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International Council on Social Welfare



Welcome Letter

by Antonio López Peláez, ICSW Executive Director

Dear ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

Welcome to the November 2025 issue of our newsletter.

This year, 2025, is proving to be a very important year for the ICSW from the perspective of social welfare, social policies, and social work. ICSW is a knowledge-based organization whose main purpose is to organize, highlight, and transfer activities, results, and good practices in the field of social welfare. From this point of view, throughout 2025 we have strengthened our ties with our sister organizations, the IFSW and the IASSW. We have collaborated in the Social Development Commission, on World Social Work Day, and in different events in different countries. We have also been able, in a social environment as polarized as the current one, to work together to address social problems that are often not on the public agenda, and we have been able to agree on documents (such as the Ronda Declaration, which is available on the ICSW website, endorsed by the IFSW, the IASSW, and the ICSW), which are also guidelines for social policy. In the face of a polarized environment, wars, and humanitarian disasters, throughout 2025 we have highlighted the power of networking and the effectiveness of participatory work. Finally, we have been able to assess the new challenges to well-being and discuss the strategies we need to strengthen social well-being.

A prime example of this teamwork, without forgetting our own identity, can be found in the solution sessions that the ICSW, IFSW, IASSW, and the ICSD have organized and shared at the Second World Summit for Social Development 2025, Qatar, November 4-6, 2025. In this newsletter, we publish the contributions of our president, Dr. Zelenev, and the members of the ICSW who participated in the Second World Summit for Social Development. These contributions reflect very well the intensity of the debates, the lucidity of the proposals on well-being, and the rigor in the analysis of the processes of social exclusion. I sincerely believe that this newsletter will be widely consulted. I would like to take this opportunity to thank ICSW President Dr. Zelenev, ICSW Vice President Ronald Wiman, ICSW Special Representative at the UN in Geneva Dr. Kirwan, and Dr. Shajahan for their contributions to the ICSW-sponsored Solutions Session: "Designing Integrated Social Policies for Inclusive and Sustainable Development" at the Second World Summit for Social Development. Leila Patel and Lauren Graham (ICSD), Dr. Mahesh Chougule (ICSD), and Patricia Welch Saleeby (IFSW) also participated in this session. I encourage all readers of the ICSW Newsletter to carefully read their contributions, which are truly enlightening and allow us to delve deeper into the characteristics of an integrated social policy.

The second part of this Newsletter is dedicated to the ICSW South Asia Region. In each issue of the Newsletter, we share research, evaluations, and best practices from the different regions that make up the ICSW. In this case, I would like to thank the ICSW South Asia President, Dr. Suresh Pathare, for his interesting article entitled "Situational Analysis of Social Protection in South Asia." Dr. Profulla C. Sarker addresses the challenges facing social protection in Bangladesh in his article "Social Protection Landscape Programs and Practices in Bangladesh: A Functional Overview." Dr. Shajahan addresses child protection in the article on "Child Protection in South Asia: Progress, Gaps, and the Path Ahead." Finally, Sanjai Bhatt and Mohd Salman, in their article entitled "Sustainable Employment: Global and Indian Trends in Green Jobs," address a key issue, the development of work opportunities that ensure economic security while upholding social fairness and environmental responsibility.

It is an honor for me to present this November 2025 newsletter, with articles on the Global Summit and on the challenges facing social welfare in South Asia. I hope you find it interesting, and I am sure it will be one of the most consulted newsletters on our website.

Take care and stay healthy.
Antonio
ICSW Executive Director

President's Corner



ICSW - Sponsored Solutions Session : Designing Integrated Social Policies for Inclusive and Sustainable Development

by Sergei Zelenev, ICSW President

Introduction

The discussion on integrated social policy featured prominently in ICSW's engagement at the Second World Social Summit, reflecting months of sustained analytical preparation and strategic dialogue. The preparatory phase for the ICSW-sponsored Solutions Session, held in Doha, extended over two months—a substantial investment of time justified by both the political significance of the Summit and the opportunity it offered ICSW to articulate its vision before a global audience. This background work, undertaken in close collaboration with partners from the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD), and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), ensured that the session was grounded in diverse perspectives and aligned with the broader professional community. The main elements of this preparatory work were distilled in a concept note circulated prior to the session.

A central focus of the preparatory process was the draft Political Declaration of the Second World Social Summit. This document, which will guide global social development efforts in the coming decade, embodies both continuity and innovation. It reaffirms the enduring priorities of poverty eradication, employment promotion, and social integration—long-standing pillars of ICSW's advocacy—while also broadening the global agenda to address climate change, digital transformation, demographic shifts, and widening inequalities. For ICSW, the draft declaration represents both a recognition of its long-standing commitments and a renewed call to action. It highlights the urgency of universal social protection, inclusive labor markets, and multidimensional approaches to poverty; underscores the need for stronger multilateral cooperation; and stresses the vital role of civil society in shaping effective and equitable social policies.

In this evolving landscape, ICSW saw its mandate clearly: to mobilize its global network to ensure that the commitments articulated in the declaration translate into meaningful outcomes for the most vulnerable. By championing universal social protection, promoting solidarity across generations, and advocating for policies rooted in equity and inclusion, ICSW aims to transform the aspirations of the declaration into tangible progress on the ground.

Against this backdrop, the decision to focus ICSW's Solutions Session on integrated social policy was both timely and strategic. Integrated approaches have long been a hallmark of ICSW's analytical work and policy advocacy. Their strength lies in recognizing the structural and multidimensional nature of social problems. Poverty, for instance, is seldom a matter of income deprivation alone but is interwoven with barriers to healthcare, insecure employment, inadequate housing, and social exclusion. Fragmented, sector-specific policies often yield partial or temporary solutions, leaving underlying vulnerabilities unresolved. Integrated social policies, by contrast, acknowledge these interdependencies and seek to reinforce them through coherent strategies—linking, for example, cash transfers with access to education, health services, and active labor market measures. Such synergies reduce inefficiencies, strengthen developmental outcomes, and enhance institutional accountability.

Moreover, integrated social policy is essential for promoting equity and social justice—core dimensions of sustainable development. It offers a corrective to short-term, growth-oriented policymaking by ensuring that development gains are broadly shared and that marginalized groups are systematically included. At a time when societies face interconnected crises—from economic shocks to climate-related disasters—integrated systems of social protection, healthcare, and labor market support are indispensable for building resilience.

In addition to the Solutions Session, ICSW contributed to other key analytical efforts at the Summit, including the IASSW-led Solutions Session on universal social protection and the intergovernmental equity discussions at the Solutions Session convened by IFSW. Together, these engagements underscore ICSW's continued leadership in shaping holistic, forward-looking approaches to social development.

The concept note for the ICSW-sponsored Solutions Session was prepared and circulated well in advance and also posted on the ICSW website. Its summary appears below.

Concept Note Summary

The concept note emphasized that while traditional pillars of social policy—poverty reduction, healthcare, education, employment, and social security—remain essential, they are no longer sufficient when addressed in isolation. Fragmented, sector-based responses struggle to keep pace with rapidly evolving societal needs. As the world confronts rising inequalities, demographic shifts, technological disruption, and the intensifying effects of climate change, the demand for integrated and holistic social policies has become urgent and unavoidable.

Integrated social policy was presented as a forward-looking framework that situates individuals and communities within a wider socio-economic ecosystem. It calls for policy coherence, cross-sectoral collaboration, and interventions that span multiple dimensions of wellbeing—economic, social, environmental, and cultural. Importantly, it recognizes the interdependence of global and local realities and underscores the need for multilevel governance capable of linking national strategies with local implementation.

The concept note also highlighted the central role of the social service workforce and the importance of partnerships across governments, civil society, academia, and communities. It reaffirmed that integrated approaches are critical not only to addressing complex risks but also to expanding human capabilities, strengthening social cohesion, and ensuring inclusive and sustainable development.

