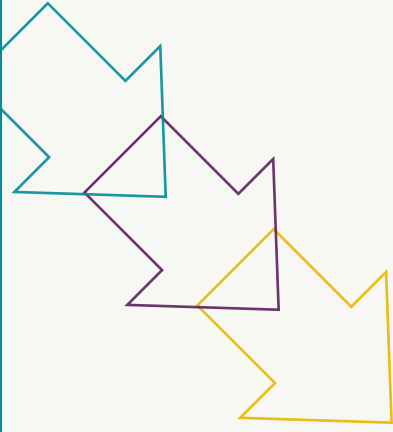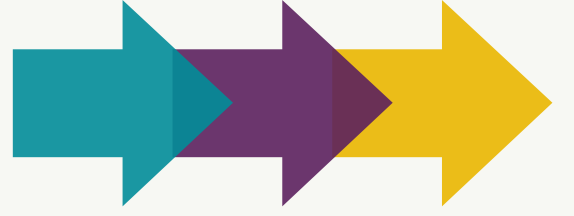# CLEAR

Covid-19 Learning, Evidence
and Research Programme

ক্লিয়ার

কোভিড-১৯ লার্নিং, এভিডেন্স
অ্যান্ড রিসার্চ প্রোগ্রাম

Research Briefing

Social Protection During Covid Times: Research for Building Forward Better

April 2022

Social Protection During Covid Times: Research for Building Forward Better

This briefing summarises priority areas for future research and key stakeholders with whom to engage, as identified in the scoping paper _Social Protection During Covid Times: Research for Building Forward Better_ by Muhammad Shahadat Hossain Siddiquee, Avinno Faruk and Imran Matin from the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD). The scoping paper and this briefing were commissioned for the Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR). CLEAR aims to build a consortium of research partners to deliver policy-relevant research and evidence for Bangladesh to support the Covid-19 response and inform preparation for future shocks.

Social protection in the context of Covid-19

Bangladesh has adapted and expanded social protection programmes and projects to mitigate the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and support households. However, scrutiny of the planning, design, programming, and delivery of the various government programmes during the pandemic reveals a number of drawbacks rooted in the existing social protection framework on which they were based. These relate to issues of rights, governance, distribution, and access. To mitigate the potential impacts of future shocks on the livelihoods of poor, marginalised, and impoverished people, and to ensure social justice, a comprehensive social protection system for Bangladesh requires better evidence to address a number of critical evidence gaps.

Existing data gaps and research opportunities

Despite efforts to expand the social protection budget and coverage during the pandemic, social protection systems faced a number of critical limitations. These require urgent attention from the government to make the system more responsive, dynamic, and reliable – to help those who need it most when they need it. The following are suggestions for possible areas for future research that can help prepare social protection systems for the next crisis.

Poverty and vulnerability

A rigorous study to devise appropriate mechanisms for identifying vulnerable non-poor people could help identify those non-poor people who would require social protection during future crises and would assist the design of a much-needed comprehensive national database for social protection.

A better understanding of social protection in the context of urban Bangladesh could inform urban social protection policies to make them more far-sighted and more effective in addressing issues of poverty and vulnerability.

Service delivery, accountability, and governance

Analysis of the factors that might contribute to the modernisation of safety nets, particularly in terms of verification, targeting, and payment, would make an important contribution to future systematic reforms, accuracy improvements, and the effective development of accountability mechanisms.

Innovations

The potential use of technology to design innovative targeting mechanisms in situations where targeting needs to be faster and more responsive would be a valuable area of new research. Such systems, that are self-correcting, with proper grievance and redressal mechanisms built in at the community level, hold great potential to improve efficiency and transparency, to protect poor people and support them to withstand and recover from future shocks.

Research to support the design of a universal old age allowance (OAA) scheme as a part of the government social protection system is much needed. Full and effective coverage of such a programme will require innovating appropriate and dynamic approaches supported by evidence of what works.

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Key stakeholders

The Government of Bangladesh had been operating various social protection schemes under its different ministries.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) runs the Safety Net Systems for the Poorest (SNSP) Project and five of the largest Social Safety Net (SSN) programmes that are geared towards provision of public works for the working-age population and food-based humanitarian relief. The Local Government Division under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRDC) is the executive ministry for the Income Support Program for the Poorest (ISPP) Project. The Department of Social Services (DSS) under the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) is responsible for the schemes supporting elderly people, widows, and persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Food initiated the open market sales (OMS) programme in 1978 to achieve price stability by selling rice at a fixed, lower price than the market rate.

Various multilateral organisations have been engaged in programmes and studies covering livelihoods and the social safety of poor and excluded people in Bangladesh. These include the World Bank, the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), UNICEF ROSA (Regional Office for South Asia), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Country Team in Bangladesh, and Oxford Policy Management (OPM), among others.

Local development actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – for example, BRAC and

Precarious living, Dhaka.
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the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) – are also working actively to support poor and vulnerable people. Community-led, voluntary organisations such as Bidyanondo and the Pashe-Achi Initiative have been providing support such as food relief, small capital and asset transfers, market linkage, and so forth.

A number of research organisations have been regularly conducting surveys and providing evidence regarding the situation of poor and vulnerable people including the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University, the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), the Centre for Peace and Justice (CPJ), the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), and the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), among others.

Reference

Siddiquee, M.S.H.; Faruk, A. and Matin, I. (2022) *Social Protection During Covid Times: Research for Building Forward Better*, Dhaka: BRAC Institute of Governance and Development

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✉ **clear.bgd@ids.ac.uk**

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