

BUILDING CONVERGENCE FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION IN MAHARASHTRA

**25TH FEBRUARY 2022
CONSULTATION SUMMARY**



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for every child

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1

BACKGROUND

Social protection broadly refers to a set of policies and programmes aimed at protecting people against poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion throughout their life. Within the current context, there is a need to revisit social protection to expand its purview and increase accessibility. The COVID 19 pandemic established the need to shift from immediate and short-term relief measures to long term resilience-focussed social protection, while acknowledging the critical value added by civil society in supporting last mile connectivity. In the wake of relief work in 2020-2021, research was conducted on various aspects of social protection in Maharashtra by several independent agencies including Centre for Policy Research (CPR), Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies (RCUES), AILSG Mumbai, YUVA and UNICEF, which highlighted concerns that need to be addressed to create a holistic Social Protection System (SPS) for the most vulnerable groups, including women and children.

The urgency of responses during the pandemic required strategic partnerships for extremely specific purposes; their success has spurred demands for the institutionalisation of multi-stakeholder coalitions. As a first step, a consultation was conceptualised towards synergising future efforts at implementing the life cycle approach to social protection, bridging short-term gaps and ensuring long-term and sustained support for vulnerable groups from the ground to the policy level and across the state of Maharashtra. On 25th February 2022, a half-day online consultation on 'Building Convergence for Social Protection in Maharashtra' was organised by YUVA with the support of UNICEF, to understand the existing social protection landscape and address

identified gaps and other emergent challenges. The platform which served as a coming together of informed voices to identify, articulate, evaluate and comment on improving policy and programme

issues identified by the presenters, included civil society organisations, movements, collectives, academicians and officials engaging with social protection concerns in Maharashtra.

WHAT IS SOCIAL PROTECTION ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE?

