

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES AND NATIONAL SECURITY OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Socio-economic disparities can pose threat to the security of a nation-state. They may even threaten a state's survival. Thereby States have to adopt a comprehensive security approach to address socio-economic disparities. Pakistan is also challenged by socio-economic disparities caused by several internal and external factors. National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-2026 has duly recognised these factors and proposed a comprehensive security paradigm for the country. This study deploys a Comprehensive security approach as propounded by Copenhagen School to understand the linkage between socio-economic disparities and the national security of Pakistan. It attempts to explain how socio-economic disparities affect Pakistan's national security and what can be done to address them.

Keywords: *Socio-economic Disparities, Comprehensive National Security, National Security Policy*

Introduction

With the end of the Cold war, the broad understanding of national security underwent a remarkable change. The post-cold war era debates over national security were dominated by the Copenhagen School of thought. This school surfaced in the realm of security, which was dominated by the traditional approaches to security in terms of defining and understanding the concept.¹ Copenhagen School, for the first time, emphasized the non-traditional aspects of security, purporting a shift away from traditional security studies.² Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde 's work "*Security: A New Framework for Analysis*" added other security sectors – political, economic, societal, environmental – to the list that made the idea of security a comprehensive

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¹ Rebecca Glasencnik, "International Security Studies: Critical Security, Human Security and Copenhagen School Approaches," *Wordpress*, November 28, 2012, <https://bekahbblade.wordpress.com/2012/11/28/>.

² Alan Collins, "*Contemporary Security Studies, 4th Ed.*" (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016).

concept.³ There was a delicate shift of referent object of security, from state to individual, with a claim that “the security of individuals is inseparably entwined to that of the state”.⁴

When viewed through the prism of Copenhagen School, Pakistan is vulnerable to several threats related to other sectors of security going beyond.⁵ Pakistan’s security mosaic presents a grim picture. The pillars of Pakistan’s national power potential intend to safeguard its core national interest(s) and objective(s) in the traditional security domain. Concerns around socio-economic disparities have not been given adequate priority. This warrants a holistic understanding of the national security of Pakistan which should guide formulation as well as implementation strategies.

Aristotle once said that “*Well begun is half done*”.⁶ To attain comprehensive, security objectives, it is important to identify the key threats and factors which may emerge as a security threat in the future i.e., socio-economic disparity. The instability that socio-economic disparities can create in the country can hit almost every sector of national security highlighted by the Copenhagen School. This paper attempts to examine the threats that socio-economic disparities can pose to Pakistan’s national security. For this, it looks into the concept of nation-state, threats, and national security. Later, it looks at the relevant sections of the NSP, focusing on socio-economic disparities and analyses the challenges they pose to national security and the way forward.

Nation-State and National Security

Consequent to the “Peace of Westphalia (1648),⁷ the idea of nation-state found linkage with the modern system of states based on the “Westphalian System”.

- **Nation-State:** In *Strategy and Statecraft*, nation-state is defined as “a polity controlling fixed territory with defined borders.”⁸ The

³ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, “Security: A New Framework for Analysis,” (United States:Lynne Rienner Publishers, September 1998).

⁴ Martin Shaw, “*There is No Such Thing as Society: Beyond Individualism and Statism in International Security Studies*,” *Global Society and International Relations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

⁵ Brig (Retd) Muhammad Khurshid Khan, “A Stable Pakistan: Proposed Model of National Security,” *Margalla Paper*, vol 17 no. 1. (2011):71. <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/issue/view/6/57>.

⁶ The International Association of Forensic Toxicologists (TIAFT), “Well Begun is Half Done – Aristotle,” <http://www.tiaft.org/well-begun-is-half-done.html/> (accessed on August 25).

