

The Making of Benazir Income Support Program

*Kaiser Bengali**

Abstract

The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), introduced in 2008-09, is a unique cash support scheme for economically stressed families. Its uniqueness arises from several facets. The cash transfers are provided only to women aged over 18 years and have been ever married. It is unconditional and aimed at supplementing income as opposed to alleviating poverty. It was politically neutral, given that the facility to identify potential beneficiaries was extended to all parliamentarians, irrespective of party affiliation. A set of filters, applied electronically, ensured objectivity in beneficiary selection. Disbursement mechanism was automated to ensure minimal leakage.

This paper outlines the process of the preparatory work that went into designing BISP – the conceptual debates, the beneficiary identification and disbursement procedures, etc. – involving a combination of high quality research with political decision making. It also addresses the debates surrounding BISP, cites independent empirical studies that show that the parliamentarian-based beneficiary selection mechanism was efficient and equitable and did indeed cover the deserving, and also responds to the variety of criticisms.

Introduction

Cumulative food inflation in Pakistan during the decade ending 2007 had been about 90 per cent, which meant that the purchasing power of the poorest section of the population had almost halved. This was the gist of one of my presentations to Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed on the state of Pakistan's economy during one of my visits to Dubai in the latter half of 2007. Her response was to ask for a scheme to be devised that would mitigate the impact of inflation and compensate low income families for the erosion of their real income.

Tragic events did not allow her to proceed on her ideas; however, her aspiration did bear fruit. Following the general elections in March 2008, Pakistan Peoples Party Co-Chairman Asif Zardari formed a

* Dr Kaiser Bengali is a renowned Economist who has represented the Governments of Balochistan and Sindh in National Finance Commission.

small informal working group to formulate directions for economic policy. The group comprised Naveed Qamar, Shaukat Tareen, Salim Raza, Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Shahid Kardar and myself and some others who participated occasionally.

Following the formation of government, a meeting was called in May 2008 in the Prime Minister's Secretariat to discuss proposals for a social security scheme. The meeting was chaired by Finance Minister Naveed Qamar and attended, among others, by the Finance Secretary Farrukh Qayyum, Salman Faruqi, Shaukat Tareen, Saleem Raza, Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Shahid Kardar and myself.

The conceptual debates

Given that there did not exist any prior model in the country for launching a large-scale social security programme, discussions commenced on some very basic issues and ended up covering substantive conceptual questions. At the very outset, the PPP Co-Chairman expressly ruled that any benefits rolled out by the programme was to be directed exclusively at women.

Various options were discussed. I was in favour of in-kind assistance by revamping and strengthening Utility Stores to provide subsidized essential commodities for deserving families and submitted a detailed proposal to Finance Minister Naveed Qamar in this regard. However, opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of direct cash transfers, which was agreed upon.¹

At a subsequent meeting, an intense discussion ensued on the name to be accorded to the programme. One view saw the programme in terms of poverty alleviation, with which I strongly differed and pointed out the limits of cash transfers that needed to be recognized. I argued that:

- Poverty was a macro phenomenon and could not be expected to be reduced through micro measures. As such, cash transfers should be aimed at supplementing income, instead of reducing poverty.
- Poverty was too extensive and fiscal space too limited to cover all the poor.
- About 5 per cent of the bottom poor among the 'poorest of the poor' did not have permanent homes and addresses, as they were mobile – e.g., farm labour in rural areas and construction labour in urban areas. This section of the population is likely to be missed out in any

¹ The option of basing disbursement through the *Baitulmal* and *zakat* systems was also considered, but discarded.

data-based targeting scheme and would need other measures to be covered.

The case for placing the programme in terms of ‘income support’ was accepted and the name *Benazir Income Support Programme* was agreed upon and approved by the PPP Co-Chairman.

Another issue that led to intense discussions was about making the program conditional or unconditional. Initially, majority opinion was in favour of payments being made conditional – to enrolment of children. The political participants and myself were in favour of the unconditional option. The argument we made was that the education deficit was supply-driven and not demand-driven. Conditional grants were relevant to create demand for a public good, such as education. However, illiteracy as well as poverty were not suffered as a matter of choice. The causative factors were rooted in supply of appropriate educational facilities and employment opportunities. Finally, the decision was made in favour of unconditional payments.

