



Evaluation of Save the Children
Finland's Child-Sensitive Social
Protection (CSSP) programme in Asia
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Abbreviations:

Abbreviation	Full form
CCSA	Child-Centred Social Accountability
CGPlus	Child Grant Plus Parenting
CSSP	Child-Sensitive Social Protection
CWAC	Community Welfare Assistance Committee
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ISELA	International Social-Emotional Learning Assessment
JCTR	Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MoLSAF	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PETS	Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys
PMIS	Panchayat-level Management Information System
RTI	Right to Information
SC	Save the Children
SCF	Save the Children Finland
SCT	Social Cash Transfer
SCTP	Social Cash Transfer Programme
SRSP	Shock-Responsive Social Protection
SSA	Social Security Allowance
VSLAs	Village Savings and Loan Associations

Executive Summary

The Child-Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) Programme

Save the Children Finland (SCF) supports **child-sensitive social protection (CSSP)** initiatives, implemented through Save the Children (SC) Country Offices (COs) across six countries in Asia and Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Somaliland/Somalia, Zambia, India, Nepal, and the Philippines) as part of its Global Program to address child poverty.

The overarching aim is to ensure social protection yields **positive and enduring outcomes for children** through a tripartite strategy:

1. **Improving access** to social protection for vulnerable populations.
2. **Improving parenting practices** in beneficiary households ("Cash Plus" interventions).
3. **Increasing government commitment** to CSSP.

SCF operationalises CSSP through two main pillars:

- **Pillar 1:** Social Protection System Strengthening (supporting inclusive, accountable, and scalable government systems).
- **Pillar 2:** Cash Plus Interventions (linking cash transfers with complementary services like parenting, nutrition, and education).

Objective of the Evaluation

The evaluation focused on SCF's CSSP programme between 2022 and 2025, with the objective of assessing the CSSP approach using the OECD/DAC criteria (Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability) and to position SCF's approach within global best practice on CSSP. It draws on findings from the six country-specific evaluation reports.

Methodology

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, primarily relying on a combination of:

- An in-depth desk-based review of programme documents and existing literature.
- Targeted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Findings

The findings of the CSSP evaluation are organised into two main segments, reflecting the core pillars of Save the Children Finland's approach: Social Protection System Strengthening, and Cash Plus and Access to Essential Services. A cross-cutting section on Policy and Strategy Influence is also included.

Pillar 1: Social Protection System Strengthening

SC's contribution involved strengthening the foundational delivery architecture of government-led social protection systems. SC's role varied by System Maturity: foundational work in nascent systems (e.g., Somaliland/Somalia), system strengthening in transitional systems (e.g., Zambia), and advancing policy in mature contexts (e.g., Nepal, Philippines). SC achieved tangible impact on access to and coverage of social protection by strengthening local "on-ramps" like enrolment and registration. This resulted in the registration of 35,345 people in Nepal, a 23% increase in access to 13 schemes in India (Rajasthan) and enrolment of 3350 households to the social cash transfer (SCT) programme in Zambia. System integrity was bolstered by enhancing accountability, transparency, and grievance handling through localised innovations, such as community monitoring in Côte d'Ivoire and the formation of 27 grievance-handling committees in Nepal. SC also provided proof-of-concept models for shock-responsive and adaptive social protection (SRSP), particularly through developing plans for piloting flexible enrolment in Nepal and building foundational adaptive systems in Somaliland.

Pillar 2: Cash Plus

The study assessed how SC mitigates non-financial barriers to human-capital gains. The CSSP Parenting Programme is SCF's most successful cash 'plus' component, consistently showing significant improvements across all six countries. These include increased caregiver engagement, reduced maltreatment, and improved child development outcomes. SC facilitated linkages to services (health and education) through accountability mechanisms, leading to infrastructure improvements such as the refurbishment of a primary school in Zambia and the development of a Mother and Child Health (MCH) centre in Somaliland. Nascent components in Livelihoods and Productive Inclusion are emerging as a strategic direction, demonstrated by vocational training for sixty youth in Côte d'Ivoire and savings initiatives in the Philippines.

Cross-Cutting: Policy and Strategy Influence

SC's technical expertise and evidence generation have been effectively used to influence government policy and institutionalise CSSP principles. In the Philippines, SC's collaboration led to the formal adoption and national scale-up of the CSSP parenting programme into the 4Ps' social protection programme. A key policy milestone was achieved in Zambia, where SC played a technical advisory role and successfully ensured child sensitivity was formally recognised as a cross-cutting pillar in the revised National Social Protection Policy. In emerging systems like Somaliland and Côte d'Ivoire, SC led and supported the drafting and launching of the national social protection policy and implementation strategy and signed formal Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), laying the groundwork for undertaking systematic engagement for social protection system development. SC's rigorous piloting and evaluation serve as "policy laboratories," generating evidence to advocate for national-level adoption and institutionalisation.

Conclusion

SCF's CSSP model is a highly relevant and effective investment in inclusive, child-sensitive social protection. Effectiveness and impact are demonstrated through measurable gains in increased access to social protection programmes by vulnerable households, enhanced caregiver engagement and child development outcomes, improved access to and quality of essential services and policy influence. Efficiency is moderate, leveraging existing government structures, but sustainability challenges remain due to limited fiscal resources and reliance on external financing in less mature systems. The evaluation confirms that the CSSP approach is a valuable driver of impactful change, though its durability depends on greater government ownership.

Recommendations

- Enhance Sustainability: Systematically leverage local government functionaries as facilitators/trainers for 'plus' modules to embed capacity within state systems.
- Deepen Cash-Plus: Expand the CSSP framework to explore, where feasible, a cash plus economic strengthening' strand
- Strengthen Evidence: Continue broadening the evidence base on parenting and integrate core child-outcome indicators into national M&E frameworks.
- Boost Efficiency: Expand the use of cost-efficiency and affordability analyses (e.g., Nepal model) and undertake national CSSP investment cases (e.g., Zambia model).
- Strengthen Accountability: Support the expansion and government anchoring of accountability mechanisms into national systems.

1. Introduction

Save the Children Finland (SCF) has been extending support to child-sensitive social protection (CSSP) projects to selected countries in Asia and Africa. This is part of the SCF's Global Programme, which aims to reduce child poverty through CSSP initiatives in six countries across Africa and Asia (Cote d'Ivoire, Somaliland/Somalia, Zambia, India, Nepal and the Philippines). SCF works with national and local Save the Children (SC) offices to implement the CSSP projects, which have an overarching aim to ensure that social protection initiatives yield positive and enduring outcomes for children. This is pursued through a tripartite strategy focusing on:

- Improving access to social protection programmes for vulnerable and poor populations.
- Improving parenting practices in households receiving social protection.
- Increasing commitment to CSSP from governments.

The evaluation of SCF's CSSP programme followed a mixed-methods approach. The evaluation focused on SCF's programme between 2022 and 2025, and it assessed the CSSP approach using the OECD/DAC criteria. The evaluation draws on the six country-specific evaluation reports, a CSSP parenting research (synthesis) study covering all six countries, as well as targeted KIIs. It should be noted that, given time and budgetary constraints, only a small number of KIIs were undertaken, limiting the scope of the evaluation findings. Nonetheless, they provide a useful overview of SCF's CSSP programming approach and how it compares with global best practice.

