



Bangladesh readiness assessment: delivering anticipatory social protection

Working Paper

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Climate change

Keywords:

Climate resilience, social protection, loss and damage, climate finance, climate change justice, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs), early warning systems

This is an extract from the IIED working paper 'Delivering anticipatory social protection: country readiness assessment'. The full paper includes complete analysis of eight countries and can be downloaded from www.iied.org/21896iied

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Introduction

Climate change poses severe and urgent risks, especially to vulnerable communities. Social protection programmes, which historically focused on poverty alleviation and basic services, are increasingly seen as vital tools for building climate resilience. Proactive, anticipatory measures in social protection can offer cost-effective resilience against climate shocks, reducing poverty, enhancing access to services, and preventing distress migration. These programmes contribute to long-term sustainable development by tackling multiple dimensions of vulnerability, from raising living standards and human development to empowering individuals and fostering economic growth.

However, despite potential, vulnerable countries grapple with challenges in delivering anticipatory and risk-responsive social protection. These challenges include ineffective targeting of beneficiaries due to limited data and poor information systems, inconsistent social protection coverage caused by resource limitations and policy gaps, sometimes resulting in programme duplication, underdeveloped early warning systems (EWSs) that lack comprehensive climate hazard coverage, particularly in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), inefficient decision making and delivery mechanisms, and difficulties in coordination among various stakeholders and sectors during crisis.

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Anticipatory Social Protection Index for Resilience (ASPIRE) Tool

The ASPIRE diagnostic tool offers a multi-layered approach to evaluate a country's readiness and effectiveness in delivering anticipatory and shock-responsive social protection. It assesses the maturity, readiness and gaps within existing social protection programmes by considering diverse national contexts, which include varying climate risks, institutional capacities and policy frameworks. The tool assesses a country's policy domain, covering aspects such as policy objectives, innovation, risk definition, target specification and assistance types, which identify areas that require attention to enhance the anticipatory risk-responsiveness of social protection programmes. The ASPIRE tool assesses the systems domain, and covers aspects such as financial capacity, administrative capacity, fiscal space, infrastructure, technology and information systems, and institutional mechanisms. Overall, using the ASPIRE diagnostic tool can allow governments to identify gaps and challenges that impede the effective integration of anticipatory response in social protection programmes, including insurance-linked responses. Funding agencies can leverage ASPIRE's detailed analysis to allocate resources more effectively, focusing on the most urgent gaps and impactful opportunities. **More details about the ASPIRE tool and how it can be used can be found at www.iied.org/21901iied.**

The applicability and effectiveness of the ASPIRE tool has been rigorously tested through the analysis of eight countries: Malawi, Ghana, Senegal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Uganda, Ethiopia and India. These countries were selected to represent a diverse range of climate risk contexts. Within each country, three social protection programmes were further chosen for the assessment — representing different delivery mechanisms, such as public works, food and in-kind assistance, and cash transfers. By applying ASPIRE to these eight countries, the analysis offers valuable insights into how social protection programmes can be tailored to meet diverse climate risks and vulnerabilities. The end goal is to strengthen these countries against climate risks by enhancing their readiness, filling policy and system gaps, and facilitating the successful incorporation of insurance-linked anticipatory payout mechanisms. **The complete analysis of the 8 countries and 24 programmes can be found at www.iied.org/21896iied.**

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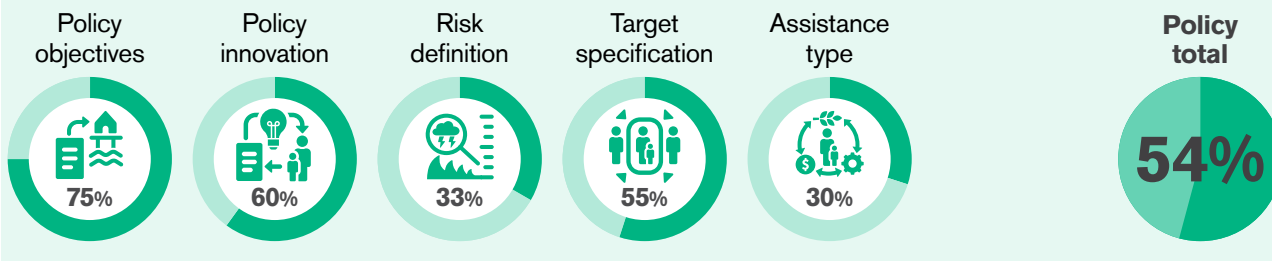
Country analysis: Bangladesh

This document provides the full analysis of Bangladesh's social protection policies, systems and programmes in terms of their readiness in delivering anticipatory climate resilience, using ASPIRE tool. The secondary sources and evidence used for the review are listed in the Annex.

