



INTERNATIONAL FOOD  
POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
*sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty*

# Strengthening Social Protection for Human Development in South Asia

---

**Akhter Ahmed**  
**International Food Policy Research Institute**

**Renewed Policy Action for the Poorest and Hungry in South Asia**  
**New Delhi**  
**2 December 2008**

Wednesday, December 03, 2008

# What is social protection?

---

- Social protection involves policies and interventions that assist the poor and the vulnerable to reduce the risk of shocks, mitigate their impact and cope with the aftermath
- Social protection policy addresses not only programs aimed at mitigating the impact of shocks and coping with their aftermath, but also interventions to reduce risks in the first place

# Sources of risks

- For the poor and vulnerable in South Asia, risks arise from three main sources:
  - Those related to employment and income
    - job loss; crop failure => sudden loss of income
    - low earnings; low crop yields => chronic low income
  - Health related
    - Illness, disability, death
  - Old age related

# Family Coping Strategies Exacerbating Risk

---

- Reduce food consumption => malnutrition
- Debt
- Sale of assets
- Child drops out of school
- Child sent into employment => youth in abusive child labor
- Absence from school/work

# Limitations of informal arrangements

---

- In South Asia, cultural values have traditionally placed the primary responsibility of social protection on family and on community ties—mainly through intrafamily and inter-household transfers
- Informal risk management instruments such as private transfers or community level support systems are effective mainly when risks are household-specific. However, they tend to break down once a large shock strikes the entire community

# Pubic SP interventions can help

---

## ■ Food/nutrition programs:

- Feeding, supplementation, fortification
- Food subsidies, free food distribution
- Food stamps

## ■ Family welfare support:

- Unconditional cash transfers
- Conditional cash transfers (health, education)

## ■ Job programs:

- Job creation – public works; microfinance

## ■ Social health insurance ,disability, accident insurance

- Pension programs; homes for aged, senior citizens' programs

# Human development: What role for social protection?

---

- Even in an environment of high economic growth, many households are left behind due to their low asset base (e.g., poor health and nutrition, low education, and limited physical assets)
- For these households, targeted social protection programs can offer both short- and long-term routes out of poverty
- The focus is on human capital interventions rather than on safety nets
  - Fiscal expenditures for such interventions should be regarded as human capital investment rather than simply income transfers to the poor

# Health issues

- While illness, injury, and disability are all health-related risks, illness is highly correlated with poverty
- Malnutrition, poor provision of preventive (primary) care, and inadequate caring practices contribute to ill health. Low immunization coverage, and lack of potable water and sanitation exacerbate the spread of infection
- Public health services are the most important measure for reducing health-related risks.
  - However, important challenges remain in public health provision, such as the disproportionate public health spending on personal health care services, rather than preventive care, and the lower access of the rural poor to public health facilities

# Education issues

---

- Education contributes significantly to poverty reduction. Every additional year of education increases a person's potential for a better life in the future
- However, the absence of efficient consumption-smoothing instruments often forces a poor household to pull children out of school if adverse income shocks hits the household
- Direct and opportunity costs of schooling are the main causes for children from poor households to drop out of school in the face of economic hardship

