



Photo: Mariano Silva, UNICEF, Mozambique

TECHNICAL NOTE 2026

# Good practices on Gender Equality in Social Protection Programming



**Anders Rönquist**

Assistant Head of Department,  
Head of Unit for Eastern Africa  
and the Horn of Africa (HORNÖST),  
Africa Department (AFRIKA)

**“***Social protection is a human right with direct effects on poverty, resilience and livelihoods. It is also an enabler for achieving the objectives of Swedish development priorities, such as decent work, climate resilience and gender equality. Sida's approach to social protection is outlined in a Guidance note and in Briefs explaining the links to human rights based approach, shock response, climate change, migration and gender. Drawing on evidence-based results and Sida's experiences this technical note on gender and social protection intends to inspire programme design that aims to make social protection systems more gender transformative.*



**Juliana Nyasha Tirivayi**

Honorary Professor, Department  
of Social Policy and Social Security  
at Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg  
(H-BRS)

**“***This is timely and useful guidance that clearly distinguishes between different levels of gender integration in social protection and emphasizes how and why gender-responsive and transformative approaches are essential for achieving sustainable gender equality.*



**Naila Kabeer**

Emeritus Professor,  
Department of International  
Development and International  
Inequalities Institute, London  
School of Economics (LSE)

**“***This technical note provides a valuable reminder that social protection policies have moved beyond the piecemeal, isolated interventions of their early years to a more systemic approach that recognizes their potential to help women and their families to weather crisis, that promotes more sustainable livelihoods and, when designed carefully, that addresses the structural roots of gender inequality.*

This technical note was developed by Britta Olofsson (Sr. Programme Manager), Lisa Hjelm (Sr. Programme Manager), Gisela Strand (Sr. Policy Specialist Gender Equality) and Anja Taarup Nordlund (Sr. gender expert at Sida gender help desk at NCG). We extend our gratitude also to Sida thematic experts, working groups and to Sida partners who have provided valuable input, comments and cases. Special thanks to academic scholars pointing the work in the right direction.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. TOWARDS A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. WHY A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMING .....</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 Contributing to gender equality and other Swedish priorities .....	7
3.2 Gender equality and social protection are human rights .....	7
3.3 Addressing multidimensional vulnerabilities across the life course .....	8
3.4 Creating opportunities for women and communities .....	9
3.5 Social protection for women and girls during shocks and crisis .....	9
<b>4. HOW TO DEVELOP A GENDER EQUAL APPROACH IN SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMING? .....</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1 Understanding the situation of women, men, girls and boys .....	10
4.2 Applying a life-course approach .....	11
4.3 Implementation and operational consideration .....	12
4.4 Dialogue, coordination and stakeholder engagement .....	13
4.5 Results-based management (RBM) and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) .....	14
<b>Annex 1. Contribution assessment questions.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Annex 2. Dialogue and follow-up questions .....</b>	<b>17</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**Social protection is a human right with direct effects on poverty, resilience and livelihoods. Well-designed programmes can also improve gender equality and reduce women's vulnerabilities across the life course.<sup>1</sup>**

Gender-inclusive social protection can enhance women's freedom, choices and opportunities to maximise their well-being and participation in social and economic life. In this regard, Sida has high ambition, with 80 per cent of the support for social protection tagged with the OECD DAC Gender Policy Marker.<sup>2</sup> A recent assessment of eight bilateral Sida-financed social protection contributions confirmed the high level of gender mainstreaming but also showed that more can be done.<sup>3</sup>

The assessment clarified that social protection programmes may include efforts to improve gender equality, such as ensuring that women are the recipient of cash transfers, but may still not address root

causes of gender inequality, gender norms and discrimination. Only when programmes are designed with a gender perspective, they can effectively address the differences between and among women, men, girls and boys in terms of their relative position in society. This may include the distribution of resources, opportunities, and power, as well as the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV), improved access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and to the care economy.<sup>4</sup>

This technical note aims to provide a hands-on tool for social protection programming for Sida's staff and partners. It includes topics such as what a gender transformative or responsive contribution entails; why it is important to integrate a gender perspective throughout the life course and how this can be achieved. It is complemented with strategic questions to be asked at different stages across the contribution management cycle (see annex 1 and 2).

## WHAT IS SOCIAL PROTECTION?

At Sida, social protection is defined as a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing and protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, throughout their life course placing a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups".<sup>5</sup> Sida's support includes all social protection and care instruments. Some examples below.<sup>6</sup>

<b>Social assistance</b>	Non-contributory cash or in-kind transfers such as child grants or social pensions; school feeding programmes; public works or cash for work programmes.
<b>Social insurance</b>	Contributory schemes which pool economic risks such as unemployment insurances, health insurance, or weather-based insurance.
<b>Labour and jobs</b>	Skills building programmes; job-search and matching programmes; active labour market programmes; or employment guarantee programmes.
<b>Social care services</b>	Adult and childcare services; services for people with disabilities; protection services; provision of direct outreach, case management and referral services.

