

Marginalization: Cause And Effect Of Poverty
Example from Pakistan
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One fifth of the world population lives below the poverty line today. In Pakistan, poverty is deeply rooted in its colonial history. Pakistan is an Islamic country with its own history and cultural heritage.

General Information about Pakistan: To the west is Peshawar, the capital of North West Frontier Province and gateway to Khyber Pass, the western approach to the subcontinent. In the South is Hyderabad and metropolis of Karachi. In the North are places like Swat Valley, Chitral Valley, Gilgit, Hunza and Baltistan, the most beautiful and unspoiled regions in the world.

Islamabad is the national capital, 20 Kms from Rawalpindi, which is situated on the Grand Trunk Road, between Lahore and Peshawar. Rawalpindi, having a population of about 5 million, is one of the oldest settlements along the Khyber-Peshawar-Lahore route. Pakistan stretches from the Arabian Sea in the South to the Tibetan Plateau in North, over a total area of 796,000 sq. kms. It consists of four provinces: Sind, Punjab, Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province; plus the northern territory of Gilgit-Hunza, Baltistan and liberated part of Kashmir.

The country is divided into six geographical regions, where the Indus river forms the backbone of the whole country. From Tibet it crosses Ladakh close to Chinese border and transverse the Karakoram into the plains. The plains end with the Salt Range of the Potwar Plateau, and from here it finally meet the Hindukush, the Karakoram and the Himalayas. Except for the Indus plains, the whole country is hilly deserts, plateaux and great mountains.

The population is now reaching 140 million, about 70% of them living in rural areas. Karachi is the biggest city, with 11 million populations, a metropolitan city. Lahore, the magnificent city is a Mughal masterpiece. Lahore is the second biggest city of Pakistan with population of about 9 million.

Economic Development of Pakistan: After partition from India in 1947, from 1950's onwards, by the end of decade of development, the national wealth had become concentrated in just 22 families of the country. The wide income gap between the population divided Pakistan from Bangladesh in 1971. After that, the capitalistic economic policies were reversed, and there was massive nationalisation of industries, banking and financial sectors, trading, education and health services.

But still economic growth of Pakistan continued to decline and kept fluctuating. Post 1988 economic scenario, was affected mainly by poor planning in 70s and 80s, which caught up with the national economy in 90s, which has witnessed the worst economic situation of our country, especially during post nuclear explosion period.

During 1990s our economy became increasingly dependent on foreign loans. Political instability in 90s along with poor management of economy, affected family incomes negatively and the country witnessed an increase in poverty levels.

At present, the poverty scenario in the country presents a gloomy picture: 38 per cent of total population is living below poverty line, i.e., has average family income below Rs. 3000 (about 52 Euro) per month; 62 percent of adults in Pakistan cannot read or write, while 76 percent female adults are illiterate and 8 million children are out of school; 45 percent of population has no access to safe drinking water, 40 percent have no access to basic health services, 53 percent of population has no access to sanitation and 38 percent of children under 5-years are malnourished.

Rapidly increasing poverty, economic insecurity, deprivation and stress are all affecting millions of Pakistani families everyday. One in three families is living in poverty. When it comes to families with children suffering from disabilities, the situation is even more disappointing and heart breaking.

Condition of Disabled Persons: In 20 years of my professional life, I have seen that persons with disabilities lack even the basic rehabilitation services, they are unable to get rehabilitation appliances or are unable to get their appliances repaired, they lack education, they have very minimal chances of learning any skills, they have no jobs, most can never get married or get a chance to raise a family, due to lack of money. There are groups of people, and there are persons, who would like to form groups work for their own welfare on self help basis, but most of them lack resources and so can not participate in their duty towards national development.

People get sick, remain ill and even die, as they do not have enough money for their health care. Their families watch their beloved ones, slowly getting close to their graves, with open helpless hands. Sometimes they do not have money to buy even a pain killer.

People with physical disabilities sometimes develop contractures, as they do not know that simple little exercises everyday can prevent its formation. The contractures deform their joints, stop them from walking, make them remain sitting forever with no therapeutic care to regain walking, leading to formation of kidneys or bladder stones, causing infections, leading to death. A little exercise daily could have prevented this vicious cycle. Such vital information are either not available, or ordinary persons, poor persons do not have any access to such information.

