

Social Safety Network Program of the Government of Bangladesh

Introduction:

Social Safety Net Programs (SSNPs) play a vital role in Bangladesh's efforts to combat poverty, reduce vulnerability, and promote inclusive growth. With a vision to create a more equitable society and improve the overall well-being of its citizens, the government of Bangladesh has implemented a comprehensive range of SSNPs. These initiatives are designed to provide targeted support to the most vulnerable and marginalized segments of the population, offering them a safety net to escape the clutches of poverty and achieve sustainable livelihoods.

Bangladesh is a developing country with a significant proportion of its population living below the poverty line. The nation faces various challenges, including economic disparities, food insecurity, and limited access to essential services. In response to these challenges, SSNPs have been strategically devised and implemented to address the specific needs of different vulnerable groups.

The objectives of SSNPs are multifaceted and encompass poverty reduction, human development, social protection, and empowerment of disadvantaged communities. These programs focus on offering financial assistance, access to education, healthcare, and nutrition, as well as opportunities for income generation and skill development.

The success of SSNPs in Bangladesh has been lauded both domestically and internationally. These initiatives have significantly contributed to poverty reduction and improved the quality of life for millions of vulnerable individuals and households. Moreover, they have played a pivotal role in achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations, particularly those related to eradicating poverty, ensuring good health and well-being, and promoting quality education.

However, SSNPs also face challenges in terms of targeting accuracy, budget constraints, and administrative efficiency. It is essential to continually assess and refine these programs to ensure they effectively reach those in need and create lasting positive impacts on their lives.

This review explores the key SSNPs in Bangladesh, their objectives, implementation strategies, and the impacts they have had on poverty reduction and social development. Additionally, it delves into the challenges faced by these programs and provides

recommendations for further enhancing their effectiveness and reach. By analyzing the success and shortcomings of SSNPs, we can gain valuable insights into building more robust and inclusive social safety nets for a prosperous and equitable Bangladesh.

Definition of Social Safety Network Program:

Social Safety Net Programs (SSNPs) in Bangladesh refer to a range of government-run initiatives designed to provide social protection to the nation's vulnerable and marginalized populations. These programs aim to alleviate poverty, reduce social inequality, and enhance the overall well-being of individuals and households who are most at risk of falling below the poverty line.

The primary objective of SSNPs is to ensure that even the most disadvantaged citizens have access to basic necessities and services, including food, education, healthcare, and housing. They are intended to function as a 'safety net' that provides financial support and other forms of aid to those facing economic hardships, thereby helping to prevent them from slipping into extreme poverty.

SSNPs in Bangladesh encompass various types of programs, including cash transfer programs, food security programs, employment generation programs, and social services programs. Each of these programs is tailored to address specific areas of vulnerability and need, offering targeted support to different segments of the population such as the elderly, women, children, and the extreme poor.

By providing such support and protection, SSNPs in Bangladesh play a crucial role in promoting social development, enhancing human capital, and achieving sustainable poverty reduction in the country.

Classification of Social Safety Network Programs:

The Social Safety Network Programs in Bangladesh can be broadly classified into four categories:

1.Cash Transfer Programs: These programs involve direct cash payments to eligible individuals or households to provide immediate relief from poverty and economic shocks. They are designed to enhance the purchasing power of beneficiaries and improve their access to essential goods and services. Examples include:

- **Old Age Allowance:** Provides financial assistance to elderly citizens without any regular income source.
- **Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Program:** Aids destitute women and widows by offering cash support and vocational training.
- **Widow and Destitute Women Allowance:** Offers financial aid to vulnerable widows and destitute women.

2. Food Security Programs: These initiatives focus on ensuring adequate food supplies to vulnerable populations to combat hunger and malnutrition. Examples include:

- **Open Market Sales (OMS):** Provides subsidized food grains through open markets to vulnerable communities.
- **Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Program:** Offers food assistance to destitute households during lean periods.

3. Employment Generation Programs: These programs aim to create income-generating opportunities for unemployed or underemployed individuals. Examples include:

- **Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP):** Provides employment opportunities and asset creation for the extreme poor.
- **Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA):** Creates temporary employment by developing public assets in rural areas.

4. Social Services Programs: These initiatives aim to improve access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. Examples include:

- **Primary Education Stipend:** Provides financial assistance to underprivileged students to encourage primary education enrollment.
- **Maternal Allowance:** Offers financial support to pregnant women for accessing proper healthcare.