2. Contextualising social protection

This section anchors the evaluation in the current thinking on the functionality of social protection systems and the role organisations such as SC can play. Social protection systems have evolved from fragmented safety nets into state-anchored institutional architectures that are designed to guarantee a foundational level of security across the life cycle.¹ Today, they comprise a coordinated set of policies, programmes, and delivery systems that protect individuals from poverty, prevent vulnerability through resilience-building, promote human capital, and contribute to social inclusion and transformation.² A consensus has developed that for a social protection system to be sustainable, it must be 'state-anchored', with the government defining standards, ensuring compliance, and guaranteeing equitable access.³ Development partners, such as SC, act as enablers; piloting innovations, generating evidence, and strengthening capabilities within government frameworks.

As this synthesis report shows, SC plays a critical role by supporting governments to strengthen social protection systems, generate evidence for CSSP, and enhance impact through child-sensitive cash-plus interventions.

2.1. Child-Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP)

CSSP aims to put the spotlight on children, prioritising them as key beneficiaries of social protection. As defined by SC, 'child-sensitive social protection involves designing and implementing specific social protection policies and programmes that directly address children's needs and rights and improve child development.'⁴ CSSP recognises that children experience vulnerabilities in a multitude of ways and that their experiences are vastly different from those of adults. CSSP prioritises acting in the best interest of children, actively including children who are marginalised, and focusing on children's perspectives. By virtue of their age and status in society, children are also practically and legally less able to claim their rights, emphasising the need for tailored

¹ Eds Schuring, E., and Loewe, M. (2021). 'Chapter One: Introduction to the Handbook on Social Protection Systems', *Handbook on Social Protection Systems*, pp 8 and 24. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839109119>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., pp. 27.

⁴ Save the Children and the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty (2017). Briefing Paper: Child-sensitive Social Protection, accessed: 20.10.2025. Available here: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/csspbriefingbranded.final_01112017.pdf.

CSSP.⁵ Significant empirical evidence underscores the high long-term returns on early interventions, which can be up to tenfold in lifetime earnings for every dollar invested.⁶

Box 1: Why Child-Sensitive Social Protection?

CSSP situates social protection within the broader human-capital and capability frameworks.⁷ It foregrounds early, continuous, and equitable access to support as the most cost-effective means to prevent irreversible losses in health, cognition, and productivity. CSSP thus redefines efficiency not merely as fiscal prudence but as maximisation of long-term social returns.

SCF operationalises CSSP through two main pillars. The first focuses on Social Protection System Strengthening, which supports governments to build inclusive and accountable systems that deliver CSSP at scale. The second pillar prioritises Cash Plus Interventions that enhance the impact of cash transfers by linking them with parenting programmes, nutrition and education interventions, family budgeting, access to essential services, and livelihood support. Together, these pillars address both the financial and non-financial barriers to children's well-being and human capital development. The two pillars are interdependent levers - cash transfers address immediate liquidity and consumption needs, whereas complementary "plus" interventions strengthen the service and care systems that sustain long-term child development outcomes.⁸

The evaluation findings are organised in two main segments as presented below.

3. Evaluation Findings

3.1. Pillar 1: Social Protection System Strengthening

This section of the report presents findings on how SC contributes to strengthening the foundational delivery architecture of government-led social protection systems. It draws on evidence from the six-country case studies and situates them within global discourse on delivery systems, data integration, and accountability. The country case studies were Somaliland, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia, Nepal, India, and the Philippines.

Findings from SCF's CSSP Programme

1. System Maturity

Social protection system maturity determines not only how national systems perform, but also how SC can engage effectively within them. System maturity reflects the degree to which delivery, data, and accountability subsystems are institutionalised, conditions that define whether social protection can act as a stabiliser during crises or remain a set of fragmented safety nets.⁹

In contexts such as Somaliland, where no financing, or state-led delivery system exists, SC's programming has had to be foundational, establishing basic administrative systems, delivering direct transfers, and demonstrating proof-of-concept for child-sensitive approaches. SC has driven implementation in the absence of government systems, however, there has been a focus on implementing initiatives with the government, to encourage future state-ownership. This underscores a critical strand in the global literature: without state-anchored systems, humanitarian responses cannot evolve into sustainable, child-sensitive, shock-responsive mechanisms.¹⁰ In early-stage systems like Côte d'Ivoire, SC's role remains catalytic, piloting innovations and

⁵ DFID, et al. (n.d.). Advancing Child-Sensitive Social Protection, accessed: 20.10.2025. Available here:

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/CSSP%20joint%20statement%208%2020%2009.pdf>.

⁶ Garfinkel, I., et al. (2022). 'The Benefits and Costs of a Child Allowance', *The Journal of Benefit-Cost Analysis*, accessed: 20.10.2025. Available here:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-benefit-cost-analysis/article/benefits-and-costs-of-a-child-allowance/665380DF301F990D8FDB06A7BB3D5BD9>.

⁷ Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. (New York: Alfred Knopf).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ World Bank (2025). *State of Social Protection Report 2025: The 2-Billion-Person Challenge*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at:

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/3a191516-270b-40c9-acdf-79e3f382c708/content>

(Accessed: 20 October 2025) Ayliffe, T., Aslam, G. & Schjød, R. (2017). *Accountability in Social Protection: Conceptual Framework and Tools*. Development Pathways;

Oxford Policy Management (2017). *Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems Research: Literature Review*. Oxford: Oxford Policy Management. Available at:

<https://www.opml.co.uk/files/Publications/a0408-shock-responsive-social-protection-systems/srsp-literature-review.pdf>

(Accessed: 20 October 2025).

¹⁰ Ibid

building institutional relationships to prepare the ground for national ownership. In transitional systems such as Zambia, SC has had more room to focus on *system strengthening*, embedding data interoperability, advocating for co-financing arrangements, and “cash-plus” parenting interventions to institutionalise government-led delivery. Finally, in mature systems like Nepal, India and the Philippines, SC’s influence has been *transformational*, advancing policy integration, adaptive learning, and national scale-up of child-sensitive social protection.

Across all six cases, therefore, system maturity matters because it determines both the *form and feasibility* of SC’s engagement—from building systems with the state in fragile, humanitarian settings to enabling systemic reform and resilience in more institutionalised environments.

2. Policy, Strategy, and Programme Influence

Save the Children has actively worked to strengthen state capacity through direct partnership. Across multiple contexts, SC has provided technical and financial assistance to governments in developing social protection policies, strategies, and operational frameworks. This aligns with global literature highlighting that sustainable systems must be state-anchored, with external actors acting as catalysts rather than substitutes.¹¹ Because SC’s impact has cut across both social protection systems strengthening and Cash Plus, a separate, cross-cutting segment on *Policy, Strategy and Programme Influence* is included as section 3.3.

3. Access and Coverage: Building the ‘Plumbing’ of Delivery Systems

SC has made a tangible impact on social protection system strengthening by supporting the creation of practical on-ramps that connect citizens to entitlements. SC’s initiatives operationalise the principle that access begins at the local level through documentation, enrolment, registration, and grievance redressal.¹² The six-country portfolio demonstrates measurable progress:

Nepal: SC supported eligibility mapping, targeted outreach and documentation drives, registering 35,345 people with social protection programmes from 2021-June 2025. Municipalities have also co-financed Child Grant Plus Parenting programme activities, illustrating growing subnational accountability.

India (Rajasthan): The Panchayat-level Management Information System (PMIS), managed by local government, increased access to 13 social protection schemes (including Old Age, Widow, and Disability Pensions, caregiver scheme, and schemes for construction workers and housing) by 23% from 2017 to 2019 in the project area.¹³

The Philippines: Mapping of households eligible for social protection in 10 Barangays (local government) enabled the surfacing of previously invisible households; however, integration with national registries remains partial, reflecting wider data interoperability challenges.

