INTRODUCTION

The World Bank Group has been working closely with the Department of Social Services (DSS) of the Bangladesh Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) on the Cash Transfer Modernization (CTM) project. The purpose of the CTM project is to improve the transparency and efficiency of key cash transfer programs for vulnerable populations by modernizing service delivery.

The last-mile service delivery of DSS programs are handled by a range of staff collectively referred to as Social Workers (SWs). Enhancing the productivity, skills, motivation, and satisfaction of the SWs is critical to improving the efficiency of the programs themselves, including key MoSW cash transfers. Because of this important nature of SW work, this brief has been developed to provide an overview of findings and analysis of SW jobs. Findings are based on a range of activities conducted thus far, including qualitative and quantitative field research and pilot testing of small projects, with particular focus on front line workers' jobs, motivation, efficiency, performance, job satisfaction, and other factors that affect the quality of social protection (SP) service delivery.

The sections of the brief are as follows:

• **About Social Workers**: Who they are
• **Introduction to Research**: An overview of research activities in 2018-2019
• **Survey Respondents**: Profile of the SWs interviewed during the 2018 quantitative survey
• **Mission and Job Description**: A qualitative overview of SWs’ jobs
• **Cash Transfer Programs**: An overview of work related to cash transfers
• **Rural Social Services (RSS) Program**: An overview of work related to RSS, including the results of pilot tests conducted by the World Bank to improve efficiency
• **Time Use**: What SWs do, and their time allocation
• **Job Satisfaction**: Job satisfaction of SWs
• **Motivation**: Motivation of SWs, and findings from pilot conducted by the World Bank to improve motivation
• **Performance**: Analysis related to performance, assessments of performance of SWs, and with what performance (and assessments) are correlated.
• **Capacity**: Tech literacy, soft skills, and more.
• **Recommendations**: How to improve motivation, efficiency, and capacity of SWs.
ABOUT SOCIAL WORKERS

The Department of Social Services (DSS) provides services to the vulnerable groups of society, including the poorest of the poor, the marginalized, and other disadvantaged groups. DSS’s mission is to “improve the quality of life and social well-being of the people of Bangladesh through integrated and developmental social services in partnership with relevant stakeholders utilizing appropriate and available resources.” To this effect, DSS implements three of the largest government social safety net programs under the Ministry of Social Welfare – Old Age Allowance (OAA), Allowance for Widowed, Deserted, and Destitute Women (AWDD), and Disability Allowance (DA) programs.

Union Social Workers (USWs), Urban Social Workers (UrSWs), and Trade Instructors (TIs) – henceforth collectively referred to as Social Workers (SWs) - are DSS’s field level staff who work closely with local government and citizens to implement and deliver these programs. As DSS’s foot soldiers on the ground, their role is critical in the day-to-day running of DSS services and activities in the field, including implementing DSS’s social safety net programs, responding to queries from citizens about various government programs, and coordinating with field staff from other ministries as needed. The MoSW is one of few safety net implementing ministries that have union-level frontline workers, and SWs’ work has been increasing as the government’s safety net programs grow in volume and budget. Currently, the main programs that these staff support include the Rural Social Service (RSS) and major cash transfer programs mentioned above. SWs operate as part of a larger group of staff in these offices, run by Upazila Social Service Officers (USSOs), who function as the link between DSS and the Union Parishad committee in their respective unions. SWs’ days are split between field and office.

According to DSS, there are 4,659 posts available for USWs, UrSWs, and other field level staff positions - namely, field supervisors (FSs) and TIs - spread out over 481 upazila and paurasabha (Municipal Corporation) offices around Bangladesh. A significant proportion of these positions remain vacant, creating capacity constraints in many offices where some SWs are responsible for multiple unions or have to take on additional workload. A recruitment drive is in progress to bring upazila offices up to capacity. This may ameliorate some of this additional pressure on existing SWs as new field staff are added to offices.

Moving forward, the performance and efficiency of SWs will be vital to the success of, and must remain aligned with, MoSW priority programs and reform strategy.

Social Workers are DSS’s field level staff. As DSS’s foot soldiers on the ground, their role is critical in the day-to-day running of DSS services and activities in the field.
MOTIVATION

Social Workers play a critical role in ensuring the smooth functioning of DSS’s programs on the ground. Despite this, very little data exists on the demographic characteristics of these SWs, what they do, their productivity, levels and sources of motivation and job satisfaction, and capacity.

