

Poverty alleviation in Pakistan, A challenge for Pakistani education system

A review of poverty alleviation policies

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Abstract

*Pakistan is a developing country where a large portion of the population is poor and illiterate. Education is the basic ingredient of socioeconomic development and the most effective and efficient mean of poverty alleviation. The developed countries succeeded to alleviate poverty by mean of an effective education system. The main objective of this paper was to study the poverty alleviation efforts in Pakistan with respect to education. This study reviewed poverty alleviation documents. It was an effort to look deeper into the education system of Pakistan to sought out ways to address the challenges of prevailing poverty in Pakistan. It is an effort to explore the impact of education on poverty. It was found that the poverty alleviation papers and policies were documented and presented ideally but were not implemented properly, the education system was not linked with poverty alleviation strategies. The students were prepared for theoretical and white-collar jobs which were not available for graduates of education system. The education system of Pakistan has not succeeded to meet the job market demands. The technical and vocational education was not given due attention. It is recommended to revisit the education and poverty alleviation policies to meet the challenge of poverty and to uplift the economic status of Pakistan. **Key words:** Poverty alleviation, technical and vocational education, formal education, poverty line, human capital, human resource, economic development.*

Introduction

According to Pakistan Economic Survey (2013-14), poor is one who lacks the financial resources and essentials to have minimum standard of living. Poverty is one of the major problems faced by the people across the

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world. It is gravest in developing and underdeveloped countries like Pakistan. A number of reasons are there for the poor socioeconomic status of the people of Pakistan. Education is essential ingredient for poverty alleviation. Afzal, M. et al. (2010), found direct effect of school education on socioeconomic growth of a country. The government of Pakistan has been declaring Pakistan as a welfare state. It is the responsibility of the welfare state to provide basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, basic health facilities, employment and education. To fulfill the duty towards a welfare state, the government of Pakistan has been making efforts to frame policies to help the poor strata of the society. The main objective of this paper was to study and analyze these policies with reference to education as the education is a way of hooking out the poor from poverty net. This study was significant as poverty is a hurdle for developing the country. In spite of a number of education policies and poverty strategy papers, the poverty is still prevailing in the length and breadth of the country. The number of poor has increased and the divide among the poor and the rich has widened. It is required to directly attack on poverty to solve the problems of people living in miserable condition with poor food, health and education. A valid, effective and productive education system seems to be the only solution of the problem. The researches show that education was used as launching pad for economic development. General type of education groomed poverty and the solution of the problems is provision of skilled human resource. An education system that provides unskilled human resource unfit to meet the labor market demand supplements unemployment and poverty. The poverty is a challenge for education and needs to be addressed on priority bases. There is direct relationship of poverty and educational outcomes. The children of low-income families start school late and linger behind in educational attainments (Ferguson, 2007).

Review of Literature

Poor is one who lives under the poverty line. According to Ali & Chaudhry (2015), development is measured in term of GDP and per capita income. Unemployment, poverty and income inequalities hinder the process of development. Gross or national level development are not the true signs of the poverty alleviation as the national level development may or may not trickle down to the grass root level to address the poverty problem.

According to Pakistan Economic Survey (2013-14), education is learning knowledge, skills and habits. It is an instrument that shapes the future of individuals and nations. Socioeconomic development of a nation depends upon the effective used of the instrument of education. Skilled and literate people play vital role in the development and prosperity of the country. A large investment in education and skill development is the basic requirement of uplifting the economic status of the country. Pakistan is signatory of a number of international conventions such as EFA 1990, MDGs and Dakar Framework for Action which bind Pakistan to alleviate poverty and illiteracy. Habib, M. (2013) was in view that expanding the education system was a great challenge for Pakistan. Almost half of Pakistani's population is illiterate and quarter of school going age out of school.

Qureshi (2001), stated that government of Pakistan has been claiming Pakistan as a welfare state. The welfare state is one which works for the welfare of the people and tries its best to make them safe from all types of vulnerabilities such as poverty and disease. Constitution of Pakistan (1973) confirms the rights of the people of Pakistan for being equal and protects them against all types of discriminations on the bases of sex, race and creed, Article 38 (d) of the constitution binds the state to provide basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, housing, education and medical relief to all citizen of Pakistan irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race who are unable to earn their livelihood on account of infirmity, sickness or unemployment. Article 25

safeguards the people of Pakistan from discrimination while Article 25 A gives the right of education and binds the government of Pakistan to provide free and compulsory education to all children of age five to sixteen. Articles 26, 27 and 28 provide shield against vulnerabilities of all types. Article 37 clearly promotes the social justice and encourages the eradication of social evils. Article 37 (a) stresses on special care, education and economic wellbeing of the backward classes and areas, 37 (b) is about the provision of free and compulsory secondary education and removal of illiteracy, 37 (c) binds the government to provide technical and professional education, 37 (f) asks for provision of technical education for agricultural and industrial development, employment and participation in national activities for development.

