

B R I E F

Introduction

Social safety nets (SSN) are cash or in-kind/food transfer programs designed to help individuals and households cope with chronic poverty, destitution, and vulnerability (World Bank, 2018). Some of these social protection programs include conditions or additional interventions that can enhance their impact on nutrition. Examples include attending health and nutrition services, targeting households with nutritionally vulnerable members (e.g., pregnant, and lactating women, children under 24 months), administration of transfers in a gender-sensitive manner, distributing transfers during periods of seasonal or climatic vulnerability, and focusing on emergencies (Ruel & Alderman, 2013; Alderman, 2016) developed a framework that identifies which of the [World Bank ASPIRE categories](#) of social safety nets have the potential to be nutrition sensitive. These are captured in six broad categories with multiple program subcategories (Table 1).

Table 1: Nutrition Sensitive Social Protection Programs (NSSPPs) categories and subcategories

Program category	Program subcategory
Public works	Food for work Cash for work
Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT)	Poverty targeted cash transfer, last resort programs Family, children, orphan allowance, including orphans and vulnerable children benefits Emergency cash support Public charity, including Zakat ¹
Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)	CCT
Food and in-kind transfer	Food stamps, rations, vouchers Nutrition programs (therapeutic, supplementary feeding) School supplies In-kind/non-food emergency support Other in-kind transfer
School feeding	School feeding programs

¹Religious cash transfer among Muslims

Source: The Atlas of Social Protection Indicators of Resilience and Equity (ASPIRE) (World Bank, 2018) and (Spray, 2016)

The number of countries implementing social protection programs have increased over time (Spray, 2016). This is true in South Asia, a region which bears a high burden of malnutrition in relative and absolute terms. Countries in South Asia are implementing various social protection programs, ranging from cash transfers, food transfers, school meal programs to allowances for old citizens, widows and the differently abled. Yet there have been limited efforts in South Asia to identify data on the coverage of these programs among priority populations (e.g., 1,000 days).

The current effort aimed to identify data gaps for NSSPP coverage in South Asia to aid discussions on how to improve measurement of the reach of NSSPPs in the region.

Objectives

1. To map data available on the reach of NSSPPs from population-based income, expenditure, health, and nutrition related surveys for eight South Asian countries.
 2. To map data available on nutrition, food security and poverty outcomes in population-based surveys.
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Methods

First, we identified and reviewed nationally representative population-based surveys in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka that collected information on income, expenditure, health, and/or nutrition. In **Table 2**, we report on questionnaire availability, dataset availability, and representativeness of the data.

For objective 1, we first identified which types of NSSPPs (**Table 1**) exist in each country using www.socialprotection.org. We did not include scholarships and school supplies related NSSPPs. Then we reviewed the population-based survey questionnaires and assessed the availability of data elements relevant to coverage of the country-specific NSSPPs.

For objective 2, we reviewed questionnaires to assess data availability for three undernutrition outcome indicators included in Sustainability Development Goals (stunting, wasting among children under five years of age and anemia among women of reproductive age i.e., 15-49 years). We also assessed data availability on food security and poverty, an underlying determinant of nutrition outcomes that is directly targeted by social protection programs (House et al., 1990; Black et al., 2013).

Key Findings

Key Finding #1: All South Asian countries regularly conducted household surveys to collect data on income, expenditure, health, and nutrition.

All South Asian countries conducted surveys that collected data on income, expenditure, health, and nutrition related information within an interval of approximately five years. The survey interval for the National Sample Survey (NSS) in India and Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) in Nepal was longer at about ten years. (**Table 2**).

Key Finding #2: Data on NSSPPs was available in most of the countries.

Most surveys included data on coverage of some NSSPPs (Table 2). Overall data availability on NSSPPs was highest in Bangladesh (10 programs) followed by Nepal (6 programs), Sri Lanka (5 programs), India (4 programs), Afghanistan (3 programs), and Pakistan (2 programs), and Bhutan (0 programs) (Table 3).

Key Finding #3: Data on NSSPP coverage and nutrition outcomes and determinants are generally not available in the same survey.

