programmes, described WFP's activities during recent emergencies, emphasizing the role of shock-responsive social protection in addressing crisis situations. In 2024, Bangladesh experienced three floods and one cyclone, offering multiple opportunities to test shock-responsive interventions. WFP implemented pilot responses at various stages—before, during, and after emergencies. Through anticipatory action, WFP supported 9,000 people in the Jamuna Basin through the MCBP and the EGPP and assisted mothers during the eastern floods in Feni and Cumilla via the MCBP.

On post-disaster recovery, WFP collaborated with MoWCA on the Vulnerable Women Benefit Programme (VWBP) to provide cash assistance for asset recovery to participants who had graduated from the investment component of the programme but lost assets due to disasters.

To consolidate these experiences, WFP plans to host a lesson-learning session in collaboration with the Cabinet Division and relevant line ministries to share insights from these multiple interventions.

Then, Mr. Siddiqui Islam took the floor and elaborated on WFP's efforts to institutionalize shock-responsive social protection since 2023, particularly focusing on two programmes: EGPP and MCBP. He added that WFP established standard operating procedures (SOPs) with the support from MoDMR, the Cabinet Division, and the Ministry of Social Welfare and developed a joint action plan with the relevant departments and ministries. He re-affirmed that WFP interventions cover all stages of disaster response: pre-disaster (anticipatory action), during emergencies, and post-disaster recovery. He highlighted that anticipatory action is being extended to over 500,000 households across 17 districts, covering a wide range of disasters such as cyclones, flash floods, and monsoon floods. He added that future plans foresee the expansion to three additional social protection programmes, including the Old Age Allowance and Disability Allowance and the transition from the current digital cash transfer system to align with the government's G2P system. He underlined that to date, WFP has reached 9,000 beneficiaries through anticipatory actions and 30,000 during emergencies. By 2025, WFP aims to reach 50,000 beneficiaries across five social protection programmes. Moreover, WFP has conducted post-distribution monitoring to evaluate what worked well and identify areas for improvement. Impact evaluations are ongoing to assess the effectiveness of interventions.

18. Ms. Mousumi Pervin, Senior Climate Change Officer, from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) presented the bank's approach to adaptive social protection. She provided an overview of ADB's ongoing Social Resilience Programme, initiated in 2021 under Sub-Programme 1, which focused on policy-based budget support tied to specific policy conditions. Now, ADB is preparing Sub-Programme 2, with a focus on improving the efficiency, inclusiveness, and livelihood improvement within social protection programmes.

She added that ADB's strategy emphasizes enhancing existing social protection systems rather than introducing entirely new approaches. The four key priorities for improving adaptiveness in social protection systems include: 1. Improved targeting systems, targeting the most vulnerable populations effectively, ensuring outreach to last-mile users and those in genuine need; 2. Developing solutions that minimize duplication, create synergies, and integrate all aspects of social protection to ensure inclusivity; 3. Flexibility in programme design, redesigning social protection programmes to be more flexible, allowing them to adapt to evolving social issues and challenges; and 4. Securing financial

resources, addressing mismatches between planned initiatives and actual resource needs to ensure adequate funding and financial sustainability.

She highlighted that ADB is providing technical assistance to the Cabinet Division and the MoDMR to update existing Disaster Management guidelines. Consultants have been engaged to support MoDMR in finalizing these guidelines. Technical support is also being extended to enhance capacity building for implementers, which remains a high priority for ADB.

19. Dr. Mahfuz Kabir, Advisor to the DFAT/UNDP SSPS project delivered the presentation, summarizing key findings conducted by the General Economics Division, Cabinet Division, and UNDP in collaboration with University of Dhaka. He highlighted that social protection must address two types of shocks: idiosyncratic shocks (individual-specific, such as illness or job loss) and covariate shocks (affecting large populations, like COVID-19, natural disasters, and climate-induced events).

Shocks have three phases: before, during, and after. While knowledge exists about damage and loss, the psychological impacts, particularly psychosocial recovery, remain underexplored.

