

# Policy Brief

Enhancing social protection for female tea garden workers  
and their families in Sylhet division



This policy brief presents a set of policy recommendations for expanding and strengthening social protection support and access to basic services for improving the living conditions of tea garden workers, especially female workers and children. The findings and recommendations are based on a study that is the product of collaboration between UNICEF Bangladesh and Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), a national think tank.

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# Policy Brief

## Enhancing social protection for female tea garden workers and their families in Sylhet division

Tea garden workers (TGWs) in Bangladesh are recognized as a marginalised group lacking access to adequate social protection support, education and health care services, and decent work conditions. Being confined within remote tea estates, they are often confronted with extremely limited livelihood opportunities, poor living arrangements and health outcomes, and lack access to many benefits to which they are entitled.

The government of Bangladesh duly acknowledges the disadvantaged situation of TGWs and has devised a special social protection programme for them: the Programme for Livelihood Improvement of Tea-garden Labourers. There, however, exists significant room for improvement in ensuring coverage of these workers under various social security schemes, especially the recently consolidated Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP). Considering the already weak socio-economic conditions of TGWs, care must be taken so that eligibility criteria do not exclude otherwise extremely poor and vulnerable potential beneficiaries.

### Key Findings

- ◆ The poverty incidence among TGWs is estimated at 61.9 per cent, which is almost four times the corresponding poverty incidence of Sylhet Division and three times the national poverty rate.
- ◆ More than half of the tea garden working population are multidimensionally poor, compared to 24.6 per cent of national households.
- ◆ It is estimated that the recently raised daily minimum wage rate for TGWs from Tk. 120 to Tk. 170 will help reduce the headcount poverty incidence by 20 percentage points (from 61.9 per cent to 42 per cent).
- ◆ Half of tea garden households do not have a drinking water source at their

dwelling or in close vicinity, compared to just 12.5 per cent in communities outside tea gardens, and most accommodation lacks a toilet and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. More than 7 per cent of tea garden households do not have access to electricity, compared to just 3 per cent for other communities.

- ◆ The average years of schooling in the tea garden workers' community is 2.9, which is considerably lower than the national average of 6.2 years. Children attending tea garden schools do not receive any benefit under the Government's Primary Education Stipend Programme (PESP).
- ◆ The rates of stunting, wasting and underweight are higher for children residing in tea gardens than for those in non-tea garden communities.
- ◆ About 43 per cent of tea garden households are enrolled in at least one social protection scheme (including the special programme for tea garden workers), compared to 55 per cent for non-garden communities in Sylhet Division. Only around 12 per cent of pregnant workers received the maternity benefit payment from at least one source (either government or NGOs) during pregnancy.
- ◆ The multiplier effect of the expansion of the MCBP for all pregnant women and mothers with children for the tea garden workers' community would result in a decline in moderate poverty by 5.0 percentage points and extreme poverty by 4.6 percentage points. This would contribute to reducing multidimensional headcount poverty by 8.0 percentage points.

## Recommendations

### **Improve universal access to social protection schemes for tea garden workers.**

- ◆ Act swiftly to bring all TGWs, who are already identified as a marginalised group, under the existing social protection support mechanisms comprising all elements of lifecycle-based schemes.
- ◆ Ensure that support from the Programme for Livelihood Improvement of Tea-garden Labourers covers all tea garden workers, rather than a selected few from each garden.
- ◆ Extend the MCBP to benefit all pregnant women and mothers with children of qualifying age, and increase the benefit amount. The eligibility criteria for the MCBP (women aged 20-35 years with up to two children) should be relaxed for tea garden workers.

**Strengthen the health and WASH facilities of tea gardens as a matter of priority.**

- ◆ Expand and improve the health services currently provided at on-site facilities.
- ◆ Develop a set of standards so that basic WASH facilities – including toilets – are provided and regularly inspected.

**Improve working conditions for female tea garden workers.**

- ◆ Introduce or improve provision of daycare facilities and children’s playgrounds/ parks to help female workers manage their childcare and workload commitments.
- ◆ Establish workload adjustments to support the health and well-being of pregnant women.
- ◆ Ensure that employers comply with women’s right to maternity benefits as stipulated by law.

**Improve tea garden education facilities and standards.**

- ◆ Arrange transportation so that tea garden children can attend nearby primary schools.
- ◆ Improve teaching standards in tea garden schools.
- ◆ Extend coverage of primary and secondary stipend programmes to all children in tea gardens.

About half a million TGWs and their family members are experiencing multidimensional deprivations including limited livelihood opportunities and low wages, as well as reduced access to health, education, and social protection services. To ameliorate the poor socio-economic conditions and marginalised status of the TGW community, the Government of Bangladesh has introduced a special social protection scheme, the Programme for Livelihood Improvement of Tea-garden Labourers.