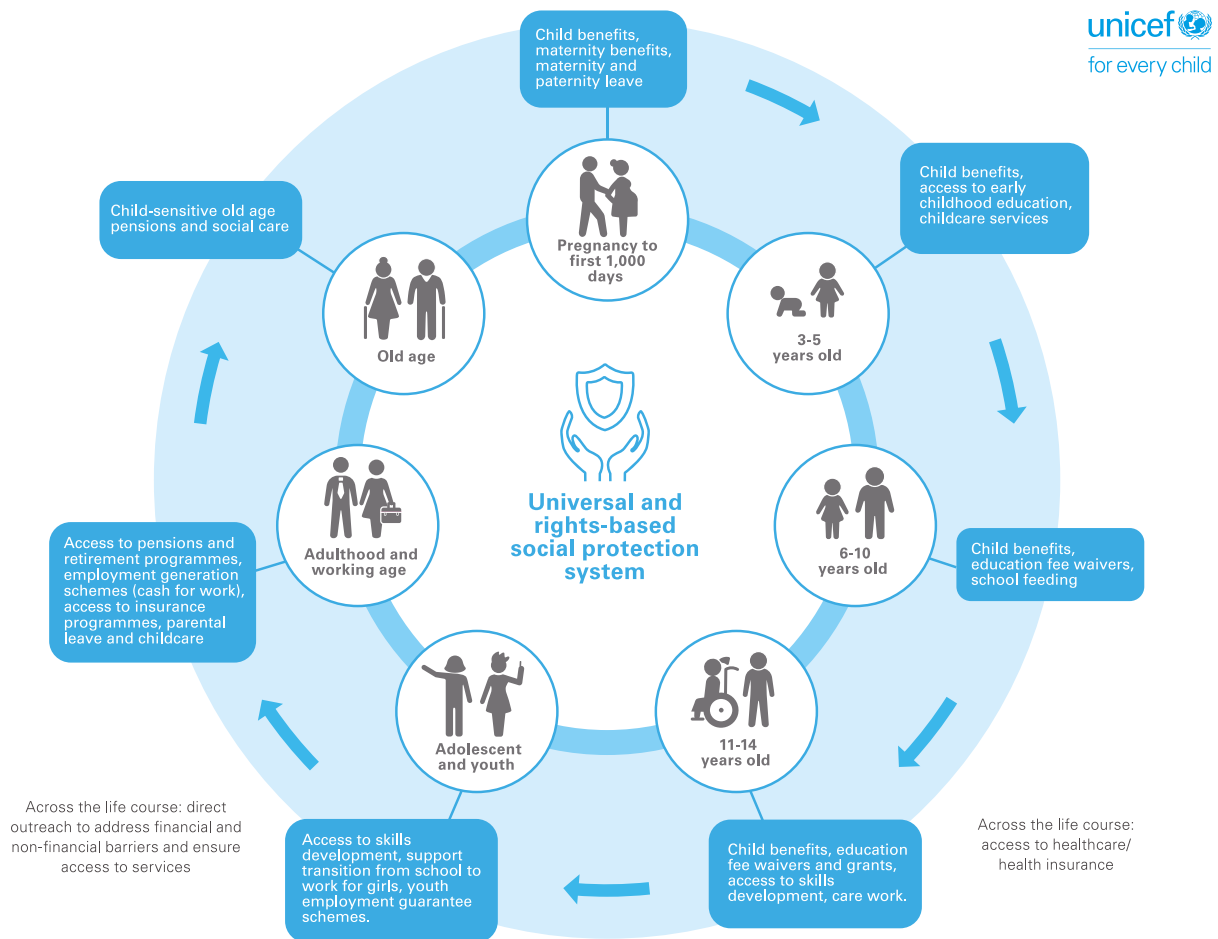


Figure 1: UNICEF'S life course approach to Social Protection

OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTATION

The consultation was organised with the aim to:

1. Understand various approaches to facilitating last mile access and the role of diverse stakeholders in these processes.
2. Understand how processes of enabling access can be streamlined with the support of the local administration in urban, rural as well as tribal areas.
3. Collectively develop advocacy strategies for institutionalising last mile delivery.

2

EXISTING SOCIAL PROTECTION LANDSCAPE

SOCIAL PROTECTION FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Across the globe, social protection is far from universal, and often least accessible to communities that have fallen into the cracks of a much divided society. Currently, only 45 per cent of the world's population have access to some element of social protection and only 29 per cent are covered by comprehensive social security systems throughout their life cycles (ILO, 2021). The pandemic has brought fresh threats to the security, as it reversed all efforts to reduce poverty. In 2020, for the first time in over 20 years, global extreme poverty rose and simultaneously 120 million additional people were forced into poverty, thus giving birth to a 'new poor' (World Bank, 2021).

INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

In India, while social welfare is deeply embedded in the Constitution as a principle underlying both policy and practice, social protection is often piecemeal or sporadic. In fact, only 24.4 per cent of the entire population is covered by at least one social protection scheme (ILO). However, in the past two decades the government has transformed the approach to social protection, with schemes like the Right to Education Act and Food Security Act, adopting a rights-based outlook. Yet, the national expenditure on the subject remains as low as 1.4 per cent of its budget, among the lowest in Asia (Yadav, 2015), and much behind the world average of 12.9 per cent (ILO). Further complications arise because social protection features as a responsibility of the Central and State government, often with implementation channels including bodies of Local Self Governance.

MAHARASHTRA PERSPECTIVE

An analysis of the expenditure of the government of Maharashtra found that it spent only 35 per cent of its budgeted expenditure on social welfare programmes in 2021-22.

The priority areas included education and health which constitute 57.2 per cent of the budgeted expenditure, while other areas like rural development (13.1 per cent), SC, ST, and Minorities development (12.4 per cent) and social welfare and nutrition (9.7 per cent) received a lesser proportion

(CPR, 2021). Hence, in addition to adequacy of budgets for social protection, it is also necessary to evaluate the distribution of funds and the rate of utilisation across sectors. For this, it is not only necessary to empower the state mechanisms to gather information using technological aids like MIS, but also design ways in which this evidence can be used strategically to make social protection a tool to reduce vulnerabilities and target poverty (Banerjee & Bhattacharya, 2019).