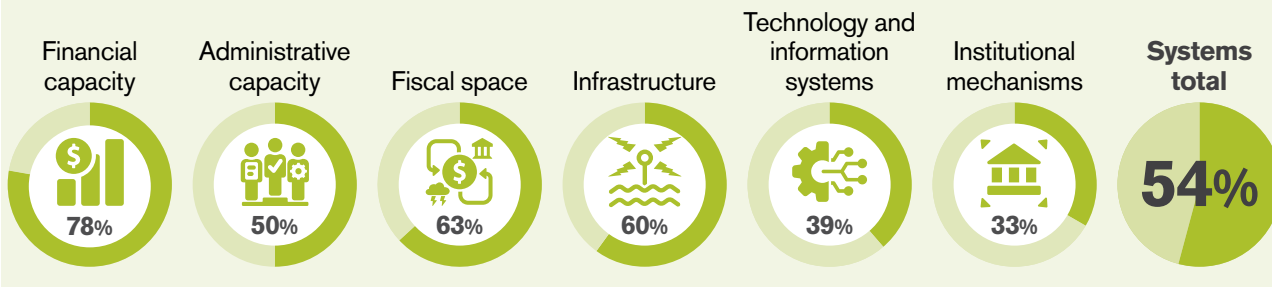
BANGLADESH SCORE CARD

POLICY AND SYSTEMS

Policy

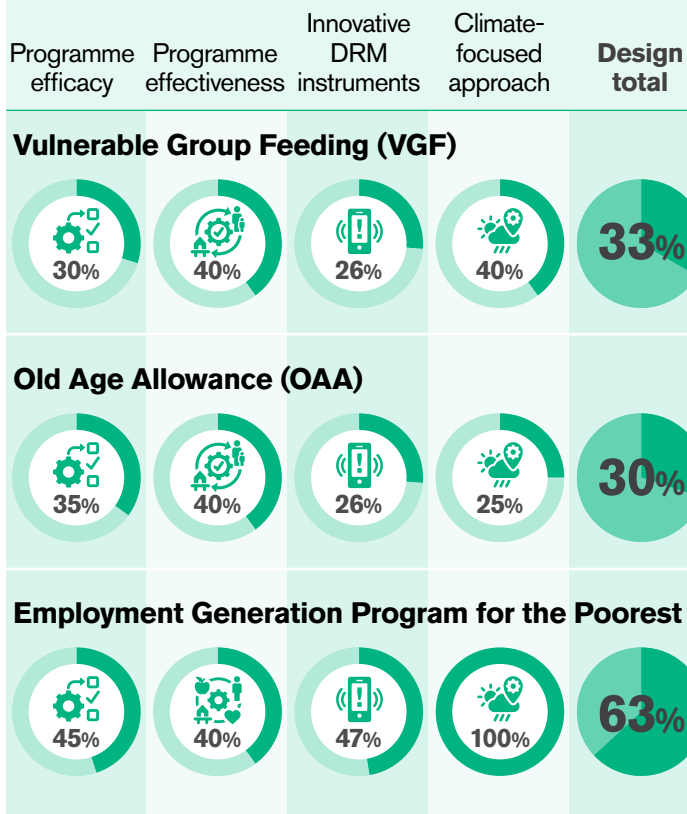


Systems

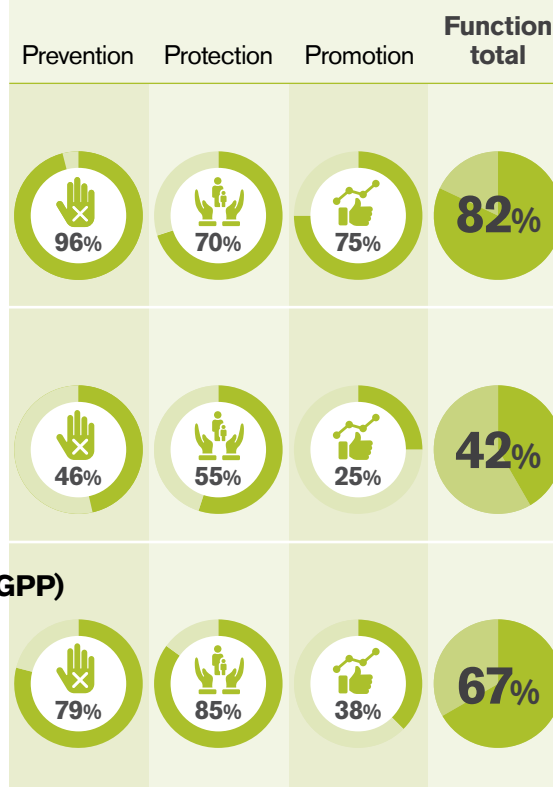


PROGRAMMES

Design



Function





Policy framework

Policy objectives

POLICY OBJECTIVES	
The country's social protection policy has a clear vision, goals and objectives	5
The policy explicitly mentions building resilience to climate shocks as an objective	5
The policy prioritises anticipatory response to climate shocks (ie preparedness and proactive measures to mitigate impacts)	1
The country uses systematic policy planning cycle mechanisms to manage the design and delivery of social protection programmes	4

Clear vision, goal and objectives: The country's social protection policy has a clear vision, goals and objectives. It follows a lifecycle approach, prioritising the poorest and most vulnerable members of society and including them in the broader social security programme. The policy aims to provide adequate protection to the poor and vulnerable, improving their ability to cope with crises and economic adjustment.

The National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh emphasises non-discrimination and ensures that the social security programmes are available to all deserving individuals, regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, profession or location. It promotes an inclusive social security system that effectively tackles lifecycle risks and addresses gaps in coverage, especially in early childhood needs.

The NSSS guarantees support to prevent and protect against risks faced by the people. It envisions a comprehensive social security system that provides a guaranteed minimum income and a safety net for those who experience shocks and crises that may push them into poverty. The strategy includes the initiation of a social insurance system that allows individuals to invest in their own social security, providing security against risks such as old age, disability, unemployment and maternity.

The policy expresses the right to social security. It aligns with the national constitution and international conventions agreed by Bangladesh. While the strategy does not discriminate, it does make special provisions for vulnerable populations, including women, children, disabled people and poor people in urban areas.

Efficient targeting is promoted through programme consolidation in line with lifecycle risks. The NSSS aims to strengthen the system by consolidating programmes into a small number of priority schemes and

gradually increasing coverage. The benefits are non-discriminatory and available to all poor and vulnerable people who meet the income and selection criteria, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, profession or location.

The policy aims to avoid creating a culture of dependency among the target populations and encourages them to be active in their search for livelihood opportunities. The NSSS action plans focus on skill-building, training, income-generating activities and self-employment for different groups, empowering them to become self-sufficient. The aim is to make communities self-reliant and sustainable through various programmes.

Building resilience part of objective: The policy of Bangladesh includes building resilience against climate shocks as an objective. Several major social protection programmes in the country also have climate resilience-building features. To assess their effectiveness in addressing climate risks, three programmes were reviewed: Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP), and Old Age Allowance (OAA).

VGF provides food transfers to poor households during religious festivals and natural disasters. Half of the support is provided during festivals, and the other half is used for disaster relief.

The EGPP aims to create employment for the unemployed poor during the seasonal lean period. It focuses on reducing poverty and enhancing disaster resilience through various rural infrastructure projects, including water conservation and management.

The OAA programme, which provides unconditional cash transfers to elderly individuals, does not have explicit climate resilience-building features.

Overall, while VGF and EGPP incorporate climate resilience measures, there is no evidence of such features in the OAA programme.

Anticipatory response: The policy prioritises preparedness and anticipatory response to shocks. However, there is no mention of anticipatory response in the social protection policy itself. While the EGPP and VGF programmes have elements of climate resilience and adaptation, they are not anticipatory in nature.

A study indicates that the three programmes reviewed have elements of shock-responsiveness, but they lack anticipatory response. The study also suggests that the OAA, Allowance for Widows, Deserted and Destitute Women (VA), Disability Allowance (DA) and EGPP have the potential for early action and immediate response, particularly in the context of floods. The digitisation efforts by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) have made these programmes more practical for shock-responsive actions.

Systematic planning cycle: The country has systematically adopted policy and planning cycle mechanisms for social protection. The policy development process involved evidence-based policymaking and public consultations.

The NSSS Action Plan emphasises the need for a tailored M&E framework for social security programmes. The Core Diagnostic Instrument is recognised as a valuable tool for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the social security system.

Mechanisms for review and monitoring of the policy practices exist. The NSSS incorporates a plan for monitoring the progress and results of social security programmes, building accountability and advancing desired outcomes. The implementation progress is regularly reviewed through qualitative and quantitative methods, including key informant interviews and data analysis from secondary sources.

The NSSS highlights the importance of ongoing M&E to improve delivery processes, document results and inform policymakers. Implementing ministries/divisions, the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division and General Economics Division have specific responsibilities in the M&E framework. Evaluation reports are shared with the Central Management Committee and the responsible Parliamentary Standing Committee, and information is made readily available to stakeholders.

