Working Paper # 166

Capacity Development Challenges in the way of SDGs implementation in Pakistan

By

Ammad Javed Khan and Wajid Ali
ABSTRACT

Capacity building interventions in major public service domains are inevitable to expedite the prospects for a welfare and egalitarian society. In the field of education, some primary organizational capacity building gaps relate to managerial capacity coupled with lack of experience especially in matters related to policy formulation, planning and management of educational programmes. However, capacity challenges are acute in the area of climate change, health, economic growth, poverty, gender, etc. Owing to limited technical and intellectual capacity of the institutions related to women empowerment, planned development programmes and manifestos have failed to address gender issues.

The study underlines the fact that coordinated and well-planned efforts are essential to improvise the policy agendas of capacity building initiatives that are rational to some extent and viable for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study identifies and examines the challenges of capacity building which are coming in the way of materializing SDGs in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Capacity Building, SDGs, education, health, environment, poverty, gender
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction........................................................................................................................................ 1  
2. Methodology ..................................................................................................................................... 2  
3. Results and Discussion ..................................................................................................................... 2  
3.1. SDGs and the case of Pakistan ................................................................................................ 2  
3.2. Education ..................................................................................................................................... 3  
3.3. Health ......................................................................................................................................... 3  
3.4. Eliminating poverty, inequality, and hunger: ............................................................................ 4  
3.5. Gender Equality ......................................................................................................................... 5  
3.7. Climate Change ............................................................................................................................ 6  
4. Conclusion and Recommendations ................................................................................................. 6  
5. References: ....................................................................................................................................... 8
1. INTRODUCTION

During the last two centuries, the world has progressed immensely and witnessed industrial and agricultural revolutions, complex societal networks, matchless institutional frameworks like the United Nations, and state-of-the-art global trade and transport regimes. Though these trends heralded a new epoch in the history of human civilization, they also created numerous sustenance challenges. The nature of these challenges is diverse such as: climate change, environmental insecurity, population explosion, massive poverty, unplanned urbanization, class stratifications, poor demographic transitions and rise of dictatorial and autocratic regimes across the globe (Szombatfalv 2010; World Trade Organization 2009).

Unfortunately, Pakistan, a country blessed with enormous natural and human resources, is also confronted with sustainability-related issues. The country’s potential of natural and human resources has not been harnessed properly and successive generations continue to live a miserable life. With economic growth being plummeted and developmental projects running at a snail’s pace, social indicators present a gloomy picture of the country’s economy. Poverty has increased rapidly and the population bomb is ticking. Quality of life of people has deteriorated to a considerable extent. When it comes to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Pakistan is ranked 122 out of 157 in the global index. Even the score of Pakistan (55.6) is lower than the regional average (63.3) and the peer group, including Bangladesh (56.2) and India (58.1) in 2017.

In sustainable development, capacity building is a critical component of policy choices and implementation frameworks. It is a process to strengthen the management and governance of an organization so that it can effectively achieve its objectives and fulfil its mission (Beesley et al. 2010; Connolly & York 2002). To achieve this goal, there is a need to acquire capacity building at all levels besides a willingness to make the required changes (Milen 2001). This will also help establish a responsible, efficient and accountable government (Imam 2011). To this end, capacity building of individuals, institutions, think tanks and civil society organizations, as well as federal & provincial governments is indispensable to achieve the SDGs. In many developing countries, people require technical support for the implementation of SDGs. Moreover, the means of implementation, i.e statistical capacity and tools to formulate, implement and monitor the SDGs agenda at local and sectoral level is also insufficient rather absent in some of the countries. Building strong institutions, boosting relevant skills and inter-ministerial coordination are also the major capacity building challenges as there are few policy-revie and evaluation processes in place. The issues of capacity building are found in almost all the departments (i.e. education, health, environment, and infrastructure) which are pivotal to SDGs achievement in the developing countries.

The study examines the challenges of capacity building to materialize the SDGs in Pakistan emphasizing the government to proactively engage itself in the formulation and implementation of tactical agendas like SDGs. It may be mentioned that different capacity building issues are interdependent, and the redressal of one challenge may positively influence the outcome of more than one Sustainable Development Goal.

The study also outlines the capacity building challenges faced by those departments which are pivotal to sustainable development in the country.
2. **Methodology**

This research is secondary in nature, as the data has been collected from different research papers, government documents, statistical databases, and historical records. Systemic review has been conducted to analyze the nature of capacity building gaps and their influence on the Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan.

