

## **Covid-19: Evolving Normative Institutional Framework for Poverty Alleviation in Pakistan for Emergency Response**

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Abstract:

*The aim of this paper is to examine what kind of social policies and poverty alleviation strategies have been envisaged by Pakistan to deal with the emergency situation of lockdown during Covid-19 and its implications on the poor class, which makes 38 percent of Pakistan's population. The Government of Pakistan (GoP) is fully cognizant that the lockdown will affect at least over 100 million people in Pakistan, keeping in view of its daily wage-earning economic compulsion; there was all the rationale available for the policy intervention by the GoP for evolving a normative institutional framework. If there had not been any policy intervention, people would have died of hunger which could have been catastrophic for Pakistan. Therefore, this paper rationalizes the necessity for the GoP to formulate a framework for normative institution to achieve the objective of disbursement of emergency cash and how it will enable it to contribute in overarching mission.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Pakistan is among those countries of the world that is facing Covid-19 pandemic. The first case of Covid19 was reported in Pakistan on 26 February, 2020, in Karachi. However, gradually the number increased by the domestic careers amid international travelers from Iran and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) as pilgrims in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Currently Pakistan has 39,000 patients amid 834 deaths. The increasing numbers warranted the government response with a plan not only to cater the health facility but to meet the needs of all those people who would lose their jobs due to lock down situation. With rise of the cases, the government also faced the political pressure to take leading role in devising comprehensive policy to be followed by the provincial governments too. Therefore, the government came up with the systematic programme in different stages. The first course of action was to address the medical emergency and to shut down the entire international channels of travelling to stop spreading of the pandemic in Pakistan. Later on, Pakistan developed some new institutional set up to address the pandemic financial outcome which resulted in burdening people, as a result of the lockdown. Therefore, distribution of the cash programme was started under the Ehsaas Programme, previously known as Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). It is the biggest cash distribution programme of the government to mitigate the negative impact of the lockdown on the poor daily wage earners, labourers and other factory workers who lost their jobs. This paper would highlight the institutional set up with

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technological use in distributing this money and addressing the poverty in Pakistan, and how effective this programme would be to deal with the pandemic. Since Pakistan has multi-dimensional poverty and 37 percent of the people are living below the poverty lines. If the government does not come out with this intuitional set up of cash distribution, there would be another catastrophic situation of starvation. Therefore, keeping in view the unique feature of programme, this study highlights the policy response of GoP on the aspect of economic policy response to the risk of social order, which has been “a greater challenge” for Pakistan.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This paper is based on the conceptual framework of qualitative research method combined with document analysis. The analysis of the document has become a systematic approach for evaluating and reviewing the document both in print and electronic format (Bowen 2009). This paper analyzes government documents vis-à-vis Covid-19 government policy, legislative context along with the planning method, provides qualitative data for analyzing the new institutional approach of addressing poverty during this time.

### **Rationality of the Ehsaas and Emergency Cash disbursement**

#### **(Government of Pakistan, Poverty Alleviation Program)**

Poverty and economic inequality are derivative source of multi-faceted economic problems in Pakistan. Therefore, there was a strong rationale for a public policy intervention for setting up umbrella institutions to respond to poverty and Covid-19 emergency. Pakistan is a country of 200 million people in South Asian region which makes it 5<sup>th</sup> populous country in the world. Its 39 percent population lives in poverty (Planning commission of Pakistan, 2014). The subsisting level is maintained through the daily wage earning, working in mills, workshops, hotels, industry and informal industry. As Asad Umar stated, “around 18 million people could lose their jobs in the country due to ongoing lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of corona virus disease.” (“Lockdown may render,” 2020).