Regular evaluations are conducted to assess the effectiveness of the policy. However, assessments often exist in silos, lacking comprehensiveness and leading to irregularities in the analysis of social protection efforts.

The NSSS has been revised and updated at least once in the last five years. The policy recommends reforming the designs and delivery system of existing programmes in two phases. A review of the implementation progress led to the introduction of Phase II of the NSSS Action Plan, which involved workshops, review and revision before approval.

Policy innovation

POLICY INNOVATION	
Rights-based regulatory provisions are given for the social protection of vulnerable communities	2
The policy offers portable benefits for migrant populations	2
The policy emphasises universal access to a range of benefits by vulnerable communities	3
The policy acknowledges community, CSO, NGO and private sector engagement in social protection interventions	5

Rights-based entitlement: Rights-based regulatory provisions are included in the social protection policy to ensure the protection of vulnerable communities. The NSSS aims to shift from a discretionary approach to a targeted universal approach, expanding coverage to the urban poor and socially excluded people.

Thorough analysis to identify the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups is lacking, as highlighted in the NSSS Action Plan. Despite the identification of vulnerable groups in the NSSS, a significant portion of the population still lives in extreme poverty or are classified as vulnerable and not comprehensively covered under social protection programmes.

Access to social protection programmes is challenging for poor and marginalised people due to supply- and demand-side problems. Constraints on the supply side include fund constraints, incorrect documentation and discretionary selection of beneficiaries. On the demand side, lack of awareness and knowledge of procedures hinder access to social protection programmes. Access to information and decision making on social protection policies and services, as well as access to justice and remedy, is a priority in the NSSS. However, there are a lack of rights awareness and exercise of claims by rights holders, contributing to inefficiency in the overall system. Many people have poor understanding of beneficiary selection processes and low motivation to participate in ward meetings or engage with social protection schemes.

Portability of benefits: The policy document implicitly mentions portability benefits for migrant populations, but specific attention to migrants and their families is lacking in the initial version of the NSSS strategy. However, the Phase II Action Plan (2021–26) of the NSSS includes the strengthening of social allowances for migrant workers and their family members as a major reform activity.

The current focus of social protection in Bangladesh is primarily on rural areas, and there is a need to modify existing social safety nets to include urban areas. Many migrants in urban areas are unable to access social protection benefits, despite high levels of poverty in

slum communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated poverty in urban areas, highlighting the necessity for accessible social protection mechanisms that can be accessed when needed, regardless of location. Development partners recommend providing old age pensions, disability benefits and child benefits equally to both urban and rural areas, aligning with the vision of the NSSS. It is important to make these benefits portable to cater to the increasingly mobile poor population in the context of climate change.

Universal access: The policy emphasises universal access to a range of benefits for vulnerable communities. However, in practice, universal access is not implemented effectively.

The NSSS initially prioritised the hardcore poor and the most vulnerable sections of the population due to institutional capacity, fiscal space, existing system inertia and administrative structures. The strategy recommends shifting from a discretionary approach to a targeted universal approach for several programmes to address low coverage and avoid leakages. The expansion of social security schemes to include the poor and vulnerable residents of urban areas and socially excluded individuals is also highlighted.

According to the Midterm Implementation Review of the NSSS conducted by the General Economic Division, the social security system in Bangladesh has a 71% error of exclusion, meaning it fails to reach those most in need, and a 46.5% error of inclusion, reaching those who may not be in vulnerable situations.

Based on available data, the number of beneficiaries for the three reviewed programmes is as follows: VGF — 18 million, OAA — 4.9 million to 6.5 million, and EGPA — 2.65 million. However, only 28.4% of the population in Bangladesh is covered by at least one social protection programme, and only 14.9% of the vulnerable population belonging to vulnerable groups are covered by social assistance programmes. These statistics indicate a significant gap in achieving universal access to social protection benefits.

Stakeholder engagement: The policy acknowledges the engagement of communities and civil society in social protection interventions. There is evidence of institutionalised consultations between the ministry responsible for social protection delivery and NGOs/CBOs/CSOs.

NGOs are recognised as valuable partners in the implementation arrangements for NSSS. They are involved in piloting innovative ideas, identifying potential beneficiaries (especially those in remote or marginalised areas) and helping resolve grievances related to the NSSS. NGOs are also appointed by the government to provide development services for the Vulnerable Group Development Programme.

The government's Cabinet Division emphasises the organisation of dialogues and conferences with development partners and NGOs, as stated in the Action Plan 2021–2026 of the NSSS. Consultation workshops on government-NGO collaboration have been organised by the Cabinet Division on various aspects of the NSSS and social security programmes.

The NSSS defines the role of local government institutions in implementing the strategy and emphasises close collaboration between implementing ministries/divisions, local government institutions and NGOs in programme delivery.

Private sector organisations are expected to contribute to the financing of the NSSS and other social protection programmes, as outlined in the policy. However, no specific evidence could be found regarding the financial contribution from private sector entities, other than development sector entities like the World Bank, mentioned as a key partner for programmes like the EGPP.

Regarding social audit and data sharing, the NSSS document highlights the need for social audit processes to reduce corrupt practices and mentions examples such as hotlines for reporting incidents. However, no evidence could be found regarding the practice of social audit for the three reviewed programmes or the sharing of monitoring data in the public domain.

Risk definition

RISK DEFINITION	
The policy identifies types of risk that the most vulnerable communities face	3
The policy clearly defines trigger points for hazard events (eg anticipated drought based on rainfall data) that may activate the anticipatory social protection	1
The policy sets out contingency plans for social protection measures to come into force when trigger points for hazardous events are reached	1

Definition of risk to most vulnerable: The policy identifies the types of risks that the most vulnerable communities face but this is not effectively applied in practice.

The NSSS acknowledges the covariate risks faced by households in Bangladesh, including seasonal risks, food prices and economic recession, and the need for social protection programmes to mitigate these risks. These risks include household-specific shocks like health issues, unemployment and asset loss, as well as community-level shocks such as natural disasters, epidemics, political crises and global recessions.

However, despite the identification of these risks, the implementation of social protection programmes

falls short. As mentioned before, only 28.4% of the population in Bangladesh is covered by at least one social protection programme, and only 14.9% of the vulnerable population covered by social assistance programmes belong to the vulnerable population group.

Definition of trigger points: The NSSS does not explicitly mention the trigger points of hazard events that would activate anticipatory social protection. However, it recognises that households in Bangladesh face various shocks, including household-specific shocks like health issues, unemployment and asset loss, as well as community-level shocks such as natural disasters, epidemics, political crises and global recessions. The policy highlights the existence of disaster risk mitigation programmes implemented by the Ministry of Food and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, as well as food allowance programmes like VGF and Open Market Sales to address price shocks. The government also has fiscal and monetary policy instruments to address recessionary pressures on the economy.

