UNESCO-ICSSR Research Meeting:
Social Protection Policies in South Asia
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New Delhi, India

Summary Report

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Under the experienced guidance of Prof. Ravi Srivastava, Professor of Economics and Chairperson, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, JNU, an advisory committee was set up with the following members: Dr. K. N. Jehangir, Consultant, ICSSR and Mr. M. A. Jawaid, Deputy Director, ICSSR, Mr. C. Upendranadh, Senior Fellow, Regional Coordinator, Social Protection in Asia Research Programme, Institute for Human Development and Ms. Rukmini Tankha, Research Associate, Institute for Human Development, Ms. Marina Faetanini, Programme Specialist, Social and Human Sciences and Regional Coordinator for UNESCO Forum of Ministers in charge of Social Development from South Asia, UNESCO New Delhi.


The complete version of all the papers of the UNESCO-ICSSR Research Meeting can be downloaded from UNESCO New Delhi website: www.unesco.org/newdelhi
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary Report</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achin Chakraborty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations from Researchers</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Upendranadh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract of Papers</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Participants</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Achin Chakraborty  
Professor of Economics  
Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata, India

A Summary Report based on the research papers presented and deliberations made in the UNESCO-ICSSR Research Meeting held on 18-19 March 2010

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1. Background

The research meeting on Social Protection Policies in South Asia was jointly organized by UNESCO New Delhi and the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) on March 18-19, 2010 in New Delhi. It was organized within the framework of UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme and its flagship activity, the Regional and Sub-regional Fora of Ministers in charge of Social Development, launched in 2001 in Latin America to enhance dialogue between Ministers, researchers and the civil society. The South Asian Forum of Ministers in charge of Social Development was launched in 2006 in Bhurban, Pakistan and the Second Ministerial Forum held in New Delhi, India in 2008 stressed the importance of research for evidence-based policy-making. Accordingly, the research meeting of March 18-19, 2010 was held with the objective of providing support material and expertise to the next Forum of Ministers in charge of Social Development from South Asia, expected to take place in Sri Lanka in 2011 on Social Protection Policies in South Asia. The research meeting specifically addressed the following questions:

- What are the social policies that work under which conditions and what lessons can such experiences offer to other countries?
- How can such policies be further strengthened to enhance the transformative potential?
- How can a regional perspective be built on issues of social protection?

There were twelve full-length research papers presented by experts on social protection policies in South Asia, which were thoroughly discussed by the participants in the meeting. In a round table discussion towards the end of the meeting, attempts were made to synthesise and to come up with specific recommendations based on the two days deliberations. In the present paper we first present a comprehensive analytical summary of the features of various social protection programmes and policies, drawing on the South Asian experiences. They include *interalia* the design features, implementability, institutional capacity, fiscal requirements, problems of coverage and
quality. We then discuss the possible social protection policy alternatives based on both academic and practical evidence. Even though the papers focused on specific country experiences, we have organised this summary paper around programmes and policies to better understand the commonalities and contrasts between country experiences.

2. Clarifying the concept: What is social protection?

Almost all the participants in the meeting felt that more clarity was needed at the conceptual level itself. The social protection perspective can be seen as more comprehensive than some other perspectives, such as poverty and deprivation, human development, social security, human rights, and so on. Social protection policies are expected to address insecurities related to the failure to meet basic economic and social needs as well as those related to sudden change for the worse. While the former type of insecurity – persistent poverty and deprivation – would require various ‘promotional’ policies with the broader goal of poverty eradication and enhancement of human capability, the latter calls for ‘protective’ measures to provide security in the face of contingencies. In the South Asian context, social protection policies have to deal with both promotional and protective type measures. While promotional policies include income, asset and consumption transfers to the poor and the assetless, protective policies aim at protecting people from sudden reversals that threaten the quality of their daily lives. To make the concept more inclusive we perhaps need to add such ‘preventive’ policies that are expected to reduce the probability of occurrence of those sudden reversals.

All these policies can either be viewed as passive beneficiary oriented public policies or as people’s entitlements and citizenship rights. In South Asia there is a growing, albeit limited tendency to articulate the demand for social protection in terms of rights and entitlements (guarantees). This makes the social protection perspective different from the perspective of conventional poverty alleviation programmes. A related distinguishing feature of the concept of social protection is its emphasis on the ‘transformative potential’. With increasing awareness about rights and entitlements, the existing imbalances in power in the South Asian societies can be expected to change.

Apart from the ethical and the right-based perspectives that provide the rationale for social protection, there is an altogether different rationale that is being articulated by economists recently. The recent theory and evidence “offers a new perspective on social protection policies in poor countries, suggesting that there is a scope for using these policies to compensate for the market failures that perpetuate poverty, particularly in high-inequality settings”

1 Presentation by Upendra Nath
2 Ravallion (2003) cited in Mahendra Dev
instruments provide justification for public intervention in the form of safety nets, credit and insurance for the poor. Existence of social protection schemes can maintain social cohesion and can prevent irreversible losses of human capital. This in turn can facilitate economic growth. Social protection measures for improving or protecting human capital range from labor market interventions, unemployment or old age insurance to targeted income support programmes.

3. The South Asian context

A general concern has been voiced at the UN about the devastating consequences of the global economic and financial crisis and the need for urgent actions by country governments to mitigate the social impact of the crisis. In the South Asian context, however, to think of social protection as a response to global financial and economic crisis does not seem to be a good starting point. Instead, certain common afflictions which are endemic in nature in almost all South Asian countries need to be kept at the centre of discussion.

South Asia continues to have the largest concentration of people below the international poverty line in the world, even though most of the countries in the region have been experiencing moderate to high rates of growth in GDP in the past one and a half decades or so. India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal have all had an average annual growth rate exceeding 5 per cent in the period since 1995. Pakistan’s growth rate also followed this trend in the more recent years. However, there is little evidence that the effects of high economic growth are trickling down to the lowest economic strata. On the contrary, new forms of vulnerabilities have been afflicting a large number of people in the region. This ‘development failure’ despite moderate to high rates of economic growth is reinforced by the slow rate of structural transformation of the labour market. Continued predominance of the informal segment of the economy and persistence of surplus labour in the region provides the backdrop for any thinking toward social protection policies. Conventional measures of social protection, e.g. pensions, provident fund, unemployment benefits, etc cover only a small fraction of the labour force in South Asia\(^3\).

That the formal social security systems of the type common in more industrialised countries are largely inapplicable in South Asia is widely acknowledged. The reasons were summarised by Guhan (1995)\(^4\) as follows:

1. Credit and insurance markets are underdeveloped, restricting the scope for private insurance.

\(^3\) Presentation by Rizwanul Islam

\(^4\) Cited in Kabeer (2009)
2. The scope for social insurance is limited because the labour market is characterized by high proportions of self-employment and unstable and irregular wage employment.
3. Rural populations are spatially scattered, occupationally diffuse and difficult to reach administratively.
4. High occupational diversity and employment instability characterize the urban informal sector.
5. The problem of poverty is not open unemployment, which has been the focus of formal security systems, but irregular and informal employment in diverse activities with low returns.

Given these constraints that are embedded in the nature of the economy, how have the countries in the region responded so far to the need for social protection? All South Asian countries focused more on social assistance and promotional policies for a long time. Only in recent times, the need for protective, social insurance and contingency types has been recognized. Apart from this broad similarity between the countries, there are important variations in the social protection policies across countries. After all, social policies are the products of the particular histories and political economies of different countries.

4. Types of existing social protection policies in South Asia

Even though the triadic classification of social security measures – promotional, protective and preventive – can help us understand the nature of social protection policies in a certain way, there could be other ways of classifying the policies and programmes viewed from different vantage points. From the discussions in the research meeting it emerged that the central focus of social protection policies ought to be employment.

Employment-oriented programmes
There is some ambivalence in policy thinking about how one should view an employment-oriented programme. The public works programmes that mainly aim at creation of employment are often criticized on the ground that they produce very little social infrastructure. However, from the social protection point of view, this criticism is rather misplaced. In a sense, an employment programme like India’s National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)\(^5\) can be seen primarily as a conditional cash transfer programme – a form of safety net. In this view, the goal of building infrastructure for development comes as a secondary one. However, the political acceptability of an employment generation programme among the non-poor might be positively influenced by its potential to create so-called public assets.

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\(^5\) The Act has been re-termed as The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act since 2 October 2009 (MGNREGA)
Employment-oriented programmes have existed in India for long in the form of public works of various kinds, especially in times of crisis or to address seasonal unemployment. The Food for Work (FFW) programme was launched in the 1970s to make food grains available to poor landless households conditional on the work they were supposed to perform on public construction projects. This programme was subsequently replaced by the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), which was later merged into the supposedly better designed and funded Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). Meanwhile the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) emerged as the one with the most influence on thinking about employment-oriented social protection measures for its sophisticated design and generous funding. The idea of ‘guarantee’ has since been accepted widely in designing employment programmes, the culmination of which is seen in India’s most ambitious NREGA that was launched in 2006.

Interestingly, employment programmes in Bangladesh followed almost the same chronological sequence as in India – starting in the 1970s with two employment programmes, viz. the Food for Work programme and the Rural Maintenance Programme, making a gradual transition to the 100-day employment programme in 2008, through the Rural Infrastructure Development Programme launched in 2002, and finally ending with employment programmes for the extreme poor\(^6\). However, the 100-day employment programme in Bangladesh was launched in response to the 2008 food crisis. Yet, it could cover only a fraction of the extreme poor. This is generally true for all employment programmes anywhere in the region – the extreme poor, who are incapable of doing hard physical work, are excluded from the coverage. However, in Pakistan the coverage of employment programmes is generally far more limited than in Bangladesh and India.

Nepal too has a food for work programme whose objective is to improve rural infrastructure and increase employment opportunities for the poor through public work schemes. The food-for-work programmes are self-targeted since only the poor are likely to work in these types of programme. Although leakages have been reported, most of the food-for-work programmes have adopted a social auditing system to improve transparency and reduce leakages\(^7\). Nepal too has moved to an employment guarantee programme. Sri Lanka has had a public works programme as one of the components of Samurdhi – a large cash transfer programme. We shall therefore discuss Samurdhi in a different section.