ROLE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

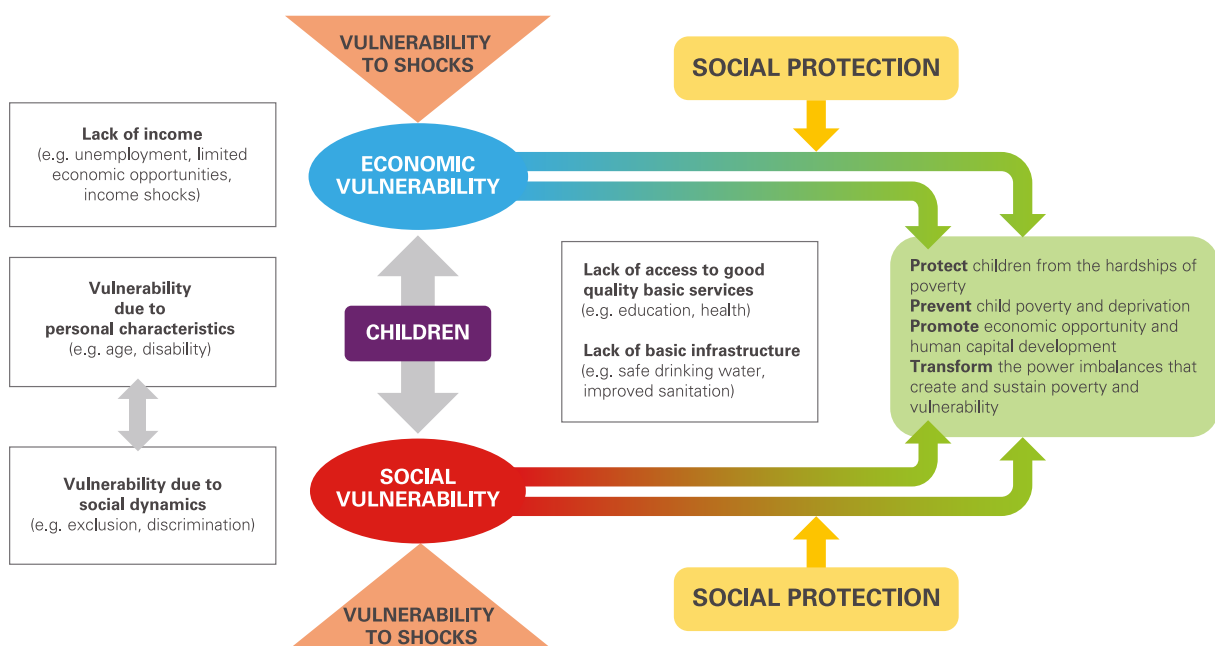


Figure 2: UNICEF'S conceptual framework of Social Protection

Social protection not only covers social vulnerabilities that people face but also economic vulnerabilities.

With the threat of the triple Cs - Climate, Conflict and Covid19, there was never a more crucial time to rapidly increase coverage and ensure social protection systems that are able to respond to future shocks - Ms. Natalia Winder-Rossi, UNICEF Associate Director, Social Policy and Social Protection.

3

GAPS IN DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

DESIGN-RELATED CHALLENGES

- Lack of an overarching national social protection policy framework
- Lack of convergence among implementing departments
- Lack of gender responsive social protection systems.
- Absence of any KPIs or SOPs that can assess and track program performance
- Intersectional vulnerabilities don't factor in the design
- Budget Inadequacy
- Disparate methods of accounting for budgets - proposed, allocated, sanctioned and received
- Weak Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks
- Lack of portability of social protection schemes
- Lack of emphasis on evidence based action plans
- Lack of accessible grievance redressal system
- Strength of CSOs for better implementation of schemes
- Role of ERs conspicuously absent, and ERs not providing enough support for access to schemes

DELIVERY-RELATED CHALLENGES

- Partial enumeration of beneficiaries
- Lack of documentation available with the beneficiaries
- Lack of awareness among beneficiaries about SPS schemes
- Lack of digital and financial literacy among beneficiaries.
- Inaccessible registration/application processes
- 'Silo approach' to social protection with meagre intra-organisational coordination
- Severe infrastructural and human resource deficits
- Delays in receipt of relief, benefits or services