The National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), adopted in 2015, emphasises lifecycle support for disadvantaged groups on a priority basis. Furthermore, protecting and promoting workers' rights is an essential factor in alleviating their working conditions and living standards. As such, TGWs and their families should also be able to benefit from other regular social security schemes that address different risks and vulnerabilities at various stages of life. These include support for pregnant mothers, children, working-age people, and the elderly population.

Against this backdrop, this policy brief provides a snapshot of the current socio-economic state of TGWs and identifies ways to strengthen social protection support mechanisms for them, along with additional complementary measures to improve their working and living conditions. It also highlights the significance of ensuring comprehensive coverage for TGWs under the MCBP, a social protection scheme which is being implemented in Bangladesh. This policy brief draws on the findings of detailed fieldwork carried out in Sylhet Division, which boasts an overwhelming concentration of tea production activities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The field work for the underlying study includes a household-level primary questionnaire survey in 35 tea gardens and numerous Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted during January-February 2022.

# Key findings: Socio-economic conditions of tea garden workers

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## Wages and non-wage benefits

In the tea industry of Bangladesh, the land for production is leased by the government under an agreement requiring garden authorities to provide a range of non-wage benefits to their workers in addition to wages and food rations. The Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 and Bangladesh Labour Rules 2015 further stipulate that tea garden management will ensure housing, health and education services, and WASH facilities for workers and their families. Hence, TGWs are often left out of certain government services.

When the field survey was conducted in January 2022, a permanent tea garden worker could earn a minimum of Tk. 3,600 per month. The target for each worker is to pluck 22 kilograms (kg) of tea leaves daily. For each additional kilogram of plucking, workers are paid Tk. 5. Permanent workers are used to receiving Tk. 117-120 per day as minimum wages for seven days, working for six days on a weekly basis,<sup>2</sup> while temporary workers are paid only for the days they work. In August 2022, after workers protested for a wage increase, the minimum daily wage was raised to Tk. 170.

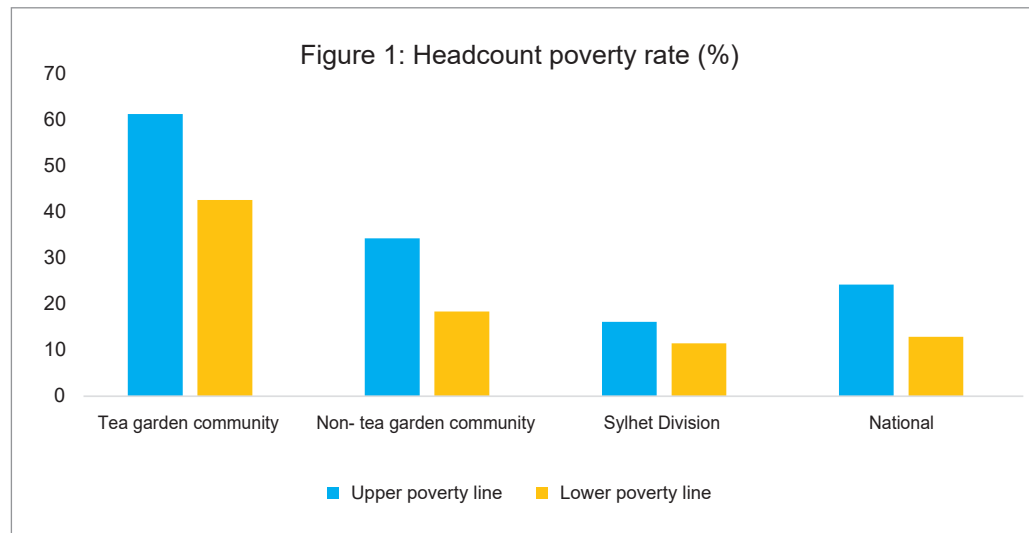
Permanent workers receive various non-wage benefits, including food rations, accommodation/housing facilities, health services, and education services for their children. Each worker receives 3 kg of flour or rice as food ration per week at Tk. 2.5 per kg, as well as food rations for their dependants and children. They receive two bonuses every year and are eligible for the employee provident fund entitlements upon their retirement. During their working years, 7.5 per cent of their wages are deducted as a provident fund employee contribution, which is matched by the employer. Upon retirement (from 60 years of age), a permanent worker gets a lump sum payment of Tk. 2.5-3 lakh, and then receives a monthly payment at a rate of Tk. 150-200 per week for their remaining lifetime. Temporary workers do not receive any non-wage benefits other than a food ration of 3 kg flour or rice per week at Tk 2.5 per kg. However, it is important to note that the extent, quality, and availability of non-wage benefits often differ across tea gardens.