Session Highlights

Moderated discussions underscored three central themes:

- **The continued relevance of integration.** Despite significant policy innovation over recent decades, siloed approaches persist. Panelists strongly argued for renewed commitments to coherence, coordination, and long-term institution-building.
- **The need for human-centered, capability-enhancing approaches.** Integrated social policies should empower people, particularly marginalized groups, by expanding access to services, opportunities, and social protection.
- **The essential role of the social service workforce.** Effective integration depends on a well-resourced, professionalized, and respected workforce capable of coordinating across sectors and responding to multidimensional needs.

Speakers also emphasized the importance of evidence-building, research partnerships, participatory policymaking, and community-engaged approaches to ensure that integrated policies are context-specific, culturally grounded, and sustainable.

Gloria Kirwan (ICSW), moderating the session, concluded by emphasizing that the lessons presented offer valuable guidance for balancing the multiple policy pillars necessary for sustainable development and ensuring coherence across all levels of governance.



Composition of the Panel

Open to ICSW partners, the composition of the panel reflected ICSW's commitment to presenting both scholars and practitioners addressing pertinent issues at conceptual and country-specific levels. (Detailed biographical notes of the participants, in order of appearance, are provided below.)

Leila Patel (IASSW/ICSD)

Distinguished Professor of Social Development Studies at the Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA), University of Johannesburg. Her research focuses on social welfare and social development in the Global South, with particular emphasis on poverty eradication, social protection, gender, and the care economy. She is the founding director of the CSDA and played a leading role in shaping South Africa's post-apartheid welfare policy. Professor Patel has published extensively in international journals and authored several influential books, including *Social Welfare and Social Development* (2015, Oxford University Press) and *Social Protection and Social Development in the Global South* (2023, Edward Elgar). She is the President of the International Consortium for Social Development and serves on the Board of UNRISD.

Lauren Graham (IASSW/ICSD)

Development sociologist deeply committed to advancing social justice. Her academic work focuses on expanding opportunities for individuals to realise their full capabilities by addressing structural barriers that lead to marginalisation. Grounded in Amartya Sen's capability approach, her research seeks practical interventions that enable people to lead lives they "have reason to value." Concentrating on excluded groups such as unemployed youth, persons with disabilities, and children in adversity, she integrates theoretical inquiry with applied research to inform effective social policy. Professor Graham is based at the University of Johannesburg, where she serves as Interim SARChI Chair in Welfare and Social Development and as Chairperson of the International Consortium for Social Development: Africa Branch.

Sergei Zelenev (ICSW)

President of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW). He previously served as ICSW's Executive Director (2012–2019) and Special Representative to the United Nations. Prior to joining ICSW, Dr. Zelenev spent nearly three decades with the United Nations Secretariat in New York, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and held field assignments across Africa and the Caribbean, focusing on peacekeeping, capacity-building, and intergovernmental policy work. He is the author and editor of several books and numerous articles on social policy, social protection, ageing, youth, and intergenerational relations, and lectures widely on social policy and socio-economic development.

P.K. Shajahan (ICSW)

Professor at the Centre for Community Organisation and Development Practice, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, India. He has served as Dean of Academic Affairs (2019–2023), Dean of Students Affairs (2015–2018), and Dean of Social Protection (2012–2015) at TISS. Dr. Shajahan is a Founding Member and Co-President of the Critical Edge Alliance, former Global Vice President of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), and former Member-at-Large of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). His research and teaching focus on social policy, community organization, and participatory development.

Ronald Wiman (ICSW)

Retired Chief Social Policy Expert of the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). He also served as Social Policy Adviser to the Foreign Ministry of Finland and for three years to the Ministry for Health and Developmental Social Welfare in Namibia. For the UN, he worked for five years, including assignments in Ghana and at the UN Secretariat/Disabled Persons Unit in Vienna during preparations for the Copenhagen Social Summit. He has been a member of the Finnish Government delegations to the UN CSocD regularly since 1998. His CV includes several publications on social policy and sustainable development. He served as President of ICSW Europe (2017–2022) and is currently Vice President of ICSW Global.

Mahesh Chougule (ICSD)

Assistant Professor in the International Program on Social Policy and Development at Thammasat University, Thailand, and Head of the Research Unit "Contemporary Challenges: Social Policy Impact on Social Mobility and Development." He also serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Social Policy, Social Change and Development (J-SPSD)*. His research explores welfare regimes, social protection, social mobility, and policy integration across ASEAN and East Asia. Author of several Scopus-indexed publications, Dr. Chougule's comparative work on Thailand's *Baan Mankong* Programme and Singapore's HDB system advances inclusive urban development and resilience. In 2025, he received the SDC Impact Award for Academics for his contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Patricia Welch Saleeby (IFSW)

Social Work Program Director at Bradley University and Chair of the Sociology, Criminology, and Social Work Department. She has 20 years of teaching experience at undergraduate and graduate levels in rural, urban, and suburban institutional settings. Dr. Saleeby has served in national leadership roles with the National Association of Social Workers, the American Public Health Association, and the Council on Social Work Education, including Commissions for Diversity, Social & Economic Justice, and Global Social Work Education. She is currently Co-Chair of the World Health Organization Functioning and Disability Reference Group, overseeing global health and social care classifications including ICD, ICF, and ICHI. Dr. Saleeby is Editor-in-Chief of Health and Social Work and holds degrees from Washington University (PhD Social Work), Case Western Reserve University (MSSA Social Administration), and Oberlin College (BA Biology).

Moderator: Gloria Kirwan (ICSW)

Senior Lecturer at the Graduate School of Healthcare Management and Program Director of the MSc Leadership and Innovation in Healthcare at RCSI. She serves as the UN-Geneva Representative for the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW). Gloria's academic career spans Trinity College Dublin (2000–2018) and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (2018–2022), where she focused on professional social work education. Holding qualifications in social work, law, and social sciences, she completed her PhD in 2017 on service user participation in health and social care decision-making. Gloria is Editor of *Groupwork*, *Journal of Social Work Practice*, and *Irish Social Worker*, and actively engages with national voluntary health and social service organizations.

The presentations addressed both overarching themes and country-specific experiences, positioning integrated social policy as a central driver of sustainable development that complements the traditional economic, social, and environmental pillars. The following review reflects the speakers' statements. Every effort has been made to preserve the authentic voice of the panelists while ensuring a balanced presentation.

Integrating Social Protection Policies at Community Levels for Children, Youth, and Families: Lessons from South Africa

Leila Patel, (IASSW) & Lauren Graham, (ICSD)

Despite long-standing calls for greater integration of social protection policies, implementation in many countries remains fragmented, poorly coordinated, and unable to meet people's needs across the life course. In much of the Global South, social protection is weakly linked to labor market support and social services (Patel, 2024). To help people navigate vulnerability, manage risks, and move out of poverty, greater policy and delivery integration is essential.

The World Bank's *2025 State of Social Protection Report* underscores the need to harmonize the three pillars of social protection—social assistance, social insurance, and labor market programs—to help households escape poverty and seize opportunities. The G20 Development Working Group, convened under South Africa's 2025 presidency, similarly emphasized connecting social protection systems to decent work. The International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD), in its 2025 Doha Declaration, called for “integrated, inclusive, and gender-sensitive systems,” strengthened links with employment and social services, and enhanced intersectoral collaboration.

This paper draws on lessons from South Africa's efforts to implement integrated social protection at the community level for children, youth, and families—an approach vital for accelerating progress toward the SDGs.

Levels of Integration

Devereux (2023) identifies three levels of integration:

1. **Policy level** – legislative and strategic alignment across ministries and sectors.
2. **Program level** – collaboration in program design, budgeting, staffing, and interdepartmental coordination.
3. **Administrative level** – integration in service delivery, including shared data, digital tools, and coordination protocols that reduce silos.