⁷ Lumen Learning, “Boundless World History,” Accessed on Feb 14, 2022.<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-worldhistory/chapter/nation-states-and-sovereignty/> (accessed on Feb 14,2022).

privileges given to a nation-state in the Westphalian system were; “each state has sovereignty over its territory and domestic affairs, to the exclusion of all external powers, on the principle of non-interference in another country’s domestic affairs, and that each state (no matter how large or small) is equal in international law”.⁹

- **National Security:** National security as a collective term is used for defence and foreign relations, and the protection of a country’s interests. Whenever contemporary scholars discuss “national security” they term it as “the ability of a nation to protect its internal values from external threats”.¹⁰ In addition to military aspects (traditional security), the concept of national security encompasses elements of political independence, territorial integrity, internal stability, and national unity (non-traditional security). Furthermore, John C. Gannon argues that “besides many other factors, demographics, health; natural resources, and environment; science and technology; the global economy; national and international governance; and future conflicts are the drivers which impact the national security”.¹¹ Another approach to defining national security postulates that the non-traditional security themes can be encapsulated into the term ‘human security’; the idea that assumptions of national security should revolve around the security of the individual, which moves away from the state-centric view.¹² A combination of traditional and non-traditional security is what is known as *comprehensive security*.¹³

The comprehensive approach integrated in the National Security Policy covers all those sectors and elements that either contribute to stability or may incite conflict. Existential threats that

⁸ Basic book of Strategy and Statecraft of National Defence University, Islamabad.

⁹ Lumen, “Boundless World History.”

¹⁰ International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, “National Security,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. 1968. (accessed on March 2, 2022) <http://www.encyclopedia.com/>.

¹¹ John C. Gannon, “Defining US National Security for the Next Generation,” Conference on the Role of Foreign Assistance in Conflict Prevention US Agency for International Development, January 8, 2001, National Intelligence Council: www.dni.gov/nic/

¹² Peter H. Liotta and Taylor Owen, “Why Human Security?” *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* vol. 7, no. 1 (2006): 37- 5, <https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/shjdir/v7n1/>.

¹³ NSD, “Islamabad Security Dialogue,” *National Security Division and the Advisory Board of the National Security Committee of Pakistan*, March 17-18, 2021, <https://mofa.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/>.

have the potential to impair the unity, cohesion, and integrity of a state must be mainstreamed. The threats induced by the socio-economic disparities within a state can be existential threats to national security. There is a great need for securitization¹⁴ of the socio-economic disparities as underscored by Ole Wæver of the Copenhagen School. To gauge the intensity of positive as well as negative consequences of socio-economic equality and inequality respectively, it is important to identify the key facets of socio-economic disparities, which are as follows.

Socio-economic Factors and Disparities

The world is divided into several socio-economic statuses (SEs). It can be defined as “an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and an individual's or family's economic access to resources and social position as compared to others”.¹⁵ SES is commonly used to depict an economic difference in society.¹⁶ It is generally broken into three levels: high, middle, and low to describe three places an individual or group may fall into. Socio economic factors help us determine an individual's or a group's SES. SES is also used as an instrument to measure the socio-economic disparity by quantitatively assessing the socio-economic factors (education, health, income, and occupation). These factors are crucial for the comprehensive national security of Pakistan.

- **Socio-economic Factors:** There are certain factors by which the SES is assessed. Broadly speaking, SES encompasses income, education, health, and occupation as well as family structure related changes.¹⁷
- **Socio-economic Disparities:** An analysis of SES shows inequalities in individuals' access to resources (in addition to the issues related to privilege, power, and control).¹⁸ Therefore, socio-

¹⁴ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, “*Security: A New Framework for Analysis*,” (United States: Lynne Rienner Publishers, September 1998)

¹⁵ J Michael Oakes, Peter H Rossi, “The Measurement of SES in Health Research: Current Practice and Steps toward a New Approach,” *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003): 769–784.

¹⁶ Institute of Education Sciences, “National Center for Educational Statistics,” *Institute of Education Sciences*, March 31, 2008, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/glossary/s.asp>.