The designing process

The task of designing the programme was assigned to me and, accordingly, a notification was issued in June 2008. I was provided a one-room office on the 3rd floor of Q Block in the Federal Secretariat and three young newly recruited graduates² were assigned to me. Additionally, there were two clerks, one peon and one driver. The three young graduates proved to be outstandingly competent; however, mention of the latter four is also important because their contribution to launching BISP was significant. The total size of the then BISP staff numbered 8.³

There were two main tasks: formulating an objective mechanism to identify beneficiaries and setting up modalities of disbursement. The first step with respect to targeting, i.e., identification of beneficiaries, was to search for available data on which to base the programme. The only available credible data with reasonable coverage was at NADRA. I met the then NADRA Chairman (Retired) Brigadier Saleem Moeen, who provided unlimited access to the remarkably detailed and professionally maintained CNIC database. We began to sort, classify and tabulate the data and one of the first revelations was that there were 24 million

² They were Amir Mitro, Naveed Akbar and Noor Rahman.

³ Naveed Qamar, Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Salman Faruqui and Qamar Zaman Kaira continued to provide strong support on day to day basis. The then Cabinet Secretary was an obstructionist throughout.

married women and 16 million married men. I shot off an email to the NADRA Chairman: *who are the rest of the 8 million men married to?*

Two days later, NADRA responded with the explanation that women tend not to acquire national identity cards, unless they need to – for government employment, passport, driving license, college admission, etc., – and it was the house-bound women who were without the cards and, thus, not on NADRA’s database. There followed a mammoth district by district analysis of CNIC possession and comparison with Census population data to identify districts where coverage was low. NADRA Chairman ordered deployment of mobile vans to the under-covered districts and about 13 million new cards were issued during the course of the year, with a vast majority of them being women. BISP was beginning to empower women even before its launching.

Targeting modality

Despite its extent and depth, NADRA database did not contain information relating to income or assets of cardholders. However, data on education levels was available and was explored. An exercise was carried out to identify families where *‘there were no adults above primary level of education’*. Incidentally, the numbers of such families turned out to be exorbitantly high and there remained the problem of rationing within this group.

With all the assorted research being carried out to understand the basis on which to structure the programme, a political decision to entrust parliamentarians with the task of identifying potential BISP beneficiaries threw me and my team into a crisis mode. We were faced with a real danger that the programme might fall prey to political patronage and, in the event, all the meticulous ‘research and analysis’ efforts at designing it appeared to be futile.

Exit, however, was not an option. A plan to create a firewall – disqualification filters – began to take shape and the NADRA database was again put to use. It had been discovered that NADRA possessed some key information on cardholders. Based on this information, a software written for NADRA that defined a set of filters or exclusion criteria to install a computer-based verification process. The filters excluded applications in cases where any member of the family was:

1. A serving employee in a government, semi-government or autonomous organisation, authority or department.
2. A retired employee of a government, semi-government or autonomous organisation, authority or department and drawing pension.

3. Possessed a passport.
4. Possessed a NICOP.
5. Held an account in a foreign bank.

The design that emerged was as follows:

- Ever-married women 18 years of age and above were to be beneficiaries.
- Possession of CNIC was mandatory.
- Forms submitted by an MNA/Senator on behalf of the applicant would be fed into the NADRA computer.
- The computer would read the CNIC number and check against selected variables.
- If the applicant was found to be a serving or retired government employee, possessing a passport or NICOP, holding an account in a foreign-owned bank, etc., the computer would reject the application.
- Accepted forms would be awarded a unique number⁴ and forwarded, electronically, to Accountant General Pakistan Revenues (AGPR), which would estimate the required amount and release the total amount to Pakistan Post.
- Pakistan Post would forward the required amounts to its regional offices, which would forward the amounts to local post offices for distribution to entitled families.

The design was tested and found to be workable. It was then presented at a high-level meeting, chaired by the President, who gave his assent. A number of designs of the BISP card were also presented and the President approved one of them. Two important directives were:

- (1) All parliamentarians, irrespective of party affiliation, were to be included in the programme, and
- (2) FATA, Azad Kashmir and Northern Areas (now Gilgit-Baltistan) were also to be covered.

An amount of Rs. 34 billion was allocated for the year 2008-09 and which was the second largest allocation in the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). Given the allocated budget, it was decided to make a cash transfer of Rs. 1,000 per month on a quarterly basis to identified recipients. The limitations were not lost sight of.

