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Scoping Study on Enhancing Food Security and Nutrition and Managing Risks and Shocks in Asia and the Pacific Through Support to Social Protection Systems

Sri Lanka



UNIVERSITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON



CIDT

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Executive Summary

This study is one of a set of country scoping studies and part of a broader project commissioned by WFP's Regional Bureau Bangkok exploring the use of social protection to enhance WFP's work on improving food security and nutrition, and shock response.

The study aims to:

- provide an overview and analysis of the social protection landscape in Sri Lanka, including significant actors, policies and initiatives, and opportunities and challenges (relating to enhancing food security and nutrition and managing risks through social protection) and;
- inform the integration of social protection into the future WFP Sri Lanka Country Strategic Plan (CSP)¹ (while considering the new WFP Strategic Plan (2021) and WFP Strategy for Support to Social Protection (2021) to ensure alignment with the new institutional vision).

The study's methodology was a combination of desk review of published and grey literature (including government and development partners recent extensive sector overviews, notably those commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP – see Talakaratna et al. 2022) and the Ministry of Finance's

Department of National Planning (DNP)), and key informant interviews with stakeholders including national and local government, United Nations agencies, donors, international financial institutions (IFIs), and other development and humanitarian partners as well as WFP staff at country level.

Sri Lanka has a longstanding history of national social protection provision and has one of the highest social protection coverage rates in South Asia, reaching 27 percent of the population through social assistance alone (IPC-IG 2020). However, transfer values are low outside public sector pensions and not indexed to inflation. Coverage is through large national programmes, implemented through various ministries, departments and agencies, and multiple small-scale civil society actors. The largest national non-contributory programme is the Samurdhi subsidy programme, implemented by the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), which provided cash transfers to 1.8 million beneficiaries in 2020. Sri Lanka has an effective and well-established disaster response capacity managed by the Disaster Management Centre (DMC). However, the Government of Sri Lanka mainly channelled its response to the Covid-19 pandemic through the social assistance system by scaling up provision, vertically and horizontally, primarily using the Samurdhi programme and staff.

¹ The CSP was being drafted in 2022 and was subsequently revised and published as WFP (2022) 'Sri Lanka Country Strategic Plan 2023-2027

There have been significant recent policy developments, with the role of social protection highlighted in the most recent National Development Plan and the preparation of a draft National Social Protection Strategy by the Department of National Planning in early 2022. The draft strategy identifies challenges in the sector, including coordination and strategic oversight of activities, and sets out a series of institutional and procedural recommendations to address them. However, the draft strategy's underlying vision is not based on programme expansion, the progressive realization of universal provision, or lifecycle approaches (as envisaged in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and promoted by development partners in Sri Lanka), but instead calls for more targeted provision and graduation. The 2022 budget has reduced allocations to the Samurdhi programme, and the Government is explicitly calling for resources and DSD activity to be concentrated on livelihoods development rather than social assistance. Allocations to social protection are likely to be further compromised by the fiscal consolidation recommendations of the recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan agreement.

Over the last five years, WFP Sri Lanka has developed a workstream on shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) to address food security and nutrition and to manage risks and shocks. The strategy has been to provide direct shock-response support, implemented through Samurdhi staff at local level, and pre-registration of vulnerable populations into SCOPE (WFP's beneficiary information and transfer management system). This set of interventions initially integrated with the DMC but currently operated separately.

Given WFP's new priorities for social protection (outlined in WFP 2021b), the Government's reorientation of the Samurdhi programme, and the constrained fiscal context, this is a particularly opportune moment to assess WFP Sri Lanka's priorities and approaches.

The study's findings propose a broad shift of focus in WFP's strategy and point to recommendations that WFP Sri Lanka:

- explores shifting effort beyond direct implementation towards deepening its collaborative and strategic engagement and advocacy;
- draws on lessons learned from interventions under the previous CSP regarding the advantages and binding limitations of approaching SRSP through the Samurdhi programme and DSD (legislative, mandate, institutional priorities, resource constraints) and considers whether other additional institutional partnerships might enable WFP to add even greater value;

- leverages from the recognition that social protection is one of several appropriate and effective entry points for achieving shock response and nutrition objectives in Sri Lanka, and therefore promotes the integration of social protection, disaster management and nutrition programming both within WFP and externally; and
- works in collaboration with other development partners (DPs) to enhance the efficacy and performance of existing social protection mechanisms in terms of design and implementation factors – value, coverage, funding and contingency planning in collaboration with the disaster management authorities and stakeholders.

Given the critical food security implications of the current macro-economic crisis and its likely medium-term duration, the study's findings also recommend that WFP:

- initiates an urgent internal and national debate on the relative merits of food compared to cash provision to address food security at this time when the primary constraint to food security may be food availability or accessibility;
- examines the potential role of subsidies and other alternatives to transfer provision;
- engages in advocacy to ensure that social protection expenditure is protected during the restructuring and fiscal consolidation processes which are likely to accompany the IMF rescue package; and
- considers expanding to a procurement role and designing its crisis response based on collaboration across the food security, disaster management and social protection portfolios.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

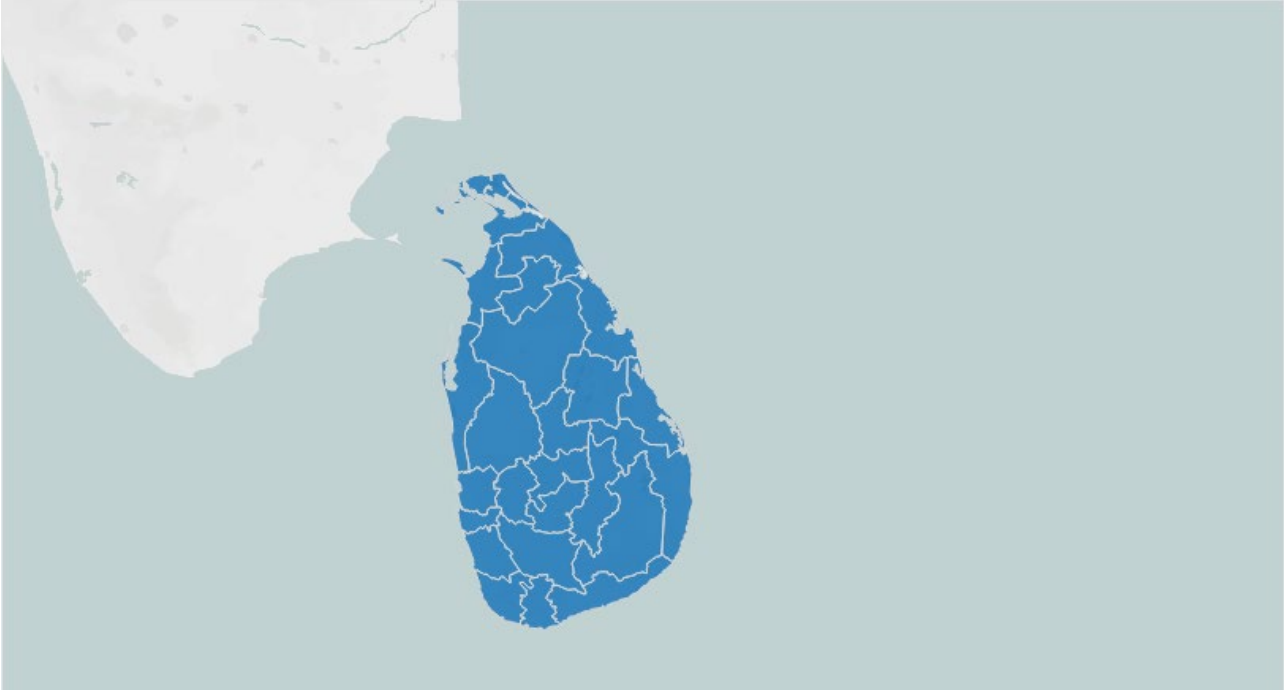
ASP	Adaptive Social Protection
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CBT	Community-Based Targeting
CO	Country Office
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
CT	Cash Transfers
DA	Disability Allowance
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DMA	Disaster Management Act
DMC	Disaster Management Centre
DNP	Department of National Planning
DP	Development Partner
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DSD	Department of Samurdhi Development
EPR	Emergency Preparedness and Response
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HGSF	Home-Grown School Feeding
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IFI	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMIS	Integrated Management Information Systems
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Office of Migration
ISPS	Integrated Social Protection System
IWMS	Integrated Welfare Management System
KDA	Kidney Disease Allowance
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LKR	Sri Lankan Rupee
MDM	Ministry of Disaster Management
MIS	Management and Information System
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoWCA	Ministry of Women & Child Affairs
NCDM	National Council for Disaster Management
NDMCC	National Disaster Management Coordinating Committee
NDP	National Development Plan
NEOP	National Emergency Operations Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NP	Nutrition Package
NPF	National Policy Framework
NSMP	National School Meals Programme
NSPC	National Social Protection Council
NSPCC	National Social Protection Coordination Committee
NSPD	National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities
NSPS	National Social Protection Strategy
PAMA	Public Assistance Monthly Allowance
PIP	Public Investment Programme

PSPS	Public Servants Pension Scheme
RAM	Research, Assessment and Monitoring
SBCC	Social and Behaviour Change Communication
SCA	Senior Citizens Allowance
SPAC	Social Protection Advisory Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRIS	Social Registry Information System
SRSP	Shock-Responsive Social Protection
TA	Technical Assistance
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSPRG	UN Social Protection Results Group
WFP	World Food Programme

CURRENCY

The Sri Lanka Rupee (LKR) has depreciated considerably in recent years. For this reason, throughout the study, transfer values are provided only in LKR.

Figure 1: Map of Sri Lanka





1. Introduction

1.1 Background and objectives

This study is part of a wider project commissioned by WFP's Regional Bureau covering Asia and the Pacific (WFP RBB) to conduct a series of scoping studies and a regional synthesis report on enhancing food security and nutrition and managing risks and shocks in Asia and the Pacific through support to social protection systems. The wider project's objective is to influence the formulation of social protection in Country Strategic Plans (CSPs) for selected Country Offices (COs) by carrying out four country scoping studies on social protection in the Asia Pacific region (Cambodia, Pakistan, Samoa and Sri Lanka). The scoping studies and regional synthesis report seek to consolidate lessons about and understanding of the social protection landscape, significant actors, policies and initiatives, and opportunities and challenges that can help integrate social protection into the WFP CSPs. This understanding will help ensure that CO's engagement in social protection is well-defined with clear objectives, outputs and activities, including capacity building actions to support the design and delivery of social protection. The studies also seek to inform a wider community of actors working on social protection in the region about developments and new perspectives in the sector.

Specifically, this study seeks to:

- a) **Enable a deeper understanding of existing national social protection policies, programmes and related instruments** focusing on food security, nutrition and shocks in Sri Lanka; and the main national and international social protection actors in-country or regionally, their priorities, roles and activities.
- b) **Provide an overview of the challenges and opportunities of social protection** in Sri Lanka to: address multidimensional vulnerability better; help people better manage risks and shocks; and contribute to zero hunger.
- c) **Provide strategic and programmatic recommendations to WFP CO** that can feed into the formulation of the new CSP to define and improve its strategic direction, policy, programmatic and partnership engagement in support of national social protection systems and goals.

The structure of the remainder of this study is as follows. Section 2 overviews the Sri Lanka context, looking at poverty, vulnerability, food security and gender equality. Section 3 discusses national social protection priorities and systems, while Section 4 provides an overview of currently operating social protection programmes. Section 5 looks at the country's responses to shock,

Section 6 looks at significant actors operating in the social protection space, and Section 7 discusses how social protection could advance zero hunger. Section 8 looks at WFP's current role in social protection in Sri Lanka, and Section 9 offers insights into how WFP could strategically support national social protection in Sri Lanka.

The study considers issues of gender equality, diversity, inclusion, protection and accountability throughout.

1.2 Methodology and scope of work

This study was conducted through a desk review of available literature and secondary data (both quantitative and qualitative) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders, including WFP staff at regional and country levels, national and local government, United Nations agencies, donors, IFIs, other development and humanitarian partners. Across all phases of inception, data collection, analysis and report writing, the study draws on the following.

- The new global WFP Strategic Plan 2022–2025 (WFP, 2021a) and WFP Strategy for Support to Social Protection (WFP 2021b) to ensure alignment to the vision of and priority areas for WFP in social protection (zero hunger and managing risks and shocks) and the strategic framework of the strategy. The strategy also includes a diagram of the 12 building blocks of the social protection system which should be used to analyse the social protection system and find opportunities for WFP support to social protection.
- The CSP (or CSP evaluation if available) for Sri Lanka to understand the CO's overall strategic direction, strategic objectives, goals, inclusivity and related activities.
- Other relevant WFP and partner literature, such as the WFP school feeding strategy and regional implementation plan, the SRSP capacity assessment tool, WFP's global gender strategy, the World Bank and ILO global, regional and national assessments of the social protection landscape, and regional learning documents supplied by WFP.

