

SKS Foundation Strategic Plan

July 2019–June 2024



SKS



SKS Foundation

Striving for a Sustainable Change

Strategic Plan 2019-2024

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1. Introduction and Background

1.1 SKS Foundation

SKS Foundation is a national non-government organization (NGO) rooted in Northern Bangladesh with a long historical background. It works with multi-disciplinary approach with vulnerable groups including *char* dwellers, ethnic minority, landless and marginal farmers who suffer from exclusion and lack of access to resources. It has grown more visibly over the last two decades with diversity in its plan and programs. As a matter of fact, the Organization was conceived in mid-eighties out of voluntary initiatives run by a group of self-motivated local youths who came together to help poor and marginalized families in isolated Chars (riverine islands) in Gaibandha district in Northern Bangladesh. It was formally established as [*Samaj Kalyan Sangstha* (SKS)] on 1st December 1987. The voluntary initiatives of the group gradually pushed SKS to engage with poor and oppressed section of the society also on the main land to fight against exclusion, deprivation and injustice.

The extended mandate created opportunities for SKS to gain more visibility with involvement in multi-sectoral development work including microfinance. Since then SKS emerged as a national NGO and renamed as SKS Foundation in 2008. It was also a critical time for the Organization to think about growing opportunities and new expectations of the society towards the organization, which ultimately pushed SKS Foundation to move into running some social enterprises in phases. Despite several challenges, SKS Foundation has been continuing its operation in greater north and few other regions including the coastal belt, drought zone and urban settings under several partnerships to serve different categories of disempowered population with particular focus on women. The Organization celebrated completion of its 30 years of glorious existence in December 2017. As of now it reached 3.3 million people with contribution to several MDGs in the past and SDGs at present in association with government, donors, civil society and communities.

This new Strategy (2019 – 2024) of SKS Foundation represents a progressive thinking in its development program and approach, reinforcing the focus and priorities, building on the critical strengths which are instrumental in meeting future challenges, and drawing on the lessons learned from the past and adapt. In fact, the strategic growth paradigm of SKS Foundation is already in progress. The new Strategy therefore can be considered as evolutionary and not revolutionary, which stresses on improvement, consolidation, expansion and continuation of the good works and reaching out new frontiers and priorities in the next five years in an effective and efficient manner.

1.2 Vision, mission and values

The vision, mission and organizational values of SKS Foundation are meant to contribute towards achieving the global aims of sustainable development, help implement the country's strategy for poverty reduction and meet the expectations of our stakeholders, constituencies and the society at large.

Vision

A poverty-free society where everyone has access to resources and live with voice, dignity and justice.

Mission Statement

SKS Foundation facilitates improvement of life and livelihood of the poor and excluded by reducing their vulnerabilities, promoting empowerment and improving access to development opportunities and resources. SKS Foundation collaborates with government including local government, private sector, NGOs, networks and donors to ensure sustainable development.

Core values

SKS Foundation maintains some guiding principles, referred to as core values of the organization, to carry out its mission.

- ▣ **Respect:** SKS Foundation treats and behaves with everyone with respect and dignity without any prejudice.
- ▣ **Accountability:** SKS Foundation feels accountable to relevant stakeholders for its works, outputs and results.
- ▣ **Gender sensitivity:** SKS Foundation is committed to promote and maintain gender sensitivity in its organizational environment, culture and programs.
- ▣ **Integrity:** SKS Foundation doesn't compromise with professional standard, quality, honesty and regularities of any form.
- ▣ **Transparency:** SKS Foundation maintains the highest level of transparency in programs, organizational functions and decision-making.
- ▣ **Professionalism:** SKS Foundation values professionalism and strives for innovation in its thought and work process.



1.3 Unique features

SKS Foundation stands out more visibly in the NGO community in Bangladesh because of its special attributes, that give the organization a distinct image and explain its background. SKS Foundation is rooted with these attributes not only in the region but also in the minds of local people and community. Some are ingrained in the core values while others are as follows:

Hard-to-reach priority: SKS Foundation has born out of its original mission to help excluded population such as *Char* dwellers, indigenous groups and hardcore poor who live with some form of exclusion. The Organization is recognized for its consistent focus and continuous work with them.

Visionary thoughts: SKS Foundation has grown with visionary thoughts. It is committed to growth and diversity by acting in a timely manner and with innovation. The timely decisions helps the organization to successfully move on to multi-disciplinary development.

Less hierarchy: SKS Foundation avoids bureaucracy and offers good working atmosphere for both men and women. It maintains a participatory environment where staff members are at the heart of the organization. Senior colleagues including the head of the Organization is very much accessible.

Brand sensitive: SKS Foundation is seriously committed to maintain its name and fame (brand identity) in all aspects of organizational engagement. It maintains its reputation in partnership execution, self-governance, program/project management, service delivery and resource management.

Progressive growth: SKS Foundation believes in progressive growth rather than revolutionary change. It follows incremental growth strategy both in programme and organisational development. SKS Foundation considers social development as nucleus around which other components are pivotal. It values social enterprising for resource economy and self-reliance.

Change and adapt: SKS Foundation is flexible to change and adapt. It learns from every individual and identity that interacts with the organization. SKS Foundation remains willing to respond to any potential need and opportunity consistent with its mission.

Holistic approach: SKS Foundation strongly believes in comprehensive development. It maintains a programmatic focus that includes social, economic and environmental development along with social enterprising. It emphasizes on rights-based approach to address critical issues where opportunity permits.

1.4 Strategic planning process

SKS Foundation has been driving its strategic planning process since last two decades. This is the 4th consecutive 5-year Strategic Plan. The last one (2014-19) concludes in June 2019. This Strategic Plan is meant to guide SKS Foundation's operation for another five years (July 2019 – June 2024).

The planning process has followed a 6-month period, starting at the beginning of January 2019. Decision to initiate the new strategic plan has been approved by the governing body. Prior to approval by the board, a Terms of Reference (ToR) was developed and the issue was discussed at the senior management level to agree on the planning process, time-frame and resources to be engaged to formulate the plan. The Terms of Reference specified the objective and indicated expectations about the planning process that clearly emphasized on participation of the major stakeholders in the process and consultation with peers, partners and civil society actors including community representatives for feedback.

The planning process was thoroughly accompanied and guided by an external resource person from WaterAid Bangladesh - one of the SKS Foundation's resource partners having partnership for nearly a decade. SKS Foundation is thankful to WaterAid Bangladesh for allowing one of its Directors to provide technical support and help formulate this Strategic Plan. A Steering Committee (Strategic Plan Formulation Committee) was formed to steer the process and coordinate with the resource person. The Committee was headed by the Chief Executive of SKS Foundation who has overseen the entire process and provided critical inputs. Other members of the Committee were also instrumental with their inputs and facilitation role throughout the process.