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<sup>2</sup> A worker from a category A tea garden receives Tk. 120 per day, while workers from categories B and C receive Tk. 118 and Tk. 117 per day respectively.

## Poverty incidence

The headcount poverty rate, i.e., the proportion of the tea estate households living below the poverty line, as estimated from the field survey data, is estimated at 61.9 per cent, which is almost four times the corresponding poverty incidence of Sylhet Division and three times the national poverty rate (Figure 1). The rate of extreme poverty is 43 per cent for the same workers' community. Although there is no significant difference in moderate poverty incidence between male and female-headed households, the latter are more prone to extreme poverty (i.e., 47 per cent of female-headed households lives below the extreme poverty line compared to 42 per cent of their male counterparts). The presence of many temporary workers in conjunction with the overall low wage rate is attributable to this higher level of deprivation.<sup>3</sup>



Source: Authors' estimates using RAPID-UNICEF survey and HIES 2016.

The recent increase in the TGWs wage rate will help reduce the extent of poverty among TGW communities. A microsimulation analysis undertaken shows that the increase in the minimum wage will help lower the moderate headcount poverty incidence of the tea garden community from 61.9 per cent to 42.3 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it will help reduce the extreme poverty incidence from 43 per cent to 23 per cent.

<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the poverty gap ratio—defined as the per cent of poverty line income that is needed to lift a poor household out of poverty—is estimated to be 14 per cent for TGWs and their families, almost double the corresponding rate for the non-tea garden household group. The squared poverty gap, which measures the severity of poverty, is found to be 4.5 per cent for the tea garden community – three times the national estimate of 1.5 per cent (HIES 2016).

<sup>4</sup> The inflation rate is considered to be 8 per cent. The poverty line income is adjusted by the inflation rate to estimate the revised poverty line.



However, TGW communities are experiencing lingering deprivations in multidimensional indicators. The multidimensional headcount poverty—estimated using 10 non-income indicators—among TGWs and their families is estimated at 52 per cent, meaning that more than half of the tea garden population are multidimensionally poor.<sup>5</sup> This is much higher than the comparable rate of 41.3 per cent for the non-tea garden population in Sylhet Division, and the national average of 24.6 per cent. The multidimensional poverty index (MPI) of tea garden communities is calculated at 0.23, implying that they experience 23 per cent of all possible deprivations as measured by non-income indicators. The comparable MPI score for the non-tea garden worker population in the same region is 0.18, 0.16 for Sylhet Division, and 0.10 nationally.

### Housing facilities

Permanent TGWs are provided with land to live on. While most tea gardens provide some construction materials such as bamboo, wood, and straw for building mud-walled houses, only a few provide brick-walled houses. The two-room houses provided by the garden authorities usually lack toilet and drinking water facilities, which workers need to provide for themselves. Workers also have to cover any maintenance costs related to their accommodation. Half of tea garden households do not have a drinking water source such as a tube well at their dwelling or in close vicinity, while the comparable figure is much lower (just 12.5 per cent) in the communities outside tea gardens.<sup>6</sup> More than 7 per cent of the surveyed tea garden households do not have access to electricity, compared to just 3 per cent for other communities.

### Health provisions

Most tea gardens provide basic health facilities, which provide some of the most common medicines to permanent workers free-of-cost. These health facilities usually have one dresser, one compounder, one cleaner, and a female attendant. In the absence of qualified doctors on a regular basis, TGWs and their family members often have to visit the nearest government hospital for any medical consultations. A part of the cost of medical expenses in government hospitals is borne by the tea garden authorities.

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5 Multidimensional poverty is estimated based on 10 indicators covering three dimensions of human development, namely health, education and standard of living, using the Alkire Foster methodology. Each dimension is given equal weight (33.3 per cent). A person can be defined as multidimensionally poor if they are deprived in one third or more of the weighted indicators.

6 In some cases, the garden authorities provide one tube well or deep tube well for every 5–10 houses.

Female TGWs receive 3–4 months maternity leave, with a monthly maternity payment for up to two children. During childbirth, there is some assistance from the on-site garden health facility, albeit often from inexperienced midwives. Children who live in tea gardens with better management and that are located near urban centres are found to have improved nutrition levels, while those living in tea gardens located in remote areas tend to suffer from malnutrition, wasting, and stunting.

The safety and security of TGWs are often overlooked in many gardens. Several factors such as no shelter or toilet close to the workplace, no safety kits, working for long hours in a harsh environment, risk of snake bites, and being exposed to poisonous chemicals, have detrimental impacts on the health of TGWs. Severe back pain from long working hours, skin diseases, headaches, and injuries are common amongst workers. Many workers also suffer from fatigue and job stress. Many male workers are addicted to locally produced, low-quality alcoholic beverages, exacerbating their already poor health.