Significant recent reports consulted and cited in this study include (but are not limited to) the first draft Sri Lanka WFP CSP (2022b), the 2021 White Paper on Nutrition and Food Security commissioned by WFP (Urquhart 2021), the forthcoming research paper into the enhancements of Disability Inclusion in the WFP Sri Lanka programme, the draft National Social Protection Strategy

(2022) and the UN multi-agency response to the proposed strategy. The study does not attempt to repeat the extensive detailed overviews of the sector prepared in the last year by the Government and development partners, notably those reports commissioned by the UNDP and the Department of National Planning (DNP, sometimes referred to as NPD) published in early 2022. Instead, it summarizes their findings and draws on their analysis. The economic crisis in Sri Lanka means that, especially for shock-responsive social protection, the landscape in which policies and programmes are designed and implemented is in a state of constant and substantial flux. This study's findings are based on a literature review and interviews that took place in January 2020 to April 2022, before the general population felt the worst effects of the economic crisis. As such, the report reflects on the situation in early 2022 and does not analyse subsequent actions, particularly, WFP's shock-responsive programming and support to government.

2. Sri Lanka context

Poverty and inequality Sri Lanka is currently in a macroeconomic crisis, resulting in international debt default and social and political destabilization. Despite steady growth over the last decade and progress on SDGs, a combination of the socioeconomic after-effects of the Covid-19 crisis, the current global food and fuel inflation crisis and the economic and agricultural strategies adopted over recent years has exacerbated pre-existing structural vulnerabilities now threatening continued progress. Food production has declined significantly, and poverty and food insecurity are increasing.

Sri Lanka had made good progress in addressing poverty and development in recent decades, with the national poverty headcount halving from 8.9 percent to 4.1 percent between 2009 and 2016, although 40 percent of the population lived below \$5.5 poverty line in 2016 (United Nations Sri Lanka and Government of Sri Lanka 2017, Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics 2017). Before the Covid-19 pandemic, moderate poverty remained a challenge, as well as persistent pockets of deeper poverty in the dry zone, central areas and isolated regions. A high proportion of the poor was employed but still living in poverty. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Bank suggests that an additional 500,000 people may have been pushed into poverty (World Bank 2021b), with job losses concentrated in subsectors like construction, garment manufacturing, transport, and food and accommodation. Also, there is a group of 'new poor' in the lower-middle part of the income distribution, likely residing in urban areas and more educated than the poor before 2020. The Gini coefficient fell from 41.0 in 2002 to 39.8 in 2016² but the pandemic and subsequent economic crisis will likely result in increased income inequality (WFP 2022b).

A significant number of households are likely to be in an increasingly precarious position due to falling household incomes, increasing food and fuel prices and rising unemployment resulting from a combination of the economic after-effects of the pandemic, the sharp decline in domestic food production, the national fiscal crisis and global food and fuel price inflation. Vulnerable population segments such as daily wage earners, the aged, women-headed households, youth and the disabled are likely disproportionately at risk.

Previously, agricultural production had contributed significantly to national food security, with 80 percent of Sri Lanka's food requirement produced domestically. This

situation has changed radically over the last six months due to a sharp reduction in food production (estimated at between 20 and 50 percent), combined with a shortage of foreign exchange reserves to purchase imports and a steep rise in international food and fuel prices. The price rises are mainly because of the conflict in Ukraine and have led to significant food insecurity, which is likely to persist in the medium term.

2.1 Effects of Covid-19 and policy environment on structural vulnerabilities

The Covid-19 crisis induced widespread livelihood losses, leading to a significant increase in poverty. The ILO estimates that following the initial 2020 lockdown, informal workers experienced an 87 percent drop in income (IPC, 2020), while the World Bank estimates a fall in GDP growth from 3.3 percent to -3.2 for 2020 and 0 percent growth for 2021 (ibid). The sharp economic slowdown is estimated to increase the US\$3.20 poverty rate from 9.2 percent in 2019 to 11.7 percent in 2020, leading to 500,000 new poor (World Bank, 2021b). Analysis by the World Bank suggests that this figure may have doubled to 22 percent (pers. Comm. Daniel Longhurst). While poverty was relatively low in Sri Lanka before the pandemic, pre-existing vulnerabilities were high, partly due to high levels of informality. (In 2021, Sri Lanka's informal economy was estimated to be approximately 31.1 percent of GDP³.) Many people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic are also those more vulnerable to climate change – such as the rural poor who depend primarily on the climate-sensitive agricultural sector. The crisis hit the agriculture sector particularly hard, with far-reaching consequences for food security and farmers' livelihoods. Covid-19 has deepened vulnerabilities and significantly disrupted food systems. Agricultural policies linked to restricting fertilizer usage have exacerbated the situation and significantly reduced domestic production. There are direct impacts on access to food and demand, as well as indirect impacts through decreases in purchasing power, the capacity to produce and distribute food, and additional care responsibilities, all of which more strongly affect the poor and vulnerable and their nutritional outcomes. While rural areas experienced increased challenges, the urban areas became the new hotspots of vulnerability because of the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis.

² World Bank Development Research Group data.

³ <https://www.worlddeconomics.com/National-Statistics/Informal-Economy/Sri%20Lanka.aspx>, accessed 31 November 2022

Workers in urban areas and those engaged in industries and services were proportionately more affected by livelihood loss; however, while the 'new poor' are slightly more likely to be urban (World Bank 2022), the crisis did not fundamentally change the nature of poverty in Sri Lanka. Most of the poor continue to live in rural areas, and the most significant increase in the US\$3.20 poverty rate occurred in places where the rate was high even before the crisis.

2.2 Vulnerability to climate risk and disasters⁴

Sri Lanka faces significant environmental challenges, with the 2018 UN Common Country Analysis noting that:

“while broadly in line with average temperature increases across the region, the impact of climate change on Sri Lankan livelihoods is projected to be among the most severe in South Asia due to the high degree of vulnerability of households in ‘hotspot’ areas”.

The country faces significant and increasing climatic, and other risks, shocks and stressors and the deepening global climate crisis increasingly threatens recent development gains. Already highly prone to natural hazards, climate change is a major risk multiplier that exacerbates almost all other shocks and stressors impacting vulnerable populations and the economy. Sri Lanka ranks 75 out of 181 countries on the 2021 World Risk Index, with a score of 7.55, which places it in the boundary area between medium and high risk. It scores particularly high on 'susceptibility', which is informed by infrastructure, food supply and nutrition, and economic framework conditions, and the situation has deteriorated significantly since the index was published. The country ranked 6th on the Global Climate Risk Index 2020, which analyses the extent to which countries were affected by weather-related loss events (for example, storms, floods, heat waves) based on 2018 data (Eckstein et al. 2018 cited in Urquhart 2021).

Long-term climate trends are potentially as serious a threat to development and well-being as are shorter-term extreme events. According to the Berkeley Earth Dataset (Urquhart, 2021), Sri Lanka has experienced warming of at least 0.8°C over the 20th century, and while rates of increase vary across locations, they have accelerated in recent decades. Mean day-time maximum and mean night-time minimum air temperatures also have increased, with the latter contributing more to the average increase in annual temperature (Climate Change Secretariat 2016).

Although total annual rainfall remains steady, the variability of the monsoon, including seasonal onset and duration, was observed to be increasing (Amarasingha et al. 2021). The number of consecutive dry days has increased, while consecutive wet periods have decreased (Premalal de Silva 2009, Ratnayake and Herath 2005). The observed trends for maximum one-day and five-day heavy rainfall events and total precipitation on extreme rainfall days are increasing, indicating increasing rainfall intensity (Jayawardena et al. 2018). In the future, Sri Lanka faces a significant threat from extreme heat, with a potential rise in the number of days surpassing 35°C from a baseline of 20 days to more than 100 days by the 2090s. More frequent and intense El Niño events across the south Asian region will lead to more frequent heat waves of a longer duration. Rainfall is projected to decrease across the dry zone, but with a higher percentage of annual rain projected in the dry zones during the monsoon period, while the inter-monsoon periods experiencing less rainfall and droughts is expected to increase.

Extreme weather events, such as droughts, and floods with associated landslides, already compromise food security, nutrition, lives and livelihoods, resulting in death and displacement. Eighty percent of the country's land territory is in dry and intermediate zones, which face frequent water shortages between monsoon seasons and are highly vulnerable to hydrometeorological events such as flooding, storms and droughts. Sri Lanka also experiences increasingly frequent maritime hazards.

The Government of Sri Lanka has strengthened resilience by investing in anticipatory and adaptive coping capacities such as developing early warning systems, undertaking climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures, emergency planning, climate-proofing infrastructure and putting in place extensive, albeit low-value social assistance. The Government had focussed on developing its agricultural sector as an engine for economic development. However, recent policy initiatives, including reducing agricultural subsidies and limiting inorganic fertilizer use, and more recently, forex constraints and the fiscal tightening associated with the current macroeconomic crisis have severely reduced fertilizer importation and disastrously impacted domestic production and food security (Urquhart 2021).

The fragmentation of land holdings and continuing land degradation are long-term trends that threaten agricultural sustainability, productivity and livelihoods. As the frequency and severity of weather events intensify, rain-dependent livelihoods are likely to be heavily affected by shocks and stressors.

⁴ This section draws on analysis provided in Urquhart, 2021.

2.3 Food security and nutrition

Even before the 2022 reduction of domestic food production and the current fiscal and forex crises, Sri Lanka faced a nutritional 'triple burden': i) undernutrition rates unchanged for over a decade, ii) rising rates of overweight and obesity, and iii) micronutrient deficiencies, with over 50 percent of households unable to afford healthy diets in 2017 – notably higher than the regional average (37 percent) (FAO et al. 2021). Stunting rates have remained around 17 percent since 2006, while child wasting has broadly unchanged over the last 20 years (Department of Census and Statistics, 2017). Studies in 2017 found that 11.5 percent of 6–12-year-olds were stunted, and 30.2 percent wasted (Jayatissa et al. 2017a), and 13.7 percent of 10–18 year-olds stunted and 26.9 percent wasted (Jayatissa et al. 2017b). For comparison, wasting rates in Sri Lanka are the seventh highest in the world and second highest in Asia after Pakistan (UNICEF/WHO/World Bank 2021). The 2020 Global Food Security Index ranked Sri Lanka 75th among 113 countries across measures of affordability, availability, quality and safety of food items, and natural resources and resilience (CORTEVA 2021). Despite high levels of domestic production at the time, a 2018 study found that 20 percent of households could not purchase a minimum-cost nutritious diet, with higher percentages reported in the estate sectors (WFP 2018a). A World Bank analysis in the same year calculated the cost of a diet in line with Sri Lanka's national food-based dietary guidelines as being unaffordable to 40–60 percent of households (WFP 2018a).

The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting loss of jobs and reduced incomes compounded these pre-existing nutritional challenges, now further exacerbated by the deteriorating macroeconomic context. A recent survey study indicated that the pandemic had a significant negative impact on spending on food and the quality of food consumed (World Bank, 2021a), and it is likely that the current fiscal crisis⁵, reduction in domestic food production due to the (now rescinded) 2021 fertiliser import policy, and reduction in food imports due to forex constraints will have a further adverse effect on nutrition, undermining development gains in food security and nutrition in recent decades.

2.4 Gender equality, social inclusion and anti-discrimination

Sri Lanka's position in the gender parity index fell from among the top 20 countries in 2006 to 102 out of 153 countries in 2020 (World Economic Forum 2021). Women, men, girls and boys experience shocks and stressors differently and have differential access to information and resources that could help them respond. Women are more likely than men to face multidimensional poverty and near multidimensional poverty (FAO 2018). Of the 8.6 million economically active population, 64 percent are male and only 35 percent female. Despite Sri Lanka's achievements in human capital development that favour women, such as high levels of female education and low total fertility rates, low female labour force participation rates persist due to a combination of domestic responsibilities, women lacking the skills in demand in the labour market, and gender bias in hiring (Solotaroff et al. 2020). These gender inequities affect the ability of individuals and communities to develop resilience capacities and to avoid negative coping mechanisms in repetitive shocks.

⁵ The economy contracted by 3.6 percent between 2019 and 2020, and the debt to GDP ratio rose from 91 percent to 119 percent between 2018 and 2021 (Wignaraja, 2022)

3. Social protection in Sri Lanka: policy priorities and systems

Sri Lanka has a longstanding history of national social protection provision and has among the highest social protection coverage rates in South Asia, covering 27 percent of the population through a combination of social insurance and social assistance (IPC-IG 2020), although transfer values are low outside public sector pensions and not indexed to inflation. Coverage is through large national programmes, implemented through a range of ministries, departments and agencies, and multiple small-scale civil society actors. Premaratna et al. 2022 identified 20 different government initiatives in the sector. However, provision is poorly coordinated between these actors, and understanding of what constitutes social protection remains contested across government, development partners (DPs) and civil society.