Explanation of Social Safety Network Programs:

1. Old Age Allowance: The Old Age Allowance program is a key initiative under the Social Safety Net Programs of Bangladesh, providing financial assistance to elderly citizens who lack a regular income source. The Old-age Allowance Programme of Bangladesh was introduced in 1998 to provide a means-tested monthly cash payment to older people to help reduce their vulnerabilities and income insecurity. The

programme was created and promoted by the government and is financed from the government's revenue budget.

Historically, the Old Age Allowance program has been in place since the mid-1990s as part of the Government of Bangladesh's efforts to provide social protection for its senior citizens. The program provides a monthly cash allowance to men and women aged 65 and above who do not have any other sources of income.

The specific details of the campaign may vary from year to year, but generally, the program is promoted through various mediums such as local government offices, community announcements, and media coverage. Outreach efforts often focus on raising awareness among potential beneficiaries and their families about the availability of the allowance, the eligibility criteria, and the application process.

2. Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Program:

The Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Program is a social safety net program of the Government of Bangladesh that aims to increase the earning potential and social empowerment of the most disadvantaged ultra-poor households and vulnerable rural women. The program is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) and the Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF).

The VGD Program is a three-year program that provides cash transfers, skill development training, and access to microcredit to help beneficiaries meet their basic needs, improve their livelihoods, and generate income. The VGD Program was launched in 1975. The program is currently implemented in 482 upazilas (subdistricts) in Bangladesh. The program is funded by the Government of Bangladesh and by donors such as the World Bank and the United Nations. The VGD Program is scheduled to be completed in 2025.

Beneficiaries of the VGD Program receive a monthly cash transfer of BDT 500 (approximately US\$6). The cash transfers are intended to help beneficiaries meet their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. The cash transfers are also intended to help beneficiaries save money and build assets.

Beneficiaries of the VGD Program also receive skill development training in areas such as poultry farming, livestock rearing, and sewing. The skill development training is intended to help beneficiaries improve their livelihoods and generate income. The training is provided by the PKSF and other NGOs.

Beneficiaries of the VGD Program also have access to microcredit through the PKSF. The microcredit can be used to start a small business or to meet other financial needs. The microcredit is provided at a low interest rate and with flexible repayment terms.

The VGD Program has had a positive impact on the lives of beneficiaries. The cash transfers have helped beneficiaries meet their basic needs, and the skill development training has helped beneficiaries improve their livelihoods. The microcredit has also helped beneficiaries start small businesses and generate income.

A study by the World Bank found that the VGD Program has helped to reduce poverty, improve food security, and increase school enrollment among beneficiaries. The study also found that the program has had a positive impact on women's empowerment.

The VGD Program is a valuable social safety net program that is helping to improve the lives of the most disadvantaged ultra-poor households and vulnerable rural women in Bangladesh. The program has provided cash transfers, skill development training, and access to microcredit to help beneficiaries meet their basic needs, improve their livelihoods, and generate income.

The VGD Program is a good example of how social safety net programs can help to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the most vulnerable people in a society. The program has had a positive impact on the lives of beneficiaries, and it is helping to build a more inclusive and prosperous Bangladesh.

3. Widow and Destitute Women Allowance: The Widow and Destitute Women Allowance (WDWA) program is a social safety net program of the Government of Bangladesh that provides financial assistance to widows, deserted women, and destitute women who are unable to meet their basic needs. The program is implemented by the Department of Social Services (DSS) under the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW). The WDWA program was launched in 1998. The program is currently implemented in all upazilas (subdistricts) in Bangladesh. The program is funded by the Government of Bangladesh. The WDWA program is scheduled to continue indefinitely.

Beneficiaries of the WDWA program receive a monthly allowance of BDT 300 (approximately US\$3.50). The allowance is paid quarterly. The WDWA program has had a positive impact on the lives of beneficiaries. The monthly allowance has helped beneficiaries meet their basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. The program has also helped to reduce poverty and vulnerability among beneficiaries.

The WDWA program is a valuable social safety net program that is helping to improve the lives of widows, deserted women, and destitute women in Bangladesh. The program provides financial assistance to these women, which helps them to meet their basic needs and reduce their vulnerability to poverty.

4. Open Market Sales (OMS): Open Market Sales (OMS) is a government program that sells food grains to the public at a subsidized price. The program is intended to stabilize the market price of food grains and ensure that everyone has access to affordable food. The government buys food grains from farmers at a minimum support price (MSP). The food grains are then stored in government warehouses. OMS shops are then opened in different parts of the country where the food grains are sold to the public at a subsidized price. The subsidized price is typically set below the market price. Anyone can buy food grains from OMS shops. However, there are some restrictions on the amount of food grains that can be bought. For example, a person can only buy a maximum of 50 kilograms of rice per month.