Spinal cord injuries are one of the main causes of urinary tract infections, the biggest reason of deaths among such persons. There are thousands of persons having this injury every year, but proper management and care is expensive. They often sell their cattle, land, house, and even children to get some rehabilitation care.

A strong network of rehabilitation centres through out the country can be a big help. Big cities provides such commercial, on-profit services, but those services are not for poor persons. In a big city like Karachi with a population of 11 million, there are very few places where a poor child could get rehabilitation services on low-cost basis. Parents have to take loans and sell any expensive

things that they may have in their homes to pay for their child's rehabilitation. Thus the parents get themselves involved in a vicious cycle of ever increasing poverty and decreasing power to meet their family needs.

Poverty in Northwest Province: Generations after generations, people never get out of this cycle of poverty. That is why poorer families are getting even more poor. Persons and families already suffering, suffer even more everyday, especially when they are from any disadvantaged / marginalised group.

In our province, Northwest Province, the population is 22 million. Poverty affects every aspect of life here. If men work to earn daily living, women cook, wash, clean, take care at home and also fetch wood and water for daily use. A common tradition is to have large number of children. Increasing poverty forces the family elders to put children to work, in the fight against poverty, as child workers instead of getting education. So these children, instead of having a school bag, books and copies, work as rag pickers, shoe polishers, car washers, motor mechanics, house maids or even beggars from a very young age. Generations are being getting affected by poverty, with helpless and hopeless parents reach their graves, passing their whole lives in trying to make both ends meet in their fight for survival.

One of the solutions to alleviate poverty lies in bringing structural reforms in the economy and rural society to break the hold of feudal-groups on the state power and liberate the masses and economy from their clutches. Government must ensure that poor people are able to obtain basic services. Otherwise, it would be reckless of us to successfully reach the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, only to be confronted by dysfunctional cities, dwindling water supplies, more inequality and conflict, and even less cropland than we have now to sustain us.

Considerations on Gender issues in Pakistan:

Article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan, in the Chapter on Fundamental Rights of the citizens say 'There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone». Quid Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Father of our Nation, in one of his speech said: "It is a crime against humanity that our women are confined within the four walls of their homes like prisoners. Women should stand side by side with men as their companions in all aspects of life".

After these two very quotes about status of women in Pakistan, let me briefly talk about the actual conditions faced by women in Pakistan. Women, like in most societies of South Asia, are considered inferior to men - physically weaker, mentally less endowed and created only to serve the household. This classical image of women keeps her illiterate, economically unrecognised, socially inferior and legally helpless. The social distortions of male dominated society have created mind sets so that people firmly believe that women are meant to serve the men. This is true not only among lower strata of society or in rural areas, but it is also true at higher levels in feudal and tribal cultures in Pakistan.

In most families, especially in tribal and rural areas, women do not get the right to choose their life partners – the choice is made by parents or family members, on the basis of family relationships or money. After marriage, life in the joint family means that women have to cook, wash, press clothes and do other household chores, not only for their husbands, but also for their husbands' families, so that their role is that of maid-servants. For the marriage they are also required to bring expensive dowry from their parents' homes.

In rural areas, a woman is expected to work in the fields along with her husband and also to cook, give birth to children and to look after all their needs till they grow up. In some areas of the country, sending girls to schools is regarded as a sin. If a woman has no child or has no male child, she is considered almost as an outcast and her husband can be persuaded or forced by his family to bring another wife.

Even the societies, where women have been ostensibly helped by enactment of modern legislation, in reality, they situation remains as depressed as ever. Pakistan is a good example of the tricks played upon women in the name of law. Even where the laws are forthright, women are denied their benefits due to momentum of traditional norms, beliefs and customs, and lack of facilities, which could create confidence and daring among them.

Above all other issues is the tyranny created by the religious leaders (Mullahs), which force women to be prisoners inside their homes. The *hudoon* and *zina* ordinances are examples of laws damaging the women. Thus, victims of men's assault have been punished by the courts whereas, the culprit men have usually escaped without any punishment. According to a survey report, almost one third of women in jails in Pakistan, are there because of these ordinances. These laws also become a blessing for men who, for example, do not wish to give share of the ancestral property to their sisters and daughters. Women are also utilised to pay *dyat*. Moreover, one third of women in jails in Pakistan are either convicted or under trial on similar charges. Many of them with their children.