Zambia: During 2022-2024, SC has supported the enrolment of 3350 households onto the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) and Keeping Girls in School (KGIS) programme and boosted the programme’s coverage. Prioritising capacity building at the local level, through the Community Welfare Assistance Committee (CWAC) members, has improved enrolment processes.

Cote d’Ivoire: SC has worked with the government social workers to reach beneficiary households. By working within structures that are already owned by the government, SC increases the likelihood of sustainability.

Across these cases, SC’s role aligns with current thinking that delivery systems are one of the ‘binding constraints’ to scale: they determine whether fiscal and political commitments translate into effective coverage.¹⁴ By strengthening identification, enrolment, and grievance systems, SC provides governments with the administrative scaffolding necessary for expansion.

¹¹ Schuring, E., and Loewe, M (2021). Handbook on Social Protection Systems, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollbook-0a/edcoll/9781839109102/9781839109102.xml>. Gentilini, U eds (2025). How Scale-Up Happens: Financing, Political Economy, and Delivery in Social Assistance Expansion, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9512ff5-4559-4dac-878b-ec191d6a04fb/content>.

¹² García, M. & Moore, C.M.T. (2012). The Cash Dividend: The Rise of Cash Transfer Programs in Sub-Saharan Africa. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

¹³ Save the Children. (2020). Child-Sensitive Social Protection in South Rajasthan, India. New Delhi: Save the Children India.

¹⁴ Ibid.

4. Accountability, Transparency, and Grievance Handling

SC's targeted interventions have significantly bolstered the integrity and responsiveness of social protection systems through enhancing governance and citizen feedback loops. Accountability is both a governance and social inclusion function. From a governance perspective, accountability refers to the processes and structures through which stakeholders are held accountable for delivering services.¹⁵ From a social inclusion perspective, accountability empowers citizens to actively participate in the design, implementation, and monitoring of social protection.¹⁶ SC's contributions to developing strong accountability include strengthening grievance platforms, community feedback scorecards, and public information displays on benefit coverage.

SC has embedded accountability through innovations tailored to local system maturity. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, where formal grievance systems are nascent, SC initiated community-based monitoring and score cards, improving transparency and community-ownership in pilot cash transfer programmes. In **Zambia**, SC worked through the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) to institutionalise Child-Centred Social Accountability (CCSA) platforms, combining public expenditure tracking surveys (PETS), budget analysis, and community scorecards to advocate for increased budget allocations to the SCTP and ensure responsiveness to local needs.

In **Nepal**, SC prioritised the formation and operationalisation of grievance-handling committees in line with the government's established grievance-handling guidelines for the Social Security Allowance (SSA); 27 grievance-handling committees were established in 2024¹⁷.

In **India**, SC's CSSP interventions in Rajasthan encouraged the use of rights-based accountability instruments, including the Right to Information (RTI) framework and government grievance redressal portals, enabling people to seek redress for missed payments or to check the status of their applications. Community facilitators also used these channels to document cases of exclusion and liaise with frontline workers to resolve them.

In the **Philippines**, SC's Barangay Social Protection and Related Initiatives Link (BSPRIL) exemplifies how accountability can be localised and institutionalised within existing governance systems. By equipping Barangay officials with tools and training to map eligible households, establish community help desks, and publicly display service information, the system's participatory design enhanced inclusion and awareness of available social protection programmes and strengthened citizen confidence in the local government's capacity to deliver social protection.

Collectively, these approaches demonstrate that accountability and transparency are not merely add-ons but structural pillars of social protection system strengthening. SC has been successful at developing and advocating accountability systems at the local level and helping communities understand their entitlements. As systems mature, SC's role will likely shift from facilitating community-led grievance mechanisms to institutionalising digital feedback platforms, open data practices, and participatory budget monitoring within government systems. This evolution mirrors broader global evidence that robust accountability ecosystems, i.e., combining technological, institutional, and civic mechanisms, are essential for achieving equitable, adaptive, and child-sensitive social protection at scale.

5. Shock-Responsive and Adaptive Social Protection

By focusing on local operationalisation, SC has provided critical, scalable proof-of-concept models for national adaptive social protection strategies. The maturity of a social protection system is measured not only by coverage but by its adaptability.¹⁸ Strengthening and speeding up access to the programmes is invaluable for adaptability, especially in the face of a shock.¹⁹ The future of social protection programming lies

¹⁵ ILO and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021). Global research on governance and social protection, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/08/Global-overview_SP-Governance_June-2021.pdf.

¹⁶ Ayliffee, T., Aslam, G., and Schjodt, R. (2017). Social Accountability in the Delivery of Social Protection, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://socialprotection-humanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Social-Accountability-Literature-Review.pdf>.

¹⁷ Save the Children Finland. (2024). Annual Narrative Report: Realizing the Rights of Children through CSSP in Nepal (PAHUNCH). [Annual Narrative Report].

¹⁸ Beazley R., et al. (2024). Maturity Model: Adaptive Social Protection System, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://publications.iadb.org/en/maturity-model-adaptive-social-protection-system>.

¹⁹ Social Protection Human Rights (n.d.). Standards of Accessibility, Adaptability, and Acceptability, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://socialprotection-humanrights.org/framework/principles/standards-of-accessibility-adaptability-and-acceptability/>.

in shifting from static welfare to dynamic risk management to protect households from idiosyncratic and covariate shocks.²⁰

In **Nepal**, SC's access to the social protection model represents an early step toward operationalising shock-responsive social protection within an increasingly decentralised governance framework. Through collaboration with municipal governments in Madhesh province, SC is piloting the integration of contingency protocols and flexible enrolment processes that will enable rapid registration and payment to vulnerable households during crises. These interventions will complement government efforts to align the SSA with national SRSP strategies led by the Department of National ID and Civil Registration. SC's approach will contribute both practical lessons and institutional learning that can inform subsequent government policy shifts towards a more resilient and shock-responsive national social protection architecture.

In **Somaliland**, where the national social protection system remains embryonic and entirely donor-financed, SC's work has focused on establishing foundational adaptive delivery systems within a humanitarian setting. In the case of Somaliland, this is in targeted IDP camps in Hargeisa and Berbera. Here, the value of the cash transfer is significantly higher than other cash transfer programmes across the region (USD 20), which aligns with global best practice that larger cash transfers are better placed to help households build resilience.²¹ Although still at pilot scale, these interventions demonstrate how adaptive design—utilising humanitarian responses to build social protection systems—can serve as a transitional bridge between emergency aid and institutionalised national systems. In such fragile contexts, adaptability itself becomes a proxy for system maturity: it reflects not the scale of coverage, but the capacity to pivot, coordinate, and protect households during shocks.

Together, the Nepal and Somaliland experiences illustrate two ends of the adaptive systems continuum. Nepal demonstrates how adaptive elements can be institutionalised within a maturing system, while Somaliland shows how adaptive pilots can precede and catalyse the formation of a system. Across both, SC's contribution resides in producing actionable, locally owned models that provide governments and development partners with tested operational pathways for building national SRSP and Adaptive social protection strategies. It should be noted that shock-responsive programming was not a core element of SC's CSSP design during the 2022-25 phase. Nonetheless, with the global rise of covariate shocks, prioritising shock-responsive social protection programming is crucial.²²

6. Scale of interventions

Across the six contexts, SC demonstrates a consistent comparative advantage in catalysing access to social protection through delivery-system innovations. It has succeeded in embedding inclusion, accountability, and documentation functions at both national and local levels, but its direct influence over fiscal ownership, payment infrastructure, and national data integration remains limited, as these are aspects beyond the influencing capacity of SC, given the scale of the interventions in these countries. Nevertheless, the evidence affirms that SC's programme is able to reduce exclusion errors, enhance procedural fairness, and generate public-sector learning that strengthens future state capacity, albeit sometimes on a small scale.