Only the BIHS in Bangladesh contained data on nutrition outcomes (height and weight of children 0-59 months) and most of the NSSPPs in the country. The NFHS in India contained data on nutrition outcomes as well as food transfers and conditional cash transfers for institutional births (Table 3). The NLSS in Nepal had data on nutrition outcomes only, while the NDHS had data on nutritional outcomes and conditional cash transfers during childbirth. The Nepal MICS contained data on nutrition outcomes and poverty targeted cash transfers, various allowances, and nutrition programs. The NSS in Pakistan contained data on poverty-targeted cash transfers and nutrition outcomes. Data on food security and NSSPPs within the same survey were available in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan.

Key Finding #4: Across countries, data are only available for half of the NSSPPs that exist.

School feeding programs existed in all 7 countries studied, but data on these programs were available only in 3 countries (Table 3). Poverty targeted cash and food transfer programs existed in 6 of 7 countries, but data on these

programs were available only in 4 countries. Programs on food/cash for work, disabled allowance, and conditional cash transfer targeted to women existed in 5 of 7 countries but data were available in only 3 of these 5 countries.

Recommendation

To better guide food and nutrition policy decisions related to social protection, population-based household surveys should measure coverage of all NSSPPs that exist in the country in addition to food security, poverty, and nutrition outcomes.

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Table 2: Questionnaire, dataset, and NSSPP data availability from population-based surveys in South Asia

Country	Population-based Household Survey	Survey round	Representativeness	Questionnaire avail.	Dataset avail.	NSSPP data avail.	Include in further analysis
Afghanistan	Afghanistan Living Condition Survey (ALCS)	2017	National, province	✓	✗	✓	✗
		2013-14	National, province	✓	✗	✓	✗
	Afghanistan Demographic and health Survey (ADHS)	2015	National, province	✓	✓	✗	✗
	National Nutrition Survey (NSS)	2013	National, province	✓	✓	✗	✗
Bangladesh	Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES)	2016-17	National	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2010	National	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2005	National	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey (BIHS)	2018-19	Rural	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2015-16	Rural	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2011-12	Rural	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS)	2017-18	National	✓	✓	✗	✗
Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)	2019	National	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Bhutan	Bhutan Living Standard Survey (BLSS)	2017	National	✓	✗	✓	✗
		2012	National	✓	✗	✓	✗
	National Nutrition Survey (NNS)	2015	National	✓	✗	✗	✗
	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)	2010	National	✓	✗	✗	✗
India	National Sample Survey (NSS)	2011-12	National, state	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2009-10	National, state	✓	✓	✓	✓
	National Family Health Survey (NFHS)	2019-21	National, state, district	✓	✗	✓	✗
		2015-16	National, state, district	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2005-06	National	✓	✓	✗	✗
Maldives	HIES	2019	Atolls, Male, National	✗	✓	-	✗
		2009-10	Atolls, Male, National	✗	✓	-	✗
	Maldives Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS)	2017	Atolls, Male, National	✓	✗	✓	✗
		2010	Atolls, Male, National	✓	✗	✓	✗
Nepal	Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS)	2010-11	National, urb./rur., AEZ, dev. regions	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2003-04	National, urb./rur., AEZ, dev. regions	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS)	2016	National, urb./rur., AEZ, dev. regions	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2011	National, urb./rur., AEZ, dev. regions	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)	2019	National, urb./rur., AEZ, dev. regions	✓	✓	✗
Pakistan	Pakistan Social & Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM)	2018-19	National, province	✓	✓	✓	✓
		2015-16	National, province	✓	✓	✓	✓
	National Nutrition Survey (NSS)	2018	National	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS)	2018	National	✓	✓	✗	✗
Sri Lanka	HIES	2016	National	✓	✗	✓	✗
		2012	National	✓	✗	✓	✗
	National Nutrient and Micronutrient Survey (NNMS)	2012	National	✓	✗	✓	✗
	Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey (SDHS)	2016	National	✓	✓	✗	✗

We were not able to find the questionnaire used in the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) in Maldives. We were not able to access the datasets of Afghanistan Living Condition Survey (ALCS), Bhutan Living Standard Survey (BLSS), or HIES and NNMS in Sri Lanka.

