

WORKSHOP ON POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY IN THE MOUNTAIN AREAS OF PAKISTAN 20TH MARCH 2012

Dr. David Molden, Director General International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development,

Poverty Analysts, Social Policy Experts, Distinguished Guests and Participants

Asalum-u-Alaikum and Good Morning

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this workshop on Poverty and Vulnerability in Mountain areas of Pakistan.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Pakistan is home to world's most spectacular peaks and the only place in the world where three great mountain ranges Himalayas, Karakoram and Hindu Kush meet.

However the issue of poverty in the mountain areas of Pakistan is relatively serious. These areas are among the least developed in the country.

Harsh weather conditions, remote geographical location, scattered population across many small villages, undeveloped physical and social infrastructure, under - developed markets, and inadequate investment in financial and human capital have been among key defining characteristics of the poverty problem in these areas.

Dear Colleagues

How to improve the well-being of the poor living in mountainous regions is the purpose why we are gathered here.

In developing pro-poor poverty reduction strategies, and promoting the greater participation of women in development, both International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development and Benazir Income Support Program share commonality of purpose.

It is an honor for Benazir Income Support Program to join hands with ICIMOD in conducting this workshop.

In order to hold any meaningful dialogue on issue of Poverty in mountain areas, we must understand that the mountain communities largely depend on natural resources to earn their living. For poverty analysis and poverty reduction interventions to be effective, it is important to understand the livelihood activities vis-a-vis multiple sources of vulnerability faced by the poor in these regions.

Moreover we must realize that poverty in these areas is directly affecting the natural environment rather it is causing reduction of natural resources.

Unless concerted action is taken immediately, poverty, hunger, and decline in resources will continue to aggravate the worst livelihood conditions in mountain areas.

Distinguished Guests

In any society, there always happen to be an economically weaker segment vulnerable to the poverty trap. Once they are gripped by poverty, economic system in place has no 'touch-button' solution to provide them a level playing field.

It is here that Social Safety Nets as an interim measure intervene to break the vicious cycle of poverty. They are necessary to alleviate poverty.

This is where I would like to share with you the role of Benazir Income Support Program in linking pro-poor policy, women empowerment and community development in the most crucial times in the history of Pakistan.

Benazir Income Support program started with an unconditional cash grant of Rs 1000/- to provide support to the under-privileged families. In a short span of three year time, today we have been able to reach out to more than 6 million families across the country. Over a period of time these families with BISP assistance are able to increase their monthly expenditure on food items.

Not limiting the scope of BISP to monthly cash grants, BISP is promoting a culture of self sufficiency through various initiatives.

BISP has been developed into a comprehensive social safety net by provision of Health & Accident Insurance, Vocational & Technical Training, and Micro Finance for gainful self-employment through Waseela-e-Haq Programme.

Its comprehensive conceptual framework, well-supported by state-of the art technology and international best practices makes it the most transparent and credible social safety system not only in the country but in the world as well. BISP has achieved in three years what many organizations and programmes around the world have not achieved in decades.

Let me give you a glimpse of our achievements:

Lack of reliable and objective data has always been the weakest link in all the social safety initiatives launched in last sixty years. BISP faced the same problem, but instead of relying on unscientific alternatives BISP opted for scientific, transparent and internationally recognized targeting approaches. To ensure objective and scientific identification of the most deserving families, BISP has conducted a Proxy Means Testing (PMT) based poverty scorecard survey of the entire country, which is an unprecedented accomplishment in the entire South Asian region.

More than 25 million households have been surveyed in the width and breadth of the country. It's hard to find a parallel of an extensive social safety net survey of this magnitude in the entire world. With the completion of Poverty Survey in FATA, the number of beneficiary families is projected to touch the 7 million mark. This means BISP will be supporting more than 42 million individuals (almost 23% of the entire population).

I feel immense pride to share with you that now BISP has the most authentic, most current, and most reliable socio-economic data of more than 25 million Households of Pakistan.

To date BISP has disbursed more than \$ 1.2 Billion among the marginalized segments of our society. Besides, monthly cash grant of Rs.1000 per month, BISP provides interest-free returnable financial assistance up to Rs.300,000/- (about \$ 3530) to the randomly selected beneficiary families to promote self-employment among women and to improve their livelihood.

Furthermore, to empower beneficiary families to become economically independent, BISP offers opportunities of free of cost Vocational and Technical Training to each beneficiary or her nominee.

To reduce the economic risk of these under privileged families BISP provides insurance cover of Rs. 100,000 (\$1176) for the life of the bread earner of the family. This is again a new idea for the lower strata of the society and this is an indication that lives of all the Pakistanis are very dear and priceless.

Besides providing above-mentioned social safety net related assistance, BISP also caters for the needs of already marginalized affected by any human-induced or natural emergency through its Emergency Relief Package. Through this package BISP has provided immediate and timely assistance to earthquake affectees, IDPs of Swat and Malakand, flood affectees, and the civilian bomb blast victims. So far, BISP has disbursed almost Rs.8.5 billion (\$ 100 million) under this package.

Realizing the value of education for building human capital, BISP is in the process of designing a new initiative under which financial incentives will be provided to the beneficiary families to enroll their children in primary schools with the support of World Bank and DFID.

Because of BISP rate of women registration with NADRA has increased many folds and more than ten million women have got their CNICs in last three years, including more than 100,000 women of FATA. This is a huge achievement for giving the marginalized women of the country their identity and respect in the society.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

In the context of rapidly changing socio-economic and geo-political environment, only sustainable development strategies and comprehensive implementation framework is required to address the issue of poverty.

I sincerely hope this workshop will provide us with better insight into the overall poverty situation in the region more specifically in the mountain areas and shall provide us with an opportunity to develop synergies for way forward in coming up with meaningful solutions.

I assure full support and co-operation to ICIMOD from Benazir Income Support Program in their future endeavors and hope that today's session prove valuable source of information and knowledge on the subject.

Thank you.