Due to the lack of sufficient toilets in tea gardens, open defecation is a major problem. Almost 17 per cent of the surveyed households still defecate in the open.

### **Education facilities**

Most tea gardens provide primary schools run by garden authorities, with just one or two teachers who teach all subjects. Students attending these facilities do not receive any benefit under the government's Primary Education Stipend Programme (PESP). Workers often send their children to nearby schools at their own cost. Only a few tea gardens have government primary schools or NGO-run schools. The school drop-out rate of tea garden children is very high. Findings from the field survey indicate the average years of schooling in tea garden areas is 2.9, far lower than the national average of 6.2 years. Most tea garden workers want their children to have better education and break the intergenerational cycle of working in tea gardens.

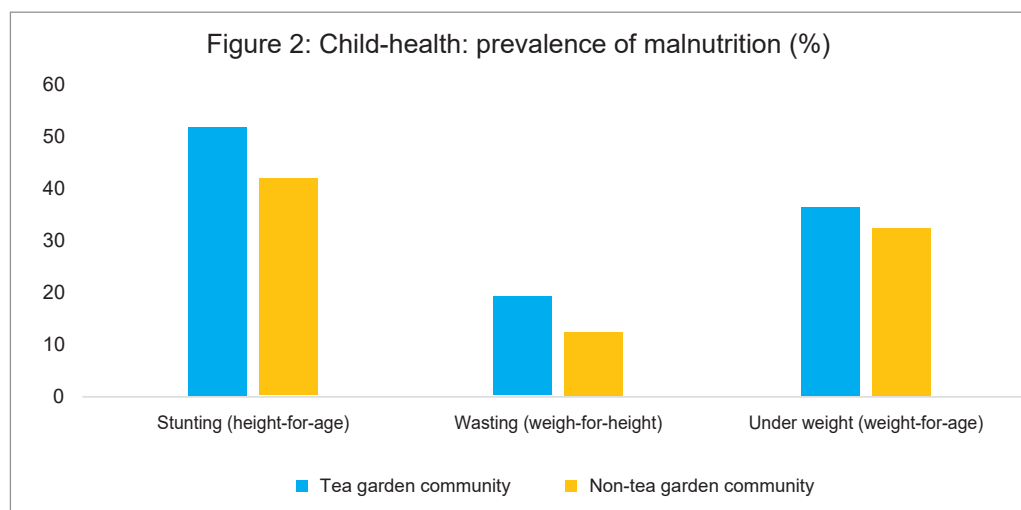
### **Social protection services**

Access to general social protection schemes is limited for TGWs and their families. About 43 per cent of TGW households have access to at least one social protection scheme, whereas the comparable figure for non-tea garden workers is 54.4 per cent. Only 12 per cent of pregnant women received some maternity benefits during pregnancy. Similarly, only a few TGWs receive benefits from social protection programmes such as the Old-age Allowance and Vulnerable Group Development (VGD). About 24 per cent of primary school-going children in the TGW community can access the PESP, if they attend a government primary school. Most children enrolled in tea garden-managed schools remain outside the stipend scheme.

Although the Programme for Livelihood Improvement of Tea-garden Labourers should be accessible to all garden workers, only 10 per cent of TGW households reported receiving assistance from this social protection scheme. A list of names of permanent workers is provided to the local government based on which workers receive Tk 5,000 per year. Due to the lack of budget, the recipients of one year are often excluded from the list in the following year. Temporary workers are excluded from this scheme.

