

## Addressing Rural Poverty in Pakistan: Perspective of Community Engagement

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### ABSTRACT

Poverty has been a key concern since the early days of Pakistan. The measures taken by the government in addressing the issue can be understood both in social and economic perspectives. But it is essential to realize poverty in Pakistan, does not only mean a high unemployment rate and a barrier towards growth. Perhaps; illiteracy, health concerns, sanitation, crime, terrorism and a weak infrastructure are the consequences from this quandary. The motivation behind this study is to understand, how community engagement can be developed in a framework which addresses rural poverty, by allowing local members to participate in areas that create an inter-reliant society.

**KEYWORDS:** Community Engagement, Health, Literacy, Rural Poverty, Technology.

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

Today in the information age, it has become significant for nations to engage in the process of globalization, which constitutes towards their progress, development and sustainability. The case of Pakistan in relation to a way forward has been tangled with devastating challenges. What is important to learn is, how a society and its individuals play a vital role for a promising future, but Pakistani citizens have been unfortunate in facing poverty and its facets, particularly in rural areas. Over the period of time, different surveys and quantitative techniques have been utilized in attaining the exact portion of the population living below poverty line by local and international institutions. A survey report by Sustainable Policy Development Institute (SDPI) states 46% of rural population is living below poverty line in Pakistan [1]. What is thought provoking is every province, region and district has its own concerns of poverty, but the real problems are in areas of education, water supply, health, sanitation, and livelihood.

According to a report by UNESCO [2], literacy in Pakistan is defined “as a person of 10 plus age is literate if he/she can read a newspaper and write a simple letter, in any language.” This statement needs to be elaborated in a social and moral context; the connection between poverty and education is not a new one. A concrete understanding is simply, due to limited resources in Pakistan for social development, the contemporary definition of literacy is still far back. Literacy does not only mean to read, write and find employment, but rather managing challenges of poverty, that are igniting internal vulnerabilities [3], i.e. terrorism, sectarian violence crime, depression, drugs, violence and etc. Being literate also means to have worldly knowledge, in this study’s context possibility for rural communities to take health precautions and to interpret knowledge for livelihood.

Health concerns relating to management of diseases, modern facilities, availability of doctors and limited knowledge to rural communities has been a known fact. According to a report by World Health Organization (WHO) [4], the doctor to population ratio is approximately 1:1000. Poverty is a dimension which leads citizens in numerous complications, as the public health care system being very poor and the private being unaffordable. It is simple to interpret many of problems in rural communities that arise in relation to health are from poor water management, sanitation and limited knowledge on infant care, maternity and etc.

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This is a general study and its objective is not to provide in-depth knowledge on prevailing societal problems in Pakistan. But rather to understand the concept of community engagement, how could it be used for empowering rural societies in Pakistan for becoming self-sufficient, active and vigilant in solving domestic challenges.

## 2 Community Engagement

According to Gottlieb [5], community engagement is a genuine process which allows members of a community to work cohesively on building relations for addressing real societal problems. It is initiated by defining goals, getting involved, devising concrete strategies, prioritizing agendas, implementing them and monitoring progress. What is essential to recognize is that all work is done with the given resources; the concept enhances partnerships and mobilizes relations at the fullest.

### 3How to promote Community Engagement in rural settings of Pakistan?

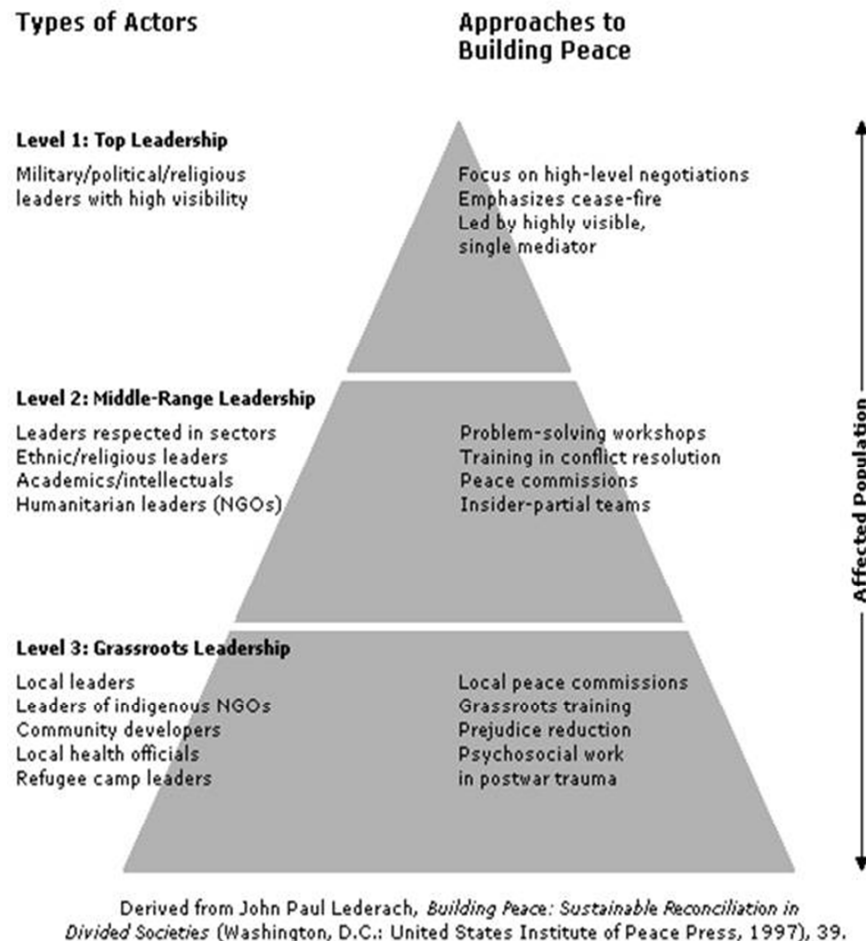
Community Engagement would not only limit itself within the boundaries of formal structures, example public health offices, schools, hospitals and etc in Pakistan. It would allow informal networks to develop within a community with the sense of realization to tackle prevailing problems. It is a vital question, why would individuals' in particular rural setting of Pakistan be motivated to work collectively in a group. According to Minkler (1990) [6], if communities are organized in a meaningful manner and imparted with knowledge, it allows their mindsets to evolve in a direction of hope; they feel the necessity of change in attitude and finding solutions.

