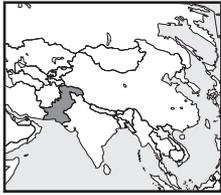


■ PAKISTAN

A difficult context for poverty reduction



By all measurements there are millions of people living in poverty in Pakistan. The political climate and strong cultural and religious traditions complicate poverty alleviation and social development progress. Despite ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women, Pakistani women continue to be victims of honour killings and have low participation in the labour market.

Social Watch Pakistan

Aijaz Qureshi / Mushtaq Mirani

Pakistan, located in South Asia and a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, is a federal state with four provinces (Punjab, Sindh, North-West Frontier Province, and Balochistan), one territory (Northern Areas) and one capital territory (Islamabad). There are several languages spoken in the country but Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Urdu, Brahvi, Seraiki, and Hindku are the main tongues.

The federal Constitution has seen several amendments since its promulgation in 1973 and consequently its form and contents have changed markedly. Currently, the self-appointed President, General Pervez Musharraf, presides over the country, which is under military rule.

The economy and unemployment

The Economic Survey 2004-2005 states that gross domestic product (GDP) grew at a rate of 8.4%¹ during the timeframe of the study; however several independent economists contest this rate. According to the same survey the per capita income² also rose from USD 579 in 2002-2003 to USD 736 in 2004-2005. According to the World Bank's gross national income (GNI) per capita ranking for 2004,³ Pakistan falls into position 160 out of 208 countries with a per capita income of USD 600.⁴

The benefits of growth are hotly debated. The Government claims that growth will reduce poverty and improve quality of life.⁵ Political parties, civil society organizations and development experts reject this idea and assert that poverty has increased,

the gap between the rich and poor has widened and quality of life has further deteriorated, following the worsening poverty pattern of the 1990s.⁶

There are indicators that confirm that the country is not faring well. The 2004 Human Poverty Index, which measures three dimensions - a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living - ranks Pakistan only 71st among 95 countries. The latest United Nations Development Programme estimates also state that the richest 20% of the population consume almost five times more than the poorest 20%.⁷ Furthermore in 2004 Pakistan ranked 142nd among 177 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) with a value of 0.497 based on values from 2002.⁸ This value is almost equal to the 1999 HDI value of 0.498, demonstrating that human development in the country has been stalled for years.

Considering the expenditure levels on health and education, this arrest in human development is not surprising. In 2002-2003 the Government spent only 1.7% of the gross national product (GNP) on education and in 2004-2005 it spent a mere 0.6% of GNP on health.⁹

The unemployment rate is also disputed by independent economists. According to the Economic Survey 2004-2005 there are 3.52 million people unemployed in 2005, down from 3.72 million in 2004. The Labour Force Survey 2003-2004 estimates the total unemployment rate at 7.7%, in rural areas at 6.7%, and 9.7% in urban areas. Those people over 10 years of age who are without work, but available to work and seeking employment are included in the unemployment measurements.¹⁰ Independent ex-

perts dispute this rate and claim that the unemployment rate is actually much higher and that there is disguised unemployment in rural areas, which would raise the rate to at least 20%. There is also a growing trend among women to seek employment. If this factor is included in the employment survey then the unemployment rate increases further.

Meanwhile, the consumer price index rose 17.56% between 2000 and 2004 with fuel and lighting prices rising the most sharply by 23%.¹¹

Poverty

Depending on the measure adopted, (USD 1 a day, USD 2 a day or national poverty line), 13.4%, 65.6% or 32.6% of Pakistanis are living in poverty respectively.¹² Considering that the country has a population of 150 million this means that there are roughly 20.1 million, 98.4 million or 48.9 million people living in poverty in Pakistan. Whatever the measurement, there are too many people living in poverty. It is generally accepted that poverty is worse in rural areas - the Asian Development Bank reported a rural poverty rate of 39% in 2002.¹³

The social consequences of poverty levels have been manifesting themselves in ugly ways. Suicide rates are on the rise. In 2004, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan recorded a total of 716 suicides during the year, of which 192 victims were male and 524 female. As of 30 June 2005, already 589 suicides have been reported which suggests that last year's figures will be surpassed. Reasons for suicides include illness, domestic problems, financial problems, marriage choice, matrimonial problems, psychological problems and unemployment. In 2004, domestic problems were reported as the reason for 251 suicides while financial problems and unemployment were cited as the cause of 64 suicides. Midway through 2005, unemployment and financial problems had already been blamed for 66 suicides each.¹⁴

1 Ministry of Finance. *Economic Survey 2004-2005*. "Growth and Investment." 4 June 2005. www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters/01-Growth.pdf

2 The GNP at market price in dollar terms divided by the country's population.

3 The World Bank uses the Atlas conversion factor when calculating the GNI per capita in US dollars in order to reduce the impact of exchange rate fluctuations. The Atlas conversion factor is the average of a country's exchange rate for that year and its exchange rate for the two preceding years adjusted for the rate of inflation in the country.