## 2. TOWARDS A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

The following table has been developed utilising Sida's gender scale to improve the understanding of different approaches in addressing gender inequality (see the brief '[How Sida works with Gender Equality](#)').

GENDER SCALE DEFINITIONS	EXAMPLES OF FEATURES IN SOCIAL PROTECTION CONTRIBUTIONS	EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL RISKS
<b>Gender transformative</b> Contributes to change structural drivers of gender equality. These include change of social norms, cultural values, power structures and institutions and the root causes of gender inequalities and discrimination.	Social protection programming which explicitly seeks to change harmful gender norms, roles, and power relations (e.g. family workshops, male engagement, community norm change campaigns). Efforts to ensure women have direct control over transfers and decision-making opportunities, marriage and relationships. Some programmes partner with women's rights organisations and promotes intersectional inclusion (e.g. for people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ communities, minorities).	Risk of doing harm and risk of discrimination is small. In case of poor implementation, such as campaigns with misguided messages, lack of local buy-in, a short-term risk is, though, immediate harm, such as risk of GBV. If there is inadequate coverage, there is a risk of lack of impact or transformation. In a long-term perspective, failing to challenge harmful norms provides the anti-gender and rights movements with arguments to preserve harmful norms.
<b>Gender responsive</b> Deliberately addresses different needs and vulnerabilities of women, men, girls and boys, addresses equitable distribution of benefits, resources, status, rights, but do not address the root causes of inequalities.	Programmes which address different needs and strive to have an equitable distribution of benefits (e.g. maternity and paternity leave; child care subsidies). It may integrate components targeting women's practical needs (e.g. Cash Plus training and health care linkages). Generally, social protection programming uses sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators.	There are risks of focusing on symptoms (e.g. providing income support) but not underlying causes (e.g. discriminatory inheritance norms).
<b>Gender numbered</b> Focus on the number (50/50) of women and men.	Programmes where women and men are equally benefitting, but do not seek to change inequalities and may even perpetuate inequalities, such as programmes with quotas without supporting services. They may target women as recipients but without empowerment measures (e.g. cash only, no complementary training).	Risk that gender stereotypes are perpetuated (e.g. women as "only caregivers"). Risks of increased workload of women and girls, household conflicts or GBV when resources are redistributed.
<b>Gender blind</b> No attention to gender, fail to acknowledge the different needs of women, men, girls and boys.	Programmes designed without an understanding (analysis) of what types of roles and responsibilities are traditionally assigned to women and men, such as care work, and what gender inequalities persist in the society in which the household exists. E.g. flat-rate transfers.	Failing to recognise the impact of power dynamics within a household. Heads of households are often men, this may include households with divorcees and widows, where sons or brothers to the deceased or to the widow may control household funds and activities. Women may have little or no access to the funds. This includes access to e.g. funds for child support.
<b>Gender negative</b> Activities that aggravate or reinforce gender inequalities and harmful social norms.	A health or social insurance programme linked to formal employment. Programme design which restricts transfers to head of household (mainly men) and/or does not offer child support. Public works programmes which only employ men.	Women are more likely to be in an informal employment or self-employed. Elevated risk that women are actively excluded, and will not have access to, control over, or benefit from insurances, further deepening the economic divide and lack of possibilities for women. These features exclude women and vulnerable groups, reinforce traditional gender roles, and limit women's control over financial resources. Without childcare or flexible options, women face heightened care burdens.

Sida should always strive towards a gender transformative approach contributing to ending harmful gender norms, such as (but not limited to): female genital mutilation; child marriages; norms that assign childcare primarily to women; gender-based violence; taboos around menstruation; and norms that limit women's voice and decision-making. In addition, Sida should promote men's equal participation in care.

Gender responsive approaches identifies barriers such as unequal care burdens, discriminatory practices and mobility constraints, and designs measures to reduce them. It also requires allocating resources fairly, so that programmes do not reinforce existing inequalities. It is often a gender responsive approach which is applied in the country's policies and programmes where Sida is working.

Both approaches can be intersectional, recognising that gender intersects with other identities such as age, disability, sexual orientation, race, caste, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs. Sida defends the rights of all, including people whose gender identity is non-binary.<sup>7</sup>

The OECD DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker is a commitment that donors have made to show to what extent their supported projects and programmes are designed to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Sida reports on progress to the OECD DAC on an annual basis. It helps track commitments, strengthen accountability, and ensure that gender equality is considered in how programmes are planned and delivered.

By utilising the minimum criteria presented by the gender policy marker, the likelihood that the contribution can become responsive or transformative increases significantly. Applying the marker criteria will show where the contribution needs strengthening. Please read more about [the Gender Equality Policy Marker in Sida's Gender Tool Box](#).

## 3. WHY A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMING?

Despite progress over the last decades, it is estimated that 3.8 billion people around the world remain entirely uncovered by social protection, women in particular are lagging behind.<sup>8</sup> While all groups in society have the right to social protection, this technical note is focused specifically on gender equality.