4

SOME EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

MIGRANT CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

[as cited by the Centre for Policy Research]

- The Gujarat Government's Migration Card initiative helps track inter-state and intra-state migration of school-going children, and the Migration Monitoring Software, has enabled tracking and streamlining of implementation in real time.
- Maharashtra Government's Education guarantee cards (EGCs) fitted with a chip for all students in an attempt to track out-of-school children from migrant families or those without permanent addresses, and increase the enrollment of such children in schools.
- Orissa has initiated seasonal hostels for children of migrant workers that has helped in the continuation of education and prevention of child migration and labour in the state.

Different on-ground challenges emerge in each state which hinder the implementation of the RTE Act. Some scalable strategies that have worked to promote education among migrant children can be customised based on the needs and challenges of different states.

CONVERGENCE FROM BELOW: STATE AND NON STATE ACTORS

[as cited by Jan Swasthya Abhiyan]

CAN (Community Action for Nutrition) marked the convergence of the community at the village level, and the frontline workers and functionaries

at the village, block and district levels, along with civil society participants with the collective aim of reducing child malnutrition. This process was supported by the Tribal Development Department and covered 400 tribal habitations and villages in rural Maharashtra. Using the tools of jansamvad and participatory problem solving, the convergence of various stakeholders with a common cause, and diverse mechanisms to target the same problem, resulted in a mass mobilisation, renewed commitment and an actual marked improvement in household nutrition.

THE 'MUMBAI' MODEL

[as cited by Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies (RCUES) of the All India Institute of Local Self Government (AILLSG)]

As Mumbai saw a rise in COVID19 infections, 24 decentralised 'War Rooms' in the city's municipal wards, each under the helm of the Assistant Municipal Commissioners (AMCs) were created. These 'war rooms' emerged as the centralising hubs that could consolidate information in real time, direct it to the appropriate levels of decision making and respond quickly. Single point helpline number with these dedicated response teams supervised the unfolding situation in the city 24/7. The use of data analytics (COVI-Techs, Mobile Apps, and Geographic Information System – (GIS) and Global Positioning System – (GPS) facilitated the collation of reliable and accurate data, based on which decisions were taken. This 'Mumbai Model' emerged as a successful one at mitigating the onslaught of the COVID -19 virus and has been feted by the NITI Aayog and the Supreme Court as a 'good practice' (AILLSG & UNICEF India, 2021).

PUBLIC PRESSURE AND POLITICAL WILL

[as cited by Jan Swasthya Abhiyan]

As 70 per cent of health services are provided by the private sector and during Covid19 there were significant cases of overcharging which adversely affected Covid widows and families. Jan Swasthya Abhiyan organised Santap Sabhas or 'Anger Assemblies', where women and families who have been victims of overcharging shared their experiences and expressed their anger. This led to a positive meeting with the Health Minister of Maharashtra who asked to audit all these overcharging complaints, and in many cases money of upto INR 80,000 was refunded to the aggrieved families.

5

RECOMMEN- DATIONS

Some areas for addressing these challenges were identified in the key findings of the studies conducted by CPR, AILSG and YUVA with UNICEF. These opportunities and recommendations also emerged from the various attendees participating in the consultation.

- Advocacy for adequate social protection
- Institutionalisation and scaling-up of best practices
- Legal interventions to address exclusion issues
- Development of accessible IEC material
- Life-course approach to social protection
- Rights-based approach to social protection
- Portability of scheme benefits across the country
- Collaboration between government and civil society
- Gender-transformative and shock-responsive social protection systems
- Accessible redressal mechanisms to ensure effective and uniform delivery of services
- Formal recognition and integration of non-state actors
- Decentralised platforms for last mile delivery
- Robust MIS systems and social registries
- Universal social protection policies

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONVERGENCE & STRATEGIES : FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE

The consultation served as a platform to bring together various stakeholders to discuss the scope of convergence in working towards universal social protection, with a specific focus on marginalised groups.

