

Strategies for strengthening social protection in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific

An Overview

Sri Lanka's achievements in the areas of social development and social protection surpass most developing countries. The country has made considerable progress on the Sustainable Development goals. It provides the most extensive social security coverage in South Asia. However, the performance in poverty reduction during the past decade has been modest. While challenges remain, particularly in improving the quality of education and health services as well as the income levels of the poor and reducing regional disparities in social and economic outcomes, Sri Lanka's accomplishments are remarkable.

In Sri Lanka, free educational services have been made available to the entire population. Schooling is compulsory for children in the age group of 5-14 years.

Free health system available to the entire population, there are other facilities made available by the government under different Acts of Parliament. As a life expectancy at birth of 73 years, an infant mortality rate of 11.1 per 1,000 live births and a maternal mortality ratio of 19 per 100,000 live births, the health programmes have demonstrated considerable success in improving the general health of the population

Overall Policy of the Government

Overall Policy of the Government is implementing specific social protection schemes for all the necessary segments of the society to improve their living condition and empowering them to contribute to the development of the country

Sri Lanka has made significant progress in reducing poverty over past decades. The Poverty Head Count Ratio at the national level has declined from 22.7 percent in 2002 to 6.7 percent in 2012/13. Despite the above achievements, inequality and vulnerability remain issues of great concerns. Generally, certain segments of the population like children, disadvantaged women, elders and disabled are vulnerable. The government mainly focuses to ensure the well-being of those segments within the family through group specific interventions. In line with the above principle, major welfare and livelihood assistance programmes have been implemented aiming at the above vulnerable groups to ensure inclusive growth where each and every individual of the country is able to enjoy the economic and social benefits.

Safety Net Programme Currently, number of welfare programmes are being implemented island-wide mainly focusing on poverty reduction and reducing vulnerability. These programmes are managed by different agencies at national and provincial levels. However, at present most of the ineligible families/ persons are receiving welfare assistance. According to the HIES 2012/13 data, although 6.7 percent of the households are below the poverty line, 28 percent of the households in the country have received Samurdhi cash transfers. Further, almost two-thirds of the poorest quintile does not receive any cash transfers at all.

Main Safety Net Programmes

Income Support programmes	
Samurdhi - (Divi Neguma) Subsidy and related benefits	Low income households

Monthly allowance for disabled	Persons with disabilities in low income households
Elderly allowance (Monthly)	Persons 70 years old and above in low income households
Public assistance monthly allowance	Highly vulnerable low income households, often with elderly, disabled, widows, single mothers or orphans
Assistance for illnesses	Persons with a chronic illness in low income households
Rehabilitation Grants (one-off grants for micro-business activities, as alternative to PAMA)	Low income /vulnerable households
Nutritional Support programmes	
Thriposha national supplementary food programme (2 take-Home packs of Thriposha per month)	All pregnant and lactating mothers (up to 06 months from birth) and undernourished children aged 06-59 months
Nutrition Allowance (Poshana Malla food stamp Rs.2000 per month)	All pregnant and lactation mothers below required body mass index (BMI)
Fresh Milk for nursery children	Children 2-5 Years in ECD centers in low nutrition areas

Prevailing issues in existing welfare programmes

1.Targeting (inclusion and exclusion errors) –include the beneficiaries those who are not eligible to receive benefits and exclude the eligible persons. In most cases beneficiary selecting criteria is based on the poverty line and also suffer from lack of clearly defined criterion/ definition. Therefore, the following major weaknesses are identified:

- Difficulty to identify the real income of beneficiaries
- Difficulty of eligible person to enter the programme
- No clear exit mechanism to remove empowered families

2. Inefficient institutional framework and higher administrative cost - There are overlaps in programmes, both at national and provincial levels and among agencies. This duplication makes it difficult to develop a coherent and efficient social protection system.

3. Unavailability of a proper social security system in the informal sector - This is mainly because those who are employed in the informal sector do not enjoy the benefits of any existing social security scheme. This is crucial as Sri Lanka's aging population is increasing. Therefore, it is necessary to establish an integrated welfare and subsidy management ("one-stop-shop") and social security system for addressing the above issues. Further, the targeting system of the welfare programmes; especially Samurdhi, needs to be revised using scientific method (namely Proxy Means Tests (PMT)). This means shifting to indirect methods of eligibility assessment based on score obtained from a formula with a weighted set of proxy indicators including household assets, demographic characteristics, housing conditions, expenditure pattern, etc., in addition to the monthly income. Particularly, attention needs to be given to identify "pockets of poverty" and ensure the well-being of the people specially in underserved areas.