Effective integration requires coherence across all three levels so that individuals experience seamless access to services.

Solutions from South Africa

1. Basic Package of Support (BPS) for NEET Youth

With one-third to two-fifths of South African youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET), many face cycles of discouragement and poor mental health. The BPS reconnects these youth to systems of opportunity through:

- **Outreach and coaching**, where youth workers assess needs, support goal-setting, and make referrals.

- **Community of Practice (CoP)** mechanisms bringing together government and civil society partners to coordinate youth services.

Key lessons:

- Skilled frontline workers—both professionals and paraprofessionals—are crucial for helping people navigate fragmented systems and rebuild confidence.
- Collaboration depends on sustained relationship-building, an often-overlooked investment.
- Lasting coordination requires formal systems—shared data, protocols, and clear accountability—beyond personal networks.

The BPS demonstrates that integration requires administrative alignment and human engagement to restore agency for excluded youth.

2. Communities of Practice for Child Wellbeing

This project strengthened integrated service delivery for children in early grades. Although many children receive grants, education, and health support, these services are poorly coordinated, and teachers and caregivers often lack information.

A social worker convened teachers and nurses to assess children's wellbeing across six domains using a digital tracking tool, identify risks, and organize interventions.

Key lessons:

- Over 18 months, wellbeing indicators improved significantly. Shared data and collaboration enhanced intervention planning.
- Policy frameworks exist, but implementation gaps and human-resource shortages—particularly the scarcity of school-based social workers—undermine results.
- Success relied heavily on local leadership and the coordinating role of social workers.
- Digital tools improved planning but cannot replace the human relationships essential for collaboration.

Conclusion

South Africa's experience shows that integration must begin from the bottom up. Community of Practice models provide mechanisms for multisectoral collaboration, shared accountability, and evidence generation. Scaling such initiatives requires embedding local innovations into national systems supported by adequate budgets, staffing, and digital infrastructure. When policy, program, and service delivery systems align, social protection becomes a catalyst for human development and social inclusion.

Integrated Social Policy as a Core Driver of Sustainable Development

Sergei Zelenev, (ICSW)

Sustainable development is commonly described as the interplay among three interdependent pillars: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Integrated social policy operates as a core driver within this triad, ensuring that progress is not achieved at the expense of equity, cohesion, or resilience.

Instead of treating social issues as secondary or fragmented, integrated social policy embeds them into the fabric of development—linking social protection, health, education, labor markets, and community empowerment into a coherent strategy. Integration enables governments to address the interconnected nature of human needs while strengthening coherence across the SDGs.

Integrated approaches reduce duplication, curb inefficiencies, and amplify the impact of public investment. They align short-term interventions with long-term goals, avoiding the partial solutions that fragmented policies often produce. When designed well, integrated measures—such as combining social protection with education reforms and active labor market programs—create synergies that accelerate development and optimize resources.

Integrated social policy also strengthens social cohesion and justice, cornerstones of sustainable development. Fragmentation deepens inequality and exclusion, whereas integrated approaches promote inclusivity, participation, and institutional trust. They enhance resilience, enabling societies to withstand shocks and adapt to change—contributing to stability and environmental stewardship.

Integrated social policy is therefore constitutive of sustainable development, addressing multidimensional vulnerabilities and reinforcing equity. Without an integrative perspective, sustainability risks becoming a narrow technocratic exercise detached from its human foundation.

Policy recommendations:

1. Establish permanent inter-ministerial coordination structures with joint planning, shared budgets, and integrated monitoring systems aligned with the SDGs.
2. Institutionalize participatory policy processes involving communities, local governments, and civil society.
3. Design social protection systems that go beyond income support by integrating health care, skills development, and green jobs initiatives.

Fostering Social Participation for Inclusive Sustainable Development

P.K. Shajahan, (ICSW)

This contribution argues that inclusive and sustainable development can only be achieved through participatory governance mechanisms that enable the meaningful engagement of marginalised communities in policy design, implementation, and monitoring. Drawing from a southern epistemological perspective and case studies from India, Africa, and Latin America, Prof. Shajahan maintains that development must be locally grounded, context-sensitive, and co-created with those historically excluded from decision-making. This approach not only strengthens democratic legitimacy but also ensures that policies reflect lived realities rather than abstract assumptions.

In India, decentralised institutions such as the Panchayati Raj system and Kerala's People's Plan illustrate how participation enhances social inclusion, strengthens local accountability, and helps localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). African experiences with community-based natural resource management, informal savings groups, and youth-led civic initiatives, along with Latin American innovations in participatory budgeting, social protection, and urban planning, further demonstrate that social participation fosters equity, transparency, and long-term sustainability.

The author argues that integrated social policies must explicitly link social protection, livelihood security, and environmental stewardship through participatory planning processes. This requires institutionalising citizen forums, expanding opportunities for community-driven monitoring, investing in local organisational capacities, and embedding participatory methods across the entire policy cycle—from agenda setting to evaluation.

Experiences from India, Africa, and Latin America clearly demonstrate that participation transforms public policy from an administrative tool into a democratic act. When people shape the agendas that govern their lives, policies become inclusive by design and sustainable by nature. Ultimately, inclusive and sustainable development requires reimagining governance—not as a top-down delivery mechanism, but as a co-creative, iterative process where communities act as agents, innovators, and active stimulators of their own development.

The Wellbeing Economy – An Instrument for Realizing the SDGs

Ronald Wiman, (ICSW)

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) stated that “human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.” This declaration laid the foundation for the three classic pillars of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.

The *World Summit for Social Development* (Copenhagen, 1995) expanded this dialogue by introducing a more comprehensive social dimension. However, this dimension was often regarded as “soft,” with limited resources allocated for its implementation.

By the turn of the millennium, the OECD and the World Bank helped shape the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), a largely sectoral framework aimed at reducing poverty by 2015. Finalized by the UN Secretariat, the draft goals were submitted to the *Millennium Summit* in New York in 2000. The MDGs grew out of several commitments contained in the *Millennium Declaration*, approved by the Summit in September 2000. They comprised eight goals with 21 targets and a set of measurable (“hard”) economic and health indicators for each target.

While notable progress was achieved, results were uneven. Consequently, in 2010 the UN Secretary-General launched consultations for a post-2015 agenda, leading to the 2012 report *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, which paved the way for the Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs. This report called for an inclusive, people-centered, and sustainable global development strategy anchored in the UN Charter’s core values — human rights, equality, sustainability, and peace and security.

In essence, sustainable development came to be understood as a value-based *agenda of equity* within and between generations — ethically sound, socially fair, environmentally sustainable, and economically viable. Sustainable development is not the sum of its “pillars” but the product of the simultaneous interaction of the three dimensions.

A piecemeal or “pillar”- approach failed to capture these interdependencies. The financial crisis of 2007–2009 further underscored the need for comprehensive, integrated social policies as essential instruments for achieving development goals: During the 2010s the OECD had introduced its concept of *inclusive growth* emphasizing that social protection is essential even for sustainable economic growth.

The Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 further stressed the need for more integrated approach involving social values in all policies. For some SDG objectives, such as those related to poverty, food, health, quality education, gender equality, decent work and inequality reduction, social policy serves as the principal instrument; as for others, it is a necessary enabler or facilitator of success.

