

Building Resilience in Crisis: Adaptive Social Protection – A National Priority for Pakistan

High-level Concluding Plenary

Instruments for social protection have become effective ways to assist individuals affected by catastrophic shocks (World Bank 2020). Pakistan's social safety net has evolved into a potent mechanism to reach out to the most vulnerable parts of the population in such situations. The emergency cash transfer model, first used by the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) during the COVID-19 Pandemic, has proven to be an impactful approach in supporting families in distress, especially in times of disasters whether anthropogenic or natural. After the devastating floods in August 2022, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) increased the amount of the Flood Relief Cash Assistance budget from PKR 28 billion to PKR 70 billion for flood-affected families across the country. BISP has so far disbursed approximately PKR 35 billion among 1.4 million flood-affected families (BISP n.d.).

The GoP has established a relief fund and allocated PKR 5 billion to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) where funds for next-of-kin, injured people, and damaged and destroyed homes were earmarked, while the NDMA and Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) also provided general in-kind support. However, the floods became a global symbol for the destructive impact of the climate change and another frightening wake-up call for Pakistan pointing to the extreme high risks of future climate-induced disasters for the country. Therefore, it is high time to think of an *integrated, adaptive Social Protection system* that is not only precise but also viable. Moreover, an agreement is evolving that cash transfer relief packages alone are not enough to build resilience of households in the long-run. Although the emergency cash transfer provides immediate relief and consumption smoothing, it cannot graduate people out of poverty and protect them effectively from future catastrophic shocks.

In lieu of traditional Social Protection Programmes (SPPs), there must be programmatic approaches that are reliable, targeted, and structured. In addition to this, they should have an element of enhancing the capacity of people to bounce back to a stable household stage after the shock occurred. Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) is a simplified yet more refined version of typical social protection. It helps to build the resilience of poor and vulnerable households to shocks by directly investing in their capacity to *prepare, cope, and adapt* to these. ASP aims at ensuring that these households are not pushed into or trapped in the poverty cycle again. This promotes government-led investment in the three resilience capacities of households that are particularly vulnerable to shocks along with the pre-and post-shock continuum, through SPPs.

Together, social safety nets, social insurance, and labour market programmes constitute the social protection 'system' along with the policies that guide them and the delivery systems that underpin them. The pronounced ability of safety net programmes in particular to build the resilience of poor and vulnerable households can be harnessed and enhanced in relation to covariate shocks. A safety net may have a transformational effect on a household's resilience capabilities when support is provided to it. A cash transfer, for instance, offers an additional source of income that might let the beneficiary household take adaptation-supporting precautions (like saving) and engage in higher-risk, higher-return livelihoods. The recipient household is better equipped to control consumption and steer clear of unhealthy coping mechanisms in the event of a shock. Furthermore, the continuation of payments might directly improve the beneficiary household's ability to cope if after shock preparatory measures are exhausted (for instance, due to depleted funds).

The higher the household's capacity to prepare, cope, and adapt, the lesser the implied impact of the shock on well-being and the increased likelihood that the household will 'bounce back faster' recovering to pre-shock levels. By extension, vulnerability and resilience can be simplistically seen as 'two sides of the same coin' where a household is vulnerable to a shock because of a limited capacity to prepare, cope, and adapt, translating into an inability to minimise and resist the negative impacts, bouncing back slowly.

The Sustainable Development Conference (SDC) has planned a thematic day on 'Adaptive Social Protection' this year. There will be three technical sequential sessions on components of resilience: ***Preparedness, Coping and Adaptation***, followed by a high-level evening plenary.

The ***Evening Plenary*** will draw policy conclusions in the context of Pakistan based on the reflections of the technical sessions. The plenary will explore the four building blocks - programmes, data and information, finance, and institutional arrangements and partnerships - of the World Bank's ASP framework (Bowen et al., 2020). It will highlight both the elements of existing social protection systems that can be the cornerstones for building household resilience as well as the additional investments and priorities that are needed to enhance these outcomes. This will examine, with the help of pertinent examples, the necessity of supplementing conventional targeting techniques through integration and layering of various datasets to better inform vulnerability, building resilience among poor and vulnerable households in 'hot-spot' areas of recurrent shocks through modified programmes; investments in institutional partnerships to synergise various initiatives and contingency planning to enable the increased responsiveness of SPPs after a shock hits.

References

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Plenary Organisers

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