## Children and women's issues

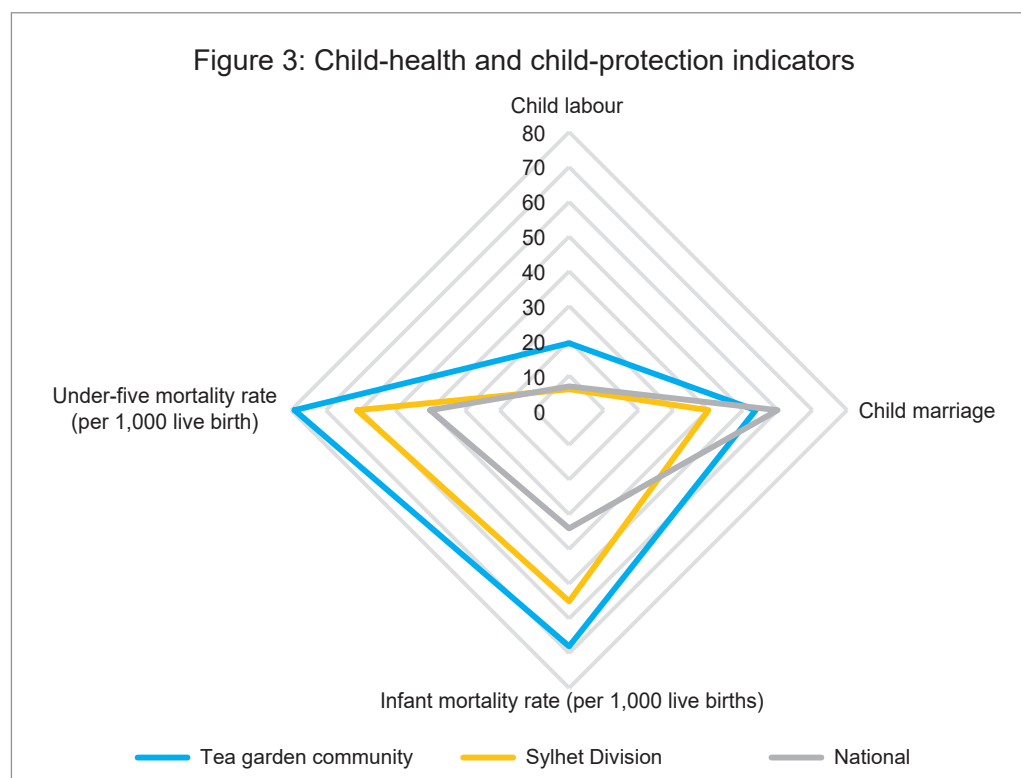
Children who reside in tea gardens with better management and that are located near urban centres are found to have improved nutrition levels compared to those living in the gardens in remote areas. Results from the primary survey indicate that the incidence of wasting and underweight among tea garden children are, respectively, 18.4 per cent and 36 per cent. These rates are much higher than the rates in non-tea garden communities (12.3 per cent and 31.8 per cent, respectively, as shown in Figure 2). More than half of tea garden children are suffering from stunting, significantly higher than the national average of 28 per cent, and 37.6 per cent for Sylhet Division (as reported in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019).



Source: Authors' estimates based on the RAPID-UNICEF household survey 2022.

Infant and under-five mortality rates in tea garden communities are much higher than in Sylhet Division and in overall Bangladesh (Figure 3). Child labour continues to be a common phenomenon in many tea gardens. In the face of deprivation, children often seek employment outside tea estates. Child marriage is also fairly prevalent in most tea estates in Sylhet. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the incidence of child marriage reduced due to mass awareness campaigns and the increased school enrolment of girls. However, many children dropped out of school during the pandemic and, consequently, the incidence of child marriage is thought to have surged. The survey

findings suggest that 5.4 per cent of tea garden workers' children did not return to school after COVID-19, with the post-COVID dropout rate much higher among female students (6.8 per cent) compared to their male counterparts (4 per cent).



Source: Based on the Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019; and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Baseline survey on situation of children in tea gardens of Sylhet division, 2018: Key results (2018).

Many women bear children at an early age, causing health concerns for both mother and child. Although pregnant workers are entitled to maternity leave with their daily wages for their first two pregnancies, women often do not take maternity leave for fear of income loss and continue to work until the very end of their pregnancy. Miscarriage is reported as quite common among female TGWs. Furthermore, as workers can only access the help of untrained midwives, child mortality, stillbirths, and maternal deaths are reported to be widespread. Most tea gardens cannot access ambulance services even during emergencies.

Female workers are assigned to tea plucking, which requires much more time compared to workloads usually assigned to male counterparts. Often, women have to walk 4–5 kilometres to reach their workplace for plucking tea leaves. Due to the lack of daycare facilities, female workers have to carry their children while working or keep their children at home in the care of their siblings, who are also children. Meanwhile, the lack of sanitary facilities means that women in tea gardens face difficulties managing their menstrual hygiene needs. Discussions with workers reveal that women are often subject to physical and mental abuse at work.