According to economic researchers the main cause of the poverty is uneven distribution of wealth. Jewayni (2014), pointed out five main reasons of poverty i.e. unequal distribution of wealth, colonialism, discrimination, poor governance and environmental degradation. Unequal distribution of wealth makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. This unequal distribution of wealth has created islands of wealth and the oceans of the poverty. Colonialism has been a major source of poverty which divided the people, groomed the feudal system and pushed the poor segments down. It disintegrated the institutions, countries and societies. These countries could not reorganize and reestablish their institutions which resulted in further disintegration of societies and institutions. Throughout the world where ever the colonies were formed, the countries failed to rid of the socioeconomic degradation and the poverty continued in these countries even after getting freedom. Discrimination is a major agent of poverty as the color of skin, family, race, creed and place of birth played vital role in dividing the people into poor and rich. Discrimination forces the poor to remain poor and rich to be rich in India, Pakistan, South Africa and even United States. The poor governance resulted in poor infrastructure and poor management of the institutions. The poor governance

failed to provide social justice and equal opportunities to the people at large. The poor governance helps the rich to grow and suppresses the poor. The states with poor governance failed to cater the needs of the people at bottom of socioeconomic hierarchy. Environment degradation is a silent agent that causes premature deaths, high rates of diseases, epidemics, climate changes and natural disasters. All these factors cause high rates of illiteracy and poverty.

Rehman, Jingdong and Hussain, (2016), found that Pakistan is among countries having worst literacy rates as it has ignored education inspite of the fact that it is the most important element for the development of a nation. The worse economic condition of the country is due to this poor state of education. Pakistan was at ranked at 113 out of 120 countries. A large number of the poor used to not send their children to school but when they were provided financial aid, they send their children to school as the study of Sabates et al. (2018), found that cash transfer to the families enabled the them to meet their financial needs resultantly they invest on education of their children. Government presented a number of policies to alleviate poverty but poverty retained in the society. Hussain, A. (1994), concluded that all previous policies and development strategies reproduced poverty instead of alleviating it. A rapid increase in loan dependency, budget deficits and erosion of natural resources. Horizontal and vertical, rural and urban disparities increased. The society has polarized. Past strategies not only failed but even increased the multifaceted crisis. Among these policies were Rural Development Programs such as Village Aid Program, Basic Democracies, Rural Works Program, People Works Program, Five Point Program, People's Program, Tamer-e-Watan Program and Rural Support Program; Programs for Human Development such as Social Action Program (SAP-I and SAP-II), Growth and Macroeconomics Policies for Poverty Alleviation, Land Reforms, Employment Creation Schemes, Income Transfer Program such as Zakat and Ushar program, Pakistan Baitul Mal program, Food Subsidy Scheme (FSS), Individual

Financial Assistance, Food Coupon Scheme, Social Security Schemes such as Provincial Employees Social Security Scheme, Employees Old age Benefits (EOB) Scheme, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), Benazir Income Support Program, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Following were the objectives of the study

- a) To review the poverty alleviation strategy/policies of the government of Pakistan
- b) To study the effect of poverty alleviation strategies/policies on poverty and education

Review of the Poverty Alleviation strategies

The review of the poverty alleviation strategies/policies/programs is as under

1. Village Aid Program (1952)

Under this program funds were allocated for school buildings, education sector programs/schemes such as primary and adult education, initiated social centers to train and educate women and girls to provide skills to enable them for self and paid employment. The skills provided to women and girls were home reservation, management, child care and maternal care, food and fruit preservation, sewing and knitting, embroidery and tailoring.

This scheme mostly failed to achieve the objectives due to non-cooperation and non-coordination among the various departments and agencies (Qureshi, 2001). This scheme could not make a dent in poverty. Inequalities and number of poor increased; and fragile and dependent economic structure weakened the country as a whole (Hussain, A. 1994)

2. Basic Democracies (1959)

Projects were initiated for school buildings; education institutions were handed over to the district councils. The district councils failed to cater the needs of educational institutions, poverty alleviation targets were not achieved.