¹⁷ Allison Milne and Lee A Plourde, “Factors of a Low-SES Household: What Aids Academic Achievement?” *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, vol. 33, no. 3 (September 2006): 183-193, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ764667>.

¹⁸ American Psychological Association, “Socio-economic Status,” *American Psychological Association*, Accessed on February 14, 2022.

economic disparity arises when some people or groups are systematically excluded from an upstanding economic cycle.¹⁹ In simple terms, this inequality prevails when some people in a society are less privileged in terms of income, education, health, and occupation than others.

Poverty is Inequality?

Generally, it is believed that where there is poverty, there is inequality. However, this is a wrong assumption as both are two distinct concepts. There can be a wealthy country with little poverty and a huge amount of inequality. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is one such example. A similar one is Cuba; there is more poverty in Cuba than in KSA, but it is less inequitable and more equal. Poverty and inequality do not change at the same pace and they may even change in opposite directions. A decrease in poverty is not always accompanied by a decrease in inequality; it may be accompanied by an increase in it.²⁰

Linkage between Socio-Economic Disparity and National Security

There is a strong linkage between socio-economic disparities and the national security of a country. The socio-economic harmony brings dividends, which can be seen in the socio-economic models of the United Kingdom (UK) and South Korea.

- **United Kingdom (UK):** The UK with its policies of the welfare state,²¹ as noted by Sir William Beveridge,²² has a system of 'National Insurance' which has three basic elements: family allowances, a National Health Service, and full employment to its citizens. All three elements are basic factors which determine the SES of an individual.
- **South Korea:** Republic of Korea (ROK) has also kept the socio-economic has prioritized concerns and ensured provision of

<https://www.apa.org/topics/socio-economic-status> (accessed on February 14, 2022)

¹⁹ APEC Economic Committee, "Socio-Economic Disparity in the APEC Region," *APEC Economic Committee*. (2006):04.

²⁰ Andre Beteille, "Poverty and Inequality," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 38, no. 42 (2003): 44-56.

²¹ Virginia Noble, "*Inside the Welfare State: Foundations of Policy and Practice in Post-War Britain*," 1st Ed. (UK: Routledge, 2009).

²² Sir William Beveridge, "Beveridge Report: Social Insurance and Allied Services," *Socialist Health Association*, November 1942: <https://www.sohealth.co.uk/national-health-service/>.

education to almost 97 percent of its population²³ and health insurance to almost every citizen.²⁴

While looking at the negative consequences of socio-economic disparity on the national security of a nation-state or a region, one can see examples of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and countries engulfed in the Arab Spring.

- **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):** Despite being the second-largest African country with nearly 200 million acres of cultivable land and large reserves of diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, zinc, and coltan (which is used in mobile phones and other electronics), DRC is one of the poorest countries ridden by socio-economic disparities. It ranks 175th out of 189 as per the UN Human Development Index 2021 and 73 percent of its population lives in extreme poverty. The roots of this menace lie in years of exploitation and violent plundering by colonizers, leaders, private interests, neighbouring countries, and internal warring factions.²⁵ DRC is experiencing instability and anarchy. The immense potential of the natural resources cannot benefit the people of Congo. DRC has an inherent socio-economic disparity due to a lack of legitimate political infrastructure and the absence of coherent systems.
- **The Arab Spring:** The series of protests against governments, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across much of the Arab world in the early 2010s was the result of factors of corruption and economic stagnation.²⁶ The Arab Spring was ignited by the discontentment of the locals, especially of youth and unions, with the rule of local authoritarian governments. However, many have also concluded that the huge disparity in the income levels and pressures of the Great Recession (2008) also cause such chaotic movement.²⁷ The damage done by the socio-economic disparity was such that even today, numerous ongoing conflicts

²³ Korean Education Center UK, "Education in Korea," *Korean Education Center UK*, 2020, <http://www.koreaneducentreinuk.org/en/education-in-korea/>.

