

Putting Child Sensitive Social Protection into Practice in Bangladesh

APPROACH PAPER





Child Sensitive Social Protection is a Save the Children initiative in South Asia aiming to reduce vulnerability and poverty of children by ensuring that social protection measures lead to meaningful investment in children. Currently the programme is being implemented in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. This paper is a part of a series of working papers being developed on the programme with the purpose of sharing practical approaches for implementing CSSP.

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The names of people have been changed to protect their identity.

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SALIM was taken out of school at the age of 10 to work in a tea stall when his father met with a serious accident.

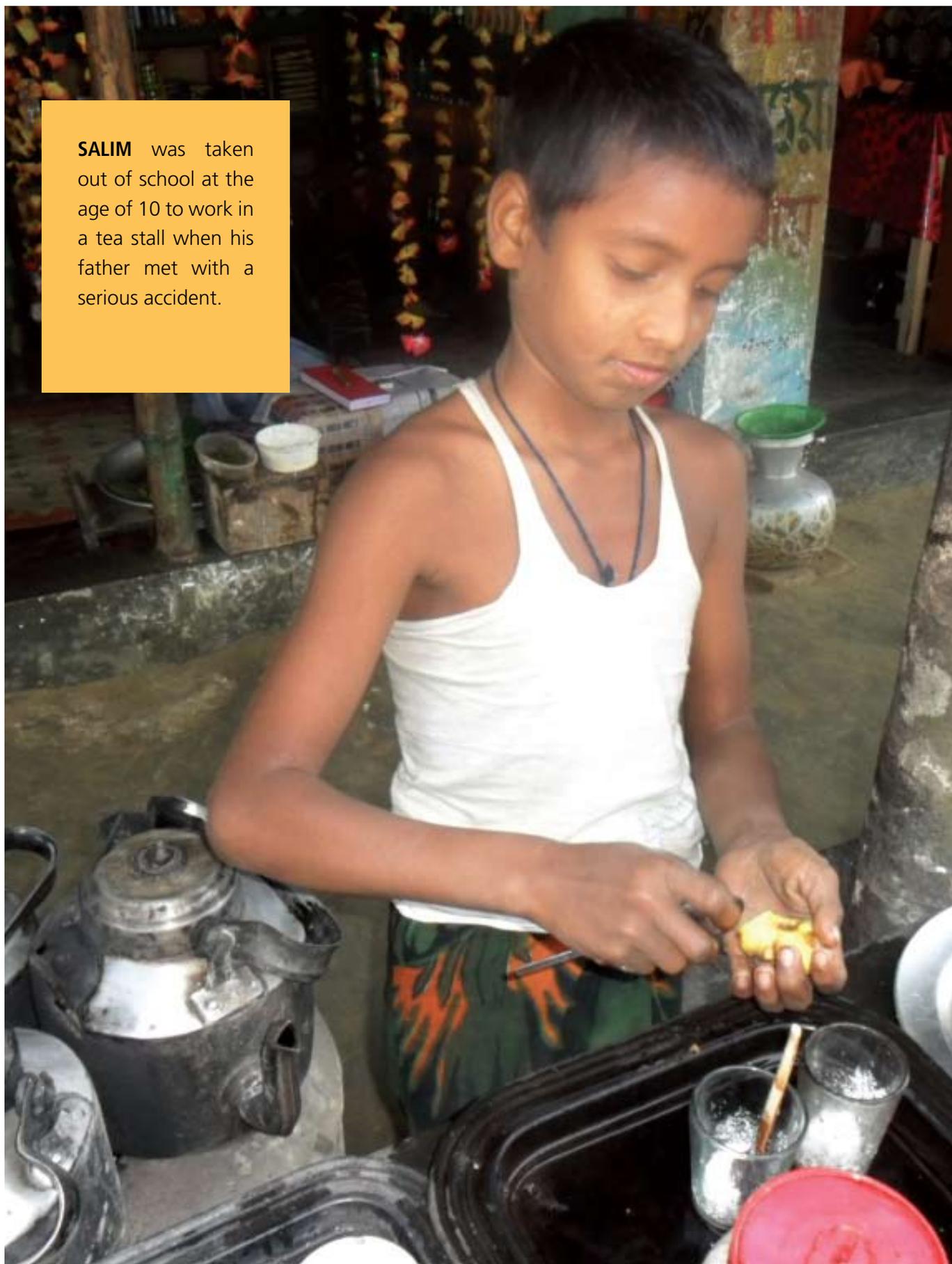


Photo: Rajot Kanti Debnath

1 WHY WORK WITH CHILD SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION?

It is estimated that one out of every six child is working in Bangladesh, which results in 7.4 million children being engaged in labour across the country. Children who work are often denied many of their rights, which eventually hampers their development. It also puts them at risk of different forms of exploitation. While household poverty is a key driver of child labour in Bangladesh, social acceptance and demand for child workers by employers are also principal factors making it difficult to break this trend¹.

In 2007, Save the Children initiated a project in selected parts of Mymensingh and Netrokona districts in which one of the key objectives was to reduce child labour² by increasing awareness among parents and the community. Through a rapid survey in 22 wards³, it was found that at least 13 per cent of children of school-going age were engaged in labour⁴. Children were found to be working in local shops, tea-stalls, restaurants and fisheries; some children were engaged with pulling rickshaws, and many children, especially girls, were sent to Dhaka or other cities as domestic workers.

Save the Children initiated a series of short studies aimed at understanding the social and economic

patterns around child labour in the project area. It clearly emerged that children who work often belong to households that are chronically poor, or slide into poverty due to shock or stress stemming from events such as illness, accident and marital breakdown. In addition, such households are often quick to resort to child labour and do not consider alternative ways of ensuring children's long-term educational needs and rights at a time of household stress.