In the 2010s, new integrated approaches aiming at building bridges between the pillars of sustainable development emerged. One such model is the *Wellbeing Economy- approach*, which places human wellbeing — rather than GDP — as the ultimate goal of economic and social policy. In Finland, the concept was first introduced in 2014 by *SOSTE – the Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health*, an ICSW member. The approach soon gained traction also in Finnish government circles and was adopted as a central theme of Finland’s EU Presidency in 2019. It resonated strongly with the EU’s founding vision: “*The Union’s aim is to promote peace, its values, and the well-being of its peoples.*”

The EU Council Conclusions of November 2019 describe the Wellbeing Economy as “*a policy orientation and governance approach that puts people and their wellbeing at the very center of policy and decision-making.*” Accordingly, the long-term, holistic, and multidimensional wellbeing of people and the planet must become the ultimate goal of all policies and decisions.

The *Economy of Wellbeing* (alternatively Wellbeing Economy) represents an integrated, cross-sectoral policy framework that seeks to bridge economic, social, and environmental objectives in the pursuit of sustainable development. Holistic and inclusive social policies — grounded in equity, social and gender equality, and wellbeing for all — are essential to ensure a just transition toward sustainability.

The concept of wellbeing is fundamentally distinct from the basic needs – approach or from a straightforward reading of Abraham Maslow’s “Theory of Human Motivation” (1943) as a “hierarchy” of needs. Wellbeing defines human beings as agents of action who have the will and ability to manage their lives to reach goals they value – given “enabling environments”, echoing the language of the two Social Summits.

There are four interacting dimensions in wellbeing: material, social, psychological/self-actualization and own goal-oriented action: HAVING, LOVING, BEING and DOING, reflecting the theory presented by the Finnish famous Sociologist, Professor Erik Allardt in 1972. Wellbeing results from simultaneous realization of all these four interdependent dimensions. More ‘Love’ cannot compensate for bread, neither vice versa. The extensive World Bank global study summarizing experiences of over 60 000 poor people: “*The voices of the poor*” (2000) showed that also the poorest of the poor have “higher” aspirations, but they face institutional and environmental obstacles against achieving those aspirations. Staying alive is not enough for living.

In shorthand: Human beings (and their communities) derive resources from physical, social and cultural, and human capital for *purpose-oriented* action (“doing”) to manage their lives in order to produce the kind of wellbeing they value.

There are many sets of indicators for measuring the objective (facts) and subjective (experience level) dimensions of wellbeing and corresponding societal level and environmental counterparts, enablers – and obstacles. These can be reached by social, environmental and economic policies to empower people, ‘to enlarge their choices’ in Amartya Sen’s (2000) “Development as Freedom” -terminology. Societal policies with social values at the top are, in this framework, not charity but creators of enabling environments that make it possible for all people to achieve their wellbeing equitably.

The multidimensional Wellbeing Economy – approach lends itself well for putting people and their wellbeing at the center of sustainable development as agents of action and beneficiaries, given the limits of the planet.

Background documents

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Beyond Silos: Integrated Social Policy as the Engine of Sustainable Development

Dr. Mahesh Chougule, (ICSD)

This presentation builds upon his ongoing research and field experience with Thailand's Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) and its Baan Mankong community housing programme, illustrating how integrated social policy can effectively advance sustainable development. Thailand's Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) has emerged as a leading example of how community-driven approaches can strengthen sustainable development, inclusive urban transformation, and long-term social resilience. Through its flagship Baan Mankong community housing programme, CODI links secure housing and land tenure with livelihood generation, community-managed finance, and participatory local governance, offering a practical model of integrated social policy rooted in community leadership and collective action.

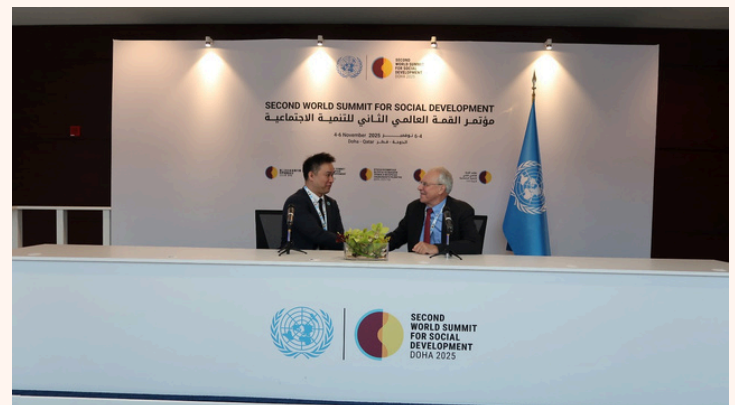
Since 2003, Baan Mankong has upgraded more than 1,500 informal settlements, supported over 90,000 low-income households, and expanded to 76 of Thailand's 77 provinces. These community-led initiatives have produced improvements that go beyond physical housing upgrades: they have expanded financial inclusion, strengthened social cohesion, enhanced trust between residents and institutions, and increased resilience against climate-related and economic shocks. The programme demonstrates that when communities are empowered as planners and decision-makers, physical infrastructure becomes social infrastructure, supporting dignity, participation, and mobility.

Integrated social policy is essential because poverty is multidimensional. Housing, health, education, employment, and social protection intersect in people's daily lives, and the CODI model shows the benefits of aligning these systems. In my presentation, I emphasized the importance of equity, participation, and resilience as guiding values, noting that community networks, local authorities, and state agencies achieve better outcomes when they work in partnership rather than in isolation.

Comparative insights from Singapore's Housing and Development Board (HDB) further highlight the value of integration. In Singapore, housing policy is coordinated with employment services, public health systems, education pathways, and community cohesion programmes. This integrated approach has contributed to stability, reduced socio-spatial inequality, and strengthened national identity. While CODI represents bottom-up, community-led governance, and HDB reflects a strong state-led model, both show that integrated policy frameworks can generate mobility, stability, and shared prosperity.

Three policy levers emerged from these experiences: cross-sector coherence and shared leadership, ensuring that ministries and agencies pursue common outcomes; participatory and multi-level governance, empowering municipalities and citizens to co-design solutions; and investment in community capacity, local innovation, and data-driven policy learning, enabling adaptive and evidence-based responses to emerging challenges. These elements move social policy beyond technical coordination toward a holistic development strategy.

By moving beyond silos, integrated social policy can unite social justice, sustainability, and community empowerment. Programmes like CODI and coordinated systems such as HDB show that locally grounded solutions, when supported by national frameworks, can advance social cohesion, reduce inequality, and position communities as central actors in achieving the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



A Social Work Perspective on Integrating Social Policies to Achieve Greater Inclusion and Sustainability

Patricia Welch Saleeby, (IFSW)

In her statement, Dr. Patricia Welch Saleeby emphasized the interconnectedness of social, economic, health, and environmental factors, arguing for holistic approaches over traditional siloed policies. Representing the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), she highlighted the profession's role in supporting marginalized individuals and advocating for social change. Social workers operate at the frontlines, witnessing daily the complex links between social, political, economic, health, and environmental well-being. As she stated, “integrated social policies are not just a nice idea; they are an essential strategy for a healthier, more equitable, and more just and prosperous global society.”

For decades, social issues, economic indicators, and public health have been treated as separate challenges, addressed by independent experts in distinct policy silos. Unfortunately, this approach is fundamentally flawed because, in reality, these issues are deeply linked. Decisions in one area have significant spillover effects across others. Dr. Saleeby continued by asserting that social, economic, and environmental policies are, by default, health policies. As she noted, “individual health and well-being is fundamentally shaped by one’s environment and living circumstances. However, personal choice means nothing if options are unavailable, unaffordable, or discriminatory and if systemic failures in our living, working, and learning environments deny people the fundamental right to better health.”

Treating these issues in isolation creates multiple problems and fragmentation in services. People most in need often have complex, overlapping issues and fall through “the proverbial cracks” because different agencies and programs fail to work together. Therefore, Dr. Saleeby called for an integrated approach to address these gaps across sectors. Ultimately, different sectors must work together to achieve a common goal – that is, the improved well-being of individuals, families and communities.

