



World Food  
Programme

SAVING  
LIVES  
CHAN GING  
LIVES

# WFP's Work in Enhancing Sustainable Social Protection in Sri Lanka

2025



## Acknowledgments

This Social Protection booklet was developed by Mathilde Achilli (Programme Policy Officer Social Protection - WFP Sri Lanka) with the support of Rushini Perera (Head of Resilience, Social Protection and Emergency Preparedness & Response - WFP Sri Lanka). Many thanks to colleagues from WFP Sri Lanka for their technical contributions: Gothami Chandrarathne (Programme Policy Officer Social Protection and EPR), Rohini Singarayer (Programme Policy Officer Sustainable Livelihood Development), Manjula Samarasekera (Head of IT and Digital Assistance Services), Jasenthu Padmasiri (Programme Support Officer for Digital Assistance Services), Shreya Mukherjee (Programme Partnerships Officer), Yumna Salman (Operational Information Management and Performance Reporting Officer), Dilka Peiris (Programme Policy Officer Nutrition), Heshani Ranasinghe (Programme Policy Officer Gender and Protection), Harini Fernando (Programme Associate Gender and Protection), Tanya Jansz (Communications Officer) and Carol Taylor (Communications Associate). Many thanks also to Aphitchaya Nguanbanchong (Regional Programme and Policy Officer Social Protection - RB Bangkok), Arniela Renique Vega (Regional Programme and Policy Officer Social Protection - RB Bangkok), Shama Maqbool (Programme Policy Officer Resilience and Food Systems - RB Bangkok) and Clare O'Brien (Senior Adviser Social Protection - Headquarters) for their overall guidance and review. A special thanks to Nagarajah Rasalingam (Communications Assistant) for supporting the designing and editing of the Social Protection booklet.

## Contents

Executive summary .....	2
Country context .....	4
Social Protection Overview.....	6
Social Protection Landscape.....	8
<b>WFP's Corporate Strategy for Support to Social Protection .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>WFP's Work in Enhancing Sustainable Social Protection in Sri Lanka .....</b>	<b>14</b>
 Enhancing Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) .....	16
 Improving the Food Security and Nutritional Impact of Social Protection Systems.....	22
 Building the Resilience of People and Systems through Social Protection.....	28
 Advancing Digital Social Protection.....	34
<b>Partnership Engagements .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Annex: WFP Assurance Framework.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Acronyms .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Photo Credits.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>47</b>

# Executive summary

The objective of this booklet is to shed light on the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Sri Lanka's contributions in strengthening and enhancing sustainable social protection systems in the country. It mainly targets stakeholders and government agencies interested to know about WFP's engagement and offer in the domain of social protection. Government agencies engaged in social protection activities, namely the Welfare Benefit Board, the Department of Samurdhi Development, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, are a key focus of engagement efforts. The booklet also extends its focus to the broader humanitarian and development community including International Financial Institutions, international, local non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, embassies and the UN Resident Coordinator.

Food and nutrition insecurity are improving in Sri Lanka compared to elevated levels in 2022; however, it remains a serious challenge, with an estimated 16 percent of the population experiencing moderate acute and food insecurity in late 2024. This is most severe among women, children, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.<sup>1</sup>

A landmark for Sri Lanka's advancements in social protection, was the adoption of the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) by the Government in August 2024. The Policy sets out the objective to build an integrated, equitable and efficient system that provides protection to all citizens when they need it throughout their lives and that can respond to shocks and mitigate their socioeconomic impacts. The Government is drafting the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) to operationalise the policy and close protection gaps.

WFP has developed a global social protection strategy, which outlines its commitment in the sector of social protection. The strategy provides a structured framework to governments and donors on WFP's offer in strengthening national social protection systems. In Sri Lanka, WFP applies this strategy to guide its daily social protection activities, ensuring alignment with global principles while addressing local needs.

**Central to WFP's approach are two priorities:**

- 1 Social protection that helps people meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs and;
- 2 Social protection that helps people manage risks and shocks.

In practice WFP provides technical assistance and advice to governments. Sometimes WFP delivers on behalf of governments and performs complementary actions (e.g., Cash

Plus programmes).

Based on national needs and priorities, WFP Sri Lanka has been engaging with the Government in the areas of social protection programme features, system architecture, knowledge and learning. Through support to government-led systems and programmes (such as Thripasha Company Limited, School Meal programmes, the Aswesuma social assistance and Samurdhi Empowerment and livelihood programmes), WFP works as an enabler to strengthen national social protection systems and capacities through the following four key areas of engagement:

- ▶ Enhancing shock-responsive social protection.
- ▶ Improving the food security and nutritional impact of social protection systems.
- ▶ Building the resilience of people and systems through social protection.
- ▶ Advancing digital social protection systems.

This booklet is designed to allow readers to explore each section independently, according to their interest. It begins with an overview of the country context, followed by key concepts and definitions of social protection. Next, it delves into Sri Lanka's social protection landscape, highlighting key policies, governance, programmes, and actors. The booklet then transitions to WFP's social protection strategy, outlining its offer. Finally, it explores WFP Sri Lanka's work in enhancing sustainable social protection systems across its four key areas of engagement, with the last part highlighting key partnership engagements.

# Country context

Sri Lanka has made notable progress in its journey towards addressing the challenges of food insecurity and malnutrition, while enhancing shock-responsive social protection to better support vulnerable communities in crisis. Additionally, efforts have focused on strengthening the resilience of national systems and vulnerable communities' capacities to anticipate, prepare for and better manage shocks and stressors. These efforts reflect the country's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (namely SDG 1 to end poverty and SDG 2 on zero hunger), and thereby securing a more stable and prosperous future for all its citizens.<sup>2</sup>

However, despite these positive developments, Sri Lanka continues to face

challenges that require ongoing attention and intervention. The country's progress was hampered by several events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic crisis in 2022 – the worst in decades – which affected vast swathes of the population, particularly the poor and marginalized communities. Compounding these difficulties, Sri Lanka is prone to multiple disasters, such as floods, droughts, and landslides, which further disrupt the livelihoods and intensify the hardships of its population, exacerbating the challenges faced by vulnerable groups. The poverty rate in Sri Lanka has nearly doubled in the span of one year, rising to 25.6% in 2022 compared to 13.1% in 2021 (US\$3.65 per capita 2017 PPP), and is projected to remain above 25 percent in the next few years.<sup>3</sup>

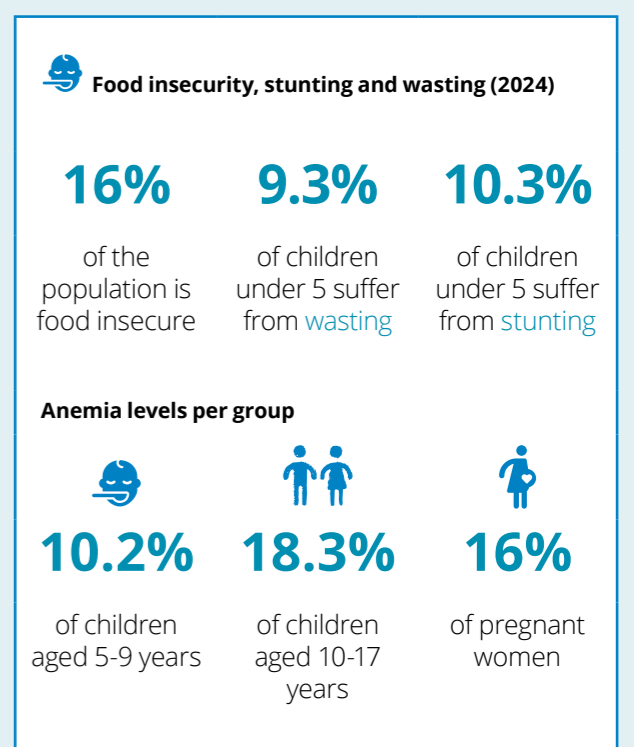


## FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

Food and nutrition insecurity are improving compared to elevated levels in 2022; however, it remains a challenge for Sri Lanka. The household food security assessment in 2024<sup>1</sup> reported 16 percent of the population as food-insecure, which was an improvement from 28 percent in 2022 and 24 percent late 2023.<sup>4</sup> Although fewer households are resorting to coping strategies, food consumption levels remain concerning.