3.2. Pillar 2: Cash-Plus and Access to Essential Services

The cash 'plus' model extends transfers by combining financial support with complementary inputs that mitigate non-financial constraints.²³ Generally, the evidence suggests that cash 'plus' programmes produce more impacts than just cash transfers, although this is not universal. Impacts on health and nutrition outcomes

²⁰ Gentilini, U eds (2025). How Scale-Up Happens: Financing, Political Economy, and Delivery in Social Assistance Expansion, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9512ff5-4559-4dac-878b-ec191d6a04fb/content>.

²¹ Bowen, T., et al (2020). Adaptive Social Protection: Building Resilience to Shocks, accessed: 06.11.2025. Available here:

<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/579641590038388922/adaptive-social-protection-building-resilience-to-shocks>, Davis, B et al (2025). From Evidence to Action: The Story of Cash Transfers and Impact Evaluations in Sub-Saharan Africa, *The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, UNICEF, and Oxford University Press*. Accessed: 27.11.2025. Available here:

<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a6e06279-00d7-41c0-8c78-a6df973acf92/content>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Roelen, K., et al. (2017). 'How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors', *Innocenti Working Paper WP-2017-10*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, Italy, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://oro.open.ac.uk/97425/>.

are often the strongest, with government-led cash plus programmes.²⁴ In contrast, unless designed very carefully, psychosocial stimulation or mental health support often produces the weakest impacts.²⁵ The supply of services and the quality and coherence of the design of a programme often drive outcomes, rather than the concept of a 'plus' component.²⁶

Findings from SCF's Programme

The following section examines SC's success with cash 'plus' programming across the six country projects. While Pillar 1 addresses financial and administrative access to entitlements, the assessment of Pillar 2 examines how cash 'plus' interventions mitigate the non-financial barriers that constrain a household's ability to convert income support into sustained human-capital gains. As previously stated, these interventions are aligned with current thinking on cash 'plus' as a response to both behavioural and supply-side deficits.²⁷

1. Parenting

The CSSP Parenting programme is SCF's most widely replicated and most successful cash 'plus' component. Delivered through existing public and community cadres such as government social workers (Philippines and Côte d'Ivoire) and community welfare assistance committees (CWACs) (Zambia), these programmes focus on nurturing care and child development. Evidence from the six-country portfolio reveals consistently positive outcomes, particularly regarding improvements in caregiver-child relationships, a reduction in maltreatment rates, and improved child development outcomes.

Nepal: The Child Grant Plus parenting intervention significantly increased caregiver engagement scores from 0.52 to 0.97, far surpassing the comparison group.²⁸ This led to significant developmental improvements for children in the programme: socio-emotional gains for those aged 0–2 were 1.41 points higher, and overall gains for those aged 3–5 were 37% greater than in the comparison group.²⁹

Zambia: Integration of parenting within the SCTP reduced maltreatment practices and significantly improved socioemotional outcomes among children. At the start of the programme, 52% of children were able to manage stress and 55% had conflict resolution skills, which increased to 82% and 93% respectively by the endline.³⁰ Maltreatment of children at the hands of caregivers dropped to almost 0 by the endline study, a significant reduction.

The Philippines: The parenting module is designed to promote child development and responsible parenting for parents receiving the 4Ps social protection programme.³¹ A study brought out that children whose parents participated in the pilot had higher gains in 4 out of 5 International Social-Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA) domains. The success of the pilot intervention resulted in the creation of MaPangBata, a national scale-up of the CSSP parenting programme and its integration into the Family Development Sessions, which are compulsory for families receiving the 4Ps cash transfer.³²

India (Rajasthan): The programme significantly improved caregiving practices and reduced child maltreatment. Child-reported caregiver engagement nearly doubled (from 1.71 to 3.04),³³ while psychological aggression dropped by 65% (from 1.75 to 0.60) and physical violence decreased sharply by 87% (from 1.21 to 0.15).³⁴ These changes were accompanied by an increase in caregivers' use of non-violent discipline.³⁵

²⁴ Angeles, G., et al. (2022). 'Health services availability and readiness moderate cash transfer impacts on health insurance enrollment: evidence from the LEAP 1000 cash transfer programme in Ghana', *BMC Health Services Research*, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12913-022-07964-w>.

²⁵ Little, M., et al. (2021). 'Effectiveness of cash-plus programmes on early childhood outcomes compared to cash transfers alone: A systematic review and meta-analysis in low- and middle-income countries', *PLoS Medicine*, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003698>.

²⁶ Roelen, K., et al. (2017). 'How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors', *Innocenti Working Paper WP-2017-10*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, Italy, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://oro.open.ac.uk/97425/>. Gentilini, U eds (2025). *How Scale-Up Happens: Financing, Political Economy, and Delivery in Social Assistance Expansion*, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9512ff5-4559-4dac-878b-ec191d6a04fb/content>.

²⁷ Roelen, K., et al. (2017). 'How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors', *Innocenti Working Paper WP-2017-10*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, Italy, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://oro.open.ac.uk/97425/>. Gentilini, U eds (2025). *How Scale-Up Happens: Financing, Political Economy, and Delivery in Social Assistance Expansion*, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9512ff5-4559-4dac-878b-ec191d6a04fb/content>.

²⁸ Kamra, A. (2022). *Impact Evaluation of the Child Grant Parenting Programme in Nepal*. Kathmandu: SC Nepal.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Save the Children (2025). *Zambia Endline Parenting Report*, accessed: 22.10.2025.

³¹ DSWD (2025). *Guidance Note On The Implementation Of The Family Development Sessions (FDS) Module on the MaPangBata*. Accessed on: 22/10/2025

³² Save the Children (2022). *CSSP Interim Report*. Accessed on: 22/10/2025

³³ Krupar, A. (2022). *The Impact of Palanhar Plus on Children's Social-Emotional Learning and Caregivers' Parenting Outcomes in Dungarpur*. Helsinki: Save the Children Finland.

³⁴ Save the Children. (2024). *Endline report: Impact Assessment Study of a Parenting Programme Provided to Beneficiaries of the Caregiver Social Protection Programme in Rajasthan, India*. Helsinki: SC Finland.

³⁵ Ibid.

Somaliland: By the endline evaluation, rates of child labour outside of the home dropped to 0% following the parenting sessions, along with clear increases in physical affection and praising for children. The number of children enrolled in school increased from 77% at the baseline to 97% by the endline, suggesting a much greater prioritisation of education.³⁶ The number of caregivers using violent discipline decreased by 11%, while the frequency of caregivers taking an interest in their child more than doubled.³⁷