⁴ The unique numbering proved to be crucially useful. While more than two dozen MNAs and Senators from different political parties personally appreciated the programme, two legislators claimed that they had received only three boxes (or 6,000 forms) instead of four boxes, i.e., 2,000 forms short. They were asked to provide the numbers of the 6,000 forms, so that the 2,000 missing forms could be cancelled. The said legislators never reverted.

Despite the vast outlay, the amount was sufficient to cover only about one-sixth of the population or less than one-third of the population then below the poverty line. The sum of Rs. 1000 per month was also insufficient to impact poverty or enable families to graduate out of poverty. However, it amounted to a 20 per cent increase in purchasing power for a family earning Rs. 5,000 a month and could buy 22 days of *atta* in 2008 prices for a 6 member family. This proved to be highly significant to recipient families.

Each MNA and Senator were to receive 8,000 *numbered* forms, which were sent to them in four boxes of 2,000 forms each to the main post office of their respective constituency. Two copies of letters were dispatched to each MNA and Senator, one to their Islamabad address and the other to their constituency address. The letters specified in detail the conditions of acceptance, explicitly stating that if the conditions were not adhered to the application was likely to be rejected.⁵ It also asked for their four boxes to be collected from the principal post office in their district on the basis of official letter of authority. Additionally, phone calls were made to each MNA and Senator to inform them of the letter and the four boxes that had been dispatched.⁶

Disbursement modality

An important element in distribution was the separation of beneficiary selection and disbursement processes. There was no intermediary involvement and no human interaction. Two views prevailed with respect to disbursement modality. One was to disburse through banks and another was to disburse through the post office, with the former being favoured. I was tasked with meeting bank officials and produce a workable scheme. A meeting with Presidents and senior executives of all Pakistani banks was held in Karachi, courtesy the State Bank of Pakistan and the personal efforts of then National Bank of Pakistan President Ali Raza.

⁵ Nearly 40 per cent of the forms submitted by parliamentarians were rejected.

⁶ The mammoth task of verifying addresses and telephone numbers, preparing nearly 1,000 copies of letters, placing the letters in envelopes, addressing the envelopes, and delivering the envelopes to the post office was carried out by the 8-member team, including the four members of administrative staff, out of the one-room office. The nearly 450 phone calls were made by myself and the three members of the technical staff. That this exercise was carried out during Eid-ul-Fitr holidays is a tribute to the dedication of the entire team.

Data on location of bank branches was obtained from all the banks in the country and another mammoth analytical exercise was carried out. A district by district GIS mapping of bank branches was carried out and it was revealed that most of Balochistan, FATA, Northern Areas (now Gilgit-Baltistan), Chitral and Kohistan districts of then NWFP, and Tharparkar district of Sindh had a very thin geographical coverage of bank branches. A case study of a remote village in Zhob district of Balochistan revealed that it would cost a family Rs. 800 to obtain Rs. 1,000 from the bank branch in the nearest town.

Comparatively, there were post offices in every single village. Resultantly, it was decided to disburse through post offices till the reported banking technology of branchless banking was implemented in the country. A series of meetings with the Director General of Pakistan Post, Mian Mohammed Ahmed, and other officials followed to firm up the modalities of disbursement. An important aspect of the modalities was to create a mechanism, whereby delivery of payments to the designated house could be confirmed. An internal monitoring mechanism was created, whereby, parliamentarians could access their account using a dedicated password to verify receipt of payments to designated families.

The advantage with disbursement through post offices was that the amounts could be delivered at doorsteps, without any cost in time or money to recipients. This was important given the constraints relating to women's mobility, particularly in rural areas, and women's limited inclusion in the banking system.

Some claims have been made to link the BISP initiative with the IFI/donor-sponsored National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2007 and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme II (PRSP-II) 2009. This is incorrect. Except for Shahnaz Wazir Ali and myself, none of the political individuals driving the BISP agenda were even aware of the existence of the above strategy papers. And in any case, there is a graveyard of such strategy documents prepared at various points of time over the last half a century – few of which have seen any fruition. The credit for the epic programme goes entirely to the social democratic impulses of the PPP, the only political party in the country that empathizes with the poor.

The most creditable aspect of BISP was that it was an entirely a home-grown product and entirely indigenously designed, *without* any shadow of external conceptual or technical input. That it is being applauded across the world is a credit to Pakistan.

The first payments were rolled out in October 2008. It was hailed as the first step towards a comprehensive rights based social protection system, as opposed to a charity-oriented social protection programme, and a vanguard of the long-promised welfare state.