According to the 2024 figures from the Family Health Bureau, undernutrition, manifested as stunting and wasting, continues to affect a considerable portion of young children, while micronutrient deficiencies remain prevalent.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Preliminary findings from the latest household food security assessment 2024 (to be published)

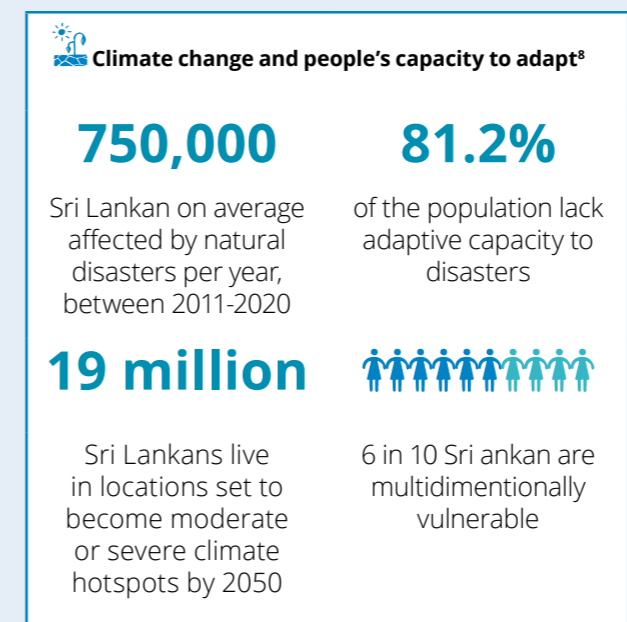


## COUNTRY VULNERABILITY TO SHOCKS

Being a tropical island in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka has consistently been placed among the top ten countries at risk of

extreme weather events by the Global Climate Risk Index.<sup>6</sup> Sri Lanka is highly vulnerable to climate change, and the negative effects of rising temperatures, extreme weather events and increasing sea levels are manifold. In the past 30 years, floods have affected more than 10 million people in Sri Lanka. Drought is a major challenge for livelihoods and food security affecting nearly 8 million people between 2008-2018.

Climate change directly affects food systems and threatens to worsen the food security situation by affecting food and water availability and reducing agricultural output, including essential staples such as rice.<sup>7</sup>



# Social Protection Overview

## WHAT IS SOCIAL PROTECTION?

A common interagency definition describes social protection as the “policies and programmes aimed at preventing, and protecting people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups” (SPIAC-B, 2019).<sup>9</sup> Social protection is therefore a policy tool for preventing and protecting people from falling into poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion, and supporting individuals and households to manage and strengthen their resilience to shocks and stressors. Evidence shows that social protection can contribute to ensure food security, improve nutritional outcomes, build human capital and resilience.

## IS SOCIAL PROTECTION A HUMAN RIGHT?

Yes, social protection is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948), Article 48. This means that governments have an obligation under international human rights law to guarantee a minimum level of social protection for all.<sup>10</sup>

## WHAT IS UNIVERSAL SOCIAL PROTECTION?

Universal social protection refers to social protection systems that ensure everyone has access to comprehensive, adequate and sustainable protection over their life course, and can access benefits when needed (ILO, 2024, p. 6).<sup>11</sup> This protection can be provided through a mix of benefits and schemes, including through social insurance, tax-funded social benefits, social assistance services, and other schemes guaranteeing

basic income security and access to essential services. In an environment still marked by income instability and widespread multidimensional vulnerabilities, social protection assumes a pivotal role to reduce and prevent poverty and invest in human capabilities.

## HOW DOES SOCIAL PROTECTION ENHANCE FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION?

Social protection can enhance the four pillars of food security and nutrition: availability, access, utilization and stability. Social protection directly improves access to food by enhancing financial capacities and ensures stability by providing food during shocks. However, food availability (the sufficient supply of food) and utilization (access to a nutritious diet, clean water, sanitation, and health care) are less inherently linked to social protection and require special attention during programme design and implementation. Recently, the concept of food security has also evolved to recognize the central role of agency, which allows individuals to make independent choices, and sustainability, ensuring that the food needs of the present generation do not compromise those of future generations.<sup>12</sup>

## HOW DOES SOCIAL PROTECTION ADDRESS RISKS AND SHOCKS?

Social protection interventions are usually designed to support households experiencing shocks as a result of life cycle events such as loss of jobs, illness or death (idiosyncratic shocks). However, in a context of climate change and economic fluctuations, to name a few stressors, large portions of

the population can become more vulnerable to risks and covariate shocks. Governments thus need to adapt their routine social protection programmes and systems to cope with changes in context and demand following large-scale shocks. The concept of shock-responsive social protection allows Governments to adapt their existing programmes, systems, plans and partnerships, in advance of a shock (ex-ante), or by supporting households once a shock has occurred (ex-post). Leveraging existing social protection systems can therefore reduce the impact of shocks and thereby increase individuals’ resilience.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL ASSISTANCE?

Social assistance programmes are non-contributory and provide financial or in-kind aid. They ensure the basic needs of vulnerable populations are met, making them well-suited to rapid financial aid. This aligns with WFP’s mandate on food security and supporting governments in scaling up and adapting programmes for effective, timely responses.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL INSURANCE?

Social insurance protects against life-course and work-related contingencies, such as maternity, old age, unemployment, or sickness, and is typically funded by worker and employer contributions.



# Social Protection Landscape

This section outlines Sri Lanka's policy framework for social protection, government priorities, key social protection schemes and the main stakeholders of Sri Lanka's social protection landscape that WFP engages with.

## NATIONAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION

The Sri Lankan Government launched its first National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) in August 2024, a landmark milestone for the country in introducing a regulatory legal framework to guide the development of its social protection system. The policy is designed to establish a unified approach to social protection, integrating various programmes and services that target vulnerable populations, including the poor, elderly, persons with disabilities, children, and women. The policy focuses on equity, sustainability and on increasing people's resilience to economic crises and poverty.<sup>13</sup> The NSPP sets out to provide a long-term and integrated vision of the social protection system and will be accompanied by the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) to provide strategic guidance to close protection gaps and ensures policy coherence (strategy still being drafted).

## GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

The introduction of the NSPP will enable alignment, enhance coordination, and harmonization of social protection programmes and systems, promoting an integrated social protection systems approach.

Government priorities for social protection established through the NSPPs aim at building a comprehensive and efficient social protection system in Sri Lanka, and include:

- ▶ **Social assistance** for vulnerable groups with no other means of adequate support;
- ▶ **Social care** covering services to help people who are unable to care for themselves;
- ▶ **Social insurance** covering employment related publicly provided or mandated insurance against old age, disability, death as well as health and economic shocks;
- ▶ **Labour market and productive inclusion programmes** including both passive and active interventions and contribute to the decent work agenda.



## SRI LANKA'S SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES

The Government invests 4.7 percent<sup>1</sup> of its Gross Domestic Production (GDP) on social protection (including healthcare) against 11.8 percent at the Asia and Pacific regional level. 41.3 percent of the population is covered by at least one social protection programme (excluding healthcare), which remains lower compared to the regional average (53.6 percent).<sup>14</sup>

Sri Lanka has a wide range of social protection programmes, including social assistance, social insurance, and labour market interventions. This booklet focuses on a selection of social assistance programmes where WFP plays an active role, including the Aswesuma Welfare Benefit Payment Scheme, the Samurdhi Livelihood Empowerment Programme, the former Samurdhi Subsidy Programme, the National School Meals Programme and Thriposha Company Limited (see box 1 for a brief overview of key social assistance and insurance schemes to give context to the broader social protection landscape).

## KEY ACTORS

### Government

The Department of National Planning (NPD) of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, is a key actor in the coordination of the social protection landscape, having led the development of the NSPP and currently drafting the NSPS.