The participants identified three levels of convergence:

- Between civil society and state actors for problem identification and participatory social protection policy formulation
- Between state actors of various levels and departments for effective scheme implementation
- Among civil society representatives to articulate the needs of vulnerable populations, and advocate for systems that ensure last mile connectivity

The consultation set the stage for civil society actors to collectively understand the potential of convergence and collectively imagine some areas of collaboration. Adopting a rights-based lens, the participants also questioned the 'targeted beneficiary approach' indicating that civil society must reform the understanding of a citizen to one who is entitled to their right to social protection thereby defining the narrative to highlight the obligations of the State. The participants also discussed various areas of convergence among civil society actors, based on the principles of equity and non-discrimination, which are indicated as follows.

AREAS OF CONVERGENCE

- Awareness about social protection
- Assistance in making identity documents
- Assistance in enumeration of vulnerable groups
- Accountability/monitoring for effective implementation
- Dialogue between various stakeholders about changing scenarios and needs
- Evidence-based advocacy and policy design
- Legal Intervention to ensure equitable access to social protection
- Organisation and mobilisation of people's demands
- Participatory planning and design - including government & civil society joint-consultations
- People's data generation and sharing using MIS/action research
- Thematic response groups with collective agenda setting

6

THE WAY FORWARD

Through the discussion of the consultation, what prominently emerged are some key focus areas for a robust SP mechanism that factors in different kinds of workers, vulnerable groups, including a focus on intersectionality and longitudinal issues.

- In the current landscape, citizenship determines, to a large extent, people's access to social protection and social security benefits. Hence, there is an urgency to focus on **Universal Social Protection** in order to advance towards Agenda 2030.
- The institutional challenges in delivery mechanisms lower participation and coverage. Future strategies have to focus on supporting **decentralised platforms** for delivering social protection to the last mile.
- The gaps in convergence amongst state departments and civil society stakeholders currently impede progress and reach. These can be addressed through **creation of a platform in Maharashtra** as a first step towards coalescing efforts.

There was a collective interest to come together through a multi-stakeholder platform. Such a platform can be a common voice with shared commitments for a holistic and far reaching Social Protection System. Evidence based studies and activities which were discussed during the consultation by various CSOs show us the critical role civil society can play in programme designing, targeting and last mile delivery.

Another outcome was the need to focus on enabling social protection as part of a basket of rights and entitlements, which is critical toward ensuring long-term resilience of marginalised

and vulnerable populations. In this context, a few directions emerge, including one that the platform can be designed to strategically intervene in a range of thematic areas under the larger umbrella of Social Protection. Within each thematic area, targeted interventions, research and advocacy campaigns can be initiated in order to further the overall thematic agenda.

The future of a platform such as this is wide in its scope, and there is a need for a multi-stakeholder group to meet again to take forward the outcomes of this consultation. The next meeting will discuss further on priorities for an integrated social policy, strategies and ways we can work together to reach our collective goals. The directions that have emerged from the consultation will be taken up collectively and we will keep all interested groups informed and enable wide and inclusive participation.

*Annexure include the agenda for the consultation and the concept note

7

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ABOUT YUVA

Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) is a non-profit development organisation committed to enabling vulnerable groups to access their rights. YUVA encourages the formation of people's collectives that engage in the discourse on development, thereby ensuring self-determined and sustained collective action in communities. This work is complemented with advocacy and policy recommendations. Founded in Mumbai in 1984, currently YUVA operates in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Assam and New Delhi.

At the community-level, through an integrated 360-degree approach, YUVA delivers solutions on issues of housing, livelihood, environment and governance. Through research, YUVA creates knowledge that enhances capacity building. Through partnerships in campaigns, YUVA provides solidarity and builds strong alliances to drive change.

ABOUT UNICEF

UNICEF India is committed in its continued support to the Government in this extraordinary journey of development to reach every child everywhere in India. Our goal is to enable every child born in India to have the best start in life, to thrive and to develop to her or his full potential. To achieve this we use our technical expertise together with partners to tackle the root of several, deeply entrenched structural challenges. We have been present in India for 70 years. UNICEF's key strength lies in our evidence-based technical expertise that informs policy action and implementation, while at the same time building the capacity of partners.