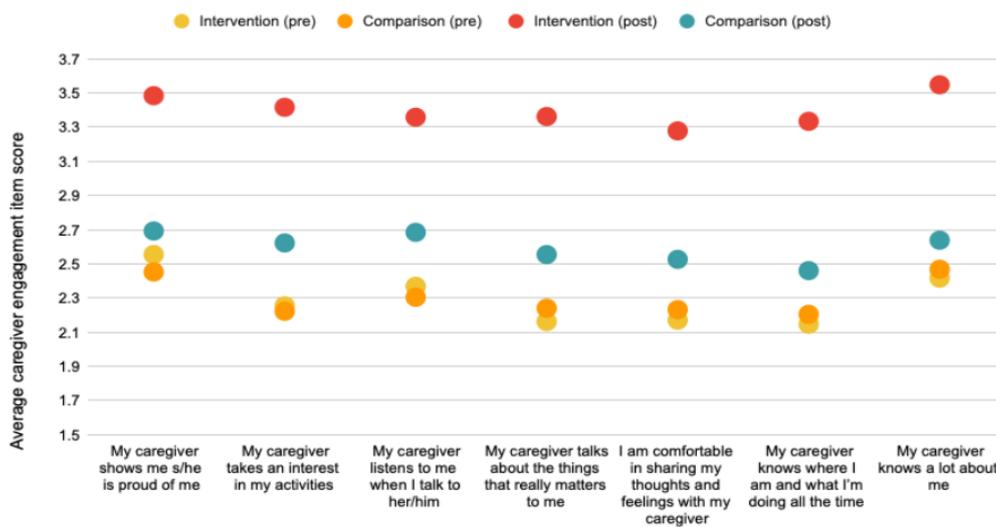
Côte d'Ivoire: Parenting initiatives reduced school drop-out rates and improved parent-child communication. School drop-out rates reduced from 14% among boys to 0% by the endline parenting report.³⁸ Children reported that they felt their caregivers listened to them more, in an increase of 17.9%.³⁹ The number of caregivers choosing to leave their children at home reduced by 67.3%.⁴⁰

Parental Engagement

Evidence from the CSSP projects illustrates a cascade of positive effects, where improved caregiving forms the foundation for children to thrive. As shown in the Figure below, children in the intervention group reported significantly higher caregiver engagement—specifically feeling more supported, valued, and listened to—compared to those in the control group. This improvement was consistent across every item on the scale and in diverse country contexts, demonstrating that the parenting programme enhanced caregiver-child interactions, resulting in measurable positive shifts from pre- to post-intervention.

Figure (a): Child-reported caregiver engagement: Average score for each item on the caregiver engagement scale across the five included comparable studies (India 2022, Philippines 2022, Somaliland 2023, Zambia 2024, Cote D'Ivoire 2025).⁴¹

Figure 1 | Child reported caregiver engagement



Maltreatment

The intervention also resulted in a statistically significant reduction in maltreatment, with both caregivers and children reporting a marked decrease in the use of harsh discipline. Post-intervention data show an increase in adoption of non-violent discipline techniques by caregivers and a drop in average scores for caregiver-reported physical violence and psychological aggression, a trend that is corroborated by the children's own accounts, suggesting the programme effectively raised awareness and mitigated maltreatment.

³⁶ Save the Children (2025). Somaliland Endline Parenting Report, accessed: 22.10.2025

³⁷ Ibid

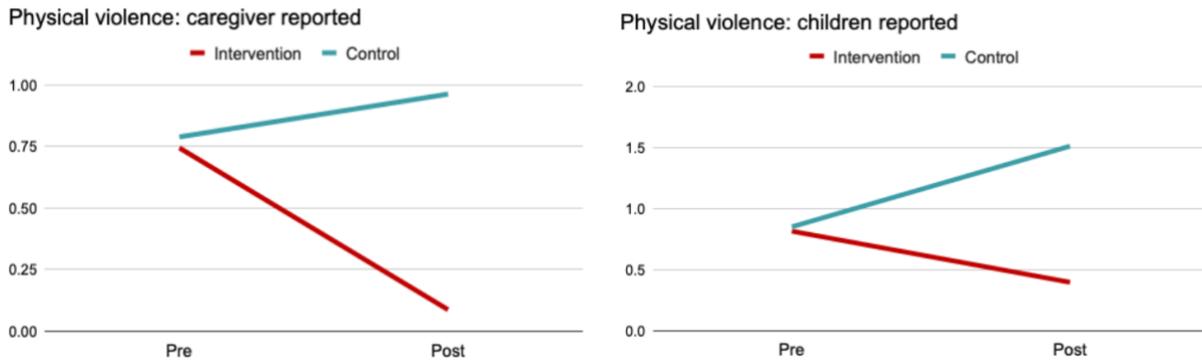
³⁸ Save the Children (2025). Côte d'Ivoire Endline Parenting Report, accessed: 22.10.2025.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ SCF. (2025). Strengthening Child Outcomes through Integrated Social Protection and Parenting Programmes: A synthesis of studies 2018-2025 (forthcoming).

Figure 2 | Change in caregiver use of physical violence⁴²

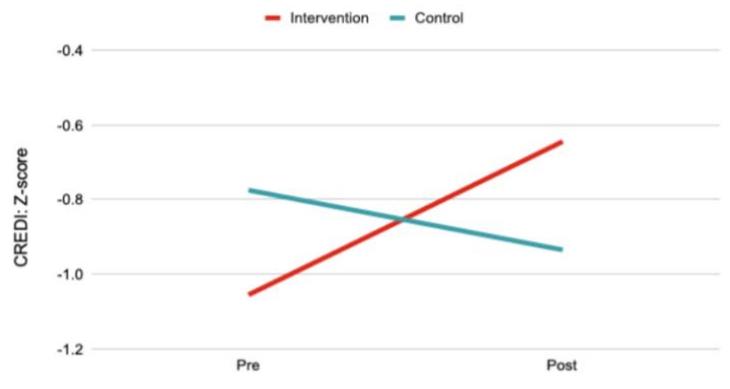


Child Development

Evaluations in Nepal and Somaliland indicate that interventions targeting caregiver engagement led to measurable improvements in children aged 0–3. Using the Caregiver Reported Early Development Instruments (CREDI)⁴³, results show that intervention groups achieved higher scores across motor, cognitive, language, and social-emotional domains compared to comparison groups.

Beyond these developmental benefits, the programme also demonstrated high economic value in Nepal, generating a return of USD 12 for every USD 1 invested⁴⁴. This return on investment is driven by a projected 2.9 additional years of schooling and proves to be three times more cost-efficient than cash transfers for achieving comparable cognitive gains⁴⁵.

Figure 3 | Overall CREDI scores⁴⁶



Even among older children, aged 6-12, the parenting interventions significantly improved social-emotional learning. As illustrated in the figure below, the intervention group demonstrated greater pre-to-post gains than the control group across all six domains of the International Social Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA)⁴⁷: self-concept, stress management, perseverance, empathy, conflict resolution, and relationships.

⁴² Average change pre to post intervention in caregiver use of physical violence, reported by caregivers and children, respectively, across the included comparable studies (Zambia (2021), Nepal (2022), India (2022), Nepal (2024), Zambia (2025a), Cote D'Ivoire (2025)). Ibid.

⁴³ The Caregiver Reported Early Development Instruments (CREDI) is a tool specifically designed to assess early development in children aged 0–3 years. It evaluates four key developmental domains: motor, cognitive, language, and social-emotional skills. CREDI provides raw scores, which are unique to CREDI and do not correspond to any other known metric.

⁴⁴ Nystrand, C. (forthcoming). Preliminary results from the long-term cost-effectiveness of CG Plus. Helsinki: SC Finland.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Overall CREDI z-scores pre and post intervention for intervention and control groups, across studies with comparable data: Somaliland 2023 and Nepal 2024.

⁴⁷ The International Social Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA) is designed to evaluate social-emotional competencies in children aged 6 to 12 years. Its domains include key areas such as self-concept, stress management, perseverance, empathy, conflict resolution, and relationships. Scores for each domain are reported as the percentage of questions answered appropriately.

Figure 4 | ISELA scores⁴⁸



These findings illustrate that cash ‘plus’ parenting interventions not only drive holistic developmental gains in early childhood but also represent a fiscally compelling strategy, delivering significantly higher economic returns and cognitive outcomes compared to cash transfers alone.