### 3.1 CONTRIBUTING TO GENDER EQUALITY AND OTHER SWEDISH PRIORITIES

Evidence shows that social protection is an enabler for achieving the objectives of Swedish development priorities, such as decent work, health and education, climate resilience, peacebuilding and gender equality. The Strategy for gender equality including women's and girls' freedom and empowerment 2025–2028 and Sida's technical note on Women's Economic Empowerment reiterates social protection as a key priority for women's economic empowerment and well-being. When it comes to gender equality, social protection programmes designed with a gender lens can support the strategic aims and improve the lives of women and girls in several different dimensions.

### 3.2 GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL



### PROTECTION ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

Sida recognises social protection as a human right which is enshrined in instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Art. 9. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>9</sup> refers to non-discrimination, including social security in employment, maternity leave, equal access to family benefits and maternity services.<sup>10</sup> Social protection and women's rights are further reiterated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.<sup>11</sup>

Social protection is explicitly mentioned in the Sustainable Development Goals forming part of the human right agenda and for leaving no one behind. More specifically, it is included in the SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). Social protection is also described as an enabler of several additional SDGs, such as: SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth).

#### Social protection is strongly associated with poverty reduction and employment!

Zambia has an ambitious social protection policy, budget and approach which includes support to women and girls. The World Bank programme Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihood (GEWEL) funded by Sida and other partners includes a Cash Plus component Supporting Women's Livelihoods reaching 144,000 women and indirectly 750,000 beneficiaries since 2016.

A recent impact evaluation shows that the productivity grant of 225 dollars in combination with training in business and life skills has strong impact. For example, food consumption increased by 35 per cent, household savings by 234 per cent and household income by 62 per cent. Overall the Supporting Women's Livelihoods programme reduced poverty by 30 per cent. Further, it strengthens resilience and climate change adaptation as most businesses are focusing on agriculture production and more resilient crops are being introduced. Another positive effect is the digital and financial literacy increase among the women linked to the digital payments of the Social Cash Transfers.