The Government has relied on the Samurdhi Subsidy Programme and workforce, through the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD) (Ministry of Rural Development, Social

Security and Community Empowerment), to scale up provisions during large scale shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Since July 2023, the social protection entitlement transitioned to the Aswesuma Welfare Benefit Payment Scheme, coordinated by the Welfare Benefit Board (WBB) (Ministry of Finance, Planning & Economic Development). The Samurdhi and Aswesuma programmes coexist: while WBB handles the new social assistance cash programme, DSD supports the socio-economic and livelihood empowerment of the Aswesuma households.

National Disaster Management agencies, led by the Disaster Management Division of the Ministry of Defence, are well-established in Sri Lanka and can therefore play a key role in integrating social protection and disaster management sectors for more effective preparedness and response to shocks and emergencies. Key actors include: Disaster Management Centre (DMC), the Department of Meteorology (DOM), the National Disaster Relief Services Center (NDRSC) and the National Building Research Organization (NBRO).

The Ministry of Education leads the National School Meal Programme (NSMP), ensuring its implementation in schools to address child hunger and improve education outcomes. The Ministry of Health governs the Sri Lanka Thriposha Company Limited programme and provides technical support to both programmes (NSMP and Thriposha), focusing on nutritional standards and effective delivery mechanisms.

<sup>1</sup> Social expenditure excluding healthcare in Sri Lanka covers 2.8 percent against 8 percent in Asia and the Pacific (ILO, 2024)

## International Financial Organizations (IFIs) and development partners

The Asian Development Bank and the World Bank supported the Government in strengthening social protection through investments. They have been assisting the government in improving its social protection landscape, particularly in the areas of agriculture, climate resilience and nutrition. In recent years, they have supported the development of a single registry of citizens, the Integrated Welfare Benefit Management System (IWMS) and supported the funding of cash transfers administered by the Welfare Benefit Board. They are also supporting the livelihood components managed by DSD, targeting Aswesuma beneficiaries under the Samurdhi Livelihood Empowerment

pilot programme.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) prioritizes fostering international monetary cooperation, promoting trade and economic growth, ensuring financial stability to support global prosperity. The IMF provided the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) to help Sri Lanka recover from its 2022 economic crisis. Under the EFF conditions, the Government has committed to monitoring and enhancing key social safety net programmes.

The rest of the development community, including international and local non-government and united nations organizations (ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF etc.), are committed to supporting the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in ensuring universal and inclusive social protection.

against food insecurity among children, the intervention plays a critical role in the country's broader social protection and nutrition strategies.

- ▶ **National Nutrition Supplementary Feeding Programme (Thripasha Company Limited):** Thripasha is a nutrient-rich supplementary blended food, distributed free of charge by the Government to pregnant and breastfeeding women and undernourished children, to improve their nutritional status. It is made from a blend of maize, soy, milk powder, and a mix of essential vitamins and minerals.

In addition, there are other social assistance programmes that fall under different ministries:

- 1 Senior Citizen's allowance targets low-income individuals over 70 years.
- 2 Civil Service Pension for public servants ('Pay as You Go' scheme).
- 3 Disability allowance supporting persons with disabilities.
- 4 Chronic Illness allowances for chronic kidney patients.
- 5 Pregnant Mothers voucher allowance.
- 6 Assistance programmes from the Provincial Councils
- 7 In-kind post-disaster assistance provides by National Disaster Relief Services Center (NDRSC) and the Disaster Management Center (DMC)<sup>17</sup>

## Box 1 Main Social Protection Schemes in Sri Lanka

### Social Assistance (tax-financed, non-contributory)

- ▶ **Aswesuma Welfare Benefit Payment Scheme:** covers 2.4 million families facing economic hardship (around one tenth of the population) with monthly cash transfers.<sup>15</sup> It was introduced by the Government in 2023 as a successor to the Samurdhi Subsidy Programme. The Aswesuma Welfare Benefit Payment Programme was established to ensure more effective and inclusive support for vulnerable populations (eg, digitize beneficiary lists, exit those who are not eligible, and differentiate benefits based on vulnerability level).<sup>16</sup>

- ▶ **Samurdhi Livelihood Empowerment Programme:** targeting the Aswesuma beneficiaries, the livelihood empowerment model supports to lift households out of poverty into sustainable livelihoods through social, financial, livelihood, psychological, coaching and mentoring empowerment programmes.
- ▶ **National School Meals Programme (NSMP):** provides daily nutritious meals to approximately 1.5 million school children. Implemented by the Government, the programme aims to enhance child nutrition, improve school attendance, and support learning outcomes. By serving as a safety net

### Social Insurance (contributory)

Apart from the senior citizen's allowance and civil service pensions, classified nationally as social assistance, the remainder of social insurance programmes cover a small share of those working in the formal sector<sup>18</sup>:

- ▶ Employee Provident Fund.
- ▶ Employees' Trust Fund.
- ▶ Farmer's Pension and Social Security Benefit Scheme.
- ▶ Fishermen's Pensions and Social Security Benefit.
- ▶ Self-Employed Persons Pension Scheme.

The vision of social protection set out in the National Social Protection Policy emphasises the expansion of insurance-based approaches and social security as the current pension system arrangement have insufficient coverage and adequacy to cover the ageing population.<sup>19</sup>



# WFP's Corporate Strategy for Support to Social Protection

WFP's corporate strategy for support to Social Protection outlines two strategic priorities for WFP's engagement in social protection<sup>20</sup>:

## 1 Social Protection that helps people meet their food security, nutrition and associated basic needs:

Under this priority, WFP supports initiatives that ensure people have access to adequate, nutritious, and safe food throughout their lives. This includes supporting food security-specific or nutrition-specific programmes, integrating food security and nutrition approaches in social protection, and assist programmes that aim to reduce multidimensional poverty more broadly in contexts where food insecurity and malnutrition are a major concern.

To implement these two priorities, WFP supports the design and delivery of nationally led social protection systems, providing strategic and technical advice and/or implementing programmes on governments' behalf. In addition, many of WFP's directly implemented activities contain elements that mirror those of national social protection systems, creating opportunities to explore complementarities between WFP's interventions and those of national partners.

### WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF WORK OF WFP GLOBALLY?

WFP supports all aspects of national social protection systems including an enabling environment that steers the sector (system architecture), the programmes that deliver benefits and services (programme features) (see figure 1), and cross-cutting processes of evidence generation, knowledge, learning and monitoring. More specifically:

- ▶ WFP supports the enabling environment and platforms that facilitate programme delivery

## 2 Social Protection that helps people to manage risks and shocks:

Under this priority WFP works with governments on enhancing social protection systems to help people prepare for, respond to and recover from shocks, as well as build their longer-term resilience. WFP pursues actions that strengthen the contribution of social protection to building people's resilience to shocks and stressors, and including situations of disruption, conflict and protracted crisis, with the aim of reducing the negative impact of these events.

systemwide, providing strategic and technical advice to strengthen policies and legislation, institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms, and systems and processes for planning and financing.