Formulation of the strategic plan went through an extensive participatory process. Evaluation of the achievements and shortfalls of the previous strategic plan period, growing and missing strengths of the Organization along with emerging trends in development, future priorities to be considered, community expectations and market opportunities were assessed through several workshops organized between February and April 2019 involving the main stakeholders including senior colleagues and community representatives of SKS Foundation. The workshops were facilitated by the resource person. Alongside, a number of consultation meetings were organized intermittently between March and April 2019 with NGO leaders, LGI representatives, government officials and community leaders, who are familiar with SKS Foundation and its work, to take their feedback on board and expectations on how best SKS Foundation can respond to future needs and priorities.

The draft Strategic Plan was shared with major stakeholders in May 2019 to get their views and recommendations. Major highlights of the Plan have been shared with the General Committee of the SKS Foundation's Governing body to get their final opinion and advices. The Plan was finally approved by the SKS Foundation's Executive Committee and set out for implementation with effect from 1st July 2019.

2. Context Analysis

2.1 National Context

Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries with 160 million people on a land area of 147,570 km² sharing its land borders with India and Myanmar. As of 2018, 63.5% of the total population lives in rural areas. Given the population shift towards urban from rural areas, Bangladesh urban population will overtake rural population by 2030¹. Bangladesh has in the recent years reduced population growth. According to World Bank, the growth rate reduced from 1.5% in 2006 to 1.08% in 2016.

Despite numerous challenges, Bangladesh made a good progress against several MDG targets at the end of 2015 which includes reduction in poverty, gender parity at primary and secondary education. Additionally, the country made significant progress in several health indicators including prevalence of underweight children, infant and maternal mortality and immunisation coverage. Currently Bangladesh is striving hard with challenges of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The country already noted mixed progress in several front. Some of the new challenges are due to setting the bar a bit high.

IMF recognized *Bangladesh's economy* as the second fastest growing *economy* with 7.1% growth in the recent years. In the decade since 2004, the average GDP growth is 6.5%, that has been largely driven by its exports of readymade garments, remittances and the domestic agricultural sector. Bangladesh is a middle power and a developing nation. The market-based economy of Bangladesh is the 42nd largest in the world in nominal terms, and 31st largest by purchasing power parity; it is classified among the Next Eleven emerging market, middle income economies and a frontier market².

Bangladesh continues to reduce poverty but at a slower pace. Poverty is still visible, though it has reduced to 24.3% from 31.5% in the preceding years. 12.9% of the total population live in extreme poverty as compared to international extreme poverty rate of 13.8% in 2016. Poverty reduced faster in rural areas. Between 2010 and 2016, urban poverty declined from 21.3% to 18.9%, while rural poverty decreased from 35.2% to 26.4%. However, poverty reduction has been uneven across divisions, with the northwest region seeing poverty rise³.

The literacy rate in Bangladesh has increased remarkably from 46.66% in 2007 to an all-time high of 72.76% in 2016; for females the rise is from 43.74% to 69.90%⁴. The UIS data said Bangladesh is now ahead of India (69.30%), Nepal (59.63%), Bhutan (57.03%) and Pakistan (56.98%) in the global literacy rate index. Public expenditure on health and education increased

1. United Nations Population Division

2. Economy of Bangladesh - CIA World fact Book 2018

3. Bangladesh Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2016

4. Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS)

but access to government services is still difficult for the poor and voiceless. The whole range of government services is swamped with corruption, compounded with inefficiency and poor governance.

The country suffers from widespread political and institutional crisis. The country tends to be centralized in decision-making. Space for civil society in political debate in the recent years has reduced with lack of political tolerance. The NGO Affairs Bureau has increased its scrutiny for approval of NGO projects out of security threat. Government tends to avoid acknowledging contributions of the NGO sector and follow limited consultation with civil society in national policy-making. The overwhelming complacency of the government for a consistent economic growth in last couple of years has reduced significant donor funding in the recent years.

2.2 Northern Bangladesh – the regional context

Over the past three decades, the northern region, which is the home of SKS Foundation, has experienced certain degree of social, economic and political transformation with regard to development. Despite some visible improvement in school enrolment; women participation in income generation; local government system; agricultural activities and farm produce; vegetation coverage; communication network and so on, the region still remains poor, vulnerable and relatively backward. Absolute number of people living below the poverty line continues to be higher compared to national average. The region, particularly in terms of poverty reduction, did not progress as much as expected due to multiple factors including political exclusion.

In the recent years, the overall context of the region represents a mixed trend. Agricultural growth with crop diversification in the region continues; while farmers continue to suffer income losses due to market erosion and trade manipulations. Women leadership in political arena including local government increased over the years with lack of leadership skills and competence. The lean season crises in the north has reduced but not eliminated. Magnitude of the employment crisis in the region continues to draw attention of all concerned without being virtually addressed with sustainable long-term solution by policy-makers.

Bangladesh being one of the densely populated countries with huge economic potentials in South Asia remains increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change impact. The region is on the top of the list in terms of flood and other climate induced risks. Despite some improvement in the drought situation in the recent years, the region is increasingly experiencing climate change impact in several front. Annual rainfall is getting erratic with wide annual variation in monsoon precipitation. Global environmental effect, especially changes in the Himalayan region has influenced the erratic change in weather pattern in northern Bangladesh. The region is also extremely vulnerable to earthquake.

Natural disaster, especially flood in the upstream, is a huge deterrent affecting the rural livelihood almost every year in the region and consequently holding the region's economy, which is largely based on agriculture, back from rolling up. Consequence of flood can't be avoided due to geographical location, which constitutes the gateway of the main rivers emanating in the Himalayan region further up in the north. River erosion in the region is recurring. The region experienced some greening over the last few decades with massive tree plantation. Tree plantation has gained a momentum and became increasingly popular.

Gender discrimination in general has reduced, but violence against women still continues. The region is blessed with good communal peace and harmony, better than other regions in the country. Char dwellers still suffer exclusion and deprived of essential government services; while wage exploitation continues for the landless and ethnic minority in the region. The exploitation is more acute for women.