Consequently, the Pakistan policy response to Coronavirus was a greater challenge itself, keeping in view the economic compulsion of the people. However, since the cases of virus were increasing due to the travelling of people to bordering countries in early March, as Pakistan shares the borders with China and Iran directly. China is considered as an epicenter of coronavirus whereas Iran also shares border where many pilgrims visited and came back infected. Therefore, it became a compulsion for Pakistan to cease air, sea and land routes of travelling to other countries to limit the spread of Covid19 in Pakistan. It was not an easy decision politically also as there was raging political debate on the issue of lockdown. The provinces already opted to experiment with lockdowns. Therefore, government as a matter of fact faced very tough situation due to the political pressure of the provincial government, the centre faced a greater challenge to formulate a plan with nation-wide consensus, whereas the Prime Minister and policymakers at federal level has to face tough choices: “can Pakistan afford a de facto shutdown of economy already in recession?” It was the biggest question f for the government at federal level. Provincial Government of Sindh announced a strict shutdown in the province, this will have a direct impact on the country’s supply chains since Karachi, the capital of Sindh, is Pakistan’s main port for external trade. However, “a

nationwide shutdown would harm the most vulnerable in Pakistan – including those working in the country’s substantial informal economy, food insecure populations, and those living in slums outside the densely-populated urban centers.” Premier Imran Khan argued against any such lockdown, and thus, his government pursued different strategies for coronavirus containment. To answer this the federal government came up with a robust National Action Plan on Covid-19 (National Institute of Health (NIH), 2020).

### **SUPPORTIVE LITERATURE**

Given that COVID-19 is new in research literature, at the time of this write-up, the existing literature is mostly available on the medical aspect of the Covid-19. An article “Social and administrative issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan: better late than never,” has taken an account of whole literature written in the early time of Covid-19 specifically of Pakistan case (Anser, et al 2020). The researchers categorized the literature into different types such as health related issue and microfinance. The research related to issues Microfinance borrowers with regards to repayment of their loan, due to lockdown and reduction of economic activity in Pakistan (Malik, et al. 2020). Khan et al. (2020) conducted a survey as to how to take precautionary measures. Mukhtar (2020) analyzed the Psychological effect on medical staff during Covid.19. How it puts stress on medical staff exposed to the positive cases directly. There are host of studies such as Waris et al. (2020), “COVID-19 outbreak: current scenario of Pakistan. *New Microbes New Infections*,” Muhammad et al. (2020), “COVID-19 pandemic and precautionary measures in Pakistan. *Anesthesia, Pain Intense Care*,” Yusuf, (2020), “Cancer care in the time of COVID-19—a perspective from Pakistan”, available on the medical related problems due to COVID-19 which has discussed the negative impact of COVID on mental health and on cancer patients, how to contain and prevent it was also discussed in the literature. The article “Missed takes towards a pandemic of COVID-19? A systematic literature review of Coronavirus related diseases in Pakistan” by Haq, et al. (2020) compiled the database of the researches which deals with pandemic and other related diseases with the intent of helping government to combat with the pandemic in future. An article by Noreen et al., (2020b) “COVID-19 Outbreak in Pakistan; a Situational Analysis” discussed COVID-19 by using all the data available to describe the confirm COVID-19 cases, active cases and resultant deaths to analyze the overall situation in Pakistan during active COVID-19 period that is helpful in taking the precautionary measures for future policy making.

Malik, et al. (2020), discussed the Covid-19 to analyzed that how it posed the challenge for institutions who are serving the community directly for their livelihood. In this aspect they focused on the microfinance vis-à-vis households help. They found that since sales fell considerably during COVID-19 period in Pakistan, therefore, the loan repayment for the microfinance borrowers has become a critical challenge. They recommended that it would be good that COVID-19 had exposed the weakness of such microfinance institutions, therefore, the microfinance policy should be reformed in the light of weaknesses. Another article, “COVID-19 and Labor Law: Pakistan,” by Ahmad (2020), discussed economic aspects by focusing on the labour issues resultant to pandemic and lockdown. It has projected that there would be a massive disruption of jobs and employment up to 21 million people and reflected the apprehensions that government transfer of 12, 000 rupees per person would not be enough to take care of wage earner.

Noreen et. Al. (2020a) in their article “COVID-19 Pandemic and Pakistan; Limitations and Gaps”, analyzed the factors which hindered a general level of understanding of awareness in adopting social distance and following SOPs in addition to dense population which caused transmission of virus. They proposed on the “The three-pronged approach of trace, test and treat needs to be aggressively implemented to halt the community transmission leading to exponential increases in cases.” Keeping in view the research volume on COVID-19 pandemic, these referred all are valuable studies and certainly have supported government in consolidation of the analysis and identifying issues particularly in the field of medical. However, gap is found regarding the research on institutional preparation of the government of Pakistan and its policy towards dealing with this sudden pandemic of COVID 19, the resource allocation of the government to combat the issue and to what will be the outcome. It will further help in improving in the policy making.