²⁴ Young Joo Song, "The South Korean Health Care System," *International Medical Community: JMAJ* 52(3) (200): 206–209.

²⁵ Concern Worldwide US, "The DRC Crisis, Explained," *Concern Worldwide US*, October 28, 2021, <https://www.concernusa.org/story/drc-crisis-explained/>.

²⁶ Lin Noueihed, "Peddler's Martyrdom Launched Tunisia's Revolution," *Reuters World News*, January 19, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/>.

²⁷ The Arab Spring—One Year Later: The CenSEI Report analyzes how 2011's clamor for democratic reform met 2012's need to sustain its momentum; "The Arab Spring – One Year Later," *The Center For Strategy, Enterprise & Intelligence (cenSEI) Report vol 2, no. 6* (2012): <https://censei.wordpress.com/our-products-and-services/the-censei-report/>.

are considered an outcome of the Arab Spring. Civil wars in Syria,²⁸ Yemen,²⁹ and Libya (concluded in 2020)³⁰ and the bank crisis in Lebanon are some of the by-product of the Arab Spring sparked by socio-economic disparity among other factors in the region.

The Current Socio-Economic Landscape of Pakistan

The socio-economic disparity is persistent in the social spheres of Pakistan. In general, socio-economic disparities in Pakistan can be divided into two categories: general disparities among the citizens of Pakistan and the disparities that prevail among different regions of Pakistan.

According to Pakistan's National Human Development Report (NHDR) 2020, there exists an immense inequality among Pakistan's provinces and regions, across the urban-rural divide, and within neglected and less privileged segments of the population, such as youth, labourers, women, and children. Pakistan's NHDR 2020³¹ presents the idea of "two different Pakistans", "one for the affluent and the other for the poorest". One with a myriad of opportunities such as quality education guaranteed health care and generational wealth while the other is without even the minimum life necessities and livelihood. Intrinsically, the 1 percent poorest of the population holds only 0.15 percent of national income, while the 1 percent of the richest holds 9 percent of national income back in 2018-2019. According to the report, the widening wealth inequality, access to services, and income generation may have a long-term negative impact on human development. To mitigate income inequality, it is the per capita income of the poorest 40 percent of Pakistanis that must grow at a rate that supersedes the income growth rate of the total population. While discussing the general socio-economic disparity the report suggests two pertinent findings related to Pakistan:

- Pakistan has a Gini coefficient (that is a usual tool to measure income disparities) of 30 percent, signalling low inequality overall.
- Pakistan has a level of income inequality that is low to moderate but changes considerably. For example, during 1987-88 to 2013-

²⁸ BBC, "Why has the Syrian War Lasted 11 Years?" *BBC*, March 15, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>.

²⁹ Kali Robinson, "Yemen's Tragedy: War, Stalemate, and Suffering," *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 25, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/background/yemen-crisis>.

³⁰ Center for Preventive Action, "Yemen War: Background," *Council on Foreign Relations | Global Conflict Tracker*, March 25, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen>.

³¹ UNDP, "Pakistan National Human Development Report," *UNDP*, 2020, <https://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/>.

14 income inequalities increased by 6 percent and 8.7 percent respectively for different regions of Pakistan.³²

The other type of disparity is regional disparity in Pakistan. According to Pakistan's NHDR 2016,³³ the most unequal income distribution was in urban Punjab where the Gini coefficient remained highest during 1987-88, and with an increase of 5 percent it remained at the top even during 2013-14. In rural Punjab, income inequality also increased by 29 percent from 1987-88 to 2013-14. During the same time, the income distribution in rural Sindh worsened by almost 36 percent while overall inequality in Sindh also increased. And in the urban areas of both Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), income inequality worsened by 28 percent and 26 percent respectively. This whole mosaic suggests an overall increase in income inequality across all provinces of Pakistan. Furthermore, some evidence also shows that income disparities among various provinces have considerably increased over the last 15 years. According to NHDR 2020, the provinces experienced a wide increase in income inequality from 2006 to 2016, which further decreased the difference between the richest and poorest quintiles. In terms of GDP, the gap between the rich and poor increased slightly between 2006 and 2019. KP has witnessed substantial human development in recent years but it did not go that far. And finally, Baluchistan shares a profile of being the province that has the lowest share of the country's population and the weakest performance on indicators of human development. Irrespective of their income progress, all these provinces have consistent inequalities in education, living standards, and health facilities.³⁴

