

Best Practices Report for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Benazir Income Support Program

Introduction

Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) is the largest single social safety net program in Pakistan's history. BISP was launched in July 2008 with an immediate objective of consumption smoothening and cushioning the negative effects of slow economic growth, the food crisis and inflation on the poor, particularly women, through the provision of cash transfers to eligible families. Its long term objectives include supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eradicate extreme and chronic poverty, empowerment of women and to achieve universal primary education.

Model of the Project

In the beginning no reliable data was available for identification of the underprivileged and vulnerable persons in the country. The task of identification of the potential beneficiaries of BISP was, therefore, entrusted to the Parliamentarians in what was the Phase-I of Targeting. Application Forms were distributed among the Parliamentarians in equal number (8000 forms to each member of the National Assembly and Senate and 1000 forms to each member of the Provincial Assemblies), irrespective of party affiliation. The forms received were verified through National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) database and out of 4.2 million received forms 2.2 million families were found eligible for cash transfers.

In Phase-II a nationwide Poverty Scorecard Survey was launched, the first of its kind in South Asia, which enabled BISP to identify eligible households through the application of a Proxy Means Test (PMT) that determined the welfare status of the household on a scale between 0-100. The survey was started in October 2010, conducted by the independent firms hired through a competitive bidding process. The survey has the following features:

- 7.7 million families are identified as living below the cutoff score of 16.17
- Creation of a large and reliable national registry of the socioeconomic status of almost 27.36 million households and approximately 155 million individuals across Pakistan.

Funding of the Programme

Funding for BISP has been carried out by the Government of Pakistan and International Financing Institutions (IFIs). The budget allocation for the BISP is specified in the annual budget. Development partners like Asian Development Bank, World Bank and DfID are providing funding for BISP.

Achievements

Under BISP, various initiatives are being undertaken like Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), Waseela-e-Taleem, Waseela-e-Rozgar, Waseela-e-Haq and Waseela-e-Sehet. The present Government has expressed a strong resolve to reform the social protection mechanism in line with its manifesto. Therefore, the present government continued the previous government's social protection programmes, including BISP. In the last 2 years, the government placed special emphasis on the expansion of BISP and improvement of its system. The following are BISP's major achievements in financial years 2013-14 & 2014-15:

- (i) The elected PML-N government increased BISP 2013-14 budgetary allocations to 75 billion rupees which was subsequently increased to Rs. 97 billion in FY 2014-15, and further enhanced to Rs 102 billion for FY 2015-16.

- (ii) During FY 2013-14, BISP disbursed Rs.65 billion. The expenditure for the current FY is expected to cross Rs. 100 billion (highest disbursement by BISP in a FY during last 6 years).
- (iii) The present government increased the cash benefit for the poorest of the poor from Rs 1000/- to Rs 1200/- per month in FY 2013-14 and again increased it by 25% to Rs. 1500/-in FY 2014-15.
- (iv) The number of BISP beneficiaries increased from 3.72 million in FY 2012-13 to 4.62 million in FY 2013-14 and to 5.1 million in September, 2015.
- (v) BISP is making payments to more than 94% of its beneficiaries through technology based payment mechanisms like Smart/Debit cards and mobile phone banking to 4.6 million beneficiaries. During the last two financial years, BISP has issued more than 760,034 debit cards to its beneficiaries.
- (vi) Waseela-e-Taleem has been rolled out to 32 districts all over Pakistan and so far one million children have been registered in the programme out of which 700,000 have already been enrolled in schools. The Government has also increased the monthly stipend under the programe from Rs. 200 to Rs. 250 per month per child.
- (vii) Waseela-e-Sehat covers health care for beneficiary families as well as life insurance coverage for one male bread earner of each beneficiary family receiving cash grant. Under Life Insurance, lives of the bread winners of 4.1 million beneficiary families have been insured. In the aftermath of 18th Constitutional amendment, BISP is planning to shift this initiative to the concerned provinces.
- (viii) BISP has achieved strong results from an internationally recognized National Social Economic Registry program, containing information on existing and potential beneficiaries which is being used by many government and non-government organizations for various pro-poor programs, development of an automated MIS that includes an elaborate beneficiary payment disbursement mechanism, and grievance redress module, has also been established. A strong communication and public information campaign mechanism is also in place. These efforts have led BISP to disburse Rs. 315.29 billion in cash transfers to over 5.04 million beneficiaries by June 30, 2015
- (ix) A Pilot for Biometric payment system was launched in Larkana in March, 2015 to discourage the culture of middle-men and other complications.
- (x) The first ever impact evaluation report of BISP was launched by the President of Pakistan in September, 2015

Future Targets and Plans

In line with Government's resolve to run BISP on transparent and efficient lines, the future focus of BISP is on improving grassroots social mobilization capacity through partnerships with provincial governments and NGOs, shifting of all the beneficiaries from traditional to scientific payment mechanisms in the future and progressively move towards further refinement of graduation programs to enable the target beneficiaries to escape poverty on sustainable basis.

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