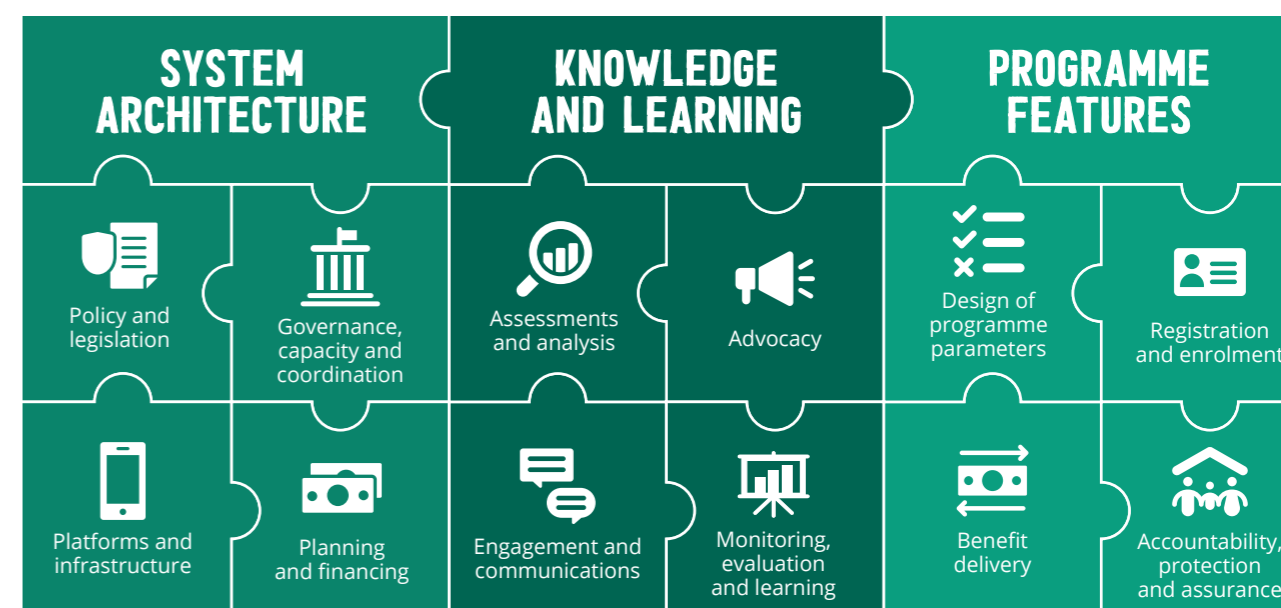
- ▶ WFP supports the design and/or delivery of specific social protection programmes, such as cash and in-kind assistance programmes, including school meals, and access to complementary services such as health and nutrition. This includes support to improve the effectiveness,

efficiency and shock-responsiveness of targeting and registration processes, delivery mechanisms and grievance redress systems in line with programme objectives.

- ▶ WFP facilitates evidence-based decision-making through innovative data analysis approaches, ranging from

food security, socio-economic and climate risk assessments to in-depth social protection analysis, and supports advocacy strategies to highlight the importance of social protection in addressing multidimensional vulnerability including in the face of increasing climate and weather related risks and shocks.

Figure 1 WFP Social Protection Building Blocks



### WHAT ARE WFP'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES IN ADVANCING SOCIAL PROTECTION GLOBALLY?

- ▶ **Field presence:** WFP's global frontline presence in remote locations, fragile and conflict -affected areas enables support in establishing and strengthening social protection, even in the absence of others.
- ▶ **Operational experience:** WFP's expertise in delivering and scaling food and cash assistance makes it an ideal partner for designing and implementing effective systems and programmes.
- ▶ **Analytical capabilities:** WFP's analytical expertise helps map, identify,

and target those most in need of social protection.

- ▶ **Food security and nutrition expertise:** WFP supports governments in integrating nutrition goals into social protection policies and designing food- and cash-based assistance for better nutritional impact.
- ▶ **Humanitarian-development-peace nexus:** WFP is committed to strengthening resilience and peace while achieving core development and humanitarian outcomes.





## WFP's Work in Enhancing Sustainable Social Protection in Sri Lanka

Supporting social protection is fundamental to WFP's contribution to Zero Hunger. WFP Sri Lanka is engaged to (1) build and strengthen various components of national social protection systems, (2) support the quantity and quality of national social protection programming and, (3) strengthen partnerships and evidence on social protection.<sup>21</sup> Throughout these engagements, WFP aims to improve the conditions of those living in or at risk of food insecurity and malnutrition, ensuring that the needs of women and other vulnerable groups are met. WFP enhances sustainable social protection through the following areas of engagement:



Shock-Responsive Social Protection



Resilience Building through Social Protection



Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection



Digital Social Protection Systems



## Why is Shock-Responsive Social Protection important for Sri Lanka?

Climate change is transforming and intensifying the risks confronted by individuals and households. Social protection interventions are usually designed to support households experiencing shocks as a result of life cycle events such as loss of jobs, illness or death (idiosyncratic shocks). However, in a context of climate change and economic fluctuations, to name a few stressors, large portions of the population can become more vulnerable to risks (covariate shocks). Governments thus need to adapt their routine social protection programmes and systems to cope with changes in context and demand following large-scale shocks. The concept of shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) encompasses the ability of Governments to introduce or adapt programmes, systems, plans and partnerships, in advance of a shock, or by supporting households once a shock has occurred.<sup>22</sup>

Aligned with the National Social Protection Policy's (NSPP) focus on strengthening delivery mechanisms and improving coordination, and the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP), WFP is enhancing social protection systems to better anticipate and respond to large-scale shocks. To achieve this, it is important to support efforts in integrating social protection with disaster risk management (DRM). The rationale in integrating the two sectors is that social protection can build upon mechanisms run under the DRM framework, enabling more efficient and comprehensive preparedness and response (see box 2). For instance, early warning systems (part of DRM) have the potential to provide alerts of hazards which can in turn trigger cash to social protection beneficiaries. This approach, though not yet implemented can help mitigate a hazard that could transform into a disaster.

Social protection can be instrumental in scaling up climate action and help women, people with disabilities and other groups manage and adapt to climate change impacts. By supporting the integration of social protection programming with disaster preparedness & response, climate information systems, early warning mechanisms and Anticipatory Action (AA), WFP aims to enhance resilience and promote adaptation strategies.



**Enhancing shock-responsive social protection**



## WHAT IS WFP DOING IN SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION?

WFP promotes shock-responsive social protection, fostering preparedness and responses by:

**Enhancing coordination between the social protection and disaster risk management stakeholders**



**Integrating anticipatory action work to social protection in a more systematic way, and implementing programmes that can be scaled by the government and development partners**



**Building the capacities of governments on SRSP and providing technical support**



**Generating evidence to demonstrate effective policy and programmes' best practices and lessons learnt**



Shock-Responsive Social Protection

## UNDER SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION, WFP IMPLEMENTS THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

- ▶ **WFP supports the Government of Sri Lanka to improve adequacy of its social protection system in times of crisis.** During the 2022 economic crisis, WFP and FAO conducted the Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission, to inform the food insecure areas. Based on this study, WFP supported the GoSL to expand its social protection programmes in highly food insecure areas by channeling humanitarian assistance top-ups to the Samurdhi programme (see case study 1).
- ▶ **WFP offers its expertise in programme design and analysis.** Since the introduction of the Aswesuma programme in July 2023, WFP has supported the GoSL in conducting assessments to analyse how social registry criteria align with food security and climate indicators. The primary goal of this assessment is to explore how the current social registry can be leveraged during times of crises to be more comprehensive in reaching food insecure and climate vulnerable populations.
- ▶ **WFP continues to support the Government as it develops its social protection strategy.** To advance on the GoSL's requests for support, WFP, alongside the UN social

protection group, provided policy guidance and technical inputs to the draft National Social Protection Policy, highlighting the potential of social protection systems in responding to shocks more efficiently. WFP is eager to support the development of the National Social Protection Strategy, currently being drafted, and of future roadmap, framework and SOPs to inform SRSP in the country.

- ▶ **WFP provides platforms to enhance inter-agency and stakeholder coordination.** As co-chair of the Anticipatory Action Technical Working Group, WFP leverages this strategic platform to enhance the knowledge and initiatives surrounding anticipatory action in the country and forge linkages between key national actors involved in disaster management and social protection sectors, while promoting social protection as a key instrument for large-scale climate risk management.
- ▶ **WFP contributes in generating evidence to inform Sri Lanka's SRSP journey and to advocate for the inclusion of social protection systems during shocks.** WFP is conducting a scoping study to assess the social protection system's shock-responsive capacity to anticipate, prepare for and respond to emergencies. The study aims to understand the current gaps for an efficient response and how to better integrate social protection with disaster risk management.





## CASE STUDY 1 WFP EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

In 2022, WFP supported the Government in assisting those affected by Sri Lanka's economic crisis, providing cash assistance to 167,000 beneficiaries (half of which were women) through the national social assistance programme Samurdhi. Leveraging its partnership with the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), WFP and DSD swiftly developed and implemented Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to channel funds directly through national systems to those in need across seven districts.

This collaboration, built on previous joint efforts with DSD, enabled WFP to scale up the programme, covering 35% of the total cash assistance financed as part of WFP's overall emergency response. The adaptation and deployment of resources ensured that the most vulnerable populations were reached promptly when they most needed support.