Clearly there are lessons that countries in the South Asian region can learn from each other. For India, the graduation to NREGA, starting from the food-for-work programme, signifies a definite step forward in terms of political and managerial sophistication in design and implementation. One would like to call it even ‘a paradigm shift’. Earlier

\(^6\) Presentations by Rizwanul Islam, Akhter Ahmed and Barkat-e-Khuda

\(^7\) Paper by Bishwa Nath Tiwari
publicly funded employment programmes in India suffered from multiple afflictions – low coverage, bureaucracy led implementation with little community involvement, low quantum of work, exclusion of women, corruption driven leakages, non durability of assets created, and so on. NREGA seems to have successfully countered some of these problems and achieved moderate success – at least more than all earlier employment programmes in comparison – presumably for its distinctly different design features. For the first time, we see an employment programme which is explicitly rights-based. The incentive structure for its performance is also not perverse, unlike many poverty alleviation programmes. As the resources allocated from the federal government to the states are based on demand, and there is no cap on allocation, the states cannot complain of a shortage of funds. And most importantly, the wage rate set at the statutory minimum level, which is higher than the prevailing market wage rate in most places, has made this programme distinct from the conventional norm of setting the wage rate below the market rate to ensure self-selection. The so-called self-selection enjoys a kind of easy popularity among economists as an efficient means of targeting the needy. The idea is that some conditions are imposed as necessary for entitlement. For example, a public works programme may set a wage lower than the market wage rate so that only someone desperate for income or the food provided would be willing to participate. This is not a very moral way of proceeding, and NREGA has successfully avoided that route.

The evaluation studies on NREGA implementation show varying degrees of success of the programme in terms of average number of days of work per household provided across Indian states. Although the average person days worked per household for 2009-2010 is 37, which is far less than the expected 100 days, states and districts vary widely in terms of this indicator. To what extent can low achievements be attributed to the failure of the state government or to the labour market dynamics in that particular state is not always clear. The Act stipulates that whoever demands a job from their local unit of governance (Panchayat) must be provided with work within fifteen days, failing which the person has to be given an unemployment benefit from the state government funds. Even though this stipulation is meant to put pressure on the state government and its local bodies, the actual cases of disbursement of unemployment benefit are rare – the number of days of work ‘demanded’ and the number of days of work ‘provided’ almost always match in the data provided by the state governments. In the states where the rural landless people are known to have very limited alternative job opportunities at the wage rate offered by NREGA, it is apparent that work actually provided is not a true reflection of the demand.

The employment programmes are likely to have easy political appeal since they have high visibility. They rely on a high degree of self-selection. In the case of NREGA both seem to have been favorable – the political and economic imperative of winning the

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8 Presentation by Santosh Mehrotra
rural vote got expression in the programme and the civil society activism that preceded the enactment succeeded in securing some space in the public discourse. Self-targeting has also worked – participation of the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in the programme is more than their respective proportions in the population.

**Social assistance through subsidized food**

India’s Public Distribution System (PDS) is the single most costliest government programme responsible for distributing subsidized food, and other essentials like kerosene, to about 160 million families at subsidized rates, through a network of around 4, 62, 000 Fair Price Shops (FPS). It is perhaps the largest distribution network of its kind in the world. This programme involves a complex storage and food acquisition scheme.

PDS started out as a minimally targeted rationing scheme with a strong urban bias. Since the 1970s, it rapidly extended its network to rural areas and has evolved as an important instrument of government policy for management of availability and for distribution of food grains at affordable prices. Historically, the objectives of PDS have been (i) maintaining price stability, (ii) achieving food security at household level, (iii) rationing during situations of scarcity, and (iv) keeping a check on private trade.

The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) was introduced in 1997, and under this scheme, special cards were issued to families Below Poverty Line (BPL) and food grains were distributed at a lower price for these families compared to those Above the Poverty Line (APL). The entire population was divided into three categories – Below Poverty Line (BPL), Above Poverty Line (APL) and *Antyodaya Anna Yojana* (AAY) or the poorest among the Below Poverty Line population. APL was removed for some time but re-introduced for viability of ration shops. Under this scheme the BPL households are provided with 35 kg of food grains per month at a subsidized price. AAY, the destitute households (part of BPL households) are provided at specially subsidized rates (Rs. 2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 3 per kg for rice) for a monthly provision of 35 kg of food grains. 25 million people (38% of BPL) have been covered under the AAY quota. Targeting is supposed to be more effective as compared to the universal system. The Central Government allocations to different states of India are based on poverty ratios. According to the Central Government there are around 65 million poor households in the country. States in turn distribute allocations based on their BPL lists. Identification of the BPL population in the state for targeting of schemes is done using 13 non-income indicators. If we add states’ BPL lists, there are 100 million poor households in India. There is competitive populism to include more households in the BPL list. TPDS is subsidized by the Central Government and to some extent by state governments.

PDS/TPDS has been instrumental in preventing widespread hunger and famine by supplying food from surplus regions of the country to deficit ones by means of market integration. It has helped in maintaining stability of food grain prices to a large extent.

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9 This section draws heavily on the paper by Mahendra Dev
PDS, including system of minimum support price and procurement, has performed reasonably well and contributed to food grain production and income security to farmers in certain regions. It has been successful in reaching out to a large number of consumers, including the poor, in several regions. India’s food policies and PDS helped control domestic food prices as compared to soaring global food prices during 2005 till the middle of 2008. Even on earlier occasions, PDS contributed to relative stability of food prices and distribution of food grains in years of droughts and famines in several parts of the country.

However, the TDPS is plagued with large inclusion and exclusion errors of targeting and with leakages.

Leakages vary enormously between states. In Bihar and Punjab, the total leakage exceeds 75 per cent. Some other problems are: low quality of food grains, infrequent supply of food grains, inefficiency of the Food Corporation of India (FCI), political interference and corruption, no system of inspection of entitlements and, viability of Fair Price Shops (low margins, etc.).

Food subsidies generally involve large transaction costs that deplete funds. There is clearly a need for a reform of the TPDS. The focus of reforms can now be shifted to more efficient delivery systems of public services. It has been recognized that better governance is very important for effective functioning of food based programmes. Social mobilization, community participation and decentralized approach are needed. Introduction of food coupons is going to be a major step toward reform. States like Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and more recently Bihar, have reported considerable improvements on the introduction of food coupons. It has helped in reducing the number of fake ration cards and effective in ensuring that grains are not being diverted to the open market. The basic problem identified in the PDS is lack of public accountability.

**Rights-based approach toward food security**

The Indian Parliament is going to enact the National Food Security Act in order to provide a statutory basis to food security for all. According to this proposed law, every family below the poverty line in rural as well as urban areas will be entitled by law to 25 kilograms of rice or wheat per month, at Rs. 3 per kilogram. Although the ongoing Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) is supposed to provide subsidized food grains to the BPL population, the legislative measure may lead to better accountability by making the PDS system more responsive in reaching out to the targeted population. There has been a serious debate in this context. Should the PDS be targeted or universal, as rights generally refer to all citizens?

The proposed national food security act seems rather narrow. The Right to Food campaign demands a comprehensive ‘Food Entitlement Act’. It not only goes beyond the narrow promise of supplying food grains to the Below Poverty Line population by demanding universalization of PDS, it also demands safeguards against the intrusion of
corporate interests in food policy and elimination of all social discrimination in food related matters. The general view is that at the very least the Act has to build on several interventions: nutrition schemes for children, the PDS, social assistance for vulnerable groups (eg. pensions, Antyodaya Anna Yojana) and other interventions.

**Social assistance through cash transfer**

All the countries in South Asia have some social assistance programme that transfers income to specific groups such as the old, disabled, and widows. India’s National Old Age Pension (NOAP), widow/disabled pensions are all examples of cash transfer programmes. Cash transfer can be either conditional or unconditional.

The Old Age Allowance was introduced in Bangladesh in 1998, which covers 1.7 million people aged over 65 years. This is a tax financed social assistance scheme targeted to the poorest 20 people in each ward. It is means tested, and the beneficiaries are selected by the community.

The main safety net programme in Sri Lanka, *Samurdhi*, is a large cash transfer (unconditional) programme for the income poor. The programme has three components – the cash transfer component which accounts for 80% of the programme budget, a small micro-credit and microinsurance component and a rural public works component. The latter two components are intended to help recipients smooth their consumption flows and graduate out of poverty. The income transfer is received as commodity and encashment stamps that can only be used to purchase goods at government co-operative stores at unsubsidized prices which are often higher than those prevailing in the open market. The value of the cash transfer is not adjusted for inflation and has hence deteriorated over time. The income transfer now supports a smaller share of a household’s food consumption basket than before. Various reforms have been undertaken by the government to improve transparency in its targeting procedures and to ensure exit clauses to help people move off the eligibility rolls. Yet the targeting efficiency has not improved much. Many poor households who need support remain outside the programme. The experience of *Samurdhi* shows how political interests can create obstacles to achieve the desired outcome and how the change from a universal programme to a targeted one converted the programme into an instrument of political patronage.\(^\text{10}\)

In Nepal, the Old Age Allowance programme was introduced as early as in 1994. A monthly allowance of NRs 100 was given to all citizens of 75 years and above. In 2008, the amount was raised to NRs 500 and the age limit was reduced to 70 years in general, and 60 years for Dalits and the residents of Karnali, the remote region of Nepal. As a result of these changes, the number of beneficiaries has more than doubled from 360,733 in 2007-2008 to 643,441 in 2008-2009, with a four-fold increase in budget. Widows aged above 60 years who have no income source were provided with NRs 150

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\(^{10}\) Paper by Ramani Gunatilaka
per month. In 2008, the amount was increased to NRs 500, and definition of beneficiaries has been expanded to cover all single women above the age of 60 years. These changes have almost doubled the number of beneficiaries from about 250,000 to about 500,000, with a 5.5-fold increase in budget\textsuperscript{11}.

**Conditional transfer**

The most prominent conditional transfer programmes are food for work and employment guarantee programmes, which we discussed earlier. Here we discuss other kinds of conditional transfer programmes. Bangladesh launched the Food for Education programme in 1993, which was subsequently replaced by the Cash for Education programme in 2002. It provides monthly cash transfers to poor households on the condition that children are enrolled in school and maintain a minimum attendance. The Cash for Education programme forms a major component of the education budget, accounting for about one third of the annual development budget earmarked for primary education. It is the largest conditional cash transfer programme in the country and is fully financed by the Government. An estimated 5.5 million pupils benefit from this programme\textsuperscript{12}.

