Social Protection in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Policy Brief by Sustainable Development Policy Institute

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1. Background

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province represents some of Pakistan’s hardest hit areas emerged due to natural and man-made calamities.\(^1\) This situation has been further exacerbated by the ongoing war on terror, and Pakistan’s fight against those who have challenged the writ of state. The underlying binding constraints to production activities have also implied capital flight and skilled manpower from the province. This, in turn, has incurred a rising incidence of unemployment and poverty at local level.

This region still faces an uncertain outlook with ongoing drone strikes by US, and fast approaching NATO exit from Afghanistan. However, there is a new government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with a younger political representation under the banner of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI). This new provincial leadership has exhibited a more amplified voice at the national and global level. The change of setup at the political level has also implied raised expectations of individuals and communities facing the above-mentioned socio-economic challenges.

With the help of development partners, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the past several years, has put in place social protection programmes that aim to trigger job creation, protect poorest of the poor from rising inflation and augmenting individual and community’s capacities to cope with negative effects of increasing militancy in the region. While the reform of social protection programmes is an ongoing exercise, it is important to come up with evidence-based inquiry that informs the communities and policy practitioners regarding the effectiveness of past and ongoing initiatives.

A recent study by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) conducted for United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) analyses the social protection and assistance programmes in some targeted areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after evaluating them on pre-determined criteria. The basic aim of this study was to assess the efficiency of these programmes and to see whether they could be extended to RAHA\(^2\) area for sustainable support provision to a wide range of deserving that include the poor, women-led households, internally displaced persons, disabled, Afghan migrants and others.\(^3\)

2. Social protection and assistance programmes

These programmes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can broadly be divided into two categories, a) social insurance programmes and b) social assistance programmes.

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\(^1\)This policy brief presents key findings and recommendations from the detailed study on the same subject commissioned by UNDP Pakistan.

\(^2\)Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas.

\(^3\) The analysis exhibits findings from the qualitative and quantitative data collected from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Primary data was collected from three districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which included Buner, Lower Dir and Nowshera.
Social Insurance Programs

Currently, there are three social insurance programmes being run in the province. These programmes are essentially meant to extend financial support to public employees and include provincial government servants’ pension programme, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Benevolent Fund and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Employees Social Security Institution (ESSI).

While provincial pension programme is available for all civil servants regardless of their pay scale, benevolent fund and ESSI are essentially for the poor and the needy. In terms of disbursement, pension system is perhaps most efficient. But in case of benevolent fund and ESSI, some political interventions have been seen.

All three programmes have direct linkages with Pakistan’s commitment under Millennium Development Goals related to poverty alleviation and improvement in health and education facilities. The same may see their extension to RAHA districts if job creation in the medium to longer run is able to bring public and private sector workers under the above-mentioned social insurance programmes.

Social Assistance Programmes

There are eight different social assistance programmes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – albeit with different geographic and demographic scope. These programmes are running under Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), Provincial Reconstruction Rehabilitation and Settlement Authority (PARRSA), Bacha Khan Poverty Alleviation Programme (BKPAP), Department of Social Welfare and Women’s Development, Special Initiative of the Chief Minister, World Food Programme, Stipends under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Programme and Programmes for Afghan Refugees.

Many of these programmes are in a nascent stage and have relatively limited coverage. The PDMA and PARRSA programmes that aimed at IDPs essentially target displaced and flood-affected persons. The provisions made under the programmes are small and usually make for one time assistance to targeted population during floods and military operations.

Contrary to PDMA and PARRSA, BKPAP uses community targeting mechanisms with limited scope but efficient targeting. At the time of this study, the programme covered only 40 union councils (UCs) of four districts. While the aim is to target households under crisis particularly prior to sowing and harvesting season but support provided is rather small (limited to PKR 5,000). With a potential to be extended to RAHA districts, the programme can prove to be efficient for hedging against various forms of poverty.

Special Initiatives of the Chief Minister is similar to BKPAP. This was in place when the previous provincial government completed its tenure in March 2013, and now the
programme is likely to continue in some form under the PTI regime. It aims at promoting employment through small enterprise development. The programme also runs Rozgar schemes in which small loans are offered. Another feature of the programme is Stori-da-Pakhtunkhwa scheme, which offers scholarships to bright students. In view of the human resource deficit, there is a scope of extending this programme to RAHA districts.

Department of Social Welfare and Women Development uses self-targeting mechanism to provide welfare homes, Darul Amans, drug rehabilitation centers and sarkari sarai. All these programmes are essentially meant to target the transitional needy. The programme currently does not target RAHA districts, but it has the potential to be extended there.

Stipends under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Programme are aimed at promoting girls enrollment in middle schools. Monthly stipends are provided to female students along with free text-books. Though primarily dependent on support from external development partners, the scheme is highly visible and effective. After successful implementation of its Phase-I in seven districts, this facility has now been extended to the girls’ public schools in the entire province.

The last two social assistance programmes are largely for calamity-hit areas that target internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Afghan migrants. The programme by World Food Programme caters for health, education, livelihood and nutrition related needs. With substantial scope of its extension to RAHA districts, the programme is contingent upon sustained support from the development partners.