The programme not only met immediate needs but also strengthened nationally owned systems to be more resilient. Moving forward, WFP aims to build on this foundation by fostering stronger coordination between the social protection and disaster management sectors. This involves creating more cohesive strategies and plans, improving information-sharing mechanisms, and aligning objectives to deliver a comprehensive and unified response to crises. By doing so, WFP seeks to ensure that these systems not only operate more effectively but also contribute to enhanced resilience at the national and community levels.



## Box 2 Why should we integrate SP and DRM frameworks?

Disaster Risk Management represents the policies and strategies that prevent, reduce and manage risks to reduce the likelihood of a disaster occurring. DRM also improves coping abilities when a shock hits.

Social protection can contribute to all disaster risk management actions by increasing the capacity to absorb shocks and reducing the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards. Various programmes, projects and activities undertaken under each of the components of disaster risk management can be linked to most social protection programmes (e.g., Early warning can trigger a social assistance scheme to transfer funds to communities living in disaster prone areas; Risk assessments and vulnerability assessments, can help identify locations and populations likely to be in greatest need of assistance etc..).

“ I was so relieved when I was informed of the cash I will be receiving, knowing I could buy food and medicine for my husband who is disabled, and that I don't have to worry for the next months. ”

**M Podi Manika**  
Samurdhi Beneficiary





## Why is Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection important for Sri Lanka?

Malnutrition remains a significant barrier to human and socio-economic development, affecting millions worldwide. The importance of a nutrition-sensitive programme approach lies in its ability to link food security and nutrition with broader social protection measures, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive not only the financial support they need but also the nutritional guidance and resources necessary for healthy lives.

WFP's vision on nutrition-sensitive social protection focuses on integrating nutrition objectives into social protection systems to improve food security and tackle malnutrition. Social protection interventions provide a critical platform to address the underlying causes of malnutrition, including poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to essential services. By embedding nutrition goals into social protection policies and programmes, WFP aims to enhance the nutritional outcomes of populations identified as vulnerable through social protection platforms.<sup>23</sup>

Implementing nutrition-sensitive social protection allows WFP to tackle food insecurity and malnutrition more effectively while promoting resilience and improving livelihoods. This integrated approach is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Zero Hunger (SDG 2). Social protection initiatives can improve food security and nutrition over time, which are intrinsic to social protection (i.e., increase people's income to buy nutritious food and ensure food security in the event of a shock). These approaches ensure that social protection systems do more than just provide immediate relief — they become a long-term solution for sustainable development.



**Improving the food security and nutritional impact of social protection systems**



## WHAT IS WFP DOING IN NUTRITION-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION?

WFP supports improving food security and the nutritional impact of social protection interventions by:

**Integrating nutrition-specific indicators into social registries, ensuring social protection platforms are reaching the nutritionally vulnerable, and may therefore be leveraged for additional nutrition (cash/in-kind) support**



**Prioritizing the integration of nutrition-sensitive interventions within social protection programmes, by enhancing local food systems through smallholder farmers to increase local production of quality maize for Thripasha, and investing in home grown school feeding programmes**



**Incorporating Social Behavioural Change (SBC) complementary initiatives to enhance nutritional awareness of food value chains (eg, healthy practices) at community level**



## UNDER NUTRITION SPECIFIC AND TARGETED SOCIAL PROTECTION, WFP IMPLEMENTS THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

▶ **WFP focuses on the inclusion of nutrition-related goals within national social protection programmes and more broadly into strategies.** In support of the Government's mission to build resilient food systems, WFP has historically supported the government in sustaining the national school meal programme, reaching 1.5 million children by procuring nutrient-dense foods like iron-fortified rice and lentils. Social protection can therefore be a

vehicle to tackle the complex issue of malnutrition and build sustainable food systems that encourage healthy diets, improving nutritional outcomes.

▶ **WFP promotes social protection as a delivery channel for large-scale food fortification.** During WFP's emergency response, WFP provided assistance through the national Thripasha programme (provision of fortified food to mother and children under five) and scale up

the provision of fortified rice to school meals. Nutrition was placed as a direct objective of the programme, enhancing the nutritional quality of beneficiaries' diets while addressing micronutrient deficiencies.

▶ **WFP aims to provide supplementary benefits to meet nutritional needs, identifying and supporting populations most at risk of malnutrition.** Through the Cost of Diet tool, WFP measures the affordability of nutritious diets and models programmes accordingly. The CoD estimates the lowest possible cost of a diet that meets all nutritional needs for a typical family, using local food prices, availability, and nutrient content.

▶ **WFP supports food systems through sustainable value chains and community engagement.** To enhance a sustainable value chain of maize production procured for the Thripasha Company Limited programme, WFP supported smallholder farmers in the production of quality maize, through maize farming trainings, infrastructure and assets. In addition, capacity strengthening

trainings were provided to the National Food Promotion Board of the Ministry of Agriculture to implement and sustain rice fortification programmes, focusing on supplying fortified food to national social protection initiatives such as the school meal programme.

▶ **WFP promotes and implements the home-grown school feeding model, where meals are sourced from local school meal suppliers such as smallholder farmers.** WFP supports them with agricultural supplies, through, for example, resources to expand their micro-level farming, technical trainings to meet production standards, market support assessments, and financial management trainings. In addition, all meal suppliers received a Social Behaviour Communication training on good nutrition and diets. Sensitizing meal suppliers on nutrition at the production level, allows to have multiplier effects on school children's consumption. Ensuring school meals are enriched with nutritional intake, such as vegetables and eggs, has been proven to have long-term effects on cognitive development, health and educational outcomes.<sup>24</sup>





## CASE STUDY 2 HOME-GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING

In 2020, WFP launched its Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) project, augmenting its longstanding support for the national school meals programme, one of the largest social safety nets in the country

Fluctuating food prices mean that school meal providers often face difficulties in procuring food items for the meals within the allotted budget. This was aggravated during the economic crisis, when rising food prices left school meal providers unable to sustain their business, causing a breakdown in the school feeding programme.

The project overcomes this problem by providing smallholder farmers with the tools and other resources needed to grow food and rear poultry for eggs for the school meals. By integrating smallholder farmers within the national school meal programme system, their livelihoods are strengthened while schools are assured of an uninterrupted supply of meals. This model helps improve child nutrition, stimulates the production of nutritious food, and boosts local economies.

Impact:

- ▶ **Empowering communities:** HGSF strengthens local food systems by economically empowering caterers, helping them to shift out of poverty and enhancing the nutritional quality of the school meals. Its biggest benefit is that it strengthens the sustainability of the school meal programme ensuring that children receive fresh, diverse and healthy food in school.



- ▶ **Transformative power for women:** The project is a catalyst in empowering women in food systems. By supporting smallholders and school meal providers, primarily women from economically disadvantaged communities, the initiative promotes their financial independence. It also enables them to contribute actively to building a self-sustaining system that enhances food security for children and the broader community.

“When I first started as a school meal provider, there were many times when I felt like giving up. one problem was high food prices.

I was enrolled in WFP's Home Grown School Feeding project. I now **cook the school meals using my own produce** and I am able to **sell the surplus to earn an additional income.**”

**Nilani Jayarathne**  
School Meal Provider





## Why is Resilience Building important for Sri Lanka?

WFP invests in interventions that strengthen the resilience of vulnerable people and systems, recognizing resilience as the outcome of interconnected activities that collectively support food security and sustainable development. Building resilience is essential for individuals, households, communities and systems facing frequent covariate shocks and stressors, such as natural disasters, economic crises, and climate change. Hence, WFP understands resilience as: “the capacity to provide enough, safe, and affordable food and healthy diets to all – even in the face of structural vulnerabilities, shocks and stressors”.<sup>25</sup>

A resilience-building approach tries to build people’s assets and capabilities enabling them to cope with shocks, sustain themselves and retain their productive assets without further falling into poverty. In addition, resilience building also means to enhance systems’ resilience to avoid any disruptions caused by shocks (e.g., food systems). Thus, enhancing resilience requires investments in different types of support at different levels. On one hand, social assistance and social insurance, such as cash transfers or insurance mechanisms, can help build individuals material and immaterial assets and capitals (e.g., housing, assets, and human capital such as education) fostering peoples’ resilience. On the other hand, systems such as social protection, disaster risk management, and food systems rely on integrated and coordinated approaches, alongside investments to foster systems’ resilience.