Samurdhi Subsidy Programme

The Samurdhi subsidy programme is the main social protection initiative for the poor in the country both in terms of the expenditure and the number of beneficiaries. This associates with multiple programmes like the subsidy (or the cash transfer), social security (or insurance), microfinance and livelihood development.

Benefits of the Samurdhi Subsidy Programme

Category	Total Monthly Subsidy (Rs.)	Net Subsidy Amount (Rs)	Compulsory Savings (Rs.)	Contribution to Social Security Fund (Rs.)	Contribution to Housing Fund (Rs.)
1-2 member families	1500	1345	100	45	10
3-5 member families	2500	2245	200	45	10
6 or more members	3500	3145	300	45	10
Empowered Families	420	N.A	365	4	10

The main purpose of the subsidy programme is to promote compulsory savings and improve savings culture among poor families. However, currently, these compulsory savings can only be withdrawn after a beneficiary reaches the age of 60 years unless he/she suffers from a serious illness or require funds for investment. Despite being in operation for nearly two decades and having a substantial coverage of families, the Samurdhi subsidy programme has several weaknesses relating to targeting both inclusive and exclusive errors. The Samurdhi cash transfer programme has undergone a few waves of reforms during the last decade. These reforms were aimed at enhancing the quantity and coverage of benefits and restructuring the design of the programme. The rising cost of the Samurdhi programme requires to bring down the number of ineligible beneficiaries, while targeting the benefits only for the needy groups.

Women

The condition of women in Sri Lanka is determined by the social-cultural norms and economic status. As a result of social policies on free health and education services, women's quality of life has remarkably improved.

Issues and Challenges

- Low female labor participation
- Low participation in decision making process
- Amount of Women Headed Household (WHH). According to the most recent Household and Income Expenditure Survey (2012/13), it is estimated that out of 5.2 million households in Sri Lanka, 1.2 million households or 23 percent of the households are WHH.
- Increase of incidence of violence against women (WAW)

Ongoing Programmes

Implementing several livelihood development programmes targeting vulnerable women, providing training, financial and technical assistance to improve the economic status of the family. These include Samurdhi, cash grants, concessionary lending facilities etc.

Conducting awareness programmes on reducing Gender Base Violence (GBV) at national, district and divisional levels

Providing services mainly for widows and Women Headed Households collaboratively with the relevant Ministries and agencies and other stakeholders in Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Key Strategies

- Implementing social programmes for women on business development training and technology transfer, create markets and market linkages, share business information and facilitate access to credit for the business.
- Implementing a range of special programmes by both government and non-government institutions especially focusing the Women Headed Households and vulnerable women.
- Boost the supply of child care facilities to enhance women labour force participation through a comprehensive programme to establish day care centers with the support of stakeholders.
- Strengthen the counseling system in each DS division to resolve family disputes
- Develop a comprehensive program to identify current gaps and limitations covering the areas of legal aid for land dispute, GBV, awareness raising on sexual transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS Social stigma associated with widows, divided/separated families etc
- Develop model of vocational training for skill development
- Initiate a campaign to change attitude towards women's participation in the labour force
- Increase women participation in decision making at political and institutional level

Elders

As a consequence of changing fertility, mortality and international migration trends, Sri Lanka's aged population has increased from 6.6 percent in 1981 to 9.2 percent in 2001 and 12.2 percent in 2012. It is projected that elder population will double from the current level in 2041 and reached the level of 24.8 percent.

Issues and Challenges

- Changing attitudes of traditional family support to older people.
- Formal social security systems have limited coverage and inadequate benefits
- Inadequate geriatric health care
- Lack of opportunities to participate in productive economic activities
- Ill treatment of elders

Ongoing Programmes

A new model for elder care is being developed to ensure protection of vulnerable elders (Figure 8.1)

A spatial programme is being implemented to establish elder care centres - a data base of elder care centers and web page for the elderly care is currently created with the participation of the all stakeholders.

Financial assistant is provided low

Key Strategies

Increase the number of day care centers for senior citizens to spend quality leisure time with the private sector participation

Establish special ward facility in every hospital for senior citizens with trained geriatricians

Provide free passes to senior citizen for public transport (over 74 years)

Provide higher interest rates of deposit of senior citizens

Provide training on gerontology to Service Officers, Elders Rights Promotion Assistants, Social Development Assistants, Development Officers, Counselors, Hospital Attendants and Family Health Officers

Provide necessary medicine for chronic diseases such as kidney diseases, cancer, heart diseases, etc. at a concessionary rate for elders

Facilitate senior citizen to engage in productive economic activities

Implement a health insurance scheme for senior citizens

Establish elders' cooperative societies in order to facilitate microfinance, marketing, national and international networking, etc.

Improve and expand infrastructure facilities of exiting elder homes

Introduce universal pension scheme (social security system with health insurance scheme) for all the persons above 65 years of age who do not have the benefit of any other pension scheme.

Establish at least three elder care centers in each DS division

Include basic principles of gerontology in the school curriculum

Establish subsidized elder homes for elders who have regular income

Differently-abled

The issue of disability exists in every society. According to the Department of Census and Statistics, out of the population aged 5 years and above, 8.7 percent have reported at least one difficulty. Of this 1,617,924, 43% were males and 57 were females.

Issues and Challenges

- Low educational achievement especially in tertiary education
- Less economically active
- Higher rate in poverty
- Inability to live independently participate in community activities

Key Strategies

Identify the children with disability in their early childhood

Invest specific programmes and services for people with disabilities

Promote employment and develop livelihoods through Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR)

Teach skills for developing income-generating opportunities and for being employed

Impart knowledge about the labor market

Build appropriate attitudes to work

Provide guidance on developing relationships with employers to find a job or receive on-the-job training

Support targeted welfare programmes for differently abled persons with severe disabilities and low income.

Promote self-employment and provide microfinance

Improve human resource capacity of the employees who are engaged in providing services to the differently-abled

Improve public awareness and understanding of disability

Summary

Sri Lanka has made considerable headway in expanding access to social security for its people. Most Sri Lankans generally have security in the areas of health, education, food and housing. The country's social protection system is much more extensive than in other South Asian countries, with up to a third of the workforce covered in case of employment protection and social security, and about 28 percent of households covered in the case of the largest safety net (Samurdhi) programme. Sri Lanka's social protection has three main elements: employment protection and promotion; social security/insurance and safety nets. While some social protection programs have a universal coverage (i.e, Health and Education) the others are specially targeted programs (Samurdhi, old age, disability, conflict affected).

As per many studies done by the relevant implementing agencies and the international community, social protection in Sri Lanka could be further strengthened and refined to reap better benefits. Many individuals cope with poverty and vulnerability rather than emerge out of it, thereby perpetuating a continuous cycle of poverty. There are noticeable weaknesses in all three core areas of social protection in Sri Lanka. Although the Sri Lankan labor market as a whole enjoys some employment protection and social security, the segment that benefits most are the formal sector few of whom are likely to be poor. In contrast, the informal sector workers who constitute two thirds of the labour force and who are much more likely to be poor, are largely unprotected. Sri Lanka's social insurance schemes provide some measure of protection, but they offer limited coverage, provide inadequate benefits, have weak administrations and regulation, and, crucially, their financial sustainability is in question. Similarly in the area of social safety nets, there appears to be considerable targeting problemmes with the Samurdhi Program. Some of the vulnerable groups for example, the poor and disabled, are not covered as disability payments are mostly focused on soldiers, leaves out other poor disabled groups and fiscal constraints that limits coverage, for example conflict and disaster relief programmes. However, it is evident that the social protection and social service programmes in Sri Lanka, over the past few decades, have contributed to the improvement of physical well-being of the population particularly in the fields of health and education. Nevertheless, more research is needed to assess the contribution of social protection programmes in enhancing psychological dimension of family well-being. Social protection programmes are vital to promote growth while ensuring that the dividends of growth are shared more equally among population, and promoting such programmes is one of the key challenges for Sri Lankan policy makers.