Finally, there are interventions aimed at facilitating Afghan migrants living in refugee camps. With inadequate and scarcely available facilities in the targeted areas, these programmes are targeting only a small proportion of refugees. Provided that funding becomes available, refugees living in RAHA districts can benefit from these programmes.

3. Policy Options

Going forward the focus needs to be on efficiency of existing programmes and demand-side accountability in the ongoing initiatives. The need for some specific reforms is discussed below.

- While targeting efficiency and coverage of social insurance programmes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is commendable, there are issues regarding ease of access. The problems are severe for the disabled, sick or sparsely located. Many deserving poor are unable to personally appear before the designated offices and produce lengthy documentation. In order to facilitate these disadvantaged
groups, the government and the development partners should consider establishing their mobile units and also make access possible via phones.

- **The process of grievance redressal** is undocumentated and cumbersome. Most resolutions require multiple visits of the claimant adding to their costs. The provincial government needs to make these mechanisms simple, transparent, accountable and time bound. If grievances are not addressed on time, the department should be made liable to pay all costs borne by the complainant.

- **Targeting efficiency** of benevolent fund is questionable as not every deserving or needy civil employee can claim it. Many require political sources so that their rightful claim can be processed. The procedural information is cumbersome to understand. There have been past requests to bring the process online. Even after fulfilling the process requirements, the funds are rarely adequate. Stringent monitoring systems should be placed on benevolent funds’ distribution. Application process should be simplified and accessible to everyone. Delays in application processing should not be tolerated and if a claim is rejected, reasons should be shared with the applicant in writing.

- The ESSI programme, which is meant for the poor and low paid public and private sector employees, **excludes workers from agriculture and informal sectors.** The quality of services provided under ESSI health and education programmes need to be revisited. The high administrative costs need to be lowered through prudent process restructuring. There is also a need to improve advocacy of this programme as a large proportion of respondents had no knowledge of this facility.

- Under PDMA and PARRSA targeting efficiency, geographic coverage and ease of access is relatively better. The grievance redressal mechanism of these programmes is clearly documented. However, the support available has been termed inadequate to meet the needs of those in short-term crisis. The intervention is **contingent upon funding by development partners** and this can threaten the sustainability of programmes. Given importance of the two programmes, their financial sustainability should be ensured through mandatory endowment and enhancement of budgetary allocations. Financial support should be made realistic to the needs of grieved families and individuals.

- The BKPAP’s limited coverage needs to be revisited. On a number of instances, evidence was quoted regarding **violation of merit in the funds disbursement process.** The programme should be safeguarded from political interference. The support provided under the programme needs revision and may be linked with changing needs of beneficiaries.

- The interventions by the Department of Social Welfare and Women Development, is also marred by **low budgetary allocation.** Other than sarkari sarai, the uptake of services available under the programme is low, partially attributed to lengthy administrative procedures. Those with greater social capital and political connections are better able to access the benefits. The operations under this programme do not have a properly documented grievance
redressal mechanism. Since the budgetary allocations cannot be significantly improved in the short run, the government should have clear prioritization of the areas where funds provision should be adequate. These may include initiatives such as vocational trainings for women, and health and educational programmes. In the long run, the department should have its own stable and increasing endowment fund that can sustain developmental initiatives.

- Special initiatives of the Chief Minister (before 2013 general elections) have made impressive effects in terms of promoting education and temporary employment in the province. However, it has **limited outreach, inadequate financial support** to small investors, and **complex application process**. No documented grievance redressal mechanism was found for the Rozgar scheme. Ideally, such initiatives should be based upon research identifying skills and potential of the unemployed youth in the province, and the sectors where investment may be directed for employment and infrastructure development.

- The school feeding programme under WFP was limited in scope, and now it has been completely phased out. The cash for work programme is inadequate to cover a family’s food needs. Though WFP does carry out regular monitoring of its work, there is no formal grievance redressal mechanism in place at the agency.

- The scope of the stipends programme in its phase-II is now universal, and the ease of access has also been termed satisfactory. The key issue with the programme is that most of the funding has been derived from external sources. Under changed priorities of development partners, the sustainability of this programme will be difficult.

- At the start of the Afghan refugees programme, its targeting efficiency was good; however, amid a massive influx of refugees, scope of programme coverage remained somewhat small. The grievance redressal mechanism was weak.

The PTI government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has exhibited the intent to make social protection more comprehensive. The new leadership has recognized prevalence of poverty and expressed the resolve to take up the challenge, and address it through creating jobs and enabling ownership of assets to the poor.

Going forward the above-mentioned resolve will depend critically on the provincial government’s capacity for resource mobilization. Currently, most of the above-mentioned programmes are facing funds inadequacy which in turn is partially responsible for poor coverage in some cases. While approaching the development partners has been the usual resort, however, in the post 18th Amendment milieu, it is important that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government demonstrates an improved tax revenue collection in order to meet its social protection and human development needs. This effort should be supplemented by strengthening social protection governance mechanisms, including monitoring and evaluation framework and grievance redressal mechanisms.