WFP is engaged in enhancing the resilience of food systems through social protection interventions. By investing in the resilience of both people and systems, WFP aims at building long-term resilience against food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition, and reach “Zero hunger” SDG 2.

**Building the resilience of people and systems through social protection**





## WHAT IS WFP DOING IN BUILDING THE RESILIENCE OF PEOPLE AND SYSTEMS THROUGH SOCIAL PROTECTION?

WFP is eager to maximize synergies between social protection interventions and other complementary interventions for resilience gains by:

**Implementing sustainable livelihoods and empowerment programmes that build community-level capacities and graduate people out of poverty through integrated resilience programmes that enhance their assets and capital**



**Conducting complementary actions to cash programmes through Social Behavioural Change (SBC) campaigns promoting nutrition, gender equality, effective cash management, among others**



**Integrating social protection and food systems interventions, like Home Grown School Feeding and voucher schemes, to meet nutritional needs, boost local agricultural markets, and enhance communities' ability to withstand future shocks**



**Enhancing the integration and coordination of social protection and disaster management for reliable delivery of regular assistance during shocks**



## UNDER RESILIENCE BUILDING, WFP IMPLEMENTS THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

- ▶ **WFP builds the resilience of people to enhance their assets and capital.** WFP programmes such as the Joint Food Security Initiative provided cash assistance to vulnerable individuals affected by the economic crisis alongside raising their awareness on nutrition, gender, cash management, thereby simultaneously building their financial inclusion and social capital. The micro-retailer empowerment programme (see case study 3), targeting women, not only empowered them in building their social capital but also directly engaged them in productive activities at the community level. The R5n project built the resilience of farmers through asset creation (e.g., farm ponds, agro-wells for agricultural activities during dry season), training and livelihoods diversification. The school meals programmes contributed to building the human capital of children by increasing school attendance, consumption of nutritious food, which in turn enhance concentration and better cognitive developments. Thus, social protection plays a crucial role in providing targeted support that enhances the resilience of populations.
- ▶ **WFP enhances system integration for a holistic approach in building resilience.** As mentioned in the section on shock responsive social protection, integrating social protection with early warning systems, anticipatory action, and climate services, enhances preparedness and response capabilities. Through the study on strengthening the linkages

between social registries and climate risk data, climate information was overlaid with the Aswesuma social registry to identify disaster risk hotspots with the most vulnerable people. In addition, one of the goals of the scoping study on shock responsive social protection aims to identify which early warning mechanisms can be leveraged and integrated to social protection programmes. Both studies aim to inform the integration of social protection with climate, anticipatory action to enhance system resilience.

- ▶ **WFP promotes resilience building of food systems to effectively respond to food insecurity and malnutrition.** WFP implements interventions to make food systems more resilient, ensuring a reliable food supply that adequately meets demand at all times, even when under stress. For instance, beyond improving nutrition and attendance for school children, the Home-Grown School Feeding programme empowers the entire community, especially rural women, helping them break the cycle of poverty and malnutrition as contributors to the production of food/crops while building local community ownership for the sustainable continuation of the National School Meal Programme. Likewise, the micro-retailer empowerment voucher programme triggered both the demand and supply of nutritious products in the local market, acting as a catalyser of food systems with a transformative impact on the community.



### CASE STUDY 3 MICRO-RETAILER EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME

The micro retailer empowerment programme of WFP, contributed to building resilience of households and micro-retailers to shocks and stressors. Through the pilot programme, WFP provided electronic vouchers to 9,200 individuals supported by the Samurdhi programme to help them meet their essential needs. Additionally, the initiative strengthened the capacity of 25 small retail businesses, mostly run by women who were also recipients of social protection. The programme provided training on digital devices and apps, as well as cash, business, food and inventory management. Each voucher also generated an 8% return for micro-retailers.

The post distribution monitoring evaluation found that 96% of micro-retailers' income increased as a result of the project and 92% were able to use the profits to purchase goods for the next procurement round. 95% of Samurdhi beneficiaries used their voucher to purchase food items, highlighting the essential role of the voucher programme in meeting their basic needs. The programme not only contributed to building resilience of people but also of systems and was therefore a catalyst for food system transformation with multiplier effect on the community:

- ▶ Empowered SMEs with livelihood opportunities.
- ▶ Connected rural supply chains and food value chains (small holder farmers, village retailers, and social protection beneficiaries).
- ▶ Enhanced food and nutrition outcomes for the most vulnerable.



“ Through this project, my customer base has expanded to people from the neighbouring villages, and **I am finally earning a profit. I also received a wealth of knowledge on business management.** This support has been a huge source of strength to me.”

**N Hiruni Dilsha Kure**  
Micro-retailer





# Advancing digital social protection

## Why are Digital Social Protection Systems important for Sri Lanka?

Since COVID-19, there has been a growing trend in using technologies for the delivery of social protection programmes and services.<sup>26</sup> Digital and technology advances can be leveraged by social protection systems to increase individuals' access to equitable, efficient and effective services while reducing costs. Despite progress in the use of digital mechanisms, barriers in digitalizing social protection systems remain, namely on data management, targeting, integration of processes, and assurance frameworks including data protection and data quality.

WFP is engaged in tackling these challenges by providing governments with technical advisory, to strengthen their implementation capacities of social registries, data protection and privacy, community feedback mechanisms, and provisions of emergency cash transfers through national systems.





Through its engagement with the national government and its technical and operational expertise in applying digital solutions to social protection programme delivery, WFP is well equipped to enhance the quality, efficiency and accountability of social protection programmes. Digitalizing social protection programmes, not only improves the user experience in accessing services and the programme's impact (e.g., financial inclusion), but also allows to improve the systems' responsiveness by reaching vulnerable people faster.





## WHAT IS WFP DOING IN ADVANCING DIGITAL SOCIAL PROTECTION?

WFP supports the Government's digitalization processes by:

- Promoting information privacy and data protection standards to enhance the quality of programmes and protect sensitive information of beneficiaries** 
- Implementing digital community feedback mechanisms and grievance redress mechanisms for better accountability to affected populations** 
- Following cash assurance frameworks for better accountability of the assistance provided (see annex on the link between cash assurance framework and digital SP)** 
- Engaging with international financial institutions (IFIs) to support the Livelihood Empowerment Programme on strengthening Samurdhi's digital monitoring systems** 

## TO SUPPORT THE DIGITALIZATION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS, WFP IMPLEMENTS THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

► **WFP supports the strengthening of platforms and infrastructure.** A priority for WFP is to support social protection delivery platforms and infrastructure for national government actors, that improve programme efficiency and effectiveness without compromising the rights and privacy of individuals. In 2020, WFP signed a data sharing letter of understanding with the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), assuring correct

data handling to affected populations. Through capacity building activities, WFP trained DSD and WBB officials island wide to support national actors apply principles of data protection and privacy in accordance with the National Data Protection Act. In addition, WFP supports DSD address digital gaps (e.g., paper based) and improve their shock-responsive capabilities by using WFP's beneficiary management system, SCOPE, for

beneficiary registration, transfer, and reconciliation. WFP implemented anticipatory actions by digitally pre-registering 7,000 households in flood-prone areas with biometrics using SCOPE (see case study 4).

► **WFP supports improved data management to enhance programme delivery.** WFP is committed to increase the impact of its programme delivery and augment individuals' autonomy, especially for women. WFP provided electronic devices and developed a beta application for micro-retailers to record e-voucher transactions and issuance of commodities, and print invoices. This also provided technical assistance to the DSD to extract reconciliation reports. WFP also funded the DSD to develop a business registration platform, an open business application, which will be available for any retailers and Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) to help them network and promote their goods and services. Lastly, WFP signed a letter of understanding with the Asian Development Bank to support the Samurdhi Livelihood Empowerment programme to (i) provide financial support to DSD for

the Empowerment Pilot Program; (ii) development of a monitoring strategy and provide technical support for this initiative; and (iii) provide training and capacity building to DSD to support successful implementation of the programme.