To address this trend, it was realised that a combination of social and economic interventions were needed. Hence, in 2011 Save the Children designed a project on Child Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) in 22 Union Parishads⁵ of Mymensingh and Netrokona districts with child labour reduction as the prime focus. The overall strategy of the project is to address the dismal situation with respect to child labour in the area by improving access for poor households and their children to government social protection programmes while, simultaneously, inducing parents to make social and economic investments in their children. In designing the project, one of the basic premises was that global evidence increasingly suggests that social protection can play a key role in reducing child labour⁶.

¹ www.unicef.org/bangladesh/Child_labour.pdf

² In this document we use the term child labour interchangeably with child work. We refer to all work (paid or unpaid; at home or outside the home) that deprives the child of education and hampers holistic development of children.

³ Usually one or two villages are designated as a ward. Nine wards normally make up a Union. Union Parishads are the smallest rural administrative and local government units in Bangladesh.

⁴ The percentage of child labour is likely to be much higher. This figure is based on a rapid neighbourhood survey in which it was possible for people to underreport child labour. Conversely, 28 per cent of children of school going age were identified as not being in school. While some of the children were chronically ill or some were children with special needs whom parents were not sending to school- many of these children were also likely to be working.

⁵ see note 3 on Union Parishad

⁶ see eg ILO, 2013. 'World Report on Child Labour: Economic vulnerability, social protection and the fight against child labour'.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE CSSP PROJECT

The CSSP project in Bangladesh is based on a set of interventions that are closely interlinked to achieve the project objective of improving well-being of children by reducing child labour and increasing school retention and attendance. The interventions are summarised in the figure below, and are subsequently described in detail in the different sections of the paper⁷.