The OMS program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh. The program has helped to stabilize the market price of food grains and ensure that everyone has access to affordable food. The program has also helped to reduce poverty and improve food security in the country.

5. Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Program: The Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Program is a social safety net program of the Government of Bangladesh that provides food assistance to vulnerable households during times of crisis. The program is implemented by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR).

The VGF program was launched in 1974 in the aftermath of the Bangladesh famine. The program was designed to provide food assistance to the most vulnerable households in the country, including those affected by natural disasters, conflict, and other shocks. Vulnerable households: Households that are at risk of food insecurity and malnutrition. Natural disasters: Events such as floods, cyclones, and droughts that can cause widespread damage and displacement. Conflict: Armed conflict that

can disrupt livelihoods and access to food. Shocks: Unexpected events that can have a negative impact on household incomes and food security.

Beneficiaries of the VGF program receive a monthly food ration of 10-30 kilograms of rice per household. The food ration is distributed through local government offices. The VGF program is usually implemented during times of crisis, such as floods, cyclones, and droughts. The duration of the program varies depending on the severity of the crisis.

The VGF program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh. The program has helped to prevent food insecurity and malnutrition among vulnerable households during times of crisis. The program has also helped to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the most vulnerable people in the country.

The VGF program is an important social safety net program that helps to protect vulnerable households during times of crisis. The program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh and has helped to reduce poverty and improve food security.

6. Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP): The Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP) is a social safety net program of the Government of Bangladesh that provides short-term employment to able-bodied, unemployed poor people for 80 days per year in two phases during the seasonal lean period, to reduce poverty and enhance disaster resilience of vulnerable households.

The EGPP was launched in 2008 in response to the 2008 global food price crisis. The program was designed to provide short-term employment to the poorest households in Bangladesh, who are most vulnerable to the effects of economic shocks. Seasonal lean period: The period between the harvests, when there is less work available in the agricultural sector. Monsoon season: The rainy season, which can make it difficult to work in some areas. Community-based public works projects: Projects that are undertaken by communities to improve their own infrastructure.

Beneficiaries of the EGPP are selected to work on community-based public works projects, such as road construction, water supply, and sanitation. The beneficiaries are paid a daily wage for their work. The EGPP has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh. The program has helped to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the poorest households in the country. The program has also helped to build community assets and infrastructure, which has benefited the wider community.

The EGPP is an important social safety net program that helps to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the poorest households in Bangladesh. The program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh and has helped to build community assets and infrastructure.

7. Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA): The Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA) program is a social safety net program of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh that provides employment to destitute women and casual laborers during the lean season. The program is implemented by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives (MLGRD).

The REOPA program was launched in 2003 to provide employment to destitute women and casual laborers during the lean season, which is the period between the harvests. The program was designed to help these vulnerable groups meet their basic needs and improve their livelihoods.

Beneficiaries of the REOPA program are selected to work on community-based public works projects, such as road construction, water supply, and sanitation. The beneficiaries are paid a daily wage for their work.

The REOPA program is implemented during the lean season, which is the period between the harvests. The program usually runs for 6 months, from November to April. The REOPA program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in

Bangladesh. The program has helped to reduce poverty and improve the lives of destitute women and casual laborers. The program has also helped to build community assets and infrastructure, which has benefited the wider community.

Key terms

- Lean season: The period between the harvests, when there is less work available in the agricultural sector.
- Community-based public works projects: Projects that are undertaken by communities to improve their own infrastructure.

The REOPA is an important social safety net program that helps to reduce poverty and improve the lives of destitute women and casual laborers in Bangladesh. The program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh and has helped to build community assets and infrastructure.

8. Primary Education Stipend: The Primary Education Stipend (PESP) program is a social safety net program of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh that provides financial assistance to poor families with children enrolled in primary school. The program is implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoE).

The PESP program was launched in 2002 to help reduce poverty and improve the quality of education for children from poor families. The program provides a monthly stipend of BDT 100 (approximately US\$1.29) to each eligible child. The PESP program is one of the largest social safety net programs in Bangladesh, with over 5 million beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries of the PESP program receive a monthly stipend of BDT 100 (approximately US\$1.29) to help cover the cost of education, such as school fees, books, and uniforms. The stipend is paid directly to the child's guardian.

