Multi-Tiered, Shock Responsive Social Protection in Pakistan

The COVID-19 crisis urged policymakers to adapt existing systems rapidly to meet the new challenges facing all aspects of public policy. In many ways, the crisis presented an extraordinary situation requiring extraordinary measures. In Pakistan, the Federal Government responded by launching the Ehsaas Emergency Cash programme to provide PKR 12,000 to over 15 million poor families (PASSD 2020). Nevertheless, the crisis exposed several weaknesses in the federation’s shock responsive systems, particularly at the provincial level, which visibly fell short of meeting citizens’ needs of consumption smoothing and livelihood assistance.

Pakistan has a multi-tiered system of governance for Social Protection Programmes (SPPs) instituted at the federal, provincial and district levels. Although the 18th Constitutional Amendment delegated the social protection function (social welfare, Zakat, population welfare, unemployment insurance etc.) to the provinces, the Federal Government continued with the delivery of the country’s largest cash transfer programme. Since 2018, not only has the unconditional cash transfer programme been expanded further but several satellite programmes aiming to develop human capital, youth livelihoods and welfare-to-work interventions have also been initiated. In some cases, this approach of expansion has overlapped with the ongoing or upcoming provincial SPPs.

As the federal and the provincial social protection authorities currently lack a common platform to discuss and resolve governance issues, the potential of complementarities and linkages is yet to be explored. Areas for such multi-tiered cooperation range from legal frameworks to institutional development and from initiating vertically aligned schemes to common monitoring and evaluation methods. Immediate areas that require such cooperation include dynamic social data, reliable methods for social outreach and mobilisation, payments and social insurance infrastructure and integrated databases of programmes and beneficiaries for a robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system. As the social protection system graduates from mere cash transfers to human development and productive inclusion, the need for people-friendly innovation, financial inclusion and digital literacy also calls for the attention of policymakers.

Given the gaps identified in the social protection initiatives during the COVID-19 crisis, all tiers of the government need to develop long-term synergies and complementarities. Recognising that a dialogue among the various tiers of the government, civil society and academia can help achieve this objective, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Sub-National Governance programme (SNG) and Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) initiated a series of consultative events in September 2021. This roundtable session will be the culmination point of this series and has been preceded by a webinar and a learning workshop.

In the plenary session supported by FCDO, there’s a need to agree on the methodology of ‘Integreted Social Protection Systems’ (systems that create complementarities among federal and provincial entities) and deliberate on:

- The nature of multi-tiered governance of social protection and agreeing on how to optimise its use for Pakistan.
- Knowing that poverty alleviation, shock responsive solutions and graduation are best understood by those closest to the beneficiary, hence, how can multi-tiered programmes be made most responsive to citizens’ needs?
- How can the demarcation of social protection jurisdiction envisaged by the Ehsaas Strategy be evolved and implemented with provincial consensus?
- To what extent can the Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division (PASSD) become a platform to coordinate with the provinces for implementation of social protection?
Ten years after devolution, have the provinces developed enough capacities to deliver on their role with respect to social protection?

Integrated aspects such as Dynamic Data Profiling, Single Beneficiary Registry, One Window Services, Digital and Financial Literacy.

Agreeing on the need of consolidation for identification of programmes, data sharing, social mobilisation, outreach, registration, payment process, financial inclusion aspect, periodical inclusion/exclusion methods, M&E and impact assessments, and Grievance Redressal Methods (GRM) where possible.

Agreeing on a mutually agreed roadmap to develop complementarities between the federal and the provincial governments for the upcoming social protection and human development interventions.

The discussion will continue in the concurrent session, Towards Building an Effective Social Protection System being co-organized by SDPI and Syed Muhammad Mustafa, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Pakistan Office

References


Plenary Organisers
Dr Sohail Anwar, Sub-National Governance Program (SNG), Foreign, Development and Commonwealth Office (FCDO), Pakistan

Dr Fareeha Armughan, Research Fellow, Centre of Evidence Action Research, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Dr Vaqar Ahmed, Joint Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan