

**Brave Beyond BISP**  
Pakistan | Bucknell University  
**Project Leader:** Chanzé Ahsan | Pakistan | Bucknell University  
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For decades, the population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), a province of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan, has confronted the challenge of conflict and militancy induced displacement. This has resulted in the displaced and hosting communities encountering a range of vulnerabilities due to the loss of livelihood and traditional social protection systems coupled with growing competition for local resources in the displaced areas. Women have been particularly affected owing to the death or conscription of their men into militant groups. For many, this has paved the way for them to assume leading economic roles, opening opportunities to navigate public spaces. However, these leading roles are very seldom accompanied by empowerment. This is in large part due to their weak social position, which is often exploited in the workforce. Women and girls bear an unequal burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities as well as overrepresentation in informal and precarious jobs. Women also do not exercise the same rights as men owing to strict traditional norms and an extremely conservative society. This is evident from the rate of multidimensional poverty, the highest, while female literacy is one of the lowest<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, women in KPK lack any control over productive resources like inherited land resulting in increased dependence on male family members. All these factors contribute towards women's victimization, namely, increased economic insecurity, unpaid workload, domestic violence and abuse.

Nevertheless, these women do receive some economic assistance in the form of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), which is one of Pakistan's largest social safety net programs. Initiated in 2008 to financially support the most "vulnerable and deserving women and their families from the poorest households across the country" (bisp.gov.pk), the programme currently provides unconditional cash transfers (UCT) of PKR 1,650<sup>2</sup> per month to 5.7 million 'ever married women.'<sup>3</sup> Targeting is based on a Proxy Means Test (PMT)<sup>4</sup> to establish a household's welfare and poverty status. Towards this end BISP has organized beneficiaries in the form of BISP Beneficiary Committees (BBCs). These BBCs provide opportunities to women for leading their own developmental process.

### **The Need to Transfer Beyond BISP**

However, according to a study by the Pakistan Institute of Developmental Economics (PIDE), UCTs have not reduced poverty amongst the poor<sup>5</sup>. Wide-scale allegations of corruption within the program and inadequate policy responses from successive governments have only worsened matters. Historically, there has also been a lack of focus on more long-term sustainable efforts towards poverty alleviation and the achievement of SDG1.

Evidence of the inadequacy of short-term social protection programs is supported by organizations such as Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), an International Development Organisation focused on empowering society's most vulnerable and exploited. According to a report by BRAC, traditional social protection interventions, such as cash transfers, merely help the poor and vulnerable cope with their volatile conditions. And while these programs are a critical aspect of a government's policy alleviation efforts, they ultimately fail to reach society's poorest. This is because the many aspects of a cohesive social protection program (which incorporate elements of social sector policies within education, health, and nutrition, amongst others) are instruments that fail to reach society's "ultra-poor"<sup>6</sup>.

Instead, the report finds that sustained efforts towards poverty alleviation can be achieved when poor and vulnerable households do more than just cope. To support this, the report champions a graduation-based approach to poverty alleviation. The term 'graduation' refers to the participants improving their incomes, assets-base and wealth ranking. This transition is expected to have a significant impact on their poverty status with a high likelihood of an eventual exit out of safety net programmes.<sup>7</sup> Such members of the graduation program can then "remain food secure, lead sustainable economic lives and ultimately become more resilient<sup>5</sup>."

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<sup>1</sup> Derbyshire, V. (2020, March 02). Literacy Rate in Pakistan 2020, UNESCO.

<sup>2</sup> Approximately \$10

<sup>3</sup> Ever married women or men are persons who have been married at least once in their lives although their current marital status may not be 'married' (UNDP)

<sup>4</sup> This methodology estimates household income by associating indicators or 'proxies' with household expenditure or consumption (Kidd, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> Shaikh, H., & Anis, A. (2020, October 12). Poverty eradication in Pakistan: Past, present, and future

<sup>6</sup> Rashid, L. (2017). *BRAC's Ultra-Poor Graduation Programme An end to extreme poverty in our lifetime* (Tech.). BRAC.

