

# Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme

Policy Note 03

## Ensuring Food Security and Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Bangladesh

Policy Insights Drawing from the National Conference on Social Protection 2025

### Overview

The Food Security & Disaster Response Cluster constitutes a core pillar of Bangladesh's non-contributory social protection architecture under the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) Action Plan II (2021–2026). Led by the Ministry of Food and supported by multiple line ministries; including Disaster Management and Relief, Commerce, Agriculture, Social Welfare, Women and Children Affairs, Health, and the Finance Division; the cluster plays a central role in ensuring food access, price stabilization, and emergency response in a climate-vulnerable and shock-prone context

In Bangladesh, where climate variability, global price volatility, and recurrent disasters intersect with structural poverty, food security cannot be treated as a standalone welfare issue. It represents a resilience function within the broader shock-responsive social protection system. The cluster integrates protective transfers, preventive stock management, and emergency relief mechanisms, positioning it as a hybrid instrument of both safety net and crisis response.

### Functional Scope and Institutional Architecture

The cluster operates across three functional domains. First, it delivers protective interventions through food grain distribution and cash-based transfers targeting poor and vulnerable households. Second, it performs preventive functions through procurement, stock management, and price stabilization mechanisms aimed at mitigating supply disruptions and inflationary shocks. Third, it activates emergency response modalities, including food, shelter, and essential support during disasters

Institutionally, the cluster reflects a multi-ministerial coordination model involving nine ministries. While this architecture acknowledges the cross-sectoral nature of food security, it also introduces complexity in decision-making, mandate alignment, and accountability. The cluster's exclusion of conditional workfare programs maintains functional clarity within the NSSS structure, but coordination with adjacent clusters remains critical for lifecycle and shock-responsive integration.

## **Systemic Challenges**

Despite notable strategic progress, the Food Security and Disaster Response Cluster continues to face several structural challenges that constrain its effectiveness. Inter-agency coordination remains fragmented, with overlapping mandates, differing operational protocols, and limited integration of real-time data hindering seamless program alignment. In the context of shocks, such delays in information flow or resource mobilization can compromise timely response.

Fiscal pressures present another persistent constraint. Balancing investments between anticipatory resilience-building and reactive emergency relief remains challenging, especially amid global commodity price fluctuations and increasing climate-induced disaster frequency. Climate change further intensifies systemic vulnerability. More frequent flood cycles, cyclones, salinity intrusion, and localized crop failures heighten the demand for both preventive stock management and emergency interventions, placing considerable strain on logistical capacity.

In addition, last-mile delivery also remains uneven, as hard-to-reach coastal, char, and remote areas face persistent logistical barriers that compromise timely and equitable distribution. Without strengthened delivery infrastructure, inclusion risks remain, particularly for women-headed households, persons with disabilities, and elderly populations. Finally, monitoring and evaluation systems require consolidation. The absence of integrated budgetary and beneficiary data for recent fiscal cycles limits the ability to assess performance, recalibrate strategies, and make evidence-informed decisions.

## **Reform Priorities**

Strengthening the cluster requires a focus on institutional consolidation and system modernization rather than program proliferation. A key priority is the establishment of clear inter-ministerial coordination protocols, with defined leadership mandates for both normal and emergency periods. The adoption of joint operational frameworks and digital information-sharing platforms would reduce fragmentation and enhance responsiveness.

Accelerating digital integration of beneficiary databases, stock monitoring systems, and geographic targeting tools is equally critical. Linking food distribution mechanisms with national social registries would enable rapid expansion in response to shocks while minimizing duplication. Institutionalizing anticipatory social protection mechanisms is another essential reform. This includes pre-positioning food stocks in high-risk districts, connecting early warning systems with automatic resource activation triggers, and incorporating climate risk analytics into planning.

Strengthening last-mile delivery systems also requires targeted investment, including mobile distribution units, enhanced local government capacity, and the leveraging of community-based structures to improve access in vulnerable zones. Finally, fiscal sustainability must be addressed through diversified resource mobilization, incorporating climate finance, contingency funds, and alignment with development partners, ensuring predictable financing to balance preventive and emergency functions.

## **Strategic Directions for System Strengthening**

Moving forward, the cluster should evolve toward a fully shock-responsive and lifecycle-aligned. Looking ahead, the cluster should transition toward a fully shock-responsive and life-cycle-aligned model within the NSSS framework. This entails moving beyond primarily reactive relief toward integrated resilience planning, where food security interventions are linked explicitly with poverty graduation pathways, nutrition-sensitive programming, and gender-responsive targeting. Greater alignment with climate adaptation strategies is crucial; procurement and stock management should be coordinated with climate-smart agriculture initiatives to enhance sustainability. Embedding gender analysis within food distribution systems will further ensure equitable access and mitigate intra-household disparities. Institutionally, the cluster would benefit from a consolidated performance dashboard tracking beneficiary coverage, stock levels, fiscal utilization, geographic gaps, and response times. Such evidence-driven approaches will strengthen

accountability, enable strategic recalibration, and reinforce policy coherence across the system.

## **Conclusion**

The Food Security & Disaster Response Cluster remains a cornerstone of Bangladesh's social protection system, particularly in a context characterized by climate exposure, market volatility, and recurrent disasters. Its integrated mandate across protection, prevention, and emergency response reflects strategic alignment with the NSSS vision of shock-responsive social protection.

However, sustaining effectiveness requires deeper coordination reform, anticipatory financing mechanisms, digital integration, and strengthened last-mile systems. By institutionalizing resilience-oriented reforms and embedding climate-responsive planning, the cluster can transition from a reactive safety mechanism to a proactive resilience platform ensuring that vulnerable populations maintain continuous access to food and emergency support in an increasingly uncertain risk environment.

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The Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme is a flagship initiative jointly led by the Cabinet Division and the General Economics Division (GED) of the Bangladesh Planning Commission, implemented with financial and technical support from the Australian Government (DFAT) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In September 2025, SSPS provided technical assistance to the Cabinet Division to organize the National Conference on Social Protection in 2025 under the theme "Journey Towards an Equitable Society." The conference served as a national platform to discuss inclusive, resilient, and rights-based social protection reforms, marking a key milestone in Bangladesh's efforts to strengthen its social protection system.