Dr. Kabir added that Bangladesh currently implements 140 social protection programmes, but better results can be achieved without increasing the budget by reorienting and reprioritizing these programmes for greater shock responsiveness and adaptiveness. Welfare programmes need significant reform to ensure efficiency, inclusivity, and alignment with disaster impacts. They should be redesigned taking into account demographic factors: gender, age, disability, and ethnicity. Moreover, cash and in-kind transfers should prioritize health care, nutrition, and shock-specific needs. Existing insurance schemes, he conveyed, often implemented by development partners, should expand to cover climate-induced shocks comprehensively. He moved on, sharing that a 2022 indexing study highlighted physical, economic, social, and institutional vulnerabilities in different regions.

There is a need for a dynamic mapping system to track vulnerabilities across the country and develop regional climate models to predict and address disaster recurrence. He then proposed an institutional structure where the Prime Minister's Office or Chief Advisor's Office provides overall policy guidelines, Cabinet Division could issue administrative guidelines and the MoDMR is the main implementing agency, with support from other ministries like Social Welfare and Labour. He underlined the role of academia to support with monitoring, evaluation, mapping, and modeling efforts. He emphasized the need to address psychological security, particularly for adolescent girls and women, in disaster-affected areas. Finally, he recommended to incorporate insights from all relevant stakeholders into programme design and implementation; to focus on maximizing efficiency within existing financial resources to achieve objectives and to strengthen monitoring, evaluation, and modeling frameworks to enhance disaster preparedness and response.

20. Saad Gilani presented on behalf of the International Labour Organization (ILO), introducing Recommendation 205—a global standard adopted in 2017 to address employment and job protection in conflict or disaster situations. This recommendation emphasizes safeguarding employment and income-generating opportunities before, during, and after shocks, often overlooked in adaptive policy planning. It calls for preserving rights, equality, non-discrimination, education, vocational training, and social protection, especially for vulnerable groups like refugees, returnees, and migrant workers.

Gilani highlighted the importance of incorporating these measures across all stages: preparation, response, early recovery, and development. He commended UNDP for its

study, which underscores income loss and employment as areas severely impacted by disasters. While infrastructure may recover quickly, employment often lags, delaying community resilience. Ensuring employment protection is, therefore, crucial for sustained resilience.

He offered to provide a more detailed presentation on integrating these recommendations into existing government guidelines, if updates are required.

21. Fabian Klinge delivered a presentation on behalf of GIZ, noting that while GIZ does not currently run a standalone programme in adaptive or shock-responsive social protection, it participates in the Global Shield against Climate Risks Initiative. Launched at COP27 in 2022 by the B20 and G7, the Global Shield aims to facilitate pre-arranged protection for vulnerable countries, like Bangladesh, against climate and disaster-related risks. It does so by supporting the use of climate and disaster risk finance tools, such as subsidized crop insurance, regional disaster insurance, and adaptive social protection initiatives.

Mr. Klinge explained that the Global Shield is supported by a Secretariat in Germany and operates through country-specific processes. In Bangladesh, this process is managed by ERD with assistance from the Institute of Water Modeling. The country process involves an assessment of current initiatives in adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, followed by a gap analysis to create a tailored support package. He stressed the importance of ensuring that all relevant programmes are included in this assessment, not only those that are already adaptive, but also those which are not yet and where the Global Shield could help rendering them more adaptive and shock responsive.

22. At the end of the DPs presentation, Ms. Lubna from the Embassy of Switzerland how the MoDMR is coordinating the efforts of development partners' interventions. She also requested that the Cabinet Division share their plan to address the current price hike, which is significantly affecting people's livelihoods.

23. Mr. Hasan highlighted the existing coordination framework, noting a committee led by the Secretary of Coordination and Reforms, which includes 15 Line Ministries. Although this committee has only met once, he committed to organizing another meeting soon, recognizing it as a critical coordination forum. He outlined four key areas for enhancing adaptive social protection:

- Adaptive Coordination: Coordination must be responsive and flexible, adapting to changing contexts.
- Adaptive Information: Effective information sharing among relevant Line Ministries is essential. This includes creating a seamless, automated exchange of data to inform proactive measures and better understand vulnerable populations.
- Adaptive Funding: Funding needs to be responsive, allowing adjustments to allocations based on emerging needs. Legal and local funding frameworks should be adaptable to meet these demands.
- Programme Adaptation: Programmes should be flexible, allowing changes in criteria and delivery modes, such as switching from in-kind support to cash allowances.