In 2018 and 2019, the World Bank conducted several activities to better understand Social Worker’s jobs and characteristics:

- **Qualitative interviews and focus groups, and piloting of different projects with USWs between May to November 2018**: The qualitative work utilized tools such as value-stream mapping, semi-structured focus groups, and testing new ideas with small samples of USWs. Additional focus groups and qualitative interviews were conducted to assess the experiences of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of cash transfer programs, and local upazila- and union-level officials involved in social safety net programs (SSNPs).

- **A quantitative survey with SWs and USSOs at Upazila and UCD offices in three divisions (Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rangpur) from November to December 2018**: The purpose of the survey was to better understand the experience of SWs and the nature of their work, as well as to use these findings to develop solutions that enhance the effectiveness and impact of their work.

This report largely focuses on results of the quantitative survey with SWs, but incorporates results and insights from the other activities as well.
The survey sample included Union Social Workers, Trade Instructors, and Urban Social Workers from 180 upazila and paurasabha offices, interviewing 917 respondents in total. Their supervisors (Union Social Service Officers and Field Supervisors) were also interviewed separately to gauge employee performance and understand practices and processes for operational activities.

The sample was drawn from three key divisions - Dhaka (central), Rangpur (North), and Chattogram (South). At the first stage, 180 upazilas were selected using proportional random sampling (stratified by division and urban-rural status). At each upazila, enumerators created a roster of all SWs in the office and then randomly invited 7 staff to participate in the survey.

Most respondents were USWs (64%), followed by TIs (28%), and, finally, UrSWs (8%). TIs were included in the sample as USWs are often supplemented or supported in their work by this cadre. Consultation with DSS staff and survey results suggest that while TIs’ core responsibility is to facilitate capacity building training sessions to motivate and train unskilled and low-income community members, they tend to also take on core responsibilities of USWs in most locations.

Box 1 summarizes key characteristics of survey respondents. Data suggests that while the USW cadre tends to be dominated by males, there are more female UrSWs and TIs. Educational qualification also varies between the two groups, and many do not meet the required minimum qualification for their positions. Of USWs, 78% reportedly completed higher secondary education or above. This is lower for TIs (35% completed higher secondary education or above), who have lower educational requirement, with 61% having education at or above secondary level.

It is evident that career progression is relatively limited for SWs. Most respondents have been in their current position for almost two decades, with a similar number of years in service (with DSS) overall, suggesting that their positions have remained unchanged throughout the majority of their careers. Around 80% have been transferred from a different upazila. Average monthly salary is around US$300, which is roughly half of their average household income per month (US$616).

### BOX 1. PROFILE OF SOCIAL WORKERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>USW</th>
<th>TI</th>
<th>UrSW</th>
<th>All</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (HSC+)</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of household</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in civil service</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in current role</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly salary (BDT/US$)</td>
<td>26,203/311</td>
<td>22,461/266</td>
<td>26,851/318</td>
<td>25,223/299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly HH income (BDT/US$)</td>
<td>52,687/625</td>
<td>48,473/575</td>
<td>58,060/688</td>
<td>51,984/616</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relevant Acronyms:** Union Social Worker (USW), Trade Instructor (TI), Urban Social Worker (UrSW), Bangladesh taka (BDT)
MISSION AND JOB DESCRIPTION

The primary function of Social Workers is to operationalize DSS’s mandate.

However, detailed terms of references are not advertised during recruitment of SWs. In addition, clear job descriptions are not available to them once they join. When considering the consistently-growing list of services and activities they are involved with, this leads to a further lack of clarity about how to perform all tasks.

Based on a review of available documents and interviews with DSS staff at various levels, a rough job description for USWs and UrSWs is to:

- Implement three cash transfer programs: OAA, AWDD, and DA, and all related tasks including data entry and maintaining and updating digital MIS;
- Implement RSS, which includes surveying Unions/Municipalities to identify eligible households, forming committees to disburse revolving funds to, loan repayment collection, and all data entry;
- Collect RSS installments and deposit at the bank;
- Attend Ward committee meetings every quarter to guide participants on committee meeting rules, and conduct issue-specific discussions;
- Run awareness campaigns and counseling on various social issues;
- Conduct disability survey for the Disability Detection Survey Programme to identify disabled individuals and provide ID cards;
- Implement the Program for Improving the Living Standard of Bede (gypsy) and Underprivileged Communities, which provides allowances, trainings and scholarships;
- Implement the Development Program for improving the living standard of Hijra community, which provides training and scholarships;
- Oversee local volunteer clubs;
- Under the direction of DSS officers, implement all other DSS activities and tasks