## Mother and child benefit programme: Improving tea garden workers' welfare

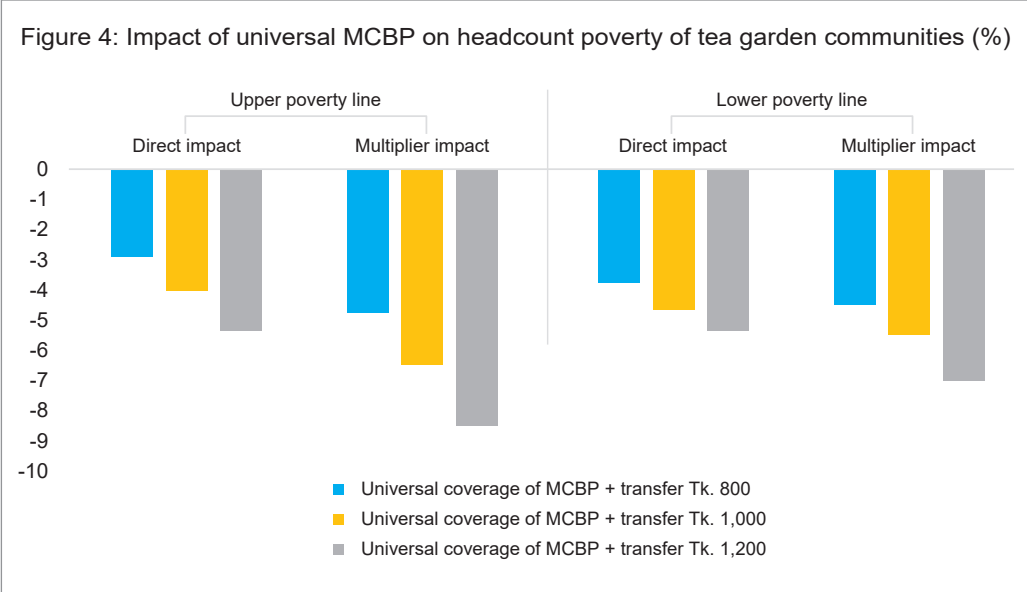
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Considering women's general vulnerability and the adverse implications of deprivations for pregnant women and newborn babies, Bangladesh introduced two programmes, the Maternity Allowance Programme for the Poor and Allowances for Urban Lactating Mothers, targeting rural and urban areas, respectively. These two schemes have now been consolidated, with improved features, as the MCBP. The objective of this social protection intervention is to support women from poor households during the first 1,000 days of their child's life. The scheme provides cash assistance and awareness-building to boost the nutritional status of mothers and support the cognitive development of their children. Stunting in the early years of a child's life—specifically from conception until the age of two—has adverse long-term health consequences. The MCBP support aims to tackle this problem by generating long-term health benefits and thus productivity gains. However, even though the tea garden community is among the most deprived and marginalised communities, only a few TGWs are accessing support from the MCBP.

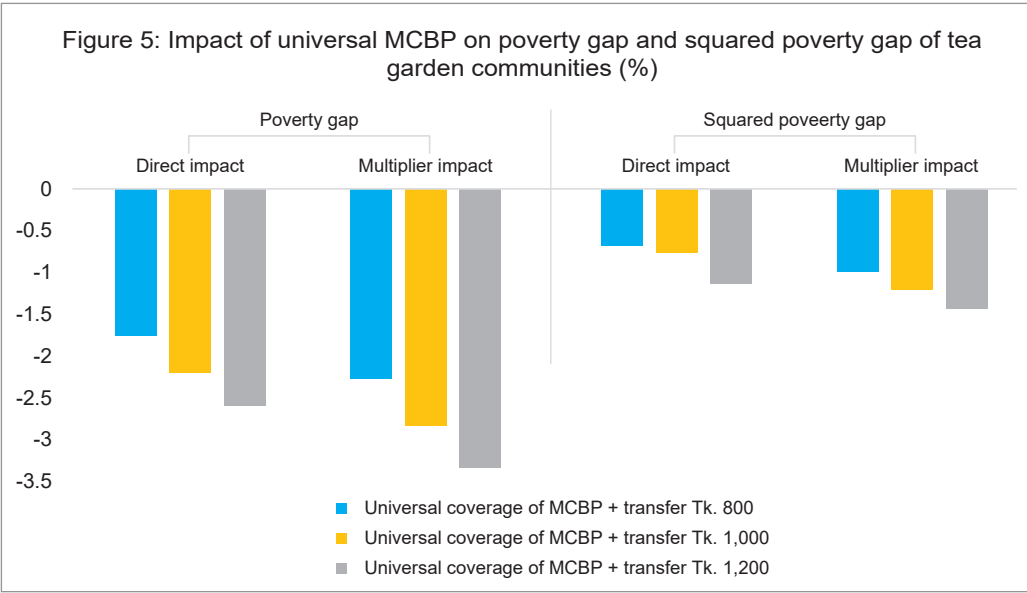
A microsimulation analysis to assess the potential impact of universal MCBP coverage shows that when all pregnant women and mothers with children of qualifying age are supported with a monthly transfer of Tk. 800, the amount which is provided under the current scheme, the incidence of moderate poverty amongst TGWs declines by 3 percentage points (from 61.9 per cent to 58.9 per cent) (Figure 4). The decline in extremely poverty amongst the same group of households is even bigger, at 3.9 percentage points (from 43 per cent to 39.1 per cent) (Figure 3)<sup>7</sup>. If the multiplier effects of the transfer amount are considered, the corresponding reduction in moderate and extreme poverty rates will be 5 percentage points and 4.6 percentage points, respectively. This implies that around 23,000 people can be lifted out of moderate poverty and 22,000 from extreme poverty due to this intervention.

