

Urban Social Protection in Bangladesh: Forging Strategic Framework

Mohammad Khaled Hasan
Additional Secretary,
Cabinet Division



Presentation Outline

Constitutional Framework

Rural-centric vision's urban implications

Current Policy Architecture

Existing social protection policies; urban-rural distribution

Urban Challenges

Unique vulnerabilities and needs of urban populations

Strategic Interventions

Proposed reforms for urban protection gaps

Implementation Framework

Delivery mechanisms & ministerial responsibilities

What is Urban?

Over 60% of Bangladesh's urban population lives in metropolitan cities; Dhaka and Chittagong alone house over 48%.

For effective social protection planning, "urban" in Bangladesh entails:

- **High-density population with diverse economic activities.**
- **Prevalence of informal settlements and housing insecurity.**
- **Distinct governance structures (city corporations, municipalities).**
- **Vulnerability profiles unique from rural areas.**

Urban social protection strategies must address both metropolitan concentration and the distinct characteristics of smaller urban centers.

The Constitutional Vision: A Rural Focus

The Constitution of Bangladesh establishes a development model with an explicit rural orientation:

Article 16 directs the state to enact a "radical transformation in the rural areas" to "remove the disparity in the standards of living between the urban and the rural areas."

The Policy Echo: A Rural-Centric Architecture



Historical Focus

Policies mirrored Constitution's rural focus.



Established Systems

Robust systems for agrarian poverty.



Emerging Gap

Limited capacity for urban vulnerability.



The Critical Gap

While aiming to elevate rural areas, significant urban poverty is overlooked.



Constitutional Provision: Article-15 and 16

Article 15: Basic Necessities

"The State is responsible for economic growth, increasing productive forces, and improving citizens' living standards."

Article 16: Rural Development

"The State shall radically transform rural areas through agricultural revolution, rural electrification, and cottage industry development."



National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh



JULY 2015

General Economics Division
Planning Commission
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Life Cycle Approach to Social Security

Bangladesh's social security framework employs a life-cycle approach, covering all stages from early childhood to old age.

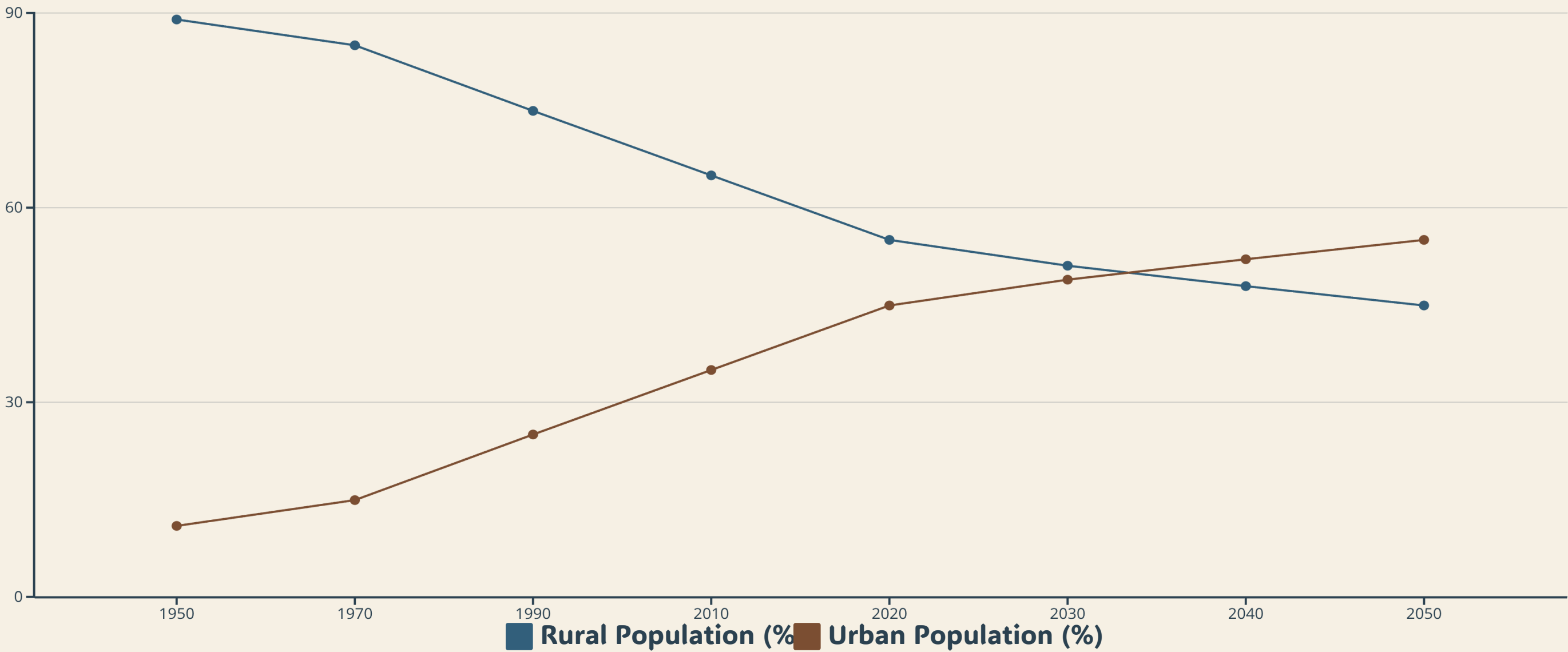
Historically, its implementation has been stronger in rural areas, leading to significant gaps in urban coverage.

