



## Mr. Qazi Azmat Isa

Mr. Isa is the Chief Executive of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) with 25 years of experience in the development sector.

### 01 **Pakistan Poverty Alleviation fund (PPAF) provides cross-cutting research on poverty. What is your take on poverty that is PPAF's narrative, as well?**

Research is fundamental to how PPAF works; our research function identifies direction, allows us to ensure that we remain the true path, and as required to recalibrate. Over time we have a body of cross-cutting research that has allowed us to refine our focus, our prioritized regions and programmatic components that will have the greatest impact in eliminating poverty.

I strongly believe that in Pakistan, there is no shortage of theories of poverty alleviation or even resources, which if targeted correctly could improve the lives of the millions who live in poverty. The real limitation is in our understanding of poverty. Since we started working to alleviate poverty, the measure of poverty has changed from basic income poverty to a multidimensional index. The real issue, I feel, is a poverty of the mind that, above all, derails Pakistan's attempt at understanding poverty, let alone alleviating it.

### 02 **There are variant ways to define poverty; monetary poverty, health poverty, educational poverty, and PIDE is recently working on environmental poverty. Along what axis do you think poverty exists in Pakistan?**

I am sitting in Islamabad; I possess resources which the majority of our people don't have access to. From this vantage point, I don't think my experiences have equipped me to give an adequate answer to the myriad layers of poverty. I think the best way to explore the nuances of poverty is to ask the people themselves and you will receive such incredible responses; such as I am poor because I don't have social capital or there isn't anyone I can speak to when I feel lonely.

Restricting poverty to mere economic measures is conceptually limiting. Poverty to me is the poverty of being alone, poverty of being deprived, poverty of being excluded, and poverty of lack of voice. Our policy narrative is oblivious of these nuances. More than defining how deprivation of voice, choice, and freedom affects people, we are misconstruing poverty by only constricting it to the economic measure. These people can't get their voices to the decision makers. Limiting definitions to IMF and World Bank standards is misconstruing. Interestingly, we all know what the core issue is.

### 03 **PIDE has recently conducted a book launch webinar on the evolution of growth in China. The takeaway of the book is the importance of ethics in order to create a normative order for progress be economic or non-economic or both. What is your opinion?**

Yes, the Confucius ethics have been instrumental in designing and re-affirming growth and progress in China. The importance of work ethic, mutual respect, communal learning, and help have defined self-reliant progress in China. PPAF has been putting in concerted efforts to broaden the dimensions of poverty defined along both economic and non-economic indicators. Our recent endeavor about visualization of geography of poverty has focused on spatial poverty in Pakistan

defined in terms of 27 different indicators of economic and human development. What we have found is that in Balochistan people described themselves poor due to sense of deprivation and exclusion. Have we been able to articulate this feeling of being deprived and excluded in our policy and academic debates?

**04 PIDE research also shows that most of the areas in rural Sindh and Balochistan don't have the washroom facility even in Masjids and those areas are in the closer proximity of the wealth generating areas. True?**

This is a frightening phenomenon, where you have the richest and the poorest living side by side. The rich have become oblivious to the sufferings of the poor. Mapping of the poor in different Tehsils, identifying their causes of poverty, and framing interventions based on their poverty narratives is mandatory. The change has to come from within, from within each of us, but credible research is the first step towards bringing these issues to light, reminding people that inequity exists and we have to do our best to improve the lives of all our people.

**05 How do you view PPAF's role as a think tank working on poverty alleviation research?**

Building the evidence around the most effective approach to poverty alleviation is one of PPAF's biggest priorities. We invest resources in conducting in-depth research of the highest quality to generate ideas that improve the efficiency and efficacy of our programmes and do this by linking up with academia, research institutes and global experts. Generating credible evidence is one aspect of our role, the other equally important one is to contribute to the national narrative by sharing our findings and advocating for pro-poor policies. Our research stems from our own programmes and the practical realities of development as opposed to theoretical constructs – in that while we generate evidence and posit the narrative, we function as the national apex for poverty alleviation not just a think tank.

**06 Given Pakistan's challenging past in alleviating poverty, how successful has the State intervention been in attempts at poverty alleviation? What is your take on steps undertaken by the current government?**

While Pakistan faces challenges in alleviating poverty, it is important to recognize that our definition of poverty has evolved over the years and we did successfully reduce income poverty to single digits. Since then, we have expanded how we asset poverty to include access to fundamentals such as living standards, asset ownership, health and education and today we are striving to address the incidence and intensity of multidimensional poverty.

The current government's Ehsaas program centers on tapping whole-of-government multi-sectoral collaboration for solutions; ensuring joint federal-provincial leadership; and mainstreaming the role of the private sector through an approach which will provide a level playing field on the one hand and foster locally-relevant innovation on the other, to create jobs and promote livelihoods. PPAF supports the Government's social protection programme by providing a poverty graduation approach for the poorest households in over 1,600 of the 6,000 Union Councils in the country through various programmes funded by donors such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Italian Development Corporation, the Government of Pakistan and others.

**07 How do you view social policies on poverty in Pakistan?**

In Pakistan's context, social protection means providing a safety net to the poorest households, those that earn less than Rs. 10,000 per month. The safety net can take the form of pure cash transfers (unconditional cash transfers) or cash with a caveat that it be spent on certain goods/services (such as health and education). Social protection can also extend to providing benefits such as vouchers that provide access to medical treatment or health insurance.

*Inclusion and correct targeting makes for a good social protection programme:*

Inclusion of the poorest households especially those who may not be easily identified (women headed households, minorities, persons with disabilities) and are usually not visible in the mainstream. Providing such households with cash and/or benefits has substantial impact on their ability to survive.

## **08 What is the role of civil society in poverty alleviation in Pakistan?**

Where poverty is so pervasive and along so many dimensions, each and every one of us has a role to play. Civil society is an intrinsic part of how we reach the communities that we work with.

PPAF programmes are implemented through non-governmental partner organizations that follow a community-led, demand-driven approach. Our partners are from civil society and their commitment to their communities leads to much greater social cohesion and inclusion than could be achieved otherwise.