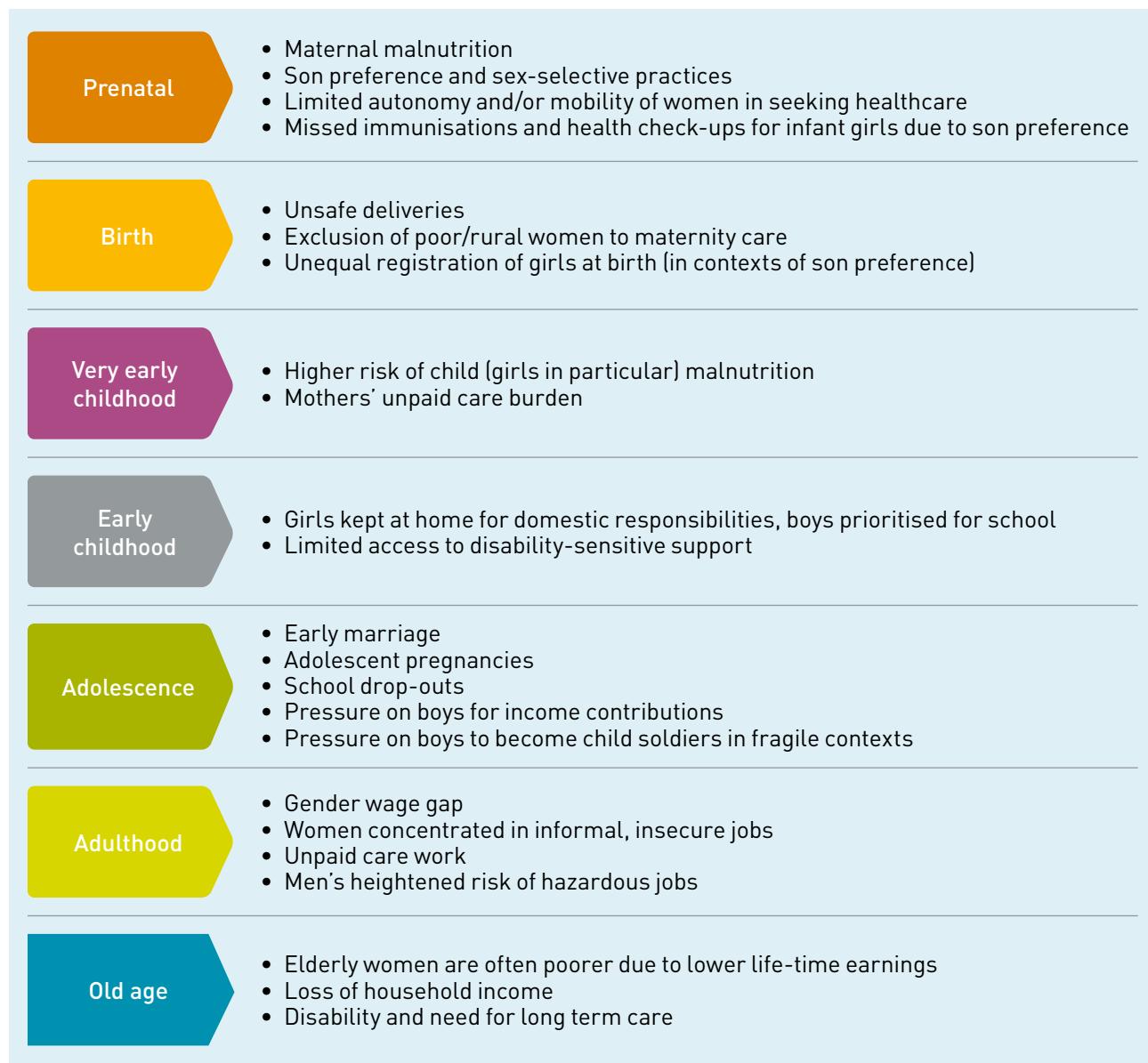
Photo: Hillevi Ekberg, Sida

### 3.3 ADDRESSING MULTIDIMENSIONAL VULNERABILITIES ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

The life-course approach is included in Sida's guidance note for social protection<sup>12</sup> and is a favourable model for linking to the human rights agenda. A life-course approach to social protection programming reflects that women, men, girls and boys face different risks and vulnerabilities at different stages in life, and that social protection must be designed to address these challenges, as included in figure 1 below.

Women and girls from the poorest households are in a particularly disadvantaged situation because they confront varying compounding vulnerabilities and risks over their life course. Ranging from inequalities in receiving care in their early years and access to education, to early marriages and unsafe child-bearing, to disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid care work, labour market discrimination, experiences of violence and old age poverty.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1. Examples of vulnerabilities across the life course





#### Evidence of results on reduced violence

Research on Sida financed social protection shows that social protection can have significant potential to reduce violence against women and children, even if GBV prevention is not an explicit programme objective.<sup>19</sup> The Cash Plus programme in Tanzania led to a sustained reduction (43 per cent) in the experience of sexual violence among adolescent girls (21 months after the intervention had ended).<sup>20</sup> In Mozambique, the child grant Cash Plus case management programme decreased the experience of physical and/or emotional Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by 38 per cent.<sup>21</sup> (See also text box in section 4.3 on cash transfer and Cash Plus programming).

Photo: UNICEF

### 3.4 CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND COMMUNITIES

There is extensive evidence that well-designed social protection programmes have a high return on investment. For every dollar transferred to poor families through a cash transfer, there is an estimated multiplier effect of USD 2.50 in the local economy.<sup>14</sup> The evidence suggests, however, that impacts extend beyond increases in monetary resources, with results ranging from poverty reduction outcomes, such as improved nutrition and early childhood development, to women's empowerment and livelihood diversification.<sup>15</sup> Cash transfers have improved school attendance for girls and boys,<sup>16</sup> dietary diversity and health and reproductive health outcomes,<sup>17</sup> and some programmes have seen an increase in women's decision-making power and financial autonomy.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.5 SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS DURING SHOCKS AND CRISIS

In recent years, large scale shocks have become more frequent, from pandemics to food, fuel and financial crises. Violent conflict is a reality in countries where Sida work and climate-change related disasters and environmental crises escalate. Such shocks often affect women and girls disproportionately and exacerbate discriminatory gender norms. Examples include forcibly displaced people being subject to sexual violence, girls not being able to return to school after a crisis, and female headed households having higher expenditure to respond to climate disasters.

In an unpredictable and uncertain world it is crucial for Sida to design and implement social protection linked to emergency responses or government-led programmes that are flexible and inclusive, based on a robust understanding of women's and girls' risks and needs, and attuned to the nature of the shock. For example, Sida can expand gender-responsive social protection with scalable shock components, both anticipatory and reactive, that shield women and girls from the immediate impacts of crises. See also [Sida brief on Adaptive and shock responsive social protection](#).

Also, Sida should advance coordination between social protection and climate change adaptation policies to protect women and girls from climate risks and promote sustainable and resilient livelihoods. See also [Sida brief on social protection and climate change](#).

In sudden-onset and protracted crises, Sida should support the establishment of coordination mechanisms between social protection, climate and humanitarian actors to mitigate gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities, while laying foundations for building fully-fledged social protection systems over the longer term; this can also include support designed to include IDPs and refugees. See also [Sida brief on migration and social protection](#).

## 4. HOW TO DEVELOP A GENDER EQUAL APPROACH IN SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMING?

Sida often supports government-led social protection programmes but Sida can also fund pilots or research to allow governments to test models, gain experience, and draw lessons before scaling up. Another approach often used by Sida, is to support research, advocacy, and capacity building.

### 4.1 UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION OF WOMEN, MEN, GIRLS AND BOYS

It is always imperative to ensure that social protection programmes are designed to deal with the challenges existing in a specific context and different types of systems can be considered.

Understanding conditions for women, men, boys and girls is part of the analysis to contextualise social protection programming.