2.3 Looking back from the past

Looking back the last five years of the Organization is felt important before looking ahead the next five years. Our achievements and shortfalls in the last Strategic Plan period (2014-2019) have been thoroughly discussed and analyzed by critical mass of the Organization. The main reflections are as follows:

Social Empowerment: SKS Foundation supported well the enrolment of its constituency members in government-run social safety net services; enhanced participation of women in household decision-making and increased enrolment of ethnic minority groups, such as Santal, in mainstream development activities. During this period, organizational capacity and confidence to implement social development projects of multiple nature including rights-based activities enhanced. Sustainable increase in community awareness is also noted, especially with regard to child rights, early marriage, girls' education, water, sanitation & hygiene, women's rights and right to information. SKS Foundation has been awarded for its legal aid support and social empowerment activities implemented during this period under DFID grant.

Nevertheless, some expectations also remained under achievement in this sector. SKS Foundation could have focused more on sensitizing service providers for ensuring justice in targeting user groups. Participation of women and marginalized groups in local power dynamics and decision-making is yet to be meaningful due to lack of capacity development of the group leaders. SKS is yet to take up a strong policy advocacy role at national level and make use of its huge ground experience in national level advocacy.

Economic Development: SKS Foundation's last five years was quite promising with its economic development activities for the poor, marginalized groups and small holders through microfinance operation and modest skill development training. Member enrolment in the program in last five years increased by 20% and disbursement by 21%, exceeding the target set for the last strategic plan period. Self-employment opportunities, especially for women, were increasingly visible in livestock rearing, crop cultivation and variety of small business, which contributed to increase family income of the borrowers. The average borrowing capacity of the members increased by more than 3 folds which elevated the average loan size to a height of Tk 28,000 in 2019 from a level of Tk 9,000 in 2014. SKS managed to generate a surplus of Tk 290 million against its set target of Tk 250 million in last five years.

One of the areas of under achievement in economic development was training, both for capacity development of the staff and borrowers. Initiative in the last five years in this regard was inadequate. SKS Foundation is yet to cover 100% upazilas in northern Bangladesh and introduce digital technology and system automation in operational management of microfinance program.

Environmental Justice: In environmental sector, SKS Foundation takes pride with its engagement in the last five years in disseminating environmental and climate change messages in the communities and promoting livelihood resilience of the disaster vulnerable households. Climate-resilient agricultural practices (adaptations) were increasingly visible across households and farms supported by SKS Foundation. The Organization managed to attract donor funding for disaster response much better than any time in the past. SKS had significant contribution in improving water, sanitation and hygiene coverage in rural areas. Promotion of inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools and community health centers was one of the significant achievements in this sector.

However, SKS Foundation could not do well in promoting multipurpose tree plantation by beneficiary households. Promotion of early warning system and multipurpose flood shelters were under achieved mainly due to lack of resources. Apart from agriculture, disaster preparedness for small rural enterprises was a major neglect in the last five years from SKS side.

Social Enterprising: SKS Foundation's last five years have been quite venturous with a number of new social ventures being initiated and established. This includes residential facilities (SKS Inn), outreach media (Radio Sarabela), print media (SKS Printers, *Dainik Madhukar*, *e-madhukar*), health services (SKS Hospital) and quality education (SKS School & College; *Nutonkuri Bidyapeeth*). Radio *Sarabela* received national and international award (ABU, Meena, RTI awards) while SKS Inn received the best tax payer award from the government. SKS Hospital is well-acknowledged for its quality services with economic price (up to 75% discount) and free cataract operation for the poor patients. SKS School & College, and *Nutonkuri Bidyapeeth* achieved 100% success in public exam. All these establishments are serving the local community alongside offering employments.

One of the inherent challenges in managing social enterprises with distinct institutional identity is to operate them with clear individual policy and guidelines. Business specific policies are yet to be framed for each individual business. This was one of the shortfalls in last five years' Plan. The Social Enterprises received civil society appreciations; and the demand for such services is on rise. The next five years (2019-2024) would be a challenge for SKS Foundation to diversify and scale-up the current profile of its Social Enterprises in order to meet expectations of the users and providers.

3. Stake and influence analysis

3.1 Stakeholder analysis

SKS Foundation is committed to comprehensive development with multisectoral plan and engagement. Though Government is constitutionally mandated to achieve SDGs through sectoral development work in the country with respective ministries in the lead, the work is extensively supported and influenced by multilateral and bilateral agencies because of their direct and indirect financing role. NGOs play a complementary role in sectoral development through various timebound projects to help accomplish the national goal for development.

NGOs' work is influenced by several stakeholders. Through a mapping exercise, SKS Foundation identified four categories of immediate stakeholders having influence on its works and achievements. These include Government, Local Government, Resource Partners and Local Communities. In each category, four critical actors are identified, and their level of influence is estimated with regard to their influence on SKS Foundation's work on a scale of 0 to 10 (<5 low influence, 5-7 moderate influence, >7 high influence). The results are summarized in the Table below:

Major stakeholders of SKS Foundation

Stakeholders	Influence level	Stakeholders	Influence level
1. Government authority		3. Resource partners	
Upazila/District Administration	High	Multilateral Agencies	Low
Regulatory Authority	High	Bilateral Agencies	Low
Line Departments	Moderate	INGOs and Foundations	High
Law Enforcing Agencies	Moderate	Banks/Financial Institutions	Moderate
2. Local Government		4. Local community	
Union Parishad	High	Peer NGOs	Low
Upazila Parishad	Moderate	Community Leaders	Moderate
Zila Parishad	Low	Constituency Members	High
LG Departments	Moderate	Media	Moderate

3.2 SWOT analysis

SKS Foundation's organizational readiness in relation to strategic plan represents a complex composite of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. These are identified through group discussion and using a common framework of SOWT analysis. The analysis has identified i) institutional strengths that would be instrumental to make use of new and existing opportunities; ii) potential opportunities that would be relevant for SKS Foundation to consider over the next five years; iii) institutional weaknesses that are likely to distract SKS from relevant opportunities; and finally, iv) critical threats from outside that may hinder SKS Foundation's operation in the next five years. The factors are summarized in the following Matrix:

Strengths:

- Core facilities and quality human resources
- Integrity with internal control mechanism
- Good recognition with growing brand value
- Complementary business enterprises
- Gender sensitive culture and practice
- Experience/expertise around hard-to-reach
- Comprehensive development approach

Weaknesses:

- Less experience in national level advocacy
- Attracting qualified staff with tight salary
- Less attention on staff capacity develop
- Lack of experience in research and KM
- Lack of (or outdated) policy on some issue
- Too much dependency on the senior staff
- Poor documentation and dissemination

Opportunities:

- Scope to boost use of IT in Mgt functions
- Scope to work more on climate change
- Growing demand for social enterprises
- Growing market for vocational trade/skills
- Area expansion scope beyond northwest
- WASH integration in other sectors
- Collaboration scope with Govt. & private sector

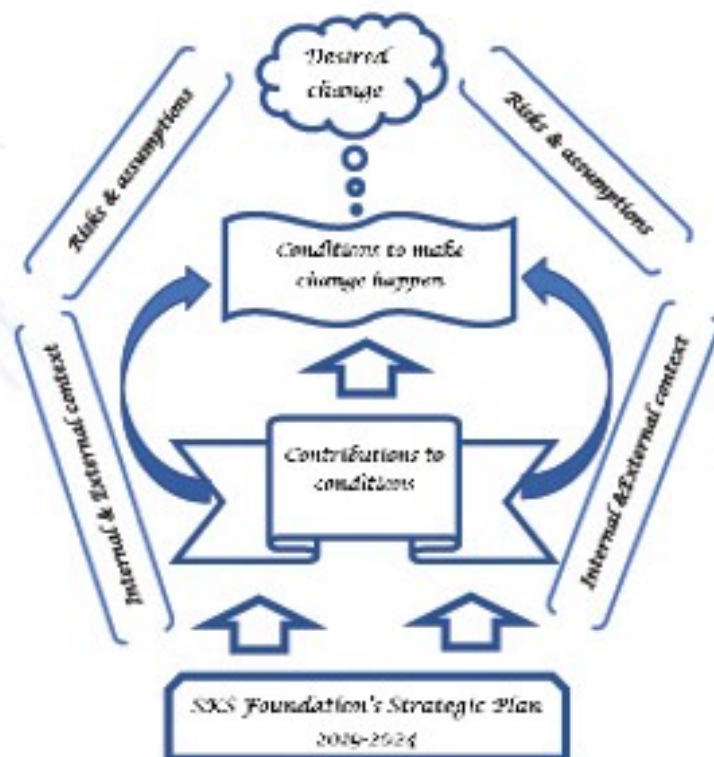
Threats:

- Reduced development grant in the country
- New stringent govt regulations for NGOs
- Growing competition among NGOs
- Climate change impact on development
- Politicisation of local government system
- Undue interference political power group
- Shift in donor priority and resource cut

Strengths and weaknesses are internal that SKS Foundation can handle while opportunities and threats are external that SKS can hardly control. These internal and external factors together constitute SKS' readiness and have provided a basis for the new Strategic Plan (2019-2024). The above factors have guided SKS' choice on strategic issues and programmatic approach. SKS Foundation's performance and achievements during this Strategic Plan period will also largely depend on these factors.

4. Theory of Change

SKS Foundation's Strategic Plan 2019-2024 has followed a theory of change to showcase i) what change SKS Foundation aspires to achieve at the end of five years (desired goal); ii) illustrate on the basic conditions to make the desired change happen (critical outcomes); iii) what would be SKS' contributions towards the desired change over a period of five years (strategic objectives); and iv) the risks and assumptions SKS considers in the change paradigm. The following diagram shows the change process.



4.1 What SKS Foundation desires to change

SKS Foundation has set a goal for the next five years to contribute towards its vision of poverty and discrimination-free society. SKS looks for a positive change happening in the lives and livelihood of the poor and excluded groups who are its most potential and deserving programme participants. However, the changed development statement of SKS Foundation is defined as follows:

"Quality of life of the poor and excluded groups improved with access to and use of effective and inclusive development opportunities and resources."

The change is simultaneously reflective of the national development plan and priorities which aims to contribute to several SDGs including poverty reduction. SKS Foundation would like to see that its intended participants are increasingly able to access and use essential resources and services, no matter who deliver them, in order to reduce their vulnerability against discrimination, exclusion and threats; and bring about a positive change in their lives.

4.2 Conditions to make change happen

The change SKS Foundation desires to see after five years may not happen unless certain conditions are achieved. The conditions will appear as critical outcomes (results) which SKS will induce with dedicated plan and interventions. Eventually, the conditions will help SKS Foundation find out its contributions to those conditions over the next five years towards achieving the desired change. The following conditions are required to achieve the desired change.

- a) Local institutions, groups and communities are empowered to deal with inequalities, exclusion and poor governance perpetuating social odds and injustice.
- b) Livelihood inputs and financial services are within the reach of the poor and marginalized groups and members who disparately need them for improved income and living.
- c) Communities, groups and households, those who are vulnerable, are better equipped with capacity and confidence to fight against climate change and environmental risks.
- d) Availability of self-financed quality services in health care, education, communication and other service sectors reasonably increased for those who suffer deprivation.

SKS Foundation will contribute to the above conditions with dedicated role and responsibilities consistent with national and regional context, resource opportunity and organizational capacity. While SKS will plan its own contributions aligned with other requirements; other actors commonly active in development discourse will also have the opportunities to contribute.

4.3 SKS' contributions to conditions

SKS Foundation's contributions to the conditions specified in the above sub-section defines its strategic objectives and milestones for the next five years. The contributions are pigeonholed in a way that it clearly represents the attribution towards the condition. The contributions (**strategic objectives**) for the next five years are as follows:

Contributions to conditions (Strategic Objectives)	Conditions to make change happen (Outcome-1)
SO 1.1 Promote critical awareness and ability of the poor and excluded communities and disadvantaged population to fight against social odds and injustice.	Local institutions, groups and communities are empowered to combat inequalities, exclusion and poor governance that perpetuates social odds and injustice.
SO 1.2: Strengthen local institutions and leadership with means and capacity to promote effective and pro-poor service delivery in all essential aspects of life.	

Contributions to conditions (Strategic Objectives)	Conditions to make change happen (Outcome-2)
SO 2.1 Increase inclusion of the resource poor in economic and financial services, livelihood innovations and marketable skill development.	Livelihood inputs and financial services are within the reach of the poor and marginalized groups and members who disparately need them for improved income and living.
SO 2.2: Promote opportunities for social enterprise development, self-employment, partnership and market with special focus on women and adolescent girls.	

Contributions to conditions (Strategic Objectives)	Conditions to make change happen (Outcome-3)
SO 3.1 Mobilize critical knowledge and resources from multiple sources including government to help climate change adaptation by communities and institutions.	Communities, groups and households, those who are vulnerable, are better equipped with capacity and confidence to fight against climate change and environmental risks.
SO 3.2 Promote community-based disaster preparedness and environment friendly actions in livelihood practices including promotion of WASH.	