3.1 The policy context

The Government of Sri Lanka's 2020 development plan, Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour (GoSL 2019) committed to achieving the targets underpinning the SDGs through a policy framework including food security and nutrition and social protection system reform. However, until recently, government policy engagement on social protection had been identified as a significant gap in Sri Lanka. In 2022, the commitment to social protection set out in the national plan was reiterated in the Public Investment Programme (PIP) for 2021–2024 (DNP 2022b), which states that:

'The Government has a strong interest in strengthening social safety net programmes to provide a better support to the poorest and most vulnerable groups such as poor, elderly, disabled, children and women in the country. The wellbeing of those segments is ensured through specific interventions as major welfare and livelihood assistance programmes. As individuals face different risks and vulnerabilities at different stages in life, these programmes can be tailored to address these risks at each stage.'

In February 2022, the DNP also published a draft National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) as part of an initiative financed by the World Bank (see Annex 1).

The NSPS sets out as its main policy objectives:

- To develop an Integrated Social Protection System (ISPS) connecting all the social insurance, social assistance, labour market and other service programmes.

- To provide social protection to all extremely poor and vulnerable people throughout their life cycle stages.
- To enhance the prospects for better employment for members in the labour force.
- To provide sufficient legislative coverage, financial and human resource; improve efficiency of service delivery for social protection for labour market participants.
- To instil a sense of responsibility among people to identify risks and plan effectively to cope with them.

The strategy identifies and addresses many aspects of social protection, which it defines broadly. Two elements are relevant to WFP, the emphasis on livelihoods promotion and graduation and the highlighting of the inadequacy of the existing institutional set-up for social protection due to the fragmentation and poor coordination across programmes. The strategy proposes creating an institutional architecture for coordination and a series of reforms to move towards a 'modern, adaptive and unified social protection system' (DNP 2022). This proposal addresses longstanding concerns regarding the absence of a national social protection strategy which has contributed to programme fragmentation, and a lack of coordination across the diverse agencies implementing social protection programmes. The strategy proposes a new institutional framework and establishment of three national-level bodies to enhance coordination and programme effectiveness:

- National Social Protection Council (NSPC),
- Social Protection Advisory Committee (SPAC), and
- National Social Protection Coordination Committee (NSPCC)

The NSPS proposes that these institutions relate to each other, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Under this new coordination system, all social protection interventions will link to the National Social Protection Council (NSPC), established through a parliamentary act. This body must be independent and responsible to the parliament. However, the relevant ministries or agencies will implement all the social protection programmes. The NSPC will efficiently and effectively oversee the social protection policy, strategy and outcomes across the country. Integrated information systems will connect information about beneficiaries and service providers.

The mandate of the NSPC will include ensuring coherency and consistency in the nation’s social protection policies and intervention and coordination with the actors currently working in the sector, as illustrated in Figure 2.

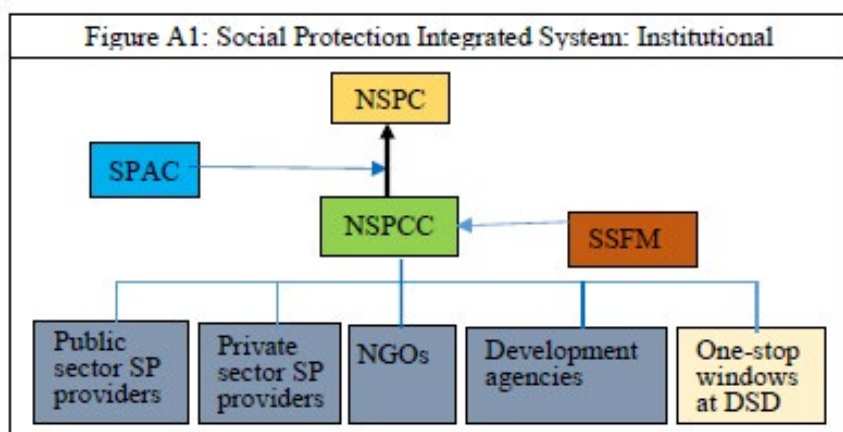
The draft NSPS also analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the existing social protection system, as summarized in Table 1.

In response to the draft NSPS, the UN Social Protection Results Group (UNSPRG) (composed of ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, WFP and the World Bank, and led by UNICEF)⁶ identified some areas for discussion, notably: the emphasis on targeted social assistance for the needy rather than social assistance for all; and the proposed narrow, targeted

provision focused on reducing beneficiaries, rather than expanding coverage to all, throughout the lifecycle. They also noted that the strategy focused on reducing inclusion errors and removing beneficiaries from the Samurdhi subsidy/cash transfer programme – the primary vehicle identified for social protection provision – rather than moving progressively towards universality.

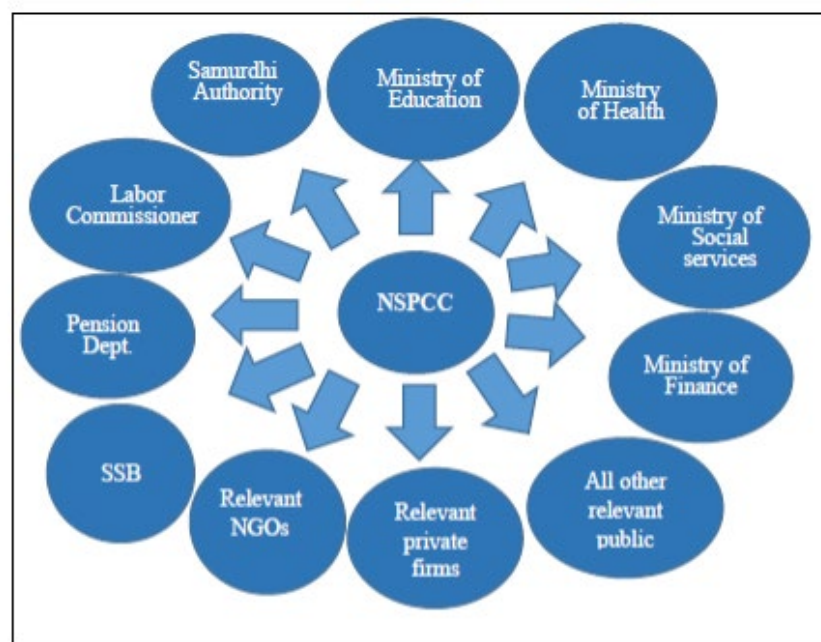
UNSPRG has put forward proposals to strengthen the draft. Many of these focus on definitions, approaches, and terminology – such as streamlining and aligning the definition of social protection to global definitions, structuring the document according to a lifecycle approach and changing the language and terminology used to refer to the vulnerabilities faced by people and to vulnerable

Figure 2: Proposed Social Protection Integrated Institutional System



Source: DPN, 2022a

Figure 3: NSPCC Coordination with Social Protection Sector Actors



Source: DPN, 2022a

6 Letter from UN Social Protection Results Group to DNP, 18 February 2022.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis for Social Protection in Sri Lanka

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several well-established and active social protection programmes • Well-established institutional mechanisms • Strong institutional support and organizational structures • Signatory to international conventions and treaties related to social protection • Well-established tradition and values on social protection by the society • Bipartisan consensus on social protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of integration and coordination among organizations • Poor conceptualization and policy directions • Inadequate coverage and benefits, and poor targeting (some programmes) • Overlapping and duplication of services • Unavailability of an integrated information system • Limited fiscal space and poor financial management • Poor and inefficient fund management • Lack of sustainability of programmes • Some outdated and inadequate legal instruments (Acts and Ordinances) • Slow growth of employment opportunities (jobless growth) • Lack of awareness, knowledge and interest about the programmes (among the general public) • Lack of civic responsibility leading culture of dependency
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the priorities in the national agenda 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' • Demand for integrated social protection systems • Existing strong administrative body (Presidential Secretariat) • Support by international development agencies • Increasing adoption of ICT systems • Covid-19 offering some policy reform space • Increasing focus on employability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow recovery of the economy from crises such as Covid-19 • Rapidly increasing aging population • Increased trend in natural and man-made disasters • Politicization of welfare operations • Increasing costs of living and slow economic growth • Lack of foreign reserves • Resistance towards reforms

groups. The Group also suggests a wider consideration of vulnerabilities (including those with origins in the Covid-19 Pandemic) and more consultation with relevant stakeholders, especially existing beneficiaries and those not included. Overall, UNSPRG argued that to address the core issue of fragmentation:

‘It is crucial that the National Social Protection Strategy does not add to ... fragmentation, but instead addresses the issue by proposing an integrated system administered at a central level by a single ministry, with a strong management and information system (MIS) that brings together data from the different programmes. To do this, the strategy document should also address how existing programmes and authorities fit in with the suggested reforms.’

The discussion between UNSPRG and the DNP on the conceptualization, reach, and ambition of the social protection sector and the policy context for this in Sri Lanka is ongoing. DPs are pushing for an extended vision and expansion of provision and financing, while the Government is seeking to reduce social assistance spending and focus on livelihoods within the Samurdhi programme. This message was consistently promoted by KIIs (see Annex 3) during this study.

Additional outstanding challenges identified in this study relating to national priorities and strategies in the social protection sector include contestation of the poverty line and food security measurement; limited systems architecture (for example, dependence on paper-based systems); lack of integration or coordination with disaster risk management (DRM); and with nutrition programming.

For the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), there are debates about the prioritization of promotion (livelihood) objectives in social protection rather than provision (assistance) objectives and the reduction of the Samurdhi programme financing in the 2022 budget⁷.

The latter is an issue of concern, as it indicates that DP aspirations to support extended provision may be in tension with government priorities and strategic thinking for the sector. An overall perception that the Government stance is against the expansion of social protection funding, coverage and provision has been articulated by multiple KIs during research for this study. Informants noted that investment in productive activities and livelihoods is instead the priority for DSD and the Government overall.

3.2 Systems and architecture⁸

Systems for implementation social protection are also evolving.

INFORMATION AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Currently, both the Government of Sri Lanka, DP and civil society social protection provision is highly dependent on manual interventions. Several initiatives are underway to promote the use of digital technologies and an integrated information management system to coordinate individual programmes through a central interface. Integrating functions of the social protection delivery chain and interoperability with other government systems would deliver economies of scope and scale and enable better coordination and monitoring of provision across programmes.

The DSD currently operates the Samurdhi Information Management System (also known as Samurdhi CRM), an electronic beneficiary database developed in 2019 based on the previous Samurdhi Information System. The Samurdhi beneficiary database currently houses approximately 1.7 million verified beneficiary records.

To enhance operability across programmes, the Ministry of Finance, as part of a World Bank project in 2017, initiated the development of a Social Registry Information System (SRIS). The project's objective is to develop a 'back end' information management system to monitor and manage the variety of social protection programmes currently implemented. However, the scope of the SRIS was reduced due to implementation challenges,

and currently, it only supports a subset of the current Samurdhi cash transfer programmes and operates as a register of beneficiaries without the intended Integrated Management Information Systems (IMIS) functional capabilities.

However, work is underway to develop the SRIS into an Integrated Welfare Management System (IWMS), an integrated system which could monitor and manage all government-administered social protection programmes plus future initiatives. IWMS would directly address concerns raised by UNDP and others that the fragmented system has 'led to several inefficiencies such as high administration costs, duplication of programmes and an overlap of beneficiaries' (Tilakaratna et al. 2022, p. 9).

3.3 Financing

Financing for social protection in Sri Lanka is a contested area as the Government is moving away from expanding provision in favour of investment in livelihoods and graduation approaches. Sri Lanka is now facing a macroeconomic crisis, announcing a plan to default on US\$ 35.5 billion in foreign debt in April due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. This unsustainable macroeconomic position, the growing fiscal deficit and severe foreign exchange shortages impeding critical imports led the Government to agree an IMF support package in April 2022 (IMF, 2022), alongside a US\$10 million World Bank loan for the immediate purchase of medicines and other essentials. The Government is also in discussion with China, Japan and India for additional emergency financial assistance, including credit lines for fuel imports (Press Trust of India, 2022).

The World Bank has warned that the measures required to address the macroeconomic crisis would adversely affect poverty (World Bank, 2021b; 2022), as the interventions proposed in the IMF's 2021 Article IV report (the set of governance and policy conditions which are required for receipt of the support package) include increasing income and value-added tax rates (a regressive form of taxation) and removing energy subsidies. In its report, the IMF calls on the Government to mitigate the adverse impacts of macroeconomic adjustment on vulnerable groups and strengthen social safety nets, increasing spending and widening coverage (IMF, 2022) However, how this will be achieved in the context of fiscal consolidation is yet to be established.

⁷ Sunday Observer, (2021). Budget 2022 Proposals: Reactions of IPS researchers, 28 November, 2021. <https://www.sundayobserver.lk/2021/11/28/business/budget-2022-proposals-reactions-ips-researchers>

⁸ This section draws on Tilakaratna et al., 2022 and Premaratna et al., 2022.

The Government of Sri Lanka 2022 budget reduced allocations to the Samurdhi Ministry overall and called for a shift in Samurdhi financing away from social assistance in favour of livelihoods development. These financing changes imply a real-term reduction in the domestic financing available for continued Samurdhi implementation at the present scale. This change of focus is not readily compatible with DP and IMF calls for extended Samurdhi provision. It is a significant issue for WFP's attention as there will be an increasing need for ongoing Samurdhi support due to rising poverty levels at the same time as diminishing government allocations if the current 2022 budgetary allocations and government view of the future of Samurdhi activity are maintained.