These findings validate the wider discourse that emphasises the powerful potential of parenting programmes.⁴⁹ Moreover, despite a limited geographic scope across the country’s (with the exception of the Philippines), SC’s approach exemplifies CSSP principles by embedding parenting programmes within existing social protection delivery structures, thereby maximising efficiency and sustainability.⁵⁰ These are promising results, although it must be noted that the success of parenting programmes is very dependent on context, so careful and repeated design considerations are imperative.⁵¹

2. Linkages to Services

Cash ‘plus’ interventions also strengthen linkages between social protection beneficiaries and essential services, which have led to tangible results within communities. Increasingly cash ‘plus’ programmes are looking to link beneficiaries with programmes and services that already exist. This has the added bonus of improving cross-sectoral coordination, reducing duplication and inefficiencies, and boosting the impacts of programmes when they operate together.⁵² Across countries, SC facilitated coordination with health clinics, schools, and community-based providers to address supply-side barriers. Most of this work was done through establishing Transparency and Accountability mechanisms, which encouraged beneficiaries to develop an understanding of the services that should be available to them, while advocating for their improvement.

Zambia: In Zambia, through the CCSA component, SC enabled communities participating in the SCTP to identify and act on barriers to service access. Community scorecards and dialogue platforms led to tangible improvements, including the refurbishment of Sananga Primary School in Nalolo District and the procurement of school desks in Western Province following citizen advocacy through district planning processes. These outcomes illustrate SC’s contributory role in strengthening the accountability and responsiveness of public services connected to social protection.

In the **Philippines**, the BSPRIL strengthened local social protection governance by establishing barangay-level social protection desks and mapping tools that connected unregistered households to

⁴⁸ ISELA scores for each domain pre-post intervention, averaged across the four included studies that measured ISELA (Zambia 2025a, Philippines 2022, India 2022 & Somaliland 2025).

⁴⁹ Redferm, A., et al. (2019). ‘Cost and cost-effectiveness of a parenting programme to prevent violence against adolescents in South Africa’, *BMJ Global Health*, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6528756/#:~:text=Programme%20effectiveness,received%20the%20comparator%20handwashing%20programme>. Pruce, K., Price, R., and Sabates-Wheeler, R. (2025). Learning from cash plus: A summary of evidence, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/articles/report/Learning_from_Cash_Plus_A_Summary_of_Evidence/29529065/1/files/56128529.pdf.

⁵⁰ Gentilini, U eds (2025). How Scale-Up Happens: Financing, Political Economy, and Delivery in Social Assistance Expansion, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9512ff5-4559-4dac-878b-ec191d6a04fb/content>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Roelen, K., et al. (2017). ‘How to Make ‘Cash Plus’ Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors’, *Innocenti Working Paper WP-2017-10*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, Italy, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://oro.open.ac.uk/97425/>.

programmes such as the Sustainable Livelihood Programme. In **Nepal** malnourished children were identified and referred to the malnutrition treatment centre. Additionally, capacity building of health post staff on growth monitoring was also undertaken.

In **Somaliland** and **Côte d'Ivoire**, where social protection systems remain in formative stages, SC's interventions served primarily as demonstration and integration models rather than system-embedded delivery mechanisms. In Somaliland, SC directly implemented cash transfers linked with nutrition screening and parenting support, laying the groundwork for an eventual state-led system. Here, community scorecards were used to engage beneficiaries on the services available to them and these, alongside media campaigns, helped develop a stronger understanding of child-sensitive services. These efforts have had tangible impacts, such as the government developing an MCH centre. Investment from the government was powerful given the low level of institutionalisation of service in Somaliland. In Côte d'Ivoire, SC complemented the government's Filets Sociaux Productifs by introducing child-sensitive "plus" components—nutrition, parenting, and school participation—that the government later recognised as integral to its evolving national framework. Citizen-led accountability mechanisms have mobilised resources to improve local services, such as the refurbishment of Sananga primary school in 2023. Across both contexts, SC's role was to bridge humanitarian or pilot modalities and long-term system development through local coordination, knowledge generation, and demonstration of child-focused service linkages

SC's interventions contributed to improving access to health, education, and nutrition services across countries. However, the degree to which changes can be linked to SC's efforts varies by context. In some settings, SC played a more direct role in shaping or facilitating the mechanisms that supported access, while in others its contribution formed part of a broader set of government, community, and programme-led actions that collectively influenced outcomes.

While it is beyond the scope of the CSSP interventions to fully ensure the availability of quality essential services, there has been a significant impact of this strand of work in bolstering the impact of social protection interventions on children's development opportunities.

3. Livelihoods and Productive Inclusion

An interesting finding from the evaluation was the initiation of livelihood opportunities within CSSP programming as part of the cash 'plus' approach. While cash transfers help households in the short-term, livelihood support can provide opportunities for households to increase long-term stable income.^{53,54} This can be essential for children, as caregivers are able to financially invest in children's access to health, education, and nutritional support.⁵⁵ Indeed, livelihood support is often considered a sustainable graduation pathway of cash 'plus' programming.⁵⁶ Livelihoods-oriented components remain nascent within SCF's portfolio but represent a strategic direction for the next phase. In countries where clear opportunities exist for engaging with income-generating and livelihood activities, some interventions have been initiated. Most notably, Côte d'Ivoire has introduced livelihood opportunities, with positive results.

The **Philippines**: The introduction of a savings and credit initiative for women who are beneficiaries of the 4Ps social protection programme, supported women to initiate small businesses and pay for children's education.

Côte d'Ivoire: SC complemented the government's Filets Sociaux Productifs by linking youth to vocational and entrepreneurship opportunities. In 2023, sixty young participants completed training in trades such as hairdressing, tailoring, catering, and auto mechanics. The programme also established five new Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and strengthened existing groups, expanding access to community-based financial services for caregivers and youth.

⁵³ EDI Global (2021). Impact evaluation of a bundled youth livelihoods intervention applying a cash 'plus' model, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://edi-global.com/project/impact-evaluation-of-a-cash-plus-model-on-a-bundled-youth-livelihoods-intervention/>.

⁵⁴ Pruce, K., Price, R., and Sabates-Wheeler, R. (2025). Learning from cash plus: A summary of evidence, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/articles/report/Learning_from_Cash_Plus_A_Summary_of_Evidence/29529065/1/files/56128529.pdf.

⁵⁵ Pruce, K., Price, R., and Sabates-Wheeler, R. (2025). Learning from cash plus: A summary of evidence, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/articles/report/Learning_from_Cash_Plus_A_Summary_of_Evidence/29529065/1/files/56128529.pdf.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Zambia: Community scorecards and district dialogues under the CCSA component were used by communities to advocate for livelihood support within local development plans.

Nepal: The CGPlus evaluation shows that household-budgeting modules helped parents use grants for education, livestock, and small business inputs in addition to consumption. Municipalities co-financed the expansion of these sessions.

These early interventions resonate with policy discourse that calls for integrating social protection and labour systems. The World Bank has routinely called for stronger partnerships between labour market policies and social protection to promote resilience, self-reliance, and sustainability.⁵⁷ For further prioritisation and integration of the livelihood component in SCF's programming, a challenge SC faces is to balance cost-effectiveness with in-depth support, ensuring that any productive inclusion element complements rather than dilutes the core child-sensitive mandate.

3.3. Policy and Strategy Influence

SC recognises that sustainable social protection programmes must be led by the government and, as such, has prioritised relationship building and collaboration. Scaling-up cash 'plus' programmes from small-scale pilots to comprehensive national systems is a political process, not just a technical one.⁵⁸ Generally, this process is shaped by three key, interdependent factors: fiscal resources, political will, and delivery capabilities.⁵⁹ A favourable fiscal environment is not the sole requirement for expansion; some flagship programmes, such as Zambia's SCTP, have been scaled up under vastly different macro-fiscal conditions.⁶⁰ This growing body of evidence emphasises that SCF's process is aligned with global practice, as significant time, effort, and resources are put into working closely with governments, in an effort to encourage them to take ownership of CSSP programming. Success in this area significantly increases the likelihood that SC's programmes will be sustainable.