While the policy acknowledges the risks faced by households, it does not provide specific trigger points or mechanisms for activating anticipatory social protection measures based on hazard events like anticipated droughts determined by rainfall data.

Contingency plans for trigger points: There is no specific mention in the NSSS document or the action plans for 2016–2021 and 2021–2026 regarding contingency plans for social protection measures in response to trigger points of hazard events. The policy does not provide explicit guidelines or provisions for implementing contingency plans to address the specific needs and risks arising from hazard events.

Target specification

TARGET SPECIFICATION

The policy identifies the groups of households or individuals that are most at risk of being affected by shocks or crises, and should be targeted for assistance	1
The policy recognises diversity of vulnerability (eg women, children, elderly people, displaced people, etc.)	4
The policy specifies who is eligible for assistance from social protection programmes	3
Targeting criteria are transparent, fair and based on objective indicators defining vulnerability	3

Identifies households or individuals most at risk:

The NSSS recognises various vulnerable groups and their specific needs within its social protection strategy. Women, children, elderly and disabled people, socially/ racially marginalised communities and displaced and

migrant communities are all covered in the policy. However, the implementation of social protection measures for these groups is not comprehensive and faces challenges.

Women are acknowledged as a vulnerable group, and the NSSS outlines various programmes and benefits for their support, such as financial assistance, participation in the labour market and maternal health schemes. However, budgetary constraints limit the effectiveness of these programmes.

Children are also considered a vulnerable group, and the policy advocates for child grants, school stipends and other support programmes. However, social protection for children is inadequate and does not fully address their needs.

Elderly and disabled people are included in the policy, with provisions for old age allowances, pensions and disability benefits. However, the social protection system needs further improvements to meet the diverse needs of these groups.

Socially/racially marginalised communities are recognised as having specific vulnerabilities, but the policy falls short in providing comprehensive strategies to address their needs, particularly in terms of financial inclusion and access to services.

Displaced and migrant communities receive limited attention in the NSSS, with a focus on strengthening social allowances for expatriate migrant workers. Access to social protection benefits for migrants in urban areas remains a challenge.

Overall, while the NSSS identifies these vulnerable groups and their specific needs, there are gaps and limitations in the implementation and effectiveness of social protection measures for these groups.

Policy identifies diversity of vulnerability: The NSSS acknowledges the heterogeneity of vulnerability and recognises the need to address the specific needs of different vulnerable groups within the target population. The policy mentions the inclusion of socially excluded populations such as ethnic minorities, transgender individuals, tea garden workers, HIV-affected people and more.

The Action Plan for 2021–2026 emphasises the coordination of programmes among implementing ministries and the consolidation of selected programmes based on a lifecycle framework. It highlights the importance of targeting different age groups, especially children, vulnerable women, the elderly and disabled people. The plan also recommends a shift from a discretionary approach to a targeted universal approach to improve coverage and prevent leakages.

However, the General Economics Division's review highlights the shortcomings of the social security system and suggests that the current programmes fail to effectively reach those most in need of social protection while also providing assistance to individuals who may not be in vulnerable situations.

Eligibility defined: The fragmented nature of Bangladesh's social protection system has led to inefficiencies and reduced impact. The ad hoc development of numerous programmes, often with overlapping objectives, has resulted in duplication and inefficient service delivery. The NSSS recognises the need for consolidation to avoid duplication, expand beneficiary coverage and achieve efficiency, but this consolidation has not been effectively implemented.

The social security system in Bangladesh faces significant errors of exclusion and inclusion, with a large portion of the population not receiving the social protection they need. The system fails to reach those most in need of assistance and provides benefits to individuals who may not be in vulnerable situations.

The low coverage of social protection programmes is evident, with only a small percentage of the population benefiting from at least one programme. Moreover, the proportion of the vulnerable population covered by social assistance programmes is even lower.

Targeting criteria transparent, fair and objective:

The policy explicitly defines transparent, fair and objective targeting criteria for social protection programmes. However, there is no evidence of these criteria being adopted and implemented effectively.

The existing social protection programmes in Bangladesh primarily focus on rural areas, while poverty rates in urban areas remain high. The coverage of social protection programmes in urban areas is low, reaching only 11% of the urban population, despite 19% of urban residents living in poverty. In contrast, coverage in rural areas exceeds the poverty rate, with programmes reaching 36% of people, while 26% live in poverty.

To improve targeting and reduce costs, the use of a social registry such as the National Household Database is necessary. This can help in better identifying eligible households and improving the efficiency of programme delivery.


The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a more robust and adaptive social protection system. It is crucial to develop well-targeted and less fragmented programmes that consider demographic changes, unplanned urbanisation, labour market vulnerability and frequent shocks.

Certain risk groups, such as young children, remain underserved in the social protection system. Despite one in every eight poor individuals being a young child, only 1.6% of social protection expenditures are

allocated to this group. Aligning allocations with the share of the poor in different categories and addressing the specific needs of different age groups is essential.

To enhance service delivery, scaling up Government-to-Person (G2P) and mobile financial services is recommended. These measures can significantly reduce processing time for fund transfers from the treasury to beneficiaries. However, it is necessary to allocate sufficient resources for staffing, capacity-building training, digital literacy and improved equipment to ensure effective implementation of programmes at the local level.

Assistance type

 ASSISTANCE TYPE	
The policy explicitly sets out the types of assistance provided through social protection programmes (ie income support, food assistance, healthcare, etc.)	1
The assistance specified is comprehensive (ie livelihood support, health, food, shelter, education etc.), depending on local context	2

Assistance through anticipatory support: The policy does not explicitly specify the types of assistance provided through anticipatory social protection programmes, such as income support, food assistance or healthcare.

While Bangladesh's social protection programmes, such as the EGPP, VGF and OAA, are clear about their nature of assistance and eligibility criteria, there is no specific mention in the policy regarding the types of assistance provided under anticipatory action.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh expanded its social assistance system to provide additional coverage to vulnerable groups. Cash transfers increased from 15 million people to 39.8 million people, and food assistance was provided through programmes like the Special Open Market Sales and the Food Friendly Programme. However, the pandemic also revealed the limitations of the existing social protection system. It is necessary to expand existing programmes, implement new initiatives and develop social insurance programmes to ensure a minimum level of protection for all citizens and effectively mitigate vulnerability in the population.

In summary, while the policy does not specify the types of assistance under anticipatory social protection programmes, efforts have been made to expand coverage and provide assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there is a need to enhance and diversify the social protection system to address the vulnerabilities of the population and prepare for future shocks.

Assistance provided is comprehensive:




The assistance provided through the NSSS is comprehensive, covering multiple thematic areas such as livelihood support, health, food, shelter and education. The policy defines thematic clusters including Social Allowance, Food Security and Disaster Assistance, Social Insurance, Labour and Livelihood Intervention, and Human Development and Social Empowerment.