4. Social protection in Sri Lanka: programmes

4.1 Overview

Sri Lanka has a range of social protection interventions delivered by different government agencies. A recent UNDP study estimates that over 38 social protection interventions are currently implemented (Tilakaratna et al. 2022), 23 of which are implemented by various government agencies. Tilakaratna et al. 2022, discuss the main interventions at length. This section discusses elements of specific programmes that are explicitly relevant to WFP’s strategy and operations.

4.2 Formal social protection provision

The main types of social protection programmes in Sri Lanka are social insurance, social assistance (often described in government documents as ‘welfare’) and nutrition programmes. Provision is characterized by the DNP thus:

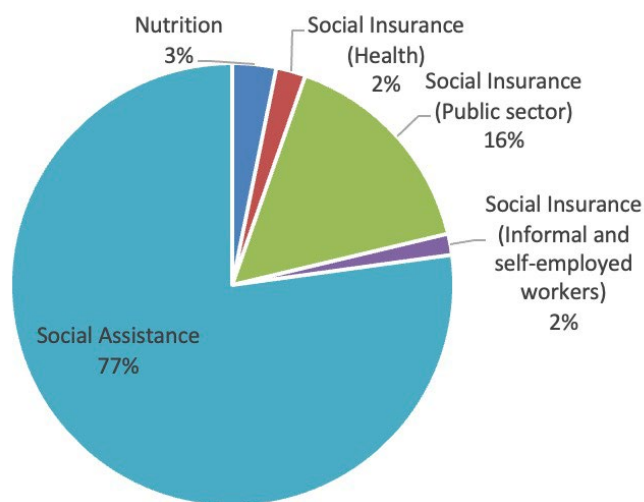
‘Social insurance coverage is limited to a small fraction of individuals who work in the formal sector and are relatively well off, whereas social welfare provides assistance to individuals and families in need including cash and in-kind assistance for poor disabled persons, health assistance, disaster relief assistance and education assistance for children. Social Security covers against contingencies such as old, death, permanent disability and other life cycle events, including old age retirement incomes (pensions) and healthcare assistance.’ (DNP 2022a).

Table 2 shows the main formal social protection programmes, divided into nutrition programmes, social insurance and social assistance.

Total government expenditure on these programmes was 2.1 percent of GDP in 2020 (excluding additional Covid-19 allocations) (Tilakaratna et al. 2022). This spending was primarily allocated to non-contributory social assistance, which accounted for 77 percent of expenditure, while public sector and informal sector social insurance accounted for 18 percent, social health insurance 2 percent and nutrition 3 percent (Figure 3).

Provision is highly skewed in favour of the elderly, with over 70 percent of social protection provision being pensions (Tilakaratna et al. 2022, p. 6-7).

Figure 4: Allocation of Government Social Protection Expenditure



Source: Based on data from Tilakaratna et al. 2022

THE SAMURDHI SUBSIDY PROGRAMME

The Samurdhi⁹ Subsidy Programme, part of the larger Samhurdi programme, is the most extensive national social protection programme and the primary government instrument for social protection provision. The term ‘subsidy’ is somewhat misleading as it provides cash transfers rather than reducing the price of specific goods or services.

The Samurdhi programme was initiated in 1995 and has two objectives: i) poverty reduction through the short-term strategy of reducing vulnerabilities through income transfers and social security and ii) the long-term objective of poverty reduction through livelihood development and empowerment. The programme has three main areas of activity: the provision of social assistance, rural development and income generation. It implements the four large cash transfer programmes, the Samhurdi Subsidy Programme, the Senior Citizens Allowance (SCA), the Disability Allowance (DA) and the Kidney Disease Allowance (KDA) under the social assistance work programme. The majority of Samurdhi financing is

⁹ Samurdhi means ‘prosperity’ in Sinhala.

Table 2: Data on Main Social Protection Programmes in Sri Lanka (2020)

Programme	Beneficiaries	Annual Budget (LKR m)	% national budget	% GDP
Nutrition				
National School Meal Programme (mid-day meal programme)	1,079,097	2,299	0.049%	0.015%
Thriposha Programme*	1,077,234	2,592	0.056%	0.017%
Fresh Milk for School Children*	405,911	541	0.012%	0.004%
Nutrition Package for Pregnant Women	237,550	4,751	0.101%	0.032%
Morning Meal for Preschool Children	85,798	76	0.002%	0.001%
Social Insurance (Health)				
Suraksha Health Insurance Scheme (free insurance for school children)	4,199,915	1,450	0.031%	0.010%
Agrahara Medical Insurance Scheme	1,500,000	5,469	0.116%	0.037%
Social Insurance (Public sector)				
Widows/Widowers and Orphans Pension Scheme (W&OPS) (Department of Pensions)	143,001	50,646	1.073%	0.338%
Public Servants Provident Fund (PSPF)*	4,888	395	0.009%	0.003%
Migrant Worker's Insurance Scheme	1,520	115	0.002%	0.001%
Social Insurance (Private sector – formal)				
Employee Trust Fund (ETF)	2,600,00	20,550	0.436%	0.137%
Employee Provident Fund (EPF)	197,401	109,900	2.329%	0.734%
TEWA programme*	346	142	0.003%	0.001%
Social Insurance (Informal and self-employed workers)				
Farmers Insurance and Social security Benefit Scheme	163,500	4,503	0.095%	0.030%
Contributory Surakuma Pension Scheme	34,055	334	0.007%	0.002%
Fisherman's Insurance and Social security Benefit Scheme	5,000	112	0.002%	0.001%
Social Assistance				
Samurdhi Subsidy Programme	1,770,086	52,472	1.112%	0.350%
Public Assistance Monthly Allowance (PAMA)*	712,383	792	0.017%	0.005%
Senior Citizens Allowance (SCA)	417,067	9,868	0.209%	0.066%
Public Servants Pension Scheme (PSPS)	362,764	130,721	2.771%	0.873%
Forces Pension Scheme	107,828	47,413	1.005%	0.317%
Disability Allowance	72,000	4,320	0.092%	0.029%
Kidney Disease Allowance	39,169	1,177	0.025%	0.008%
President's Fund Medical Assistance*	6,386	1,019	0.022%	0.007%

Source: Adapted from Tilakaratna et al. 2022 (* is 2019 data)

currently allocated to welfare (Bandra 2016), although in recent months, the Government has signalled interest in increasingly shifting the focus to promoting productive livelihood development.

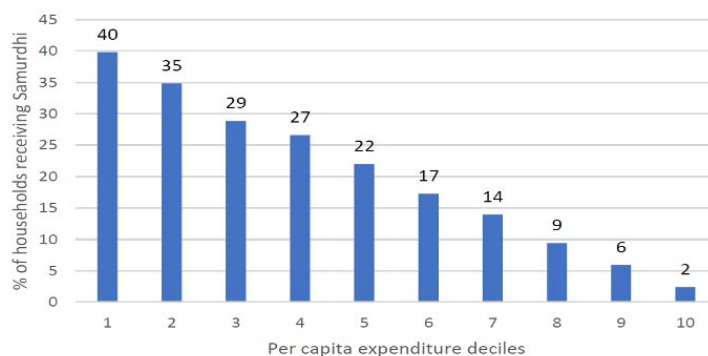
In 2022, the Samurdhi Subsidy Programme reached 1.8 million poor households (25 percent of the population), providing a monthly unconditional cash transfer with a value linked to household size and ranges between LKR 420–LKR 3,500 monthly. Transfers are deposited directly into recipient bank accounts after several deductions, variable according to recipient group, towards compulsory savings, social security and housing lottery funds. The transfer is insufficient to meet basic needs, and a transfer value increase was announced in February 2022 (DSD 2022). The Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), which falls under the purview of the State Ministry of Samurdhi, Household Economy, Micro Finance, Self-Employment and Business Development, administers the programme.

The Samurdhi Subsidy Programme accounts for 75 percent of the total Samurdhi budget. Under the Subsidy programme, low-income families receive cash assistance monthly, with eligibility depending on household size and income level.

In 2020, with an expenditure of over LKR 52 billion, the Subsidy Programme assisted 1.8 million households, an increase of 400,000 over the previous year. Allocations to the Samurdhi Ministry were reduced significantly in the 2022 budget by a reported LKR 10 billion (ICRA Lanka, 2022), despite having increased since 2014. This reduction reflected a need for fiscal tightening to reduce the budget deficit in late 2021, even before the 2022 deterioration of the domestic macroeconomic and broader global context. The 2022 budget also proposed reforms within the Samurdhi programme overall, including its transformation into a rural development movement to contribute to economic revival and food security, and a reduction in the allocations to social assistance (Sunday Observer 2021).

These reforms reflect challenges with Samurdhi. Inclusion and exclusion errors and lack of clarity over targeting criteria are long-standing concerns. Tilakaratna et al. (2022, p. 66) estimate that ‘only around 40 percent of the households in the poorest decile received Samurdhi cash transfers in 2016, while there were some percentages of households in the riches deciles that received Samurdhi benefits’ (Figure 4). Furthermore, there is some concern, widespread in government, that there are few incentives for graduation into improved livelihoods and exiting the programme, despite the complementary elements achieved through compulsory deductions.

Figure 4: Samurdhi Subsidy Recipient Households by Decile



Source: Tilakaratna et al. 2022

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE MONTHLY ALLOWANCE (PAMA)

PAMA, implemented by the Provincial Councils and the DSD, reaches 0.7 million low-income and destitute families by providing monthly unconditional cash transfers targeted to the elderly, those with disabilities, single mothers and orphans. PAMA provides a benefit of between LKR 250–LKR 500 per month, depending on the household dependency ratio.

DISABILITY ALLOWANCE (DA)

The DA provides a monthly unconditional cash transfer of LKR 5,000 to 70,000 people living with long-term disabilities in low-income households. The programme is implemented by the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities (NSPD), which is under the purview of State Ministry of Samurdhi, having previously been under the Ministry of Women & Child Affairs and Social Security.

KIDNEY DISEASE ALLOWANCE (KDA)

The KDA, administered by the DSD, provides a monthly unconditional cash transfer to 40,000 people. The programme began in 2014 and provided LKR 5,000 monthly. In 2020, coverage was reduced to only those undergoing dialysis.

SENIOR CITIZENS ALLOWANCE (SCA)

The SCA provides income support for the elderly (aged 70 plus) in low-income households. It has 0.4 million beneficiaries who receive a monthly cash allowance of LKR 2,000. The programme is administered by the National Secretariat for Elders (NSE), which falls under the purview of the State Ministry of Primary Health Care, Epidemic and Covid Disease Control.

NATIONAL SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMME (NSMP)

The NSMP provides primary school students in grades 1–5 in schools with a student population of fewer than 100 students with a nutritionally-balanced meal comprising a combination of rice, pulses, oil and canned fish, five days a week, with meals valued at LKR 30 per student per day. The programme is administered by the School Affairs Division of the Ministry of Education. In 2020 it reached 1.1 million children but was temporarily paused due to school closures.

THRIPOSHA PROGRAMME

The Thriposha Programme was introduced in 1973 to address maternal and child malnutrition and provides packages of nutrient-dense food supplements to pregnant mothers, lactating mothers (up to 6 months after birth) and malnourished children between 6 months–5 years. It supports 0.4 million beneficiaries. The programme was originally administered by the Ministry of Health (MoH), but from 2020 responsibility shifted to the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (MoWCA). Since 2010, the production and distribution of Thriposha has been managed by the MoH, through Sri Lanka Thriposha Limited, a government-owned company. The Covid-19 pandemic led to a temporary halt in Thriposha production due to supply chain issues, resulting in production halving compared to 2019.

NUTRITION PACKAGE PROGRAMME (NP)

The Government initiated the NP programme to eliminate low-weight childbirth and improve the nutrition of pregnant and lactating mothers. Under this programme, a nutrition package worth LKR 10,000 is given to pregnant mothers in need for 24 months to improve their nutrition. The programme covers all pregnant women registered with the Medical Officer of their respective Health Office.

SURAKSHA MEDICAL INSURANCE SCHEME

The Suraksha Medical Insurance Scheme is run by the School Health and Nutrition Branch of the Ministry of Education in collaboration with Sri Lanka Insurance Co. Ltd. It covers 4.2 million students in grades 1–13 in government and private schools. The scheme provides a payment of LKR 200,000 in the event of hospitalization, LKR 20,000 for outdoor medical coverage, and LKR 200,000 in the case of critical illness.

AGRAHARA MEDICAL INSURANCE SCHEME

The Agrahara Medical Insurance Scheme covers 1.5 million public sector and semi-government employees and their dependents. It is run by the Ministry of Public Administration and Ministry of Finance National Insurance Trust Fund. This scheme covers private and government hospital room charges, private hospital surgical and medical treatment, and benefits differ depending on the scheme selected.

5. Managing risks and shocks through support to social protection systems

The Government of Sri Lanka distinguishes between ‘disaster response’ and responses to longer-term, slow-onset shocks such as health or economic crises. This distinction is reflected in the institutional allocation of response mandates. Disaster response, addressing hazards is dealt with by the State Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, while slow-onset shocks and stressors tend to be managed through the respective lead line ministries, as in the case of Covid-19.