“It is essential that we, as policymakers and community leaders, embrace an intersectoral, long-term approach. We must design policies that are “integrated and indivisible” across social, economic, and health dimensions. Our goal should not be to treat people after they get sick, but to create the conditions that allow everyone the opportunity to attain their highest level of health and well-being from the start.”



Conclusion

The Solutions Session demonstrated the continued relevance and urgency of integrated social policies for inclusive and sustainable development. The diverse contributions of the panelists highlighted common challenges, innovative practices, and critical priorities for the future: strengthening policy coherence, investing in the social service workforce, expanding partnerships, and grounding policies in human rights and human development principles.

As the global community moves toward implementing the commitments of the Second World Social Summit, ICSW and its partners will continue to advocate for integrated, people-centered policy approaches that advance social justice, reduce inequalities, and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable world.

Sergei Zelenyev
President of ICSW



Situational Analysis of Social Protection in South Asia

by Suresh Pathare

Introduction

South Asia—home to nearly one-quarter of the world’s population—has achieved notable development progress in recent decades. However, major vulnerabilities persist. Millions continue to face income poverty, gender inequality, climate-related risks, widespread informality, and weak human capital outcomes. Public spending on key social sectors such as health, education, and social assistance remains below global norms. As a result, many households remain unprotected against medical costs, income shocks, and growing care responsibilities.

This brief article brings together insights from these key sources and incorporates recent evidence on universal health coverage (UHC), fiscal space, and unpaid care work to provide an updated analysis of the social protection landscape in South Asia.

The UNICEF/IPC-IG review highlights this chronic underinvestment and the wide variations in spending across countries. The ADB TECH-3 study further underscores the absence of a well-developed care system—childcare, eldercare, and disability services—which is a critical yet overlooked pillar of social protection in the region. The World Bank’s *Rethinking Social Protection in South Asia* adds another important perspective: the need for integrated delivery systems, coherent policy frameworks, and progressive universalism to reduce programme fragmentation, improve resilience, and ensure equitable access.

Regional Spending Patterns and Sectoral Situation

Low aggregate social spending:

UNICEF/IPC-IG estimates that South Asian countries allocate about 3.37% of GDP to education, 0.95% to health, and 0.90% to social assistance—levels that are significantly below global averages. While countries such as Maldives and Bhutan invest relatively more in these sectors, Pakistan and Bangladesh remain among the lowest spenders. This persistent underinvestment results in limited programme coverage and high out-of-pocket (OOP) spending by households, especially for health care.

The World Bank further notes that the region’s limited fiscal commitment restricts governments’ ability to adopt progressive universalism and build broader, more inclusive social protection systems.

Health: High out-of-pocket spending, low financial protection

Public health spending remains low across much of South Asia, leaving households to shoulder a large share of medical expenses—most notably in Afghanistan and Bangladesh. WHO data show that global progress toward universal health coverage (UHC) has slowed, and South Asian countries continue to face high levels of catastrophic health expenditure and inadequate financial protection.

Strengthening primary health care, improving risk pooling arrangements, and reducing out-of-pocket (OOP) payments are therefore essential priorities. The World Bank’s *Rethinking Social Protection in South Asia* further emphasises that weak delivery systems and fragmented financing mechanisms undermine efficiency and limit countries’ ability to respond effectively to shocks.

Education: High budget priority, mixed outcomes

Education typically receives the largest share of social sector budgets across South Asia, yet learning outcomes differ significantly from country to country. Sri Lanka delivers strong results even with moderate levels of spending, while Bhutan allocates more resources but continues to face literacy and enrolment challenges. These contrasts highlight that efficiency and quality of spending—not just the amount invested—are key determinants of educational outcomes, reinforcing the insights from the UNICEF/IPC-IG analysis.

Social assistance: Patchy coverage, fragmentation, limited poverty reduction

Across South Asia, public spending on social assistance generally remains below 1% of GDP, with only a few countries—such as India, Maldives, and Nepal—occasionally crossing this threshold. The World Bank highlights extensive fragmentation across programmes: India operates more than 950 centrally sponsored schemes, Bangladesh has 42, Nepal around 22, and Sri Lanka 38. Many of these programmes overlap or duplicate functions, leading to inefficiencies, higher administrative costs, and diluted impact.

Yet evidence shows that well-designed and well-delivered programmes can make a significant difference. Examples include Maldives' universal social protection schemes and Sri Lanka's Samurdhi programme, both of which demonstrate how coherent design, adequate financing, and effective delivery systems can reduce poverty and improve equity.

The Care Economy: The Missing Pillar of Social Protection

The ADB TECH-3 framework identifies care for children, older persons, and persons with disabilities as a fundamental—yet largely overlooked—pillar of social protection in South Asia. Despite the scale of need, formal care services remain limited, uneven, and inadequately integrated into national social protection systems.

Women continue to shoulder the overwhelming share of unpaid care and domestic work, which significantly depresses female labour-force participation—already among the lowest in the world. The World Bank's *Rethinking Social Protection in South Asia* reinforces this finding, noting that gender-related labour market barriers—including the lack of affordable childcare, concerns about safety, and restrictive social norms—severely limit women's access to quality employment opportunities.

Across South Asia, formal childcare, eldercare, and disability services remain fragmented, uneven in quality, and heavily urban-concentrated. Many countries lack clear standards, regulatory frameworks, or sustained financing for care provision. As the ADB TECH-3 assessment notes, existing services are often small in scale, poorly coordinated, and insufficient to meet growing demographic and social demands.

The World Bank's *Rethinking Social Protection in South Asia* further emphasises that these gaps are compounded by weak delivery systems, limited interoperability between programmes, and the absence of comprehensive social registries that would allow care needs to be systematically identified and addressed.

Emerging Opportunities and Policy Directions

Expanding fiscal space in a strategic and equitable way

Creating room for stronger social protection requires smarter and more progressive approaches to revenue generation and public spending. This includes strengthening direct taxation while reducing reliance on indirect taxes that place a heavier burden on the poor. It also involves rationalising tax expenditures and closing loopholes that undermine the tax base. Another important step is to shift resources away from inefficient universal subsidies and toward well-targeted social protection programmes—an approach strongly emphasised in the World Bank's *Rethinking Social Protection in South Asia*, which identifies subsidy reform as a major opportunity for fiscal reprioritisation. Finally, expanding domestic revenue mobilisation is essential to ensure that social protection investments remain sustainable and resilient to future shocks.

Improving spending efficiency and programme coherence

Given limited fiscal resources, improving the efficiency and coherence of social protection spending is essential. This requires consolidating fragmented programmes to reduce duplication and administrative overheads, while redirecting resources toward interventions that deliver the greatest impact. Applying tools such as benefit-incidence analysis, costing studies, and cost-effectiveness assessments can help governments identify which programmes offer the highest returns and should be prioritised. Strengthening public financial management systems—including clearer budgeting, better expenditure tracking, and stronger oversight—can further enhance the effectiveness of social protection investments and ensure that funds are used transparently and efficiently.

Making care systems central to social protection

Positioning the care economy at the centre of social protection reform is crucial for advancing gender equality, supporting labour-force participation, and strengthening human capital. This involves expanding access to childcare centres, eldercare facilities, and disability care services, especially in underserved rural and peri-urban areas. Governments can also introduce caregiver allowances and invest in training, accreditation, and better working conditions for paid care workers, ensuring that care is both high quality and professionally supported. Embedding care services within national social protection strategies—a major gap across South Asia—will help create a more coherent and equitable system that recognises the essential role of care in social and economic development.