However, there is no evidence of a national social registry being used to ensure households or individuals can access multiple programmes through a single registry. The establishment of a comprehensive national household database for beneficiary selection purposes has not yet been successfully implemented.

The policy lacks effective strategies for programme convergence and coordination among different schemes and ministries, which hinders the cohesive functioning of programmes. It is recommended to review eligibility criteria and establish a social registry to improve targeting and reduce costs. Transitioning towards a 'systems approach' where households can combine programmes based on their specific needs would be advantageous.

 **Systems framework**

Administrative capacity and fiscal space

 FINANCIAL CAPACITY	
Country income category	2
Economic dependency index	5
 ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY	
Government effectiveness index	3
Corruption perception index	2
 FISCAL SPACE	
Spending on social assistance programmes as a % of GDP	1
Special allocation of contingency funds for anticipatory risk financing	1
The country has access to extra-budgetary resources, including international financial institutions and donor organisations	3
Policies incorporate the use of private sector financing (such as green bonds, resilience bonds, etc.)	2
The country integrates and uses disaster risk financing instruments (eg crop insurance, health insurance, contingent credit, catastrophe insurance, reinsurance, catastrophe bonds, etc.)	5

Financial capacity: The country's income category is lower middle; the economic dependency index is 1.2, based on INFORM. The spending on social protection as a percentage of GDP is 0.77%.

Administrative capacity: The government effectiveness index is 6.3 and the corruption perception index is 7.3, as per INFORM.

Contingency funds for anticipatory risk financing: The policy does not address the need for contingency plans for social protection measures in response to trigger points of hazard events.

Access to other sources of finance: The Government of Bangladesh has access to extra-budgetary resources through international financial institutions and donor organisations to support its social protection programmes. Major development partners supporting social protection in Bangladesh include the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, and the Government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. These partners have provided financial support and technical assistance for the formulation and implementation of the NSSS, as well as for strengthening ministries and implementing key social protection schemes. The World Bank, for example, has supported the development of the G2P payment system and has provided funding for major social protection programmes and the establishment of the national household database.

Private sector finance: NSSS recognises the potential for private sector financing in social protection programmes. The NSSS emphasises cost-sharing arrangements between the government and the private sector for financing the NSSS and other social protection programmes. The private sector's contribution is based on social insurance and employment-based regulations, aiming to diversify the sources of funding and make social protection programmes more sustainable.

However, there is limited evidence regarding the specific adoption of private sector financing in major social protection programmes in Bangladesh.

Additionally, Bangladesh Bank, the central bank of Bangladesh, has implemented initiatives related to private sector financing and disaster risk management. It has issued policies and guidelines, such as the Green Banking Policy, which promotes green finance and climate risk management in the banking sector. Bangladesh Bank has also established a separate fund, the Bangladesh Bank Disaster Management and Corporate Social Responsibility Fund, which aims to support post-disaster response, disaster risk management and capacity-building projects.



Integration of DRF instruments: Bangladesh has integrated and used DRF instruments in its social protection framework. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief is authorised to drive national risk reduction reform programmes and enforce the legal framework for disaster risk reduction. The government has various funds aimed at strengthening vulnerable communities, providing relief after disasters, and supporting anticipatory response activities before predictable disasters like cyclones and floods.

In terms of insurance and other DRF mechanisms, the insurance market in Bangladesh is dominated by state-owned corporations and private insurers. Microinsurance programmes have been implemented by microfinance institutions to protect investments in livestock production, but there is limited use of catastrophe reinsurance protection.

While DRF systems are in place in Bangladesh, the effectiveness of anticipatory action based on triggers could be improved. The country has various funds dedicated to disaster risk reduction, emergency response and unforeseen incidents. However, the allocation of domestic disaster-related funding is done through the Finance Division, and the availability of funds for DRR is modest.

Integration and implementation of DRF in social protection programmes involve a range of stakeholders, including microfinance institutions, NGOs and government bodies like the Ministry of Finance. Efforts are being made to improve access to financing tools that promote resilience and reduce economic losses due to disasters.

Infrastructure, technology and information systems

 INFRASTRUCTURE	
Communication index	3
Physical connectivity	3
 TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS	
A national database/social registry exists	1
Climate-smart information systems are used for different purposes including for social protection	1
Early warning systems for major climate hazards are available	1
Early warning systems are applied in social protection programmes	1
Artificial intelligence (AI), risk modelling, etc. are used to implement the programmes	1
Platforms for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of social protection entitlements are used (eg mobile-based payment)	2

Infrastructure: The communication index of the country is 4.4 and the physical connectivity is 4.6, as per INFORM.

National database/social registry: While the development of a social registry — the National Household Database — is currently underway, there is no evidence of its use in the implementation of social protection programmes. The NSSS outlines the establishment of a national single registry, and the Ministry of Social Welfare is leading on coordinating this.

However, as of now, the National Household Database is not fully developed, and thus a comprehensive national social registry is not in use for the implementation of the NSSS.

Climate-smart information system: There is no evidence of the use of climate-smart information systems in the VGF, OAA and EGPP social protection programmes.

Availability and application of EWSs and AI: There is no evidence of EWSs being employed in the VGF, OAA and EGPP social protection programmes in Bangladesh. However, there are instances where EWSs have been used in the distribution of social assistance, such as cash grants being transferred to beneficiaries as an early action in response to flooding. Additionally, there is no evidence of the use of AI or risk modelling in the social protection programmes. However, Bangladesh has leveraged technology in other areas, such as establishing digital centres in rural areas, implementing e-education initiatives, and expanding access to affordable internet, which has contributed to various development goals.

Efforts for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in delivery: Platforms for efficient delivery of social protection entitlements are used in at least one major social protection programme in Bangladesh. The NSSS emphasises the importance of maintaining an automated system that regularly updates the list of beneficiaries and transfers payments online to simplify implementation, reduce costs and minimise corruption. For example, in the OAA programme, beneficiaries receive a passbook and their accounts are opened with designated banks or payment service providers. The NSSS aims to strengthen the G2P payment delivery mechanisms, developing an advanced system for direct transfer of funds from the government to beneficiaries' accounts with different payment service providers. However, there is no evidence of platforms for efficient delivery being employed in other major social protection programmes in the country.

Institutional mechanisms

🏠 INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS	
Bodies and mechanisms exist for social policy coordination across ministries and departments	1
Bodies and mechanisms exist for multistakeholder engagement at the grassroots level	1

Cross-ministry/department coordination: There is no evidence of the presence of bodies and mechanisms for harmonised action and coordination in social policy at the ministry and policymaking bureaucratic levels in Bangladesh. The coordination and mechanisms in place for coordination and analysis of performance are weak. The different sectors of social protection, humanitarian response, and DRR traditionally operate separately, with separate funding sources and different target groups, resulting in competition for resources and challenges of institutional coordination. The institutional context and capacity supporting social protection programmes in Bangladesh are weak, with issues such as ineffective local-level committees, weak coordination among implementing agencies, and a shortage of manpower. There are also weaknesses in the coordination of disaster risk management activities, including at the local level. If long-term social protection programmes are to effectively meet expanding needs, the challenges of institutional coordination need to be addressed.