Of these, the core set of tasks involves the cash transfer and RSS programs. A breakdown of DSS’s allotted budget for each of these programs is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Program budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Social Services (RSS)</td>
<td>3.002*</td>
<td>250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Age Allowance (OAA)</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>26,400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowance for Widowed, Deserted, and Destitute Women (AWDD), Widow Allowance (WA)</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>10,200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Allowance (DA)</td>
<td>1.545</td>
<td>13,905.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DSS Website 2019; Budget Documents, Ministry of Finance, 2019, DSS official documentation (RSS at a glance), 2019

*Beneficiary numbers are cumulative up to FY 2109-2020.

WHAT SWs DO

Contrary to their intended job description, some SWs have more than one union in their catchment area. Average size of USWs’ catchment areas is 1.89 unions, although it can be as high as 11 unions. Those at municipalities have larger catchment areas, and are responsible for over four wards on average, and TIs are responsible for 1.47 unions on an average.

Among the survey participants, around 92% of union and urban SWs, and 73% of TIs were actively involved with cash transfer programs. Similarly, over 90% of USWs and UrSWs, and 81% of TIs were actively implementing the RSS program.

A substantial proportion of this work is field-based, as indicated by the number of days SWs spend in the field each week on average. This field travel comes at a cost, which, though subsidized partially by DSS’s annual travel allowance paid to SWs, involves some out-of-pocket costs for them as well. On average, they spend 536 BDT (US$6.39) traveling to the field each week (around 26,000 BDT or US$310 per year) and are reimbursed 10,947 BDT (US$130) each year. SWs also report spending 222 BDT (US$2.65) out-of-pocket each week for other work-related expenses.
While the basic job description is consistent across all SWs (with some variation between TIs and USWs/UrSWs), their level of effort and responsibilities (as indicated by time spent in the field and number of unions in their catchment area) does vary based on age, number of years in the present upazila, level of education, and trainings attended. In particular, more educated SWs (i.e. those with HSC or higher level of educational attainment) have 0.7 more unions in their catchment area and, subsequently, spend a quarter of a day more in the field each week relative to their peers. This trend holds true for USWs as well, although male USWs tend to have disproportionately more responsibility. The next two sections summarize SWs’ reported work portfolio for cash transfer and RSS programs.

**CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMS**

All three groups of SWs are involved in the implementation of the various cash transfer programs, though, on average, USWs have are responsible for a larger number of beneficiaries. Figure 2 below shows the average number of beneficiaries per program for all SWs who are involved in implementing the cash transfer programs. On average, each SW is responsible for 1,943 beneficiaries across all three programs (with a maximum of 17,912 beneficiaries) in their catchment area, with the majority belonging to the OAA program.

As before, responsibility tends to vary by demographic characteristics of SWs. Among USWs (and across all SWs), being male and having higher secondary or higher levels of education are both significantly associated with having more beneficiaries within their catchment area (with male USWs having almost 500 more beneficiaries on average1 compared to their female counterparts). Number of years in the current upazila is also significantly associated with more beneficiaries; the difference, however, is marginal.

To better understand the day-to-day activities of SWs, the survey also asked about the frequency with which they engage in certain tasks related to cash transfer programs. Data suggests that during the prior month, two-thirds of all SWs worked on replacing or duplicating passbooks—9 on average—for beneficiaries. These were primarily OAA beneficiaries, who passed away, dropped out of the program or lost their passbooks. Almost all SWs (90%) have frequent interactions with beneficiaries on a weekly basis. This is especially true for OAA beneficiaries, with nearly 97% reporting that they interacted in person with an average of 42 OAA beneficiaries in the past week. The average across all three programs is 65 beneficiaries per week, but the intensity of beneficiary engagement is much higher for UrSWs (108 per week).