Contributions to conditions (Strategic Objectives)	Conditions to make change happen (Outcome-4)
SO 4.1 Develop sector-specific sustainable social business consistent with local demand and affordability that has potential to scale-up.	Availability of self-financed quality services in health care, education, communication and other service sectors reasonably increased for those who suffer deprivation.
SO 4.2 Strength quality service delivery under social enterprises with innovation, diversity and institutional development.	

Though the contributions are aligned against specific condition (result); they can still be linked to multiple layers as they are interrelated and spontaneous. SKS' contributions to conditions are further described in subsequent section where the strategic targets and indicators of progress are defined.

4.4 Risks and assumptions

Accomplishment of the desired change, critical results (conditions) and strategic objectives (contributions) as described in the Theory of Change are subject to certain risks and assumptions. The following risks and assumptions will apply to SKS' Theory of Change.

- » Political peace and stability will remain at a level that will not affect normal operation of the NGOs in the country.
- » Aid flow in the country (donor fund) including government resources for development will not significantly drop.
- » SKS will be able to align with government plan and priorities and contribute to SDG targets in multiple sectors.
- » Pro-poor priorities of the government in resource allocation and commitment for inclusive development will not go aside.
- » Local government leadership and government agencies at field level will remain supportive to SKS work because of its reputation.
- » Unavoidable natural disasters will not significantly undermine SKS' work progress or benefits in the community.

5. Strategic aims, objectives and priorities

5.1 Strategic aims and objectives

SKS Foundation has set four strategic aims consistent with its vision, mission and program structure. These are the higher-level objectives that SKS wants to reach through achieving the lower-level strategic objectives. SKS Foundation's strategic aims for the next five years are labelled against four designated program themes (discussed in the subsequent chapter) and are as follows:

Programme Theme	Strategic Aim
Social Empowerment	1. Combat social inequalities, exclusion and poor governance that perpetuates chronic deprivation and injustice for the poor and voiceless.
Economic Development	2. Promote income security and economic freedom of the poor marginalized groups and members who suffer serious livelihood challenges.
Environmental Justice	3. Reduce environmental abuse, climate risks and disaster vulnerability with special focus on those who are critically vulnerable.
Social Enterprising	4. Increase people's access to basic quality services in health, education and other sectors with reasonable stake and terms.

Each of the above strategic aim transpires from the strategic objectives SKS Foundation sets out in the theory of change described in chapter-4. Meeting the aims will invariably represent SKS' higher-level accomplishment which it will attain through achieving the lower-level objectives. Thus, the strategic objectives represent the pathways through which the strategic aims will be addressed.

Strategic Objective 1.1: Promote critical awareness & ability of the poor & excluded communities & disadvantaged population to fight against social odds and injustice.

Strategic Objective 1.2: Strengthen local institutions and leadership with means and capacity to promote effective and pro-poor service delivery in all essential aspects of life.

Strategic Objective 2.1: Increase inclusion of the resource poor in economic and financial services, livelihood innovations and marketable skill development.

Strategic Objective 2.2: Promote opportunities for social enterprise development, self-employment, partnership and market with special focus on women and adolescent girls.

Strategic Objective 3.1: Mobilize critical knowledge and resources from multiple sources including government to help climate change adaptation by communities & institutions.

Strategic Objective 3.2: Promote community-based disaster preparedness and environment friendly actions in livelihood practices including promotion of WASH.

Strategic Objective 4.1: Develop sector-specific sustainable social business consistent with local demand and affordability that has potential to scale-up.

Strategic Objective 4.2: Strength quality service delivery under social enterprises with innovation, diversity and institutional development.

Strategic Aim-1

Combat social inequalities, exclusion and poor governance that perpetuates chronic deprivation and injustice for the poor & voiceless.

Strategic Aim-2

Promote income security and economic freedom of the poor and marginalized groups and members who suffer serious livelihood challenges.

Strategic Aim-3

Reduce environmental abuse, climate risks & disaster vulnerability with special focus on those who are critically vulnerable.

Strategic Aim-4

Increase people's access to basic quality services in education, health & other sectors with reasonable stake and terms.

The strategic aims and objectives are all subject to measurement with clear measurable indicators. Measuring progress towards these aims and objectives are discussed in a separate section on monitoring in the later part.

5.2 Strategic issues and priorities

Strategic issues are those that can impact SKS Foundation's operation, success and failure, as well as those individuals directly associated with us. The issues are also linked with organizational credibility, community demand, national priority and global call for development. The issues are unlimited, but SKS has limited its choice owing to its limitations in capacity and availability of resources. As many as 40 priority issues have been identified through an individual survey in which SKS Foundations' Senior Managers were involved. The list is further scrutinized through a voting exercise in a workshop to finally come up with a list of 20 issues as a matter of priority for the next five years. The issues are aligned with SKS Foundation's vision, mission and core values and are distributed across four strategic aims and program themes as follows:

Program Theme	Strategic Aim-1	Strategic issues to be considered
Social Empowerment	Combat social inequalities, exclusion and poor governance that perpetuates chronic deprivation and injustice for the poor & voiceless.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of excluded and marginalised groups in development • Women empowerment and gender sensitivity within SKS and outside • Application of rights-based approach in SKS projects and activities • Youth empowerment through marketable skills development • Child-rights and social inclusion of children in development • Sensitization of the duty bearers for accountability in service delivery

Program Theme	Strategic Aim-2	Strategic priority issues to be considered
Economic Development	Promote income security and economic freedom of the poor and marginalized groups and members who suffer serious livelihood challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth employability and augmentation of employment opportunities • Enterprise and entrepreneurship development for reinforcement of self-employment opportunities • Human resource development with focus on both staff and community • New area of operation with women's access to financial services • Use of software and IT-based automation in program management

Program Theme	Strategic Aim-3	Strategic priority issues to be considered
Environmental Justice	Reduce environmental abuse, climate risks & disaster vulnerability with special focus on those who are critically vulnerable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change adaptation in social and economic livelihood • Community-based disaster preparedness, emergency response and resilience • Awareness raising on environmental pollution, protection and safeguard • Research and advocacy for environmental justice and green economy

Program Theme	Strategic Aim-4	Strategic priority issues
Social Enterprising	Increase people's access to basic quality services in health, education and other sectors with reasonable stake and terms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality education services for all with reasonable cost and stake • Technical and vocational training for youth and self-employment • Primary health care, WASH and nutrition services for the poor and marginalized groups • Quality health services for all with reasonable cost and stake • Diversifying and scaling up Social Enterprises to recycle economic gains