There are several other conditional cash transfer programmes in Bangladesh. The Female Secondary Stipend Programme stipulates the condition that the recipient must attend a secondary school and must not get married early. The Vulnerable Group development Programme transfers food to destitute rural women on the condition that the recipient participates in skill development programmes\textsuperscript{13}.

Similar conditional cash transfer programmes are in place in Nepal too. Scholarships are the most significant education-related transfers. Under the programme, following transfers, a monthly stipend of NRs 350 is given to 50 per cent of the girls in primary school, especially those belonging to poor households or excluded groups, and a monthly stipend of NRs 350 is given to Dalit students in primary schools. Both of these scholarship schemes are a conditional cash transfer. They are based on the condition of students’ regular attendance to schools\textsuperscript{14}.

**Social assistance through transfer in-kind**

Food is the most common form of transfer in-kind across all the countries in South Asia. We discussed India’s Public Distribution System in moderate detail in a different section. Other examples of in-kind transfer are India’s Indira Awas Yojana (IAY)-a housing programme for the poor, free text books, free hostels and free uniforms. In-kind transfers are generally viewed by economists as paternalistic.

\textsuperscript{11} Paper by Bishwa Nath Tiwari
\textsuperscript{12} Kabeer (2009)
\textsuperscript{13} Presentation by Rizwanul Islam
\textsuperscript{14} Paper by Bishwa Nath Tiwari
Social protection in urban areas
There has been a relative neglect of social protection in urban areas throughout South Asia, especially in India. The most talked about employment guarantee programme in India, NREGA, is meant for the rural poor. The characteristics of urban poverty and vulnerability are different from the rural. Restructuring in the urban economy is more frequent than in the rural. Eviction drives have become a common feature of the metropolitan cities in India in response to infrastructure demands placed on the cities for supporting rapid economic growth. Some urban households may remain poor because they do not have access to quality education, while children of some households may be forced to exit from the education system because their shelters have been demolished or they have been relocated to a resettlement site. This heterogeneity and the absence of an appropriate institutional structure to address social protection needs make it more challenging in urban areas. Any social protection initiative in urban areas would have to take into consideration an inclusive definition of urban citizen, a rights-based approach to basic shelter, water and sanitation and an institutionalization of the process of tenure allocation\(^{15}\).

Social protection for the conflict affected
South Asia has the world’s largest conflict-affected population – around 71 million\(^{16}\). Nepal has had a period of violent conflict marked by massacres, torture, disappearances, displacements, and a general environment of terror that has eclipsed faith in the State. Needless to say, conflicts deeply affect the lives of people. More than 13,347 people have been killed in Nepal, approximately 8 per cent of women and about 3 per cent of children (2006). Political activists, agricultural workers and police personnel became major victims, accounting for 72 percent of the total\(^{17}\). The Mid-West Development Region was the most affected. Overall, the conflict took its highest toll in rural, less developed areas and regions, such as Mid-West and Far-West Development Regions, as well as on excluded groups and poor population, including rural agricultural labourers. The Government of Nepal allocated NRs 1.5 billion in the 2008-2009 budget for subsistence allowances to families of martyrs and handicapped as compensation. In addition, with the support of donors, the government provided subsistence allowances to the ex-combatants. The total social security budget due to conflict amounts to NRs 23 billion.\(^{18}\) In Sri Lanka too, a separate social welfare programme, besides \textit{Samurdhi}, is providing dry ration and cash assistance to internally displaced persons.

\(^{15}\) Paper by Darshini Mahadevia.
\(^{16}\) Kabeer (2009)
\(^{17}\) Paper by Bishwa Nath Tiwari
\(^{18}\) Paper by Bishwa Nath Tiwari
**Drawing on traditions**

There are at least two traditional systems of social assistance that found place in the discussions. The *Zakat* programme in Pakistan, which drew on the Islamic concept of *zakat* as religious duty, was the first major form of social assistance in the country. It was introduced in 1980 as part of the ‘islamisation’ drive undertaken under Zia-ul Huq’s regime\(^\text{19}\). It is financed by imposing a 2.5% tax on every Muslim income earner. The *Zakat* programme was intended to assist the needy, the indigent and the poor, particularly the orphans, widows and the disabled. The local *Zakat* committees are responsible for identifying who is eligible for assistance.

The other traditional system of social assistance is the tradition of granting *Kidu* or welfare by the King of Bhutan to people facing various situations of hardship. As a tradition, it has been strengthened with each successive monarch. This is in conformity with Article 9 of the Constitution that states: “The State shall endeavor to provide security in the event of sickness and disability or lack of adequate means of livelihood for reasons beyond one’s control.” Alongside the other social protection policies and initiatives of the democratic government today, His Majesty the Fifth King continues to look into the social needs of the people. He strengthened the Gyalpoi Zimpön’s Office, which receives and looks into formal applications for *kidu*, by appointing welfare officers in various districts of the country. Another measure taken to ensure effective delivery of *kidu*, was the appointment of Their Royal Highnesses the Princesses of Bhutan as His Majesty’s representatives to different regions of the country. This was done primarily so that they could evaluate and monitor the welfare program in various districts, by traveling and working frequently with the people in remote locations. Over the course of his numerous tours around the country, His Majesty has granted *kidu* to students in financial difficulty, the aged, destitute, disabled, and other vulnerable sections of Bhutanese society. Such welfare considerations have mostly been in the form of land, but also cash and in-kind according to needs. These have at times been given in the aftermath of natural calamities such as the recent floods and earthquake that caused significant destruction in the country.

As a response to the immense destruction caused by the earthquake in the Eastern part of the country in 2009, His Majesty’s welfare office created the Kidu Fund. With contributions to this fund coming from individuals and organizations within and outside the country, financial and manpower support was well underway to help those affected in rebuilding their homes. A new kind of *kidu* i.e. the provision of a mobile medical clinic was initiated in 2009, when His Majesty took a medical team with him during a trip to the most remote locations in the country. This was done in order to provide specialized medical services to the people in the most remote villages.

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\(^{19}\) Kabeer (2009) and presentation by Karamat Ali.
5. Issues in governance and design

In absolute terms, the Indian Government spends huge sums on poverty-reduction programmes. The amount of expenditure and the sheer range of schemes of selective support are impressive. And yet, much of that spending never reaches the poor and those economically insecure. The Tenth Five Year Plan of India (2002-2007) estimated that the leakage from the numerous Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) was between 20% and 70%. In India, according to the presentations made, the process of reexamination of schemes in the light of rigorous evaluations is characterized by bureaucratic inertia\(^{20}\). Schemes are often replaced for no apparent reason. In Bangladesh the situation seems to be relatively different. Successive governments have shown willingness to evaluate programme effectiveness, confront shortcomings, and make amends. As a result, substantive changes in the administrative structure and implementation mechanisms have been observed. Most relief programmes have subsequently transformed into social protection programmes with a focus on development. There is a growing practice of engaging NGOs in the implementation of various safety net programmes.

The People’s Security Surveys, that the International Labor Organization (ILO) conducted in 15 countries, revealed that in Bangladesh a large majority of the people were aware of a good number of targeted schemes implemented by the Government. Amongst them, the poorer households were more likely to be aware of governmental schemes targeted at them. The level of awareness in Bangladesh about these programmes is much higher compared to other countries. This is clearly due to the successful efforts of NGOs in Bangladesh.

**Universal versus targeted**

Although the limitations of various forms of selectivity that go with targeting have been documented very extensively, there is a hard-held belief that a targeted programme is always better than a universal programme. The argument starts from the claim that targeting is necessary to make sure that limited resources reach the neediest or the most deserving. This poses a moral dilemma. Who are the neediest? Are some people in need less deserving of social security and assistance than others? Any criteria for selection of the deserving must inevitably be arbitrary.

Means-testing is the most common form of selection, which usually depends on either income or a proxy for income, such as assets. Some observers refer to administrative targeting, whereby local officials determine who should receive assistance by checking on proxy indicators of income or means, such as land ownership, schooling, ownership of amenities etc. Application of implicit tests of need and deserving status will set up

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\(^{20}\) Presentations by Darshini Mahadevia, S. Mahendra Dev, and Santosh Mehrotra
unfairness, deception and petty corruption. Identification of Below Poverty Line families by the state governments in India is a case in point.

There is an increasing demand for universal social protection measures in India, where some existing programmes are universal and some other programmes are targeted. While the Public Distribution System became targeted in 1997, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) has remained universal since its inception. India has many targeted programmes for BPL population. On the other hand, NREGA is a self-targeted scheme.

Targeting has both tangible and intangible costs. The administrative and political costs of targeting are higher than other costs but can be reduced through self targeted public works. In India, discussions around universal and targeted social protection schemes have always reflected one of the key priorities in policy making.

In Bangladesh, the beneficiaries for the old age allowance scheme are selected by the community. This type of a community based selection procedure may not be problematic in this context as one of the selection criteria is the recipient’s age. Community based targeting strategies may have populist appeal but they presuppose a very special set of circumstances. It presupposes a democratic structure within the community that would guard against clientelist practices.

Administrative targeting can take place at various levels of government, national or local. It has been found that the Central Government is in a better position to identify poor communities, while local bodies are more suitable for identifying poor households and poor individuals.

**Cash or kind? Conditional or unconditional?**

As in other countries, India does not have conditional cash transfers in the form of social assistance, although NREGA is a kind of conditional transfer. It is often argued that in most situations cash transfer is better than in-kind transfer. The need for respecting the freedom of choice of the poor, for relieving financial constraints, reducing administrative costs and reducing inequality in subsidies, patronage and corruption, are a few of the arguments in favor of direct cash transfers. India’s four major transfer programmes, viz. Public Distribution System (PDS), fertilizer subsidies, *Indira Awas Yojana* (IAY) and *SwarnaJayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana* (SGSY)- programme meant to promote self-employment of the poor, together accounted for Rs 73,144 crore in the 2008 budget. The huge costs of these programmes can be avoided if cash transfer was chosen instead of in-kind transfer. There is a need to have some type of conditional cash transfer, particularly for women and children, to improve food security. Conditional cash transfers that have worked well include the food-for-education program in Bangladesh, Mexico’s PROGRESA program and the *Bolsa Escola* in Brazil. Cash transfer may not achieve the desired outcome if the supply side is weak so that the recipient finds it hard to exercise his/her freedom of choice.
6. The way forward

- Even though enough light has been thrown on the definition, scope and limitations of the concept of social protection, it can hardly be claimed that a precise, robust and mutually agreed-upon conceptualization has been arrived at. Although it raises the need for further dialogue, the lack of precision may not be a serious issue as we feel that there is a shared understanding – however rough it is. Social protection strategies must encompass promotional, protective as well as preventive types of policies.