The legislated mandate for disaster responses sits with State Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, according to the 2005 Sri Lanka Disaster Management Act (DMA), and responsibility for implementation falls to the National Council for Disaster Management (NCDM) and Disaster Management Centre (DMC) (see Box 2). Hence based on an established national institutional and legislative framework, DRM is managed separately from social protection provision.

BOX 1: SRI LANKA DISASTER MANAGEMENT ACT

The Sri Lanka Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005 was enacted on 13th May 2005 and the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) was established with effect from 1st August 2005 as provided by the Act. The Act required establishing two important Institutions, The National Council for Disaster Management (NCDM) and The Disaster Management Centre (DMC) under the National Council for Disaster Management (NCDM) as the lead agency on DRM implementing the directives of the NCDM. In January 2006, the above Ministry was renamed as the Ministry of Disaster Management & Human Rights¹⁰.

Under the DMA, the DMC is the focal point for disaster response and has a mandate for disaster analysis, prevention, mitigation, response and building back, and takes a coordinating role at district level through DM district officers.

The DMC is considered an effective and credible agency for delivering disaster shock responses. However, unlike Samurdhi, the DMC does not have the capacity to provide cash transfer responses but rather supplies

materials, equipment and in-kind support. The DMC has a good relationship with WFP receiving material, financial support, capacity development and training inputs. Separately from the social protection team, WFP provides technical assistance (TA) to the Ministry of Disaster Management, and other disaster management agencies on National Disaster Management Strategy. The TA aims to strengthen national emergency management, risk-reduction mechanisms, and operational tools and support streamlining of the emergency management framework through the operationalization of the National Emergency Operations Plan (NEOP). WFP assisted agencies in information management, assessment tool development, scenario-based contingency planning, and relief management planning and response. WFP also supports local planning through disaster management and public administration institutions.

The DMA does not mandate the DSD to play a role in non-disaster slow-onset or chronic shock responses, and the DSD does not currently coordinate its programming with the DMC or engage strategically with the DMC nationally. This is a potential gap for shock-responsive social protection, although the DSD does not see a role for itself in terms of shock response and does not include this function in the new National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS). The vision of social protection set out in the NSPS does not envisage a significant role for social protection in disaster or shock response and has a greater emphasis on expanding insurance-based approaches and social security rather than social assistance.

KIIs identified a ‘serious disconnect’ between the Samurdhi programme and the DMC regarding disaster response, noting challenges around duplication, lack of coordination and that the two institutions currently work in isolation. The Samurdhi Bank and its cash transfers are not integrated into the national disaster response system.

Addressing this disconnect and preventing the two institutions from working separately would require enhanced coordination. This coordination could entail developing a national master plan, including DSD and DMC. Such a plan would include formally integrating cash transfers into disaster response, considering challenges relating to transparency, targeting criteria, vulnerability, and leaving no one behind. It has been noted that the ad

¹⁰ http://www.dmc.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29&Itemid=189&lang=en

hoc localized coordination currently taking place is unlikely to result in strategic or effective development of SRSP capacity.

Within WFP, there was discussion regarding whether DSD has the capacity and mandate to play a greater role in shock responsiveness and undertake SRSP. This study suggests that questions remain about Samurdhi's capacity to become shock responsive and whether the Government or DSD view the vertical and horizontal scale-up which occurred under Covid-19 as setting a precedent for future SRSP programming. However, the results of previous pilots and extensive use for Covid-19 demonstrate the potential to deliver scale-up through Samurdhi. Furthermore, the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka may lead to Samurdhi's use in the near future, particularly in the absence of alternatives if the current food security and socioeconomic situation deteriorate further. Notwithstanding the questions of capacity and mandate, this potential suggests that one option for WFP is to cautiously revisit its SRSP strategy and focus on TA in support of DSD implementation capacity and integration with DMC and nutrition interventions rather than directly implementing small-scale delivery interventions.

5.1 Covid-19 response

Social assistance programmes have been a substantial part of the Covid-19 response. Sri Lanka had the highest pre-crisis social assistance coverage in South Asia (27 percent of its population). During Covid-19, the main cash transfer programmes (Samurdhi; Senior Citizens Allowance—SCA; Disability Allowance—DA; and Kidney Disease Allowance—KDA) all expanded horizontally, enrolling those on waiting lists, and entitling them to access the LKR5,000 emergency benefit under the SCA, the DA and the KDA. For Samurdhi, a massive horizontal expansion also incorporated 2 million self-employed people.

The Government utilized existing social assistance and social insurance programmes and personnel to mitigate the pandemic's effects by providing existing beneficiaries of the Samurdhi Subsidy Programme, the Senior Citizens Allowance (SCA), Disability Allowance (DA), Kidney Disease Allowance (KDA) and the Farmers' and Fishermen's Pension Schemes with an LKR 5,000 grant. It also temporarily extended provision to those on Samurdhi waiting lists, and poor informal sector workers and individuals whose livelihoods were directly or indirectly impacted by the pandemic. UNICEF estimates that these interventions reached 60 percent of the population during lockdown, with coverage particularly high for the poorest decile (97 percent) (Premaratna et al. 2022).

The Government also doubled the value of its benefits to health care, police and civil security professionals under the National Insurance Trust Fund, a government insurance fund, doubled the value of its benefits to health care, police and civil security professionals (IPC-IG, 2020).

In addition to the temporary expansion of the largest national social protection programmes, the Covid-19 response entailed parallel complementary cash transfer initiatives, including some implemented by WFP. Other programmes transferring food were also adapted. For example, during the pandemic lockdown, the NSMP switched to delivering dry ration packs to the households of programme beneficiaries.

This temporary horizontal extension to include those on waiting lists and new beneficiaries, and vertical expansion, with top-up payments, deviates from the conventional disaster response approach adopted for short-term sudden-onset shocks supported through the Disaster Management Authorities. Hence the significant role played by the DSD in the Covid-19 response is anomalous, as DSD does not have a formal mandate to deliver crisis response and does not see itself as an agency with a shock response mandate. It played a crisis-response role in Covid-19 due to the situation's unique circumstances, with the Covid-19 Presidential Task Force programme being run by the Ministry of Health and categorizing the crisis responses as a health (essential services) and poverty alleviation initiative. Thus, the DSD acted separately from the DMC and independently of its protocols in its Covid-19 shock-responsive interventions.

6. Significant actors in SRSP

Table 3 lists the significant actors in social protection.

Table 3: Significant SP Actors Relating to WFP Mandate

Government	Development Partners (DPs)
National Planning Department, Ministry of Finance – <i>Social Protection Strategy</i>	World Bank – investment in developing a single registry and production of National Strategy
Department of Samurdhi Development, State Ministry of Samurdhi, Household Economy, Microfinance, Self-Employment and Business Development – <i>Samurdhi Subsidy Programme, the Senior Citizen Allowance (SCA), the Disability Allowance (DA) and the Kidney Disease Allowance (KDA)</i>	UNICEF – lead agency in the UNSPRG, mapping interventions and promoting integration of different actors on social protection
Ministry of Social Empowerment and Welfare – <i>Public Assistance Monthly Allowance (PAMA)</i>	UNDP – mapping of the sector as a precursor to supporting the integration of different national social protection actors
Disaster Management Centre (DMC), Ministry of Disaster Management – <i>Shock Response</i>	WFP – support to DSD on SRSP, direct provision of CT to vulnerable groups in response to lifecycle and covariant shocks (if requested to do so by government). Also, separate support on disaster management (through DMC) and nutrition
Ministry of Women & Child Affairs (MoWCA) – <i>Thriposha Programme, National School Meal Programme (NSMP), Nutrition Package Programme</i>	FAO – strengthening agricultural insurance scheme
National Secretariat for Elders (NSE), State Ministry of Primary Health Care, Epidemic and Covid Disease Control – <i>Senior Citizen Allowance (SCA)</i>	IOM – provision of social protection assistance to migrants
School Health and Nutrition Branch, Ministry of Education – <i>Suraksha Medical Insurance Scheme</i>	ILO – focus on policies to strengthen labour law, including through social protection for informal sector workers
National Insurance Trust Fund, Ministry of Public Administration and Ministry of Finance – <i>Agrahara Medical Insurance Scheme</i>	

6.1 Government actors

Government actors working in SRSP, DRM and nutrition are the DNP, the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), the Ministry of Women & Child Affairs and the Disaster Management Centre within the National Council for Disaster Management (NCDM).

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL PLANNING, MINISTRY OF FINANCE

The DNP of the Ministry of Finance plays a strategic role in the social protection sector vision and was responsible, with support from the World Bank, for the development of the draft National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS).

DEPARTMENT OF SAMURDHI DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), located in the State Ministry of Samurdhi, Household Economy, Microfinance, Self-Employment and Business Development, is the main government actor in terms of large-scale social assistance provision.

The performance of the DSD is noted in several areas such as extensive reach and financial inclusion. Its performance in the horizontal and vertical expansion of the subsidy and other transfer programmes in response to Covid-19 has been internationally recognized and celebrated. Areas where further work is required include targeting,

politicization and addressing concerns about potential corruption (see, for example, Momen et al. 2020; Centre for Public Impact, 2017).

Notwithstanding these challenges, Samurahi remains a significant social protection provider with unique reach and potential. Several prominent DPs (World Bank, ADB, DFAT, UNICEF) work with Samurahi providing technical assistance to overcome the challenges and advance the national priorities of social protection reform. WFP plays a specific role in providing support to the DSD for cash transfer activities.

MINISTRY OF WOMEN & CHILD AFFAIRS

The Ministry of Women & Child Affairs (MoWCA) has a significant role in nutrition, implementing the Thripasha Programme, National School Meal Program (NSMP) and Nutrition Package Programme. WFP has strong links with the MoWCA in supporting innovations in school feeding.

More broadly, national coordination around nutrition has been confounded in recent years due to the effective suspension of the high-level Multisectoral Nutrition Secretariat which was previously mandated to provide strategic leadership and coordination of nutrition sector activities and manage linkages with other sectors. Multiple KIIs identified this change as a factor inhibiting more effective nutrition interventions nationally.

THE DISASTER MANAGEMENT CENTRE

The Disaster Management Centre (DMC) is the lead government agency for disaster management and is the executing agency of the National Council for Disaster Management (NCDM). It implements and coordinates national and sub-national level programmes for reducing the risk of disasters with the participation of all relevant stakeholders. There are also Disaster Management Committees at district, divisional, and local levels across the country. The multistakeholder national platform, or the National Disaster Management Coordinating Committee (NDMCC) established in 2007, plays a key role in implementing disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies in the country. The NDMCC, coordinated by DMC, is required to meet monthly and includes representation from relevant government agencies, I/NGOs, Universities, Private Sector, UN Agencies and the donor community.

The NCDM is generally considered an effective and credible agency for the coordination of shock/crisis response, while DMC delivers programmes, but both are specifically focused on natural hazards rather than broader economy and policy-related shocks and stresses.

6.2 Development Partners and NGOs

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

The major development partners (DPs) active in social protection are the World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, FAO and IOM.

The World Bank is investing in social protection sector development, focusing primarily on the development of the single registry information system (SRIS) and the Integrated Management Information Systems (IMIS) as well as the production of the National Social Protection Strategy.

UNICEF, the lead agency in the United National Social Protection Results Group (UNSPRG), is mapping provision and promoting the integration of different actors working on social protection. It also provides analytical material to enhance social protection coverage and a lifecycle approach focusing on children.

UNDP has recently completed a detailed mapping of the sector as a precursor to supporting measures to integrate different national social protection actors.

FAO is supporting the implementation of the government's agricultural insurance scheme, while the IOM is focusing on the provision of social assistance to migrants.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society activities relating to social assistance and shock response remain largely uncoordinated, with 20,000 to 50,000 civil society organizations (CSOs) operating in the country on advocacy, post-conflict activities and poverty alleviation (ADB 2013). These operators, especially Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), play a major role in national disaster management efforts as they can provide locally appropriate support in remote regions (UNDRR 2022).

7. Enhancing food security and nutrition through support to social protection systems

While social protection programmes and systems tend to focus predominantly on SDG1, they have strong implicit connections to SDG2 – zero hunger. The potential for social protection to play a vital role in achieving a zero-hunger world is well rehearsed. Social protection can provide effective investments and interventions to address poverty and vulnerability and help individuals and households better cope with food security threats. Social protection can help people in need, prevent temporary needs from becoming entrenched, support resilience building and ultimately lay the foundations for more prosperous and peaceful societies, thereby creating a pathway to tackling some of the root causes of hunger and malnutrition (WFP, 2021b). The logic for this argument may be summarized thus: *‘Food insecurity describes an inability to secure subsistence needs, while the mandate of social protection is to ensure that subsistence needs are met by public means whenever private means are inadequate’* (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux 2018, p. 4).