He also noted gaps in current models for predicting disaster risks, suggesting that further data and modelling—such as UNDP's—are crucial. He pointed out the importance of inclusivity, especially regarding disabilities, which remains underrepresented compared

to support for gender and children's issues. The goal is to deduplicate fragmented support, identify gaps, and realign resources to achieve truly adaptive social protection.

24. The EU HoC, Michal Krejza summarized key operational points from the discussion. He emphasized the importance of coordinated efforts among the Line Ministries and development partners. He also supported the idea of convening another coordination meeting with the 15 relevant Line Ministries. Regular meetings of the LCG working group were also noted as essential.
He also highlighted the need for robust data sharing across databases, particularly for tracking vulnerable groups like children. Mr. Krejza acknowledged ongoing efforts to enhance data availability and urged for continued focus in this area.
He then commended Bangladesh's progress in developing a disaster risk financing strategy and encouraged the government to finalize and adopt it promptly. Finally, reflecting on GIZ's presentation, he noted that funding is available under the Global Shield initiative. However, to access this, the government must accelerate the design and implementation of relevant interventions, urging the ERD to expedite these processes.
25. Ms. Lucchese from the EU proposed continuing the discussion on adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, as there had been limited time for questions. She suggested moving the second agenda item, a presentation on the assessment-based national dialogue for working-age people, to the next LCG WG meeting to allow participants more time to engage.
26. The Cabinet Division representatives acknowledged the request and opened the floor for additional questions on adaptive and shock-responsive social protection.
27. Mr. Avirup Sarkar from the WB observed that the Finance Division has an 8,000 crore BDT fund available for responding to economic and natural disasters; however, its utilization remains low. Discussions with various ministries indicated that this low usage is mainly due to the lack of a clear guideline on accessing and using the fund to address specific shocks and disasters. He requested the Chair and Mr. Khaled to elaborate on possible solutions to develop such a guideline, enabling ministries responsible for disaster response and social protection to effectively access and utilize these resources.
28. Mr. Razib Hasan, Deputy Secretary of the Finance Division, confirmed the fund's availability and low disbursement. He noted that disbursement is based on disaster intensity and agreed that having guidelines would expedite fund utilization.
29. Mr. Khaled Hasan noted that the Ministry of Environment has specific guidelines in place, yet coordination is needed across three key frameworks: the National Social Security Strategy, the Adaptive Social Protection Guidelines, and the Standing Order on Disaster Response. He thanked the World Bank for raising this issue and proposed inviting the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to report at the next meeting on any gaps in guidelines that may hinder fund access. He remarked on the unfortunate underutilization of the 8,000 crore taka, equivalent to around 1 billion USD.
30. Mr. Sarkar added that the fund is intended not only for natural disasters but also for economic disruptions. For instance, recent inflation could be considered a type of economic disaster. He suggested that the Finance Division establish a comprehensive guideline to make the fund accessible to various ministries for diverse shocks, transforming it into a flexible resource available to any ministry that meets specified criteria