- There are different levels of concerns that need to be brought under the focus. The ‘upper’ level issues include the macroeconomic and political economy considerations and how they impact the social protection policies in South Asia. The ‘development failure’ that is characterized by the growing incidence of unemployment and underemployment coexisting with moderate to high economic growth calls for urgent attention to be given to employment oriented protection strategies.

- An analysis of some of the existing employment programmes helps us understand the design modalities so that they can be improved upon. India’s NREGA could be compared with similar programmes in other countries, e.g. Employment Guarantee Programme in Nepal and Benazir programme in Pakistan. The rights-based approach toward guaranteeing certain days of employment needs to be promoted.

- The moral appeal of human rights could always be invoked even if the rights in question were not legalized. The idea of human rights has often motivated legislative initiatives, as it is the case of India’s Right to Food campaign and subsequent legislative process to make it an Act of Parliament. Once it is an Act, it may not be reversed easily by a new government.

- With increasing movement of people across national and regional boundaries, the issue of migrants’ rights and entitlements needs to be addressed.

- India leads the way by drafting the Unorganized Sector Workers’ Social Security Bill in 2008, which would cover the country’s 340 million workers in the unorganized sector. Other countries in South Asia may consider pursuing this line. The Indian Act demonstrates that social protection for the informal economy workers is not impossible.

- The ‘intermediate’ level includes choices over different types of social protection policies whilst taking into account changing economic scenarios. For example, all South Asian countries have so far relied mostly on social assistance type of schemes. With increasing risks and vulnerabilities there is a growing need for
various social insurance type of programmes. The poorer sections are vulnerable to a range of risks which can have a devastating affect on their livelihoods and well-being. They have a higher exposure to a variety of risks, such as health shocks, labour market risks (many work in the informal sector and face high risks of unemployment and underemployment), harvest risks, life cycle risks and various other special risks. In addition, there are risks faced by the entire community such as droughts, floods, cyclones, structural adjustment policies etc. Different types of vulnerabilities would require different kinds of protective strategies against risks. For example, the global economic downturn resulted in a very specific problem for Bangladesh as Bangladeshi migrant workers returned from the Middle East and Malaysia after being expelled.\textsuperscript{21}

- At the ‘lower’ level there are issues relating to the design features of various programmes and policies. It is increasingly being suggested that we need to move toward more cash-based social assistance programmes for the chronically poor. The governments should show greater willingness to experiment in programme design and to make informed decisions based on systematic evaluations.

- The neglect of urban social protection policy should be addressed. Cities seem to lack appropriate institutional mechanisms to pursue social protection strategies in a meaningful way.

- The UN Social Protection Floor Initiative may be formulated more concretely in terms of three major programmes: (1) a major social assistance program similar to the Public Distribution System, but revised in a more cash-based direction; (2) a public works program, such as the NREGA, but inclusive of urban areas as well; (3) a basic social security package for those outside the formal sector.

\textsuperscript{21} Presentation by Akhter Ahmed
Recommendations from Researchers

C. Upendranadh
Programme and Network Manager,
Social Protection in Asia network (SPA), Institute for Human Development (IHD), New Delhi, India

These Recommendations from the Researchers are based on the research papers presented and subsequent deliberations made at the UNESCO-ICSSR Research Meeting held on 18-19 March 2010.

Introduction

1. The two day research meeting on Social Protection Policies in South Asia brought together around 40 scholars from across South Asia to New Delhi from the 18th to 19th March 2010. The meeting was organized by UNESCO-ICSSR, and supported by the Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University (CSRD-JNU), the Institute for Human Development (IHD) and the Social Protection in Asia (SPA) research network.

2. The aims of the meeting were to enhance understanding at the conceptual level and to provide country perspectives on linkages between social protection and human development. It was also to review the processes by which current social protection programmes work, in order to identify the gaps which may exist in terms of design, implementation, coverage and quality, institutional capacities, governance, and fiscal possibilities. Following this, it was to identify coherent social policy alternatives that could be recommended nationally or regionally.

3. The key questions addressed at the meeting were threefold. They included the following: Firstly, the need to understand conditions under which certain social policies work and the lessons that respective countries can offer from these experiences. Secondly, to identify ways in which such policies can be strengthened and can therefore lead to substantial transformation in society. Finally, the aim was to look at the ways in which this process can result in the development of a regional perspective on social protection.

4. The research meeting was structured around the following:

   a. An overview of social protection policies in the countries of South Asia (SAARC member countries),
   b. Country papers on social protection policies and initiatives,
c. Opportunities for concrete horizontal projects and bilateral cooperation,
d. Identification of best practices on social protection policies, and
e. Recommendations to policy makers.

It is hoped that researchers’ recommendations to policy makers will feed into the Ministerial Policy Statement of the UNESCO Forum of Ministers on Social Protection Policies in South Asia, scheduled to take place in Sri Lanka on 20-22 February 2011. So far scholars from the region have discussed over 12 research papers on social protection in different countries and have identified a set of recommendations for consideration at the Ministers’ Conference.

5. The research meeting will highlight the global economic crisis as a context for the discussion, as well as the policy response from countries of the region and from multi-lateral bodies, including agencies of the UN family which have advocated the Social Protection Floor Initiative (SPFI) and the global jobs pact for rejuvenating economic growth and employment.

6. Scholars discussed the overall development context of the region, shared perspectives and experiences of implementing social protection policies in South Asia and identified the barriers to the extension of social protection for the poor and vulnerable in the region.

7. While structural inequalities in South Asian societies are acknowledged, vulnerability and deprivation are increasing as a result of globalization and concomitant economic policies pursued by countries across the region. In spite of relatively high economic growth over the past decade, South Asian countries account for the largest concentration of economic and social deprivation.

8. Scholars from the region have drawn attention to the need to follow an employment-led development path to ensure fair and inclusive growth processes in the region. It is also acknowledged that social protection will remain a ‘sticking plaster’ unless the countries of the region pursue policies that are redistributive in content.

**Framework for promotion of social protection**

9. In order to fulfill the international covenants and commitments that the countries have made so far on social development, broader frameworks and operational initiatives on social protection are required. By invoking rights-based frameworks for social protection (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)), it is hoped that a long term and common framework containing principles for the promotion of social protection, will be available for the countries of the region. A shared understanding of the operational principles for social protection is also necessary to fulfill common aims and the needs of the communities of the region.
Social protection, citizenship and universalism
10. While citizenship-based social protection is a starting point, there is a need to address issues of social protection for the more vulnerable populations who cross borders in search of a better livelihood. Social protection mechanisms should include migrant rights, entitlements, and legal processes and procedures which help migrants to assimilate into local economies. Even within national borders, creating quality of access to and delivery of basic services for all, in both rural and urban areas, is important for the promotion of citizenship and social harmony.

Policy coordination and cooperation
11. The macroeconomic policies of the countries of the region need to include employment generation as a key objective. Employment-led growth strategies need to be adopted to enhance livelihood opportunities and decent work for all. They should be seen as a stepping stone for social protection. Fiscal policies also need to be synchronized with this objective.

12. Governments must play an important role in the promotion and coordination of social protection measures within their respective countries. The coordination and involvement of the private sector, civil society and the local community also becomes necessary. Better policy coordination among ministries implementing social development programmes is also essential.

Addressing resource-based vulnerabilities
13. There is a consensus that increasing resources at both household and community levels, is an important pre-requisite for livelihood security and reducing vulnerability. In this respect, there is a need to develop mechanisms for sharing common resources both within countries and across country borders. Risks associated with natural resources (as is the case for water) are cross-border issues which require the development of common mechanisms of mitigation. Similarly, the use of resources by the private sector needs to be considered and proper mechanisms for equity and inclusiveness need to be found to facilitate sharing amongst all stakeholders.

14. In light of the financial crisis and the global economic slowdown, response mechanisms articulated by the UN family have gained importance in the region. While it is acknowledged that social protection mechanisms are not institutionalized, there is a need to identify schemes that can mitigate the vulnerabilities and risks induced by the crisis.

15. Countries may engage in debates and discussions on how best to apply the Chief Executives Board’s (CEB) initiatives at the country-specific level, for example, the application of schemes related to social insurance, food security, social assistance, unconditional and conditional cash transfers, social safety nets and complementary credit programmes among others.
Social protection floor
16. Given the vast percentage of the population in the region made vulnerable and marginalized by the various structural inequalities and endowment deprivations, a ‘social protection floor’ is envisaged that could accommodate and enhance basic capabilities. This would include education, health care, accessibility to and affordability of food and shelter, plus the empowerment and protection of the poor and vulnerable.

Financing social protection
17. It is recommended that the levels of funding for social protection must match the levels necessary for existing and future needs. Financing of social protection should come from tax revenues and external aid, and support for social protection should be seen as complementary to government efforts.

18. Appropriate fiscal and taxation policies should be set in place for resource mobilization and spending on social protection. Fiscal and taxation policies should also be adequate to meet social requirements, for example expenditures should be sufficient to cover needs like basic health and other programmes.

19. Additional funding for social protection, for the most vulnerable, especially in the context of rising food and fuel inflation and the financial crisis, needs to be supported by national governments, donors and international financial institutions.

Institutions and governance
20. A recurring constraint, vis a vis social protection in most countries, is the fact of limited capacities for effective delivery of social services. While several programmes have been implemented, their effectiveness is limited due to poor delivery mechanisms and inadequate institutional capacity. Weak governance structures are contributing to leakages and inefficiencies.

21. Increased investments to build and strengthen the capacity of institutions for the delivery of social protection are essential. Governance reforms and democratization at the grass roots are important for effective delivery. Mechanisms should be put in place to link spending on social protection to outcomes in terms of human development indicators. Participatory governance and decentralization would help in strengthening the delivery mechanism as well as monitoring the quality of service delivery.