BOX

Ensuring that the cost of administering BISP is kept to a minimum was an important objective. I had a computer printout pasted on my office wall, which said *'Every 1000 rupees spent on ourselves is 1000 rupees taken away from some deserving family'*.

Since the programme was almost entirely automated, we had estimated that it could run with less than 300 officer rank staff – about 25 officers in the Head Office and 1-2 member monitoring teams in the districts.

There was pressure from various quarters, including from within the government, to place BISP advertisements in the print and electronic media. However, I had not made any allocation for advertisements in the budget; as I believed that BISP itself – as it began to benefit millions – would be sufficient advertisement.

Resultantly, BISP's administration cost was, till the end of 2008, just about one percent of the total programme budget.

Independent empirical evaluations of BISP

There have been few objective evaluations of BISP. However, two empirical analyses⁷ covering the period when targeting was through parliamentarians, have corroborated (1) the efficiency of targeting, confirming that over 96 per cent of BISP money orders were delivered and beneficiaries received payment and (2) that the beneficiaries were in fact poor.

The studies concluded that families receiving BISP support exhibited various aspects of vulnerability and were found to be typically:

⁷ Khan, S. and Sara Qutub, *The Benazir Income Support Programme and the Zakat Programme: A Political Economy Analysis of Gender in Pakistan*. Oxford Policy Management Briefing Notes (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2010) and Nayab, D. and Shujaat Farooq, 'Effectiveness of Cash Transfer Programmes for Household Welfare in Pakistan: The Case of the Benazir Income Support Programme', *Pakistan Development Review*, 53:1 (Spring 2014).

- female-headed
- had larger household size
- had a higher female-to-male ratio
- had a higher dependency ratio
- had a lower education-level of head of household
- had an unemployed head of household
- had a higher persons per room ratio
- had faced an unexpected shock in the five years preceding the survey
- and in rural areas
- were small landholders or sharecroppers
- had fewer animals

The studies also reported that BISP had indeed aided economically vulnerable families, helping them address immediate deprivation by meeting daily household needs, medical care and education, in that order.

Some spot interviews were carried out post-October 2008 by the BISP team in the Rawalpindi area corroborate the above finding. One woman said that her credit line with the local store had been frozen, because of the large amount due; BISP helped reopen her credit line and there is now food in the house. Another said that she was about to ask her daughter to drop out of college because she could not afford the transport cost; BISP helped her daughter to continue in college.

BISP has also contributed, by default, to women's empowerment. The first step towards empowerment was that over 8 million women were registered with NADRA and obtained CNICs – and were included in electoral rolls. This process proceeded even in conservative constituencies, including FATA, where initial lawmaker resistance was overcome. A very potent case of empowerment was indicated by a woman recipient who responded thus: 'Yes, my husband takes away the money as soon as I receive it, but he and everyone knows it comes in my name!'

The attack on BISP – 'and defence'

BISP came under attack almost immediately from two sources. One was the traditionally privileged classes, the secular and religious Right, who hold a visceral hatred of the PPP and the Bhutto name. This class includes civil society stalwarts – the NGO-crats. And the other was the IFI and donor community. Given that NGO-crats are depended on IFI and donor funding, there is a symbiotic relationship between the two. The attack was on symbolic, conceptual and on operational grounds.

The symbolic attack was aimed at the nomenclature of the programme that included the name 'Benazir'. The conceptual attack was

based on the conventional opposition to cash transfers in principle. It was – and continues to be – argued that cash transfers amount to creating ‘dependency’ and ‘beggary’ and that the resources can be used more effectively in setting up income-generating and skill development programmes.

There is an effective response to this view. One, numerous attempts have been made and many income-generating and skill development programmes have been launched over the last half a century, with considerable resources absorbed in administrative expenses – but little to show in terms of outcomes. And two, there is sufficient empirical evidence from developed countries to show that cash transfers boost consumer spending and, resultantly, spur investment and employment. The explanations are of no avail, however. The ideological blindfold is too strong for any argument *a la* rationality and evidence to penetrate.

The third and more concentrated line of attack was directed at the parliamentarian-based targeting and was propelled by the IFI/donor community and their local allies. The strength of so-called ‘empirical evidence’ to this line of attack is provided by the ‘incestuous-ness’ of IFI/donor operations. They commission (and finance) feasibility studies, which declare projects feasible for financing; they loan the finance for the projects; and they commission (and finance) evaluations of the said projects.