While a strong case has been made globally to connect food security – WFP’s primary mandate – and social protection at a national or local level, these connections are highly contingent on the specificities of national systems, policies, and political economy considerations. Analysis of the evidence gathered in this study, especially from KIIs, indicates that in Sri Lanka, it is not yet clear that building social protection is the optimal or primary avenue to address food security. This is for two main reasons – the limitations of the main social protection provider and the specificities of the current context of post-Covid economic disruption, deteriorating food security and inflation. These reasons also link to the main elements of food security – availability, access and utilization – as follows:

There are several issues specific to the Sri Lankan context to consider when examining the link between income provision through social protection and zero hunger outcomes. Concerning food access, the relatively low transfer values provided through social protection interventions such as Samurdhi means that transfers meet only a small (and declining) percentage of the food gap. This is an increasingly problematic issue in the rapid inflationary context currently prevailing in Sri Lanka. Inflation diminishes social protection’s contribution to food accessibility for the poor.

Regarding food availability, challenges relating to food production and importation are also rising, distorting the direct link between social protection provision and zero hunger. Food availability has deteriorated in 2022 because of significantly decreased domestic production and reductions in international imports due to the fiscal crisis and supply restrictions (FAO/WFP 2022). The result is reduced availability alongside increased food prices, with a significant adverse impact on food insecurity. This effect is, in turn, exacerbating the challenge of low transfer value levels in terms of the contribution of social protection to zero hunger. FAO/WFP (2022) describe a perfect storm of intersecting factors that undermine food availability – reduced market supplies of food products, limited ability to import, acute shortages and elevated fuel prices farmer behaviour¹¹ and an unfavourable outlook that reduces incentives to invest and engage in markets.

Regarding nutrition, IEC (Information, Education and Communication) campaign work to enhance food utilization is sometimes used to complement social protection provision and contribute to zero hunger. However, several KIIs challenged the relevance and value of such interventions. They argue that in cases where social protection provision was not ongoing and given the low transfer value relative to food costs, information around nutrition is of limited value as lack of resources to purchase food is the primary driver of ongoing nutritional challenges. This debate about the financial and knowledge drivers of poor nutrition continues and suggests that further analysis by WFP – specially to allow critique and either validation or revision of its nutrition-social protection theory of change and programming – would be helpful.

Overall, the relationship between nutrition, reduction of stunting and income is not simple and linear in Sri Lanka and is subject to ongoing analysis. Rising incomes and improved nutrition over the recent decades have yet to result in the anticipated reduction in stunting or wasting experienced in many other countries (see Department of Census and Statistics, 2017). Addressing food access issues through social protection may only be effective with commensurate actions to address food availability. The implication is that providing cash transfers through social protection programmes may not provide the required pathway to improved nutrition.

¹¹ Examples include decisions by paddy and vegetable farmers, such as medium-scale farmers cutting planting because of increased production costs and lower profit margins, small-scale farmers maintaining cropped areas for local and household subsistence, and private trading between households rather than releasing to markets as prices soared above the market price ceilings applied by government (FAO/WFP 2022, p. 39).



8. WFP's current role in social protection

WFP's main interventions in the national social protection sector cover nutrition and shock-responsive social protection.

8.1 WFP's activities on nutrition and social protection

Regarding nutrition, WFP's work focuses on supporting home-grown school feeding. WFP successfully transitioned its school meals programme to a fully government-run programme and continued with TA to the National School Meals Programme (NSMP). This TA (policy, advocacy and capacity development) promotes WFP's Home-Grown School Feeding approach (HGSF), which links local smallholder farmers, predominantly women, with the NSMP. By sourcing food for the school meals from local smallholder farmers – primarily mothers of the school children from some of the poorest households in the vicinity – the project provides farmers with a stable income and promotes women's financial independence in agriculture. Female caterers who cook the school meals are also supported with knowledge on preparing nutritious meals (WFP 2021). Social protection TA for the HGSF was not continued in the current CSP but is being considered for the CSP currently under development.

BOX 2: WFP AND THE NATIONAL SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMME (NSMP)

Initially, the NSMP had three modalities: i) cash-based transfers for schools to hire caterers to provide the meals, ii) milk provision, and iii) centrally sourced food-based transfers. The first two modalities are government-implemented and funded. WFP supported the third until 2017 when the Government took over and the programme shifted to the cash-based modality as part of the National School Meals Programme (NSMP). Since then, the programme has been fully government-funded and covers approximately 1.1 million schoolchildren.

WFP has also worked with the Government to improve the nutritional quality of school meals, supporting a pilot project to include fortified rice (with iron and folic acid) in the NSMP in selected locations, working as a TA provider for a HGSF modality, and supporting the initiation of an HGSF pilot.

Source: WFP Pers, Com

8.2 WFP's practical actions on SRSP

WFP's initial work activities on shock-responsive social protection were at a very practical level and associated with the immediate need for a more effective, more coordinated emergency response. The first steps were in 2017 when WFP began collaborating with the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), through the Project Management Unit within the Department of National Planning. After 2017's drought, following the second year of floods and landslides, WFP delivered cash-based transfers through the network of 1,000 Samurdhi community banks and 14,000 staff in specific geographical areas prone to climate-related shocks (WFP 2017). The partnership also aimed to strengthen the shock-responsiveness of the national safety net system to enable effective and efficient assistance for those affected by disasters.

More recently, WFP has used funds from bi- or multilateral donors to directly provide additional cash transfers in response to Covid-19 for the most vulnerable, including some Samurdhi beneficiaries. Within WFP's direct programming in response to shocks, there is a strong focus on specific vulnerable groups. For example, WFP provided temporary support to 1500 pregnant and lactating mothers and 600 families with children under 5 in selected districts to complement Samurdhi provision. It has also supported the pre-registration of 6500 households in four districts into a SCOPE database and plans to extend this to seven districts in the coming years.

In both cases – the additional support and the pre-registration efforts – the objective was to support the national Samurdhi system to become more agile and shock-responsive, particularly from managing beneficiary distribution lists to cash distributions. Box 3 has more detail on the pre-registration efforts.

Another feature of WFP's work on shock-responsive social protection is the focus on specific vulnerable groups. In 2021, WFP used additional DFAT funding to support 1500 pregnant and lactating mothers in response to the compounded impact of Covid-19. The temporary support was linked to information, education and communication (IEC) nutrition campaigns to promote behaviour change. Similarly, WFP deployed UNICEF funding to support cash transfers to 600 families with children under 5, most of whom were not covered by Samurdhi. Both interventions combined objectives of direct provision with exposure to IEC and DSD capacity building at district level. However, as with the pilot described in Box 3, these programmes

and recipients have not been integrated into ongoing Samurdhi programming and have not led to changes in broader Samurdhi processes.

BOX 3: PILOTING RE-REGISTRATION TO ENABLE A MORE AGILE NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

In a pilot project initiated in 2017/18, WFP used its SCOPE registry to pre-register beneficiaries in four flood-prone districts (including both Samurdhi and non-Samurdhi beneficiaries) independently of the Samurdhi registration process. WFP took this role as it identified that DSD lacked facilities and equipment. In addition to facilitating direct assistance by WFP, this intervention also functioned as a pilot to expose DSD to options for extending shock provision through pre-registration and development of effective payment modalities. The intervention included providing technical expertise to support digital information delivery (and thereby demonstrate the potential) and creating a registration database. The goal was twofold: primarily to establish a system of data and information management with the potential to enable future rapid expansion of provision; and secondarily to build a system with the potential to extend shock-response provision beyond Samurdhi beneficiaries and allow other programmes to work through it, including directly implemented WFP shock-response interventions, such as emergency CBTs or top-ups. The initiative was taken forward in liaison with the DMC at district level.

The primary outcomes of this activity have been developing a registry for independent WFP programming at district level and enhancing effective WFP shock-response interventions which extend to those not covered by Samurdhi. However, while the pilots may have demonstrated proof-of-concept, there is some way to go before emergency recipients are integrated into ongoing Samurdhi provision or planned future DSD provision during a shock. DSD has not yet adopted the pre-registration approach beyond the pilot sites. This is a good example of the importance and the limitations of pilots.

Source: KIIs

8.3 WFP's strategic actions in relation to SRSP

Subsequently, WFP's role in SRSP has become more strategic in focus. Practical efforts to enhance capacity in response to the 2016 typhoon, which stimulated the WFP to enter discussions with the Ministry of Disaster Management (MDM) on making Samurdhi systems more shock-responsive, and the provision of TA accordingly. WFP was given a go-ahead for this work in collaboration with the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD) by the MDM in 2016, and this resulted in a programme of DSD-focussed project implementation and TA over the ensuing five years, culminating in the Covid-19 response. While these discussions were initiated in collaboration with the national Disaster Management Authorities, they have subsequently been taken forward bilaterally with the DSD, based on district level collaboration, and there has yet to be ongoing liaison with the DMC at national level.

WFP's TA to the DSD has been intended to promote the development of a social protection system which is inclusive, adaptive and shock-responsive (WFP, 2021). Working with the DSD has enabled WFP to position itself to provide emergency cash-based assistance through social protection mechanisms alongside the DSD interventions to communities in vulnerable situations and to mitigate the compounded impact of Covid-19. Through this direct provision, WFP has provided targeted support during periods of acute economic and livelihood disruption using digital tools and end-to-end digital money transfers, facilitating financial reconciliation processes and exposing the DSD to implementation models with the potential to enhance programme effectiveness (WFP, 2021).

Much of the progress has been through addressing technical areas of delivery to enable shock responsiveness in the immediate term. There is still much work to do in this area, for example, supporting the DSD to incorporate SCOPE or similar but adapted targeting and registration systems. However, shock-responsive social protection has other difficult and time-consuming elements that may increasingly become a priority for WFP Sri Lanka going forward. These include building capacities in organizations and systems (at both local and national level), enhancing coordination to maximize the added value of individual agencies/development partners, and supporting the wider enabling environment for shock-responsive social protection.

In the latter case, a more strategic role for WFP, suggested by various respondents in KIIs, may be drawing on its supply and logistics capacity, should the current financial, economic and food production crises persist. WFP may be uniquely suited institutionally to this role, particularly in a context of deteriorating food security. While providing cash and food through social protection programmes is important, WFP can also contribute to directly reducing vulnerability by helping tackle food price volatility and availability. WFP's capacity to treat the cause and not only the symptoms of food insecurity were well recognized by KIIs.

In addition to its work on SRSP, WFP Sri Lanka has also been actively engaged in DRM, supporting the national disaster management authorities, and nutrition, but this work has not involved the social protection team. Although WFP's social protection and DRM teams were aligned at the start of the development of WFP's SRSP portfolio in 2017, these team's activities have not yet been integrated strategically or operationally, and WFP's SRSP activities and work with the DSD remain separate and somewhat siloed. Coordination of programming across nutrition, DRM and social protection was identified as critical during the research for this study if effective WFP interventions in SRSP are to be achieved.

9. Insights and implications for WFP's future work on social protection

9.1 Insights from the review process

Insights relevant to WFP's strategic approach to social protection, nutrition and food security shared by KIs and the WFP social protection team and emerging from the literature review are summarized in this section. These insights are grouped under three areas where WFP anticipates programme impacts from its interventions: SRSP, registry development and digitization and cash transfer to vulnerable groups. Several common challenges and opportunities are identified across these three areas, including the need to leverage more effectively from WFP's experiences and progress, the importance of recognizing how government priorities may change/are changing and what this means for how and at what level WFP engages with government.

FOR SRSP

In Sri Lanka, the legislated mandate for shock response falls outside the universe of social protection providers, including the DSD. This means that the vision for social protection set out by the NDP (Annex 2) in the new draft National Social Protection Strategy does not envisage a substantial role for social protection or the DSD in disaster or shock response, and the DSD does not have a budget allocation to develop SRSP capacity. In the immediate term, this limits the absorptive capacity of the DSD to work on SRSP. Overall, while the DSD was able to deliver mass support during Covid-19 using existing modalities, it does not have (and perhaps does not seek) a mandate or increased responsibilities to deliver SRSP. In contrast, the NCDM is considered an effective and credible agency for delivering shock/crisis response for natural hazards. At present, WFP supports DSD-based SRSP that is not explicitly coordinated with interventions by the DMC, leading to challenges of duplication and poor linkages between DMC and DSD that, in turn, undermine the effectiveness and efficiency of emergency responses.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for WFP to work on SRSP more effectively across a range of actors. The new institutional architecture offers an opportunity to support enhanced coordination across social protection actors and integration with disaster management agencies. SRSP does not mean working with only a single government partner bilaterally. It could be fruitful for WFP to explore working multilaterally with respective parts of the Government of Sri Lanka rather than through separate

bilateral relationships. A tripartite – DSD and DMC and WFP – could enable effective coordination and tap into respective capacities and resources.