31. The Chair requested that the Finance Division representative would coordinate with the Cabinet Division to address the issues surrounding the utilization of this fund.
32. Mr. Asif Kashem from the Australian High Commission shared that many Global South countries are now considering adaptive social protection as part of a just transition, leveraging climate-related funds. He noted that the Global Shield example was particularly relevant. He suggested that discussions on adaptive social protection also include a focus on climate change mitigation, such as green jobs, to make future access to emerging funds easier. Citing examples from countries like Indonesia and South Africa, which are already making this shift, he emphasized that incorporating mitigation strategies alongside adaptation efforts would enable Bangladesh to benefit from global learnings and funding opportunities.
33. Mr. Khaled Hasan clarified that the primary focus is on climate adaptation rather than mitigation. He emphasized that social protection programmes are being designed to enhance adaptation efforts, with any mitigation effects occurring indirectly. While acknowledging the importance of mitigation and the need for substantial funding, he suggested keeping it in consideration but not as the central focus of current efforts.
34. Ms. Lucchese revisited Lubna's question from the Embassy of Switzerland, emphasizing its relevance. She suggested that, aside from the Cabinet Division, a representative from MoDMR could clarify the coordination mechanisms of DPs interventions. From the development partners' side, technical coordination meetings are held every month. In October, the EU organized a DPs-only workshop on adaptive/shock-responsive social protection. Reflecting on the way forward she acknowledged that presentations from multiple development partners—could feel overwhelming. However, she noted as key points that agencies like the EU, World Bank, ADB, and UNDP have emerged as primary system-strengthening agencies, while UNICEF and WFP are the main partners implementing shock-responsive interventions across various phases. She supported WFP suggestion to draw conclusions and lessons from these interventions and discuss them in a workshop to inform system strengthening. She highlighted the role of MoDMR and the Cabinet Division in developing and agreeing on SOPs to ensure coordination and interoperability across systems and line ministries, emphasizing that this should be practical and actionable. Lastly, as other DPs participants, she raised again the issue of economic challenges, such as inflation and workers' unrest, expressing that development partners are unclear about the government's short-term plans to use social protection measures to address the economic crisis. She requested a clear and practical response on this point.
35. Mr. Hasan noted that the interim government (IG) has set-up several reform commissions. He stated that the IG has emphasized the importance of social protection, confirming that programmes will continue without interruption. The focus of reforms should be on improving governance and the delivery mechanisms as part of the administrative reform commission. The IG has committed to maintaining social protection programmes, including pension reforms, while enhancing coordination and efficiency. Key objectives include minimizing leakage, rationalizing programmes, and improving delivery systems, in line with the previous government agenda.
36. The Chair returned on the importance and necessity of adjusting prices for social protection allowances, noting that while the government supports a significant number of beneficiaries through cash and in-kind programmes, current coverage is only around

40%, leaving nearly 60% without support. Expanding this coverage would require substantial funds, making full adjustment challenging in the current economic climate. To address these challenges, the government is gradually increasing support in specific areas. For instance, allowances under two social welfare programmes have recently increased from 600 to 800 taka. However, due to ongoing international crises, the government cannot fully adjust allowances to match rising prices at this time.

37. The Chair went on outlining three main priorities for social protection: 1. Implementation of a Single Registry MIS for streamlining social protection initiatives; 2. Developing the National Household Database for potential beneficiaries is crucial for accurate targeting. Currently, beneficiary selection, often influenced by local representatives, can be subject to biases. Piloting the national household database in a specific district would allow for comparisons and improvements in identifying real beneficiaries; 3. Workers' Insurance. He shared that workers in sectors like garments, footwear, and leather are vulnerable to sudden job losses. Establishing an insurance programme would provide interim support for unemployed workers. The speaker encouraged the Labour Ministry to advance this initiative.
38. Dr. Kabir, Advisor to the SSPS project, explained that the government has introduced three key measures to tackle inflation. The first one is a tightening monetary policy. Although in place for the past seven to eight months, this policy has had limited impact on inflation. Second, the government has the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) operation—an alternative supply mechanism. Recently, new items were added to the TCB's product bundle. Expanding this operation further could help stabilize the supply chain and mitigate inflationary pressures. Third, the interim government has introduced a market monitoring task force operating at national, and district levels. This initiative aims to improve market governance and could positively have an impact on the overall market conditions.
39. Mr. Ulrich Klepmann from the German Embassy emphasized the need for a robust database to effectively implement programmes aimed at absorbing economic shocks, particularly in the RMG sector. He pointed out that, although Germany allocated EUR 20 million to support 25,000 workers, only circa 11,000 beneficiaries could be reached due to database limitations. Mr. Klepmann noted that the issue is not always about lack of funds or programmes but often about an insufficient framework. He highlighted a positive development: through a GIZ programme commissioned by Germany, there is now permission to develop a comprehensive database in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and major RMG associations. He encouraged the Bangladeshi government to focus on strengthening databases in other areas as well, which would be beneficial for insurance solutions, disaster relief, crop production, and other critical programmes.
40. Mr. Riccardo Suppo from WFP highlighted that there is a consensus on key challenges with "money out" processes, which ensure that available financial resources reach those in need during emergencies. For this reason, WFP invested and tested a lot during these emergencies to build up and establish these systems for the money out. However, he expressed some disappointment with the responsiveness to these pilots, as these were intended to demonstrate the system's effectiveness and scalability. Mr. Suppo suggested that there may be a coordination gap between those managing financing instruments and those overseeing the "money out" systems. They proposed that further discussion on this topic could be beneficial to address any disconnect and improve the system's overall efficiency.

