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Rethinking Social Protection Systems as Socio-Economic Necessities

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Imagine a bridge designed for bullock carts now creaking under container trucks. That's how many social protection systems look today - built for yesterday's risks, crumbling under today's crises. To rethink social protection is to move from short-term poverty alleviation towards comprehensive economic security - a system that ensures resilience against climate shocks, empowers women, and safeguards informal workers.



From Poverty Alleviation to Comprehensive Economic Security

For decades, social protection systems meant food rations, pensions, or cash transfers. They worked but only up to a point. In South Asia, India's safety nets helped lift 120 million people out of extreme poverty. Yet Pakistan's 2022 floods pushed 9 million back into poverty, and Sri Lanka's financial crisis plunged 3 million into deprivation.

Clearly, we need to expand the focus from poverty alleviation to long-term economic security, covering rural and urban workers, gig economy earners, and climate migrants alike.

Adaptive Social Protection Systems: Building Resilience

COVID-19 revealed the fragility of rigid systems. **What's needed are adaptive and resilient social protection systems - frameworks that scale during crises and recalibrate during stability.**

This is where progressive universalism becomes vital. The approach starts with the most vulnerable - women, children, and informal workers and then gradually extends coverage to everyone. Think of it as a protection floor that grows taller with each step.



Informal Workers and the Gig Economy: The Missing Middle

Here lies the paradox: over 61% of the world's workforce and up to 91% in developing nations are in the informal economy. In South Asia, more than half of workers are self-employed or in unpaid family jobs.

Traditional payroll-tied systems exclude them. The future lies in data-driven digital platforms and interoperable social registries like those in Odisha (India) and The Gambia (Africa), which deliver real-time, targeted support. Without such rethinking, informal workers- the backbone of emerging economies will remain outside protection nets.

Gender Equality in Social Protection Systems

Social protection isn't just about survival; it's about enabling women to thrive. Women face triple risks: unpaid household labour, low-paid informal jobs, and heightened vulnerability to shocks. Encouragingly, 90% of economic inclusion programs globally target women.

By embedding gender parity into social protection through childcare support, pensions, and equal access to benefits, we don't just protect women, we multiply gains across entire families and communities.

Climate Resilience and Social Protection: A Necessary Integration

Climate change is not an externality - it is an active disruptor of livelihoods. South Asia alone lost over US$400 million in 2019 due to climate-linked extreme weather events.

That's why climate resilience and social protection must go hand in hand. Europe is already using welfare buffers to ease green transitions. South Asia can do the same: adaptive safety nets for climate migrants, nutrition-linked programs for food insecurity, and cash transfers during floods or droughts.

Towards a New Social Contract

To truly rethink social protection, we must rewrite the social contract. This means:

- Recognizing citizens as both rights-holders and contributors.
- Integrating social protection with labour reforms, climate action, and digital economies.

- Bringing in the private sector through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) for innovation and financing.

Without this, social protection risks becoming a leaky umbrella in a storm-present, but ineffective. With it, nations can safeguard both dignity and development.

The Call to Action: Reinventing for the Future

The future of resilient economies depends on treating social protection systems as socio-economic necessities, not welfare afterthoughts. The path forward requires:

- Adaptive systems that flex with crises.
- Progressive universalism to ensure coverage for all.
- Digital platforms for efficient, transparent delivery.
- Gender parity to unlock women’s potential.
- Climate-linked protection to shield against global shocks.



Resilience by Design: How CSM Tech Powers Future-Ready Social Protection

At CSM Tech, we are redefining how nations deliver dignity, equity, and security through Next-Gen Social Protection Systems. Our platforms go beyond traditional welfare delivery, building adaptive, inclusive, and data-driven ecosystems that ensure benefits reach the right people at the right time.

In Odisha, our **Social Protection Delivery Platform (SPDP)** pioneered the use of unique beneficiary and household IDs, creating a verified, dynamic social registry that eliminates duplication and combats exclusion errors. In Gambia, we transformed social protection with a real-time, dynamic registry, linked to the Central Voter Registration System, ensuring agility and inclusivity in benefit distribution. Ethiopia's **Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)**

now seamlessly serves over 11 million beneficiaries, powered by our interoperable registries consolidating data across multiple ministries.

Closer home, in Tamil Nadu, our SPDP for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) unified 83 welfare schemes under a single window, accelerating service delivery with automated workflows, real-time dashboards, and citizen-centric tools.

The benefits are clear: transparency, efficiency, and trust. Governments gain a single source of truth for policymaking, citizens experience faster and fairer access, and resources are optimized at scale.

With CSM Tech’s solutions, social protection is no longer reactive welfare, it’s proactive, citizen-first governance built for resilience and inclusion.

From Necessity to Strategy

Rethinking social protection systems as socio-economic necessities isn't optional - it's inevitable. The question isn't whether these systems will evolve, but whether they'll evolve fast enough to prevent millions from falling through ever-widening cracks.

The most successful economies of the next decade won't be those with the strongest walls, but those with the most adaptive bridges—connecting vulnerability to opportunity, climate challenges to resilient responses, and individual protection to collective prosperity. In this new economic landscape, social protection isn't just a safety net - it's the foundation upon which sustainable growth stands.

The time for incremental changes has passed. The future belongs to those bold enough to reimagine protection itself.



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