Sense of motivation has been a key in historic times for changing the direction of human behavior. Rural poverty is a plague, there are can two ways to manage it, one through government controlled strategies, which have their own goals and aims. Two, by allowing rural communities to become self-adequate in understanding problems, they feel are most important.

If the concept of shared benefits and outcomes is communicated to members of rural communities through guidance of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS), Think Tanks, and Research Centers of Universities and the members of civil society from urban areas, it would allow progress and initiate dialogue. This certainly would have cons, but educating people can do wonders.

#### 3.1 Figure

This figure below *approaches to peace building* by John Paul Lederach, can be adapted for assisting in community engagement. The model emphasizes on initiating progress from grass root levels, perhaps in context of this study the foremost concern of poverty in rural areas is empowering local communities. The model has been designed in a way that it has concrete influence upon societies which are divided and conflict driven [7]. The locals are in the best position in understanding their problems of varying levels; they can be psychological, social, economic or developmental. Once grass root level engagement is attained, it will lead on to opening doors towards progressiveness.



#### 4 Recommendations

- Following the ideology of collaboration and trust, once shared benefits are recognized, this would derive motivation towards working collectively.
- Members of the local community can engage themselves in programmes, which define clear goals of clean and a healthy environment. And how expenses for health could be ignored, if proper sanitation, wastage and drainage systems are created.
- The link between poverty and education is quite extensive, meaning how educating children both males and females would assist in improved lifestyles and better income opportunities. Through common community benefits, the locals would be able to interpret the long term implications of education in fighting crime and economic development in their area.
- Promotion of conventional work by home based workers would contribute towards national economy. Every province or district has some extravagance to offer in terms of their culture, may it be clothes, handicrafts, food and etc. There is a gap, where locals are unaware that through the use of technology their skills would be recognized. If locals are empowered by selecting anyone member of their community to act as focal person, they can work constructively in promoting their heritage, which in turn would open economic opportunities.

- Agriculture development can be initiated by allowing expert volunteers to come and impart knowledge to rural communities about effective and efficient management. These experts would provide feasible possibilities for alternate methods for water efficiency and preventing plagues against sustainable agriculture development. The local community might reach to a consensus by changing their farming methods.
- Child development can be elaborated in defining the future of Pakistan. Parents in rural areas shall be explained importance of ethics and societal behavior. Volunteers from urban areas must define how positive behavior links to a brighter future. The local community in this way may become vigilant and starts to manage for the better.
- Women development, this can be understood in two areas, one economic and second health. The local women in rural areas who work to create traditional handicrafts must be assisted in developing a direct link with the industry. Second, they should be educated for hygiene, matters related to health as maternity.
- Technology must be introduced in rural communities as a source of affordability and reliability in areas of health, education and economic development. These are the key aspects which will address rural poverty. As through the use of technology self sufficiency can be introduced by allowing locals to connect to the world. Such a dais would find volunteers not only in Pakistan, but globally, who would provide their assistance/services in various areas. The local community would be eager to engage in finding possibilities at their convenience and understanding the need to collaborate for mutual benefits.
- Peace Journalism should take on its active role for highlighting initiatives of community engagement, such a direction would increase national awareness [8].

## 5 Analyses

Every ideology has its pros and cons. There is no question about the gradual integration of community engagement with Pakistan's bureaucratic and political arenas. But the rationalization on the subject strictly falls on key actor's behavior. It is them at the grass root levels, who will lead towards social cohesion with concrete objectives of social capital. Simply, social and economic development in rural areas will be equally shared by all members.

## 6 Conclusion

There is no one perfect explanation of how community engagement may become successful in Pakistan's rural context. But there is a gap to recognize, where local communities need to be empowered for becoming self-sufficient and collaborate amongst all societal members for joint benefits. Weak structures in areas of health, education and economic development promote poverty in rural areas. Perhaps, this has existed since the inception of Pakistan, but as a challenge, community engagement can be turned into a process, where through little financial spending and by imparting knowledge locals can become vigilant and knowledgeable towards their aspirations. As mentioned in the literature and recommendations, volunteers who are experts in their fields must join in, as they to face waves of challenges from rural areas. As crime, terrorism, diseases and illiteracy are rooted in Pakistan, they all can be tackled. Volunteers would be from NGOs or urban centers/civil society they would impart knowledge and a direction towards alternate solutions. But the process of transformation lies in the hands of locals, who by their engagement and efforts would promote prosperity. The initiation must begin by educating locals about e-technologies, child development, women issues, modern farming, literacy and sanitation. Such a process would take its due course, but community engagement has immense primacy for uniting people towards concrete and achievable goals.

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