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1 After controlling for key demographic characteristics and work history.
The RSS program, which commenced in 1974, is DSS’s rural microcredit program, designed to provide interest-free loans to disadvantaged families with annual incomes below 60,000 BDT. Low-cost (10% service charge fee) loans are provided to members of organized working groups (karmadals), with loan sizes varying from 5,000 BDT to 30,000 BDT, payable within a year via 12 monthly installments. Figure 2 below provides a summary of the RSS operational process, though it is worth noting that the practices can, and do, vary slightly between locations.

Nearly 90% of SWs were involved with the implementation of the RSS program. Figure 3 below shows the average and range of number of active borrowers in SWs’ catchment areas, among those involved with RSS. **While, on average, SWs are responsible for 118 active RSS borrowers across 10 villages, the range varies significantly across SWs**, with some having over 1,000 borrowers in their catchment areas. Disaggregation of data across respondents shows that female SWs tend to have significantly less borrowers relative to their male counterparts. SWs in the Rangpur division also tend to have more borrowers on average, relative to those in Dhaka and Chattogram.
Collecting repayments from borrowers is a challenging task. Between a third to 45% of all borrowers - depending whether the statistic is reported by the SW or by the USSO, and on the time period of tracking - do not make their monthly payments on time or pay during the month at all. For UrSWs, this is slightly lower - around one-third on average. The low repayment rate contributes further to the SWs’ workloads as they have to spend more time in the field pursuing delinquent borrowers, at the cost of efficiency. This also affects the mode of repayments.

Though, in theory, repayments are supposed to be collected during monthly working group meetings, this is rarely the case in practice. On average, only 21% of all repayments are collected during group meetings. This is not surprising given that less than a third of the groups meet each month - 5 group meetings on average for an average of 16 groups in the SWs’ catchment area. This means that more than two-thirds of repayment are collected via door-to-door home visits, with nearly 43% requiring multiple visits. This explains why despite having a manageable number of borrowers in their catchment areas, SWs dedicate a disproportionate amount of their time in RSS repayment activities (more on this in the next section).

Our data suggest that repayment characteristics - late payment rates, number of visits, and mode of payment - do not vary much by demographic or other characteristics of SWs. The only exception is that male SWs (USWs and TIs) have more late repayments on average compared to female SWs, despite spending slightly more time on repayment activities.

In addition to the time allocated to field travel, administrative tasks such as writing repayment receipts is time consuming. According to SW-reported estimates, it can take up to 3.3 minutes to fill out each repayment receipts for borrowers (and this excludes time spent filling out administrative records in the office related to the loans). This suggests that SWs take, on average, 6.5 hours per month filling out receipts.

Box 2 highlights findings from two small pilots by the World Bank team, which tested the feasibility and efficacy of small changes to the existing repayment process on improving efficiency.

**BOX 2: PROCESS IMPROVEMENT EXPERIMENTS**

Based on qualitative data, feedback from field staff, and a value-stream mapping exercise, the team developed and analyzed the feasibility of two improvements to the RSS repayment process. These tweaks were meant to address two key problems identified in the field: repetitive and inefficient administrative paperwork, and difficulty of getting borrowers to repay.

**SIMPLIFY**

Provide a shortened payment receipt form, with carbon copy option to minimize time spent filling out repetitive information

**FEEDBACK**

Making late payments salient by using green sticker on passbooks for on-time payment and red sticker for late payments.

Assessments based on self-reports from USWs suggest that the shortened receipt led to an estimated 38.8% reduction in time spent filling out receipts (from a starting point of X minutes per receipt). For each client, this translated into an average of 3.07 minutes saved. As each USW deals with 132 clients/month, this translated to almost 7 hours saved each month.

Preliminary assessment of the green and red sticker experiment was also promising: there was a 7.3% decrease in late repayment rates, while translates to 2.4 fewer field visits and 9.5 hours saved each month (based on the estimated travel time spent per repayment).
TIME USE

According to self-reported estimates of time spent on tasks, SWs are frequently overworked. They spend nearly 44 hours per week on average at work, with male SWs working slightly more hours on average than female SWs. Around a third of all SWs also work during most or all weekends.

Compared to cash transfer programs, a much smaller portion of DSS’s budget is allocated for RSS. This is also reflected in the total number of beneficiaries for each program RSS. However, activities related to the RSS program disproportionately consume a significant portion of SWs’ time each week. When asked to recall how much time they spent on specific tasks during the past week, SWs reported that, on average, they spend 20.4 hours each week on RSS related activities, including repayment, data entry, receipts, and bank deposits. The largest share of this—over 13 hours per week on average—is spent on collecting repayment from borrowers.