22. Interdepartmental coordination and convergence at the grass roots level is important to enhance the effectiveness of the service delivery in the field. Mechanisms for such coordination need to be institutionalized.

23. Government agencies should intervene to help in the capacity-building of stakeholders in the design and implementation of social protection policies and capacity building should become an integral part of the implementation strategies in the region.
24. Building capacities for the monitoring and evaluating of social protection schemes and policy frameworks is also essential for the countries of the region.

**Learning and sharing**
25. Countries of the region are implementing various social protection programmes. It is important to learn from these programmes and to adapt them to the country-specific contexts.

26. Documenting best practices and cross-country studies is important for sharing and learning. Cross-country and exposure visits are also vital instruments to learn what works and where and how they can be adapted to other countries.

27. Governments, leading social science institutions, and multi-lateral bodies need to develop mechanisms for policy dialogue, the sharing of experiences, and a research policy interface at the regional level. SAARC may devise mechanisms for such a process.

28. Think tanks on social protection in the region need to be encouraged so that knowledge generation, sharing and learning can take place across countries. Donor support for such initiatives is important.

**Tracking and forewarning**
29. There is a need to strengthen macroeconomic and financial surveillance and for the implementation of an effective economic early warning system.

30. There is an urgent need to establish a UN system for monitoring vulnerability and to construct alert mechanisms to track developments and report on the political, economic, social and environmental dimensions of the crisis.

**Other recommendations**
The following discussion points have emerged for consideration in formulating policy responses to vulnerabilities and risks.

31. Strengthening food security mechanisms at the national and regional level.

32. As South Asia moves rapidly towards urbanization, mechanisms for universal social protection are essential for promoting social harmony and reducing conflict over land-use in both rural and urban areas. New and innovative schemes are especially needed to protect an increasingly neglected population of the urban poor, which has been on the rise due to rapid migration.

34. Green economy initiatives, through investments for environmental sustainability and climate-friendly development, are essential for social protection. Technology and innovation become essential in this endeavour.
36. Promotion of a decent work agenda.

37. Humanitarian support and assistance during emergencies and natural disasters
Abstract of Papers

SOUTH ASIA

Abstract by C. Upendranadh, Regional Coordinator, Social Protection in Asia Network, Institute of Human Development (IHD), New Delhi, India

Overview - Social Protection in South Asia & SPA Research Network: Mainstreaming social protection (including social security, social assistance, social insurance, safety-nets etc) policies and engaging with the debate on identifying policy alternatives and barriers for extension of social protection to large sections of the vulnerable in Asia (especially South Asia) has assumed renewed importance in the recent period. Social protection responses to the vulnerabilities and shocks that the communities of the region face can be approached through a shared perspective owing to the similarities in terms of deprivation in social and human development indicators.

The South Asian experience recounts gravitation towards the language of guarantees of social protection for millions of the poor. India is moving towards consolidation of flagship social assistance and social insurance schemes and expanding rights-based social protection with employment and food as focus. Similarly rights-based approach was a mainstay in SP policies in Sri Lanka earlier, albeit undermined due to civil unrest of the recent period. Other countries of the region are presently attempting to expand coverage and devising new programmes and schemes that provide opportunity ladders for overcoming vulnerabilities faced by millions of poor. Deficits in institutions and governance, administrative and technical capabilities and financing social protection remain real challenges for countries of the region.

SPA Network: SPA is a policy oriented research network and it has identified themes that bring out evidences on the working of some of the social protection programmes to inform policy on ‘developmental’ potential of social protection and to mainstream social protection. In South Asia, the SPA research network has research partners in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. While in India the research is around public employment (institutional and governance challenges and the impact on women) and urban land policies for slum dwellers, strategies towards graduation from extreme poverty form the research theme in Bangladesh. Similarly, in Pakistan residential land distribution programme in urban areas as social protection with a focus on citizenship based entitlement is being explored.

SPA engages in dissemination in the region through various means, including facilitating policy conclaves and research policy interfaces. For more information see www.socialprotectionasia.org
SOUTH ASIA

Abstract by Dr. Rizwanul Islam, Former Special Advisor, Employment Sector, ILO, Geneva and Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development, India

Employment and Social Protection in Bangladesh: An Analysis with a South Asian Perspective

The presentation will start by referring to what the author calls a “development failure” in the South Asian countries in general. The fact that despite reasonable rates of economic growth (and high growth in some cases like India), very large proportions of the total labour force in these countries are still employed in the informal economy indicates a failure in terms of development and transformation of the economies and their labour markets. That, in turn, has implications for social protection for workers. As large numbers are engaged in the informal economy, conventional measures of social protection, e.g., pensions, provident fund, unemployment benefits, etc. cover only a small fraction of the labour force. Hence, the definition and modalities of social protection in these countries would need to go beyond the conventional tools. An overview of alternative definitions and measures of social protection will be provided from the above perspective. The next part of the presentation will focus specifically on Bangladesh and provide an overview of the various measures through which social protection is provided in the country. In that context, the concept of social safety nets will be brought in. Measures of both conditional and unconditional cash transfers will be described. As employment creation programmes feature prominently amongst the former, the presentation will focus specifically on such programmes and provide a South Asia comparative perspective. In the concluding part of the presentation, questions and issues will be raised relating to the appropriateness, coverage, financing and effectiveness of the various programmes. With regard to finance, the issue affordability of social protection in developing countries is often raised. This issue will be addressed with reference to estimated costs in relation to GDP.

BANGLADESH

Abstract by Dr. Akhter Ahmed, Senior Research Staff, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), New Delhi, India

Strengthening Social Protection in Bangladesh: Past Experience and Way Forward

Increasingly recognized as a critical part of social policy, social protection systems have been used by many countries to enable individuals, families, and communities to reduce risk and/or mitigate the impacts of stresses and shocks to their livelihoods. Formal safety net interventions belong to the broader social protection system. Bangladesh possesses a wealth institutional diversity and a wide range of experiences in providing assistance to the poor through social safety net programs. Although some of the programs started as early as mid-1970s, the administrative structure and the implementation mechanisms have gone through substantive changes over the years.
The notable changes include “transforming relief programs to development programs”, converting “ration price subsidies to targeted food distribution,” and engaging other stakeholders—such as NGOs and micro-finance organizations—in the implementation of various safety net programs. Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia that has introduced a massive safety net intervention in response to the 2008 food crisis—the 100-Day Employment Generation Program with nationwide coverage. However, safety net coverage represents only a fraction of the extreme poor, and they do not seem to be adequate for addressing poverty or for mitigating vulnerability to poverty.

Although the largest safety net programs in Bangladesh distribute food to targeted beneficiaries, cash transfers have become increasingly important. The debate over whether cash transfers are more effective than food transfers continues, but momentum seems to be building in favor of cash transfers for promoting a social protection agenda that moves beyond the traditional food-based safety nets.

Social protection will become even more important in Bangladesh as the country faces economic downturn, food price fluctuations, climate change, and other developments that increase the vulnerability of the poor. This presentation will address the emerging issues and explore ways for strengthening the social protection system in Bangladesh.

**BANGLADESH**

**Abstract by Dr. Barkat-e-Khuda, Professor, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh**

**Social Safety Net Programmes in Bangladesh**

**Introduction:** Social protection programs or social safety net programs (SSNP) are quite common in developed countries, and are also becoming common in developing countries to cope with various types of shocks and risks affecting the vulnerable groups. SSNP should follow both the “promotion approach” and the “protection approach”, and be guided by both equity and efficiency considerations.

The proponents of SSNP consider them as a means of ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are shared widely among the population. However, the critics consider SSNP as wasting scarce public resources, and doing little to enhance long-term economic growth.

**Country Context:** Bangladesh has a large population of around 150 million people. The country is characterized by several unfavorable socio-economic conditions such as declining farm size; rising landlessness; frequent occurrence of natural disasters and river erosions; low literacy; high under-employment; widespread poverty; high maternal mortality; high malnutrition and a rapidly growing urban population with around one-third living in informal settlements.

**Social Safety Net Programs in Bangladesh:** The priority of the present government is poverty reduction by ensuring social security and empowerment and employment
generation. In the FY2008-09 budget, the government allocated 15.2% of the budget and 2.25% of the GDP for social security and social empowerment.

SSNP have been undertaken by the successive governments to improve the welfare of vulnerable groups. The major past/ongoing SSNP can be divided under four broad categories: (i) employment generation programs, (ii) programs to cope with natural disasters and other shocks, (iii) incentives provided to parents for their children’s education, and (iv) incentives provided to the families to improve their health status. They can be grouped into two types, depending on the mode of payment: (a) cash transfers, and (b) food transfers.

SSNP in Bangladesh have led to increased school enrollment and attendance, especially among girls in secondary schools and closing the gender gap; additional employment generation; provision of food during crisis; building infrastructure; and increased access to, and utilization of maternal health care services. However, several technical, organizational, programming and institutional problems limit the full potential benefits of the less successful programs.

**Lessons Learned:** Several important lessons have been learned. These include the need for: (i) high political commitment; (ii) strong partnerships at all levels; (iii) a role for all concerned stakeholders; (iv) better targeting of the beneficiaries; (v) minimizing leakages; (vi) better coordination among implementing agencies; (vii) improved monitoring and supervision; (viii) timely transfer of funds; (ix) improving the food grain delivery system, (x) larger cash transfers or credit as part of the medium-term relief to the flood-affected households; and (xi) adequate consideration given to improvement in quality of services.

**Conclusions and the Way Forward:** The school stipend programs have achieved their desired objectives. Also, the Maternal Health Voucher Scheme appears to be on track. However, because of considerable leakages and various constraints hindering effective implementation of the other SSNP, those have not achieved their desired objectives, and hence, such constraints should be duly addressed.

SSNP should be continued and further strengthened in the future, given the unfavorable socio-economic condition of a sizeable proportion of the Bangladeshis. Such programs deserve high priority to ensure the rights and entitlements of the disadvantaged groups, including the urban areas and the poorer rural regions of the country.