Strengthening delivery systems

As highlighted in the World Bank's *Rethinking Social Protection in South Asia*, robust administrative and delivery systems are fundamental to achieving broad and equitable coverage. Strengthening these systems involves developing integrated social registries and ensuring their interoperability with civil registration, health, and education databases. Expanding digital payment systems, while safeguarding data privacy and ensuring safe access for vulnerable groups, is also critical. Improving outreach mechanisms—such as the community-level engagement model used by Pakistan's BISP—can help ensure that eligible households are informed and able to access benefits. In addition, building strong grievance-redress and referral systems can enhance accountability, improve user experience, and support more efficient programme delivery.

Leveraging international financing strategically

International financing can play a catalytic role in strengthening social protection systems, particularly in lower-income and fragile contexts. Official development assistance can be used to pilot innovative care services, early-warning systems, shock-responsive safety nets, and digital platforms that enhance delivery capacity. However, external assistance should complement—not replace—domestic resource mobilisation. Ensuring long-term sustainability requires aligning international support with national priorities, building institutional capacity, and maintaining a clear plan to transition toward domestic financing over time.

Conclusion

South Asia's social protection landscape stands at a decisive turning point. Evidence from UNICEF/IPC-IG highlights persistent underinvestment, ADB draws attention to the largely invisible care economy, and the World Bank's *Rethinking Social Protection in South Asia* stresses the need for progressive universalism, integrated delivery systems, and stronger fiscal foundations. Meeting these challenges will require more than simply increasing budgets—it will demand smarter system design, greater integration of care services, improved governance, gender-responsive approaches, and financing mechanisms that are resilient to future shocks.

A more coherent, gender-aware, and shock-responsive social protection system has the potential to drive inclusive growth across the region. By protecting vulnerable households, strengthening human capital, and expanding opportunities for women and marginalised groups, South Asia can build a social protection architecture that supports both equity and sustainable development.

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Social Protection Landscape Programs and Practices in Bangladesh: A Functional Overview

by Dr. Profulla C. Sarker

Introduction

The root of social protection landscape can be traced in several key phases, evolving from informal community support and early formal mechanisms to the development of comprehensive rights-based systems at both national and international levels. Historically, social protection often relied on informal support networks, such as family and community aid, to manage risks like illness, old age, or unemployment. In Bangladesh, social protection programs play a crucial role in reducing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion by providing financial support, improving livelihoods, and offering social security to the poorest and most vulnerable populations (Chakravarti, 2022). Additionally, social protection acts as a key government investment that supports economic growth, and these programs also play a role in strengthening disaster prevention and mitigation strategies. The country's government, in partnership with international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has been expanding social protection programs to promote inclusive social development and social welfare.

Current Social Protection Programs

An approach of note is the first National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), introduced by the Government of Bangladesh with support from development partners in 2015. Established to address under performance in the country's social protection system, the NSSS aims to ensure a more efficient use of resources, strengthen delivery systems, and create a more inclusive social security system. As of the 2023-24 fiscal years, Bangladesh has 115 social protection programs, implemented by 39 ministries, with a budget of BDT 1,262 billion (16.58 percent of the national budget, 2.52 percent of gross domestic product (World Bank, 2023). These programs are grouped into five thematic categories:

- **Social Allowances:** Includes old age allowances, agricultural subsidies, and support for people with disabilities.
- **Food Security and Disaster Assistance:** Examples include the Vulnerable Women Development Program, which provides women with monthly rations of fortified rice and skills development training.
- **General Relief Operations:** A scheme designed to increase supply of and access to grains, particularly for the poor; and the 'food friendly program', while offers poor rural household's subsidized rice provisions during the lean season.
- **Labor or Livelihood Interventions:** Key programs include the employment generation program for the poor, which offers able-bodied and unemployed individuals 80 days' of work during the lean period and the Vulnerable Group Feeding Program (VGFP) for fishermen, providing fishermen with rice supplies during times of fishing bans.
- **Social Insurance:** Focuses on pension schemes and national savings programs. Human development and social empowerment: Prioritizes primary education, such as stipends for students and free textbook distribution.

In addition of above programs, the budgetary spending on top 10 social protection schemes has been increased over time. These top 10 social protection schemes are: old age allowance, employment generation scheme for the poor, food for work (FFW) program, vulnerable group feeding (VGF), primary school stipend, test relief (TR), vulnerable group development (VGD), open market sales (OMS), pension for retired government employees, and honorarium for the freedom fighters.

Challenges of Social Protection Program

Bangladesh still faces several challenges in the implementation of its social protection programs:

- **Administrative Inefficiencies:** Fragmented social protection systems and overlapping responsibilities among ministries reduce efficiency. Bureaucratic complexities and a lack of coordination between government agencies hinder the smooth implementation of programs (World Bank, 2013).
- **Mis-targeting:** Errors in targeting support such as excluding eligible beneficiaries or including ineligible ones remain a significant challenge, due to inadequate data and ineffective mechanisms (Rahman et al. 2014). Ensuring that support reaches the most vulnerable people is difficult without proper targeting systems.

- **Funding Constraints:** Limited financial resources and reliance on donor funding threaten the sustainability and scalability of social protection programs. Budget constraints also reduce the coverage and impact of these schemes (ILO, 2017).
- **Corruption and Political Influence:** Corruption distorts the distribution of benefits, reducing the effectiveness of social protection programs. Political interference further undermines the fair allocation of resources.
- **Lack of Awareness and Accessibility:** Many potential beneficiaries are unaware of available social protection programs, or face difficulties accessing them due to geographic barriers and complex administrative processes. This is especially prevalent in rural areas (IFPRI, 2017).

Priority of Challenges

The priority of challenges planned to be addressed over the next five years, among others, include (a) expanding coverage of core social security schemes for the extreme or hardcore poor and most vulnerable people of the society, focusing on mother and child, youth, working age, the elderly and people with disabilities; (b) ensuring that the most vulnerable women are provided with income security and greater opportunities to engage in the labor market, in particular when they enter into motherhood; (c) expanding coverage to the residents of urban areas and to the socially excluded people; and (d) bringing all the poor under effective social protection coverage.

Concluding Remarks

The evidence from various studies demonstrates that social protection programs in Bangladesh are effective in addressing poverty, food security, livelihoods, and social inclusion among vulnerable populations. However, continued monitoring and improvements are essential to sustain and expand their influence. The life cycle approach social protection programs needs to be ensured in supporting during various life stages and challenges to improve the quality life and well-being of the disadvantaged people. The future of social protection programs in Bangladesh is shaped by several uncertainties that could significantly impact their effectiveness and sustainability. These uncertainties stem from political, economic, social, and environmental factors, which are critical considerations in long-term planning.

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Child Protection in South Asia: Progress, Gaps, and the Path Ahead

by Prof. P.K. Shajahan, *Member, International Consultative Board, ICSW and Former Vice President, ICSW*

South Asia is the most populous region in the world, with nearly two billion people residing there, and thus has the largest child population as well. The region, over the last few decades, has seen significant efforts in expanding education, reducing poverty, and strengthening its legal frameworks in advancing child protection. However, persistent poverty, gender discrimination, rapid urbanisation, conflict, and weak enforcement of existing laws make the achievements far from desirable. A modest attempt is made to capture the prevailing situation of child safety and protection in the region, highlighting some of the key challenges, policy initiatives, and opportunities for decisive action.

1. The Magnitude of Child Protection Challenges

Child Labour

Driven by poverty and lack of access to quality education, child labour remains a critical concern for child protection across South Asia. Global estimates indicate that a total of 152 million children – 64 million girls and 88 million boys – are in child labour globally, accounting for almost one in ten of all children worldwide. Nearly half of all those in child labour – 73 million children in absolute terms – are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety, and moral development (ILO, 2017). UNICEF estimates 12 percent of the children aged 5–14 years in South Asia are involved in child labour, well over 41 million children. Most of the children engaged in child labour in South Asia are engaged in precarious labour such as in brick kilns, agriculture, garment workshops, domestic service, and urban informal work. Thus, children get trapped in the cycle of poverty with limited opportunities for getting out of the exploitative environments.