3. **Results and Discussion**

3.1. **SDGs and the Case of Pakistan**

Given the grim picture of Pakistan’s socio-economic indicators, it is necessary to take true measures to carry out the capacity building of the departments concerned to achieve the SDGs. The table below compares some of the SDGs with the social, economic, developmental and environmental realities of Pakistan besides revealing a perplexed situation of social indicators. Unfortunately, these realities are badly impacting the lives of people, may it be SDG 1 (No poverty) or SDG 2 (No hunger).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDGs</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Pakistan Baseline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDG1</td>
<td>End poverty in all its forms everywhere</td>
<td>21.04% population below poverty line $1.25, 60.19% population below poverty line $2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG2</td>
<td>End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</td>
<td>58.1% of food insecure households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG3</td>
<td>Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</td>
<td>88&lt; 5y mortality rate (per 1000 livelihoods) 170 maternal mortality ratio (per 100k live births)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG4</td>
<td>Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning</td>
<td>58% overall literacy rate 25.02 million children (5-16) are not in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG5</td>
<td>Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</td>
<td>144 rank on women economic participation 132 rank on women education attainment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Skewed mechanisms coupled with half-hearted efforts dampen the prospects for the achievement of SDGs. The problem with Pakistan is that a political elite of feudal and tribal stock has accommodated a section of the wealthy urban groups and as a whole, these privileged classes have opposed reforms, which would have been good for the country but adverse to their personal or corporate interests—be they land reforms or tax reforms needed for implementing social welfare policies and an efficient pro-people governance (Racine 2011). These kinds of attitudes reflect endearment for the status quo. The plant of capacity building cannot grow in the sweltering weather of the status quo.

SDGs underpin and cut across almost all the fields of national development ranging from ending poverty to reducing gender gaps, tackling climate change to the sustainable use of natural resources, and good governance to peace and justice. These goals can prove a watershed moment for Pakistan. Although, Pakistan was able to produce regular data for 33 of the 60 MDG indicators, yet the task for SDGs is proving difficult because SDGs have 231 indicators. A preliminary exercise to assess the data gap for
the SDGs shows that data are available for 125 indicators at the national level, 71 at the provincial level and 27 at the district level. An initial assessment portrays a dismal picture of the availability of data at federal level for SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). However, they can rejuvenate our development discourses and can prove miraculous in transforming the state of Pakistan, if resources (both financial and human) are sincerely committed to achieving these goals. In the proceeding part of the study, the SDGs related challenges will be discussed in the backdrop of capacity building requirements.

3.2. Education
SDG 4 ensures inclusive and equitable quality education for all without any discrimination. However, the menace of illiteracy has fully gripped and plagued the education system of Pakistan. In the field of education, change usually involves developing four types of capacities, i.e. human, organizational, structural, and material (Century 1999). Unfortunately, in Pakistan, institutions responsible for delivering quality education suffer from all the above capacity challenges. Organizational capacity challenges in education sector include: inefficient managerial capacity-coupled with lack of experience especially in matters related to policy formulation, planning and management of education programmes (UNESCO 2017); Human and structural capacity challenges include poor leadership and governance, institutional imbalances and the lack of political consensus (Anwar 2015; Ashfaque 2016; Haider 2013; Lall 2009); material capacity constraints include low budgetary allocation for education, i.e. 2.1 % of GDP, which is very low as compared to other countries of the region as shown in the Table 2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Public sector spending (As % of GDP)</th>
<th>Literacy rate in (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri-Lanka</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Finance 2017-18, Government of Pakistan

Pakistan has to mobilize all the necessary resources to diminish the impact of these capacity challenges which are inflicting heavy damages to quality of education being imparted to our posterity so as to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education (SDG 4.2) and ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university (SDG 4.3).

3.3. Health
SDG 3 and 4 focus on achieving improved nutrition, healthy lives, promoting well-being for all at all ages, availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. These goals stress
on improving the health of people by ensuring basic necessities of life. However, related capacities to achieve these goals by 2030 are lacking in Pakistan. Most acute challenge in this context is shortage of human capacity, i.e. public sector is inadequately staffed (Bhatta & Hafeez 2015) and 40 out of 100 rural health facilities had a sanctioned post for lady doctor but only three of these could be filled (Rizvi & Nishtar 2008) and owing to this fact, many people would bypass the first level health facilities (Shaikh, Kadir & Pappas2007). This reflects gloomy circumstances prevailing in our basic health facilities where a majority of underprivileged and downtrodden go for medical treatment.