► **WFP applies assurance frameworks to ensure accountable programme delivery.** WFP is eager to support the GoSL develop digital processes and systems that are accessible, inclusive, dignified and safe. WFP uses SCOPE to handle beneficiary data, ensuring benefits delivery and data reconciliation. During the emergency response, WFP established an internal Community Feedback Mechanism framework, a call centre where beneficiary could contact WFP to address their queries. Through digital awareness-raising campaigns via SMS, beneficiaries were informed about their rights and programme entitlements as well as sensitized on good dietary practices, gender and cash management. WFP is currently supporting the development of a Community Feedback Mechanism framework for the WBB to enhance its services for social welfare programmes.

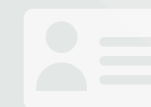


#### CASE STUDY 4 PRE-REGISTRATION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE BENEFICIARIES IN FLOOD PRONE AREAS

In Kalutara, a flood-prone area in the Western province, WFP supported DSD to pre-register 7,000 households into WFP SCOPE as part of a pilot (see box 3). Households with pregnant and breastfeeding women, and children under 5 were prioritized. Biometric data was collected at the registration to ensure that entries are unique, eligibility verified and identity of individuals authenticated for future access. While the pre-registered list was not used during floods, these were activated during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide cash assistance. The preparedness component of the pre-registration enhanced the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system by reaching people with assistance swiftly and in an accountable way.

#### CASE STUDY 5 ELECTRONIC VOUCHERS THROUGH THE WFP MICRO-RETAILER PROGRAMME

WFP piloted the use of electronic vouchers through 25 micro-retailers to support households enrolled in the Samurdhi programme, enabling them to meet essential needs while strengthening local businesses. A key innovation was the development of a customized beta Android application for these retailers, allowing them to track all commodity purchases and transactions while generating printed receipts, enhancing transparency and efficiency. Additionally, the initiative built the capacity of the small retailers through training on digital devices and applications. This approach and technology provide a scalable model for future digitalization efforts in social protection.



#### Box 3 SCOPE

SCOPE is WFP's corporate beneficiary information and transfer management platform. It is a flexible cloud-based digital platform that helps WFP better understand the people it serves to be able to provide them more personalised and helpful assistance. It facilitates the tracking of distributions with assurance, from beneficiary registration to reconciliation and reporting.



#### Box 4 Community Engagement and Inclusion

All WFP social protection programmes have a **gender, protection and inclusion lens**, specifically on beneficiary targeting which have been informed from gender and inclusive vulnerability analysis.

For each programme, WFP put in place a Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM) to grant people access to a safe, confidential means of voicing complaints, provide feedback on assistance programmes and lay the foundation for end-to-end assurance. The Government did have a hotline system to perform CFM, but it did not fully meet WFP assurance standards (mainly paper-based and therefore not always recorded as in a digital system). WFP deployed its corporate CFM solution for the emergency response in 2022. WFP organized sensitization sessions with communities and handed out posters, leaflets and cards to ensure beneficiaries knew who to contact for feedback or questions.

# OUR PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENTS

WFP works with a wide range of partners at Government level, as well as with donor agencies and development partners in the country to advance social protection initiatives, while fostering food security and nutrition. Through its partnerships, WFP increases effectiveness and cost-efficiency, fostering innovation, enhancing trust, credibility and sustainability of interventions. This section highlights WFP's key engagements with government agencies, donors, International Financial Institutions and technical partners.

## COLLABORATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA (GOSL)

WFP is a long-standing partner of the GoSL, collaborating with key government stakeholders in strengthening social protection systems since 2019. WFP's primary government counterpart is the Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment, specifically the Partnership Secretariat for WFP Cooperation (PSWFPC). The PSWFPC serves as a key strategic partner, facilitating the effective implementation of WFP's Country Strategic Plan (CSP).

Although other actors in the country are involved and contribute to WFP's achievements, this section only discusses the collaborations with the Welfare Benefit Board (WBB), the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and the Disaster Management Center (DMC). These are the entities WFP is most closely engaged with to advance strategic social protection priorities.

## WELFARE BENEFIT BOARD (WBB)

With the introduction of the Aswesuma programme, WFP provides technical expertise in integrating climate and food security indicators to the social registry.

The aim is to elevate the social assistance scheme to be shock-responsive. In addition, WFP and WBB are exploring ways to address gaps in WBB's assurance framework and accountability towards its population.

## DEPARTMENT OF SAMURDHI DEVELOPMENT (DSD)

As a long-standing partner of the Government, WFP collaborated with the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD), a key national social protection authority, to support the emergency cash assistance scale ups during COVID-19 but most notably during the economic crisis. Other activities surrounding capacity development and digitalisation were conducted throughout the years. The collaboration now focuses on capacity building of DSD officials, including promoting the integration of anticipatory action with social protection financing.

## MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Recognizing the importance of school meals in supporting children's health and education, WFP has historically supported the Ministry of Education to sustain school meals to school children with iron-fortified rice, and lentils.



*WFP pursues partnerships actively across all its operations as a means of achieving better outcomes for people<sup>27</sup>*



### MINISTRY OF HEALTH

WFP works closely with the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Sri Lanka on the prevention of malnutrition in the country, and ensuring social protection is nutrition-sensitive. WFP supports the national nutrition supplementary food programme Thriposha, from the procurement of soya and maize for the fortified nutrition supplement to working with smallholder farmers to enhance its local production. Thriposha reaches one million children (under 5) identified with moderate and acute malnutrition, and pregnant and breastfeeding women in Sri Lanka.

### NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AGENCIES

WFP works with disaster management agencies – particularly the Disaster Management Division of the Ministry of Defence, and the Disaster Management Centre - to support, build on, and enhance the country’s ability to prepare for, respond to, and anticipate emergencies. One major milestone led by WFP was the reconvening of the operational National Disaster Management Coordination Committee (NDMCC) after a five-year break. WFP’s disaster risk reduction, preparedness and emergency programmes are aligned with priorities laid out in the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP).

### DONORS (GOVERNMENT, PRIVATE)

WFP’s social protection initiatives have consistently been supported by Australia, USA, Japan, Canada, Korea and France.

During the emergency, WFP repurposed funding to address social protection initiatives including Thriposha and the shock-responsive social protection programme, piloting innovative programmes where – as one example – beneficiaries enrolled under Samurdhi banks were provided food vouchers to be spent at a set of selected microretailers.

### INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFI) ENGAGEMENT

WFP aims to increase its engagement with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank that are actively engaged in the country on social protection. Currently, WFP’s work with the WB and ADB are to provide technical support and inputs to the scale-up of the Aswesuma programme – through the digitalization of social protection schemes/ systems, and the creation/ diversification of livelihood opportunities.

### TECHNICAL PARTNERS

Anticipatory Action (AA) Technical Working Group (TWG): WFP was appointed co-chair of the AA TWG to pave the way for anticipatory action initiatives in the country and integrating AA to social protection systems. The group is also co-lead by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the Sri Lankan Red Cross Society (SLRC) and World Vision Lanka (WVL). The purpose of the group is to enhance the knowledge and initiatives surrounding

anticipatory action in the country, and forge linkages between key national actors involved in disaster management and social protection sectors. To date, the group has developed its internal action plan and conducted trainings on AA to development partners. Going forward the group will build the capacity of national actors on AA to increase their engagement in AA sector, develop the national AA roadmap and start the advocacy journey on integrating AA with social protection systems.

Social Protection Group: WFP pursues its collaboration with the Sri Lanka social protection group for a united and collective approach to building sustainable social protection in the country. The group is currently composed of ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. The ABD and WB are also invited to the group as they are key actors in the sector of social protection. Activities included feedback and recommendations to the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) and upcoming strategy, development of a policy brief on Universal Social Protection in Sri Lanka and other advocacy initiatives. The social protection group is keen to support the government in advancing social protection with one voice.