In contrast, 20.1 hours is spent on cash transfer programs, including handling selection of beneficiaries, data entry, beneficiary calls, passbook replacements and duplicates, with the highest proportion spent on selection. UrSWs spend slightly less time on average on RSS repayment (10.5 hours). The survey and qualitative data indicates that Social Workers spend 2-20 times the amount of time per RSS beneficiary as they do per any of the cash transfer beneficiaries.

Unfortunately, SWs tend to spend the most amount of time on their least enjoyable task, and the least amount of time on their most enjoyable task. The survey asked SWs to rank how much they enjoy a certain task on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest. Box 3 shows that the core set of RSS activities, and, in particular, repayment collection, is the most time-consuming task in which SWs engage. In comparison, much less time is spent on awareness building. However, on average, RSS repayment collection is considered the least enjoyable (7.5 out of 10), while awareness building is the most the enjoyable (9.4 out of 10). This holds true for all three groups of SWs. This could pose two potential problems. First, spending so much time on less enjoyable tasks can affect job satisfaction and motivation of SWs. Second, the time-consuming nature of RSS activities may also leave SWs with less time to dedicate to other tasks that can help fulfill the mission and mandate of DSS.

Table 2: Typical work day for SWs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Typical Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:00-10:00</td>
<td>Yard meeting, loan collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-12:00</td>
<td>Loan collection, discussing various issues with cash transfer beneficiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-01:00</td>
<td>Other tasks (replacing beneficiary, duplicate passbooks, meeting local govt., local clubs, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:00-02:30</td>
<td>Lunch, traveling to other villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:30-03:00</td>
<td>Loan collection (in other village/area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:30-04:00</td>
<td>Depositing the collected loan in the bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:30-05:00</td>
<td>Filling out register</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on 13 qualitative interviews. Time spent travelling to and from the duty station is not included.
JOB SATISFACTION

Eighty percent of SWs report that they are very involved in their job, and that their work is the most absorbing interest in their life. Over half of the respondents report that they are highly satisfied working with DSS, although just over a third feel that their work is appreciated by both their USSO and beneficiaries.

The best things about working for DSS are the salary, getting the opportunity of having an impact on society, and social recognition from beneficiaries. On the other hand, the biggest pains of working for DSS are transportation (especially in rural settings), lack of promotions (over 50% of those respondents asked are not confident of being promoted if they perform their job well), and workload.

MOTIVATION

Respondents in our survey were asked a series of questions about their thoughts on their job, including a self-assessment of their motivation. SWs were asked to estimate their current level of motivation, relative to when they first joined.

The average motivation level is 120, with 100 being the baseline motivation level when they first joined DSS. While this average is high, 26% of SWs are less motivated than they were when they first joined.

What predicts motivation? Correlational analysis reveals some interesting facts. First of all, educated SWs are more likely to have lower motivation than when they first joined. This may be due to a variety of factors, such as the lack of opportunities for promotion. Second, male and older USWs are more likely to have lower motivation compared to their initial motivation level of 100. Finally, environment matters: SWs located in the Dhaka division are more motivated than their counterparts located in the other divisions. No other factors, however, are found to be strong predictors of motivation. Boxes 4-6 discuss results of three small pilot tests that were conducted to improve motivation of SWs.

BOX 4. SELF REFLECTION EXPERIMENT

A small survey experiment was conducted by the World Bank to test ways to improve motivation and job satisfaction of SWs. During the survey, some SWs were asked to reflect on DSS’s mission and their sense of belonging, while others reflected on positive aspects of their job. Both were asked to write down their answers. A third group of SWs did not go through the exercise at all.

Results show that going through this exercise (especially reflecting on mission and belonging) increased self-reports of being satisfied with the experience of being a SW, and increased agreement with the statement that their USSOs appreciate the work that they do. However, the exercise also seemed to decrease self-reported motivation and feelings of being appreciated by beneficiaries.

These results appear to be associated with higher workloads, enjoyability of tasks, and career growth prospects. SWs who reported the highest working hours per week reported lower motivation and job satisfaction after going through the exercise (particularly when reflecting on positive aspects of their job). Being reminded of the quality of their workload may also matter. Among SWs who go through the exercises, those who spend less time in less enjoyable tasks and more likely to report higher motivation scores. This is also the case with those who spend more time in awareness-building activities. Finally, SWs who report (lack of) promotion as a disadvantage of of working with DSS also report lower motivation and satisfaction following the exercise.