The second capacity issue for health-related SDGs is the unavailability of basic facilities and a limited stock of essential medicines (World Health Organization 2004). Pakistan’s spending on health is far less than that of the WHO’s recommended figure of US$ 34 (per capita on health) for low and middle-income countries (Nishtar 2010). Pakistan is spending only 0.6pc of the GDP on its health sector.

Institutional and structural capacity gaps are also looming large for achieving health SDGs in Pakistan. Adequate health policy framework, which set norms and standards, has been the missing link in the health system of Pakistan (Malik et al., 2012). In Post 18th amendment, there is the absence of federal regulatory authority for the regulation and coordination of health-related subjects such as international relational ships, national health information and reporting mechanisms, financial forecasting and donor coordination (Ali & Khan 2011). These hurdles mentioned above have made it very difficult for the state apparatus to improve the lives of people and their basic rights.

3.4. Eliminating poverty, inequality, and hunger:

Sustainable Development Goal 1, 2, 10 and 12 overwhelmingly focus on eliminating poverty, inequality, and hunger by 2030. Unfortunately, poverty and food insecurity are rampant in Pakistan. The state has succumbed to the vagaries of poor policy formulation and implementation for the eradication of poverty and inequality. Poverty rules the roost and almost all the segments of our society are susceptible to it. Capacity issues to address poverty and inequality includeweak institutional capacity to devise and implement poverty reduction strategies (Khan et al. 2015); government devoid of the ability to formulate pragmatic policies will always fail to cater to the needs of masses, including food security and basic necessities of life. Similarly, capacity for agricultural data gathering and analysis is poor, which further undermines agricultural policymaking and implementation (Kugelman & Hathaway 2010).

In addition, institutional capacity for ensuring food security and poverty reduction is absent or stagnant; and there is no output regarding policy interventions to reduce food insecurity and poverty. Pakistan never had any national food policy except launching a few food security programmes at the regional levels (Mittal & Sethi 2009), i.e. essential institutional infrastructure to exploit farm and non-farm nexus is absent (Ahmed & Farooq 2010). Similarly, federal and provincial food departments are poorly prepared to assess the true picture of poverty and inequality in Pakistan and devise pragmatic strategy according to it. In many cases, research and development departments are devoid of proper equipment and facing severe human resource shortages. These trends lead to unsustainable food patterns in a society where a major portion is unable to meet their food needs and fresh drinking water.

The interconnection between economic growth, poverty reduction, structural reforms and improved governance is fairly strong in the case of Pakistan; macroeconomic stability and the consequent rapid economic growth help reduce poverty in conjunction with investment in social sectors, targeted
interventions and social safety nets (Husain 2010). The nexus between economy and poverty reduction needs to be comprehended by our policymakers to protect people from poverty and hunger.

3.5. Gender Equality

Goal 5 focuses on achieving gender equality and women empowerment. It is a major obstacle in the way of socio-economic development of the country. Majority of the policies and incentives are skewed in favour of men. In this context, Goal 5 stresses on achieving gender equality and women empowerment. It focuses on the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies besides the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

There are several capacity building challenges in the way of women development in Pakistan. The government capacity is limited (both human and financial) and issues of women are vast and diverse (Sustainable Development Policy Institute [SDPI] 2008). There are no plans in sight to build the capacity of units that are engaged in establishing and expanding social security nets for women. Provincial women departments do not have the capacity to protect the rights of women and equal opportunities for them in all walks of life.

Similarly, planned development programmes and manifestos have failed to address gender issues due to following capacity issues: poor implementation, limited technical and intellectual capacity of the institutions related to women empowerment (Moheyuddin, 2005). Ministry of Women Development is the principal institutional mechanism for the advancement of women in Pakistan. However, the ministry has not been successful in playing its catalytic role to advocate and highlight women concerns across sectors at all planning levels due to lack of institutional capacity and weak coordination with other line ministries (Asian Development Bank 2009). There is an urgent need to strengthen the capacity of federal and provincial governments in terms of gender mainstreaming.


Goal 7,8 & 9 focus on sustainable economic growth, peaceful and inclusive societies, energy security, resilient infrastructure and inclusive and sustainable industrialization. Economic growth of Pakistan is volatile and mercurial with serious repercussion towards sustainable industrial infrastructure and employment prospects. Several capacity building challenges have hindered the transition of economy to a more sustainable path. The most important bottleneck in the way of rapid economic growth and poverty reduction is lack of capacity of the civil service to function as an effective institution in implementing the policies and programmes (Hussain 2010). In this context, mainly, poor implementation of government economic agendas and policies (i.e. enhancing tax net) is due to poor capacity of civil bureaucracy to perform the assigned task because merit is absent in recruitment, promotion, performance evaluation, compensation. Bureaucracy needs to shed away its love for the status quo. Devising innovative and rational policies can pave the way for economic rejuvenation. There is an urgent need to inculcate the principles of meritocracy and professionalism in our policy communities. In the wake of remarkable but megaprojects like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), it is indispensable to upgrade the capacity building of our people and institutions to harness the dividends. For example, in textile sector there is an acute issue of capacity building of individuals and use of obsolete technology hence causing reduced productivity (State Bank of Pakistan 2017).

