



1. BISP TARGETS TO ENROLL 2M BENEFICIARY CHILDREN

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ISLAMABAD: Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is all set to achieve its targets and timelines of each and every initiative. BISP aims to enroll two million children in schools by the end of this year.

BISP Chairperson MNA Marvi Memon stated this in a meeting with DFID delegation, development partner of BISP headed by Country Head Joanna Reid. The other members of delegation included Louise Walker and Mazhar Siraj. BISP Secretary Muhammad Sallem Ahmed Ranjha and the management assisted the BISP chairperson in the meeting.

The agenda of the meeting was to review progress on the ongoing BISP initiatives that included an update on National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER), new payment model and implementation arrangements for the conditional cash transfer (CCT) on education. The meeting also reviewed progress on the overall reforms undertaken by BISP management.

The BISP chairperson briefed that BISP has made commendable progress on Waseela-e-Taleem (WeT) initiative. By December 2015, one million children had been enrolled and the target of enrolling 1.3 million children by the end of financial year 2015-16 will be achieved two months in advance, as 200,000 children will be enrolled in the month of April as a special challenge. The minister stated that BISP intends to expand WeT across the country beyond the current 32 districts so that maximum number of deserving children may exercise their right to education. She reiterated that the cooperation of DFID and other development partners would be critical in the expansion drive of WeT. It was highlighted that the MoUs have been signed with provincial and regional educational departments except KP for enrollment and attendance compliance. However, BISP is optimistic that the MoU with KP would be signed soon.

The delegation was informed that the task is on track with regard to NSER.

The BISP secretary informed the participants that pilot phase of NSER update would be initiated in June this year in 16 districts followed by a national roll out in January 2017.



During the meeting, the new payment model for ensuring the smooth functioning of the initiatives was also discussed. The delegation appreciated the performance of BISP especially for meeting the required targets.



(Express Tribune, The Nation, Pakistan Observer, Frontier Post, Jang, Express, Nawaiwaqt, Dunya, Naibaat, Jahan Pakistan, Jinnah and Ausaf carried the story and picture)

2. WB EXPANDING PAK SOCIAL SAFETY NET SYSTEM

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ISLAMABAD: After validating the latest poverty figures of 60 million or 29 percent population, living below the poverty line in Pakistan, the World Bank (WB) is preparing \$100 million follow up project for Islamabad to further expand social safety net system in the country.

A WB mission is scheduled to visit Pakistan during this ongoing month to extend deadline for three components out of four for the ongoing Social Safety Net Technical Assistance Project of \$60 million from June 2016 to December 2016 upon the request of Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

“In view of good progress on BISP, the WB is now working with the government in preparing a follow up on safety net programme,” the WB’s spokesperson in Islamabad replied briefly when The News contacted on Monday.

However, according to WB’s documents stating that supported by IDA’s technical assistance since 2009, Pakistan has established the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), a flagship national safety net system, which is one of the largest in South Asia. BISP currently provides income support in the form

of predictable monthly cash transfers of \$15 to almost 5.2 million families (approx. 20 million people) of the poorest households for consumption smoothing as well as investments in human capital development.

Up to the present time more than \$3.5 billion has been disbursed to BISP beneficiaries out of whom 93% of beneficiaries receive the cash transfers through technology based payment mechanisms (Debit Cards, Mobile Phones, Smart Cards). The programme plans to reach 5.3 million families in the next financial year.

The programme has successfully established a National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) through the use of an objective targeting system, hosting a database of more than 27 million households (approx 167 million people) the first in South Asia. More than 30 federal and provincial social sector programmes are currently using the Registry to improve their pro-poor targeting performance. BISP plans to launch update of the NSER within the current FY and complete the exercise by end of CY 2017.

BISP has also rolled out the co-responsibility cash transfers (CCT) programme, linking cash transfers to primary school education, which is currently being implemented in 32 districts in all provinces and regions. To date, over 1.3 million children have been enrolled in the programme out of which over 1.15 million children have taken admission in schools. As BISP delivers the benefit transfers to female members of the beneficiary families, it has significantly contributed to women empowerment and financial inclusion agenda in the country.



According to a recent revision in the poverty measurement methodology and release of poverty numbers, around 29% of Pakistan's population lives below the poverty line and a significant proportion is vulnerable to poverty due to any adverse natural or idiosyncratic shock. Before the start of BISP in 2008, the country's main safety net programmes (ie Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal, and Zakat) had limited coverage and were poorly targeted, as around 25 and 32 percent of resources distributed by these programmes respectively, were going to non-poor households. Additionally, administration arrangements were inadequate and implementation and monitoring and evaluation capacity were very weak.