Note: urb=Urban; rur=Rural; AEZ=Agro-Ecological Zones

Table 3: Data availability on NSSPPs, nutrition outcomes and determinants across surveys in South Asia from review of questionnaires

NSSPP subcategory	Afghanistan	Bangladesh			Bhutan	India			Nepal	Pakistan			Sri Lanka		No. countries with NSSPPs	No. countries with data on NSSPPs	
	ALCS	HIES	BIHS	MICS	BLSS	NSS	NFHS	NLSS	NDHS	MICS	PSLM	NSS	HIES	NNMS			SDHHS
Food/cash for work ¹	✓	✓	✓	✓	NA	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	NA	NA	✗	✗	✗	5	3
Unconditional cash transfer																	
Poverty-targeted cash ²	✗	✓	✓	✗	NA	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	6	4
Allowances																	
Old age	NA	✓	✓	✓	NA	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	NA	NA	✓	✗	✗	4	3
Disabled/Marty's	✗	✓	✓	✓	NA	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	NA	NA	✓	✗	✗	5	3
Widow/Single women	NA	✓	✓	✓	NA	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3	2
Public charity (<i>Zakat</i>)	✓	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	✓	✗	NA	NA	NA	2	2
Conditional cash transfer																	
Women ³	✗	✓	✓	✓	NA	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	NA	NA	NA	5	3
Students ⁴	NA	✓	✓	✗	NA	NA	NA	✗	✗	✗	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2	1
Displaced people ⁵	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	✗	✗	NA	NA	NA	1	0
Food transfer ⁶	✓	✓	✓	✓	NA	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	6	4
Nutrition program ⁷	NA	✓	✓	✗	NA	NA	NA	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	NA	NA	NA	3	2
School feeding	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	7	3
Total data availability	3	10	10	6	0	3	2	0	1	5	2	1	5	1	1		
Determinants																	
Food security ⁸	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗		
Poverty (absolute)	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗		
Women's education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Nutrition outcomes																	
Birthweight	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓		
Height and weight (Children 0-59m)	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓		
Anemia (Women 15-49y)	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗		

¹Esh-teghal Zaiee – Karmondana, National Rural Access Program, Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project in Afghanistan; Food for work, Test relief, Employment generation program for the poorest in Bangladesh; The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREG) program in India; Karnali Employment Program in Nepal

²Afghanistan Social Protection Programme in Afghanistan, Allowances for the Financially Insolvent Family in Bangladesh; Endangered Indigenous Peoples Allowance or Endangered Ethnicity Grant in Nepal; Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) or Ehsaas' Kafaalat Programme in Pakistan (2018-19 round); Samurdhi/Divineguma Programme in Sri Lanka.

³Afghan Women Leadership Initiatives to Support Adolescent Girls in Afghanistan, Maternity allowance program for the poor lactating mothers, maternal health voucher scheme; Janani Surakshya Yojana (JSY) and Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) in India; Aama Surakshya Karyakram in Nepal; Women Empowerment Center in Pakistan

⁴Stipend for primary students, dropout students and secondary & higher secondary female student programs, Anand school program in Bangladesh; Scholarships program in Nepal that includes cash transfer in selected areas

⁵Pakistan Federally Administered Tribal Region (FATA) Temporarily Displaced Persons Emergency Recovery Project

⁶Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project in Afghanistan, Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Food assistance in Chittagong Hill tract areas in Bangladesh; Food transfer to pregnant and lactating women and children under Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) and public distribution system in India; Supplementary food for lactating women and children in food insecure areas in Nepal; Ehsaas Langars Scheme in Pakistan; National Supplementary Food Programme, Thripasha in Sri Lanka

⁷Improving Maternal and Child Nutrition (IMCI) and community nutrition program in Bangladesh; Child (0-5 years) grant program in Nepal; Ehsaas' Nashonuma in Pakistan

⁸The Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFAS) in Afghanistan, Bangladesh (BIHS), Nepal (NDHS) and Pakistan (NSS and PSLM-only in 2018-19 round); food sufficiency in Bhutan

Notes:

To assess the SSN availability in each country, we reviewed SSN listed in www.socialprotection.org.

✓=Program and data available; ✗=Program available but data not available; NA=Program not available as a result data availability assessment was not applicable

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