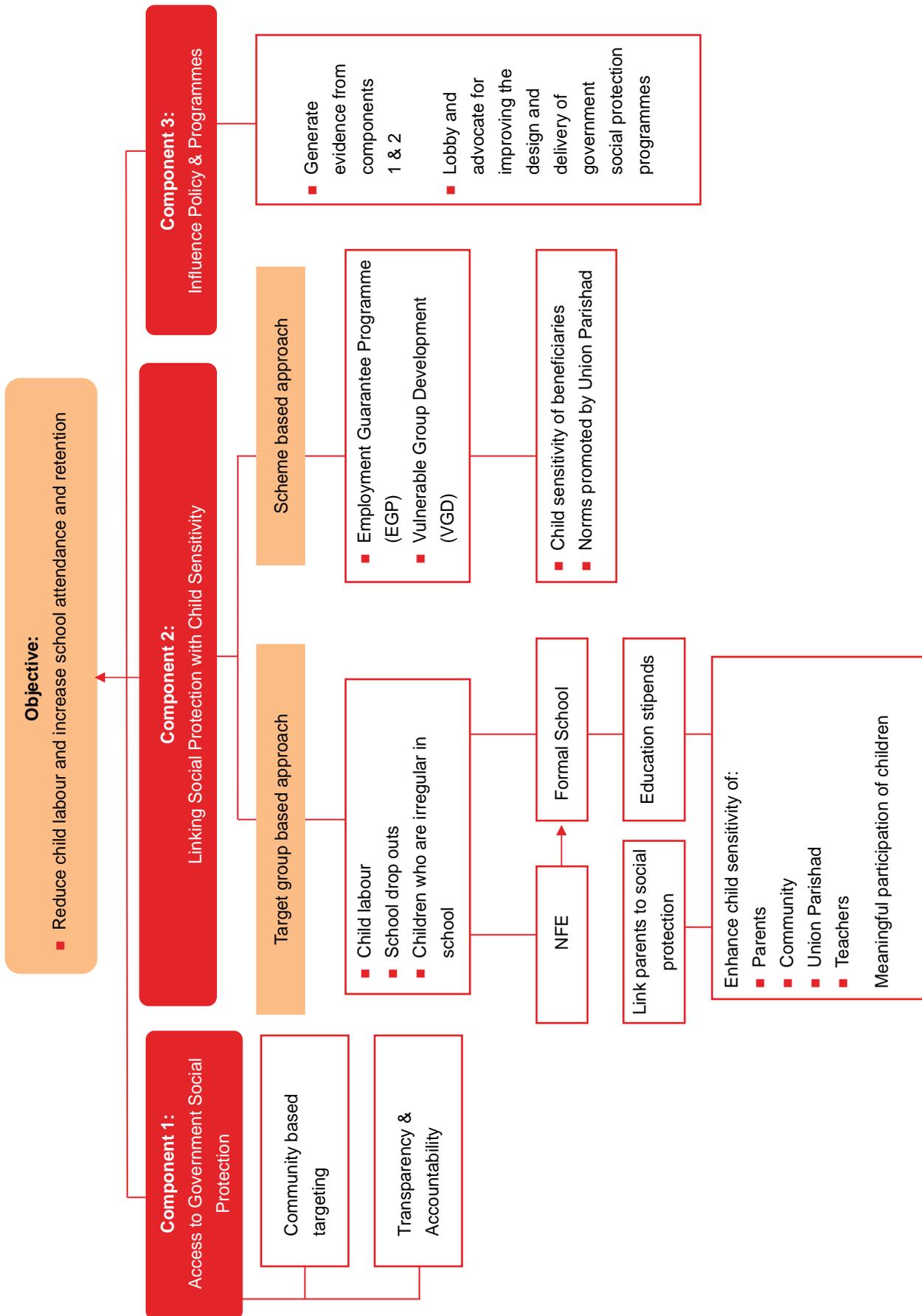
The thrust of the project is to bring child labourers back to mainstream school via a bridge course at a non-formal education centre. When entering formal school, the children are linked to the government

education stipend, which is a monthly cash transfer. In parallel, parents are facilitated to access government social assistance programmes (cash or kind transfers) and induced to attend a parenting programme. A series of activities are carried out in the project area to sensitise various groups of villagers, leaders and government to consider children's long-term development prospects. At national level, Save the Children's efforts are geared towards influencing the government to design and deliver social protection programmes that better respond to the child poverty situation in Bangladesh and contribute to realizing the rights of children.



Photo: Tanvir Ahmed

⁷ Save the Children in Bangladesh implements the CSSP project in partnership with Society for Underprivileged Families (SUF). There are 20 staff members working full-time with the project in the field. The project forms part of a regional Save the Children programme on Child Sensitive Social Protection covering Bangladesh, India and Nepal.