Child Marriage

Despite significant progress in reducing child marriage, the South Asia region is home to around 290 million child brides, accounting for 45 per cent of the global total (UNICEF, 2023). The practice remains particularly common in Bangladesh, Nepal, and rural parts of India and Pakistan. India has made remarkable progress toward ending child marriage, though this country remains home to the largest number of child brides worldwide. While the global agenda (SDGs) aims at eliminating the practice of child marriage by 2023, the rate of decline does not seem to be sufficient to reach the target (UNICEF, 2023a). Social norms, the practice of dowry, and limited educational opportunities for girls reinforce early marriage, leading to adverse health outcomes and long-term socio-economic disadvantages.

Trafficking, Abuse, and Exploitation

Human trafficking, particularly child trafficking, continues to be a grave concern for the region. South Asia in general and most importantly Bangladesh, India, and Nepal is the most vulnerable position in the world to human trafficking (Rahaman, 2015). Children are trafficked for labour, domestic service, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and begging. Underreporting is common due to stigma, cultural silence, and fear of retaliation. Poor birth registration mechanisms, porous borders, and inadequate support services create persistent vulnerabilities. Though South Asian countries have strengthened laws, such as India's POCSO Act*, enforcement gaps and a lack of child-sensitive justice systems hinder adequate protection.

Education Gaps

Millions of children in South Asia remain out of school. India and Pakistan combined account for more than 80% of South Asia's total out-of-school children (OOSC), followed by Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Nepal (UNICEF, 2018). Children from low-income families, girls, migrants, children with disabilities, and those living in slums or conflict zones face the most significant barriers. Even when children attend school, low learning outcomes limit the protective value of education.

Health and Nutrition

South Asia has among the world's highest rates of child stunting and maternal mortality (UNICEF, 2025). Malnutrition remains a significant threat to children's cognitive development and long-term health, with girls often disproportionately affected due to discriminatory feeding and care practices.

*Government of India. *Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.*

2. Drivers of Child Vulnerability

Poverty and Economic Instability: Economic shocks, natural disasters, and inflation drive families to rely on child labour or early marriage as survival strategies. Debt bondage still exists in informal sectors such as brick kilns and agricultural labour.

Gender Inequality: Gender norms restrict girls' education, mobility, and access to services: early marriage, heavy domestic workloads, and limited reproductive health support place girls at significant risk (UNICEF, 2023)

Weak Enforcement of Laws: Although many countries have robust child protection laws, including anti-trafficking legislation in Nepal* and juvenile justice frameworks across the region, implementation is inconsistent due to low capacity and limited resources.

Migration and Urbanisation: Rural-to-urban migration and cross-border movement create protection gaps for children who lack documentation and access to services. Migrant children often fall outside formal child protection systems.

Climate and Disaster Risks: Cyclones, floods, landslides, and droughts regularly displace communities across South Asia, harming children's education and exposing them to trafficking and other forms of exploitation (UNICEF, 2011)

3. Policy and Legal Responses

Regional Frameworks

All South Asian countries are signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The **SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children** (2002) provides a basis for cross-border coordination**, although operational collaboration remains limited.

National Legislation

- **India:** The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and Juvenile Justice Act create mechanisms for reporting, prosecution, and rehabilitation.
- **Bangladesh:** The Children Act (2013) and National Plan of Action target labour, trafficking, and violence.
- **Nepal:** The Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act outlines strict penalties for trafficking and victim support.
- **Pakistan:** Provincial child-protection units and the Zainab Alert system aim to improve reporting and emergency response.
- **Sri Lanka and Maldives:** Stronger public health systems support child protection, though mental-health services and alternative care remain areas for improvement.

Social Protection and Cash Transfers

Evidence shows that cash transfer programs reduce child labour and child marriage by stabilising household income and encouraging school attendance. Bangladesh, India, and Nepal have expanded such programs with promising results.

ICSW's Commitments

ICSWs global engagement on social protection and child protection emphasises the following;

- Advocating for inclusive, child-sensitive social protection systems targeting families in extreme vulnerability.
- Underscoring the need for cross-border and regional cooperation mechanisms to safeguard children affected by migration and trafficking.
- Highlights the need for people-centred, rights-based approaches ensuring meaningful participation of children and communities.

4. Effective and Emerging Interventions

Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms

Community child protection committees in Nepal, Bangladesh, and India have proven effective in preventing trafficking, monitoring at-risk families, and responding quickly to cases of child abuse.

*Government of Nepal. *Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act*.

**SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution

Safe and Inclusive Schooling

Investment in safe school infrastructure, teacher training, and gender-sensitive facilities improves retention and reduces vulnerability. While education continues to remain the most significant and powerful protective tool, ensuring safe and inclusive schooling is expected to yield measurable results.

Child-Sensitive Justice

Special courts, child-friendly justice delivery mechanisms, helplines, and trauma-informed protocols are expected to improve reporting and reduce secondary victimisation. Childline- India's national child helpline is a widely recognised good practice model available today.

Cross-Border Cooperation

Collaborative rescue operations, shared databases, and standardised procedures for reintegration are essential for addressing trafficking. These efforts remain uneven, requiring more substantial political and logistical commitment to bring state systems and civil society organisations on a collaborative platform.

5. Gaps and Persistent Issues

- **Incomplete data systems** hinder accurate assessment of child labour, trafficking, and violence.
- **Lack of trained child protection officers** limits the effectiveness of laws and reporting mechanisms.
- **Urban informal sectors** where large number of children engage in work remain largely unregulated.
- **Cultural norms** continue to justify harmful practices such as early marriage and restricted access to education for girls.

6. Some Recommendations

1. **Expand universal social protection** to reduce economic reliance on child labour.
2. **Improve quality of education, safety, and learning outcomes**, especially for adolescent girls.
3. **Scale up gender-equality initiatives**, including life-skills programs and community engagement efforts.
4. **Strengthen local child protection systems** with trained social workers and community volunteers.
5. **Enhance justice delivery** through child-sensitive protocols and fast-track juvenile justice processes.
6. **Enhance cross-border anti-trafficking cooperation** by utilising SAARC frameworks involving civil society networks.
7. **Integrate child protection into climate adaptation and disaster response plans**, particularly in high-risk zones.

Conclusion

Despite having a firm legal foundation for child rights, South Asia continue to have millions of children facing exploitation, deprivation, and violence. Universal social protection, quality and inclusive education, gender equality, and coordinated justice systems are essential for closing the gap between policy and practice. With sustained investment and regional cooperation, the region can accelerate progress and ensure that every child grows up safe, protected, and empowered.

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Sustainable employment refers to work opportunities that ensure economic security while upholding social fairness and environmental responsibility. It is centred on building a workforce that remains strong, adaptable, and future-ready. A truly sustainable employment framework rests on **three mutually reinforcing pillars**, each of which requires long-term commitment and strategic action.

First, economic resilience is more than offering a standard salary, it involves creating conditions where workers can enjoy genuine financial stability. This includes providing wages that meet the cost of living, ensuring access to essential benefits such as health insurance, retirement support, and paid leave, and safeguarding job continuity. Economic resilience is strengthened further through skills development, regular workforce planning, and establishing organisational systems capable of withstanding economic fluctuations, enabling workers to secure their livelihoods with confidence.