<sup>7</sup> *Pakistan country strategic plan (2018–2022)* (Working paper). (2018). WFP.

This project therefore aims to graduate the most vulnerable female members of society dependent on cash bails from BISP, into self-sufficient and fully functioning members of their communities by improving their vocational and entrepreneurial skills. This will increase vulnerable rural women's access to household income generation and productive assets that will enable self-reliance.

### **Project Details**

#### **Skill Sets:**

The women will be trained in kitchen gardening, backyard poultry farming, sewing/tailoring and embroidery with the support of entrepreneurial skills to enable the formation of sustainable businesses. With sewing and embroidery, the goal is to economically empower women, both by teaching them the skills necessary to support their business and also by linking them directly to markets to sell their products. This removes the “middle-man,” who often absorbs a chunk of the profit share. Through this direct-link, women will earn extra profit from their products and will be better placed to support their families and businesses. A key component in ensuring a smooth transition to the market will be SMEDA, which focuses on providing an “enabling environment and business development services to small and medium enterprises” (smeda.org) and the Women's Chamber of Commerce, which helps “women entrepreneurs belonging to all tiers of society find a forum to voice their concerns, seek assistance, and return for purposes of linkages, promotion, research and further development” (cnpwcci.org).

Additionally, kitchen gardening and backyard poultry farming will help improve food quality and security. Women in rural areas are an integral part of the community's food source. They are responsible for the nutrition and food security of the household as they comprise 70% of the workforce in agriculture<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, the benefits of this skill-set will be two-fold: firstly, the dietary needs of the family will be met and secondly, household income will be supported. In the midst of Covid, these skills will also render the potential for financial support within the comfort and security of home. An FAO report finds that women are also more likely to spend their incomes on food security, health care and education<sup>9</sup> thus making crucial contributions both during and after conflict. As KPK is particularly sensitive to hostilities, women play an integral role in maintaining peace in the region through food security. Fostering this skill will preserve and protect the peace of the community during uncertain times.

#### **Selection Criteria:**

To pre-empt and mitigate the risk of leakages, the project will liaise with relevant counterparts to identify low risk BBCs for engagement under this project. Low risk BBCs are the ones that are better organized, have successfully pursued projects of mutual interest and have demonstrated transparency during past engagements. Potential beneficiaries must then fall within a low-risk BBC. In addition, beneficiaries must also be compatible with the skills set offered. This will be determined by a training needs assessment (TNA)<sup>10</sup>.

#### **Timeline and Breakdown**

The project will be divided into three phases: in phase 1 the relevant BBCs will be identified (one week), in phase 2 TNA will be carried out (two weeks) and in phase 3 training sessions and market linkages will be established (nine weeks).

#### **Expected Outcomes and Long-Term Peace**

The most important outcomes of this project is the economic empowerment of women as well as food and nutrition security. These will contribute directly to the attainment of SDG 1 (reduction of poverty), SDG 2 (reduction of hunger), and SDGs 5 and 10 (socially and economically empowering women).

In addition, for sustainable development, the challenges of gender inequality, conflict and fragility need to be acknowledged as inextricably linked. Unequal gender relations, if left unaddressed, can continue to drive conflict and violence/ terrorism in an already compromised region. By strengthening women's active participation and empowerment, this project will eventually contribute to the region's long-term peace and resilience and ultimately lead to gender parity within KPK. This is critical for collectively achieving global commitments to women's empowerment and sustainable peace.

<sup>8</sup> Desk, M. (2015). Women in Poultry. *International The News*.

<sup>9</sup> FAO. (2016). *Peace Conflict and Food Security* (Tech.). FAO.

<sup>10</sup> In the event that the project exceeds capacity, fifty beneficiaries will be randomly selected from amongst all candidates that meet the selection criteria.

**Considerations regarding Covid-19:** During Covid, the project will be continued virtually through WhatsApp and Jazz cash transfers. Additionally, priority will be given to those who offer a lower risk of contagion spread and who can be supported during long periods of restricted movements and human interaction.