



SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR NUTRITION: WAY FORWARD FROM THE GLOBAL TASK FORCE



The Cross-Country Learning and Knowledge Exchange on Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection was convened in Islamabad, Pakistan, by the Global Task Force on Social Protection for Nutrition (GTF) and hosted by the **Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Government of Pakistan and Government of Timor-Leste with facilitation from the World Food Programme (WFP) in December 2025.**

The GTF, chaired by H.E. President Ramos-Horta of Timor-Leste, is a **country-led initiative dedicated to strengthening social protection's role in addressing the growing challenges of hunger and malnutrition, particularly in fragile and least developed countries.** Its key objectives are to ensure nutrition-sensitive social protection is a priority in the global agenda, and to foster peer-to-peer learning and exchange on scaling up such approaches.

The South-South learning exchange served as a dialogue among countries committed to integrating nutrition outcomes into social protection systems. It built on the momentum of the Second World Summit for Social Development held in Doha on 4-6 November 2025 reinforcing the leadership of the Global South in shaping the nutrition-sensitive social protection agenda.

Participants included representatives from the governments of **Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Niger, Lao PDR, Pakistan (national and provincial) and Timor-Leste,** as well as development partners and international financial institutions. Reflecting the multisectoral approach needed to address malnutrition, sectors represented included social protection, health and nutrition, education, agriculture, and planning and finance.



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF PAKISTAN

It is a pleasure to share this message as Pakistan hosts the discussion on nutrition-sensitive social protection in Islamabad. The convening reflects a shared commitment to practical cooperation, clear analysis and steady progress across our region. The Global Task Force offers an important space for this work and Pakistan values its partnership with Timor-Leste, Chile, France and the World Food Programme.

At the core of this effort is a simple conviction: no child should face malnutrition, no mother should be without care, and no family should endure hardship alone. Many developing countries continue to navigate pressures that affect growth and resilience, making coordinated action essential.

Integrating nutrition into social protection has been a major milestone. Through the Benazir Nashonuma initiative, pregnant and lactating women and children under two receive targeted support during the first thousand days. Today, BISP reaches 60 million people and Nashonuma supports 3.6 million mothers. Independent evaluations show a 6.4 percent national reduction in stunting and a 20 percent reduction among children under 20 months, demonstrating the impact of aligning nutrition, health and education.

Looking ahead, Pakistan plans to pilot a Social Protection and Jobs Compact to widen support for informal workers, persons with disabilities and children. Continued investment in nutrition-sensitive social protection and data-driven systems will guide the next phase of work. Stronger regional cooperation will also help countries scale effective approaches.

The goal of building systems that enable every child to grow, every mother to receive care and every family to live with dignity remains central. Ending malnutrition is both a development priority and a responsibility that shapes the future of all nations. Pakistan looks forward to continued collaboration and collective progress in addressing poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition across the region.



Asif Ali Zardari

President of the
Islamic Republic of
Pakistan

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF TIMOR-LESTE

It gives me great pleasure to extend my warm greetings to all participants of the Cross-Country Learning and Knowledge Exchange on Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection, convened under the Global Task Force on Social Protection for Nutrition, in partnership with the World Food Programme and the Benazir Income Support Programme of Pakistan.

This gathering brings together governments, development partners, and experts committed to a common purpose to ensure that no child, woman, or man suffers from hunger or malnutrition. It embodies the spirit of solidarity and shared responsibility that defines our collective pursuit of Zero Hunger (SDG 2) and Universal Social Protection (SDG 1.3).

As Chair of the Global Task Force, Timor-Leste is proud to stand alongside countries across regions, Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, and others facing fragility, to advocate for people-centred and nutrition-sensitive policies.

Our shared experiences remind us that progress is not measured by economic growth alone, but by the well-being and dignity of every citizen. In a world marked by uncertainty, conflict, and climate shocks, social protection systems have become a moral and practical imperative. They are the bridge between humanitarian response and sustainable development, the foundation upon which nations can build peace, resilience, and human capital.

I commend the Government of Pakistan and the Benazir Income Support Programme for hosting this critical learning exchange. Through this platform, we reaffirm that South-South and Triangular Cooperation are not abstract ideals but living instruments of transformation, connecting nations through empathy, innovation, and mutual learning.

Let us use this opportunity to deepen our cooperation, accelerate investment in nutrition-sensitive social protection, and inspire a renewed commitment to human dignity. Together, we can build a future where every life counts and where no one is left behind.



José Ramos-Horta

President of the
Democratic Republic
of Timor Leste

SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR NUTRITION AS A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Malnutrition is widely recognised as a major development challenge, prompting many countries to prioritise nutrition within national planning and policy frameworks. In this context, **social protection systems are increasingly considered not only as tools for poverty reduction but also as strategic platforms to improve food security and nutrition outcomes.**

The business case for investing in nutrition-sensitive social protection is strong. Social protection programmes which specifically address nutritional needs can break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and malnutrition and enhance human capital development. The cost of malnutrition is high for individuals, societies and economies, and the returns on investment in nutrition, particularly during the first 1000 days, are exceptional. Additional multiplier effects of cash transfers and school meals on incomes and employment for farmers, local traders, service providers and communities further strengthen the case.

These high returns are being recognised by international financing institutions who are increasingly supporting governments to integrate nutrition objectives into social protection systems.