Women, men, girls and boys do not constitute homogenous groups.<sup>22</sup> For instance, a young, displaced woman in DRC will face different challenges and possibilities compared to an elderly Zambian woman. The analysis should therefore be programme content specific, e.g. if the programme is about parental support, the programme should, as an example, analyse what the household roles and responsibilities are, including the economic distribution and financial responsibilities in relation to

#### What is a Gender Analysis?

A gender analysis identifies the difference between and among women, men, girls and boys regarding differences in distribution of resources, opportunities and choice, power and voice and human security in a given context.

A gender analysis highlights both specific vulnerabilities during the life course and actors for change among these groups. A gender analysis with an intersectional approach is key. The analysis should include sex-disaggregated data to inform the design and implementation of social protection strategies. It can provide powerful evidence on the discrimination, disadvantages, barriers and injustices that women, girls, boys and men can face, and can thereby contribute to changing discriminatory norms and practices.

parenting. This work should include an understanding of community-led care structures and existing informal care networks. The gender analysis is a precondition for identifying relevant measures to reduce risks and vulnerabilities related to different shocks, conflicts and contexts. See also [How Sida works with Gender Equality](#).

#### Results from gender analyses in Kenya

In Kenya, Sida's support has enabled UNICEF to undertake the first gender analysis of Kenya's social protection sector with recommendations on how to make different aspects of the social protection sector more gender transformative. Now UNICEF is working with the government to implement these recommendations, like addressing issues of unpaid care and pushing for female caregivers to be primary recipients of the caregiver allowance as provided for in the Persons with Disability Act Article 57.

Sida's support has also enabled UNICEF to carry out a gendered Fiscal Incidence Analysis (FIA). In partnership with Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, and World Bank, a specific analysis on women and children looked at the impact of taxes and government transfers on gender inequality and poverty, how the burdens of taxation and the benefits of transfers differ by gender, and how equitable taxation and government spending are. The findings are being used to reform the provision of social protection such as addressing unpaid care.

## 4.2 APPLYING A LIFE-COURSE APPROACH

Applying a life course approach allows the design of a social protection system to be sensitive to critical life events, transitions and turning points. As women and men face different vulnerabilities during the life course the approach is favourable for a gender responsive or transformative design. Critically, addressing inequalities earlier in life is an important foundation for reducing inequalities later in life.

Sida's portfolio includes support through the life course, from early childhood components often focusing on the first 1,000 days (from conception to two years), youth, adulthood and the elderly.

In particular, social protection programming can: support elderly and women in the informal economy; increase the opportunity for girls to complete studies; strengthen links to the care economy and increase access to pensions and financial services.

**Figure 2. Types of social protection programmes tailored to the different stages of life**

<b>Prenatal</b>	<b>Birth</b>	<b>Very early childhood</b>	<b>Early childhood</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternal social support, education and counselling</li> <li>• Antenatal care access</li> <li>• Nutritional supplements</li> <li>• Cash transfers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to skilled assistance during birth</li> <li>• Maternal leave benefits, paternal leave benefits</li> <li>• Parental social support, education and counselling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternity and paternity entitlements</li> <li>• Parental social support, education and counselling, incl. SRHR</li> <li>• Child support grant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special programmes for children with disabilities</li> <li>• Quality and affordable childcare</li> <li>• Sick child leave</li> <li>• Child support grant</li> </ul>
<b>Adolescence</b>	<b>Adulthood</b>	<b>Old age</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth monitoring and promotion, incl. school feeding</li> <li>• Education, incl. SRHR and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)</li> <li>• One-stop support mechanism</li> <li>• Child support grant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SRHR education, incl. CSE</li> <li>• GBV prevention and response programming</li> <li>• Quality and affordable childcare</li> <li>• Unemployment benefits</li> <li>• Public works programming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pension schemes, (not limited to formal employment)</li> <li>• Access to health and SRHR</li> <li>• GBV prevention and response programming</li> </ul>	



### Gender aspects in Sida's global support

Sida is collaborating with international organisations engaged in advocacy for social protection such as HelpAge International that works to improve the lives of older women and men around the world, and with Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) who is driving dialogue and research on extending social protection to informal workers. WIEGO's network includes partners such as the Self-Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA), which is the largest organisation of informal workers in the world.

Photo: HelpAge International

## 4.3 IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATION

Effective gender responsive and transformative social protection programming require attention to how programmes are designed and delivered in practice. This includes ensuring adequate financing and technical expertise on gender equality within implementing partners, with clear roles and responsibilities assigned for gender mainstreaming and gender targeted efforts.<sup>23</sup> It can also stimulate the programme design to include Cash Plus or to develop links to social and labour market sectors such as health, education, the care economy, including childcare services and infrastructure, livelihoods and decent work.

Programmes should also promote women's leadership within implementation structures and allocate sufficient resources for gender-related activities, such as community engagement, safe grievance systems, childcare support, or behaviour change initiatives.

Furthermore, implementation should integrate measures to prevent unintended consequences, such as increased unpaid care burdens, and establish partnerships with gender experts and women's rights organisations to support continuous quality improvement.<sup>24</sup>

Carefully designed social protection programmes can diminish the unequal distribution of resources and power; this approach is compelling because it speaks to daily realities of women around the world.