# Annex: WFP Assurance Framework

Sri Lanka adopts the WFP assurance framework to guarantee that money travels safely from WFP to Government and ultimately to the right people, maintaining high standards of accountability.

## WHY DO WE NEED AN ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK?

Most of WFP social assistance programmes use government transfer mechanisms to delivery cash assistance to beneficiaries. For instance, when WFP complements national social protection programmes through top-ups, WFP uses existing Government-to-Person (G2P) payment systems to channel the assistance. G2P payment systems comprise the practical mechanisms for enrolling people to receive money and ensuring that the money is transferred and accounted for. As WFP does not hold a direct contract with the government service providers delivering the payments to the people, it is important to follow an assurance framework to limit risks and to be confident that the right people are receiving the right benefit at the right time.

## HOW DOES WFP FOLLOW THE PRIORITY CONTROLS SET UNDER WFP'S G2P ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK?

WFP's *Cash Assurance Framework* and *Targeting and prioritization operational guidance note* highlight the following priority controls for an accountable transfer mechanism when channelling funds from WFP to Government to People. The following highlights how these are applied in Sri Lanka.

### ► Understand the needs

At the onset of the 2022 economic crisis, WFP and FAO conducted a Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) survey as well as a Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSAV) to support the government in identifying geographical areas and populations groups most food insecure and affected by the economic crisis. A total of 7 districts were selected for the emergency response.

### ► Understand the selection and performance of the service provider the government is using

Up to 2023, beneficiaries received their social protection assistance through the Samurdhi Community-Based Banks (SCBB) of the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD). WFP has worked extensively with the DSD to implement their system with SCOPE, WFP's transfer management system. The FSP contract process is detailed in the SOPs WFP signed with DSD.

### ► Understand the roles and responsibilities within the government system

Government's rules and procedures that determine the roles and responsibilities of different entities in their cash transfer programme is clear to WFP and documented.

On the roles and responsibilities between WFP and the Government, WFP signed an MoU and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD). The SOPs include

WFP's funds flow from Government to people, targeting criteria, data sharing, data protection, transfer value and mechanism, operational field visit recurrency as well as reconciliation processes and accountability to affected populations measures.

### ► Process people's personal data responsibly

WFP established data sharing agreements with the DSD. Trainings were also conducted on data privacy and protection to DSD officials, ensuring data protection is addressed appropriately.

### ► Clean up beneficiary lists and remove duplicate records

WFP used national IDs whenever possible to clean and deduplicate personal data of beneficiaries. SCOPE system was used to manage beneficiary data and conduct verifications.

### ► Confirm that all beneficiaries in payment lists have been verified

Due to the limited fully operational social registries, WFP provided technical assistance to the Government to verify that the selected beneficiaries and that the validity of their information would be correct.

### ► Perform transfer reconciliation for each payment cycle

WFP reconciled transfers immediately following each payment cycle and provided a summary report of the results using SCOPE, WFP's internal beneficiary tracking system. DSD played a crucial role in collecting the reconciliation information through the Samurdhi banks. WFP trained DSD staff on

the use of SCOPE for beneficiary registration, cash assistance and reconciliation.

### ► Ensure people WFP assists have access to Community Feedback Mechanisms (CFM) to raise issues and ask questions

For each programme, WFP put in place a Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM) to grant people access to a safe, confidential means of voicing complaints provide feedback on assistance programmes and lay the foundation for end-to-end assurance.

Feedback from the people WFP assists, is a key source of information that can highlight risks, fraud or other misdeeds that require WFP's immediate assistance.

### ► Post distribution monitoring

During and after programme implementation, WFP conducted independent pre/post monitoring assessments as well as Focus Group Discussions, thereby ensuring that social protection assistance meets programmatic objectives. The results and reports were also shared with DSD.





# Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank	NDMP	National Disaster Management Plan
CFM	Community Feedback Mechanism	NSMP	National School Meals Programme
CFSAM	Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission	NSPP	National Social Protection Policy
COD	Cost of Diet	NSPS	National Social Protection Strategy
DMC	Disaster Management Center	PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
DMD	Disaster Management Division	SBCC	Social Behavioural Change Communication
DSD	Department of Samurdhi Development	SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
EFF	Extended Fund Facility	SLRC	Sri Lanka Red Cross Society
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization	SRSP	Shock Responsive Social Protection
G2P	Government-to-Person	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
HGSF	Home-Grown School Feeding	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ILO	International Labor Organization	USP	Universal Social Protection
IMF	International Monetary Fund	WB	World Bank
IWMI	International Water Management Institute	WVL	World Vision Lanka
IWMS	Integrated Welfare Benefit Management System	WBB	Welfare Benefit Board
		WFP	World Food Programme

# Photos credits

Front page cover: Ruvin de Silva/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 1: Ruvin de Silva/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 2: Ruvin de Silva/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 4: Ruvin de Silva/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 7: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 8: Mehedi Rahman/HQ  
 Photo Page 11: Josh Estey/HQ  
 Photo Page 14: Ruvin de Silva/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 16: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 18: Josh Estey/HQ  
 Photo Page 20: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 21: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 22: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 26: Josh Estey/HQ

Photo Page 27: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 28: Ruvin de Silva/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 30: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 32: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 33: Mathilde Achilli/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 34: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 38: Ruvin de Silva/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 41: Ruvin de Silva/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 42: Ruvin de Silva/Sri Lanka  
 Photo Page 49: Carol Taylor/Sri Lanka

# Endnotes

1 World Food Programme (2023). Special Report FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.



2 UN Sri Lanka (2023). 2023 UN Country Annual Results Report Sri Lanka.



3 World Bank (2024, a). Rethinking Social Protection in South Asia: Toward Progressive Universalism.



4 World Food Programme (2023). Household Food Security Overview 2023 - Sri Lanka.



5 Ministry of Health Sri Lanka, Family Health Bureau (2024). National Nutrition Month Summary Report 2024.



6 UN Sri Lanka (2023). Fact Sheet: Climate Impact in Sri Lanka.



7 World Food Programme (2023). *ibid.*

8 UN Sri Lanka (2023). *ibid.*



9 SPIAC-B (2019). n.d. Social Protection Interagency Collaboration Board.



10 World Bank (2024, a). *ibid.*



11 International Labour Organization (2024). World Social Protection Report 2024-26: Universal social protection for climate action and a just transition.



12 Oxford Policy Management (2018). Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems Research.



13 Ministry of Finance (2024). Press release: The National Social Protection Policy of Sri Lanka.



14 International Labour Organization (2024). *ibid.*



15 World Bank (2024, b). Sri Lanka Moving from Stabilization to Growth: Project Information Document (PID).



16 Right to Life Human Rights Centre (2023). The effectiveness of Aswesuma Welfare Benefit Scheme Preliminary Findings and Ongoing Assessments. Interim Report of Baseline Survey.



17 World Bank (2024, b). *ibid.*



18 International Labour Organization (2016). Analysis of the Sri Lankan Social Protection Schemes in the Context of Social Protection Floor Objectives.



19 World Bank (2024, b). *ibid.*



20 World Food Programme (2021). World Food Programme Strategy for Support to Social Protection.



21 World Food Programme (2023). Executive Brief: Changing Lives - Social Protection.



22 Oxford Policy Management (2018). *ibid*



23 World Food Programme (2023). Social Protection Pathways to Nutrition - Synthesis Report.



24 National Library of Medicine (2021). Impacts of school feeding on educational and health outcomes of school-age children and adolescents in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis.



25 World Food Programme (2024). Maximizing Impact: the Intersection of Social Protection and Resilience. WFP Social Protection and Resilience Policy Brief.



26 Gentilini, U. (2022). Cash Transfers in Pandemic Times: Evidence, Practices, and Implications from the Largest Scale Up in History.



27 World Food Programme (2021). *ibid.*



## **World Food Programme**

2 Jawatte Avenue, Colombo 05, Sri Lanka

T +94 (0) 112 555 521

wfp.org | [socialprotection@wfp.org](mailto:socialprotection@wfp.org)

[wfp.org/social-protection-and-safety-nets](https://wfp.org/social-protection-and-safety-nets)



**WFP / Sri Lanka**