### **Pakistan National Action Plan for Covid-19: Policy Framework and Analysis**

At the end of February 2020, the cases of Coronavirus were reported in Pakistan, which was taken as imported virus from Iran and not a local career was reported. However, gradually by the time 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Corona positive cases reached to 1,547 in numbers, combined in four provinces. Total 14 deaths were reported till that time. Further importation of virus risk was very high, amid local transmission of the virus. Therefore, National Coordination Committee (NCC) met to devise policy response for the Covid-19. GoP took “the emergency measures to contain the transmission of COVID in Pakistan.” The Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (MONHSRC) played the leading role and developed a National Action Plan for Preparedness and Response to COVID-19 (NAPPRC). It also devised a national coordination mechanism for the COVID response within the framework of NAPPRC. NCC was constituted by the Prime Minister to look after the policy response on daily basis. The Prime Minister chairs the NCC meetings and all critical decisions like lockdown or easing in the lockdown are determined by him. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was given the key role to “reach out to people and work as operational agency of the government to respond Covid-19.” Pakistan National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF) approved a grant of \$50 million (PKR 7,899m) to supplement GOP’s response to Covid-19 (NDRMF, 2020). This grant was essential for provision of “the medical product, Testing kits, Viral RNA Extraction Kits, Mobile X-ray machines, Clinical ICU Ventilators, Syringe Pumps, N 95 Masks, Thermal Guns & Scanners.” The NDMA and NDRMF worked with closer coordination with leading Ministry i.e. MONHSRC. The medical supplies were also very big challenge in this extraordinary time. Therefore, the NDMA was given responsibility to buy medical supplies. GoP announced PKR 150 billion for poor families; PKR 100 billion for export industry and PKR 100 billion for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (National Disaster Management Authority [NDMA], 2020).

NDMA was established after catastrophic earthquake in 2005 in Pakistan. Though its role was not objectified much during that time, however the government has now decided to use the capacity and mobile resources through NMDA as an institutional response of COVID-19, because Pakistan’s institutional capacity is already much deteriorated. NDMA was acquiring the testing facility with the increasing capacity every day and presenting situational analysis on daily basis to the government of Pakistan and to the media for the awareness of general masses. From the late March

2020 onwards Pakistan is in containment phase. The situation report of Covid-19 on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, was presented to Prime Minister by NDMA which shows some highlights of the preparedness and response policy (NDMA, 2020).

The preparedness of health care, reflects the dealing with quarantine, isolation centers, in addition to available facility at hospital, the government tried to turn big hotels and University hostels, trains (Ishtiaq, 2020) bed into isolation centers to cater the need of emergency. The NDMA presented the summary of this preparedness to the Prime Minister, which shows availability of the facility region wise including Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The health opportunity in Pakistan already portrays a dismal picture where one doctor is available for every 6,325 people, that shows the inappropriate ratio of doctors and patients in Pakistan. On the other side, the risk of the virus is so high that it necessitates strong preparedness by the government. As reported by Shabbir, “out of the hundreds who visit the emergency of public hospitals every day, only 40% are serious cases. The remaining are non-emergency (OPD) cases which unnecessarily overcrowd emergency rooms in a time when anyone could be a Covid-19 carrier” (2020).