# Social protection issues

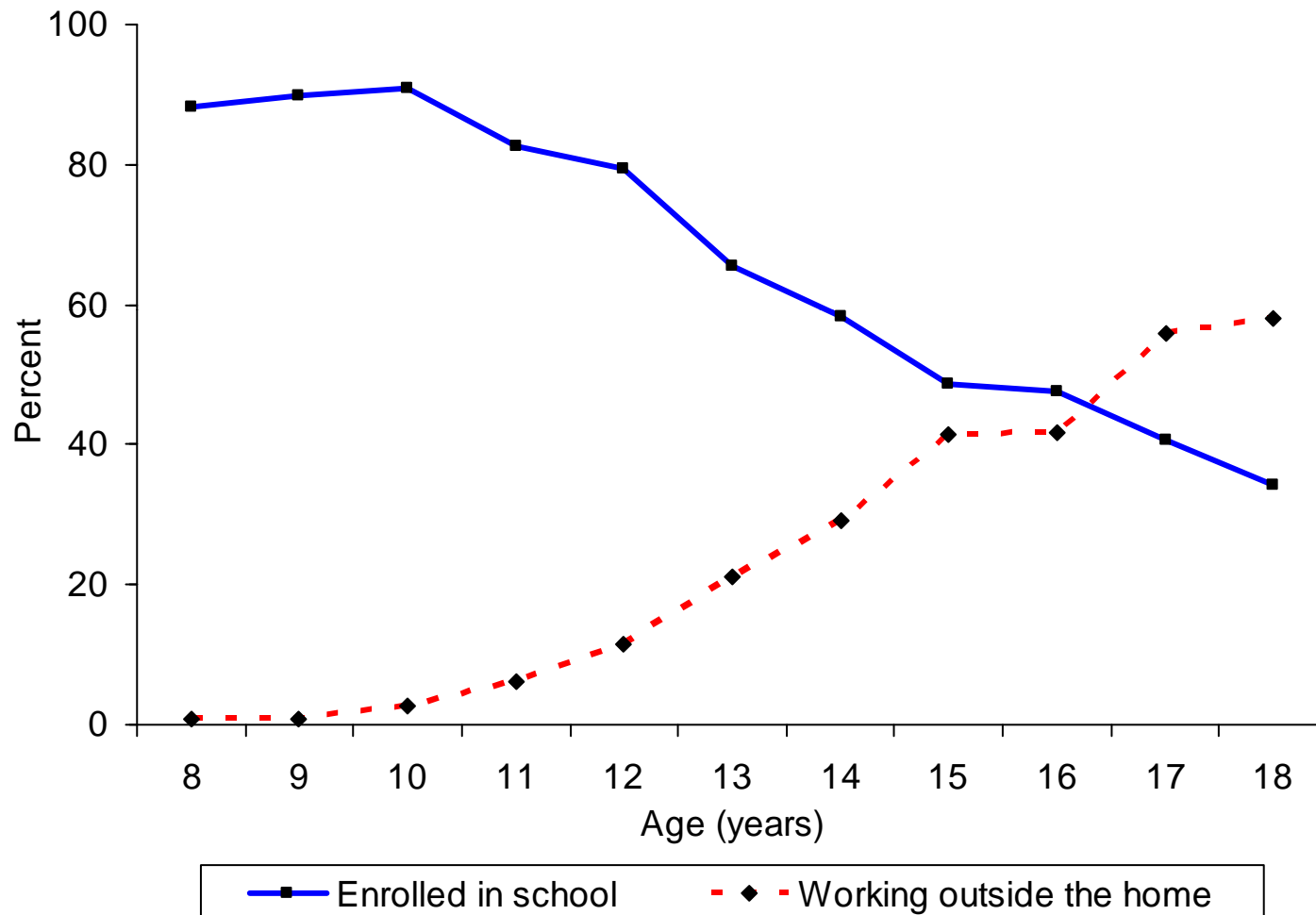
---

- Social protection programs in most South Asian countries reach only a small proportion of the poorest population
- Introducing or scaling up SP interventions is complex, associated with substantial costs, and dependent on knowledge base and capacity
- Most critical considerations that need to be taken into account:
  - The administrative capacity to target the poorest and to run the programs
  - The fiscal affordability of programs

