

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

Technical Session III - Adaptive Social Protection: Building Sustainable Capacities of Vulnerable Households

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 smoothening, 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.

This Technical Session III on *Adaptation* will look at diversifying or adjusting livelihood portfolios away from sources of income that are especially vulnerable to the impacts of a shock; building a larger and more diversified asset base, including productive, financial, and human capital-related assets to enable these adjustments in livelihood portfolios; and/or leveraging such assets to relocate away from an area of spatial concentrated risk. The ultimate expression of *adaptive capacity* may be the household's ability to reduce its exposure to a shock altogether through relocation and planned migration when adjustments to livelihood and assets portfolios fail and remaining in place would lead to chronic vulnerability and even maladaptation. Adapting to shocks and 'bouncing back better' after they hit is particular critical for poor and vulnerable households. Priority Four of the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction emphasises that reconstruction after a disaster offers an opportunity to build more resilient societies (Bowen et al., 2020).

The idea of 'building forward better' highlights the need of avoiding re-creating the vulnerabilities that made the effects of the prior tragedy worse. Applying the same logic to household resilience, it is crucial to make sure that disadvantaged and vulnerable families may 'bounce back' to a more robust state of reduced exposure and vulnerability. Additionally, a household's capacity to adjust over the long run to greater uncertainty and worsening climatic circumstances is becoming increasingly more important, particularly for Pakistan.

References

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