These exercises, however, appear to be useful for female and for the most recognized employees as going through the exercise is associated with increasing satisfaction and reports of appreciation for female SWs, and for those who are highly ranked in performance by their supervisors).
BOX 5. STORIES OF BENEFICIARIES AND USWs

In 2018, the World Bank team tested a few innovative solutions using cell phone technology to help improve USWs’ motivation.

In one pilot test, USWs were asked to submit a special story, in the form of a video, written story, photo, or other formats (to be uploaded into Facebook and/or shared with others). The stories were to focus on a cash transfer beneficiary or borrower they work with.

Implementation was challenging due to technological constraints and time requirements, leading to low participation (less than 50%). However, those participating remarked that the exercise was mostly enjoyable. A rough (non-rigorous) evaluation showed a small increase (2%) in self-reported motivation levels as a result of participating in this exercise.

In a second test, USWs were in front of the camera rather than behind it. USWs, USSOs, and beneficiaries were asked to discuss the importance and outcomes of USWs’ work, as well as the benefits of being a USW. Following this, a compilation of these videos was shown in one upazila to spark a discussion that can motivate and inspire USWs to about their work. Initial qualitative feedback was positive, and the team will continue to field test the completed video.

BOX 6. SOCIAL RECOGNITION

In another experiment, USSOs in three upazilas were asked to provide acknowledge of good performance from their staff members through social recognition. Each USSO was provided with a performance rubric, which was developed by the World Bank team following consultations with USSOs and USWs, upon which USWs’ performance could be measured. USSOs were asked to use the rubric to select the best performing USW each month. As recognition of their performance, the selected USW was given a certificate for the “Union Social Worker of the Month”, with his/her name and photo on it.

This pilot provided two important insights. First, the type of recognition matters. Recognition is more effective when done in a formal gathering, where more people can learn about their achievement. Second, when implemented well, this type of recognition can lead to improved motivation and performance among USWs.
The survey asked both SWs and USSOs questions regarding SWs’ job-related skills. Supervisors were asked to provide quantitative ratings of performance of SWs’ in their staff across a variety of dimensions: being able to follow directions, perform administrative work, communicate with citizens, manage stress, work hard, etc. Overall, these ratings were high, with average scores being just under 75%.

As shown in Figure 4, USWs are reportedly strong at communication skills with citizens, following directions, and working hard toward good results (scoring 3.8 or above out of 5). However, they need improvements when it comes to looking out for new ideas and being innovative, being interested in learning new things, and administrative work. USWs who provided 6 or more suggestions to their supervisor also rated more highly by their supervisors. Similarly, SWs who report working more hours are also scored marginally higher compared to those who report fewer hours worked. Not surprisingly, more educated SWs, and SWs with higher loan repayment rates during the last three months are also scored highly.

As shown in Figure 6, male SWs appear to score much more highly than female SWs (despite having lower on-time repayment rates, as discussed earlier), while older SWs are scored lower. In addition, SWs who are more vocal in making suggestions to their supervisor on better or different ways of doing things on the job and do not have significantly higher scores than those who are less vocal or spend less time on unenjoyable tasks.

Figure 4: Supervisors’ assessments of USW performance.

Figure 5: Attitude towards innovation

Figure 6: Predictors of top ranking
**CAPACITY**

**Capacity development opportunities are limited for SWs.** On average, SWs report having attended three trainings (excluding orientation) during their current tenure. Given an average tenure of 19 years, this suggests one training on average for every six years or more of service.

This is reflected in the digital literacy of SWs. Despite the digitization efforts for cash transfer program data, around 68% of SWs do not use computers for their work and only 18% can input program data into the computer by themselves. The number varies substantially across age groups of SWs. While about 70% SWs below the age of 40 claim that they use computers for their work, this number is only 20% for those above 40+. The majority (90%) are familiar with the digitization efforts of cash transfer program, but 61% of all SWs continue to use only paper-based data for their work instead of the digitized MIS. This indicates a gap in capacity that needs to be addressed through training for digitization to eventually improve efficiency.