4 World Bank. "GNI per capita 2004." 2004. www.worldbank.org/data/datatopic/GNIPC.pdf

5 Ministry of Finance, *op cit*. "Overview of the Economy". www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters/overview.pdf

6 Asian Development Bank (ADB). "Poverty in Pakistan: Issues, Causes, & Institutional Responses." 12 August 2002. www.adb.org/Documents/news/PRM/2002/prm_200203.asp. According to the ADB 12 million more people were added to the ranks of the poor between 1993 and 1999 and income distribution became more unequal. The income share of the bottom 20% of the population dropped 1% between 1987 and 1997 and the income share of the top 20% rose by 1.3% during the same period.

7 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). "Human Development Report Indicators Pakistan." 2003. http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/cty/cty_f_PAK.html

8 UNDP. "Human Development Index", 2004. http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/indic/indic_8_1_1.html

9 Ministry of Finance, *op cit*. "Economic and Social Indicators Table". www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters/indicators.pdf

10 Ministry of Finance, *op cit*. "Population, Labour Force and Employment". www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters/13-population.pdf

11 Government of Pakistan. Federal Bureau of Statistics. Monthly Price Indices. www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/fbs/statistics/price_statistics/monthly_price_indices/mpi7/mpi.htm

12 UNDP. *Human Development Report 2004. Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*. 2004.

13 ADB. "Agricultural Growth and Rural Poverty. A Review of Evidence", 2005. www.adb.org/Documents/PRM/Working_Papers/wp-02.pdf

14 Human Rights Commission Pakistan. www.hrcp-web.org/suicide.cfm#

Another poverty-driven phenomenon is the organ trade. The district of Sargodha in central Punjab has become the principal supplier of kidneys to most of Asia. In 2003, a government inquiry estimated that during the 1990s nearly 3,500 people from the region had sold their kidneys to international buyers.¹⁵

Human rights

The human rights situation is deteriorating in Pakistan. Due to the absence of a democratic system and of an independent judiciary, together with the dominance of tribalism, feudalism and religious fundamentalism, citizens' human rights are being violated. The unjustified arrest of political opponents and the suppression of freedom of expression are very common. Journalists and reporters are often compelled to follow the Government's official line and political dissent is largely suppressed.

Women

Women's human rights are violated and they live under severe subjugation. Violence against women goes unabated. Honour killings and domestic violence are common in many parts of the country. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reports that between May 2004 and May 2005 in the interior of the Sindh province over 451 people, including 240 women, 156 men and 46 minors were killed under the pretext of *karo-kari* or honour killing. Additionally over 30 women including 4 minors were raped over the same period in Karachi.¹⁶

Women's participation in social and economic activities is restrained due to the tradition of *pardah*.¹⁷ The Hudood ordinance¹⁸ passed during General Zia's dictatorship¹⁹ also curtails the rights of women. Despite these constraints, liberal and progressive political parties are encouraging women's participation in social, economic and political activities.

To date, the Government has not provided gender-neutral training to the police or to the judiciary, nor has it amended discriminatory laws. In effect the Government has ignored Article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was rati-

fied in 1996²⁰ while Benazir Bhutto held office.²¹ Article 5 states that State Parties to the Convention "shall take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes".²² That honour killings on the scale observed in the Sindh province still exist is evidence of the Government's weak commitment to the CEDAW. This is reflected in Pakistan's Gender-related Development Index²³ ranking which placed it 120th among 144 countries in 2002.