3

GETTING CHILDREN INTO SCHOOL AND INCREASING RETENTION

Non-formal education (NFE)

While economic poverty has been observed as a key trigger for keeping children out of school, perceptions about children and their role in the household, coupled with a lack of value for education aggravates the situation. Consequently, at times of the slightest stress in the household, parents are quick to drop children out of school, or never enrol them. Once out of school, chances of returning are remote. Therefore, considerable efforts were needed to get children back to school and to keep them in school. As a first step in reversing the situation, Non formal Education (NFE) centres were established. These proved to be highly instrumental in the initial stages of the project. Once the CSSP project staff began talking to parents of child labourers, the NFE provided parents with a tangible idea about the project and what it was offering. The welcoming atmosphere of the NFE centre and the teacher, along with other activities of the project in the community (see later sections) induced many parents to withdraw their children from labour and place them in the NFE⁸.

Each NFE centre is set up as a three-year bridge course aimed at bringing children on par with grade 5 in regular school⁹. The children are subsequently mainstreamed into formal school. For admission in grade 6, children have to pass the grade 5 Primary

School Certificate (PSC) exam. The project provides tutorial support through qualified teachers to support the NFE children to pass this exam. There are currently 22 NFE centres in the project catering to around 1100 children. Each NFE has a qualified teacher. The success rate of using the NFE as a targeted social service to achieve mainstreaming into formal school is currently 100 per cent¹⁰.

Mainstreaming to formal school and education stipends

Once children are mainstreamed from the NFE into formal school, many of them are eligible for the Primary Education Stipend (PES), which is a monthly cash transfer of Takka 100. Since the amount is very small, there is a wide debate about the stipend's relevance as a school retainer mechanism, however the CSSP project staff have experienced that it does partly encourage parents to keep children in school as some minimal educational costs can be born out of this stipend. School stipends are given to a percentage of the primary school students depending on the poverty ratio established by the government in the catchment area of the school. The higher the poverty ratio, the more the number of children that can receive the stipend in a particular school. Eligibility for PES is based on the socio-economic parameters of the household. The children who

⁸ In the South Asia CSSP programme the NFE is treated as one form of social protection, i.e a targeted and time bound social service. Ideally, the government and not NGOs should run such social services so that they can be sustained over time. Given the huge success of the intervention, it is still being continued, but will gradually be phased out. More emphasis will be placed on making children stay in or return to formal school.

⁹ Children complete grade 1 to 4 in 2 years (i.e. 6 months per grade) and take a full year to complete grade 5.

¹⁰ In addition to the 3 year compressed course, there is currently a one-year pre school facility in the NFE attended by around 1000 children annually in the age group 5 to 6 years. The idea of the preschool is to expose siblings of child labourers to the education system and thus motivate children and parents to enrol these children in formal school in class 1. Although the results are encouraging, it has been decided to discontinue the preschool from 2014. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the project is trying to reduce the dependency on the NFE and focus on direct entry to the formal school, and, secondly, the project is not able to maintain the same quality as in other SC initiatives in Bangladesh where early childhood education is the primary focus. The project will instead focus on motivating parents to enrol their children in Class 1.



Photo: Tanvir Ahmed

come from the NFE centre are invariably poor and hence eligible. However, to ensure their access to the stipend, the project staff discuss the matter during interactions with teachers and the mandated School Management Committees (SMCs).

The social environment of formal school

While it is well established that social assistance in the form of education stipends can contribute to children staying in school¹¹, it is also important that the school provides an environment that is conducive to learning and that standards of teaching should be maintained. If this is achieved, children will also be more inclined to continue their

education. Whereas it is not within the purview of the CSSP project to address quality issues related to education, it is possible for the project to work with all key stakeholders of a school to improve the social environment as a part of work on child sensitivity. Hence, project staff is undertaking sensitisation sessions with Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), School Management Committees (SMC), teachers and children to impart an understanding on child rights, inclusion of all children, and how the school environment can generally become more responsive to children. Participatory plans have been made with selected schools to identify key concerns by children and ways to address them are being developed with teachers and other stakeholders.

