

Towards a social protection floor: Assessment-based National Dialogue



International
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Myanmar

The Assessment-based National Dialogue (ABND) process in Myanmar helped to develop a consensus on the picture of the existing social protection situation in the country. This included identification of social protection schemes administered by the central Government, challenges, policy recommendations and their estimated costs. The process encompassed several national dialogue workshops which debated and decided on concrete policy recommendations to establish a social protection floor (SPF) in Myanmar.

The ABND process conducted during 2013-15 convened a wide range of social protection stakeholders, such as:

- Ministries of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement; Labour, Employment and Social Security; Health; Finance; Education; Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development; National Planning and Economic Development; and Home Affairs;
- workers' and employers' representatives;
- development agencies, such as ILO, IOM, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNOPS, WHO, WFP, JICA, World Bank;
- non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and
- research institutions.

National social protection floors (SPFs) guarantee access to essential health care and basic income security for children, persons of working age and older persons.

185 countries have adopted the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), an approach to achieve universal social protection.

This note presents a successful country experience of expanding social protection.



Main lessons learned

- The ABND process helped to define the SPF in Myanmar and provide inputs to the National Social Protection Strategic Plan, policy discussions on the Rural Development Strategic Framework and universal health coverage.
- At the time of conducting the ABND, Myanmar was in a post-conflict setting and undergoing a transition to full democracy. Against this backdrop, the ABND successfully facilitated participatory dialogue on social policy among ministries and development partners.
- The cost of providing an SPF to all people in the country was estimated, which can form a basis for prioritizing the policy recommendations and exploring the mobilization of fiscal resources.
- The ABND was harmonized with other social protection activities undertaken in Myanmar, such as the World Bank's social protection inventory. This encouraged collaboration between development partners under the auspices of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), based on mutual synergies.

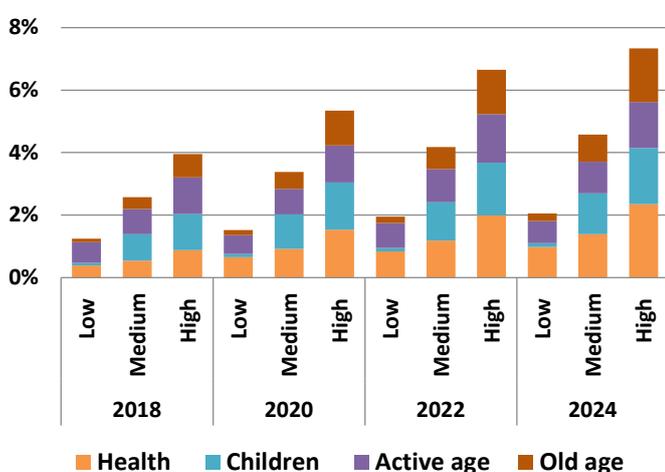
1. What was the ABND process and its outcomes?

Step 1 – Building the assessment matrix: The ABND assessment matrix was prepared based on an inventory of social protection schemes developed by the World Bank. The matrix describes the social protection schemes in Myanmar that are administered by the central Government and compares them with the SPF guarantees to identify gaps and challenges.

The matrix was reviewed at the first national dialogue workshop held 23-25 March 2014. The outcome of the workshop was a consensus on the social protection provisions in Myanmar, gaps in coverage, implementation issues and policy recommendations to address these issues and establish an SPF for all people throughout their life cycles.

Step 2 – Costing the SPF: A second national dialogue workshop was held during 18-20 June 2014 to translate the recommendations into practical policy options in order to estimate their costs. The costing exercise was facilitated by the ILO and received inputs from the UN country team, ministries and NGOs.

Figure 1. Cost of SPF packages as % of GDP, 2018-24



Source: ILO, 2015.

A third national dialogue workshop was held during 3-5 September 2014. The workshop included training on using a costing model called the Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) and a review of the policy options. The outcome was the estimated cost of three SPF packages (low, medium and high) depending on national priorities. The SPF package of benefits was estimated

to cost between 2.2 and 7.2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) once it has been fully implemented by 2024, as shown in figure 1.

Following the costing of the SPF, simulations were done to estimate the impact of the SPF on poverty reduction in the country. The simulations suggest that the SPF has the potential to reduce poverty incidence by 13 per cent and a universal social health protection scheme can reduce poverty incidence by 4.3 per cent.

Financing the SPF would involve mobilizing additional fiscal resources. At present, government revenues in Myanmar rely heavily on revenues of state-owned enterprises and proceeds from the sale of licences to international companies entering the local market. Fiscal resource mobilization could be done through several means, such as budgetary reallocations, changes in the government revenue structure, introduction of taxes, among other means. This is important to ensure the sustainable financing of the SPF.