The PESP program is implemented throughout the year. The program is currently scheduled to continue until 2025. The PESP program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh. The program has helped to reduce poverty and improve the quality of education for children from poor families. The program has also helped to increase school enrollment and attendance rates among children from poor families.

Key terms

- National poverty line: The minimum income level required to meet basic needs.
- School fees: The fees charged by schools to cover the cost of education.
- Books: Textbooks and other educational materials.
- Uniforms: The standard clothing worn by students at a particular school.

The PESP is an important social safety net program that helps to reduce poverty and improve the quality of education for children from poor families in Bangladesh. The program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh and has helped to increase school enrollment and attendance rates among children from poor families.

9. Maternal Allowance: The Maternal Allowance Program is a social safety net program of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh that provides financial assistance to poor mothers who are pregnant or have recently given birth. The program is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA).

The Maternal Allowance Program was launched in 2010 to help reduce poverty and improve the health of mothers and newborns in Bangladesh. The program provides a monthly allowance of BDT 1,000 (approximately US\$12.90) to each eligible mother. The Maternal Allowance Program is one of the largest social safety net programs in Bangladesh, with over 2 million beneficiaries.

To be eligible for the Maternal Allowance Program, a mother must meet the following criteria:

- Be pregnant or have given birth within the last 6 months
- Be from a poor family
- Have a family income below the national poverty line

Beneficiaries of the Maternal Allowance Program receive a monthly allowance of BDT 1,000 (approximately US\$12.90) to help cover the cost of food, health care, and other expenses related to pregnancy and childbirth. The allowance is paid directly to the mother's bank account.

The Maternal Allowance Program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh. The program has helped to reduce poverty and improve the health of mothers and newborns in Bangladesh. The program has also helped to increase the number of women who receive prenatal care and give birth in a health facility.

Key terms

- Prenatal care: Care provided to a woman during pregnancy to ensure the health of the mother and the baby.
- Health facility: A place where health care is provided, such as a hospital, clinic, or birthing center.

The Maternal Allowance Program is an important social safety net program that helps to reduce poverty and improve the health of mothers and newborns in Bangladesh. The program has had a positive impact on the lives of many people in Bangladesh and has helped to increase the number of women who receive prenatal care and give birth in a health facility.

Violence Against Women (VAW) and Dowry Prohibition in Bangladesh:

Violence against women (VAW) is a serious problem in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 36% of women in Bangladesh have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. This includes physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional abuse.

Dowry is a traditional practice in Bangladesh in which the bride's family gives gifts to the groom's family at the time of marriage. However, dowry has become increasingly associated with violence against women. In some cases, the groom's family may demand more dowry after the marriage, and if the bride's family is unable to pay, the woman may be abused or even killed.

The government of Bangladesh has taken some steps to address VAW and dowry prohibition. In 1980, the Dowry Prohibition Act was passed, which makes it illegal to demand or give dowry. In 2000, the Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act was passed, which criminalizes a range of forms of violence against women, including dowry-related violence.

The government has also established a number of organizations to address VAW and dowry prohibition. These include the National Women's Development Programme, the Naripokkho Foundation, and the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. These organizations provide support to victims of VAW, raise awareness about the issue, and advocate for policy changes. Bangladesh has implemented several laws and initiatives to address violence against women and dowry-related issues. Here are some of the key measures:

1. Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010:

This Act provides legal protection for victims of domestic violence, which includes physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse. It allows for the issuance of protection orders, residence orders, and custody orders, and offers provisions for monetary relief to victims.

2. Dowry Prohibition Act 1980:

Dowry demands have been a major social issue in Bangladesh. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 criminalizes the giving or receiving of dowry. It provides penalties, including imprisonment and fines, for violations. Despite this Act, dowry practices continue to persist in certain parts of society, suggesting the need for greater awareness and enforcement of the law.

3. Women and Child Repression Prevention Act 2000 (amended in 2003):

This law covers various forms of violence against women and children, including rape, trafficking, acid attacks, and other forms of physical and sexual assault. It provides for strict penalties, including the death penalty for certain offenses.

4. The National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children (2018-2030):

This is a comprehensive framework aimed at preventing and addressing violence against women and children. It focuses on multi-sectoral coordination and includes specific strategies for prevention, protection, prosecution, and integration of services.

5. One-Stop Crisis Centre (OCC):

Established in major public hospitals, OCCs provide medical, legal, and psychological support to victims of violence under one roof. They play a crucial role in supporting victims in the immediate aftermath of violence.