Social assistance schemes - such as caregiver allowances, school meals, universal pensions, and child benefits - can support women's roles both as unpaid

and paid care workers. An example from Sida's work is in Rwanda where the government led social protection programme includes social care services and early childhood development. The purpose is to make care work visible, innovate the public work programme and to reduce women's unpaid responsibilities.<sup>25</sup>

### WHAT is Cash Plus?

Cash Plus (also written as cash+) programmes combine direct cash transfers with complementary support to meet the multiple and interconnected needs of vulnerable households. While cash transfer alone can help address immediate consumption needs, the "plus" element promotes sustainable change by building skills, strengthening livelihoods, expanding access to services, and tackling social or environmental barriers that limit opportunities.

Examples of Cash Plus activities are information campaigns and awareness-raising activities, psychosocial support, provision of training and/or livelihood inputs, or behavioural change communication programmes, food or other in-kind transfers. Increasingly, digital and ICT-based solutions are part of Cash Plus, enabling more efficient delivery, supporting financial inclusion, improving access to information, and creating new opportunities for education, training, and livelihoods. Cash Plus approaches, which combine income support with behaviour change or service linkages, has seen results in addressing structural barriers such as time poverty and limited mobility.<sup>26</sup>

### Referrals to social services

In Mozambique under the UN Joint Programme, the Child Grant explicitly promotes and implements referrals and linkages to statutory social services or community responses that seek to empower women and promote gender equality. The case

management component assesses and addresses protection risks based on evidence suggesting that intimate partner violence (IPV) is likely to begin, or escalate during pregnancy, with a higher risk among pregnant adolescents.

## 4.4 DIALOGUE, COORDINATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Dialogue should be conducted by managers or the programme officer. Platforms for dialogue can be global or bilateral. In case the support includes development of a government system, the senior management should engage in dialogue issues that can span from domestic resource mobilisation to effective integration of gender. If a sector working group exists and is functioning well it can be an effective platform for strategic dialogue and coordination. Social protection programmes should also adopt participatory approaches that actively engage women's rights organisations, feminist networks, and community leaders in all stages of the programme from design to implementation and evaluation.<sup>27</sup>

Coordination between government institutions, development partners, civil society and humanitarian

actors is essential to avoid duplication, harmonise gender and social protection efforts, and to strengthen accountability across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus.<sup>28</sup>

Special attention should be given to engaging men and boys, as well as local influencers (such as religious leaders, sports stars and influencers on social media), to challenge discriminatory social norms and support positive changes in gender relations, something which women's rights organisations often are specialised in.

Also, Sida can facilitate cross-regional learning exchanges to share innovations in social protection, drawing on diverse regional contexts. This can be done in e.g. capacity development programmes, in regional and global research and on global dialogue platforms and events etc.



### Mentorship of girls and boys changed views

In Mozambique, Sida's dialogue with UNICEF on gender and social protection stimulated an activity with a gender transformative ambition. Using the "Girls Are In Action (GAIA)" mentorship curriculum, girls were engaged to develop self-awareness and self-esteem, create a collective support group, and increase awareness on strategic life choices and bodily autonomy. Girls also acquired basic financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills. Boys reported shifting their views on their responsibilities for keeping their community safe and supporting girls. Nearly 1,100 girls and boys including Child Grant beneficiaries were mentored with GAIA and in addition the community were engaged.

Photo: UNICEF, Mozambique

## 4.5 RESULTS-BASED MANAGEMENT (RBM) AND MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (MEL)

Social protection programming should be grounded in a results-based management (RBM) approach ensuring that programme design, implementation, monitoring, learning and adaptations are guided by clearly defined gender relevant results. More on RBM and on monitoring, evaluation and learning, risk and

adaptive management can be found at [Sida's method for monitoring](#). Programmes should integrate participatory MEL processes, ensuring women, girls, and relevant groups (in particular marginalised groups) have safe and meaningful opportunities to contribute to monitoring and learning. This includes for instance establishing safe and confidential feedback, that their ideas, needs and challenges are considered for adaptations of social protection programming.

### Reduction of SEAH risks

There are SEAH risks in all programmes with interactions between programme actors and beneficiaries. As with any abuse of power, risks arise if programme actors have decision-making power over a person who receives for instance loans, grants, permits etc.

In a social protection programme this can include the power to decide who is eligible for a benefit and if the programme actor has the opportunity to use

this power during interactions with the beneficiary with little or no oversight for instance from other beneficiaries, community members, programme actors, or local leaders.