Women continue to have low participation rates in the labour force due to cultural and religious constraints. In 2002, women represented only 29.5% of the labour force, while men represented 70.5%.²⁴ Their lower participation is most likely linked to lower levels of literacy among women. In 2003-04, although 53% of the population was literate, only 42% of women could read and write compared to 66% of men.²⁵ Representation in governing bodies also remains low with women holding only 73 of the 342 seats (21.3%) in the 2005 National Assembly and 18% of the positions in the Senate.²⁶ Women have 60 reserved seats in the National Assembly as well as posts reserved at local levels of government. However in certain tribal areas women are barred from contesting local elections.

In urban centres, women have more health, education and employment opportunities. But in rural areas, they are being deprived of many basic services including health services. The maternal mortality rate stands at 500 deaths per 100,000 live births and only 20% of births are attended by skilled personnel - two indicators which prove that women's access to health services is poor. Family planning services are also in short supply, resulting in a low contraceptive prevalence rate of 28% and high fertility (5.1 births per woman).²⁷ Poor access to health services might also explain why infant and child mortality rates remain high, at 83 and 107 per 1,000 live births respectively, despite significant declines since the 1970s.²⁸

Poverty alleviation and social development policy

In 2002, the Government adopted a poverty reduction strategy which focuses on five areas:

- accelerating economic growth and maintaining macroeconomic stability
- investing in human capital
- augmenting targeted interventions
- expanding social safety nets
- improving governance.

Government celebrates the advances made to date, making frequent mention of the 8.4% GDP growth and arguing that this growth will benefit the poor by increasing employment and income.²⁹ It asserts that economic liberalization has encouraged domestic and foreign investment in the country and that the benefits of this investment will trickle down to the poor. A further government strategy was the Devolution of Power Plan to support citizen participation in local governance and improve the delivery of social services to the public. Part of this plan is a 33% quota for women on local district councils to improve women's empowerment.

In the period 1999-2004, the Government spent over PKR 860 billion (USD 14.4 billion)³⁰ on the development of the social sectors and poverty related programmes which translates into less than 1% of GDP per year.

A critique of Government policies

Opposition political parties, trade unions, human rights organization and civil society organizations are critical of government policies for several reasons. They argue that despite government policies there is still a lack of real democracy in the country. To this can be added a worsening of law and order, continuing sectarian hatred, too much control of the press, the lack of an independent judiciary, human rights violations, increased violence against women, disharmony among the provinces, increased unemployment due to privatization, increasing inflation, victimization of political opponents, and expensive and delayed justice. The Government is also criticized for spending more on defence and less on the social and economic needs of the poor, and for focusing more attention on economic growth than on these vulnerable groups. Likewise, the authorities are accused of not giving enough attention to the agricultural sector, where a large proportion of the population is employed. Finally, non-governmental organizations call for adequate spending on health, education, water supply, sanitation and transportation.

Recommendations

In order to protect human rights, improve social and economic development and increase the quality of life of Pakistan's citizens, the following recommendations are made:

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15 Aamer Ahmen Khan. BBC News. "Pakistan's Kidney Donor Crisis." 13 December 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4092325.stm

16 DAWN. "Karachi: Sindh Government Criticized for Human Rights Violations: 451 Killed in Karo-kari". 17 June 2005, www.dawn.com/2005/06/17/local7.htm

17 The literal translation of the word *pardah* is screen or veil. It is the practice by which women are excluded from public observation by the use of clothing used to conceal their bodies from head to toe, and by using high walls, curtains and screens inside the home. It is practiced by Muslims and Hindus and the limits placed on women vary according to country and class level.

18 The Hudood Ordinance criminalizes extra-marital sex which includes adultery and fornication. It also criminalizes rape outside valid marriage.

19 Zia-ul Haq overthrew the Government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977 and governed until his death in 1988 when Benazir Bhutto assumed power.

20 Amnesty International. "Pakistan: Honour Killings of Girls and Women." 1 September 1999, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/engASA330181999>

21 Benazir Bhutto, who took office as President in 1988, was the first female head of State of a predominantly Islamic country. She carried out two terms in office (1988-1990 and 1993-1996).

22 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm#article5

23 The Gender Development Index is the HDI adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women.

24 Instituto del Tercer Mundo. *The World Guide 2005/2006*. Oxford: New Internationalist Publications, 2005.

25 Ministry of Finance, *op cit*. "Economic and Social Indicators Table".

26 Inter-Parliamentary Union. "Women in Parliaments World Classification", April 2005, www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

27 UNDP (2003), *op cit*.

28 *bid*.