Keeping this in view in mind, at the end of March, government decided to implement complete lockdown, which was, in fact, not an option in the given socio-economic conditions of Pakistan. But since the health care was not adequate and social distancing campaigns in the society like Pakistan has not generated the expected response; the patients, who were coming to hospitals, were not observing the social distancing in hospitals, which was another critical issue for medical care, as Pakistan has still not entered in the online medical care system, created myriad challenges for the government. By the end of March, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Pakistan rose to 1865. The rate of mortality in just 24 hours was the highest in numbers with 7 deaths.” Increase of 240 new cases in a single day was also reported (Shabbir, 2020). The Emergency hospital with 300 beds was set up on train coaches to meet the rising number of cases. More doctors and paramedics were hired by the government to deal with the rising number of cases (Government of Pakistan, n.d.). On 31<sup>st</sup> March, the number of Covid-19 tests conducted were 14,658, confirmed cases were 1865 and already there were 25 deaths. A complete lockdown was however a very tough decision to be taken, in the beginning of April, government could not come up with a unanimous decision for the lockdown in whole country. Provincial government and political leaders were demanding one clear decision as a signal from the Prime Minister for lock down to be followed by provinces. Sindh government showed kind of seriousness, in imposing lockdown to get the travel of the virus slower. The provincial governments showed concern over lack of clarity in decision making of complete or partial lock down by the federal government.

Pakistan’s political leadership remained divided on the issue of lockdown. Sindh government was the first to take prompt action for a complete lockdown, however, still they were looking at Prime Minister for further roadmap to be followed for future. Eventually the federal government also moved towards complete lockdown, after much confrontation from different parties particularly Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) which runs government in Sindh Province. There was a clear divide in Federal-Provincial regarding lockdown on health matter (“Sindh-center tension,” 2020), that shows some flaws rooted in administrative structure and institutional response.

Structural changes of governance and decentralization were brought in as an outcome of 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, also posed as an immense challenge for national response from federal government. After the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in constitution, the healthcare has become the responsibility of the provinces, as a result of decentralization through the constitutional amendment, whereas provinces plea was that it is the federal government who holds the responsibility of inter-provincial coordination on health policy and to regulate health system overall nationwide. During Covid-19 this responsibility expanded to federal government such as managing borders, “financial management as an ongoing economic recession and austerity-driven fiscal policy have complicated the provincial government as well as federal government’s capacity to respond” (“Sindh-center tension,” 2020). Therefore, it was high time for the federal government to come up with an institutional response towards Covid-19 with holistic approach. In this regards, there seems to be some disorganization and denial of the severity by the federal government, as the federal government even failed to call the meeting of Council of Common Interest (CCI) which is mandated with interprovincial harmony. During all this time the response of the federal government was to downplay the crises, provincial government particularly Sindh kept on accusing federal government for mismanaging the crisis, as Prime Minister in his public addresses during this time, showed deep concern of poor. In late March, Imran Khan in public address stated that “If we shut down the cities ... we will save them from corona at one end, but they will die from hunger on the other side” (“Millions would have starved,” 2020). Such concern of course was not out of place, but his denouncement of the complete lockdown came under severe criticism by the opposition parties as well as mounting pressure from medical practitioners and public.

Under such a compulsion, Prime Minister Imran Khan gradually accepted the severity of the crises and came up with a more practical approach to deal with the crises at the federal level and took a leadership role. However, with the surge of Corona cases daily basis as a result of local transition, coupled with political pressure, Prime Minister Imran Khan was left with no choice but to put the lock down for two weeks on April 1, 2020. It was extended for further two weeks on April 15, 2020 which was actually retaliated by the business community as well as the general daily wage workers. This economic shutdown could produce a humanitarian disaster when millions of daily wage earners go back home empty handed due to shutdown of businesses.

### **Emergency Cash Program through Ehsaas Program-Pakistan Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division: Critical Appraisal**

The lockdown period gave some breathing period to build the institutional capacity to develop mechanism to address the poverty, contact tracing and bridging the gap between federal and provincial governments to cope with Covid-19. The slow pace of the response was based on Pakistan’s false hope that the coronavirus would not spread in Pakistan. As it came to Pakistan much later than its neighbouring countries, therefore, Pakistan was not expecting to reach to the plateau. Now when the number increased in end of May 2020, the official update on coronavirus stated that 69,496 were confirmed cases, whereas deaths rate reached to 1,483 and whereas per day a whopping 88 deaths were reported. Though now Pakistan has developed its testing capacity but still in terms of ranks it stays at 136<sup>th</sup> in number of testing. A sharp increase in numbers of patients as well as in fatality rate unfortunately shows the broken healthcare

infrastructure. The local transmission of the virus was also a risk as people must go out of house to get livelihood, during lockdown and post-lockdown risk projection was also high. Eventually, government was left with no other option but to take immediate action and devise mechanism to mitigate economic effect keeping in view the economic realities.