This line of attack was – and continues to be – entirely subjective and opinionated, based on hearsay and factually incorrect information, and bereft of evidence. The content and language of many of the ‘studies’ and media articles and comments tend to insinuate that politicians are inherently ‘evil’ and insensitive to the poverty and suffering of ‘others’ – a position that reflects and endorses the agenda of the anti-democratic Right, both secular and religious. In fact, no study has provided any objective evidence that BISP’s parliamentarian-based targeting approach led to wrongful selection of beneficiaries or was an instrument of political patronage.

In response thereof, it can be said that no system can be claimed to be perfect and there are bound to be exceptions. All parliamentarians can be expected to be partial to their supporters. With respect to BISP, however, all parliamentarians – government and opposition – had received equal number of forms and, given the fully automated processing, there could be no discrimination. Even within constituencies, strict discrimination is not possible, as there does not and cannot exist any geographical demarcation by party allegiance. Families can be divided along party lines, but it would not be possible to discriminate

between family members. Any party-based discrimination can, therefore, only be in the realm of exceptions.

The aspersions against aspects of BISP is found in research studies as well as in media articles and comments. Some of them are as follows.

The PPP government launched BISP to shore up its vote bank: The charge is indeed valid, as all political parties and governments everywhere adopt policies to draw political advantage at the next round of elections. The challenge is for such policies to benefit the population at large. BISP has certainly been of immense benefit, at large, to low income families, irrespective of political affiliations.

Identity card based targeting discriminated against the poor, particularly female poor, who are more prone to be without cards: It appears that the concerned researchers were not aware that this problem was identified at the very outset and a huge amount of effort and money was allocated to extend CNIC coverage in remote under-covered areas. Resultantly, there was a very significant expansion of CNIC coverage, particularly among women.

Targeting criteria relating to minimum monthly income of Rs. 6,000, pension or other welfare benefits, ownership of agricultural or residential land beyond a certain size, etc. was not enforceable: It appears that the concerned researchers were not aware that these were stated as overall goals of BISP, but never used as criterion by NADRA for processing forms submitted through parliamentarians.

Many PML-N parliamentarians returned BISP form: The fact is that not one form was returned. Following the commencement of BISP payments in October 2008, a group of legislators asked for the ‘women only’ condition to be changed, on the grounds that women in their area are *pardah*-observing and do not possess CNICs. The President declined and the legislators threatened to return all the forms. However, the President stood his ground and the dissenting legislators organized CNICs for all their women and all the 60,000 plus forms in question with dissenting parliamentarians were deposited with NADRA.

Politically influential confiscated amounts from the post office: Such statements are generalized and no evidence of systematic irregularities is provided. Pakistan has come a long way, socially and politically, from the

1950s and it is just not possible for any one, howsoever influential, to engage in large scale confiscations. Isolated cases may, of course, be possible.

Postal staff kept up half the amount: Such statements are generalized and no evidence of systematic irregularities is provided. Given that postmen are also residents of the same community in towns and villages, it is just not possible for anyone to pocket *half* the amount! *Bakshish* (of Rs. 50-100), either asked for or voluntary, is common; but is a part of our culture. Many recipients have said that they willingly gave *bakshish* to the postman, as ‘they are also poor’.

Weakness in terms of enabling recipient families to graduate out of poverty: This is a wholly impractical hope and was never a BISP objective. Such a move requires families to invest in their assets, e.g., land, livestock, education of their children, etc. However, those at the threshold of survival tend to spend all available resources on immediate needs and cannot afford to save for any future needs. In any case, Rs. 1000 rupees was too meagre an amount to expect families to save or invest any part of it.

A typical case of misrepresentation

One more recent newspaper article⁸ represents the general grain of thought and is full of factual inaccuracies. It states, *inter alia*:

... the programme has two primary goals: eradication of extreme poverty and women empowerment

... BISP provides Rs. 1,000 per month ... to every married woman in a household ...

... in the early days of the BISP roll-out, eligibility requirements remained opaque and gave authority to lawmakers to identify households within their constituencies as beneficiaries

... given reports of leakages and misappropriation of funds ...

... beneficiaries can self-identify and opt to receive BISP. Women can go to a local BISP office to verify their eligibility requirements, and if met, are then automatically registered in the system to receive transfers

... by modifying eligibility requirements and ensuring effective disbursement methods, the uptake of this programme increased dramatically, from 1.8 million in 2009 to 5.3 million in 2015

⁸ Amber Zuberi, ‘BISP cash transfer and empowerment’, *Express Tribune*, 26 April 2017.