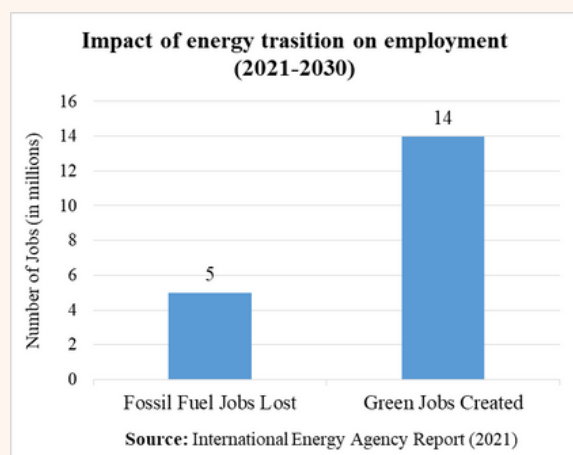
Second, social equity demands that workplaces give every individual a fair chance to grow and succeed. This requires actively addressing biases in recruitment, promotions, and pay structures so that opportunities are not shaped by gender, caste, ethnicity, disability, or socio-economic background. True equity means fostering an environment where diversity is valued, employees feel respected, and all groups have equal access to leadership roles and meaningful participation in decision-making.

Third, environmental stewardship ensures that employment practices contribute positively to ecological well-being. This entails moving beyond routine conservation measures to embedding sustainability across operations, reducing waste, shifting to renewable energy, designing climate-responsible supply chains, and lowering the overall environmental footprint of the organisation. It also includes expanding green job opportunities and equipping workers with the competencies needed to support the organisation's long-term climate and sustainability objectives.

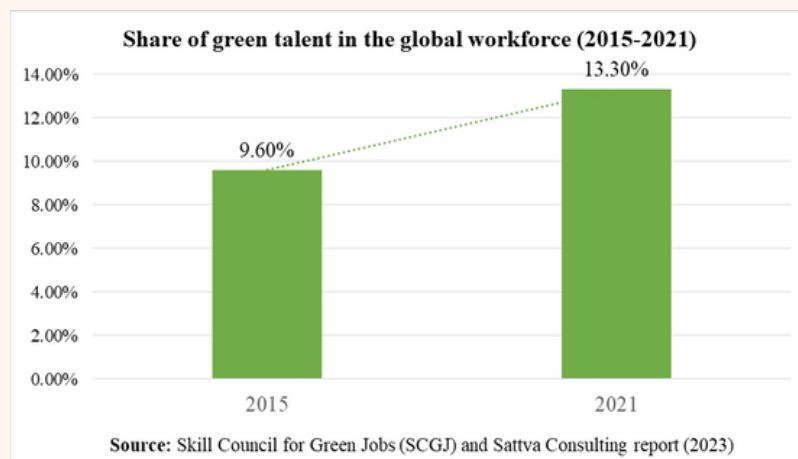
Together, these pillars shape a model of employment that supports people, strengthens institutions, and safeguards the planet, ensuring that economic progress aligns with social justice and environmental preservation.

From Fossil Fuels to Green Energy-A New Era of Job Creation and Economic Renewal:

The journey toward a sustainable, net-zero future is more than just an environmental imperative, it's a transformative opportunity for job creation and economic renewal. While the fossil fuel industry faces a significant downsizing as the world embraces clean energy, the transition offers tremendous potential for creating a greener and more resilient workforce.



Zurich Insurance Group Ltd (2024) notes that nearly 18 million people currently work in the global oil, gas, and coal sectors. While, as per the International Energy Agency (2021) approximately 5 million fossil fuel jobs may be lost by 2030 to meet the 2050 *net-zero target*, a promising 14 million new jobs are expected to be open by 2030 in sectors driving the future of energy. These jobs will span across fields like electric vehicle manufacturing, wind turbine production, solar panel installation, and clean energy infrastructure development, providing not only employment but also impactful careers that align with universal efforts to combat climate change. This shift will give rise to fresh industries, promoting local economies and offering communities and people a chance to prosper through new and innovative industries.



Rise of the Green Job Market- Global and Indian Perspective:

Green jobs are decent jobs that contribute to preserve or restore the environment, be they in traditional sectors such as manufacturing and construction, or in new, emerging green sectors such as renewable energy and energy efficiency. Green jobs can also be distinguished by their contribution to more environmentally friendly processes. For example, green jobs can reduce water consumption or improve recycling systems (ILO, 2025). These are in consonance with SDG 8 Decent work also. The green job market is experiencing significant global growth, with notable shifts in hiring patterns and skill demands in India too.

According to the Skill Council for Green Jobs (SCGJ) and Sattva Consulting report (2023) that in 2019, hiring for green jobs overtook general hiring rates in several areas, reflecting a rising worldwide demand for sustainable and environmentally-focused roles. The share of green talent in the global workforce rose from 9.6% in 2015 to 13.3% in 2021, achieving a 6% annual growth rate. This trend is further reinforced by the rising emphasis on ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) compliance, with companies increasingly seeking specialised professionals to guide their sustainability initiatives and integrate sustainable practices into their business and operational processes.

Sachin Alug, CEO of NLB Services (a leading talent and workforce solutions company) observes that India has witnessed a sharp rise in the demand for green job roles over the past two years. Industry estimates indicate that this demand may grow by nearly 15–20% every year over the next decade, driven by rapid expansion in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, waste management, and eco-friendly manufacturing. Various reports also suggest that India could potentially create around 30–32 million green jobs by 2050, highlighting the country's capacity to combine economic development with environmental stewardship. This shifting landscape underscores the urgent need to build strong talent pipelines, strengthen skill development ecosystems, and ensure a continuous supply of competent professionals equipped to meet the emerging requirements of a green and sustainable economy. India, though still developing its green talent base, shows promising growth potential in this sector. While global green hiring grows, India's market reflects an increasing alignment with sustainability-focused employment, emphasizing the need to enhance training and talent pipelines to keep pace with international trends in the green economy.

Table No. 1: Emerging Green Roles and Skills Demand Across Key Sectors in India

S No.	Roles	% Rise in demand	Skills required	Top sectors driving the demand
1.	Sustainability manager	15-20%	Environmental science and policy knowledge, economics and finance skills, analytical thinking skills, etc.	Renewable Energy
2.	Social impact manager	15-20%	Stakeholder engagement, program management, relationship management, etc.	Information Technology (IT) & Technology
3.	ESG analyst	30-35%	Sustainability reporting, ESG strategy & framework knowledge, quantitative skills, asset management and financial markets understanding, etc.	FMCG
4.	Governance & compliance specialist	15-20%	Corporate governance, regulatory compliance, risk management, etc.	BFSI (Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance)
5.	Renewable energy expert	15-20%	Understanding of renewable energy technologies, policy advocacy, market analysis, etc.	Clean Transport / Electric Vehicles
6.	Climate change adaptation planner	15-20%	Climate change analysis, data modeling, understanding of environmental science, etc.	Healthcare
7.	Green supply chain manager	10-15%	Supply chain management, sustainability, logistics, etc.	

Source: India CSR ([Green Jobs Demand to Surge 15-20% Annually for a Decade: NLB Services](#))

Building India's Green Future:

India's future of work is set to place strong emphasis on environment-friendly occupations, creating demand for new competencies in renewable energy, clean technologies, circular economy systems, and sustainable production practices. Recognising the importance of preparing a workforce for this transition, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship established the Skill Council for Green Jobs (SCGJ) in 2015 to develop standards, certifications, and training pathways in emerging green sectors. This national shift towards green jobs is not only aligned with India's climate commitments but also strengthens the foundation for a more resilient and diversified labour market. With joint efforts from government departments, industry leaders, training institutions, and academia, initiatives are expanding to support green apprenticeships, upskilling programmes, and industry-linked training models. These efforts are equipping India's workforce to adapt to sustainable technologies and respond effectively to the evolving needs of a low-carbon economy. As India accelerates investments in solar power, electric mobility, energy efficiency, waste management, and green infrastructure, workers trained in green skills will play a crucial role in driving both economic growth and ecological stewardship. Through these collaborative and future-oriented initiatives, India is positioning its workforce to become a key contributor to global green transitions while ensuring long-term environmental and economic resilience.

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