In absence of an updated national social protection framework, the federal-provincial coordination on the design and delivery of complementary services to the poor remained weak. Consequently, the sector faced fragmentation of various initiatives due to absence of a policy, platform and credible systems, which could support sector consolidation. While the federal expenditures (as % of GDP) have seen a significant increase post launching of BISP, the provinces have yet to pick up their investments in targeted programmes due to either lack of appropriate institutional arrangements or well-designed and implemented complementary programmes targeted to the poor and vulnerable.

The WB, according to the document, stays committed to supporting the Government of Pakistan in advancing the social protection agenda as part of its ongoing economic and subsidy reforms, which insulate the poor from any adverse impacts by providing income

support as well as access to human development.

The federal engagement will continue to focus on social safety net (SSN) system development agenda through, among others, update of the National Socio-economic Registry, scaling-up of the conditional cash transfers (CCTs) encouraging federal-provincial partnership and linking BISP beneficiaries to social and productive complementary services. These areas will be supported by the proposed National SP Project currently being prepared for Board presentation later this year. The provincial engagement will support the reforms in existing pro-poor initiatives by capitalizing on the federal SSN systems for effective service delivery to the poor and aligning investments in the complementary areas to allow the poor to graduate out of poverty.

3. SOCIAL SAFETY NET PROGRAMMES

Wasi Ahmed

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Social Safety Nets (SSNs) are receiving increased focus these days -- not only in the government's poverty alleviation policies but also in public discourse. Despite the absence of quantifiable data, it is commonly believed that SSN programmes are significantly instrumental in preventing the poverty graph from sliding down. The government's social safety net programmes are broadly four-fold-- generating employment, particularly rural employment; combating natural disasters and related shocks;



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facilitating children's education of the vulnerable groups; and addressing their health care needs. So, essentially, the programmes are about providing state support either in terms of cash or food. It is here in the distribution mechanism that the SSN programmes are often found at fault in respect of credibility and accountability.

The government is quite upbeat about the success of its SSN programmes. Increased allocations are being made to expand and intensify the coverage of the scheme. However, little effort is visible in making it work better to reach out to the target groups. Presently, the government runs well over a hundred programmes under the SSN, but corruption and misuse of funds are the most commonly alleged evils plaguing the operations. Moreover, although the allocation has increased over the years, it has been found to be still far from the standard practices followed elsewhere.

At a roundtable on social protection strategy and budget held in the capital recently, it transpired that Bangladesh was spending less than half of what other countries spend as a percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP). Most middle income countries spend between 6 to 8 per cent of the GDP on social safety net programmes as against little over 2.0 per cent of GDP in Bangladesh.

Mentioning the allocation as far too small, noted Economist Professor M M Akash said, "The expenditure is inadequate from the macro point of view. The allocation must be increased to make it meaningful."

He also expressed a note of concern at the government's policy to keep the rate unchanged until 2020. Analysing the SSN allocations from 2009-10 to 2015-16, he said that the government allocated Tk 160.0 billion in 2009-10 and Tk 370.0 billion in 2015-16 for various social safety net programmes, which goes to show that daily average per capita allocation stood at Tk 5.0 for the 85.2 million recipients in the fiscal year 2009-10 and at Tk 7.0 for 90.8 million recipients in fiscal 2012-13.

According to his analysis, the country presently has no less than forty million people living below the poverty line, but the number may shoot up twice as much in the foreseeable future if the SSN allocations are not substantially raised and efforts taken to avoid abuse of funds. As for the execution and efficacy of the SSN programmes, one important finding, pointed out by Professor Akash, is the overlapping nature of the various programmes under various ministries.

Around 145 SSN programmes are currently being implemented by 23 ministries, a large number of which suffer from overlapping in various forms. Besides, as a result of the lack of coordination and monitoring of progress in a proper manner, transparency and accountability are the major problems.

Speakers at the roundtable cited some lacunas that they believe do not allow the social safety net schemes function in a desirable way. A good deal of these, they said, is policy related. For example, inclusion of retired government employees as beneficiaries of the SSN programmes does not strike the right chord in alleviating poverty of the really needy people. Some 27 per cent of the SSN allocations go as



pension to the government employees. One may argue whether to treat such allocations as truly SSN allocations, given the state of the most vulnerable groups who need them most.

The SSN policy is also fraught with lack of clarity, speakers pointed out in the roundtable. There is an apparent variation in the broad objectives laid out in the planning ministry's national social protection strategy (NSPS) and the finance ministry's medium-term budgetary targets. While the NSPS aims to bring 5.5 million senior citizens under the elderly allowance scheme by 2018, the finance ministry puts the number at 3.0 million in its medium-term budgetary targets.

These do point at the lack of direction, to say the least. While corruption is pervasive in the distribution system, wrong targeting and leakage account a lot in rendering the programmes less than effective. These prove a greater problem than inadequate allocations. A comprehensive database, proper supervision and result-oriented plans can still make the programmes meaningful to a great extent.

<http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2016/04/19/26859/Social-safety-net-programmes>