Nutrition is being integrated in social protection through diverse approaches, depending on the programme, policy and socio-economic landscape and the scale and type of nutrition challenges.

Government delegations showcased a range of nutrition-sensitive approaches being implemented, including:

- Conditional cash transfers linked to health and nutrition services
- Targeting the first 1,000 days
- Nutritious school meals
- Inclusion of fortified foods in social assistance and school meals
- Nutritious food vouchers

In Pakistan, the Benazir Nashonuma Programme operating under the BISP has shown that integrating nutrition objectives in social protection programme is both feasible at scale and impactful.^[1]

Since its inception in 2020, it has reached nearly *3.9 million pregnant women and children under two*. Midterm evaluation findings show a 6.4 percentage point reduction in stunting in children 6-23 months and a 20 percent lower stunting prevalence among six-month-olds. The evaluation also finds that a higher intake of specialised nutritious foods and earlier enrolment further reduce risks of preterm births and low birth weight, which are critical for child survival.

[1] WFP. 2025. Benazir Nashonuma Programme: Midline Evaluation Results

LESSONS LEARNT AND SHARED INSIGHTS

01 **Scaled-up and impactful social protection programmes move beyond poverty reduction mechanisms into comprehensive human capital development systems.** This transformation requires sustained political commitment, cross-sector collaboration, and long-term investment, starting with identifying nutrition vulnerabilities and gaps and designing scalable models that are suitable for the context. Evidence generation should underlie these investments to refine programme design and implementation and to support advocacy for political buy-in and financial commitments.

02 **Intersectoral coordination is challenging but vital for outsized gains.** Clear governance and coordination frameworks which are multi-tier (i.e. at national and decentralised levels) and multi-sectoral are essential. Monitoring frameworks that ensure alignment and joint planning are important for success.

03 **Government ownership and long-term financing are essential for sustaining nutrition-sensitive social protection programmes.** Depending on the context and maturity of social protection systems, countries are expanding fiscal space through revenue mobilisation, reprioritisation of spending, innovative financing (e.g., blended finance, sin taxes), and by leveraging climate-related funding mechanisms.

04 Social protection programmes and policy must consider the following areas to effectively achieve nutrition objectives: **ensuring transfers are adequate** from a nutrition perspective, **enhancing quality of targeting**, ensuring registries and programme design **include nutritional vulnerabilities, addressing supply side constraints** which hinder cash transfer recipients from accessing nutritious foods, **establishing linkages with health systems** and **incorporating social behaviour change components.**

ACTION PRIORITIES



Government delegations identified action priorities to take forward in their

countries, demonstrating their commitment to strengthening nutrition-sensitive social protection.

While action priorities vary from country to country, common themes include setting up effective coordination and governance mechanisms, developing robust monitoring frameworks, strengthening implementation capacity and delivery systems for scale-up, and enhancing advocacy to generate political commitment and mobilise resources.



Evidence plays a strong role in advocacy, and it should be robust,

up-to-date and relevant for effective use. In addition to being easily accessible, evidence needs to be fit-for-purpose for the context of the country and should be translated into actionable and policy-relevant guidance and to formulate clear messages that speak to key decision-makers. Costing analyses are limited but are necessary for building investment cases and engaging stakeholders such as ministries of finance and planning. Partnership with academia and think-tanks to develop joint research agendas can enhance these efforts.



Generating commitment for nutrition-sensitive social protection at

global, regional or country levels, requires dialogue and advocacy at political and technical levels.

Ministerial exchanges as well as technical knowledge sharing are needed to secure buy-in and to enhance capacities. Existing mechanisms, including regional cooperation frameworks, should be leveraged.



Government delegations expressed strong demand for technical and

advisory support in designing and implementing nutrition-sensitive social protection programmes and strengthening systems and policy frameworks to ensure sustainability, as well as to **learn from peer countries** that have successfully scaled-up these programmes.



DRIVING THE AGENDA FORWARD



Integrating nutrition in social protection is not just a strategic and sustainable investment but, given the high cost of inaction for malnutrition, also **an urgent one**. Through collective action, global platforms such as the GTF can **help amplify this message** within the global development agenda, generate shared political commitment and influence public and private sector organisations. At national level, advocacy support can be provided to strengthen efforts to include nutrition-sensitive social protection in development planning and resource allocation.



Catalytic funding provided by development partners and other financing mechanisms **can enable governments to test scalable models and generate evidence that demonstrates the potential of integrating nutrition in social protection programmes to influence policy decisions.**



Development partners can support countries that have demonstrated willingness to take forward nutrition-sensitive social protection by providing technical advisory on improving programme design and implementation (e.g. targeting for nutrition vulnerabilities, transfer size, duration and modalities), strengthening delivery systems, their governance (e.g. strengthening policy frameworks and coordination mechanisms) and implementation capacity (e.g. registries, data-sharing, monitoring and evaluation systems), and developing financing options for scale-up.

The GTF will draw on the outputs of the Learning Exchange to define clear objectives and work plans, strengthening its value proposition for governments and partners, including through resource contributions to sustain the platform. The GTF is exploring strengthening partnerships with other existing platforms such as the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty and the g7+ as well as regional cooperation frameworks to leverage their reach and to ensure that nutrition-sensitive social protection and the voices of fragile and least developed countries are adequately represented. The Government of Timor-Leste has expressed interest to host a follow-up learning exchange in early 2027.