While program efficiency should be enhanced to reduce leakages, the government should also try to increase its allocation to such programs from around 2 percent of its GDP to around 6 percent. For this, the government should mobilize additional domestic resources, cut down on less productive activities, and motivate the development partners to provide the required resources.
BANGLADESH

Abstract by Dr. Intiaz Ahmed, Professor, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Social Protection in the Age of Globalization: Newer Shocks, More Vulnerables

Gandhi had a unique way of telling us how things relate to one another. In his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita he came back to the question as to why he is advocating the charka (spinning-wheel). His response was indicative of a precise mode of intervention trying to accomplish a much greater outcome: “A wise man will mean by the spinning-wheel not an article made of wood but any type of work which provides employment to all people.” Social protection too is a relational issue, trying to accomplish more than what it has come to be identified with. Doubtlessly, there is an element of state-centrism in the discourse on social protection. Four parameters could easily be identified: poor-centric; rural-centric; cash/food centric; and formal sector-centric. While the conceptualization of ‘poor’ has been contested for inviting discriminatory practices and making the targeted population more vulnerable the rest of the parameters has become more problematic if not untenable with the advent of globalization. The discourse on social protection otherwise cannot escape the newer shocks arising from the latter, particularly with respect to the three domains: the post-state; the non-state and the stateless, which collectively ended up reproducing more vulnerables. My presentation will highlight this in detail.

BHUTAN

Abstract by Dr. Tashi Choden, Researcher, Centre for Bhutan Studies, Bhutan

An Overview of Social Protection Policies and Initiatives in Bhutan

Since the inception of planned development in the country in the early 1960s, the Bhutanese government has placed great importance in the social sectors through the provision of free health and education services. As a largely agricultural society, government support to farmers has also been substantial, providing valuable protection to the rural population in securing their main source of livelihood. Over the decades of economic development and modernization processes, policies related to labor and employment; women and child issues; family and work-life related initiatives; as well as poverty alleviation measures have come into much sharper focus in the country. The introduction and implementation of these broad areas of social policy by the government have been complemented by the continuing tradition of granting kidu or welfare by the king to people in various situations of hardship. Additionally, initiatives of several non-government entities have been increasingly valuable in addressing issues related to at-risk youth, domestic violence, disabilities, poverty, and other social issues facing the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of Bhutanese society. This paper will provide a broad overview of these policies and initiatives, and identify some of the successes experienced in their implementation by various agencies in the country.
Abstract by Dr. Santosh Mehrotra, Director, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, India

The National Rural Employment Guarantee: Major Achievements and Serious Lacunae

The paper examines one of the largest right-based employment programme in the world, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India. It begins by analyzing NREGA data by state and by district. It goes on to identify the problems that the programme has faced as well as to make a series of suggestions to address the problems.

Abstract by Dr. S. Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices & Former Director, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, India

Social Protection: Food Based Programmes in India

This paper examines social protection policies and programmes with food based programmes in India. Responding to the shocks and vulnerabilities of the poor and marginalized through social policy has been one of the major functions of the governments all over the world. Policies related to social protection and social insurance assume importance in this context, as they would directly deliver support to the needy. By now it is recognized that presence of social protection can maintain social cohesion and can improve or prevent irreversible losses of human capital. Social protection programmes thus also contribute to promotion of human development. An important justification for public interventions in social protection programmes has been improvement in welfare of the poor and equity. There are, however, several issues and concerns regarding social protection and social pensions in India. The country relied more on social assistance in terms of promotional and preventative type. Protection or contingency type programmes have been available mainly for the organized sector. In other words, 92 per cent of Indian workers who are in the informal/unorganized sector do not have traditional social security programmes. Food insecurity is one of the major problems faced by the poor and vulnerable section. In this paper, therefore we concentrate on food based programmes in this paper. It first discusses risks and vulnerabilities faced by the poor and vulnerable sections in India. Then it provides an overview of social protection programmes in India. Next, the paper examines the achievements and problems in food based programmes like TPDS, mid-day meals, ICDS etc. Last section of the paper provides lessons from food based programmes and conclusions of the study.
**INDIA**

Abstract by Dr. Darshini Mahadevia, Professor, Faculty of Planning and Public Policy, School of Planning, CEPT University, Ahmedabad, India

**Institutional Structure and Policies for Social Protection in Urban India**

This paper is a stock staking on urban policy regime on Social Protection and available institutional structures for implementing the current and future policies on social protection. Since the urban institutional structures vary greatly by the states in India, this paper builds on the case of Gujarat, however, drawing all India implications for social protection policies and institutions for the urban India. The paper looks at the policies and institutional structure for both, the promotional aspects of social protection as well as protectional aspects of social protection in urban India.

**NEPAL**

Abstract by Dr. Bishwa Nath Tiwari, Professor, Central Department of Economics, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

**Social Protection against Global Crises in Nepal: Some Challenges**

Poverty reduction is the overarching goal of the Government of Nepal. Poverty has many ugly faces. It is not only the deprivation from income or consumption, or education and health, but also the vulnerability to risks and hazards. The nature and composition of risk and crises is changing. Therefore, a sustained reduction in poverty is a formidable task in the context of emerging local and global crises in a poor developing country like Nepal.

Recently, Nepal confronted additional four risks. Of them Maoist conflict is a national risk and other three are the global crises – popularly known as three F’s: fuel, food and financial crises. While the impact of Maoist conflict varies by regions and rural-urban parts of the country, the effect of the global crises is universal. The upsurge in the prices of petroleum products increased the transportation cost affecting the people of remote hills and mountains of Nepal. This has been further aggravated with the increased use of staples for bio-fuel production, and the export ban of rice, though of a limited duration, by rice producing countries in 2008. However, the impact of financial crisis has not yet been much realised. It will have a second generation effect in terms of reduced foreign aid, decreased demand for labour and consequent decrease in remittances, which is the first important source of hard currency in Nepal. Besides, the financial crisis will also affect transfer of technology and provision of public goods to developing countries including Nepal from developed countries, thus affecting the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Across all the crises, the one thing that is common is that their impact is higher on the poor and vulnerable people of Nepal, and they halt the human development. Therefore, the main argument of the paper is that sustained poverty reduction requires
comprehensive social protection measures as the growth cannot alone address the vulnerability of poor and excluded groups. However, there are several challenges on the way to proper management of risks.

To manage risks, Nepali communities rely on both formal and informal strategies: the informal strategies include some social insurance mechanism and diversification of income sources, among others, for risk reduction and mitigation. Also, they adopt several coping strategies after the shocks. While many informal strategies are disappearing and/or weakening, formal strategies are yet to be consolidated and effectively implemented in the country. Under the formal mechanism, the Government of Nepal has social insurance and social assistance programmes apart for some workfare programmes and provision of block grants to local governments. Besides, populations affected from disasters receive some in-kind and cash support both by GOs and NGOs. But this is limited to natural shocks.

The paper points the fact that Nepal has patches of social protection measures, and its coverage is also low compared to many other countries. Therefore, it argues for the development and implementation of a comprehensive social protection system. The paper points following challenges on the risk management: (i) decreasing informal social protection measures; (ii) scattered and limited coverage of social protection measures; (iii) inefficient targeting; and (iv) limited fiscal space. However, the paper advances that there is some fiscal space if the government can increase its revenue generation, manage better its public expenditure, and if the donors comply with their commitments. The paper ends saying that it is the political will on which depends on the sustained reduction and poverty.

Key word: crisis, fiscal space, political will, risks, social protection, vulnerability

NEPAL

Abstract by Dr. Shiva Sharma, Executive Director, National Labour Academy, Nepal

Social Protection in Nepal: Current Status and Future Need

Formal sector employment is meager in Nepal, informal sector employment dominates. Later is devoid of any social protection, although traditional mechanism to take care of poor and destitute still are to be found both in urban and rural Nepal. But poverty, discrimination, and exclusion are so rampant in Nepal that comprehensive measures to avail protection to the citizens are being realized as one of the key measure for promotion of socioeconomic inclusion. The paper makes analysis of existing formal and informal arrangements for social protection, and outlines measures to expand coverage under protection in immediate and short run.
Abstract by Dr. Nisha Arunatilake, Research Fellow and Head of Labour, Employment and Human Resources Development Research, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka

How Will the Sri Lankan Labour Market Withstand the Global Economic Crisis?

In the context of the current economic and financial crisis, the paper describes the existing social protection policies in Sri Lanka and examines their adequacy in helping individuals and families affected by the crisis. Social protection is defined to be all policies and programmes aimed at providing individuals and families income and other support for coping with the consequences of economic shocks, including social safety nets as well as income transfer programmes.

Abstract by Dr. Ramani Gunatilaka, Independent Consultant, Sri Lanka

Safety Nets for Social Protection: Sri Lanka's Samurdhi Programme

Several previous analyses have pointed out that Sri Lanka’s Samurdhi programme fails to provide an effective safety net for the poor. They have prompted various efforts at reform which aggregate beneficiary statistics and anecdotal evidence suggest have not borne fruit. This paper analyses the most recent household income and expenditure data for an up-to-date assessment. The paper first evaluates the benefit incidence of Samurdhi transfers and then compares the demographic and other determinants of the probability that a household is poor on the one hand, with the determinants of the probability of receiving Samurdhi on the other. It investigates whether targeting errors are systemic, with some groups being less likely to receive benefits than others.