3. Rural works program

This program was to uplift the rural poor population by providing basic facilities to the rural population. Could not succeed in mitigating the poverty and illiteracy

4. Peoples works program (1972-80)

It included projects of providing employment and educational facilities in rural areas. It provided a few jobs and a minor improvement was observed in providing educational facilities.

5. Integrated Rural Development Program (1972-80)

Its main purpose of the program was to improve socio-economic condition of small and medium farmers. Among other functions education was also included in it. Its achievements were not upto the mark. Evaluation of the program shows a mix performance (Qureshi, 2001).

6. Five-point program (1985-88)

Among five points one was elimination of illiteracy. It supported KachiAbadies, literacy programs, and rural development. It could not achieve its targets.

7. Peoples Program

Construction of addition classrooms was included in this program. This program failed to achieve its targets.

8. Tameer-e-Watan Program (1991)

Education was one of the agendas among road constructions, PCOs, drinking water and sanitation. This program was in the hands of MNAs and MPAs. It was politicized and failed to achieve its targets.

9. Peoples Works Program (1993-96)

It was only the change of name of tamer-e-watan program. The targets remained the same. It failed to achieve the targets.

10. Rural Support Program

Addressing the problems of illiteracy and poverty was included in this program. Both illiteracy and poverty status remained unaltered. This program showed some improvement such as primary participation rate, adult literacy rate, life expectancy, rural sanitation coverage and immunization of children were improved while infant mortality rate, population growth and fertility reduced. These were all signs of poverty mitigation.

11. Social Action program-I (1993-96)

It was to remove imbalance between rural and urban areas. Its aims were to improve primary and elementary education. This program showed some improvement such as primary participation rate, Adult literacy rate, life expectancy, rural sanitation coverage and immunization of children were improved while infant mortality rate, population growth and fertility reduced. These were all signs of poverty mitigation.

12. Social Action Program-II (1997-02)

It was to cover five areas i.e. primary and elementary education, primary and preventive health care, nutrition, rural water supply, sanitation and family planning. SAP-II succeeded to achieve its targets to some extent. Adult literacy rate, primary school participation, life expectancy, rural sanitation, water supply coverage improved while infant and mother mortality rates and population growth rates reduced.

13. Macroeconomic Policies for Poverty Alleviation (1947-77)

Since 1947 Poverty Alleviation Policies were mostly based on macroeconomic policies under the notion that economic wellbeing will trickle down. These policies failed to achieve poverty alleviation targets, instead groomed the rich resultantly 22 families took major share of economic benefits. These policies were not proved beneficial for the poor.

14. Microfinancing Policies

Microfinancing played a vital role in poverty alleviation. Grameen Bank of Bangladesh is an example of this success. In Pakistan Khushali Bank

was established in 2000. Microfinance ordinance was passed in 2001. The First Microfinance Bank Ltd. Tameer Microfinance Bank Ltd. and Pak Oman Microfinance Bank, Rozgar Microfinance Bank Ltd. were initiatives of government of Pakistan. Education element was not fully addressed in microfinancing. A long term and sustainable economic development can only be achieved if the masses are fully equipped with education and skills (Noreen, U. et al (2011).

15. Nationalization Policy 1972

In Seventies Bhutto government addressed the poor at microlevel. Roti-Kapraaur Makkan slogan succeeded to catch the attention of the people of Western part of Pakistan at large and they voted for PPP in elections. The private institutions, factories and industries were nationalized to let down the rich strata of the society and to uplift the poor. Nationalization policy uplifted the poor for time being but later on this policy effected the economic growth negatively because quality and quantity both went on down fall.

16. Export of Human resource to Middle East (1970s-80s)

Exploration of oil in middle east increased the demand of human resource. A large number of Pakistanis shifted to Middle East countries. Remittances sent by the workers in Middle East uplifted many families from poor status to non-poor status.

17. Afghan Policy (1980s)

In 1980s Afghan war started after the Russian invasion in Afghanistan. More than three million Afghans migrated to Pakistan. Pakistan helped these Afghan refugees to settle in Pakistan. Afghan people fought against Russia with the support of USA and its allies. In 1980s the economic growth remained high and poverty went down to some extent. The foreign aid helped Pakistan to uplift its economy but it was a temporary uplift without solid foundations and dropped down in 1990s when foreign aid was stopped. The reason may be that educational foundation were not provided to the masses for long term economic growth.