The strategic use of evidence from rigorous pilots is a powerful enabler of programme expansion.⁶¹ Zambia is a strong example of this, as the scale-up of the SCTP was driven by a 'transitional policy coalition' of donors and local bureaucrats who used a strong evidence base to convince a fiscally conservative Ministry of Finance of the programme's value.⁶² By rigorously evaluating its CSSP approach, SCF is also adding to a growing body of evidence on the impact of cash 'plus' programming, which can be used to advocate for expansion and improvements.

Findings from SCF's CSSP Programme

SC has worked closely with governments across all six countries to support the development, review, and adoption of formal policies, strategies, and frameworks that embed CSSP principles. In **Nepal**, SC's long-term engagement on social protection informed the development of municipal-level social protection by-laws on cash plus and the adoption of a Standard Operating Procedure on how to ensure access to social protection. In **the Philippines**, SC's collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) helped institutionalise a parenting programme within the national 4Ps social protection programme.

Crucially, in **Zambia**, SC played a key policy-advisory role in the government's review of the **National Social Protection Policy** and the accompanying **Cash Plus Strategy**. SC's technical inputs and advocacy successfully ensured that child sensitivity was formally recognised as a cross-cutting pillar in the revised strategy—marking

⁵⁷ Rigolini, J (2025). How social protection helps people become self-reliant, *The World Bank*, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/voices/how-social-protection-helps-people-become-self-reliant#:~:text=As%20the%20world%20backtracks%20on,where%20coverage%20more%20than%20doubled>.

⁵⁸ Gentilini, U eds (2025). How Scale-Up Happens: Financing, Political Economy, and Delivery in Social Assistance Expansion, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9512ff5-4559-4dac-878b-ec191d6a04fb/content>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Pruce, K (2025). The politics of cash plus in Zambia, *The Institute of Development Studies*, accessed: 21.10.2025. Available here: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/articles/report/The_Politics_of_Cash_Plus_in_Zambia/29625533?file=56482040.

an important policy milestone. The Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) formally accepted SC's recommendations, reflecting strong alignment between the CSSP approach and the national policy direction.

In **Côte d'Ivoire** and **Somaliland**, SC has laid the groundwork for policy development by supporting the drafting of national frameworks and formal Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with relevant ministries. These efforts have helped to institutionalise coordination mechanisms and define government ownership pathways, even in fiscally constrained or fragile contexts.

Somaliland: SC worked with UNICEF and the MoLSAF to develop the draft National Social Protection Policy and implementation strategy, which has been approved. SC has since been asked to co-chair the National Social Protection Steering Committee, emphasising their strong relationship with the government, putting them in a good position to advocate for change.

Nepal: Parenting guidelines for the Child Grant were formally endorsed by the Department of National ID and Civil Registration, while local government allocations to outreach functions show institutional uptake of SC pilots, indicating successful policy influence.

The Philippines: A key milestone achieved by the project is the formal adoption of the CSSP parenting programme by the DSWD.⁶³ This adoption was cemented when a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was forged between SC and DSWD for the national scale-up of the ICDP parenting programme, now known as MaPangBata, officially signed in December 2022.⁶⁴

Given the small scale of SCF's CSSP projects, the policy influence achieved has been very impressive. The projects have served as policy laboratories, illustrating at the local level what could work and then collaborating with governments to advocate for a scale-up. Across the six countries, SC has achieved significant policy influence, as opposed to system transformation. SC's comparative advantage lies in demonstrating what works at the local level, using those results to advocate for institutionalisation at the national level.

3.4. Overall Synthesis

SC's CSSP approach enriches local administrative and implementation capabilities while also working closely with national systems to advocate for sustainability. Across the delivery chain, SC seeks to emphasise the CSSP approach, building capabilities and developing an evidence base. The organisation's work exemplifies the evolution from pilot projects to embedded system functions where delivery innovations and cash 'plus' components converge to advance equitable, resilient, and child-sensitive social protection. This section analyses the findings applying the DAC criteria:

- **Relevance** and **coherence** are demonstrated through alignment with state-anchored, child-sensitive social protection priorities and integration within government delivery systems.
- **Effectiveness** is evidenced by strong enrolment gains, improved grievance redressal, and the quality of Cash-Plus interventions, particularly parenting and accountability components. While direct system transformation remains limited, **impact** is visible through policy adoption and institutionalisation in multiple countries.
- **Efficiency** emerges from adaptive use of local cadres and co-financing mechanisms that enhance coverage at modest cost.
- **Sustainability** is partially achieved where fiscal ownership and institutional embedding are progressing, though dependence on external financing persists in nascent systems.

DAC Criterion	Key Findings	Overall Assessment
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⁶³ Save the Children (2022). CSSP Interim Report. Accessed on: 22/10/2025

⁶⁴ Ibid

<p>Relevance</p>	<p>The CSSP Programme is responsive to multidimensional child and family needs through the cash 'plus' model. Across the countries, the programme responded to existing challenges, such as education, nutrition, child labour and inadequate caregiving</p>	<p>The CSSP programme is highly relevant to existing challenges, although additional considerations will continue to improve relevance (see recommendations).</p>
<p>Coherence</p>	<p>The CSSP Programme is universally aligned with national frameworks, some of which SC has been involved in developing with the government. The programme prioritises working within existing structures rather than developing new ones.</p>	<p>SC is generally embedded with government institutions, suggesting high levels of coherence. These relationships have resulted in significant policy influence in some cases.</p>
<p>Effectiveness and Impact</p>	<p>The CSSP Programme has achieved tangible outcomes through increasing enrolment in national cash transfers, improving child development outcomes by tackling poverty, malnutrition, and barriers to learning through the cash-plus model. Programmes have strengthened nurturing care and positive parenting, improved children's nutrition and school attendance, and reduced child labour, with better socio-emotional development. In several contexts, governments have begun adopting SC's child-sensitive approaches into national systems. However, sustained impact depends on embedding these developmental gains, especially in ECD, education, and nutrition, within government frameworks for long-term impact.</p>	<p>Specific levels of effectiveness differ across the countries, although all case studies demonstrate positive impacts. This suggests that, on average, the CSSP approach is showing high- to medium-impact levels.</p>
<p>Efficiency</p>	<p>SC's key efficiency driver comes from utilising local structures and leveraging existing government delivery mechanisms, however, in some cases competing demands and disproportionate workload hinder service providers to adequately engage with the CSSP interventions.</p>	<p>The CSSP programme is moderately efficient. It consists of effective partnerships with inefficiencies linked to systemic constraints within partner systems, which include issues related to workload and competing demands placed on government service providers, hindering their capacity to implement programme activities.</p>
<p>Sustainability</p>	<p>Some of the projects are showing more signs of sustainability than others. In some cases, local and municipal governments have started to co-finance activities and national governments have begun integrating the approaches. However, governments commitment to invest/ continue to invest on</p>	<p>Ownership and institutionalisation is growing; however, sustainability still remains medium to low due to limited fiscal availability, prioritisation and investment in CSSP by the government.</p>

	system strengthening and cash plus approaches is critical to the sustainability of the CSSP interventions.	
Cross-Cutting Themes	<p>Gender equality: increased empowerment of female caregivers but limited male participation.</p> <p>Disability inclusion: There has been a focus on increasing access to social protection for persons with disabilities, as well as including them in policy discussions. However, scaling this up is important.</p> <p>Climate change adaptation: indirect resilience-building with emerging SRSP integration.</p> <p>Localisation: strong local alignment.</p>	Gender, localisation, and disability inclusion were prioritised at the design stage of the programme. The programmes engage local communities and make concerted efforts to advocate for gender equality and disability inclusion. In comparison, climate change and shock-responsive social protection have not been a focus of the CSSP approach

The following recommendations draw on evidence from the six case studies and international literature to outline practical, system-level priorities for SCF and its partners. They focus on strengthening sustainability, expanding the cash-plus model, enhancing system coherence, and embedding child development outcomes at the centre of national social protection frameworks.

4. Recommendations

4.1. Sustainability and Government Ownership *(Improves: Relevance, Coherence, Sustainability)*

To strengthen sustainability and government ownership, SC should **prioritise the institutional anchoring of CSSP models within national social protection strategies and budgets**, building on what is already happening in countries such as Nepal and Zambia. This means doing more to ensure that CSSP designs, including cash-plus and parenting components, are explicitly reflected in official strategies, guidelines, and financing frameworks. As a quick win largely within SC's control, country offices should continue to **systematically leverage local and national government functionaries as facilitators and trainers for parenting and related 'plus' modules**. This has much promise as a pathway to scaling and ensuring sustainability.

At the same time, SC should **continue to actively encourage formal policy adoption pathways** by seeking MOUs and securing places in technical working groups, steering committees, and advisory councils where CSSP language and budget lines can be negotiated over the medium term. Finally, all SC programmes should strive to **consistently embed CSSP evidence into policy dialogues**. For instance, using experiences like Child Grant Plus in Nepal, by preparing targeted briefs and presentations aligned with government decision cycles. Moreover, in Somaliland, through their work on the Social Protection Policy, SC has included the child grant as a priority social protection programme for the government. Together, these actions clarify what SC must do more of and what it must initiate to move CSSP from project status to nationally owned and financed practice.

4.2. Deepening the Cash-Plus Model *(Improves: Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability)*

To deepen the cash-plus model, SC should **continue to strengthen the existing set of adaptable 'plus' options** and evolve the CSSP framework as new lessons emerge across countries (e.g., updating parenting manuals to cater to different age cohorts). Building on what is already working, i.e. the parenting, nutrition, family budgeting, and service-linkage interventions—SC should also **expand the framework to include a new "cash plus economic strengthening"** strand, reflecting the promising livelihood-support and economic-opportunity linkages already taking shape in some projects.

4.3. Evidence Generation and Adaptive Learning to Strengthen Child-Sensitivity *(Improves: Impact, Relevance)*

SC should **continue to broaden the CSSP evidence base on parenting**, including capturing outcomes in nutrition, early childhood development, education, and socio-emotional development. Building on adaptive pilots already underway in several countries, SC should advocate for **strengthening of national M&E frameworks by integrating core child-outcome indicators**—cognitive, emotional, nutritional, and schooling—and ensure that **Social Protection data systems track child-level impacts over time**. While these actions will happen infrequently, they will enable SC to generate deeper, multidimensional evidence on child-sensitive impacts and provide a stronger foundation for future government engagement and donor investment.

4.4. Cost Efficiency Analyses and Investment Cases *(improves: efficiency & sustainability).*

At the programme level, SC should **expand its use of cost-efficiency and affordability analyses** to generate clear value-for-money evidence for each "plus" component. This involves doing more of the economic and outcome modelling already undertaken in Nepal, where SC combined evidence of child-impact gains with analysis of programme costs and drew on signals of government feasibility, such as **guideline endorsement and local budget allocations**. Building on this experience, SC should now **formalise this approach into structured scalability assessments** for all major "plus" options. These assessments should examine: (i) whether the intervention meaningfully improves child outcomes; (ii) whether it is cost-effective and affordable for the government at scale; and (iii) whether delivery can be integrated into existing systems, including realistic pathways for guideline adoption and budget uptake. Applying this approach consistently will give SC a robust analytical basis to determine which "plus" components are viable for scale, and which require redesign.

At the national level, SC should **continue to undertake CSSP investment cases** like the Zambia model, which combined **cost-benefit analysis, fiscal-space assessment, and modelling of conservative and ambitious scale-up scenarios**. These investment cases should quantify long-term macro- and micro-level benefits—such as gains in GDP, education, health, and the demographic dividend—and identify the **financing requirements and gaps** associated with scaling cash-plus models through government systems. By pairing these investment cases with **realistic fiscal strategies**, including domestic resource mobilisation, reprioritisation, debt restructuring, and targeted donor support, SC can present governments with credible, evidence-backed financing pathways. Together, programme-level scalability assessments and national-level investment cases provide SC with the **full analytical toolkit** needed to advocate for government adoption and long-term financing of CSSP.

4.5. Accountability, Transparency, and Inclusion *(Improves: Efficiency, Relevance, Sustainability)*

To strengthen accountability, transparency, and inclusion, SC should **continue to support the expansion of the accountability mechanisms in place in several countries**, including grievance redress processes, community scorecards, and digital feedback tools. Lessons from across the country case studies confirm that accountability mechanisms build trust and improve programme integrity. This will require longer-term collaboration and support to ministries, local governments, and service administrators, including joint capacity building and formal inclusion of accountability tools in operational guidelines. By scaling what is already working and initiating stronger government uptake pathways, SC will help ensure that citizen voice, inclusion, and programme responsiveness become durable features of national social protection systems.

5. Conclusion

Evaluations of SC's six CSSP projects underscore the organisation's effectiveness in driving impactful change. As outlined above, the findings suggest that the projects are embedded in government systems and responsive to the specific vulnerabilities of children. Effectiveness and impact have been demonstrated through measurable improvements in access to entitlements, improved parenting outcomes, and demonstrable policy influence. Efficiency is underpinned by cost-effective delivery through government and community structures, while encouraging signs of local ownership and fiscal commitment are beneficial for sustainability. Overall, the evaluation confirms that despite some challenges, SC's CSSP model is a highly relevant and effective investment in the evolution of inclusive CSSP. Yet, the analysis also shows that the depth and durability of these gains depend on the maturity of national systems, fiscal ownership, and institutional coordination.

The recommendations point to two priority shifts that SC should advance across all CSSP countries. First, SC should systematically leverage local and national government functionaries as facilitators and trainers for parenting and other 'plus' modules, to enhance scalability and ensure delivery capacity sits within government systems rather than project structures. Second, SC should, where feasible, explore expanding the CSSP framework to include a new 'cash plus economic strengthening' strand, consolidating the livelihood-support and economic-opportunity linkages already emerging in several projects.

Alongside these priorities, the recommendations call for SC to **do more of what is already working**: strengthening existing "plus" components; embedding CSSP elements within national strategies, guidelines, and budgets; applying participatory accountability mechanisms more consistently; and continuing to build an evidence base on child outcomes. SC should also **institutionalise approaches it has already piloted successfully**, such as the evidence-based scalability analysis demonstrated in Nepal and the investment-case modelling carried out in Zambia, so that these tools become standard components of CSSP design and government engagement. Finally, SC should continue to pursue a set of **longer-term, system-facing actions** that depend on government leadership and coordination. These include working with ministries to **integrate child-outcome indicators into national M&E frameworks**, supporting governments to **strengthen and formalise grievance and citizen-feedback mechanisms**, and collaborating on **interoperable data and delivery systems** that can sustain CSSP at scale. These areas require multi-year engagement, alignment with government planning cycles, and close partnership with national and local authorities.

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