Digital literacy also has implications for communication channels with SWs. While all SWs have phones and around 40% of them use smartphones, a quarter do not send, and a third do not read, text messages.

Overall, digital literacy - reading text messages, using computers, and digitizing data - is slightly lower among older SWs, and much higher among male SWs. More educated SWs, not surprisingly, are more likely to use computers and read text messages. Number of trainings is also positively associated with these outcomes, suggesting that capacity building opportunities may, in fact, improve digital literacy.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of these analysis and activities suggest a few key areas of work to explore further.

First, there is a lot of potential to improve the performance and efficiency of SWs. They spend a significant proportion of their time involved in tasks that are less enjoyable and repetitive, and this may impede their ability to dedicate more time to beneficiaries and carry out social awareness activities, which are both important and enjoyable for SWs.

Despite this time spent in unenjoyable tasks, such as RSS repayment, timely repayment rates (less than 67 percent) do not reflect their level of effort. There is utility to be gained from improving satisfaction and soft skills of SWs: SWs with more job satisfaction, and who are more innovative, also have higher timely repayment rates.

Second, opportunities for recognition are low and based, for the most part, on RSS repayment rates and an annual rubric of general traits. While a small number of SWs are recognized for their work annually by DSS, nomination for this award is mostly at the discretion of USSOs and heavily dependent on RSS (93% of supervisors use RSS reports to assess productivity) and a rubric of general traits. This may explain why a disproportionate amount of time is devoted to RSS activities. In addition, only a third of SWs feel that their work is appreciated by both their USSO and beneficiaries, and over 50% of are not confident about quality work leading to a promotion. Collectively, all of these may lead to lower effort, job satisfaction, and motivation.

Third, no official feedback is provided to SWs on their performance. This can potentially reduce transparency of decision-making at the managerial level (about workload assignment and nomination for annual awards), and provides no pressure or encouragement to SWs to improve on areas of work where their performance might be lacking.

Fourth, while overall motivation is not low, over a quarter of SW do report lower motivation relative to when they first started. Job satisfaction is also low. Over a third of SWs are only “somewhat satisfied” with their experience working with DSS. SWs may also find their work to be less aligned with DSS’s overall mission (as suggested by the survey experiment).

Lastly, capacity building opportunities are low and trainers are irregular, both of which contribute to low skills when it comes to technology use, innovative capacity, efficiency of performing administrative tasks, interest in learning new things, etc. Capacity constraint on digital literacy and technology use has important implications for the planned cash transfer modernization efforts as SWs are the main implementers on the ground. New Ministry guidelines on mandatory hours of training for all staff are expected to improve this, but further piloting can be done to understand how to improve capacity, skills, and knowledge of SWs.

To improve efficiency, job satisfaction, motivation, and capacity, following are some potential improvements which could be fed into current MoSW procedures and central DSS programming, or eventually rolled out through DSS field offices.

- Develop a communications campaign to improve motivation, efficiency and value of their work.

DSS can lead a communications campaign to remind SWs about the importance of their jobs, connect their less enjoyable tasks to the larger mission of DSS, express appreciation for their hard work, provide actions and solutions to make their workloads easier, and keep them up to date on DSS initiatives that may be relevant or of interest to them (such as the 213 assistant USSO posts coming up in the next fiscal year).

- Simplify administrative process to save time and improve efficiencies.

The repeated nature of many administrative tasks SWs perform (copying information from forms into registers, filling out long, and repetitive receipts) lower the available time SWs have to spend on social awareness and other important tasks. Given the repetitive nature of some of the forms SWs need to fill out on a daily basis, significant efficiency gains could be achieved by simplifying forms and registers to only include the minimum required information, and using unique identifiers for beneficiaries rather than multiple identifying information.
• **Use nudges to save time on unenjoyable tasks.**

A significant portion of SWs’ time is spent on collecting repayment from RSS borrowers. Simple nudges that make undesirable behavior salient to borrowers, such as marking passbooks with red stickers or ink for late payments, and with green for timely repayments, could act as a deterrent for late payments as suggested by results of the pilot discussed in Box 2. This could reduce the need for multiple visits to collect repayment and lower frustration for SWs - both of which can make their work more enjoyable and improve job satisfaction.

• **Provide clarity on role to improve efficiency.**

DSS can provide a clear job description and performance criteria (along with provision of feedback of performance) to SWs in order to facilitate better allocation of time and effort across areas of higher priority for both DSS and their own work. This could be communicated during the annual training sessions for SWs or directly by their supervisors.