The study finds that although fewer wealthy households are getting support than before, more poor households who need support remain outside the programme. The income transfer, too, provides a smaller share of a household’s food consumption basket than it did before. While some targeting errors may be systemic with some groups less likely to receive benefits than others, in terms of most of the variables investigated in the analysis, Samurdhi’s targeting appears in line with characteristics of households that increase the likelihood of being poor. The study discusses recent efforts at developing appropriate eligibility criteria, highlights the political economy factors at grass-roots’ level which have held back implementation, and suggests that macroeconomic and political conditions may now be more conducive to reform than at any time before.
# Agenda

## Day 1: Thursday, 18 March 2010

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>9.30 – 10.00 am</td>
<td>Registration</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.00 – 11.00 am</td>
<td>Inaugural Session</td>
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<td>Welcome Addresses – Javeed Alam, Chairman, Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), India; Ranjit Sinha, Member-Secretary, Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), India</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Introduction: UNESCO Management of Social Transformation (MOST) – Marina Faetanini, Social and Human Sciences (SHS), UNESCO New Delhi</td>
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<td>Projection of MOST film</td>
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<td>11.00 – 11.30 am</td>
<td>Tea/Coffee Break</td>
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<td>11.30am – 1.00 pm</td>
<td>Session 1: South Asian Overview</td>
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<td>Chair: G. K. Chadha, Chief Executive Officer, South Asian University, India</td>
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<td>Presentation of Workshop Modalities and Outcomes – Ravi Srivastava, Professor of Economics &amp; Chairperson, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, JNU, and Marina Faetanini, Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO New Delhi</td>
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<td>South Asian Overview:</td>
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<td>✓ Social Protection Asia Network - C. Upendranadh, Senior Fellow, Regional Coordinator, Institute for Human Development, India</td>
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<td>✓ Employment and Social Protection in Bangladesh: An Analysis with a South Asian Perspective - Rizwanul Islam, Former Special Advisor, Employment Sector, ILO, Geneva and Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi</td>
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<td>✓ An Analysis of India's Social Protection Programs and Systems - John Blomquist, Social Protection Specialist, The World Bank, India</td>
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<td>Discussants: Alakh Sharma, Director, Institute for Human Development, India; P.P. Ghosh, Asian Development Research Institute, India;</td>
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<td>1.00 – 2.00 pm</td>
<td>Lunch Break</td>
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<td>2.00 – 3.00 pm</td>
<td>Session 2: Country Overviews</td>
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• Chair: T.S. Papola, Professor, Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, India


• Social Protection: Food Based Programmes in India - S. Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices & Former Director, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, India

• Discussants: Nisha Srivastava, Professor, University of Allahabad, India; Achin Chakrobarty, Professor, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata, India; Puja Vasudev Dutta, The World Bank, India;

3.00 – 3.30 pm  
Tea/Coffee Break

3.30 – 5.00 pm  
Session 3: Country Overviews

• Chair: Amitabh Kundu, Professor, Centre for Study of Regional Development, JNU

• Bhutan: An Overview of Social Protection Policies and Initiatives in Bhutan - Tashi Choden, Researcher, Centre for Bhutan Studies

• Nepal: Social Protection Measures against the Emerging Risks in Nepal - Bishwa Nath Tiwari, Central Department of Economics, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

• Discussant: S. Madheswaran, Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Policy

7.00 pm  
Welcoming reception and dinner at the India International Centre (IIC) hosted by ICSSR and UNESCO

Day 2: Friday, 19 March 2010

9.30 – 11.00 am  
Session 4: Social Protection – Flagship Programmes

• Chair: Kamal Mitra Chinoy, Professor, JNU, India

• Safety Nets for Social Protection: Sri Lanka’s Samurdhi Programme - Ramani Gunatilaka Independent Consultant, Sri Lanka;

• The National Rural Employment Guarantee: Major Achievements and Serious Lacunae - Santosh Mehrotra, Director, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Planning Commission, Government of India;

• Social Safety Net Programmes in Bangladesh: Lessons Learned - Barkat-e-Khuda, Professor, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
Discussants: Surjit Singh, Professor, Institute of Development Studies, India; Ashok Pankaj, Senior Fellow, Institute for Human Development, India; Praveen Jha, Centre for Economic Studies & Planning, JNU, India;

11.00 – 11.30 am   Tea/Coffee Break

11.30am – 1.00 pm   Session 5: Safety Nets and Urban/Rural Poor

Chair: Alakh Sharma Director, Institute for Human Development, India;
Social Protection in the Age of Globalization: Newer Shocks, More Vulnerables - Imtiaz Ahmed, Professor, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
Institutional Structure and Policies for Social Protection in Urban India - Darshini Mahadevia, Professor, CEPT University, India
Social Protection Policies in Pakistan - Karamat Ali, Director, Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, Pakistan

Discussants: Debolina Kundu, Associate Professor, National Institute of Urban Affairs, (NIUA), India; Preet Rustagi, Senior Fellow, Institute for Human Development, India;

1.00 – 2.00pm  Lunch Break

2.00 – 3.00pm   Session 6: Roundtable Discussion: Workshop Synthesis and Recommendations for Successful Social Protection Policies

Chair: Gerry Rodgers, Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development, India
Moderator: Ravi Srivastava, Professor of Economics & Chairperson, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Discussion Points:
- What recommendations for policy makers?
- What recommendations for researchers?
- Examples of potential areas for collaboration in South Asia?
- Replicated national social policies in other countries in South Asia?
- Future Prospects?
Panelists: Karamat Ali, Director, Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, Pakistan; D. Narsimha Reddy, Professor, University of Hyderabad, India; Bishwanath Tiwari, Central Department of Economics, Nepal; Ramani Gunatilaka, Independent Consultant, Sri Lanka;

3.00 – 3.30pm   Tea/Coffee Break

- **Chair**: Rizwanul Islam, Former Special Advisor, Employment Sector, ILO, Geneva and Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi
- **Moderator**: Ravi Srivastava, Professor of Economics & Chairperson, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
- **Panelists**: Karamat Ali, Director, Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, Pakistan; D. Narsimha Reddy, Professor, University of Hyderabad, India; Bishwa Nath Tiwari, Central Department of Economics, Nepal; Ramani Gunatilaka Independent Consultant, Sri Lanka;

4.30 – 5.30pm  Session 7: UNESCO Forum of Ministers in charge of Social Development from South Asia May 2010 Ministerial Meeting (Bangladesh) – The Way Forward

- **Chair**: Marina Faetanini, Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO New Delhi
- **Panelists**: Rizwanul Islam, Former Special Advisor, Employment Sector, ILO, Geneva and Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi; Santosh Mehrotra, Director, Institute of Applied Manpower, Planning Commission, Government of India;

**Vote of Thanks** – K. N. Jehangir, Director, ICSSR, India

**Rapporteurs for the meeting**: Rahul Agarwal, UNESCO New Delhi and Rukmini Tankha, Institute for Human Development, India
# List of Participants

1. **Dr. S. Mahendra Dev**  
   Chairman, Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices  
   Former Director, Centre for Economic and Social Studies  
   Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi 110001  
   India  
   Email: profmahendra@gmail.com

2. **Dr. Santosh Mehrotra**, Phd Econ (Cantab.)  
   Director, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Planning Commission, Government of India  
   Email: santosh.mehrotra@nic.in

3. **Prof. Darshini Mahadevia**, PhD  
   Faculty of Planning and Public Policy  
   CEPT University  
   University Road  
   Navrangpura, Ahmedabad, INDIA, 380009  
   Phone: +91-79-26302470/26302740  
   Fax: +91-79-26302075  
   Email: darshini@cept.ac.in  
   Alternate Email: d_mahadevia@yahoo.com

4. **Dr Karamat Ali**  
   Executive Director  
   Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research PILER Centre ST-001, Sector X, Sub-Sector V, Gulshan-e-Maymar, Karachi 75340  
   Pakistan  
   Ph: (92 21) 6351145-7  
   Fax: (92 21) 6350354  
   Mobile - 0300-8237528  
   Email: karamatorama@gmail.com