41. At the conclusion of the discussion on adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, Ms. Jurate Smalskyte Merville, Team Leader for Human Capital Development at the EU, raised three key points. First, she proposed including a discussion on the roadmap for developing the post-2026 NSSS strategy in the agenda of the next LCG WG on Social Protection. She emphasized the importance of engaging all development partners and civil society organizations (CSOs) to ensure a comprehensive and collaborative approach to the development of the strategy.

Second, building on decisions from the previous LCG WG meeting on social protection, she requested inviting the Bangladesh Social Protection Advocacy Network (BSPAN), a coalition of 15 CSOs active in social protection, to the next session to present their activities. She stressed the importance of hearing their perspectives, given the EU's strong collaboration with civil society through the Team Europe Initiative, and noted that the network had formally applied to participate in the forum.

Third, she suggested that before finalizing the date for the next LCG WG on Governance, the EU meets with the Public Administration Reform Commission. She explained that the EU has been engaging with all six reform commissions, as well as the four additional commissions expected to be formed, to address key issues. She emphasized that prior discussions with the Public Administration and Foreign Commissions are necessary to ensure effective preparations for the next Governance Group meeting. She concluded by inviting the Chair to provide comments and suggestions.

42. Mr. Aminul Arefeen from UNDP suggested to invite BSPAN to the GO-NGO platform which will be revived early next year. Moreover, he highlighted that the UNDP, in collaboration with the UNPRPD and other UN agencies—including ILO, UNICEF, WFP, the UNRC Office, and UNESCO—is collectively developing the National Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities. This initiative is being undertaken in partnership with the SDG Alliance for Persons with Disabilities, ensuring active engagement from civil society organizations and disability-focused organizations.

This framework is expected to make a significant contribution to the next National Social Protection Strategy (NSSS) and will play a supplementary role in the upcoming NSS review, which is scheduled to commence next year under the leadership of the General Economics Division. The review will likely offer critical insights into the future direction of social protection in Bangladesh.

Additionally, he added, Khaled's presentation on social protection and adaptive social protection, along with today's presentation led by the DPs, will collectively contribute to building a robust shock-responsive and adaptive social protection system in Bangladesh. These efforts align closely with the ongoing UNDP studies and strategies to ensure that Bangladesh's social protection framework evolves effectively to meet future challenges.

43. The Chair agreed to invite the BSPAN to the next LCG WG on Social Protection to present their activities and interventions. He also proposed scheduling the next meeting on governance after reviewing the reports from the reform commissions, suggesting the third week of January 2025 as a tentative date.

44. The Chair thanked all participants for their valuable contributions to the discussion and formally concluded the meeting.

Decisions/Recommendations:

- a. The Finance Division will collaborate with the Cabinet Division to identify solutions for the low disbursement of the Finance Division fund allocated for responding to economic and natural disasters.
- b. WFP and UNICEF may organize workshops to share lessons learned from the implementation of shock-responsive pilots during recent floods in Bangladesh in 2024. These insights could serve as a foundation for further developing frameworks to build a more adaptive and shock-responsive social protection system.
- c. ILO will present the Assessment-Based National Dialogue on working-age populations at the next LCG WG on Social Protection.
- d. BSPAN will be invited to deliver a presentation on their activities at the next LCG WG on Social Protection.
- e. The next LCG WG on Governance will be scheduled after reviewing the reports from the reform commissions formed by the IG, particularly those from the public administration reforms commission. The tentative date for the meeting is the third week of January 2025.



Co-Chair
Michal Krejza
Minister Counsellor
European Union in Bangladesh



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