All of the above are incorrect and, typical of others as well, exposes lack of specific knowledge and tendency to 'judgmentalize' based on hearsay: BISP was never conceived as a poverty reduction programme nor aimed at eradication of extreme poverty or protecting the poorest of the poor.

Given the fiscal constraints, the programme could only offer Rs. 1000 per month and could only cover one-third of the population below the poverty line. The programme was realistically modest enough to aim at only *supplementing* low incomes. Thus, the nomenclature 'Income Support'.

Again, given that CNIC possession was a mandatory requirement, it was realized that the poorest 5 per cent or so of the poor, in rural and urban areas, are largely homeless and mobile. Bereft of a permanent address, registration with NADRA is problematic. It was acknowledged that addressing the needs of the poorest of the poor could not be achieved through an electronic process and required a more direct approach.

BISP transfers are made to 'ever married women' not 'every married women'; i.e., BISP covered separated, divorced and widowed women as well.

The initial BISP eligibility criteria was neither opaque nor gave open-ended authority to lawmakers to identify households as beneficiaries. In the absence of any income-wise family data, lawmakers were the available legitimate source of identifying beneficiaries. However, BISP created a special software in NADRA, which listed a set of conditions for acceptability and over one-third of legislator-forwarded application forms were electronically rejected by NADRA on account of failure to meet specified conditions. In other words, NADRA's computers had the final say on beneficiary selection. And two empirical studies have concluded that the legislator-identified selection did, by and large, result in efficient identification.

As regards leakage and misappropriation, the number of verified non-delivery complaints in the first year were in single digits out of nearly 2 million beneficiaries and there has not been a single reported case of misappropriation to date.

There have been complaints that there are cases of households receiving more than one payments. There is a misperception here. BISP was designed to make payments to families and not to households. If all families in a household were identified as deserving, more than one payments to a household did occur – and legitimately so.

There is no provision for self-selection under the current beneficiary identification mode. The article assumes a level of naiveté in assuming that there would be no misreporting on the part of benefit-seeking women and no propensity to accept gratification on the part of local BISP officials to register women who turn up at their office. In any

case, with over half the population facing economic stress, automatic self-registration would lead to an explosion of numbers of beneficiaries and create a fiscal nightmare!

The programme uptake has risen from 1.8 million in 2009 to 5.3 million in 2015 because of donor funding and not because of the reasons cited.

Conclusion

It is not the objective of this paper to suggest that the parliamentarian-based targeting was better or worse than the survey-based targeting mechanism. Both methods have merits and demerits. It is the intention of this paper to show that the demonization of the parliamentarian-based targeting was misplaced and motivated by *mala fide* intentions.

While much has been said of the ‘evils’ of the former, the latter has been presented as the ultimate panacea. All empirical studies have shown that the parliamentarian-based targeting *did* cover the poor, the outreach was extensive and over 96 per cent of identified beneficiaries did receive the payments. At the same time, two telling instances with respect to the poverty survey need to be kept in mind.

1. An ex-chairman of a union council in southern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa called a meeting of village menfolk and coached them into how to respond to the questionnaire, i.e., under-state their asset ownership.
2. A landlord in upper Sindh prepared a list of potential beneficiaries and asked his nephew (who was head of the local NGO, which had received the sub-contract for carrying out the poverty survey) to complete their forms ‘accordingly’.

The parliamentarian-based targeting was the exclusion method, i.e., it excluded the non-poor on the basis of specified criteria, while the poverty survey-based targeting is the inclusion method, i.e., it includes the poor through an identification process. While both methods have their respective merits, targeting can be improved by combining the two and incorporating elements of both methods. In addition to the criteria already used, private vehicle ownership (of which electronically-recorded data is available with all provinces) can be added to exclude the non-poor.

The ‘*waseelas*’⁹ are an anachronism and must be abolished altogether. BISP can never be made an instrument to address mass poverty, illiteracy or ill-health. It should be limited to its original goal: income support to economically vulnerable families. Since BISP cannot address poverty, which is likely to keep rising, it should in the long run limit itself to cover chronically poor families that are *unable to earn a living*: the elderly, widows, and families with a handicapped person or protracted illness.

⁹ *Waseela-e-Rozgar, Waseela-e-Taleem, Waseela-e-Sehat, etc.*