¹¹ See eg DFID, 2011. Cash Transfer. Evidence Paper Policy Division

4 ACCESS FOR THE POOR TO GOVERNMENT SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES

Social protection in Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh has introduced several social protection programmes to address different dimensions of poverty including geographical, seasonal and life cycle related vulnerability. The majority of the social protection programmes are based on social assistance (cash or in kind transfers) to households identified as poor – some of the biggest programmes in the country include the Employment Generation Programme (EGP), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and school stipends. There have been ample analyses of the shortcomings of social protection programmes in Bangladesh; the key observations can be summarized as follows:

An ineffective targeting system often resulting in a failure to include the poorest; lack of transparency in the selection process of beneficiaries leading to frequent elite capture, nepotism and leakages, and a plethora of programmes, some with similar objectives, implemented by multiple departments. This results in inefficiency and higher transaction costs¹².

The CSSP project aims to address the first two problems in the project area by improving access for the poorest and the marginalised to government social assistance programmes through community-based targeting. The broader idea behind this intervention is that social protection should flow to poor households where children are at high risk of deprivation, including at

risk of becoming child labourers. Save the Children is also engaged at the national level to promote the development of better child sensitive social protection programmes (see section 6).

Community based targeting

The social protection fabric of Bangladesh is such that the supply of a programme is totally unmatched with the huge demand that results based on eligibility. For example, a programme may specify that eligibility be based on having less than a certain amount of land or income. In reality, these criteria are unhelpful, as there may be thousands of households who fall into these categories. As a result, the Union Parishads, i.e. the lowest tier of local government in Bangladesh, make their own decisions, which are often grounded in nepotism and corruption¹³.

To promote more pro-poor and inclusive targeting of social protection programmes, the CSSP project has evolved a community-based targeting (CBT) system to identify poor and vulnerable households. The CBT is spearheaded by the Community Watch Group (CWG) which is an informal group comprised of approximately 10 respected people of the ward such as members of the Union Parishad, teachers, health workers, social workers, business men and religious leaders. The CWG is formed at the outset of the project in a ward and is the key vehicle for introducing and monitoring all project activities in the field.¹⁴ One of the tasks of the CWG is to initiate

¹² see e.g. World Bank, 2006. Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: An Assessment. Bangladesh Development Series.

¹³ For most of the social protection programmes, the Union Parishad is responsible for the identification of beneficiaries and for channeling the payments.

¹⁴ The formation of CWGs has proved to be a key to the success of many of the project activities. The CWG is made up of people who have a genuine interest in the well being of children and the community at large; many of the members are educated. The CWG has become a platform for them to engage and receive some recognition for their work.



Photo: Max Holm, Save the Children Finland

and carry out CBT when a social protection scheme is allocated to their ward. The CSSP project staff orients the CWG on the different schemes and broad targeting criteria as outlined by the government for a specific scheme¹⁵.

When a social protection scheme (cash or kind) is allocated to a ward, the members of the CWG undertake a participatory poverty assessment with the community to identify the most vulnerable and poor families with the objective of proposing their names to the Union Parishad, which ultimately decides on the selection of beneficiaries. A series of meetings are held in the ward to undertake the identification and all people are encouraged to attend. There are no proxy indicators for poverty put

forward; the community discusses all households based on their knowledge and arrives at a list of the most deserving. The government's broad eligibility criteria is taken into account. Experience to date suggests that CBT can work if there is a recognised platform such as the CWG to lead the process. Once the identification of households is concluded, the list is handed over to the Union Parishad. To date, the Union Parishad members have given due recognition to the beneficiary list prepared through CBT.