Organizational capacity is at its lowest ebb. Resilient infrastructure requires scientific research, upgradation of technological capabilities, conducive policy environment for, inter alia, industrial
diversification and value addition to commodities, which ultimately gave a boost to sustainable economic growth and employment opportunities. And these aspects require institutional development through strong capacity building initiatives to integrate these goals of sustainability and technological advancement into national programmes and agendas. Unfortunately, institutional development has been very slow in Pakistan, and more often than not these have been abused by the elite to extract rent (Hussain 1999). Unless our institutions are eschewed from the rent-seeking mafias, it will be imprudent to expect novel ideas from the status quo ridden system.

The same hypothesis is true about the crunches of energy insecurity in Pakistan. The energy crisis is the largest single drain on Pakistan’s economy, shaving off up to two percentage points from annual gross domestic product growth in the country (Ministry of Finance, 2013). The absence of sound policies from the departments concerned coupled with the absence of capacity building to diagnose the crisis and rectify them are amongst the major causes of the energy crisis in Pakistan.

3.7. Climate Change

Goal 13, 14 and 15 stress on urgent action to combat climate change and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. These goals also emphasize to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and to sustainably manage forests.

Climate change has emerged as one of the biggest threats to the existence of planet earth and Pakistan is no exception to it. There is an increase in floods, landslides, droughts, and typhoons due to an uptick in frequency and intensity of extreme events in Pakistan. Severe heat strokes are now a common phenomenon as experienced in Karachi and Lahore. There are several capacity building challenges to address climatic woes and unsustainable ecosystems in Pakistan. First, there is no capacity building mechanism to undertake research and action to reduce climate change impact. Majority of researchers have failed in accessing high-quality and reliable data; secondly, there exists no plan to train human resources in specific areas of knowledge; and third, there is a lack ability to access scientific tools for on-site data recording (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2015). An action cannot be taken unless an extensive research is undertaken to detect the true cause of this malaise. Similarly, our federal water bodies do not have enough capacity (structural and individual) to assess the implications of climate change on growing water demand and reduction in our water reserves. Pakistan lacks capacity in the area of climate change adaptation, as most of the policies are adhoc, extemporaneous and are generated due to the exegesis of the moment.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

For the speedy achievement of the global agenda and to overcome the problems in the implementation of SDGs in the country, capacity building is a must by integrating the trained forces at federal and provincial level.

In their implementation process, every rupee spent on SDGs needs to be tracked via proper coding system. Similarly, SDGs related provincial annual development programmes need to be counted against SDG indicators. Pakistan needs to pick the number of SDGs and targets that can be best carried with the existing resource capacity and plan to build resource capacity for the rest of the targets and goals.

The government must ensure the integration of capacity building for institutional strengthening to facilitate the SDGs framework at federal and provincial level by stressing ownership and responsibility.
There is a need to establish intensive training programmes in commensurate with the needs of developing countries like Pakistan keeping in view the constraints in resource mobilization and administrative niches. Resource mobilization is a critical challenge in cash-strapped and crisis hit countries; the government must be cognizant of its limitations for devising realistic and pragmatic policies.

It is also imperative to enhance the capacities of national institutions to achieve SDGs by equipping the executives with latest methods and practices for the timely achievement of SDGs. Moreover, the norms and rules, which govern federal and provincial institutions should be flexible by addressing the capacity gaps related to formulation and evaluation of the projects envisaged under SDGs. Policies of the institutions must be tailored according to their respective SDGs. National policies of different institutions should be integrated with these goals by preparing implementation and monitoring frameworks.

The government and relevant international organization should also emphasize on informed decision-making by policy echelons. The apparent divorce between academia, think tanks and policy makers is very critical in Pakistan and is a hurdle in the implementation of SDGs agenda whereas it requires integrated and joint efforts by all segments of society as well as government. In addition, financial management in public departments needs to be professionalized via capacity development programme.

It is necessary to establish information centres at national and sub-national level so as to release accurate and credible information. It will help in decision making, and to facilitate information exchange between different units involved in implementation of SDGs.
5. REFERENCES:


