



1. GOVT COMMITTED TO ERADICATING POVERTY, SAYS MARVI

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ISLAMABAD: Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Chairperson Marvi Memon has said that the government is sincere in its efforts to eradicate poverty and remain committed to facilitate deserving families across the country.

The government wants to empower women through BISP to bring them in the mainstream,ö said Marvi while talking to state-run television on Sunday.

About new BISP survey, she said two-step approach was being adopted to ensure no one would be left unattended. Besides offering people to get them registered, the door-to-door approach would be adopted in the new poverty survey to get an accurate and dynamic data, she added.

The pilot phase of the National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) would cover 16 districts across the country, she said, adding that this survey was started this week from Haripur that would cover the entire country. The chairperson said that the BISP was committed to updating NSER keeping in view all the factors like accessibility, terrain and security situation. She urged support for survey teams and discussed mechanisms for effective re-survey.

She also directed the local administration to prepare detailed account of villages in the area

for effective identification of the poor. öThe BISP would test desk approach, on-demand survey and door-to-door approach in the first phase of the survey,ö she said.



She added that the BISP had developed a technology-enabled system to detect major irregularities in the cash transfer and other programmes like Waseela-e-Taleem. Record of all the suspicious beneficiaries would be confirmed from NADRA. öThese beneficiaries would be unblocked subject to verification and necessary documentary evidence,ö she said.

She also thanked Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar to increase the funds for the BISP beneficiaries to tackle the increasing poverty in Pakistan.

(Express Tribune, Pakistan Today, Pakistan Observer, Daily Times, Frontier Post, Patriot, Naibaat, Jinnah and Pakistan)



2. POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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Like every budget before it, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar too talked of poverty alleviation when delivering the 2016-17 budget. Understood to be one of the key priorities for the last seven decades, no government has been able to deliver on the promise of taking the country's population out of the crippling poverty that plagues it. The statistics provided by Dar in the budget speech were rather damning, even if taken at face value. The percentage of people that remains under poverty is at least 29 percent. This figure comes after the government boldly shifted to the Social and Living Standards Model for calculating poverty, instead of the earlier model which only focused on the ability to afford food. But Dar's claim that poverty will now stand at only 9.5 percent under this food consumption model is hard to digest. In the last 15 years, average income has not increased in line with the increase in food prices. This is why the budget allocation of Rs122 billion for poverty alleviation will be insufficient to bring about a significant decrease in poverty. It also explains why the government never announces a poverty reduction target alongside its growth target each year. Any decrease in poverty statistics is a bonus, not a clear policy objective. This is not to say nothing has been done.

Over the last four years, the PML-N government has increased funding for the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) from Rs40 billion to Rs115 billion. The

number of families receiving a Rs18,880 annual stipend will be 5.6 million next year. The BISP certainly offers a financial cushion to some of the most impoverished families in the country, but it is not enough. The government aims to supplement it through the Prime Minister's Health Insurance fund of Rs22 billion. The same money, though, could be spent on improving the ailing public health sector in the country instead. Additionally, Rs4 billion has also been allocated to the Baitul Maal, which suggests that the government's strategy for dealing with poverty focuses on cash handouts, instead of structural reform. Dar himself pointed to the BISP cash transfers as one of the key reasons for poverty having been reduced last year. The new minimum wage of Rs14,000 per month is nowhere near enough for families, which is compounded by the fact that no government has ever seriously tried to enforce the minimum wage standard it sets. While we would not advocate cutting down on the BISP, cash transfers are an easy way to avoid the structural changes needed to alleviate poverty. These include enforcement of minimum wage, price controls, improving the quality of public sector health and educational institutions, and the provision of affordable housing. The government's priority is to reduce the budget deficit, not improve living standards. Poverty reduction is not possible with such a budget.



3. BISP NEGOTIATING \$100M PROJECT TO IMPROVE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

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ISLAMABAD: Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is in negotiation process with World Bank for a new project to strengthen its institutional capacity and launch upgradation of Nation Socio-Economic Registration (NSER).

The new project, amounting to \$100 million, would be phased out in four years (2016-2020). The Department for International Development (DFID) has also pledged a grant of \$224 million in line with the funding of World Bank. Highlighting achievements of BISP during last two and half years, official sources on Friday said around 10,892 beneficiaries of BISP have been trained to make them economically independent through demand-driven vocational training. In addition, 61,877 family members of BISP beneficiaries have also availed the trainings.

The sources said BISP is committed to providing complete rehabilitation of a beneficiary through vocational training including guidance and counselling, vocational training facilities and vocational and professional training. The trainings have been given through National Vocational Training and Technical Education Commission (NAVTEC), National Centre for Rural Development (NCRD), TEVTA Punjab, Motorway Police, Aik Hunar Aik Nagar

(AHAN), Trust for History, Art and Architecture Pakistan (THAP) and other similar provincial organisations.

The sources said that the present government increased its budgetary allocations from Rs 70 billion in 2013 to Rs 75 billion in 2014, which has subsequently been enhanced to Rs 97 billion in 2015 and to Rs 102 billion in 2016. The cash benefit increased for the poorest of poor from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,200 in 2013 and from Rs 1,200 to Rs 1,500 per month in 2014. Keeping in view inflation fluctuation, the government has increased stipend to Rs 4,700 per quarter with effect from July 2015. The number of BISP beneficiaries increased from 3.73 million in 2012-13 to five million by 2015. At present, the number of beneficiaries is 5.29 million.

During this year, total cash transfer amounts to Rs 71.65 billion in two quarters, recording highest disbursement by BISP in a year since its inception. BISP is following the path of automation and 94 percent of beneficiaries are being paid through technology. For graduation of BISP beneficiaries, Akhuwat through Chief Minister's Self Employment Scheme and Prime Minister's Interest Free Loan (PMFIL) scheme provided interest free loans to 14,481 beneficiaries.

Around 133,285 family members of beneficiaries have also availed microfinance under abovementioned programmes.

Moreover, the sources said, under National Rural Support Programme, 17,420 BISP beneficiaries have availed facilities of microfinance and various training programmes



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and around 801 family members of beneficiaries have also been benefited.

BISP introduced biometric system for verification of beneficiary's particulars in case of loss of card. Earlier, the beneficiary had to activate her card by call process for verification/activation of new card. Now the beneficiary only gives his/her thumb impression in specified UBL locations numbering 75 all across the country.

For first time in history, BISP has introduced biometric withdrawal system in Larkana, Sindh for 62,000 beneficiaries. The biometric system for payment has fully ensured women empowerment by deleting the role of middleman.