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- democracy should be restored in the country
- the rights of the provinces should be honoured
- human rights must be protected
- violence against women should be stopped by all legal and administrative means
- freedom of expression should be enforced
- fundamentalism and religious extremism should be eliminated
- poverty and unemployment should be reduced
- debt bondage³¹ should be eliminated
- the gap between the rich and the poor should be narrowed
- social development, employment and poverty alleviation should be given priority in the Government's development policies
- a detailed Millennium Development Goal work plan is needed, complete with investment allocation
- a social security programme should be started for poor, vulnerable groups and poor women
- child labour should be eradicated with social support from the Government
- defence spending should be reduced and the funds spent on social development
- the agricultural sector should be developed to increase income and employment opportunities for rural people
- industrialization should be promoted in rural areas to generate employment
- the rights of fishermen, herdsmen and rural communities should be protected with respect to common natural resources
- government lands should be allotted to the landless
- access to health, education, electricity, water supply, sanitation, public transport and other basic needs should be increased for the poor. ■

29 Ministry of Finance, *op cit.* "Poverty". www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters/05-Poverty.pdf

30 Nadeem Malik. *The News*. "4.2% reduction in poverty, claims Economic Survey." 12 June 2004, www.jang.com.pk/thenews/jun2004-daily/12-06-2004/main/main1.htm

31 Paying off a family's loans via the labour of family members or heirs.

PALESTINE

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The 2005 Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) of the Palestinian Ministry of Planning includes a substantial section on poverty alleviation. The document does not articulate any gendered notion of poverty, although it declares that "MTDP projects and programmes that are gender sensitive and contribute to female empowerment will receive special attention".¹⁸ While the MTDP "recognizes the role of women in furthering Palestinian development... as dynamic members of the labour force... and... active political players in the democratic process", there are no plans or suggestions of how to operationalize these values.

A National Committee for Poverty Eradication has been established by the Palestinian Cabinet and is comprised of representatives from various civil society bodies, ministries, and private sector institutions. Its purpose is to develop a national strategy for poverty alleviation, to monitor policy documents to ensure an appropriate poverty focus, and to lobby the donors to allocate more resources for poverty eradication.

The PCBS is also working to integrate a gender component into all of its research in order to complement the ministries' move towards addressing gender issues.

The role of civil society

With hundreds of millions of dollars of assistance destined for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, civil society is committed to poverty alleviation programmes that link relief with development in order to encourage productive, responsible, and accountable state-building measures; promote indigenous development priorities; and combat heavy dependence on foreign aid despite the ongoing occupation.

Civil society is participating in a UNDP initiative in partnership with the PCBS to localize the Millennium Development Goals through the development and monitoring of indigenous poverty indicators. There is also an attempt to establish a credit bank for the poor which currently has a seed fund of USD 10 million. Palestine now boasts its own annual Human Development Report, and the 4 year-old national Palestinian Participatory Poverty Assessment Project is currently entering its second phase. Regionally Arab and Palestinian civil society actors have joined together in a United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia initiative to rehabilitate socio-economic infrastructure in Palestine; and internationally the Palestinian NGO Network is participating in the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP). With the optimistic vision that peace negotiations are imminent with Israel, there are also a large number of new programmes promoting meaningful employment for youth and women, as well as microcredit, and microenterprise.

With men unable to find employment, many women are turning to home-based businesses as a means of coping with both the need for income and the social restrictions that discourage women from working outside the home. Local and international NGOs are working to increase and strengthen microcredit and microenterprise programmes since many women lack access to information, resources or credit services.

Recommendations for local and international action include:

- To develop and implement an international advocacy plan to implement international humanitarian law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- To conduct effective international advocacy campaigns to end the illegal Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem.
- To link the poverty alleviation agenda to global agendas.
- To involve civil society organizations in the GCAP campaigns.
- To pressure the Palestinian Authority to modify the MTDP to be gender sensitive and appropriately operationalize the focus on poverty.
- To involve and engage local communities and grassroots organizations in the development of poverty alleviation strategies and programmes and to increase the role of women and other marginalized groups in decision-making processes.
- To expand the institutional and organization capacity of NGOs working in poverty alleviation programmes.
- To encourage rigorous and participatory research on poverty and gender.
- To strengthen and enhance networking and cooperation among organizations working to fight poverty, incorporating all stakeholders including Arab and regional counterparts. ■