Vision of National Social Security Strategy (NSSS)

- **Inclusive social security for all citizens**
- **Effective targeting of vulnerable populations**
- **Enhanced resilience to socioeconomic shocks**
- **Strengthened delivery and coordination**

Challenges exist in reaching urban vulnerable populations due to institutional, infrastructural, and identification barriers.

Rural-Urban Population Distribution (%)



Rural–Urban Distribution of Social Protection Programs

Key Observations:

- Imbalanced rural-urban program distribution.
- Urban social protection disproportionately low vs. poverty.
- Limited targeting for urban vulnerable.

Critical Gaps:

- Inadequate data: urban informal sector.
- Limited social security: urban women.
- Minimal protection: urban elderly & disabled.
- Insufficient urban disaster protection.

Policy Framework



1

National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2015

Aims to reduce poverty and vulnerability for all citizens, including urban populations.

Frameworks recognize urban social protection but require more detailed implementation and targeting.

Policy Framework: Key Components

Vulnerability Identification

Identify and map urban vulnerabilities: slum dwellers, informal workers, women-headed households.

Social Programs

Expand existing social programs to urban populations; introduce unemployment and childcare benefits.

Livelihood Opportunities

Invest in skills development and microfinance for urban livelihood creation.

Housing Security

Integrate affordable housing with social protection: rent subsidies, informal settlement tenure.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Incorporate urban-specific disaster preparedness and post-disaster recovery safety nets.



Current Practices and Programs

Government Initiatives

- **UPHCSDP:** Essential urban healthcare
- **NUPRP:** Livelihood & basic services for urban poor
- **URP:** Strengthens urban emergency response
- **LIUPC:** Sustainable income for urban poor

NGOs and International Organizations

- **BRAC:** Microfinance, skills training
- **UNICEF:** Child protection, education
- **ILO:** Decent work for informal sector

Community-Based Approaches

- Community Savings Groups
- Community Health Workers (CHWs)
- Youth Empowerment Programs

Delivery Mechanism: Single Registry MIS

A unified MIS is crucial for urban social protection:



Centralized Database

Central repository for all beneficiary data.



Unique Identification

Digital ID system for benefit entitlements.



Digital Payment

Integrated G2P system for benefit transfer.

Cash Support Program in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Emergency Response

The pandemic prompted unprecedented cash transfers to urban populations, especially informal workers who lost livelihoods during lockdowns.

Implementation Challenges

Difficulties in beneficiary identification, database limitations, and delivery revealed structural weaknesses.