6. Programmatic approach

This chapter deals with overarching programmatic approach which consists of several elements such as program structure, implementation modality, geographical coverage and internal coordination as applicable in SKS Foundation's operation over the next five years (2019 – 2024). During this period, SKS Foundation will continue to rely on those operational modalities that were proven effective; and will only introduce new approach that are demanding or innovative in the current context. Thus, the changes in overall programmatic approach from the preceding strategy are considered evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

6.1 Program structure and themes

The Program structure defines how the program activities are organized and grouped into main program themes. SKS Foundation's development program has already evolved from a large direct service delivery operation to one in which a range of operational modalities and interventions are employed in order to attain specified aims and objectives. The program structure of SKS Foundation has a well-rooted foundation of four mainstream program. Over the next five years, we will continue with these four main stream programs taking into consideration the strategic issues identified in chapter-5. Each of the program has underlying sub-themes and priorities to consider and has a freedom to enrich with new opportunities and demand. Undertaking a project within a main stream program will follow the list of thematic priorities attached with the program.



Social Empowerment is the 1st programmatic pillar of SKS Foundation, which seeks to maintain organization's reputation through effective development and delivery of projects and activities in addressing the emerging social issues aligned with relevant SDGs and national priorities in social development sector. The program will remain sensitive about gender equality and consider gender as cross-cutting issue across all themes. Underlying thematic issues to be considered in the next five years under this program are as follows:

- Child rights
- Girls education
- Primary healthcare
- Local governance
- Rights and justice
- Youth empowerment
- Women leadership
- Water, sanitation and hygiene
- Adolescent issues
- Social inclusion

SKS Foundation will remain flexible to include more issues should there be any opportunity and demand that are consistent with its vision, mission and strategic aims. In reality, some of the issues may appear overlapped with others; while one project may cut across multiple theme. Nevertheless, levelling a project against one or more particular themes will remain flexible and subject to our judgement.

Economic Development is the 2nd programmatic pillar of SKS Foundation and represents the largest program hub in terms of constituency reach, geographic disperse, resource involvement as well as risks and challenges involved in it. It also has the largest potential to complement and sustain the results of other programs at constituency level. Microfinance is the major element of this program. Over the next five years, the program will follow innovations and diversity and focus on the following economic themes.

- Youth employability
- Self-employment opportunities
- New and innovative venture
- Market linkage and access
- Sustainable financing
- Women entrepreneurship
- WASH financing for households
- Small and medium enterprise development
- Skills development

All the above programmatic sub-themes are directly linked with microfinance. SKS Foundation will explore technical and business innovation in its approach; while remain efficient in its microfinance operation. SKS will develop and test new microfinance product, where necessary, to remain competitive with other microfinance providers, and at the same time will address the underlying themes and priorities.

Environmental Justice is the 3rd programmatic pillar of SKS Foundation, which justifies some of its unique features and its association with the nature. This program is something core to the organization, as SKS Foundation has evolved from its historical engagement in helping the people living in isolated char areas and has gradually extended its program operation in the coastal belt, who used to fight with natural disasters to survive. The importance of the program for SKS has further multiplied because of growing concern and impact of climate change. The underlying themes of the program over the next five years are as follows:

- Emergency response
- Climate change adaptation
- Community-based disaster preparedness
- Tree plantation
- Organic farming
- Environmental sanitation
- Faecal sludge management
- Waste management
- Institution-based disaster risk reduction
- Renewable energy

Some of the above-mentioned themes are common in other mainstream programs. We will take special efforts to design efficient projects and mobilise resources to address the underlying themes. Owing to the fact, that funding for environmental justice is limited, we will remain more vigilant with our ideas ready to pick up any potential opportunity.

Social Enterprising is the 4th programmatic pillar of SKS Foundation, which until the last strategic plan, remained operative mainly with service delivery focus. Some of the issues considered under this program in SKS Foundation's previous Strategic Plan has been reallocated to other programs. Over the next five years, this program stream will gain more institutional shape and undergo diversity and growth. The underlying enterprising themes of the program are as follows:

- Quality education for all
- Vocational training with ICT focus
- Quality health services for all
- Media outreach
- Eyecare services
- Nursing education
- Child recreation service
- Disability rehabilitation

Social enterprising with education, health and media is already in operation in a limited scale with major focus on urban population. Over the next five years, SKS will further consolidate operation of the existing enterprises, and initiate ideas and plans for couple of new enterprises. Operational visibility of any new thematic engagement may take longer and go beyond this strategic plan period. SKS Foundation will follow a progressive approach in promoting growth in this program.

6.2 Implementation approach

SKS Foundation's broad approach to development is very much rooted with three fundamental aspects of development, i.e. social; economic and environment; while sustainability remains at the center. The approach is to bring people out of social, economic and environmental poverty through a process of building awareness, forging solidarity, providing access to resources and empowering them, so that they attain a certain level of maturity to sustain their development.



The overall approach will be taken on the ground with a number of implementation approaches. SKS Foundation will follow a mix of implementation approaches in program/project delivery. Selection of approach will consider operational convenience, local context, economy of scale, availability of resources and overall, the purpose of the intervention.

- **Rights-based approach:** SKS Foundation's rights-based approach will increasingly focus on institutional change with improved governance. Purpose is to ensure long lasting impact through promoting development as a right rather than a charity. The approach will create institutional space for the poor and voiceless in local decision-making process; while seeking to scaling up the changes out of any small initiative to wider system.
- **Compact work approach:** SKS Foundation will avoid spreading our resources thinly everywhere and not doing a compact job anywhere. SKS' purpose is not to increase its geographic presence lavishly with porous effort and grow artificially bigger; rather SKS will remain committed to do compact job through focusing its intervention first within existing district boundary. Before moving to a new district, SKS will make sure that it has saturated its work as far as possible in the existing area.
- **Household-based approach:** SKS Foundation is committed to ensure holistic development with an ultimate focus on household rather than individual. However, it doesn't mean, empowering individual members is less prioritized. They will still act as an entry point, but the impact of SKS' intervention has to finally percolate down on the family hub. This means, SKS will look for intervention more critically that can follow a household path.
- **Added value approach:** This is specifically applicable for microfinance program. SKS Foundation will implement its microfinance activities with some added value, that will help the organization to stand out in the NGO community. The added value will be ingrained in the implementation modality in such a way that will be seen as something not common in other NGOs. This will be ensured through adapting the existing modality and adding extra elements without stressing the resource base and business compatibility of the program.