FOR REGISTRY DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITIZATION

WFP has made substantial investments in pre-registration activities using SCOPE. These investments have provided proof-of-concept to enhance the potential for direct and independent WFP SRSP cash transfer programming. These pre-registration processes present substantial progress but remain a 'work in progress'. There is more to do to leverage from these experiences to improve shock-responsive social protection. First, there are questions about how to scale these activities. Currently, the experience is limited to four districts and 6000+ households in flood-prone areas; consequently, there are questions about how to achieve nationwide pre-registration. Second, it is not yet clear how to embed pre-registration more deeply in government-led processes. So far, DSD exposure at the district level to WFP digital pre-registration of vulnerable Samurdhi and non-Samurdhi has yet to lead to a change in DSD operational approaches, targeting criteria or inclusion of pre-registered households in ongoing programmes or planned interventions. Third, the incentives still need to be clarified, with KIs suggesting that DSD does not, at this time, wish to expand provision to include addition non-registered households at times of crisis. Further, the current crisis may either create incentives to expand provision to a wider range of households or be of such magnitude that response needs are too great for Samurdhi to absorb enough new caseloads, leading instead to a rather separate response. It is also important to consider the actions of other DPs and how these might influence the priorities of investments and new government approaches – for example, the DSD is also working with the World Bank on Samurdhi registry development, separately from WFP's pre-registration processes. Additionally, KIs suggested that, at present, for WFP's direct interventions that are independent of DSD programming and strategy, more could be done to use learning from these direct WFP interventions to improve DSD operations.

Together, these WFP experiences suggest that further work is needed to leverage from WFP's pre-registration work and that it will be necessary to demonstrate the tangible and achievable benefits of pre-registration more unequivocally, and to better understand the scale of crisis and need that Samurdhi can reasonably absorb.

DIRECT CASH TRANSFERS TO VULNERABLE GROUPS IN COLLABORATION WITH DSD

WFP's focus has been to channel additional external funding from development partners, when available, into additional direct WFP cash transfer interventions for vulnerable groups as emergency response to Covid-19, using DSD personnel but separately from existing DSD interventions. Routing emergency responses through the DSD is unquestionably good progress. However, it is important to consider the next steps – namely, the extent to which these emergency responses integrate with existing DSD policy and programming and also to understand better the circumstances in which the DSD may take over or replicate these small-scale WFP direct interventions. KIs highlight the risk that WFP's (and other DPs') goals and objectives may diverge from those of government, especially in the current fast-evolving situation. While WFP may prioritize integrating shock response into social protection, government priorities may be elsewhere. For example, KIs noted the increasing focus of government officials on identifying exit or graduation strategies for Samurdhi recipients, or that the MoF is reducing allocations to DSD for Samurdhi implementation and coverage. As the policy landscape shifts, WFP must adapt and prioritize in response. This may mean shifting from a TA approach to more advocacy and research to demonstrate the appropriateness of actions or pathways for achieving outcomes through social protection. Alternatively, it could mean working at different levels within government agencies and changing the balance of technical and operational versus policy and strategy work. Overall, it is important for WFP (and other DPs) to recognize when they find themselves drifting out of step with government and focus on priorities (such as the expansion of social protection) that are not or no longer shared with government.

9.2 Recommendations for WFP social protection approaches and immediate crisis response

This section outlines (with a rationale) potential areas where WFP can strategically support social protection development in Sri Lanka with reference to shock response and nutrition.

The recommendations recognize the shift in WFP vision set out in the WFP Strategy 2022–2025 and the new WFP Social Protection Strategy and reflect the transition to a tighter focus on shock response and nutrition security on the one hand, and emphasis on strategic support to government capacity building on the other. They also reflect lessons emerging from five years of WFP experience derived from intensive programming in support of social protection sector development and SRSP in Sri Lanka, initiated after the 2016/7 floods and drought. They also reflect the conclusions drawn by WFP in preparing the 2022 CSP, which identified the need for 'layering, integrating, and sequencing social protection approaches into nutrition-specific/nutrition-sensitive, disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation and emergency response programming'.¹²

Considering this study's findings, a shift in the focus of WFP's social protection strategy and operational portfolio may be appropriate in terms of WFP's SRSP, nutrition outcomes, and overall social protection systems development objectives. Recommendations relating to each of these areas of activity are set out below, together with an addendum setting out urgent crisis response options.

SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

There are good reasons for WFP to consider working in greater collaboration with other DPs to enhance the efficacy and performance of existing Samurdhi cash transfer programmes, which together account for most of the social assistance provision nationally. Reasons include the following: i) the operation of an effective social protection system is known to reduce a prior vulnerability and provide a cushion against shocks (Costella et al., 2021), ii) a programme's shock response capacity is largely contingent on prior sector performance (Lowe et al., 2021), and iii) following extensive use of Samurdhi and other social assistance programmes for the economic crisis, Samurdhi may be used by the government as a mechanism for future shock responses which fall outside the purview of the DMC overall. Specific actions might include the following:

- Engage in advocacy and dialogue with the DSD in collaboration with other DPs to support the ongoing development of the National Social Protection Strategy, focusing particularly on sector-wide: institutional arrangements for institutional and

¹² Draft WFP CSP, 2022. Subsequently revised and published as WFP (2022) 'Sri Lanka Country Strategic Plan 2023-2027'

programme coordination, digital integration, nutrition and disability integration, design options (including transfer values), sustainable financing, and strategic integration with Disaster Response Agencies.

- Advocate for and provide TA to promote the integration of nutrition and disability into social protection programmes.
- Collaborate with World Bank on support for enhanced DSD registration systems.

SRSP

Overall, WFP might prioritize building a strategy that enables it to leverage more effectively from its existing pilot programmes and TA initiatives in support of stronger SRSP. An effective strategy will recognize opportunities and limits to pilot programmes, ensuring exposure to new approaches through pilots and TA align with government priorities and perspectives on the future for social protection. Specific actions might include the following:

- Consider broadening engagement with government – with stakeholders including but going beyond DSD and the Samurdhi system. This could include enhanced support and interlinkage to the NCDM and DMC as an additional partner to take forward shock response capacity development, building on already successful WFP DM collaboration in this sector.
- Explore options for and potentially facilitate DMC–DSD coordination on shock response planning and operationality; and promote the integration of existing social protection interventions into the national DRM strategy.
- Assess which social protection interventions, beyond existing Samurdhi programmes, can deliver shock-responsive programming across a range of different shocks and stresses. For example, for rapid-onset environment/climate-related shocks, programmes other than Samurdhi may be most effective, while for slow-onset or seasonal shocks, Samurdhi programmes may provide the most effective and efficient support.
- Ensure that any direct delivery of cash transfers outside the national systems implemented by DSD and other national agencies can be leveraged to improve national systems – that is, WFP direct delivery of CBT ‘leaves something behind’.

NUTRITION THROUGH SOCIAL PROTECTION

Options for WFP to support nutrition-sensitive social protection coalesce around building the evidence base and working cross-sectorally on coordinated programming with government and other DPs. Possible activities include the following:

- Assess how to focus on nutrition programming with the DSD rather than attempting to address nutrition solely through direct cash transfer provision. For example, build the knowledge based on what works for nutritional impact by examining DSD programmes or specific design features within DSD programmes. Specific actions could include layering CTs with Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC), introducing a referral system for pregnant and lactating women, combining nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions, and assessing modality choice and transfer values. Other examples include directly supporting and enhancing existing Samurdhi and MoWCA interventions that focus on stunting (rather than emergency programmes tackling wasting) and addressing chronic undernutrition through transfers or building evidence on nutrition-sensitive social protection through enhanced monitoring and evaluation of HGFSF to assess impacts and the potential for expansion.
- Focus on working across multiple organizations to enhance nutrition-sensitive social protection. At an institutional coordination level, work could include promoting the reinvigoration of the Multisectoral Nutrition Secretariat and the involvement of Samurdhi and NCDM actors therein. For example, work towards learning and evidence development to appraise the impact of WFP and government interventions on nutrition through increased engagement in Research, Assessment and Monitoring (RAM). Such actions would imply a recognition that WFP RAM staff can supply necessary inputs to support government social protection initiatives. Also, that staff within WFP, other than social protection staff, can have a significant role. For example, WFP prioritizes supporting the analysis of and provides advice on the desirability of food provision in place of cash provision in situations of specific economic and market-related supply shocks that lead to constrained domestic food availability.

BOX 4: IMMEDIATE CRISIS RESPONSE ADDENDUM

Given the critical food security implications of the current macro-economic crisis and its likely medium-term effects, it is also recommended that WFP:

- initiates and informs an urgent internal and national debate on the relative merits of food versus cash provision to address food security at this time when the primary constraint to food security may be food availability and accessibility;
- examines and advises on the potential role of subsidies and other alternatives to transfer provision;
- considers shifting to a procurement role and designs its crisis response based on collaboration across the food security, disaster management and social protection portfolios; and
- engages in advocacy to ensure ringfencing of social protection expenditure during the restructuring and fiscal consolidation processes likely to accompany the IMF rescue package.

WITHIN WFP ITSELF

In addition to the programming recommendations outlined linked to specific WFP Sri Lanka institutional priorities, there are suggested options for internal discussion relating to internal WFP practices and strategy, namely:

- shifting the balance of effort further towards social protection objectives and collaborative and strategic engagement and advocacy and (except in circumstances such as a serious emergency where government cannot respond or coordinate a response) away from direct implementation to collaborative and strategic engagement and advocacy;
- recognizing the lessons learned from interventions under the previous CSP regarding binding limitations of approaching SRSP through the Samurdhi programme and DSD (legislative, mandate, institutional priorities, resource constraints);
- considering when social protection is an appropriate and effective entry point for achieving shock response and nutrition objectives in Sri Lanka, and when other entry points and approaches may be more effective – for example, shock responses outside DSD and wider health and education programmes that don't include social transfers; and

- promoting the integration of social protection, disaster management and nutrition programming within WFP.

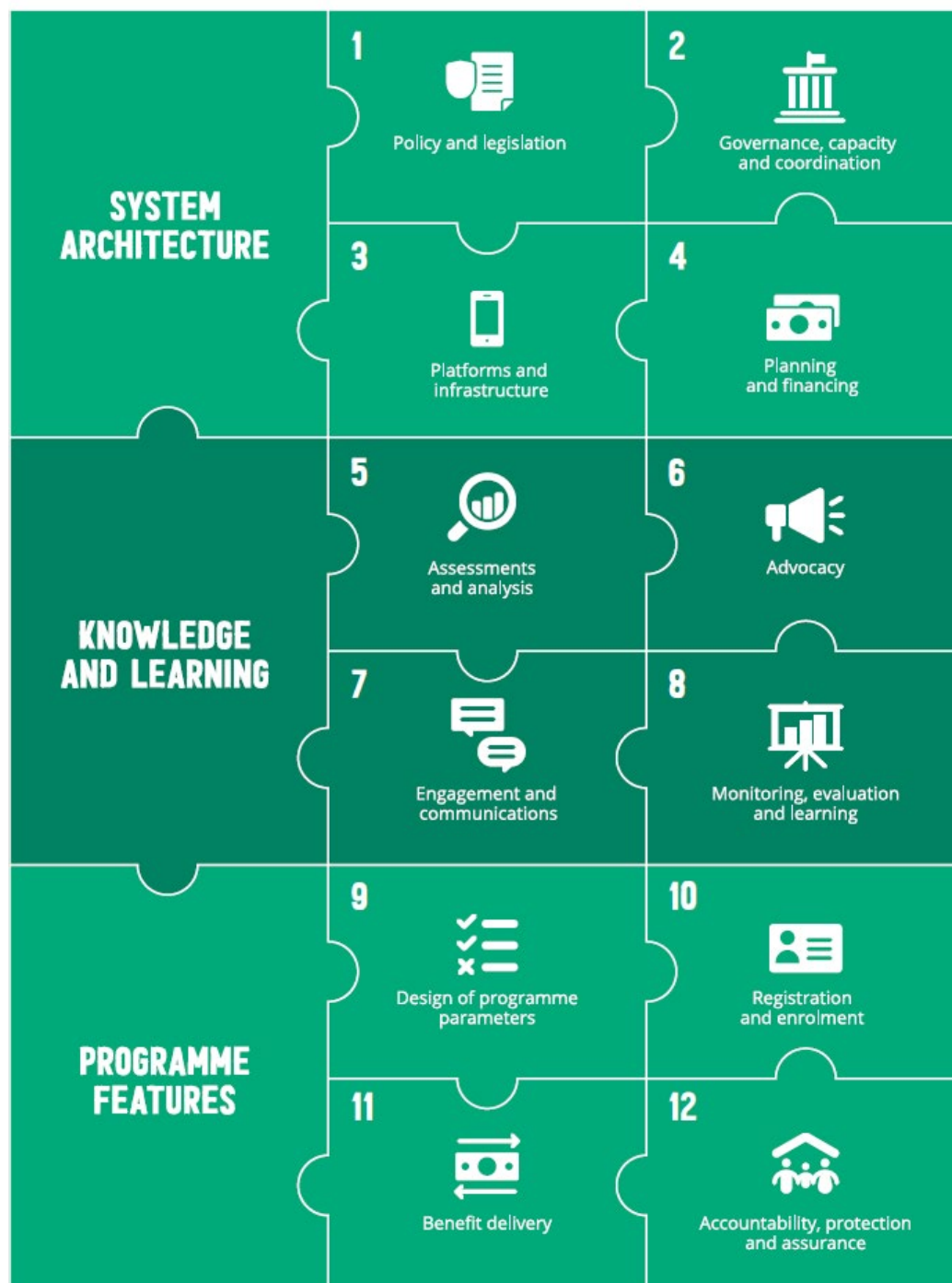
Addressing these internal strategic approach questions would entail exploring issues including:

- i) in response to specific shocks and contexts, comparing effectiveness and desirability of promoting government shock response and nutrition performance directly with disaster management and other government agencies versus through the DSD and other social protection interventions;
- ii) considering carrying out a formal SRSP Capacity Assessment using WFP's existing tool, or another as appropriate, to assess the viability of the current strategy, including a political economy analysis of the DSD as a lead partner;
- iii) reviewing and potentially reconfirming the role of the DSD as a strategic partner, given the revised global WFP mandate and Social Protection Strategic approach and the rapidly changing landscape initiated by the recent economic crisis;
- iv) developing alternative strategies for a) enhancing shock response capacity, b) addressing nutritional deficits through social protection and c) social protection sector development;
- v) promoting the integration of analysis and programming between social protection, nutrition, and DRM by explicitly drawing together social protection, CBT, school feeding, nutrition, RAM and Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) teams within WFP to identify the optimal approach to promote effective shock response and nutrition outcomes in line with WFP strategic objectives; and
- vi) considering (given the constraints of implementing SP solely through a SRSP lens in Sri Lanka, but also the potential to learn from WFP's SRSP experiences) building on the current focus on SRSP specifically and reframing WFP's social protection engagement in terms of Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) with its broader focus on social protection as a means to enhance livelihoods, as well as shock response, in line with government preferences.