• **Provide performance feedback to encourage efficiency and improve motivation.**

Supervisors can provide regular feedback to SWs on their strengths and weaknesses to provide guidance on what areas to improve on and to boost morale by highlighting strengths. This may be combined with a self-assessment by SWs of their own performance to encourage self-reflection and performance-related discussions between supervisors and SWs, as well as to improve transparency. This may be easily implemented locally by providing a simple feedback form to USSOs (asking them to list top strengths and weaknesses), and providing a corresponding checklist for SWs to guide their self-assessments.

• **Provide social recognition and recognition from USSOs to improve motivation.**

Because raises are nominal, and the chances for promotion are low, social or in-kind rewards can be both more feasible and effective in this context. Acknowledgement of services and achievement from managers and peers have been known to improve motivation and performance across many studies. Supervisors can use the performance rubric developed and tested by the World Bank team, which covers a wider spectrum of the SWs’ workload, to select top performers at regular intervals and recognize their achievement publicly (through certificates, plaques at the upazila office, awards during annual events, etc.).

• **Feedback from beneficiaries to improve motivation and performance.**

For many SWs, the recognition and appreciation they receive from beneficiaries is a key motivator for their work. Creating a platform to share feedback from beneficiaries on a regular basis, and communicating their appreciation to SWs could significantly boost their morale, and subsequently, motivation to work harder to achieve DSS’s mission. To implement this, calls can be made to a random subset of beneficiaries (whose phone numbers are on the record) and soliciting their feedback on SWs’ work.

• **Create training and skills development opportunities to help SWs manage their workload better, support innovation and soft skills, improve efficiency, and create opportunities for professional development.**

The new 60 hours training requirement for all government workers provides a good opportunity to train SWs on essential skills they might currently lack. Potential topics include a module on developing a growth mindset over a fixed mindset to improve attitude towards learning and innovation, basic computer skills to improve digital literacy, goal setting for service delivery and time management exercises to improve planning and efficiency, better guidance on improving efficiency of administrative work, role-playing exercises on common and difficult scenarios, etc.
An Unprecedented Challenge
Bangladesh’s Social Service Delivery and Social Protection

Program Brief

Social Workers for Local Service Delivery in Social Protection

An Unexpected Challenge

The Social Workers for Local Service Delivery in Social Protection

Section 9:
Progressive Social Services and Volunteer Programs

Social workers in the field at the community level and volunteers from various organizations are working together to deliver social services. A volunteer named MD. Md. Rashed (who is a journalist) has been focusing on a community welfare program. (See the image)

Section 10:

During Lunch

The volunteers are engaged in the delivery of Social Services.

Section 4:
Volunteer Work

Volunteers are involved in various activities to support the delivery of social services.

Section 5:
Village Meeting

Social workers at the village level are discussing the social services and volunteer activities.

Section 6:

Social Services and Volunteer Activities

A volunteer named Md. Rashed (who is a journalist) has been focusing on a community welfare program. (See the image)
ONLY 1/3 OF SOCIAL WORKERS FEEL THAT THEIR WORK IS APPRECIATED BY THEIR SUPERVISOR AND BENEFICIARIES.
OVER 1/4 ARE LESS MOTIVATED NOW THAN WHEN THEY STARTED WORKING.

PURSUING MOTIVATION

A day in the life of a Social Worker of the Department of Social Services, Bangladesh.

9:00 AM
Social Awareness & Cash Transfer Activities
Nasir’s favorite activity is awareness-building, but he only gets to spend less than 45 minutes of his day on this.

12:30 PM
Travelling to Other Villages
Nasir’s working area includes more than the union of his job description, increasing the time and resources spent on travelling.

3:40 PM
Depositing Collected Loans
On average, Nasir spends over 20 hours per week on microloan program activities.

4:15 PM
Doing Paperwork
Only 18% of Nasir’s colleagues can enter data into a computer. His belief about his capacity to learn prevents him from trying and learning from failure.

5:30 PM
Heading Home
The social recognition is the best thing about his job. It makes all the hard work worthwhile!

10:00 AM
Loan Repayment Collections
Less than 67% of borrowers pay on time so Nasir has to revisit houses many times a month.
Programme Brief
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September 2019