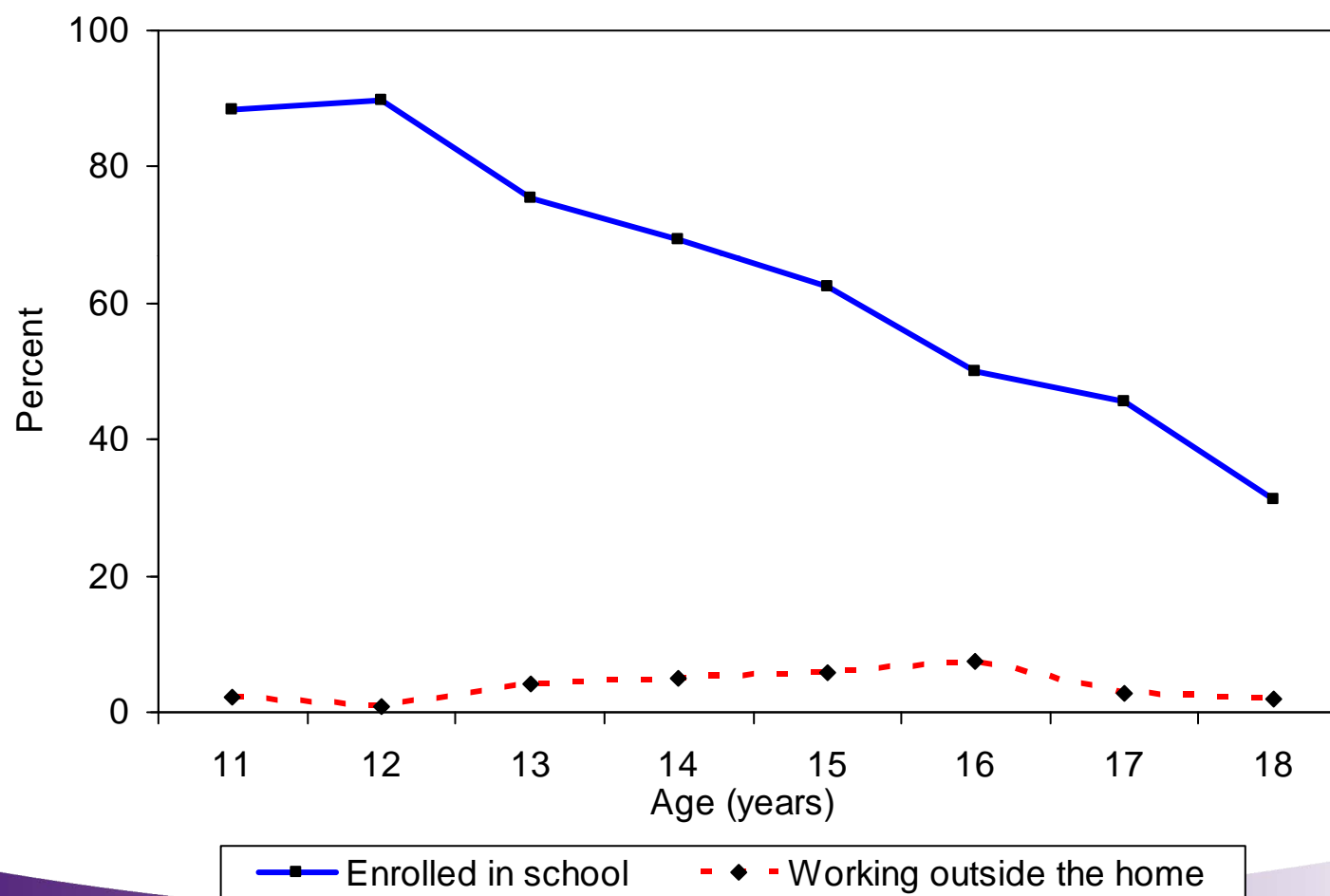
---

# **Education issues: Findings of IFPRI studies in Bangladesh**

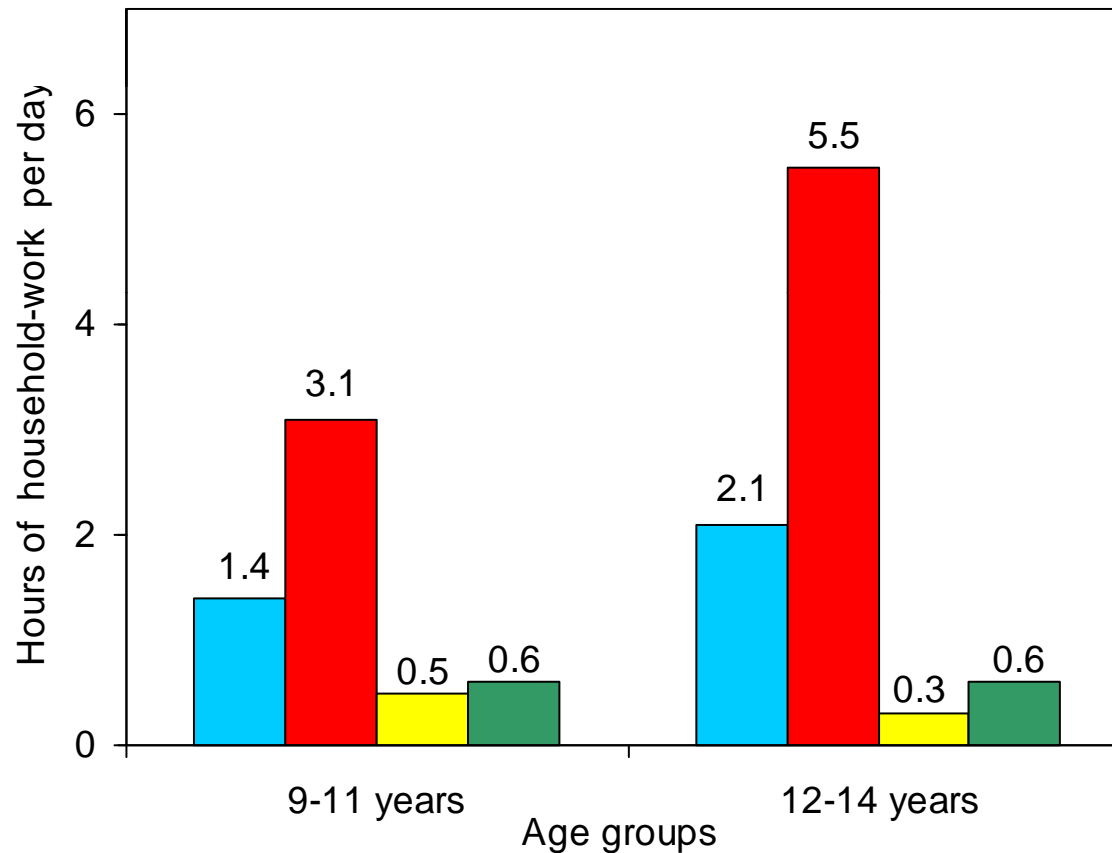
# For rural Bangladeshi boys, school enrollment declines and child labor increases as they get older



