

Speech by the Chairperson on the occasion of

Annual Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan Memorial Lecture 2012

Mr Tasneem Siddiqi,

Distinguished Guests

Members of Civil Society, Donor Organisations

Academia,

Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalam - o - Alaikum,

I am pleased to be invited on Annual Dr.Akhtar Hameed Khan Memorial Lecture 2012 as a Chief Guest.

I am indeed very grateful to Akhtar Hameed Khan Resource Centre for giving me this opportunity to be a part of this enlightened forum where we all are present to pay tribute to Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan a world renowned figure who dedicated his life to test methods for combating poverty and changing the lives of the impoverished.

Ladies and Gentlemen

A pioneer in the field of rural development, poverty alleviation and microcredit, Dr.Akhtar Hameed Khan from his experiences and contributions has given new dimension to the philosophy of social protection. He has proved that the poor could be very productive if provided with some guidance and a small amount of working capital. He was a visionary who worked for eradication of poverty and for betterment of the destitute.

Distinguished Guests

The purpose of development is to reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment and to help provide basic needs. Growth without addressing the root causes of inequality can result in a larger gulf between the Haves and Have nots.

Development implies change. We must assess the existing state of socio-economic structures in accordance with the governance issues, and carry out a resource analysis for economic and social transformation.

In any society, there always happens 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 (SSNs) as an interim measure intervene to break the vicious cycle of poverty.

As you all know that Safety net programs, as part of the broader social protection agenda, aim to address risks, vulnerability and social exclusion. These programs are designed to protect vulnerable households against livelihoods risks, helping poor people maintain an adequate level of food consumption and improve food security. Moreover social safety nets help prevent the poor from adopting damaging coping strategies and depleting their assets.

BISP is providing a safety net to the bottom 25% population of Pakistan as a cushion against rising prices of food and fuel - enabling poor families to maintain essential consumption pattern.

Dear Guests

Let me share with you the success story of BISP as a national flagship social safety net Programme of the Government of Pakistan.

It gives me immense pride to share with you that Benazir Income Support Program is successfully implementing the vision of Shaheed Mohatrma Benazir Bhutto through a most comprehensive social protection program to take care of the marginalized and under privileged strata of society, especially women. It is taking concrete steps in meeting the targets set by Millennium Development Goals for eradication of extreme poverty and hunger,

empowerment of women and ensuring universal primary education in the country.

Established in July 2008, compared to other existing public sector safety nets (*Zakat* and *Bait-ul-Maal*), BISP has evolved much larger in size and employs a scientific targeting system for beneficiary identification and provision of “targeted subsidies”. Existing safety net programs were modest in size and had ad-hoc targeting systems.

Benazir Income Support Programme, through its innovative approaches and products, has contributed to women’s social and economic empowerment in an exceptional manner by making women the primary focus of BISP’s monthly cash transfers as well as other benefits

aimed at their self-sustainability and ultimate graduation from the program as productive citizens.

At present BISP is providing cash grant to more than 4 million households as consumption support. This cash grant is given to Women beneficiary of the households.

BISP's contribution to women empowerment can be gauged from the fact that more than 15 million females all over the country have got their CNICs because of BISP. This includes far flung areas of Baluchistan, Sindh and significantly, FATA also.

As an exit strategy BISP is also providing support through microfinance, skill development and life and health insurance which are the benchmark programs of any welfare state.

Waseela-e-Taleem(co-responsibility cash transfer) is the latest and very significant initiative of BISP aiming at human capital development through promotion of education in Pakistan, thus helping produce educated, responsible and self reliant citizens of Pakistan.

Ladies and Gentlemen

BISP has gained international recognition by virtue of adopting scientific and technology-based operations and use of transparent mechanisms for targeting and disbursements.

Data collected through, state of the art and first of its kind in South Asia Poverty Census has been used to develop a comprehensive national social and economic registry, largest of its kind in Pakistan with details down to family and household level.

Electronic modes of payments have been introduced by BISP to further improve the efficiency and transparency of payments to the recipients which includes Debit/ATM cards and mobile phone banking.

In this way BISP is not only providing cash and sustenance support, it is also playing a significant role for financial inclusion of the poorest in the mainstream.

Ladies and Gentlemen

My four years long association with Government of Pakistan's flagship initiative for poverty reduction and women empowerment has provided me a platform to address the issue of poverty and inequality in Pakistan. It has also enabled me to develop an understanding that poverty cannot be alleviated without removing inequalities. As a result I have got ample opportunities to interact with people, government agencies and donor community to exchange views and ideas on what concerns us all.

I am aware that Akhtar Hameed Khan Resource Centre is playing a very important role as a knowledge bank on rural sector development in Pakistan and making significant contribution in human resource development, social mobilization and poverty alleviation through research and dialogue.

I wish that all of us who are present here to contribute to the best of our abilities and continue to work for the betterment of the poorest segment of our society to make this country a better and safe place for generations to come.

Thank you.