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7 The microsimulation analysis, an ex-ante approach, is widely recognised as an effective tool to analyse the impact of public policies and their distributional effects at the household level. For this assessment, the per capita expenditure of the households with eligible women, before and after the allowances, has been determined by adjusting the transfer amounts under the three MCBP scenarios. The estimates consider the marginal propensity to consume being equal to one—i.e., the transfers from MCBP will be used for consumption purposes only.



Source: Authors' estimates based on RAPID-UNICEF household survey 2022.



Source: Authors' estimates based on RAPID-UNICEF household survey 2022.

If the transfer amount is raised to Tk. 1,000 per month, the multiplier effect would result in a reduction in moderate and extreme poverty by 6.7 percentage points and 5.7 percentage points, respectively. Raising the amount further to Tk. 1,200 would result in corresponding reductions of 8.9 and 7.3 percentage points. That is, up to 42,000 people could move out of moderate poverty, and 35,000 from extreme poverty as a result of an enhanced MCBP programme. A regular monthly transfer of Tk. 800 would result in a 2.3 percentage points reduction in the poverty gap ratio, and 1 percentage point decline in the squared poverty gap, if multiplier effects

are considered (Figure 5). Increasing the transfer to Tk. 1,200, the corresponding reductions in the poverty gap and squared poverty gap would be 3.3 and 1.4 percentage points, respectively.

A microsimulation analysis has also been conducted to assess the impact of MCBP on the multidimensional poverty of the tea garden community. It is estimated that universal coverage of MCBP, with a monthly transfer of Tk. 800, can reduce the multidimensional headcount poverty rate by 8.4 percentage points (from 52 per cent to 43.6 per cent).<sup>8</sup> The poverty incidence will also decline substantially, reducing the MPI score from 0.23 to 0.16. Along with the cash transfer, services provided under the MCBP can also play a vital role in improving health and nutritional outcomes, the quantitative assessment of which is very difficult to undertake.

It is important to bear in mind that eligibility criteria can deter tea garden workers from accessing potential benefits. As per the stipulated criteria, a beneficiary must have a household income less than or equal to Tk. 8,000. Besides, the potential beneficiary must be 20-35 years of age and pregnant with their first or second child. These conditions could result in the exclusion of a significant portion of TGW mothers and children despite their disadvantaged situation.

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<sup>8</sup> It is assumed that the MCBP monetary transfer will improve standards of living and health and educational outcomes. Although the MPI is estimated based on non-monetary indicators, a strong statistical relationship has been found between the weighted deprivation score and household per capita monthly income. The predicted deprivation score has been computed using the post-transfer per capita monthly income. The MPI is then estimated based on the predicted deprivation score.

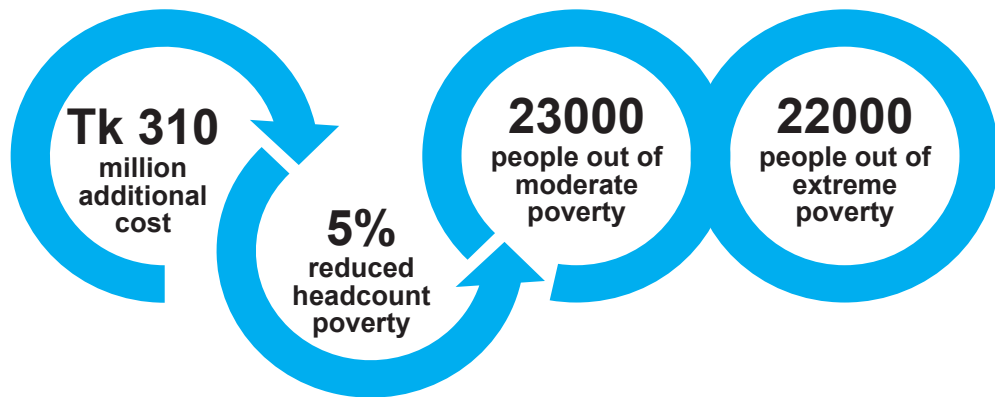
Currently, TGWs are experiencing multiple deprivations and are excluded from many essential services. The following section of this policy brief provides a set of recommendations to ameliorate their working and living standards, and improve their ability to access social protection schemes.