6. Victim Support Center (VSC):

Managed by the Bangladesh Police, VSCs provide support to victims of violence, including temporary shelter, legal assistance, medical aid, and counseling services.

Despite these laws and initiatives, violence against women and dowry practices remain significant challenges in Bangladesh. A multipronged approach involving stricter law enforcement, education and awareness campaigns, societal attitude shifts, and empowerment of women is required to address these issues effectively.

Digital security in Bangladesh:

The government of Bangladesh has been investing in the development and implementation of digital security measures and policies to protect individuals, businesses, and government entities from cyber threats.

Here are some key aspects related to digital security in Bangladesh:

Digital Security Act 2018:

The government of Bangladesh passed the Digital Security Act in 2018 to address various forms of digital threats and cybercrimes. The Act covers a broad range of issues including unauthorized access, theft of information, cyber-terrorism, defamation, and hate speech. However, the Act has also been criticized by some for potentially limiting freedom of speech and expression.

Cyber Security:

Cybersecurity initiatives in Bangladesh are primarily managed by the Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC), under the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications, and Information Technology. The BCC runs the Cyber Threat Detection and Response project, which includes a Cyber Security Incident Response Team that works to detect, prevent, and respond to cyber threats.

Cybercrime Control:

The Bangladesh Police has a specialized unit called the Cyber Crime Investigation Centre, responsible for investigating cybercrimes. The Cyber Crime Investigation Centre works closely with other police units and government agencies to ensure digital security.

Digital Literacy and Awareness:

Bangladesh has initiated various digital literacy and awareness campaigns to educate citizens about safe internet use and the potential risks and threats in the digital environment. These campaigns aim to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves from cyber threats.

Data Privacy and Protection:

Data privacy and protection are essential elements of digital security. Bangladesh has been working on formulating data protection laws that regulate the collection, processing, storage, and use of personal data to safeguard individuals' privacy.

Despite these initiatives, Bangladesh continues to face challenges in ensuring comprehensive digital security due to rapid technological advancements, increasing sophistication of cyber threats, and the digital divide within the country. Therefore, continuous efforts in capacity building, technological upgrades, legal reforms, and international cooperation are required to enhance digital security effectively.

Road traffic act security in Bangladesh:

Road safety and traffic management in Bangladesh is the "Road Transport Act, 2018." This law aims to increase road safety, regulate traffic, and improve driver conduct and vehicle standards. Here are some key aspects of the Act and how it provides security for the people of Bangladesh:

1. Driving Licenses: The Act stipulates that no person shall drive a motor vehicle without a valid license, and the license should be appropriate to the category of the vehicle being driven. This provision ensures that only individuals who have passed the necessary tests and proven their knowledge and skills can operate vehicles, thereby enhancing the safety of all road users.

2. Vehicle Fitness: All motor vehicles must have a valid fitness certificate issued by the appropriate authority. This provision ensures that vehicles on the roads are in good working order and meet the required safety standards, reducing the risk of accidents caused by vehicle faults.

3. Traffic Rules and Regulations: The Act sets out a range of rules and regulations that all road users must obey, such as obeying traffic signals, not driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and not using mobile phones while driving. These rules are designed to maintain order on the roads and prevent dangerous behavior that could lead to accidents.

4. Penalties for Violations: The Act establishes strict penalties, including fines and imprisonment, for various offenses such as reckless driving, over-speeding, and causing death or injury due to negligence. These penalties serve as a deterrent to unsafe driving and encourage compliance with the law.

5. Protection of Vulnerable Road Users: The Act has provisions to protect vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists, including rules about speed limits in populated areas and the duty of drivers to take all possible measures to avoid accidents.

6. Public Transport Safety: For public transport, the Act provides for the regulation of working hours for drivers to prevent fatigue and sets safety standards for public transportation vehicles.

While the Road Transport Act, 2018, significantly enhances the legal framework for road safety in Bangladesh, challenges remain in its implementation and enforcement. For the Act to be truly effective in improving road safety and security, it must be accompanied by comprehensive enforcement, public awareness campaigns, driver education, and improvements in road infrastructure.

Conclusion:

The Social Safety Network Program of the Government of Bangladesh plays a crucial role in mitigating poverty, reducing vulnerability, and promoting social development. By providing direct financial support, access to food, employment opportunities, and social services, these initiatives uplift the lives of the most disadvantaged segments of society. However, to achieve long-term sustainability, it is essential to continuously evaluate and strengthen these programs, ensuring they effectively address the evolving needs of the people they serve.