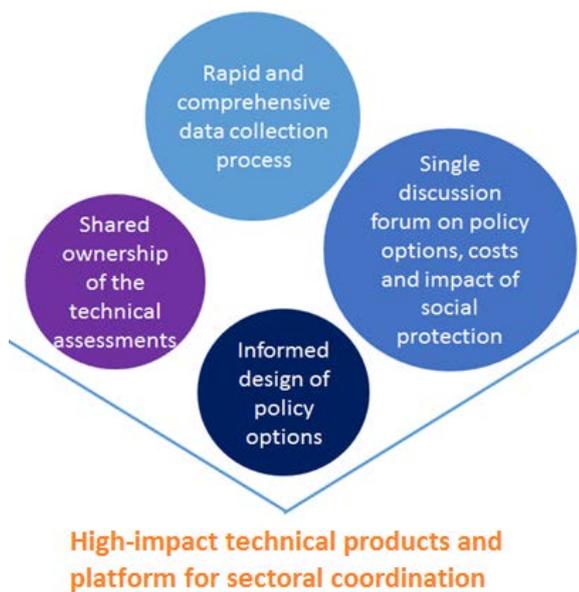
Step 3 – Launching the ABND report: The ABND report was produced in September 2014 and provided inputs to the drafting of the National Social Protection Strategic Plan. This Plan includes eight new flagship programmes for the extension of social protection, which are all policy options developed through the ABND process. It was adopted in December 2014 under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. The final ABND report was launched in May 2015 and was further used in several policy discussions, such as those on the Rural Development Strategic Framework, universal health coverage and an Essential Package of Health Services for all.

2. How did the ABND exercise capitalize on mutual synergies?

In Myanmar, the national dialogue process capitalized on the mutual synergies and resources of different development agencies. This was done by coordinating the different social protection tools being used by agencies. For instance, the ILO, World Food Programme and the World Bank worked together to combine the United Nations' ABND methodology and the SPIAC-B's Social Protection Assessment (SPA) tools.

The SPA inventory of existing social protection provisions informed the first step of the ABND, which included listing existing social protection schemes, issues and policy recommendations. Likewise, the national dialogue process, which forms the core component of the ABND, offered a platform to discuss the results of the SPA tool.

This had some positive effects. It helped to capitalize on mutual strengths and avoid duplication of effort. Cooperation between agencies allowed them to share the workload of data collection and avoid fatigue among key stakeholders. It also fostered shared ownership of the different tools. The development partners were able to provide relevant and impactful technical inputs to the policy-making process in Myanmar through a participatory process with the ultimate objective to move towards making basic social protection a reality for all people in the country.



The information collected for the ABND matrix was made available online to avoid discrepancies in the data and figures used by various stakeholders.¹ As a result, the stakeholders agreed on a baseline for monitoring progress as the extension of social protection moves forward.

Application of the different social protection tools also facilitated the development of the National Social Protection Strategic Plan, which includes eight flagship social protection schemes proposed by the ABND

¹ www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProject.action?id=3010

process. To make the Plan a reality and implement an SPF in the country, further work is required to assess its fiscal implications. Greater and improved coordination among ministries is also needed. For this to be done, the results of the ABND and SPA tools can be used as a basis for further discussions, analysis and decision-making.

3. What's next?

Extending the coverage of social protection schemes to all people in Myanmar could be done through three steps, as described below.

Mobilizing sustainable fiscal space: The recommendations from the ABND process can be used to advocate to the Government to make impactful investments in the social protection system. Building the national social protection system through fiscal investments can help to ensure sustainability of the system. A detailed expenditure review can be conducted to identify ways to generate fiscal resources for social protection. Furthermore, prioritization of the recommendations and a phased implementation plan can help to ease the burden on fiscal resources.

Scaling up existing schemes and implementing new schemes: Detailed feasibility studies and legal reviews need to be done in order to implement or extend national social protection schemes and ensure their sustainability. The implementation can be done in an efficient, cost-effective and transparent way through the use of technology.

Strengthening sectoral coordination to aid benefit delivery: Coordination among different institutions needs to be improved, which could be facilitated by the multi-stakeholder working platform established by the ABND process. This can help to synchronize the identification of beneficiaries and the delivery of benefits to avoid fragmentation and duplication of efforts. The platform can also be used to design the architecture of an integrated delivery system to improve access to social protection.

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