While investing in expanded coverage of health and education services is crucial, it is not always sufficient to ensure that people can access these services. For example, a poor family that loses its main source of income may feel forced to withdraw their children from school and send them to work. Programmes such as the National Social Protection Strategic Plan’s (NSPSP) social cash transfers and public employment programmes can help such families to boost their income security and continue sending their children to school.

Social protection can thus be seen as an important social policy instrument to reduce poverty, social and economic vulnerabilities and deprivations that can otherwise have lasting adverse impacts.
Social protection can be seen as an important social policy instrument to reduce poverty, social and economic vulnerabilities and deprivations that can otherwise have lasting adverse impacts.

The 2014 National Social Protection Strategic Plan (NSPSP) articulates possibilities around the strengthening of social protection systems in Myanmar in a practical and feasible manner.

SOCIAL PROTECTION IS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF SOCIAL POLICY

Like healthcare or education, social protection is an investment in a country’s human capital and economic development. It has the ability to reduce household-level social and economic barriers (such as income poverty and social vulnerabilities) to accessing services and engaging in productive activities. Social protection typically includes: A) Social security and social insurance, which is usually contributory and accessible to people with formal employment (tenured jobs), and/or B) Non-contributory social protection programmes that are designed to reduce poverty and vulnerabilities through tools such as social (cash or kind) transfers and human resource intensive services (case management).

SOCIAL PROTECTION IS A FEASIBLE, AFFORDABLE INVESTMENT WITH HIGH RETURNS

Cambodia has successfully demonstrated how investing in a comprehensive set of social cash transfers was estimated to generate up to 12-15% of return, measured in increased household consumption.

Similarly, the adverse consequences of not investing during the crucial period of a child’s development can be difficult and costly to make up for later in their lives. For example, with similar cash transfers, Zambia reduced its prevalence of stunting by 9 percent, Mexico by 10 percent, and Bangladesh by over 7 percent.

According to the World Bank, lost national productivity due to stunted child development can reach 2 to 3 percent of a nation’s potential GDP each year, which social protection schemes could reduce.

The increase of total revenues from 2013/14 to 2015/16 could have financed all eight NSPSP programmes for two years.

MYANMAR CAN USE SOCIAL PROTECTION TO SUPPORT ITS DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

The National Social Protection Strategic Plan Programmes

1. Maternity and Child Benefit
2. Child allowance
3. Social pension
4. Building of Integrated Social Protection System (ISPS)
5. Disability allowance
6. School-feeding programme
7. Public employment/asset creation and Vocational Education Training
8. Older-persons’ self-help groups
9. Integrated social protection services
Social protection can address the country’s following aspirations:

1. **Reduce poverty and vulnerability, and support overall growth.** Investing in a set of universal social cash transfers to vulnerable groups in Myanmar can lift 5.4 million people out of poverty.

2. **Invest in human capital for Myanmar’s development.** Unconditional social cash transfers and investments in productive activities and human capital can allow for better nutrition and health practices, schooling and improved early childhood development.

3. **Strengthen families’ resilience, including against disasters.**

4. **Strengthen social cohesion in times of peacebuilding and at the onset of rapid socio-economic transition.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAMME IN NSPSP</th>
<th>RATIONALE FOR PRIORITISING PROGRAMME</th>
<th>MILESTONE TO BE REACHED IN FIRST YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Maternal and child (0-2) cash transfer | The first 1000 days of life are critical for children’s long-term development. The role of this cash transfer is to support pregnant women and families, including covering costs of seeking health care, including antenatal care, and costs of buying medicines and more nutritious foods. | 1. Coverage of all pregnant women and subsequently their children in the selected state/region (Chin State), with regular transfers of 15,000MMK/month. COST $6.4M/year  
2. Coverage of all pregnant women and subsequently their children in the selected state/region (Taninthyari State), with regular transfers of 15,000MMK/month. COST $13.1M/year |
| Social pension for the elderly | Elderly people face a number of risks and vulnerabilities, including loss of income, inadequate savings, old age health problems, isolation, lack of care giver support, and inadequate access to health care. | 3. All people aged 85 and above in the 6 selected townships with transfer of MMK10,000/month COST - $67,500/year  
4. All people aged 75 and above in Myanmar with transfer of MMK 10,000/month COST $2.8M/year |
| Integrated Social Protection Services (training of social workers on case management and referral practices) | Social Work case managers assess the needs of a child and the family and provide an entry-point for them to access services. They coordinate to ensure a network of services and resources and support from multi-sectoral providers. | Expanding from three (in 2015) to five social work case managers trained and deployed in each of the 27 townships, and deploying new 165 case managers in additional 33 townships (5 per each township). COST $1.35M/year |
Sound program design and a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism is important to monitor progress and measure impact.

In Myanmar, this needs to be balanced with available human and financial resources. Global experiences have shown that programmes relying on complex targeting and conditionality impose significant capacity requirements and unnecessary administrative costs.

The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) has strengthened its technical readiness to coordinate social protection programmes in 37 townships across Myanmar. After the 2015 flood and landslide emergency, DSW with the support of development partners, developed a manual to guide the implementation of social cash transfers by adapting international best practice to Myanmar’s existing structures and capacities.

MYANMAR’S NEXT STEPS

Feasible opportunities of implementing NSPSP starting from the first year of new administration

In the short term, some immediate steps needed include:

- Form national Social Protection Committee led by Vice President
- Costed and coordinated national plan defining the phased roll-out of NSPSP implementation;
- Include social protection programmes in national budget;
- Design information systems, M&E systems and transparent governance rules;
- Strengthen integrated delivery systems and nationwide deployment of social work case managers; and
- Articulate areas where support can be provided.
While investing in expanded coverage of health and education services is crucial, it is not always sufficient to ensure that people can access these services.

For example, a poor family that loses its main source of income may feel forced to withdraw their children from school and send them to work. Programmes such as the National Social Protection Strategic Plan’s (NSPSP) social cash transfers and public employment programmes can help such families to boost their income security and continue sending their children to school.

Social protection can thus be seen as an important social policy instrument to reduce poverty, social and economic vulnerabilities and deprivations that can otherwise have lasting adverse impacts.