Economic preparedness for poverty alleviation required Pakistan to develop the normative framework and institutional arrangements to deal with the unprecedented threat posed by the outbreak of Covid-19. Such institutional setup emerged for distribution of the cash to mitigate the harsh outcome of Covid-19 and to avoid another economic catastrophe. A new normative framework was essential to conceive to fight Covid-19 for making consensus-based decisions of poverty alleviation with a coherent approach to deal with poor especially. This framework would enhance the effectiveness at decision-making and at the execution and implementation level. The mobilization of the coordinated efforts with other developmental organization and poverty alleviation Fund's etc. can herald new opportunities in a meaningful and long-lasting way.

Government of Pakistan conceived "Ehsaas program to create a "welfare state" by countering elite capture, to ensure financial inclusion and digital services access and overcoming financial barriers to accessing health and post-secondary education. The programme is for the extreme poor, orphans, widows, the homeless, the disabled, those who risk medical impoverishment, for the jobless, for poor farmers, for labourers, for the sick and undernourished; for students from low-income backgrounds and for poor women and elderly citizens. This plan is also about lifting lagging areas where poverty is higher (Ehsaas Program, n.d).

On 1<sup>st</sup> of April the GoP unveiled a PKR 1.13 trillion (\$6.76 billion) rescue and stimulus package with a good balance between providing direct assistance to the vulnerable and protecting industry and businesses" (Poverty Alleviation and Safety Division, n.d.). However, the success of the expectations rest in the implementation of the programme as it is already a challenge to keep track of those wage workers. This financial help of Rupee 12,000 to one family was to be given with the intention that they could buy ration for subsistence with total budget of Rs. 144 billion. The new institutional setup was strengthening by adoption of technological support to ensure the programme implementation and to ensure social distancing while execution the activities.

### **The SMS campaign could be an entry point to identify these beneficiaries**

To check eligibility for emergency cash, people could send their CNIC numbers to 8171 till April 19, 2020. For the ease of applicants, Emergency Cash application/registration web-portal was also developed to check eligibility. Those who were being asked to contact District Administration (through SMS) could register themselves at the application/registration web-portal without visiting the office till April 19, 2020" (Ehsaas Programme, n.d.).

### **An awareness campaign created through technology**

To make this institution of emergency cash distribution, the Ehsaas programme came up with some quite innovative smart solutions to create awareness in masses, for example, what are the steps which were to be taken by the individuals in the society to avoid Coronavirus and mitigate the risks. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) along with Telephone industry installed ringtone

with a message of basic protocol to avoid the virus and how to maintain distance and cleaning with sanitizer. In this way the government managed to reach to the maximum individual of mobile users as Pakistan has 161.183 million mobile users, every ring would bell with message first to the dialing person that how remain safe and then call was being forwarded.

The SMS alert services was provided by the PTA in explaining and educating people how to wash hands and maintain distancing as precautionary measure to contain virus. Mobile services and Apps were devised and used for reported case alert also. The tracking system alert says: "It has been observed that you may have come in contact with a confirmed coronavirus case in the last 14 days. You are, therefore, requested to take necessary precautionary measures by self-quarantine" (Jahangir, 2020). This alert SMS dully authorized legally by the PTA. These alerts, advise the person to visit a nearby health facility in case of developing symptoms like fever, cough, difficulty in breathing or body aches. The locations are found where the patient have possibly visited during last 14 days and the record of the recent movement has to be notified on other phones which have been in contact with the patient. Tania Aidrus, head of Digital Pakistan at PTA told that "To assist the health ministry in identifying maximum people at risk, we are using all possible types of data sources with the help of telecom providers and PTA" (Jahangir, 2020). Though, as such it was not a new phenomenon, in different countries like Taiwan, Singapore, etc. the tracking facility has been used but given the socio-economic conditions of Pakistan and lack of awareness of people, Pakistan has not entered in the digital operations as such. However, this Covid-19 has been taken as an opportunity to adopt technology to help contain the virus. Other technologies have also been used such as GPS sensors to get into phones.