• **Integrated approach:** An important percept of this strategy will be to undertake projects, as much as possible, in an integrated manner. This shift is a key to maintain our relevance in the changing development scenario of Bangladesh, where resource partners are gradually moving away from single sector issues to integrated and multi-sectoral approaches. Discussion around SDG framework has already emphasized greater integration across multiple sectors. This will require more coordination and dialogue among government, donor and sector actors.

6.3 Scaling-up policy advocacy role

Policy advocacy is not an absolute new role for SKS Foundation. It has been already representing a number of advocacy networks and alliances in the past; and joining national level discussions and providing intellectual inputs to several campaigns. However, one of the visible shifts in this period will be to scale up its' engagement in policy advocacy.

SKS Foundation will focus its efforts mostly on issues that are linked with northern Bangladesh. However, it will more actively coordinate with networks and alliances, and where feasible, will share the lead coordination with other actors active in the national level and other regions like the coastal belt, drought zone and urban settings. SKS will undertake new efforts of generating and documenting evidences on issues the organization is committed to. SKS Foundation's policy advocacy interest over the next five years will include, but will not be limited to the following issues:

- Char livelihood
- Environment
- Climate change
- Quality education
- WASH rights
- Child rights
- Gender-based violence

Internal capacity building will be emphasized during this period to create a greater orientation across the Organization on policy advocacy and influencing. Alongside, SKS Foundation will hire external resources and seek support from its resource partners to help SKS improve its advocacy capacity.

6.4 Area coverage

SKS Foundation believes in concentrated geographic focus that helps maximize development impact as well as achieving some operational advantages. SKS will, predominantly, confine its development work in the existing area and pursue a modest expansion taking into consideration the fact that development resources are limited and diminishing. Expansion of area will mainly refer to expansion within the existing districts and not moving out to a new district unless there are potential opportunities. The Organization will be very judicious about expansion decision to a new district; and will only go for it should there be a justified need. The choice must commensurate with SKS' capacity and ability to afford resources needed for expansion. As of last Strategy, SKS maintained its programmatic presence in 20 districts in four administrative divisions (Rangpur, Rajshahi, Khulna and Dhaka), which the organization will continue as its immediate area of operation. In the next five years, it will further consolidate its work in those districts, include the left-out Upazilas (sub-districts) and communities, if any, before planning to move out to a new district. In case of expansion to a new district, hard-to-reach areas and communities will get priority. However, SKS Foundation will remain open to expand in the main land depending on the match factors.

6.5 Constituency coverage

Over the next five years, SKS Foundation will continue to focus on existing constituency category which includes landless, marginal farmers, day laborers, char dwellers, indigenous population, disabled persons, adolescents and children. As of the end of last strategy, 85% of SKS Foundations' constituency beneficiaries are female. In microfinance this percentage is even higher 96%. SKS will maintain this percentage over the next five years as its strategic choice for a number of practical reasons including its thirst for making women as the main development hub for household development. In the last strategic plan period, SKS's constituency reach was 650,000 including 97,500 for microfinance. SKS Foundation intends to increase this reach by 15 -20% during 2019-2024.

6.6 Internal coordination

Internal coordination will be a challenge for SKS Foundation over the next five years. As the Organization intends to grow further, the need for effective coordination among different program components and operating units are unavoidable. SKS will emphasize on synchronizing input-output flow of related activities in a way, so that activities can complement each other without compromising their individual objectives.

Project Coordination Meeting (PCM) of the individual program attended by other program managers too will be used as a platform to ensure effective coordination with other program activities. In PCM, it will find out how best the individual projects can collaborate among each other meaningfully and for synergy. The Central Management Team (CMT) meeting, which involves the senior management members of the Organization will receive inputs and proposals from the PCM to make decision on collaboration, synchronization and complementation.

7. Organizational Development

Organizational development of SKS Foundation will remain integral to this Strategic Plan and will be considered in conjunction with programmatic issues. While the primary emphasis will be on program development and field operations, capacity and effectiveness of the Organization itself will be a critical factor in achieving the strategic objectives and meeting SKS' mission and vision in the long run. The current strategy will consider a progressive approach in organizational development to deliver the overall strategy. Over the next five years, organizational development efforts will primarily focus on the following five parameters:

- Strengthening governance
- Human resource development
- Development of organizational culture
- Improvement in management work processes
- Financial sustainability

The improvement is to deal with future challenges of program development, resource mobilization and to sustain organizational effectiveness in program management. We wish to attain this objective through a comprehensive approach aimed at developing efficient process, operational synergy, institutional linkage, balanced organizational structure and putting greater emphasis on resources mobilization. Improvement in organizational culture and governance will remain cross-cutting to this objective.

7.1 Strengthening governance

SKS Foundation will further strengthen its governance to protect against nepotism, irregularity, misappropriation and non-compliance in the overall management of the organization and its activities. Some of the strategic commitments for the next five years will be as follows:

- SKS will create greater space for participation of the major stakeholders in decision-making and keep all relevant parties apprised of all strategic decisions.
- SKS will increase interaction with major stakeholders including the governing body to receive their feedback and advices on decision-making.
- SKS will plan institutional development of the social enterprises already under operation with greater autonomy and individual policy.
- SKS will scrutinise carefully its public engagement and avoid those that may lead the organization to controversy and risk our organizational reputation.
- SKS will remain sensitive to all sorts of political sensitivity, both locally and nationally, in order to maintain its highest neutrality that the organization has earned over the years.

Additionally, SKS Foundation will develop stronger relationship with local actors including local government, local administration and civil society, where they are more concerned about SKS' successes and challenges. This will create an enabling environment for SKS Foundation to operate and govern the organization with confidence.

7.2 Human resource development

In the last Strategy, SKS Foundation made attempts to attract capable people in key positions. Significant investment on staff development was not possible due to resource limitation and lack of interest on the donor side to support staff development separately. Staff turnover particularly in non-core positions was a challenge, but somehow, SKS managed to overcome.

In the current Strategy, human resource development will constitute an important part of organizational development plan. The priority has also come out in several workshops related to this Strategic Planning. SKS Foundation will limit its ambition with this Plan depending on the resource factors. However, the priority focuses will include technical, managerial and leadership skills. Technical skill will cover agenda based on sectoral needs including advocacy skills. More specifically, it is envisioning need for skill development for writing quality project proposal, undertaking qualitative research, documenting evidence and doing policy advocacy.

SKS Foundation will develop a comprehensive plan, not only for doing human resource development, but as part of succession strategy that will help the organization avoid sudden crisis that may cause with sudden departure of key staff. Immediate focus will be on mid-level and senior level staff; and a gradual shift towards the bottom depending on the Organization's ability and financing available from other sources. For achieving the Plan, SKS Foundation will partly rely on resource partners who have been supporting SKS for years.