Multistakeholder engagement in delivery: There is no evidence of the presence of bodies and mechanisms for social policy coordination and harmonised action among different departments at the grassroots level in Bangladesh. The coordination and mechanisms in place for coordination and analysis of performance are weak. Traditionally, social protection, humanitarian response, and DRR operate as separate disciplines with different funding sources and target groups, leading to competition for resources and challenges in institutional coordination. There is a shortage of staff and skills gaps in shock-responsive approaches, exacerbating the coordination challenges. The institutional context and capacity supporting social protection programmes in Bangladesh are weak, with ineffectiveness of local-level committees, lack of a consistent committee structure, weak coordination among implementing agencies, absence of M&E, and manpower shortages. Coordination of disaster risk management activities, including at the local level, also faces weaknesses. If long-term social protection programmes are to address expanding needs, the challenges of institutional coordination need to be addressed.

Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)

The VGF programme in Bangladesh was established in partnership with the WFP to provide food transfers to the poor during disasters and major religious festivals. Initially introduced in response to the 1974 famine, the programme continues to provide monthly transfers of wheat per household.



Programme design features

The VGF programme in Bangladesh is a significant social safety net programme aimed to alleviate acute poverty and hunger among the most vulnerable and destitute members of society. There is no evidence of use of a national registry for the delivery mechanism of the programme. The programme used the Bangladesh Poverty Map in 2013 to target the poorest areas of the country and used a means test to derive an allocating formula. This mapping has enabled that highest allocations go to the poorest areas.

The Department of Disaster Management (DDM) under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), makes annual allotment plans based on poverty rates and the incidence of natural disasters in the country. Based on these estimates, DDM issues Allotment Orders, which translate into food grain delivery orders by Food Controllers of the Ministry of Food; actual food deliveries are received by Union Chairmen from local food depots of the Public Food Distribution System.

The VGF programme essentially serves as a reactive measure in response to crises, as it aims to provide immediate food assistance to affected households during and after disasters. The anticipation and response mechanism of VGF, while not necessarily innovative, is indeed critical, as it involves rapid identification of beneficiaries and swift distribution of food rations during crisis periods. The programme could potentially be improved by incorporating anticipatory actions triggered by EWSs to enable a more proactive response.

In terms of a climate-focused approach for managing community risks, the VGF programme is inherently climate-sensitive as it often responds to climate-induced crises such as floods, cyclones and other extreme weather events. However, it's not designed to directly address or mitigate the underlying climate risks. The programme could be made more climate-focused by integrating activities aimed at reducing climate vulnerabilities, such as promoting climate-smart agricultural practices, or developing community-level EWSs.



Programme functions

Prevention: VGF is primarily a reactive programme that's activated in response to disasters and crises. However, it can indirectly contribute to prevention by providing immediate food aid in times of crisis, thus preventing households from resorting to negative coping strategies such as selling off assets, reducing food intake, or engaging in high-risk jobs. This helps maintain their productive capacity and prevents them from falling deeper into poverty, contributing to their longer-term resilience.

Protection: The programme is explicitly designed for protection. It protects the most vulnerable and food-insecure households by providing them with food aid during and in the immediate aftermath of crises. This is crucial as it shields these households from the worst impacts of shocks such as floods and cyclones, ensuring that their basic nutritional needs are met during these challenging times.

Promotion: While the VGF programme does not directly involve promotional activities aimed at improving households' income or livelihood opportunities, it can indirectly contribute to promotion by maintaining households' minimum consumption levels during crises. By doing so, it allows households to recover more quickly post-crisis and frees up resources that households can potentially invest in productive activities or in improving their skills, thereby enhancing their resilience in the longer-term.

The VGF programme's main focus is on providing immediate relief rather than addressing the root causes of vulnerability or promoting sustainable livelihoods. Further enhancements could potentially incorporate these elements more directly into the programme design.


BANGLADESH: PROGRAMMES
Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)

PROGRAMME DESIGN		Total: 33%	PROGRAMME FUNCTION		Total: 82%
PROGRAMME EFFICACY			PREVENTION		
Coverage	1		The programme offers anticipatory support	3	
Benefit incidence	3		The programme offers services to protect health, livelihoods and incomes before crises hit	4	
Benefit adequacy	1		The programme encourages community-level advance planning and interventions (eg evacuation planning)	4	
Average per capital transfer	1		The programme offers subsidised health, food or education before crises hit	4	
PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS			The programme offers skills training, capacity building or awareness generation to prepare crisis response	4	
Benefit cost ratio	2		The programme supports individual or community-level asset creation (eg cyclone shelters) to protect from future crises	4	
INNOVATIVE DRM INSTRUMENTS			The programme promotes awareness, particularly among marginalised people, to achieve their representation in decision-making processes	4	
The programme uses early warning systems to provide anticipatory support to target groups	1		PROTECTION		
The programme uses anticipatory risk financing instruments such as contingency funds, catastrophe bonds, parametric insurance, weather derivatives, etc.	1		The programme offers cash transfer, food aid or livelihood support during a crisis	4	
The programme adopts a layers of risk approach (ie assessing the probability and severity of risks) that reflects a continuum from frequent but less damaging events through to rare but catastrophic disasters and then manages this risk through a variety of instruments	1		The programme offers rapid additional humanitarian support to tide communities over a crisis	4	
The programme uses a national database/registry for its operations	1		The programme supports access to health facilities or relief assistance (eg food, water) after a crisis	1	
The programme uses platforms that enhance delivery efficiency and effectiveness of delivery (eg mobile-based payments)	1		The programme provides income-earning opportunities through public works programmes or protection against livelihood loss or non-economic loss and damage (NELD) through insurance or other compensatory mechanisms	4	
CLIMATE-FOCUSED APPROACH			The programme offers waiver/relaxation/subsidy benefits to target populations in the event of climate hazards	1	
The programme maps geographical areas, livelihood groups, social groups, etc., which are vulnerable to climate change impacts and uses these different dimensions of vulnerability to plan scaling up and resource allocation	4		PROMOTION		
The programme undertakes environmental conservation and restoration of degraded landscapes (eg biodiversity conservation) to help protect natural resource-based livelihoods	1		The programme offers support for livelihood diversification	4	
The programme undertakes interventions on improving water management (eg rehabilitating water bodies) that can lead to water security for domestic and agriculture purposes	1		The programme supports improved income opportunities via building entrepreneurial skills, access to higher education or community/individual asset creation	1	
The programme undertakes interventions that lead to climate-proofing of physical infrastructure (eg roads, bridges, etc.)	1		The programme promotes new livelihood opportunities	4	
The programme envisages constructing community-based disaster risk reduction assets (eg storm shelters)	1		The programme implements planned labour mobility, migration and placement interventions	1	
			The programme improves access to markets, natural resources, government departments, financial inclusion, community infrastructure, etc.	4	
			The programme encourages target populations to participate in decision-making processes	4	

Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP)

The EGPP in Bangladesh aims to provide short-term employment to seasonally unemployed individuals while developing community assets and rural infrastructure. It focuses on generating employment opportunities for the poorest sections of society.