Identifying and mitigating these risks significantly reduce them.<sup>29</sup> This includes, for instance, that partner organisations and/or implementing agencies have adequate systems to prevent and respond to SEAH.<sup>30</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 Sida (2021) [What Works? To Reduce Poverty through Social Protection](#).
- 2 Sida (2024) Social protection overview.
- 3 Aferdita Haxhijaha and Anja Nordlund (2023) Social Protection Portfolio Assessment. Sida's Gender Helpdesk.
- 4 Paola Pereznieta and Rebecca Holmes (2023) [Gender-transformative social protection in crisis context: guidance note](#). STAAR.
- 5 Sida (2022) [Social Protection – 2 pager: Guidance Note](#), and [Social Protection Inter-Agency Board](#).
- 6 Building on: Pereznieta and Holmes (2023) [Gender transformative social protection in crisis contexts: Guidance note](#). STAAR.
- 7 Sida (2023) [Thematic Overview of Women's Economic Empowerment](#).
- 8 ILO (2024) [World Social Protection report 2024-26](#).
- 9 CEDAW can be found [here](#).
- 10 [UN agencies Social Protection – Human Rights \(website\)](#).
- 11 Beijing Declaration and Platform for action and all follow-up publications can be found [here](#).
- 12 Sida (2022) [Social Protection – 2 pager: Guidance Note](#).
- 13 UNICEF (2024) [Towards Gender responsive social protection. Evidence on Policymaking, Programme Implementation and Impacts for Women and Girls](#).
- 14 World Bank (2025) [Social protection and labor](#).
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Bastagli, F., Hagen-Zanker, J., Harman, L., Barca, V., Sturge, G., Schmidt, T., & Pellerano, L. (2016). [Cash transfers: What does the evidence say?](#) A rigorous review of programme impact and the role of design and implementation features. London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI).
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 UNICEF(2021) [Innocenti Research Brief. Cash Transfers: Past, present and future evidence and lessons learned from the Transfer Project](#).
- 19 Buller AM, Peterman A, Ranganathan M, Bleile A, Hidrobo M, and Heise L. (2018) [A Mixed-Method Review of Cash Transfers and Intimate Partner Violence in Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#). At Gender Impact platform.
- 20 UNICEF (2024) Innocenti Impact Evaluation Report. [A Cash Plus Model for Safe Transitions to a Healthy and Productive Adulthood: Round 4](#).
- 21 UNICEF (2022) Innocenti Research Report. [24-month impact Evaluation of the Child grant 0-2 Component in the Nampula province in Mozambique 2019-2021](#).
- 22 Sida (2020) brief 'How Sida works with Gender Equality'.
- 23 Paola Pereznieta and Rebecca Holmes (2023) [Gender-transformative social protection in crisis context: guidance note](#). STAAR.
- 24 UNICEF (2024) [Towards Gender responsive social protection. Evidence on Policymaking, Programme Implementation and Impacts for Women and Girls](#).
- 25 Blin, Holmes, Lippi (STAAR) and Staab (UN Women) [Social protection, care systems, and gender equality: An explainer](#).
- 26 Sida (2021) [What Works? To Reduce Poverty through Social Protection](#).
- 27 UNICEF (2024) [We Deserve Better: Unlocking the Power of Social Protection for Women and Girls](#).
- 28 [OECD website on legal instruments](#).
- 29 FCDO [DFID Guidance Note for DFID staff and implementing partners: Safeguarding Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(SEAH\) across DFID Programmes during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
- 30 Sida (2022) [Sida's approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment \(SEAH\)](#).

## Annex 1. Contribution assessment questions

### Contextual understanding and analysis

- What relevant policies and legislation are in place (e.g. care economy policies and strategies, social protection policies and strategies, national gender policies and strategies, legislation for gender equality)?
- Has a thorough gender analysis informed the programme design, considering intersectional vulnerabilities (e.g., age, disability, displacement, informal employment)?
- Does the proposal recognise that social protection impacts are not gender neutral?
- Does the programme consider women's unpaid care responsibilities without reinforcing discriminatory norms or stereotypes?
- Does the social protection system include measures to overcome cultural and administrative barriers that exclude vulnerable groups (e.g., undocumented women, refugees, people with disabilities)?
- Does the programme describe gendered vulnerabilities across the shock cycle (preparedness, response, recovery)?
- In crisis or humanitarian settings, have the additional needs of women and girls (e.g., safe access, adapted benefit levels) been considered when selecting instruments and calculating transfer values?

### Results approach of the proposal

- Does the programme include explicit gender equality results and indicators, with sex- and age-disaggregated data?
- Does the results framework measure not only access and coverage but also empowerment outcomes (e.g., decision-making power, reduced GBV risks, time use)?
- Are monitoring and evaluation systems designed to capture gender-specific risks and outcomes (e.g., exclusion errors, backlash)?
- Are there mechanisms to track whether programme design contributes to long-term normative change (e.g., redistribution of care, economic empowerment)?

### Financial proposal

- Are there an adequate budget for gender mainstreaming efforts across the projects (such as, but not limited to for gender experts, outreach to women's rights organisations and to local / religious community leaders, gender equality trainings, budgets for engagement with men and boys, socio-economic baselines with sex disaggregated methods and data collection)?
- Does the programme allocate resources for gender-specific activities (e.g., childcare, behaviour change sessions, gender training for implementers)?
- Is there a budget for engagement of gender experts, engagement with women's rights organisations and other stakeholders?
- Are estimated transfer sizes (if applied) adequate to meet basic needs and enable empowerment outcomes (e.g., investments, food security, child education)?