9.3 Presentation of issues by building block

These recommendations can be framed in relation to the WFP ‘twelve building blocks’ approach (WFP, 2021) (see figure 4) to facilitate analysis and cross-country comparison.

Figure 6: WFP Building Blocks of National Social Protection Systems



Source: WFP, 2021

It is important to note that this section outlines recommendations for internal WFP consideration relating to institutional processes and approaches, which cannot be captured in an externally facing building blocks matrix. Given the strategic institutional focus on nutrition and shock response and this study’s analysis, directly integrating WFP Sri Lanka’s social protection programming with its work on nutrition and food security and disaster management (as proposed in these recommendations) would be a useful first action to support further progress in the sector.

Table 4: Sri Lanka Recommendations by Building Block

System Architecture	Policy and Legislation	Governance, Capacity and Coordination
	Carry out advocacy in collaboration with other agencies to support the ongoing development of the National Social Protection Strategy. Integrate social protection interventions and modalities into DRM strategy.	Consider enhanced support to the NCDM and DMC as a complement to DSD to take forward shock response capacity development, building on already successful collaboration in this sector. Explore options for and facilitate DMC–DSD coordination and collaboration. Promote the reinvigoration of the Multisectoral Nutrition Secretariat and the involvement of Samurdhi and NCDM actors therein.
	Platforms and Infrastructure	Planning and Finance
	Build on the data protection agreement between DSD and WFP to continue supporting data protection, data-sharing protocols and privacy. Build on lessons from pre-registration initiatives to support DSD to modernize MIS.	Work with DPs and the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure IMF adjustment programming ringfences adequate social assistance support.
Knowledge and Learning	Assessments and Analysis	Advocacy
	Consider carrying out a formal SRSP Capacity Assessment, using WFP’s existing tool, or another as appropriate, to assess the viability of the current strategy, including a political economy analysis of the DSD as a lead partner. Assess and advise on the role of alternatives to cash transfer provision in the context of food availability constraints (for example, subsidies, food transfers). Assess the desirability of WFP taking a food importation role in the short term.	Consider broadening WFP’s social protection engagement from the current focus on SRSP to a wider Adaptive Social Protection approach to capture a broader focus on social protection as a means to enhance livelihoods.
	Engagement and Communications	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
		Enhance monitoring and evaluation of HGSF to assess impact, sustainability and potential for expansion (nutrition). Focus on learning and evidence development to appraise the impact of own and government interventions in nutrition through increased engagement on RAM – including appraisal of ICE component of cash transfer provision (nutrition) and guidance on effective behavioural change communication.
	Design of Programme Features	Registration and Enrolment
	Advocate with DSD for nutrition-sensitive approaches to social protection and for disability inclusion. Collaborate with DP to provide TA to support enhanced DSD cash transfer programme design features and implementation systems – including tools to address exclusion challenges and graduation strategy. Analyse and advise on the desirability of food provision in place of cash provision, given constrained domestic food availability.	Collaborate with World Bank and DSD on developing and rolling out enhanced DSD registration systems.
	Benefit Delivery	Accountability, Protection and Assurance
Create guidelines for the appropriateness of planning and implementation of cash transfers within the DSD system and outside it. Consider supporting and enhancing existing Samurdhi and MoWCA interventions and transfers relating to nutrition. Consider focusing on nutrition programming with the DSD for stunting/chronic hunger while addressing wasting and emergencies through direct CTs.	Support government to strengthen grievance mechanisms drawing on lessons from WFP systems in place for emergency scale-up that seek to ensure safe, accessible, inclusive and dignified mechanisms.	

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Annex 1: Draft National Social Protection Strategy (2022)

The NSPS sets out how progress will be made towards the Government's vision of a peaceful, prosperous Sri Lanka, Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour (DNP, 2019).

Introduction

The purpose of the current assignment is to develop a National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS). The guidelines, directions and recommendations for the proposed NSPS are derived from the comprehensive social protection assessment which was done as the 1st Part of the overall assignment. In the assessment, all the existing social protection programmes covering social welfare, social security and labour market were extensively reviewed and the gaps and challenges in the existing system identified. Results-Based Management (RBM) is employed to develop the proposed NSPS.

2.2. Vision and Mission

2.2.1. Vision: "An inclusive and productive Social Protection System for Prosperity and Splendour"

2.2.2. Mission: Social Protection system for Sri Lanka that effectively and efficiently protects and prevents from poverty and other vulnerabilities every citizen through the life cycle, and promotes human development, employment and inclusive growth.

2.3. Guiding Principles

The proposed social protection system must adhere to the following basic principles:

- Equity and inclusiveness
- Growth and development
- Cost-effective and sustainable
- Resilient
- SMART programming
- Civic responsibility

2.4. Strategic Thrust Areas

1. Welfare assistance for the needy (equity and protection) (T1)
2. Employability and decent work (opportunity and promotion) (T2)
3. Resilience building against shocks and source of risks (resilience and prevention) (T3)
4. Building citizen awareness and responsibility (Transformation) (T4)
5. Social protection rationalization and integration (SMART programming and Integration) (T5)

2.5. Goals, Policy Statements and Policy Objectives

2.5.1. NSPS Goal: The life cycle approach based social protection system will be developed gradually that aims at providing optimal protection to those more in need and promote employability, human development and inclusive growth. Social protection programmes will be integrated in a manner that will improve efficiency, effectiveness and outcomes.

2.5.2 Policy Statements: Under each Strategic Thrust Area, several policy statements are designed and presented in the following table extracted from the Strategy.

Table 2: Thematic areas, Thrust Areas, Policy Statements and Strategies

Thematic areas	Thrust Area	Policy Statements	Strategies
Social Welfare	Welfare assistance for needy (equity and protection) (T1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure an equitable and efficient Social Welfare System serving all vulnerable groups in need of assistance (PS6). • Ensure that poor is able to move out of poverty by building capacities and by creating opportunities (PS7). • Building resilience vulnerable groups against shocks and threats guaranteed (PS8). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve the welfare service delivery in the country so that there will be equitable access to social welfare at adequate levels. (T1S1) 2. Reform Samurdhi programme to effectively empower the needy to minimize leakages and wastages (T1S2). 3. Provide social assistance support to all the cross-cutting vulnerable groups (T1O3)
Labour Market	Employability and decent work (opportunity and promotion) (T2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure equity in the labour market participation, working environment, and remunerations (PS12). • Opportunities for potential labour market participants through education, training, and provision of opportunities (PS13). • Improve resilience through equipping labour market with required education and skills and better preparation of individuals for potential risks (PS14). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that persons of working age have opportunities for adequate employment and income security (T2S1) 2. Promote productive development of all children, and ensure their well-being, and enhance the potentials for their eventual productive engagement in the labour market. (T2S2) 3. Ensure opportunities for elderly persons to attain income security and an adequate living standard. (T2S4) 4. Ensure effective and sustainable social protection for informal sector (T2S5).
Social Security	Resilience building against shocks and source of risks (resilience and prevention) (T3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure an inclusive, affordable and productive social security coverage for all citizen (PS9). • Ensure well-being of elderly population establishing a universal pension system (PS10). • Building resilience of all citizen against shocks strengthening the social and market insurance coverage (PS11). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish an inclusive and productive social security and pension system to cover for all citizen (T3S1). 2. Building resilience of all citizen against shocks strengthening the social and market insurance coverage (T3S2).
People responsibility	Building citizen awareness and responsibility (Transformation) (T4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible participation of people in social protection schemes (PS5). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build citizens' awareness of personal responsibility on social protection (T4S1) 2. Create space/opportunities for the community, business and industry and philanthropist to proactively participate in social welfare programmes and activities (T4S2).
Governance and implementation	Social protection rationalization and integration (SMART programming and Integration) (T5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that social protection leads inclusive and sustainable economic growth (PS1). • Ensure that social protection addresses all sources of risk throughout life cycle stages (PS2). • Ensure income security and minimum standard of living for needy (PS3). • Provide an effective and efficient service delivery system through SMART programming (PS4). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish Integrated Social Protection System (ISPS), connecting all of the social insurance, social assistance, labour market and other service programmes. (T5S1) 2. Establish a social protection system that cover all sources of risks throughout life cycle (T5S2)

Source: *Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour* (DNP, 2019)

Overall Objective

To establish a comprehensive social protection system that protects and prevents people from poverty, risks and vulnerability in Sri Lanka throughout the life cycle while promoting employability, human development and inclusive growth.

Specific policy objectives are as follows:

- To develop an Integrated Social Protection System (ISPS) connecting all of the social insurance, social assistance, labour market and other service programmes.
- To provide social protection to all extremely poor and vulnerable people throughout their life cycle stages.
- To enhance the prospects for better employment for members in the labour force.
- To provide sufficient legislative coverage, financial & human resource; improve efficiency of service delivery, for social protection for labour market participants.
- To instil a sense of responsibility among people to identify risks and plan effectively to cope with them

Annex 2: Sri Lanka National Development Plan. National Policy Framework Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour (2019)

The Government of Sri Lanka's National Policy Framework (NPF) has ten policies aimed at achieving the fourfold outcome of a productive citizenry, a contented family, a disciplined and just society and a prosperous nation.

The policies, giving due consideration to socio, economic, environmental and political aspects are:

- Priority to National Security
- Friendly, Non-aligned, Foreign Policy
- An Administration free from corruption
- New Constitution that fulfils the People's wishes
- Productive Citizenry and a vibrant Human resource
- People Centric Economic Development
- Technology Based Society
- Development of Physical Resources
- Sustainable Environmental Management
- Disciplined, Law Abiding and values-based society

The NPF has also given first priority for ensuring the National Security. It clearly spelt out that those new methodologies be adopted to safeguard the national security without compromising the democratic space available to our people.

Annex 3: KIIs completed

Department/Agency/ Partner organization	Title	Name	Designation
Ministry of Health			
Directorate – Estate & Urban Health	Mrs	Dr Enoka Wickramasinghe	Consultant – Community Physician
Nutrition Division	Mrs	Dr Lakmini Magodaratne	Deputy Director
Ministry of Finance			
Department of National Planning (DNP)	Mr	R.H.W.A. Kumarasiri	DG/Project Director (WFP Programmes)
Ministry of Samurdhi, Household Economy, Micro Finance, Self-Employment Business Development			
Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD)	Mr	H.K. Ranaweera	Director (Social Security & Welfare)
Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD)	Mr	S.M. Aliyar	District Samurdhi Director - Mannar
Ministry of Defence, Disaster Management Division			
Disaster Management Centre	Major General	Sudantha Ranasinghe	Additional Secretary, Director General
District/Divisional Level Government Officials			
District Secretariat	Mr	K. Vimalanathan	District Secretary – Mullaitivu
Divisional Secretariat	Mrs	B.A. Sithari Udayangani	Divisional Secretary – Madurawa Division in Kalutara
Civil Society			
Scaling Up Nutrition – People’s Forum (SUNPF)	Mrs	Dilka Pieris	Project Director
International Development Agencies, UN & Donors			
World Bank	Mr	Thomas Walker	Senior Economist
UNICEF	Mrs	Louise Moreira Daniels	Chief of Social Policy
UNDP	Mr	Vagisha	Policy and Engagement Analyst
ILO	Mrs	Sriyani Mudiyansele	Programme Officer
SDC	Mr	Frédéric Steck	Programme Officer Multilateral Division
WFP	Mr	Kalana Pieris	Nutrition
WFP	Mr	Indu Abeyratne	EPR/DRM
WFP	Mr	Jasenthu Padmasiri	
WFP	Ms	Natacha Pugin and Rushini Perera	
WFP	Ms	Claire O'Reilly and Murali Padmanabhan	RBB Disability advisor

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