Transparency and accountability with the Union Parishads

Community based targeting is a stepping-stone towards increasing transparency & accountability with

¹⁵ The roll out of social protection programmes is scheme- wise in Bangladesh. When the UP receives a budget for a particular scheme, then the identification of beneficiaries can begin.

regard to access to social protection programmes. However, more emphasis will ultimately have to be placed on the Union Parishad as the local government unit responsible for delivery of social protection programmes in an accountable manner. This is also crucial for scaling up the initiative. To achieve this, project staff is in the process of working directly with the UP to introduce improved targeting along with better transparency and accountability. Broadly, the focus is on three types of activities:

Information about programmes: To increase understanding in the community about social protection programmes (objectives, entitlements and eligibility), the project staff is supporting the Union Parishads to spread and broadcast information in the villages. Flyers and loudspeakers are used, and information is also disseminated during village theatres and mass awareness programmes (see section 5).

Selection of beneficiaries: The project staff is facilitating the Union Parishad to directly undertake community based targeting with the support of

the local CWG who oversees the process and acts as a social watchdog. To increase buy in for the process, project staff are orienting and sensitising elected representatives and soliciting support from government officials. This process cannot be expected to instantly lead to total fairness in selection, but it will gradually improve as the community becomes more aware and transparency around social protection increases. This will put pressure on the Union Parishads.

Accountability mechanisms: The public should be able to hold Union Parishads to account about the services they provide, including social protection programmes. To do this, people need information about what decisions are taken and how money is spent. The project is now introducing public hearings on a regular basis to check the pulse in the community and with the UP in terms of improvements in the overall process of access to social protection. The hearings will also act as an opportunity to raise concerns on both sides and find solutions. Individuals will be able to put complaints forward during the hearings. (This work is in initial stages).

5 INCREASING SENSITIVITY TOWARDS AND INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN

As discussed under the NFE, the reasons for children being out of school are not only economic but are also grounded in lack of understanding or short-sightedness of parents and locally induced ideas and trends about what children should do and need. These perceptions and practices are also reflected in other spheres of a child's life and can be found hampering health and nutritional status as well as overall well-being. Hence, providing social protection to a household cannot alone ensure that children's well-being is prioritised and that children are not deprived of education and other development rights. Access to social protection must be accompanied by measures that change trends in the community and make parents realise the needs and rights of children. To achieve this, the CSSP project has developed a comprehensive set of interventions for enhancing sensitivity in general within the community and for encouraging parents to invest in their children.

Parents, children and the community

Parenting programme: The parenting programme is a core element of child sensitivity in CSSP. SC project staff implements a package comprising of 24 interactive sessions throughout the project area (one session per month) in the NFE premises. The sessions cater to parents (both mothers and fathers) of children who are studying in the NFE centre. The sessions include multiple aspects of good parenting, focusing on physical as well as social and emotional needs of a child. There are currently 800 parents attending the two-year long parenting programme.



Photo: Max Holm, Save the Children Finland

Parents' meeting: The parents' meetings is another component of child sensitivity in which 40 to 50 parents in a neighbourhood gather at the end of the day to discuss with the CSSP staff. This is a 'lighter' version of the parenting programme aimed at reaching more parents. The topics include - importance of education, ill effects of child labour, children's nutritional and health requirements. The meetings are held in the same locality every other month.

Mass awareness: A series of activities are regularly carried out in the villages for large gatherings of the community as a means to highlight issues related to CSSP and attain support from the community. The activities include cultural programmes, drama and open discussions. Several hundred people attend each gathering.

Child clubs: The project has facilitated the development of 44 informal child clubs. The child club is a platform meant to create space for children to interact, learn, and also give them an opportunity for recreation. Each child club consists of 70 to 80 children from the community with an age range of 7 to 17 years. The child clubs were initially set up for the children of the NFE centre, but have gradually come to include numerous other children. The child clubs do not have a set leadership structure, with plans and decisions made based on consensus. All children are welcome and encouraged to attend.

The child club meets on a monthly basis in the NFE centre to discuss and learn about the rights of children, the importance of education, ill effects of child labour and hazardous work. A CSSP fieldworker facilitates the meeting. Some of the child club members also act as informal community outreach workers, i.e. they meet with children who

are irregular in school and may be at risk of dropping out, talking to them as well as their parents about the need for education. The child club members prepare street plays on CSSP related topics – child poverty, ill effects of child labour, the importance of education, availability of education stipends and other social protection programmes. The children are actively involved in various community meetings. A few of the children are nominated as members of the Community Watch Group and also attend meetings with the Union Parishad to talk about education stipends and retention of children in school.