Similarly, an SMS campaign for tracking the person with the real beneficiary of money during lockdown was also devised. The website of the concerned institutions placed all the details in national language Urdu and also in English, to send an SMS on a given number, to check the eligibility from the information of data base of National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) which launched mobile registration vans in order to fast-track and speed up the verification process for the Ehsaas Programme aimed at providing financial aid to people affected by the coronavirus lockdown (Gulrez, 2020).

### **There is a Web-portal for Registration**

The Ehsaas Emergency Cash web-portal for application/registration could be accessed till April 19, 2020. The Ehsaas Programme also announced a helpline for the queries and complaints from the people who wanted to apply for the emergency cash distribution. Media also developed explanatory video to help Ehsaas programme which was placed on the website for the people who had access to watch could help themselves without much difficulties. This included the instructional video on Ehsaas Emergency Cash Registrations for the people to learn real time distribution of money. This mechanism of disbursement included that the programme would deliver only one-time cash to people with the dire need of cash to maintain their substance level for four months. It is around \$ 75 for this whole period, which is in fact a very meager amount and it is not enough for the maintenance of day to day life. And millions have already registered by the time assessment was started. But this is considered to be the largest programme of social protection interventions of the



GoP since its inception. GoP developed a kind of rule based rational to determine the eligibility through their identity card and the details which were provided by NADRA. The Ehsaas programme also assessed on the basis of their property ownership, any other sources of income, their billing and taxes etc. as a predetermined eligibility criterion. After receiving the confirmation SMS by Ehsaas office, payment was enabled through biometric cash transfer programme.

Mostly the cash was delivered to the female of the family. This distribution, while mostly retailers were closed, the bank staff was off, mostly branches were close and the scale of the disbursement was larger in emergency, was an unprecedented disbursement by Ehsaas programme which was not been witnessed earlier. The institutional set up of Ehsaas for poverty elevation managed in a way that there should not be long queue of people as it would reduce the chances of social distancing.

The limitation of the institutions was many including liquidity, as Pakistan was already passing through its stabilization period in year 2020 after receiving the IMF loan in 2019. The cyber security, updating of record for disbursement of amounts, and help line overloading were also having issues which Ehsaas programme was able to manage in an unprecedented manner.

The low level of digital literacy to understand the guidelines was the main issue. Transportation which was closed due to lockdown was another issue, as some people had to travel to receive cash points. Till May 19, total amount of Rs.104.91 billion was distributed among 8,619,142 individuals since the beginning of the programme on April 09 and it was announced on April 1, 2020 (“Rs. 104.917b disbursed,” 2020). In just about two weeks or so “as many as 3.4 million applications had been received via Ehsaas Labor Portal since the prime minister launched it on May 2” (“Aftermath of coronavirus,” 2020). Sania Nishtar, in charge of the Emergency cash disbursement programme under Ehsaas, stated that this program has been approved for helping 10 million people in cash in the wake of Covid-19 and that daily wage earners were the priority of this cash programme (“Rs12,000 to be,” 2020). To manage this programme as an institution was quite challenging for government and Ehsaas programme management also. By giving the comparison and the ground realities of dealing with the Coronavirus from other countries, Prime Minister stressed that “when China enforced a lockdown, it delivered food to people's homes” But Pakistan did not possess “any such infrastructure” For this purpose, he announced setting up a “special youth force” which “will deliver food and other necessities to people” (“Youth force ‘Corona,” 2020). Keeping this in view that liquidity would be a critical issue, Prime Minister opened an account in the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and appealed through a broadcast on electronic media to the overseas Pakistanis, this was also supported by telethon long transmission of Prime Minister for collecting funds from the people within the country and overseas for funds to be deposited in Prime Minister Covid-19 Pandemic Relief fund.