Most of the socio-cultural traditions are largely discriminatory against women causing serious problems ranging from inferiority complex to narrow mindedness, helplessness and insecurity among local womenfolk. Millions of women are mutilated, battered to death, burned alive, stripped of their legal rights and bought and sold in an unacknowledged but international trade as slaves for domestic or sexual purposes.

There are barriers against women involvement in decision making and realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedom of women. There are discriminatory attitude against the neglected half of human population, at official and individual levels. Women are the one to sufferer most in all conflicts, suffering violence in the form of rape and displacement to the denial of the right to food and medicine.

Honour killing, violence and sexual abuse, acid violence, forced marriages, involuntary virginity tests, female genital mutilation, trafficking and forced prostitution, and other crimes are often culturally sanctioned homicidal violence directed at women and girls around the country. Due to deep rooted male chauvinism that has been dominating our country since long before independence,

the plight of our women remains as pitiable as ever. Stoves still continue to burst and the clothes of young brides continue to catch fire while working in their in-laws kitchens, because the brides were unable to bring a big dowry. Stone hearted husbands are still busy torturing their wives in the most inhuman manner, and often getting away with it. Eve teasing is as rampant today, as it was fifty years ago when the nation was composed of 100% illiterate persons, be it in cities or in rural areas.

The poorest, the most illiterate, the most malnourished, the most deprived, most of the Pakistani women have no right to live according to their own choice. They also suffer from killing in the name of honour by *Karo Kari*. The “honour” killers escape punishment easily due to loop-holes in the law, or because society allows them to do. It is considered that they have no right to choose their life partners, which Islam gives to women to choose their spouse. It also gives her right to separate or divorce her husband, but our society deprives women of these fundamental rights.

A continuous struggle is needed for recognition of women's rights as human rights, including their civil, social political and cultural rights. Attainments of all these rights is critical for achieving human development in general and more specifically, women development. To ensure this, there are some prerequisites - a just legal system, inclusive democracy, poverty eradication, data collection on the state of women development and women rights, violation, an active media and an NGO/ CBO sector generating awareness, and stronger international actions, etc., are needed, which are quite poorly rated in Pakistan. On the other hand, Islam advocates rights of women and requires that they are given a respectable status in the society. Islam is the promoter of women's respect and honour and the problems of today's women are the result of deviation from the Islamic principles.

Let us see the efforts being taken to solve some of these issues. The National Commission on the Status of Women has been established by the Government after 53 years of independence. The commission is supposed to review and amend laws, rules and regulations that affect women's rights, examine the policies for women development and make recommendations for its effective impact and implementation. It will also work together with national and international NGOs with common agenda. Many NGOs are already active in Pakistan regarding women development issues.

The previous Governments had also initiated small things related to women's rights, here and there – women's police, women's banks, crisis centres, women's division, etc. But most of these remained only promises or just policies on paper with little of it being translated into reality. We cannot solve the problems of all Pakistani women with one formula, as they are different in class, region, ethnic background, religious beliefs etc. so the solutions must also be different.

Development Programmes: In Pakistan, women's development programs have to be defined within the parameters of Islam and the existing social and traditional values – keeping these in mind, specialised development programs need to be worked out. However, the entire effort is dependent on building and strengthening human capital by investing in health, education and provision of a fair playing field for all citizens of Pakistan. Women, like men, are part of a society and to expect to transform the lives of the women without reforming and investing in the whole society will not be possible. The Government should also prepare a national policy on gender on a priority basis, and pursue realistic, achievable goals to solve this critical and urgent issue.

We are also running a group of women with disability called POWER (Promotion of Women Empowerment & Rehabilitation), working in seven towns of Pakistan and addressing different issues. These groups provide technical skills and help them in understanding and solving their own problems by building consciousness, self-confidence and leadership qualities. As Dr Mahboobul Haq said, “No nation can develop if it is half-chained and half-free. Empowerment of women through their full participation in education, employment and political & social life is vital for development.