Programme design features

The EGPP in Bangladesh is a social safety net programme aimed at providing temporary employment opportunities for the ultra-poor. This is particularly relevant in the lean agricultural seasons, when rural labour demand is low, and food security is threatened. The programme is structured to create employment opportunities in public works projects, such as road maintenance and embankment construction.

The administrative systems of social protection programmes in Bangladesh are relatively weak. As programmes are spread across a range of ministries, there is no ministry that has a clear specialisation in the delivery of social protection programmes. Much of the administration is done by the local governments using paper-based management information systems. There are no central beneficiary databases for programmes, and no advanced management information systems linking local areas with the centre. As a result, the government is unable to effectively manage and monitor the performance of its social protection programmes.

Bank-based payments is one step forward from the existing informal hand-to-hand payments. As the country gradually moves towards electronic modes of payment, biometrically authenticated, digitised payment systems are being piloted at various levels using multiple channels: agent banking, postal cash cards, mobile banking and a potential national payment platform. DDM has begun to pilot digitised payments to enhance efficiency, accountability and transparency, besides catering to beneficiary convenience in terms of distance and cost to reach payment points and frequency of withdrawal.

The programme guidelines for the EGPP place the onus of awareness-generation about the programme on ward members, banks (as payment service providers) and local elites. However, reviews have found inadequate awareness of the available social safety nets, and their eligibility criteria, entitlements and procedures for grievance reporting all affect beneficiaries' ability to identify programmes relevant to them and claim the payments and services they are eligible for. This can lead to errors in targeting of eligible beneficiaries and create loopholes for inefficiency and leakage.

There is no explicit information suggesting that the EGPP incorporates anticipatory response mechanisms or innovative disaster risk management tools. However, the programme does inherently offer a form of adaptive social protection. By providing temporary employment during lean seasons, it helps vulnerable households avoid acute food insecurity, a recurring risk that could be exacerbated by climate-induced disasters. So the EGPP mainly focuses on predictable seasonal unemployment and does not explicitly include tools for broader or less predictable disaster risk management. This could be seen as a gap in the programme design, especially considering the increasing threats posed by climate change and other potential shocks.

Similarly, the EGPP does not primarily focus on climate-related risks. Its main objective is to address seasonal employment shortfalls and related food insecurity. However, indirectly, the public works projects undertaken through the EGPP (like road maintenance, embankment construction, etc.) can enhance community resilience to climate-induced hazards like flooding.

However, this programme does not seem to include a specific focus on climate change adaptation or mitigation in its design. Considering the increasing vulnerability of Bangladesh to climate change impacts, this could potentially be seen as a gap. Explicitly incorporating climate-smart strategies into public works projects, or linking the programme with other climate-focused initiatives, could enhance its contribution to managing community-level risks of climate change.



Programme functions

Prevention: The EGPP prevents acute hardship and deprivation for the poorest and most vulnerable households by offering guaranteed employment during the lean agricultural seasons. The income from this employment helps these households to meet their basic needs and prevents them from falling deeper into poverty. Further, many EGPP projects involve improving community infrastructure, which indirectly aids in preventing potential damage from natural disasters such as flooding. By bolstering local infrastructure, these communities are better equipped to manage climate-related and other shocks, thereby preventing or reducing potential losses. More than half the EGPP beneficiary households were found to have savings and many had been able to reduce outstanding loans. Improved consumption is noted in terms of the quality of protein intake as well as investment in health.

Protection: The EGPP provides protection to vulnerable households by guaranteeing a minimum number of days of employment. This safety net ensures that these households have a source of income during the most challenging times of the year, protecting them from the severe economic consequences of seasonal unemployment. In addition, the food or income support provided by the programme protects vulnerable families from food insecurity and malnutrition, particularly during the lean seasons when food availability is typically lower.

Promotion: While the main aim of the EGPP is to provide immediate support to the most vulnerable, it indirectly promotes longer-term resilience and development by investing in local infrastructure. The public works projects not only provide immediate employment but also contribute to improving local resources that can enhance the community's overall economic potential and resilience in the longer-term. For example, improved roads can facilitate better access to markets, promote trade and improve access to services, which can, in turn, stimulate local economic growth and improve living standards. Similarly, enhanced flood defences or improved water management systems can reduce the impact of climate-related shocks and stresses in the longer-term, promoting greater resilience and sustainability.

BANGLADESH: PROGRAMMES

Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP)

PROGRAMME DESIGN		Total: 63%	PROGRAMME FUNCTION		Total: 67%
PROGRAMME EFFICACY			PREVENTION		
Coverage	3		The programme offers anticipatory support	4	
Benefit incidence	3		The programme offers services to protect health, livelihoods and incomes before crises hit	4	
Benefit adequacy	2		The programme encourages community-level advance planning and interventions (eg evacuation planning)	4	
Average per capital transfer	1		The programme offers subsidised health, food or education before crises hit	1	
PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS			The programme offers skills training, capacity building or awareness generation to prepare crisis response	1	
Benefit cost ratio	2		The programme supports individual or community-level asset creation (eg cyclone shelters) to protect from future crises	4	
INNOVATIVE DRM INSTRUMENTS			The programme promotes awareness, particularly among marginalised people, to achieve their representation in decision-making processes	4	
The programme uses early warning systems to provide anticipatory support to target groups	1		PROTECTION		
The programme uses anticipatory risk financing instruments such as contingency funds, catastrophe bonds, parametric insurance, weather derivatives, etc.	1		The programme offers cash transfer, food aid or livelihood support during a crisis	4	
The programme adopts a layers of risk approach (ie assessing the probability and severity of risks) that reflects a continuum from frequent but less damaging events through to rare but catastrophic disasters and then manages this risk through a variety of instruments	3		The programme offers rapid additional humanitarian support to tide communities over a crisis	4	
The programme uses a national database/registry for its operations	1		The programme supports access to health facilities or relief assistance (eg food, water) after a crisis	4	
The programme uses platforms that enhance delivery efficiency and effectiveness of delivery (eg mobile-based payments)	3		The programme provides income-earning opportunities through public works programmes or protection against livelihood loss or non-economic loss and damage (NELD) through insurance or other compensatory mechanisms	4	
CLIMATE-FOCUSED APPROACH			The programme offers waiver/relaxation/subsidy benefits to target populations in the event of climate hazards	1	
The programme maps geographical areas, livelihood groups, social groups, etc., which are vulnerable to climate change impacts and uses these different dimensions of vulnerability to plan scaling up and resource allocation	4		PROMOTION		
The programme undertakes environmental conservation and restoration of degraded landscapes (eg biodiversity conservation) to help protect natural resource-based livelihoods	4		The programme offers support for livelihood diversification	1	
The programme undertakes interventions on improving water management (eg rehabilitating water bodies) that can lead to water security for domestic and agriculture purposes	4		The programme supports improved income opportunities via building entrepreneurial skills, access to higher education or community/individual asset creation	1	
The programme undertakes interventions that lead to climate-proofing of physical infrastructure (eg roads, bridges, etc.)	4		The programme promotes new livelihood opportunities	1	
The programme envisages constructing community-based disaster risk reduction assets (eg storm shelters)	4		The programme implements planned labour mobility, migration and placement interventions	1	
			The programme improves access to markets, natural resources, government departments, financial inclusion, community infrastructure, etc.	4	
			The programme encourages target populations to participate in decision-making processes	1	