### **Safeguarding the food security**

Since cash disbursement is related to ensure the food security, however to mitigate the overall negative impact of the Covid-19 on economy and economic burden on the consumers, government got a good cushion in the decreasing oil price internationally. Government reduced oil price in Pakistan and intended to abolish taxes on food items temporarily. To ease the financial situation

payment of the utility's bills was deferred by the government for three months for the domestic consumers. Government has announced to subsidize the items in the utility stores of Pakistan. The Utility Stores Corporation of Pakistan (USCP) is the state-owned enterprise which has its operations in whole of the country with the provision of basic food items, on a lower price than the open market. During this Covid-19 time, GoP enabled utility stores non-stop food supply to people. It allocated Rs.50 billion (\$ 298.94 Million) "for utility stores to make sure that supply of food" remain constant (Shaikh, 2020). NDMA too took a lead role in relief activities, and was mandated to coordinate and monitor the implementation of national policies, guidelines and strategies on disaster management" (NDMA, 2016, 4). It tasked to procure stockpile and "keep digital inventory and manage a proper distribution to the federal and provincial government under the guidance of afford mention coordination committee" (National Institute of Health (NIH) 2020, p.24). Not only the provision of food was made sure but NDMA was also instrumental in testing facility and managing kits and related medical facility during COVID also. NDMA also announced that the capacity of testing of virus would be enhanced by 40,000 per day. It managed the imports of kits from China and received consignment of 18 tones medical equipment that enhanced Pakistan's daily testing capacity up to 40000. ("Pakistan to attain," 2020).

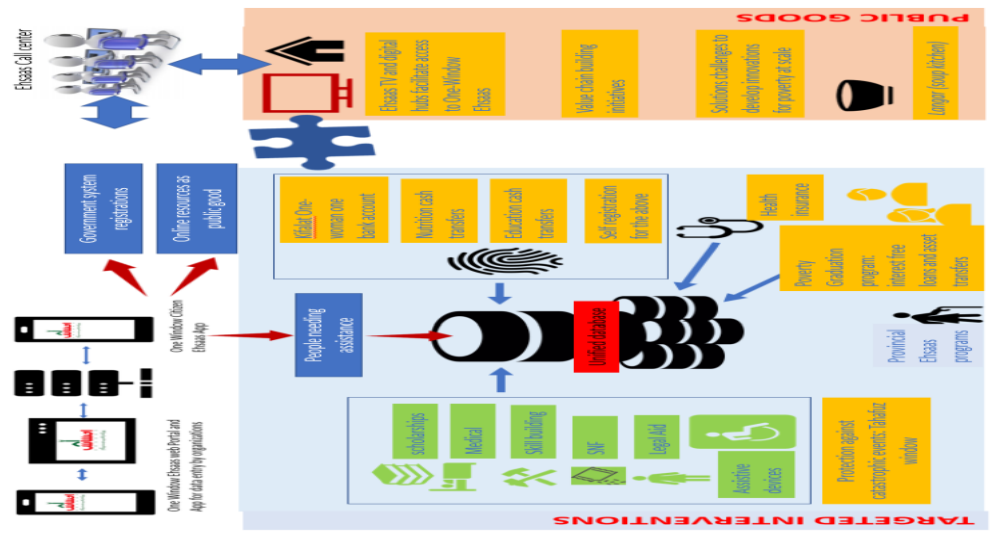
In addition to the above measures, GoP "took some other steps to ease the economic situation amid Covid-19 pandemic." SBP announced economic "refinance facility to encourage new investments" and subsidized loans on zero mark-up for the manufacture sector ("Pakistan to attain," 2020). However, Pakistan's main concern remained the balancing "public health needs with the strain COVID-19 places on its already vulnerable economy. GoP's efforts to strengthen the institution of emergency cash during Covid-19" was hailed at the international forums including the World Economic Forum. Its efforts were highlighted in the American News Channel, CNN which reported that Pakistan was "delivering one-off cash payments of about \$70 each to its 12 million poverty-stricken families, or roughly 80 million individuals, to alleviate the impact of the coronavirus-related economic shutdown in the country" (Gul, 2020).