Lessons Learned

The crisis highlighted the necessity and feasibility of expanding social protection to urban informal workers, while exposing infrastructure gaps.

Programmatic Approach to Urban Social Protection



Reformed Programs

Existing rural programs adapted for urban settings, with modified eligibility and delivery mechanisms.



Upscalable Programs

Pilot initiatives designed for rapid expansion during crises or when resources permit.



New Programs

Urban-specific interventions address unique vulnerabilities like housing insecurity and informal employment.



Unchanged Programs

Existing programs effectively serving both rural and urban populations without modification.

This multi-track approach enables strategic resource allocation and comprehensive urban coverage.

Ministry of Food

Key Responsibilities:

Urban Food Card Program

Adapt rural assistance model for urban food security.

Fair Price Shops

Establish outlets in urban areas, especially near informal settlements.

Emergency Food Reserves

Maintain urban stocks for crisis response.



Implementation Timeline:

- **Short-term (1-2 years):** Pilot urban food card program.
- **Medium-term (3-5 years):** Expand urban food security system.
- **Long-term (5+ years):** Integrate with digital benefit transfer.

Finance Division

Budget Allocation

Dedicated budget lines for urban social protection, ensuring sustained funding.

G2P Payment System

Develop comprehensive G2P infrastructure for urban contexts, including mobile banking.

Fiscal Framework

Fiscal incentives for municipal social protection investment via grants and performance-based allocations.

Impact Evaluation

Robust monitoring systems to track expenditure effectiveness and guide resource allocation.



Ministry of Labour and Employment



Strategic Initiatives:

- **Unemployment Insurance:** Pilot program for urban workers.
- **Childcare Services:** Promote workplace childcare facilities.
- **Informal Sector Protection:** Schemes for urban informal workers.
- **Skills Development:** Vocational training for urban labor demands.

Outcomes: Reduced vulnerability, increased labor resilience, improved urban working conditions.

Local Government Division

Key Responsibilities:



Program Coordination

Coordinate workfare programs with Ministry of Disaster Management in urban areas.



Municipal Capacity

Strengthen urban local bodies' capacity to implement social protection.



Community Engagement

Engage urban communities in program design and monitoring.

LGD adapts national programs to local contexts, ensuring last-mile delivery for urban residents.



Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief

Strategic Initiatives:

- **Scalable Programs:** Flexible programs for rapid urban disaster response.
- **Urban Hazard Mapping:** Comprehensive urban hazard and vulnerability mapping.
- **Rapid Social Protection:** Protocols for quick social protection deployment during urban crises.
- **Climate Adaptation:** Integrate climate resilience into urban social protection frameworks.

Implementation Priorities:

- Early warning systems with automatic benefit triggers.
- Pre-position resources in vulnerable urban zones.
- Mobile emergency cash transfers.

Gaps and Limitations



Data Gaps

Insufficient urban-specific poverty data; inadequate tracking for mobile populations.



Institutional Fragmentation

Multiple agencies, overlapping mandates; limited coordination for urban interventions.



Targeting Challenges

Traditional poverty tools less effective in dynamic, cash-based urban economies.



Resource Constraints

Limited fiscal space for expanding social protection to urban populations.



Delivery Limitations

Underdeveloped mechanisms for informal settlements and urban mobility.



Policy Framework

Insufficient urban-specific guidelines in social protection strategy.

Recommendations

Short-Term Actions (1-2 Years)

- Establish Urban Social Protection Cell (Cabinet Division)
- Map urban vulnerability in major cities
- Develop urban-specific targeting & beneficiary registry
- Pilot urban unemployment insurance & food security

Medium-Term Strategy (3-5 Years)

- Formulate Urban Social Protection Framework
- Implement unified MIS for urban social protection
- Scale pilot programs to all urban centers
- Develop sustainable financing for urban programs

Long-Term Vision (5+ Years)

- Achieve comprehensive urban social protection coverage
- Integrate urban-rural programs into national system
- Establish permanent urban social protection mechanisms
- Develop shock-responsive urban resilience capabilities

Thank You