Union Parishads

Besides the work with parents, children and the community at large, it is also crucial to sensitise key duty bearers such as Union Parishad members towards children’s rights, and to consider how social protection can be used to support this. The



Photo: Max Holm, Save the Children Finland

A child club performing a play on child labour in the community.

work with Union Parishad members has to date included training on the UNCRC and its practical implications as well as interface meetings with child club members.

Scheme-based child sensitivity

Efforts are increasingly being made to ensure that the UP is strengthening child sensitivity as an integral part of extending social assistance programmes to beneficiaries. Although household based social assistance programmes such as the Employment Generation Programme (EGP), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and widow allowances have no conditions attached to them, the UP can use the sanctioning process as an opportunity to push for child sensitivity. At this stage the following is being tried out:

- At the time of sanctioning a scheme to a beneficiary, the Union Parishad Chairman/member explains to the beneficiary that they should not resort to child labour and must keep their children in school;
- Brief awareness sessions at the site of the Employment Generation Programme (EGP) focusing on education and child labour; and
- Follow up visit to selected households every quarter – initially by project staff and CWG; gradually this will be carried out by the UP. A simple monitoring format will be developed relating to children's status in education and child labour.

6 INFLUENCING GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PROGRAMMES

The CSSP project has initiated selected activities that are aimed at engaging with and ultimately improving the composition and structure of social protection for children in Bangladesh in order to better respond to child poverty. Save the Children is now a recognised actor with respect to social protection related to children in Bangladesh due to the efforts made so far.

- Initially, a study was conducted by Save the Children to better understand the design and relevance of existing social protection

programmes for children. The study was published as a book titled 'Social Protection Measures in Bangladesh: A Means to Improve Child Well-being.' A national seminar was organised in 2010 to discuss the findings of the book with civil society, donors, government officials and elected representatives.

- In 2012, a literature review of the Primary Education Stipend was carried out by Save the Children to better understand its impact on children. This was followed by a national round



Photo: Max Holm, Save the Children Finland

table discussion in which senior government officials and prominent scholars were present. The round table discussion was covered on a full page in one of the main national newspapers.

- In 2013, Save the Children engaged closely with the development of the National Social Protection Strategy in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh has accepted that its existing set of social protection programmes is not effective in reducing poverty and that there is a need to consider strategies for improvement. Save the

Children has been present in several consultations related to the formulation of the strategy and is engaging with key donors supporting the reform process. Save the Children commissioned a study to outline recommendations for social protection programme options for the government to reduce various dimensions of child vulnerability and poverty in Bangladesh. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations have been sent to the Ministry of Planning, which is currently the lead agency to formulate the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh.

7 HOW DOES IT ALL ADD UP FOR CHILDREN?

At this juncture, the CSSP project in Bangladesh has been in place for about three years, which means that some additional time is needed to firm up the approaches to bring sustained change to scale.

Nevertheless, when visiting the field, encouraging results can be found when talking to both children and parents, which suggests that CSSP is an approach that holds great potential to reduce child labour.



Photo: Rajot Kanti Debnath

Huma is saved from child labour

HUMA'S father is unable to work due to poor health and her mother has been struggling to feed the family by working as a domestic help in a nearby town. At the age of 12, Huma was sent to Mymesingh as a domestic worker. She was never treated well by the employer and longed to be with her family and friends in the village. In the meantime, Huma's younger sister was enrolled in the NFE centre under the CSSP project and her mother began attending the parenting programme. Through a community-based targeting exercise, Huma's mother was facilitated to access the old age allowance scheme. With a regular income from the pension and a realisation about how Huma's childhood was being hampered as a domestic worker, she brought Huma back to the village. Huma's mother shares: 'Due to poverty and ignorance we were destroying our daughter's life. I wish that no parents should ever make such a mistake'. Huma now attends the NFE daily and is all set to get mainstreamed into formal school.



Photo: Tanvir Ahmed

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