### **Analysis**

All the political parties in Pakistan, at least in their election manifestoes, promise to respond to the basic necessities of Pakistan, to alleviate poverty and to have proper legislation in the Assembly. Presently Ehsaas program appeared an institution to deal with the poverty issues comprehensively; otherwise, Pakistan as such did not have a social protection system to do deal with poor, jobless or small credit etc. under one umbrella institutions. Regarding legislation of such institution, May and Bridger explained that though "the approaches, obstacles, and practices of judgment are some simple values that respond universally, rather than individually for such institutions. Cultural and systemic change at policy and practice levels is very important to develop an inclusive culture" (2010). In Pakistan many institutions were invoked in the past also but could not address the need of the poor particularly in such a difficult time , NGOs and individual level efforts of social welfare work has been carried out and they all operated in distant manner. As such no one umbrella institution was available as the Ehsaas program did during this time. Pakistan used the opportunity of this time to develop its institutional capacity amid COVID-19. The social protection policies could be best tested in difficult times as nation passed through COVID, and also the ground support

provided by the NDMA, World Bank, China and central command and control cell of GoP. Outreaching of Ehsaas emergency cash in villages and rural area was the main target as the jobless labourers went back to villages due to closure of all business in the cities, and reaching to rural areas and giving awareness to all those who are mostly illiterate was another test of Ehsaas program. This institution significantly conceptualized the integration of social policies in the development context and poverty reduction strategies. Following figure explain the integrated approach of the Ehsaas institution to work as one window which will be widely deployed in outreach of its offices in the rest of the country (Poverty Alleviation and Safety Division, 2020).

ONE WINDOW OPERATION AT THE EHSAAZ PROGRAM



Looking at the above diagram of Ehsaas Pakistan, institutional structures has been constructed on four and is trying to work together with many other welfare organization in order to provide future protection to the poor as under:

- Pillar-1: Addressing elite capture and strengthening governance, selected key interventions
- Pillar -II: Jobs and livelihoods
- Pillar-III: Human Capital Development: selected key interventions
- Pillar-IV: Jobs and livelihoods

According to a report around 25 million workers are either daily wagers or self-employed, supporting overall 25 million families, or around 120-150 million people, who were effected due to Covid, and it was a huge number out of 212 million (Poverty Alleviation and Safety Division, 2020). Pakistan government made a crucial decision to disburse cash to poor people. The severe challenges exposed the inadequacies of the institutional capacities to respond poverty, and social protection and health care also. Due to these vulnerabilities, GoP came up with policy intervention, and took enough measures to mitigate the economic loss and feed people to avoid other

catastrophic situation in Pakistan due to hunger. These efforts required a holistic approach by GoP to engage various ministries with the Ehsaas program, daily coordination meetings to evaluate standard operating procedures (SOPs) in real-time, SBP and above all the Covid-19 command and control center. Broadly, these policy actions suggested “a normative institutional framework” for Ehsaas Program. The plan proposes to “shift article 38(d) from the ‘Principles of Policy’ section of the Constitution into the ‘Fundamental Rights’ section, recognizing the State’s welfare responsibility to provide its citizens with certain basic needs” (NIH, 2020). The Ehsaas institutions have been strengthened as discussed above by the government policy intervention, to help the economic hardship by the vulnerable due to corona virus. The Ehsaas, as an institution under the Ehsaas program, distributed a total amount of more than Rs.112,1608000 among 9220763 people across the country. This relief and distribution is the biggest relief campaign in country’s history.

### **CONCLUSION**

Therefore, these institutions of Ehsaas represents the cognizance of a dual reality of the government that the poor would be the most affected by Covid-19 and high inflation would surge as a result of stabilization program, amid IMF program for Pakistan. Secondly, since Pakistan’s major strength is the youth of Pakistan, which is 60% of country’s population, it will become liability to economic growth if not capacitate to get human capital of Pakistan.

The success of Ehsaas Program to alleviate poverty, it has to deal with structural changes such as coordination with all the stake holders. For instances, who are their target groups, which are the implementing agencies and access of information they need to execute.

Transparency remains critical issue of Ehsaas as post-18<sup>th</sup> amendment, government coordination between federal and provincial programme has to be assured. The coordination between provincial governments as well as local government for distribution of resources and power, can pose serious challenges in implementation of the programme. Among many others challenges, the integration with the new dimension of poverty, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where due to terrorism and then military operations, all the social infrastructure is destroyed, Ehsaas programme has to tailor their programmes to address the requirement of the poor in these areas. The success of Ehsaas programme also depends on the population control as addressing poverty without controlling the number of people leading towards poverty is an essential requirement. Otherwise, all the development will be eaten up for growing numbers of the poor people.

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