18. Indirect Taxation Policy (since 1947)

In Pakistan the government is acting on the policy of indirect taxation which effected the poor adversely. The direct taxes are paid by the salaried persons only. This policy helped the rich but proved to be anti-poor.

19. Land Reforms (1959, 1972, 1977)

The purpose of land reform was to provide land to tenants, to reduce land ownership, to provide protection to the tenants from eviction by the land lords. The purpose of land reforms 1972, was to provide land to the landless and the poor. The main objective of land reforms 1977 was to provide land for cultivation to the landless people. Only a limited effect was noted as a small portion of land was handed over to the tenants or landless peasants. Only 2.5 percent cultivated land was handed over to the peasants and landless people in land reforms 1972. It failed to make a dent to the poverty and only 8 percent land was provided to the landless tenants in 1977 land reform policy. The land reforms could not alleviate poverty at a significant level

20. Employment creation schemes

These schemes included Credit Program, Youth Investment Promotion, Small Industries, Self-employment program, Public Transport Revamping program, Small Loan Scheme, National self-employment programs, Awami Tractor Scheme, Social Welfare program. Credit Program was administered by Small Business Finance Corporation and Youth Investment Promotion program which was administrated by the youth Investment promotion Society. Punjab small industries and Sindh Small industries were established to provide opportunities and training for skill development for earning, Self-employment program, Public Transport Revamping program, Small Loan Scheme, National self-employment programs and Awami Tractor Scheme, Social Welfare program but inspite of huge investments no significant effect was observe in poverty alleviation. The skill development and technical education to produce blue collar jobs workers.

21. Income Transfer Programs

These programs include Zakat and Usher Program, Pakistan Bait ul Maal Program, Food Subsidy Scheme (FSS), Individual Financial Assistance (IFA) Scheme and Food Coupon Scheme. This initiative was taken in Zia regime in late 70s and early 80s. It was not meant for providing education to the children of the poor but to hook out the poor from the poverty status. Ministry of Religious affairs Pakistan provided MORA scholarship to the student children of the poor. It was a good initiative and provided help to the students. Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal provided scholarship, financial support and sweet homes for needy students and orphans and Food subsidy schemes. Sweet homes were good to give admission to the children of the poor families.

22. Social Security Schemes

Provincial Employees Social Security Scheme and Employees Old Age Benefit Scheme (EOB) were for providing social security to the workers of industries. The social security schools, hospitals and skill development projects were initiated under these schemes. EOB scheme was meant to help the employees of the private organizations having more than ten employees to meet the needs of old age. Educational institutions and skill development project helped the workers to educate their children but most of these institutions provided general type of education which was not effective for poverty alleviation. The organizations were bound to provide funds for EOB but the effectiveness of this scheme was not widespread and minor change was observed.

23. Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund

The PPAF was established by the government in 1997 to alleviate poverty from the society. Its aim was to provide funds for the projects through NGOs and CBOs. The World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Federal Government were the chief contributors for the Fund. The funds were utilized in projects of low effectiveness and funds were misused.

24. Benazir Income Support Program (BISP)

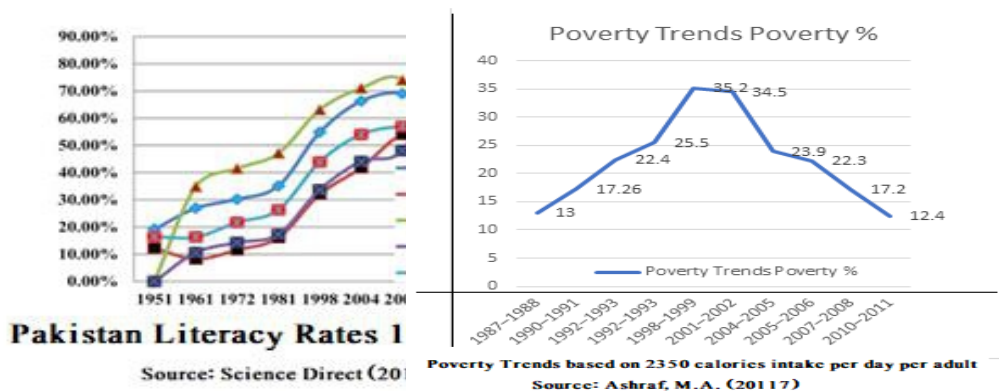
BISP was initiated in 2008 to help the poor. Waseela e taleem was one of its part to provide education and to get enrolled the out of school children. Data shows that there were 1015180 beneficiaries of BISP. An evaluation made by Oxford Policy Management pointed out a number of discrepancies yet there were a number of plus points and it proved to be a better program to make dent in poverty in Pakistan (Cheema et al, 2014). According to Jan et al. (2009), Pakistan took a step to address the poverty on sound bases by preparing the strategy papers in 2001. Impact of these papers was not proper resultantly, both poverty and illiteracy remained stagnant. According to Memon (2015), more than 64 percent of beneficiaries has control over BISP's stipend. BISP has succeeded to minimize the violence against women, improving education of women, child protection and child nutrition and health. BISP chairperson claimed that BISP has succeeded to reduce 22 percent points of the beneficiaries. Poverty can be alleviated only by giving respect, dignity, empowerment and making the lives of the poor meaningful. BISP according to Hussain (2015) has achieved its targets to a great extent. Waseela-e-Taleem program was effective. BISP initiative started in 32 districts through which more than 700 thousand children were admitted in the schools.

25. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)

Poverty Reduction Paper-I was presented in 2003 and the Poverty Reduction Paper-II was presented in 2008. The main objectives of these papers were to accelerate the economic growth, maintain the macroeconomic stability, investing in human development to improve the human resource, improving the socio-economic safety nets and improving governance. Education and training of the poor was included in these papers.

Comparison of Poverty and illiteracy trends

A comparison of poverty status and literacy shows that literacy rate improves as the poverty reduces which is pertinent from the graphical



representation of both literacy

and poverty. According to Rehman, Jingdong and Hussain, (2015), literacy rates remains uneven in Pakistan. In 1951, the literacy rate was 16.40% but it dropped to 16.30 % in 1961 and increased to 21.70% in 1972. The literacy rate slightly increased to 26.30%in 1981 and further increased to 43.90% in 1998. The literacy rates further increased to 54% in 2004 and 57% in 2009. It raised to 57 % in 2014. These rates are not encouraging and when viewed with the problems of Pakistan related to poverty, extremism and underdevelopment.

Results:

In the light of above review of poverty alleviation policies, it was found that

- The poverty alleviation policies were mostly based on the political objectives and not meant for the uplifting of the poor from the poverty status.
- The frequent changes in the governments changed the policy objectives and hence the polices could not achieve the targets of poverty alleviations
- The resources committed were not provided for the policy implementation
- No monitoring and evaluation of policies were done to know the weakness and strengths of the previous policies
- The stakeholders were not taken on board while developing the policies
- No training of the rural poor was made available to utilizes the amount provided to them

- vii. Top down policy making and implementation; over centralization and control on resources failed to implement the policies in real sense
- viii. Education enables the people to realize their capacity and training enables them to use the resources properly but in poverty alleviation policies, the education and training were not given due importance resultantly the poverty could not be alleviated
- ix. The financial and human resources were not properly utilized to alleviate poverty and to enhance literacy.
- x. Corruption and lack of political will at national, provincial and local levels detracted the policies for poverty alleviation and illiteracy
- xi. Proper monitoring system was not made available
- xii. The individuals and organizations were not trained and educated for the utilization of the resources.
- xiii. The coverage of the social security schemes was limited and the number of beneficiaries did not exceed inspite of the fact that the organizations and establishments increased.
- xiv. BISP is the largest organization that provided a nominal amount of 100 to 1500 per month to the poor household.
- xv. In most of the case the middlemen exploit the poor and minimize the effect of poverty alleviation interventions. The middlemen deceived the poor clients and diverted the benefits towards themselves.
- xvi. Use of latest technology enabled BISP to become more effective and efficient for poverty alleviation. But electronic devices such as ATMs are not available and the beneficiaries had to travel long to receive the amount in rural areas.
- xvii. Complaints of irregularities and middlemen interventions were reported. However, it is the first largest poverty alleviation related program which was evaluated, monitored and the chairperson herself takes keen interest for its success.
- xviii. Technical and vocational education facilities were not opened to provide skilled workers to meet the job market demand.

Recommendations

It is recommended to link the poverty alleviation policies/strategies with education. An effective and productive education is the solution of the problem of the poverty. Provision of general type of education should be given to a limited youth while the vocational, technical and professional education should be provided to majority of the children. The financial resources for

poverty may be provided to the poor families so that they can send their children to school.



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