

# Poverty Alleviation: A must to make progress

By Shoaib Sultan Khan

Director Media BISP

In today's modern world, no nation can make progress without catering the basic needs of its downtrodden segments and poor population of the country. Thus, the steps taken for the well-being of the poor have become one of the key indicators to judge the pace of progress of any society.

It is the realization of the same reality that today, the developed societies of the world are not only acknowledging the importance of providing relief to their poor population but also envisaging policies that are aiming to play a key role in the development and construction of the society. However, it has been a sorry tale of our country that the no significant step could have been taken for the poor and downtrodden of the society and they were denied of economic opportunities and relief they were needed. Thus, the phenomenon has resulted as compounding our socio-economic problems persistently.

However, it can be hoped that the miseries being faced by the poor population of Pakistan could now be alleviated as at last something really tangible has been done for them for the very first time in the history of Pakistan. Yes, after the inception of present democratic government, the poor and marginalized segments of society have heard good news. The commencement of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has successful reversed the process and it has made a significant headway towards poverty alleviation and make their life better.

The programme is attributed to Shaheed Benazir Bhutto who herself was the champion of the cause of poor and she had envision an economic agenda, based on the socio-economic uplift of the poor.

The programme has achieved another landmark success by empowering women folks of society. In this regard, the vision of the Father of the Nation, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah is worth mentioning. While highlighting the role of women, he said "I have always maintained that no nation can ever be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with the men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women."

We are also aware of the fact that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto remained a staunch believer of women empowerment throughout her life and political struggle. Besides her commitment with democracy and human rights in Pakistan, her vision is inspiring for the cause of women emancipation. While following this vision, the BISP has made significant advancement by translating it into reality.

BISP has adopted a multi-prong strategy to combat with abject poverty and provide relief to poor of the country. In this regard, Waseela-e-Rozgar, the initiative of imparting vocational/technical training will be highly instrumental in improving the living standards of skilled laborers as the beneficiary families would be imparted training in those areas on priority basis that would be carrying more demand. These measures are in line with the vision of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto as well as improving the lives of poor remained her priority throughout her life and political struggle.

Besides her commitment with democracy and human rights in Pakistan, she had shown her utter dedication towards service to downtrodden segments of the country. The demand driven vocational/technical training under Waseela-e-Rozgar initiative of BISP has also been contributing in empowerment and emancipation of working women. Under the initiative, only head of a registered deserving family or her nominated person could be imparted with this modern technical training.

Likewise, the steps of BISP are encouraging women to play their role in the income generation activities. This role of women would bring prosperity for the working/laborer class. BISP has taken these measures while acknowledging the fact that the global economic recession and exceptional food inflation triggered the apprehensions that already impoverished would not be able to sustain this economic shock and will plunge deeper into the abyss of poverty and hunger.

The poor in Pakistan has also become vulnerable in this scenario. Hence, the programme emerged as a long awaited ray of hope for the millions of hopeless of this country. The most important aspect of the programme remained its contribution in poverty eradication.

The pro-poor initiatives of the BISP would provide relief to people in need, especially, the poorest of the poor, in an effective, transparent and efficient manner. One may hope that efforts of BISP would ultimately lead us towards the establishment of social welfare state. However, the sustainability of BISP and all of its components would be crucial for the success of the programme in long term basis.