5. **Prof. Rizwanul Islam**  
   Former Special Advisor, Employment Sector, ILO, Geneva and Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development  
   NIDM Building, IIPA Campus  
   Indraprastha Estate, New Delhi -110002  
   Phone: + 91 11 2335 8166/2332 1610  
   Fax: +91 11 2376 5410
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Prof. Akhter Ahmed</strong></td>
<td>International Food Policy Research institute</td>
<td>CG Block, NASC Complex PUSA, New Delhi 110012 India</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asia Office</td>
<td><a href="mailto:a.ahmed@cgiar.org">a.ahmed@cgiar.org</a></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed</strong></td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>University of Dhaka, Dhaka 1000 Bangladesh</td>
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<td>Email: <a href="mailto:imtiaz@bangla.net">imtiaz@bangla.net</a>; Alternate Email: <a href="mailto:imtiazalter@gmail.com">imtiazalter@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Prof. Barkat-e-Khuda, Ph. D</strong></td>
<td>Department of Economics</td>
<td>University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh</td>
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<td><strong>Prof. Bishwa Nath Tiwari, Ph. D</strong>,</td>
<td>Central Department of Economics</td>
<td>Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur Kathmandu, Nepal</td>
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<td>Email: <a href="mailto:bishwa.tiwari@gmail.com">bishwa.tiwari@gmail.com</a>, <a href="mailto:bishwa_tiwari@wlink.com.np">bishwa_tiwari@wlink.com.np</a></td>
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<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Dr. Ramani Gunatilaka,</strong></td>
<td>Independent Consultant</td>
<td>996 Maradana Road, Colombo 08, SRI LANKA.</td>
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<td>Email: <a href="mailto:ramani.gunatilaka@gmail.com">ramani.gunatilaka@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>Alternate Email: <a href="mailto:rsgunatilaka@yahoo.com.au">rsgunatilaka@yahoo.com.au</a></td>
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<td>Tashi Choden</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu, Bhutan</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>John Blomquist</td>
<td>Social Protection Specialist</td>
<td>The World Bank, New Delhi</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Prof. Surjit Singh</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Institute of Development Studies (IDS)</td>
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<td>Prof. Amitabh Kundu</td>
<td>Centre for Study of Regional Development</td>
<td>Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi</td>
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<td>Dr Gerry Rodgers</td>
<td>Visiting Professor</td>
<td>Institute for Human Development</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Dr Janine Rodgers</td>
<td>Visiting Senior Fellow</td>
<td>Institute for Human Development</td>
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| 17. | **Dr. Debolina Kundu**  
**Associate Professor**  
**National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA)**  
**India Habitat Centre**  
2nd Floor, Core 4B  
Lodhi Road  
New Delhi – 110 003.  
Tel: +91-11-24643284, 24617543, 24617517  
Mob: 9990048720  
Fax: +91-11-24617513  
Email: dkundu@niua.org |
|---|---|
| 18. | **Himanshu**  
**Research Fellow in Economics**  
**Centre de Sciences Humaines de New Delhi**  
2 Aurangzeb Road  
New Delhi 110011  
Tel: (011) 30 41 00 70  
Fax: (011) 30 41 00 79  
Email: himanshu@csh-dc.com |
| 19. | **Dr. P.P. Ghosh**  
**Asian Development Research Institute**  
**Off Boring Road, BSIDC Colony**  
**Near A.N. College**  
**Patna -800013**  
**Bihar**  
Email: ppghoshadri@yahoo.co.uk |
| 20. | **Prof. Nisha Srivastava**  
**University of Allahabad**  
100-B, Nyaya Marg  
Ashok Nagar  
Allahabad 211001  
Email: nisha2000@gmail.com |
| 21. | **Prof. D. Narasimha Reddy**  
**University of Hyderabad**  
3-33-33  
L. Venkat Reddy Colony  
Ligampalli, Hyderabad -500019  
**Andhra Pradesh**  
Email: duvvurunarasimha@gmail.com |
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td><strong>Prof. Achin Chakraborty</strong></td>
<td>Institute of Development Studies Kolkata</td>
<td>Calcutta University Alipore Campus, 5th floor, 1, Reformatory Street,</td>
<td><a href="mailto:achin@idsk.edu.in">achin@idsk.edu.in</a>; <a href="mailto:achinchak@rediffmail.com">achinchak@rediffmail.com</a></td>
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<td>Kolkata – 700027, West Bengal, India</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td><strong>Prof. Atul Sarma</strong></td>
<td>Member, 13th Finance Commission, Government Of</td>
<td>80, DDA (SFS) Flats Sector -5, Dwarka New Delhi-110075, India Phone:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sarmaatul@yahoo.com">sarmaatul@yahoo.com</a></td>
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<td>India</td>
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<td><strong>Prof. Surinder S. Jodhka</strong></td>
<td>Indian Institute of Dalit Studies</td>
<td>Q-3, Green Park Extension New Delhi-110016</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ssjodhka@yahoo.com">ssjodhka@yahoo.com</a>, <a href="mailto:jodhka@mail.jnu.ac.in">jodhka@mail.jnu.ac.in</a></td>
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<td><strong>Prof. Kamal Mitra Chinoy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>158, Uttarakhand Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi- 110067 Phone Off:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kamalchenoy@gmail.com">kamalchenoy@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>Prof. Alakh N Sharma</strong></td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Institute for Human Development IIPA Campus IP Estate New Delhi 110 002</td>
<td><a href="mailto:alakh.sharma@ihdindia.org">alakh.sharma@ihdindia.org</a>, <a href="mailto:alakh.sharma@gmail.com">alakh.sharma@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>27</td>
<td><strong>Dr. Manisha Priyam</strong></td>
<td>Senior Lecturer at University of Delhi</td>
<td>80, Navjeevan Vihar New Delhi-110017 Delhi</td>
<td><a href="mailto:M.Priyam@lse.ac.uk">M.Priyam@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Dr. Praveen Jha</td>
<td>Centre for Economics Studies &amp; Planning</td>
<td>Jawaharlal Nehru University</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:praveenjha@hotmail.com">praveenjha@hotmail.com</a></td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Dr. T.S. Papola</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Institute for Studies in Industrial Development</td>
<td>New Delhi-110002 \ Delhi \ Email: <a href="mailto:tpapola@rediffmail.com">tpapola@rediffmail.com</a></td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Prof. R.S. Deshpande</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Institute of Social and Economic Change</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:director@isec.ac.in">director@isec.ac.in</a>, <a href="mailto:registrar@isec.ac.in">registrar@isec.ac.in</a></td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>S. Madheswaran</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Centre for Economic Studies and Policy</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:madhes@isec.ac.in">madhes@isec.ac.in</a>, <a href="mailto:madhes.hina@gmail.com">madhes.hina@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>32.</td>
<td>G.K. Chaddha</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>South Asian University</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:chadha2001in@yahoo.co.in">chadha2001in@yahoo.co.in</a></td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Ashok Pankaj</td>
<td>Senior Fellow</td>
<td>Institute for Human Development</td>
<td>Phone: 011-23358166/23766270'23321610</td>
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<td>NIDM Building IIIrd Floor</td>
<td>Fax: 011-23765410</td>
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<td>IIPA Campus, IP Estate, New Delhi 110002</td>
<td>Mobile: 9910717787</td>
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<td>Email: <a href="mailto:ashokpankaj.ihd@gmail.com">ashokpankaj.ihd@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>34.</td>
<td>Preet Rustagi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Institute for Human Development</td>
<td>Phone:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>NIDM Building IIIrd Floor</td>
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<td>IIPA Campus, IP Estate, New Delhi 110002</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:preetpat@gmail.com">preetpat@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>35.</td>
<td>Prof. Qutub Khan</td>
<td>Former UNESCO Regional Coordinator (EFA and Literacy) for the Arab States</td>
<td>Tel: 09968573968</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:gutub.khan2009@gmail.com">gutub.khan2009@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Subrata Bhattacharya</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Gramin Vikas Trust</td>
<td>Phone: 0120-2535619, 9953140813</td>
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<td>A-10, Sector I, Noida</td>
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<td>37.</td>
<td>Shubhra Dey</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Janki Devi Memorial College (JDM)</td>
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<td>38.</td>
<td>Mrs. Sherin Khan</td>
<td>Senior Specialist, Child Labour, South Asia</td>
<td>ILO Subregional Office for South Asia</td>
<td>Phone: +91 11 2460-2101-03 Extn. 291</td>
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<td>India Habitat Centre</td>
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<td>Core 4B, 3rd Floor Lodi Road</td>
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<td>New Delhi -110003, India</td>
<td><a href="mailto:khans@ilo.org">khans@ilo.org</a></td>
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|   | **Mr. Mukesh C. Gupta**  
Senior Specialist on Employment Intensive Investments  
ILO Sub-regional Office for South Asia  
India Habitat Centre, Core 4B,  
3rd Floor Lodi Road  
New Delhi -110003, India  
Tel: +91 11 2460-2101-03  
Email: gupta@ilo.org |
|---|---|
| 40. | **Dr. Puja Vasudeva Dutta**  
The World Bank  
70, Lodi Estate  
New Delhi-110003  
Phone: + 91 11 2461 7241  
Email: pvdutta@gmail.com  
Alternate Email: pdutta@worldbank.org |
| 41. | **Shonali Sen**  
The World Bank  
70, Lodi Estate  
New Delhi-110003  
Phone: + 91 11 2461 7241  
Email: ssen1@worldbank.org |
| 42. | **Dr. Mamta Kohli**  
Social Development Adviser  
DFID India  
British High Commission  
B-28, Tara Crescent  
Qutab Institutional Area  
New Delhi – 110016  
Tel: +91 11 26529123 Extn. 3319  
Direct: +91 11 42793319  
Fax: +91 11 26529296  
Email: m-kohli@dfid.gov.uk |
| 43. | **Prof. Javeed Alam**  
Chairman  
Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR)  
JNU Institutional Area  
Arna Asaf Ali Marg  
New Delhi-110 067 |
| 44. | **Mr. Armoogum Parsuramen**  
Director and UNESCO Representative to India, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka  
UNESCO HOUSE  
B-5/29 Safdarjung Enclave |
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<td><strong>Dr. Ranjit Sinha</strong>&lt;br&gt;Member Secretary&lt;br&gt;Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR)&lt;br&gt;JNU Institutional Area&lt;br&gt;Aruna Asaf Ali Marg, New Delhi-110 067&lt;br&gt;Tel: 26742059&lt;br&gt;Home Tel: 27247370</td>
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<td>46.</td>
<td><strong>Dr. K. N. Jehangir</strong>&lt;br&gt;Director&lt;br&gt;Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR)&lt;br&gt;JNU Institutional Area&lt;br&gt;Aruna Asaf Ali Marg, New Delhi-110 067&lt;br&gt;Tel: +91 11 26742351&lt;br&gt;Mob: +91 9911170065&lt;br&gt;Email: <a href="mailto:knjehangir@gmail.com">knjehangir@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>47.</td>
<td><strong>Mr. M. A. Jawaid</strong>&lt;br&gt;Deputy Director&lt;br&gt;Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR)&lt;br&gt;JNU Institutional Area,&lt;br&gt;Aruna Asaf Ali Marg, New Delhi-110 067&lt;br&gt;Tel: +91 11 26742351&lt;br&gt;Email: <a href="mailto:majawaid55@hotmail.com">majawaid55@hotmail.com</a></td>
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<td>48.</td>
<td><strong>Dr. D.S. Verma</strong>&lt;br&gt;Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR)&lt;br&gt;JNU Institutional Area&lt;br&gt;Aruna Asaf Ali Marg, New Delhi-110 067&lt;br&gt;Tel: +91 11 26742351</td>
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<td><strong>Dr. G.S. Saun</strong>&lt;br&gt;Deputy Director&lt;br&gt;ICSSR – Research Fellowships Division&lt;br&gt;271-D, Pocket-C, Mayur Vihar Phase-II,&lt;br&gt;Delhi 110 091&lt;br&gt;Tel: 26741692 Extn.287</td>
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<td><strong>Mr. Rajiv Khera</strong>&lt;br&gt;System Analyst&lt;br&gt;Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR)&lt;br&gt;G-54, Bali Nagar, New Delhi 110 015&lt;br&gt;Email: <a href="mailto:kherarajiv@netscape.net">kherarajiv@netscape.net</a></td>
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<td>Prof. Alakh N Sharma</td>
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|   | **Nidhi Ralhan**  
Social and Human Sciences Sector  
UNESCO HOUSE  
B-5/29 Safdarjung Enclave  
New Delhi 110 029, India  
Phone: + (91) 11 267 13000  
Fax: + (91) 11 267 13001/ 267 13002  
Email: n.ralhan@unesco.org |
|---|---|
|   | **Rahul Agarwal**  
Intern  
Social and Human Sciences Sector  
UNESCO HOUSE  
B-5/29 Safdarjung Enclave  
New Delhi 110 029, India  
Phone: + (91) 11 267 13000 ext. 301  
Mobile: 9999828781  
Fax: + (91) 11 267 13001/ 267 13002  
Email: r.agarwal@unesco.org |
For further information:

Marina Faetanini  
Programme Specialist  
Social and Human Sciences (SHS)  
UNESCO New Delhi  

B -5/29 Safdarjung Enclave  
New Delhi 110 029, INDIA  
Phone: + (91) 11 267 13000  
Fax: + (91) 11 267 13001/ 267 13002  
Email: m.faetanini@unesco.org; newdelhi@unesco.org  
Website: www.unesco.org/newdelhi; www.unesco.org/shs