# For rural girls, the relationship between enrollment and labor force participation is weak

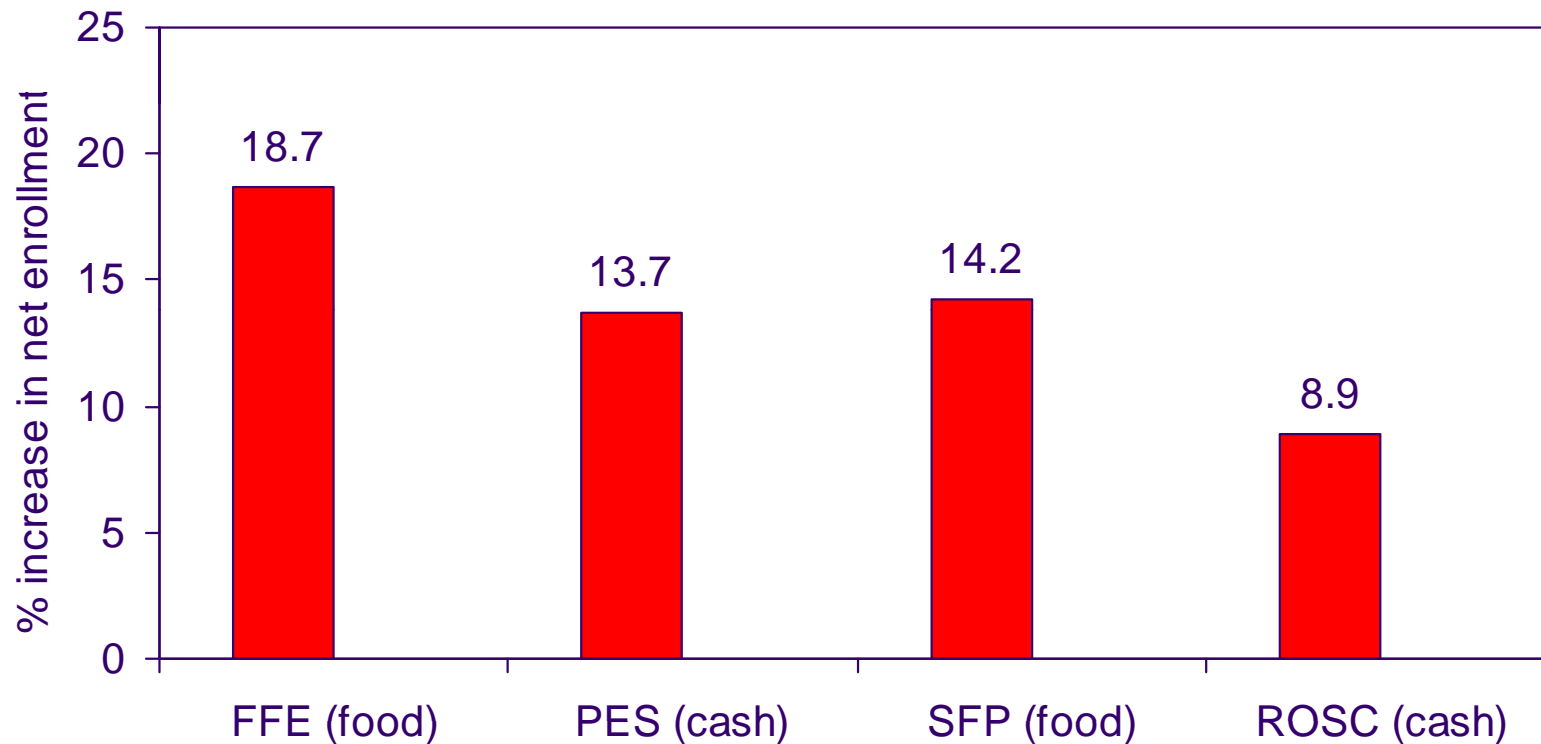


# Girls do not sit idle at home even when not working outside or not enrolled in school



■ Girls enrolled ■ Girls not enrolled ■ Boys enrolled ■ Boys not enrolled

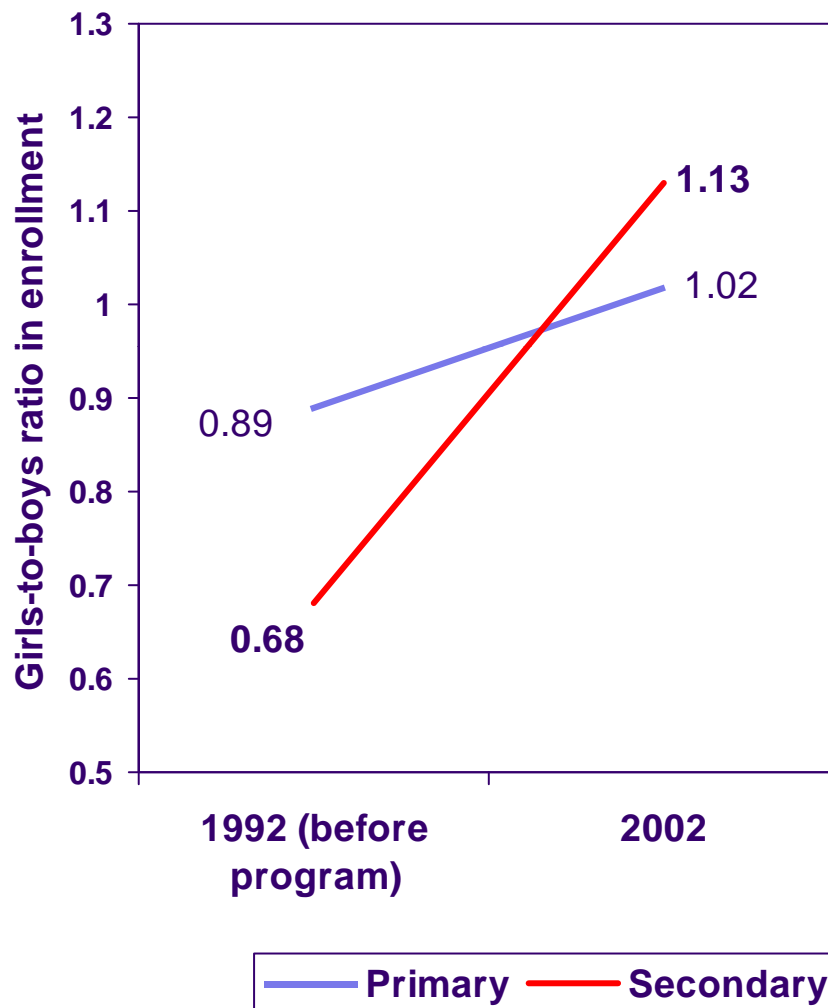
# Conditional food and cash transfers increased net primary education enrollment rates in Bangladesh



FFE = Food for Education Program  
PES = Primary Education Stipend Program  
SFP = School Feeding Program  
ROSC = Reaching Out-of-School Children Project - *Ananda* schools

# In Bangladesh, girls' secondary school stipend program over-achieved gender equity in schooling

- These programs started in 1993 in rural Bangladesh. From 1992 (before program) to 2002, girls' enrollment overtook that of boys at both primary and secondary levels of education
- However, the difference is larger at the secondary level, which indicates that the girls' secondary education stipend programs over-achieved the gender equity



# Questions

---

- Are existing SP programs reaching the most needy populations?
- Do these programs need to be re-designed for developing human capital?
- What are the challenges in scaling up promising SP programs to protect and improve human capital of the poor? What are their fiscal and administrative implications?
- What have we learned from SP programs in Latin American countries that can be applied to the South Asian context?

# Questions

---

- What role for public-private partnership in social protection? How can formal social protection build on pre-existing informal social protection mechanisms rather than crowding out the later?
- What procedures would improve flexibility of SP programs to adjust to changing situations such the crisis of rising food prices?
- What modalities of SP programs would ensure program exit and graduation?