### Organisation of the proposal

- Are implementing partners experienced in gender-responsive or transformative social protection?
- Are women's rights organisations (locally or nationally) an integrated part of the organisational set-up? (They should be integrated into design, delivery and monitoring).
- Are there clear roles for women's rights organisations and other representative bodies in design, delivery, and oversight?
- Are complaint and grievance mechanisms in place and are they gender-sensitive and safe, including referral pathways for GBV, including for SEAH?
- Does the organisational approach integrate risk management for GBV, including SEAH, such as (but not limited to) staff codes of conduct and monitoring systems?

## Technical design

- Does the programme consider the findings of the gender analysis?
- Does the programme link to overall care economy and/or social protection policies and legislation? Which parts and how? And are these gender sensitive?
- Does the programme have a life-course approach? What parts of the life course does it target and do these aim at reaching diverse groups with different tools and measures?
- Does the programme adopt unconditional transfers where possible to avoid time poverty for women, or mitigate the burden of conditionalities?
- Where conditionalities exist, has there been an analysis of gendered time use impacts and alternatives considered?
- Are there explicit measures to reduce care and labour constraints (e.g., childcare provision, flexible work conditions)?
- Are beneficiary targeting and registration processes inclusive and non-discriminatory, addressing barriers such as ID documentation or limited mobility?
- Does the programme include a Cash Plus or integrated approach that facilitates access to complementary services (health, childcare, skills, livelihoods) without adding unpaid work burdens?
- Are Cash Plus activities (e.g., training, behaviour change sessions) designed to promote empowerment without reinforcing gender stereotypes?
- Are delivery mechanisms designed to reach excluded populations (e.g., migrants, persons with disabilities, informal workers)?
- Are behaviour change sessions or community dialogues included to challenge restrictive and discriminatory social norms?
- Is the chosen payment modality (e.g., digital transfers) accessible and safe for women, considering digital literacy levels and intra-household control over resources?
- Does the modality explicitly minimise exposure to GBV /SEAH risks during registration and payment collection?

## Risk assessment

- Does the process to select beneficiaries and delivery mechanisms account for possible factors that may exclude populations on the basis of gendered challenges exacerbated by a crisis (e.g., loss of ID, loss of community recognition, lack of mobile phone, insecurity, limited mobility, etc.)?
- Has the programme a comprehensive analysis of risks related to the programme design, e.g., GBV and SEAH, to mobility constraints, digital literacy, community relations and conflicts?
- Does the programme include a risk analysis of conditionalities and their impacts on women's time and mobility?
- Does programme design reduce risks of violence, including SEAH (e.g., safe travel, appropriate facilities, community supervision)?
- Are grievance and referral systems established to safely handle GBV-related complaints and link to national systems?
- Does the programme mitigate barriers to ensure equitable outcomes (e.g., discriminatory social norms, administrative exclusion)?
- Does the programme consider risks related to monitoring activities (e.g., safety in case of travelling, methods so women and men can speak up safely, with no repercussions to their statements, such as separate sessions, possibilities of being anonymous)?

## Annex 2. Dialogue and follow-up questions

- Have there been any deviations from the proposed design that may have an impact on gender outcomes? E.g.:
  - » Training and capacity of staff in relation to gender and SEAH;
  - » Cash Plus components that aim to contribute to gender equality;
  - » Irregular payments or reduction in amounts received;
  - » External factors, such as crises (climate, weather, economic, health), security constraints, school closures, change in state budget and policies, etc.
- When and how was monitoring carried out and with whom (was the method participatory and did it ensure women and girls were engaged in safe spaces with no repercussions)?
- How were the viewpoints, ideas and needs in general, and of women and girls in particular, worked into the programme design? What adjustments/adaptations were made?
- What types of changes were observed/reported in the programme in relation to gender equality (and in what groups, e.g., in women, men, girls and boys, in elderly, decision-makers and other groups as relevant)?
- What types of changes were observed/reported in the programme in relation to meeting practical needs (e.g., safety to and from activities, timing of activities)?
- Have there been mid-term evaluations, and if yes what were the findings and recommendations and how were they addressed (or what is the plan to reflect upon them)?
- Does reporting reflect on what changed in terms of gender equality? E.g., at household, community or state level.
- Does the reporting present all compiled data sex disaggregated?
- Are heightened unintended risks, such as GBV and prevention and response to SEAH being monitored? E.g.:
  - » Are grievances mechanism functioning? (if no complaints reach the mechanism it is a strong indication it is not functioning);
  - » Has the programme utilised the referral system in place to support victims/survivors of GBV?
- Have less women taken part due to mobility issues? What was done to overcome the challenges?
- Have less women taken part due to unpaid work responsibilities? What was done to overcome the challenges?

**SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY**

---

Visiting address: Rissneleden 110, 174 57 Sundbyberg  
Postal address: Box 2025, SE-174 02 Sundbyberg, Sweden  
Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64  
E-mail: [sida@sida.se](mailto:sida@sida.se) Web: [sida.se/en](http://sida.se/en)