### Improve access to social protection schemes.

- **All potential eligible beneficiaries from the TGW community should be included in relevant schemes without exception.** Given that tea garden workers are already identified as a marginalised group, they should be immediately brought under the usual social protection support mechanisms comprising all elements of lifecycle-based schemes, including old age allowances, primary and secondary school stipends, allowances for persons with disabilities, and maternity allowances (see below). Tea garden management teams and local governments should work closely to enrol all left-out beneficiaries in the social protection programmes to which they are entitled.
- **The Programme for Livelihood Improvement of Tea-garden Labourers should cover all tea garden workers, while the cash transfer amount should be increased and provided monthly.** At present, only a small percentage of permanent TGWs are receiving Tk. 5,000 under this social protection scheme, while casual/temporary workers and permanent workers without provident fund identification numbers are excluded from the scheme. Considering the high poverty incidence and vulnerability among TGWs and their families, this programme should cover all TGW households without any exceptions. The government should also consider increasing the programme transfer amount. A monthly allowance rather than a lump sum annual instalment could have a lasting anti-poverty impact.
- **The MCBP should be extended to benefit all pregnant women, mothers and children in tea garden communities, and the MCBP benefit amount should be increased.** Currently, only a few of the eligible women in tea garden community are receiving support from the MCBP. This programme should immediately bring all tea gardens under its coverage in a universal manner, to include all pregnant women and infants. This can immediately reduce the headcount poverty incidence of TGWs by 5 percentage points, lifting 23,000 people out of moderate poverty and 22,000 from extreme poverty. Such coverage for TGWs would entail an additional cost of just Tk. 310 million (or 0.03 per cent of the social protection budget). Furthermore, since increasing



the transfer amount from Tk. 800 to Tk. 1200 would imply reducing the poverty incidence by almost double, it is recommended that the MCBP benefit should be increased.<sup>9</sup>



- **The MCBP eligibility criteria should be relaxed for tea garden workers considering their extremely disadvantageous situation.** The field survey found that two specific criteria – age, and having up to two children – can exclude many pregnant women in tea garden communities, who often suffer from pregnancy complications and malnutrition with very little medical attention. Increased access to the MCBP scheme will help boost the nutritional status of mothers while ensuring health benefits for children during a crucial window in their development.

### **Strengthen health and WASH facilities in tea gardens as a matter of priority.**

The availability of qualified doctors at garden health facilities should be given urgent attention. Additionally, the medicines and services provided at on-site facilities should be expanded and improved. A set of standards can be developed so that basic health, safety, and WASH facilities are improved and regularly inspected. Examples of best practice from individual gardens can be replicated elsewhere.

### **Improve working conditions for women and provide childcare provision.**

It is extremely important to ensure quality childcare facilities in plantation areas. Ensuring the availability of daycare facilities and children’s playgrounds/parks will greatly help female workers manage their workloads. In addition, proper toilet

<sup>9</sup> Raising the MCBP benefit amount from Tk. 800 to Tk. 1,200 for TGWs would generate an additional cost of just Tk. 160 million (this is in addition to the Tk. 310 million cost for a programme with a monthly transfer of Tk. 800).

facilities near to working areas must be provided as a basic element of improved working conditions for women. Workload adjustments which consider the health and well-being of pregnant women should be introduced, and employers' compliance with the provision of maternity benefits as stipulated in labour laws should be monitored.

### **Improve tea garden education facilities and standards, and extend coverage of universal primary and secondary stipend programmes to tea garden children.**

The education facilities in most tea gardens are extremely inadequate and of questionable quality. Local governments should work with tea garden owners to arrange transportation facilities so that children can attend nearby primary schools. Provision of transport will ensure a better quality of education and may also help reduce the school dropout rate of tea garden children. If tea garden-based educational facilities continue to operate, the quality of teaching in tea garden schools must be improved. Children attending tea garden schools should immediately be covered under the relevant primary and secondary school stipend schemes.

**Lastly, it is vital to initiate diverse policy interventions to address the varying deprivations across tea gardens.** Other than wages and food allowances, benefits received by TGWs vary widely across tea gardens. In designing interventions, therefore, an emphasis should be placed on the tea gardens where the extent of deprivation is greater and where workers lack alternative income-generating opportunities. The tea gardens that are further from urban centres or in remote places often severely lack additional livelihood options and assistance from both the local government as well as NGOs; these are also the tea gardens where children experience poorer health outcomes. Hence, targeted policies which take into account the location and extent of deprivation of individual gardens are likely to be more effective than those that do not consider heterogeneity.

Tea garden workers have long been confined to limited livelihood opportunities, being socially marginalised and deprived of basic health, education, and social protection services. The importance of elaborate social protection coverage for this disadvantaged group cannot be overemphasised. Alongside enhanced social protection, there is a critical need to review the working and living conditions of TGWs, in order to design and implement estate-level interventions, including those carried out by tea garden authorities. Tea garden communities should be brought under the initiative of localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure a holistic assessment of their current situation and to implement effective monitoring of their future socio-economic progress.





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