7.3 Development of organizational culture

SKS Foundation is proud of its organisational culture; yet there is room for improvement. Over the next five years, SKS will continue to improve and uphold its organizational culture by creating an enabling environment where everyone feels valued and motivated to perform their best. SKS will critically emphasize on leadership development, succession planning, team building, performance management and gender empowerment. The Organization will focus on strengthening management efficiency in several work processes including the use of IT systems and automation in day-to-day operation. SKS will be especially attentive to promote inter-personal respect, and respect for women and children. SKS Foundation's ultimate aim is to grow as an effective organisation in terms of work procedure, environment, values and culture – where ethical behaviour and professional attitude of the staff members are extremely important.

7.4 Improvement of management work process

Some improvement in the management work process will be another thrust area for SKS Foundation under its organizational development plan for the next five years. It will involve several aspects of management functions including human resource management, microfinance operation, management of the social enterprises, and accounting and auditing. The purpose is to improve efficiency, internal governance and precision in decision-making. Following ideas and plans will be SKS' strategic choice for the next five years:

- As a matter of priority, SKS will explore if it can introduce certain level of automation in the management of its microfinance operation through upgrading the use of information technology (IT) and online system.
- SKS will explore some improvement in central HR functions also through upgrading the use of information technology, particularly in managing staff databases, administering leave, planning staff training and processing recruitments.
- Social enterprises already in operation will go through a modest institutional development process. SKS will develop individual Terms of Reference (ToR) for each of them and forge accountability with clear business plan and targets.
- The current accounting and auditing process will be subject to review for improved efficiency and accuracy. The review will include microfinance, non-microfinance and social enterprise sector.

Implementation of the above strategic actions will depend on the availability of resources and technical expertise needed to execute them. Some of the initiatives will need detailed feasibility and cost-benefit analysis. SKS Foundation will commit to these planned improvements looking at both internal and external opportunities. If necessary, SKS Foundation will initiate some of them during this plan period and go progressively.

7.5 Financial sustainability

The share of global aid channeled to Bangladesh is likely to reduce both as a result of perceived improvements in economic conditions and through the diversion of resources by aid givers to new priority areas emerging in other parts of the world. Consequently, reduction in funding will exert increasing pressures on the continuity of the country's development efforts, particularly in achieving the SDGs. On the other hand, significant amount of funding from the multilateral and bilateral agencies mainly goes to the government; only a part of the grant is directed to the NGOs and INGOs.

Despite global decline in aid resources due to reduced commitments from donor countries and their shift to trade and investment as primary development instrument, SKS Foundation will put increased emphasis on resource sustainability. SKS will certainly approach multilateral and bilateral agencies depending on the opportunity and its ability to meet their selection criteria. Nevertheless, SKS will continue to rely more on funding available from the INGO partners, private sector and foundations.

During the strategy period, SKS Foundation envisions a modest growth in its financial resource base, which will enable the organization to operate comfortably to deliver its strategy. SKS Foundation will pursue a mix of donors and self-financing operation where feasible. SKS will further strengthen its grants and financing base with improved capacity for fundraising and partnership. It will also maintain its track record of compliance in managing donor fund, develop a team with required skill set for writing quality proposal. Complying with donor requirements will be key to continuing this success.

In order to reduce dependency on external funding for organizational growth and operation, SKS Foundation will address its financial sustainability through multiple angles. Some of the preferred strategic options will include: i) Rationalizing operational cost through optimal cost sharing with resource partners (existing projects); ii) Promote complementarity between internally available services and project activities; iii) Keep on increasing the number of projects in partnership with resource partners in non-microfinance sector; iv) Negotiate well with donors for supporting organizational development beyond project cost; v) Identify potential donor, and approach them with convincing proposal for institutional development; vi) Improve operational efficiency of the subsidized social enterprises to reduce subsidy; and vii) Explore new venture capable of generating surplus to reinvest in organizational development.

8. Monitoring the strategy

Progress and achievements against this Strategic Plan will be reviewed with an affordable simple approach, which will include a mid-term and a final review of the plan. Both reviews will be carried out internally following a participatory approach. This will be something different from conventional monitoring of individual projects. External support will be taken, if necessary, to facilitate the process. Scope of the review will include programmatic achievements, organisational development and risk assessment and mitigation.

8.1 Programmatic review

SKS Foundation will conduct a mid-term review of programmatic accomplishments before reaching the 3rd year of the Plan, which will basically focus on achievements at output level and quality of the work process. This mid-term review will inform the senior management and stakeholders of the possible gains so far; and pass on a message on the likelihood of hitting the strategic objectives towards the end. The final programmatic review will follow a comprehensive approach and assess major accomplishments along with challenges. The evaluation will tell SKS stakeholders about achievements and failures in terms of strategic aims and objectives and guide SKS Foundation to formulate its next strategic plan.

8.2 Sharing the review outcomes

Sharing of the review outcome will improve program quality and enrich organizational learning. It will reflect more clearly on SKS Foundation's accountability norms and values. It will share both mid-term and final review outcomes with major stakeholders and take their feedback for adjustment, if needed. Results of the final review will be used to inform both internal and external audiences, as well as to feed the next strategic plan.

Apart from the review exercises, SKS will consider collection of most significant change stories to understand the quality of impact of its intervention at individual and household level. The key findings will be shared with colleagues, resource partners and other stakeholders. Since advocacy is further emphasised in this strategic plan, capacity development and process documentation will be a critical part for strategy review.

8.3 Monitoring potential risks

The strategy also takes into account monitoring of the potential risks that may have bearing on implementation success of the strategy. This will help SKS to avoid any significant failure that may result from lack of insights about impending risks and constraints. Some of the risks are apprehended below:

- Uncertainty in donor support and overall funding trend
- Staff turnover and risk of losing skilled and experienced staff
- Stakeholders' satisfaction with our interventions and facilitation role
- Unforeseen management irregularities and chances of misappropriation
- Undue political influence and perception of the civil society towards SKS Foundation

8.4 Monitoring organizational change

SKS Foundation will monitor organizational affairs related to growth, diversity and sustainability at certain interval to make sure that organizational development is consistent with our strategic objectives and program development. While the primary emphasis of monitoring focus will be on program and field operations, the monitoring of organizational growth and diversity will make SKS relevant to deliver this strategy and meet programmatic challenges. This will also help SKS Foundation to meet its mission and vision in the longer run.






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