Old Age Allowance (OAA)

The Old Age Allowance programme was introduced in 1998 to provide means-tested monthly cash payments to older people in Bangladesh. The programme aims to reduce vulnerabilities and income insecurity among the elderly population.



Programme design features

The OAA is an unconditional cash transfer allowance programme administered by the Department of Social Services under the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW). The programme aims to target poor and vulnerable elderly (sixty-two years and older for women; sixty-five years and older for men). This programme aims to help elderly citizens meet their basic needs and mitigate the social and economic impacts of old age.

The OAA faces budget limitations. With no exit rules, the list of beneficiaries is not updated unless replacements take place due to beneficiaries' death or budget increases to absorb more persons. The programme design is sensitive towards women – half the beneficiaries are mandatorily women and the eligibility age for them is lower than men.

There's no explicit information available suggesting that OAA incorporates innovative disaster risk management instruments or an anticipatory response mechanism. The programme primarily aims to address the socioeconomic needs of elderly individuals rather than specific disaster-related challenges. However, in the face of a disaster, the financial support provided by the programme could indirectly contribute to the resilience of beneficiaries.

Similarly, OAA doesn't specifically include a climate-focused approach to managing community risks. However, since climate change can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, especially among the poor and elderly, there may be a need to consider climate factors in the design and implementation of the programme.



Programme functions

Prevention: The OAA helps prevent elderly citizens from falling into extreme poverty. It offers a consistent source of income, which can help elderly individuals meet their basic needs and avoid the potential negative impacts of financial stress, such as poor health and malnutrition. By providing this support, the programme helps prevent further socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

Protection: In terms of protection, the OAA offers a critical social safety net for elderly citizens, particularly those who do not have family support or other income sources. The financial support it provides can be used to access medical care, nutritious food and other necessary services, helping protect beneficiaries from health crises and other shocks. This monthly allowance serves as a form of income security, protecting elderly individuals from the potential impacts of sudden financial hardships.

Promotion: While the OAA programme may not directly promote resilience in the sense of promoting opportunities for growth and development, it does promote dignity and social inclusion for elderly citizens. By acknowledging and supporting the needs of the elderly, the programme promotes their wellbeing and fosters a more inclusive society. The consistent income can also promote the ability for the elderly to contribute to their households and communities, even in a limited capacity, rather than being seen as dependent.



BANGLADESH: PROGRAMMES

Old Age Allowance (OAA):

PROGRAMME DESIGN		Total: 30%	PROGRAMME FUNCTION		Total: 42%
PROGRAMME EFFICACY			PREVENTION		
Coverage	2		The programme offers anticipatory support	4	
Benefit incidence	3		The programme offers services to protect health, livelihoods and incomes before crises hit	4	
Benefit adequacy	1		The programme encourages community-level advance planning and interventions (eg evacuation planning)	1	
Average per capital transfer	1		The programme offers subsidised health, food or education before crises hit	1	
PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS			The programme offers skills training, capacity building or awareness generation to prepare crisis response	1	
Benefit cost ratio	2		The programme supports individual or community-level asset creation (eg cyclone shelters) to protect from future crises	1	
INNOVATIVE DRM INSTRUMENTS			The programme promotes awareness, particularly among marginalised people, to achieve their representation in decision-making processes	1	
The programme uses early warning systems to provide anticipatory support to target groups	1		PROTECTION		
The programme uses anticipatory risk financing instruments such as contingency funds, catastrophe bonds, parametric insurance, weather derivatives, etc.	1		The programme offers cash transfer, food aid or livelihood support during a crisis	4	
The programme adopts a layers of risk approach (ie assessing the probability and severity of risks) that reflects a continuum from frequent but less damaging events through to rare but catastrophic disasters and then manages this risk through a variety of instruments	1		The programme offers rapid additional humanitarian support to tide communities over a crisis	1	
The programme uses a national database/registry for its operations	1		The programme supports access to health facilities or relief assistance (eg food, water) after a crisis	1	
The programme uses platforms that enhance delivery efficiency and effectiveness of delivery (eg mobile-based payments)	1		The programme provides income-earning opportunities through public works programmes or protection against livelihood loss or non-economic loss and damage (NELD) through insurance or other compensatory mechanisms	4	
CLIMATE-FOCUSED APPROACH			The programme offers waiver/relaxation/subsidy benefits to target populations in the event of climate hazards	1	
The programme maps geographical areas, livelihood groups, social groups, etc., which are vulnerable to climate change impacts and uses these different dimensions of vulnerability to plan scaling up and resource allocation	1		PROMOTION		
The programme undertakes environmental conservation and restoration of degraded landscapes (eg biodiversity conservation) to help protect natural resource-based livelihoods	1		The programme offers support for livelihood diversification	1	
The programme undertakes interventions on improving water management (eg rehabilitating water bodies) that can lead to water security for domestic and agriculture purposes	1		The programme supports improved income opportunities via building entrepreneurial skills, access to higher education or community/individual asset creation	1	
The programme undertakes interventions that lead to climate-proofing of physical infrastructure (eg roads, bridges, etc.)	1		The programme promotes new livelihood opportunities	1	
The programme envisages constructing community-based disaster risk reduction assets (eg storm shelters)	1		The programme implements planned labour mobility, migration and placement interventions	1	
			The programme improves access to markets, natural resources, government departments, financial inclusion, community infrastructure, etc.	1	
			The programme encourages target populations to participate in decision-making processes	1	

Annex

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This document presents the country analysis of Bangladesh and is an extract from the IIED working paper 'Delivering anticipatory social protection: country readiness assessment', which uses the ASPIRE tool to evaluate the readiness and effectiveness of social protection systems in eight countries, identifying gaps and opportunities to improve anticipatory measures and climate resilience. The research provides actionable recommendations for enhancing these systems to not only respond but also proactively adapt to climate-related risks, thereby fostering resilience among vulnerable populations.

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