Persistent socioeconomic disparities will certainly affect human development in Pakistan, thereby acting as a drag for the overall development of the country. Less development means fewer resources for the people which translates into human insecurity; which is a key component of comprehensive national security. Lack of access to basic health, clean water, quality education, food, employment, social security, and social justice will certainly undermine the national security of Pakistan. The socioeconomic disparities coupled with the deprivation of the marginalized segments of society have the potential to worsen the security calculus of Pakistan. The marginalized, less privileged, and socially deprived people of the society can become targets of the forces inimical who aim at destabilizing Pakistan. Hence, much neglected

³² Haroon Jamal, "Does Inequality Matter for Poverty Reduction? Evidence from Pakistan's Poverty Trends," *The Pakistan Development Review* vol. 45, no. 3(2006): 439-459.

³³ UNDP, "Pakistan National Human Development Report," UNDP, 2016, <https://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/annual-reports/>.

³⁴ UNDP, "Pakistan National Human Development Report," 2020, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/pk/>.

phenomenon of socio-economic disparities has the potential to endanger the comprehensive national security of Pakistan.

Therefore, a proactive approach is required to address the persistent socio-economic disparities so that the comprehensive national security of Pakistan may be ensured. A clear manifestation of this approach is visible in the NSP of Pakistan. The document is the first of its type and articulates a citizen-centric approach to draw a 'Comprehensive National Security' framework for the country. It places economic security at the core with an emphasis on geo-economic vision and enhanced focus on geo-strategy so that with sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the national resource pie can expand, which will usher in greater availability of resources to bolster both human security and traditional security. A keen analysis of this policy document would also illustrate the need and ways to overcome the socio-economic disparities in Pakistan. The challenges to national security of Pakistan are discussed as follows:

Challenges to the National Security of Pakistan

Currently, there are several internal as well as external challenges undermining the national security of Pakistan. The external challenges need to be guarded against but the internal threats require a proportionate response. These challenges are as follows:

Challenges of Disharmony: Federation and Inter-Provinces³⁵

Ever since the independence, Pakistan has faced multiple challenges. These challenges have created mistrust between the federation and provinces. It is a by-product of the sense of deprivation felt by the people of these provinces due to socioeconomic disparity. These challenges when coupled with the lack of people's trust in the state, which is also a by-product of socio-economic disparity, have complicated the process of national cohesion in Pakistan.³⁶

State is the chief enabler of socio-economic wellbeing of its people. After the 18th amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan, this falls under the domain of the provinces. The complex nature of discontent and lack of harmony between the federation and provinces in Pakistan is widely

³⁵ Ehsan Mehmood Khan, "SAN Analysis: Internal Security Strategy for Pakistan," Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies-Knowledge for Peace, January, 2011, <https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/>"Pakistan: Worsening Conflict in Baluchistan," *International Crisis Group, Asia Report No: 119*, September 14, 2006, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/>.

³⁶ Nawaz M. Khan, "National Integration: Challenges and Options for Pakistan," *Journal of Security and Strategic Analyses*, vol. VII, no.1: July, 2021, <https://thesvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/dr-nawazkhan.pdf>.

recognized.³⁷ Although there exist several causes for such a predicament, this disharmony is hindering the efficient response to the issues of national security and human security. It constrains the state organs to put up a coherent response to combat socio-economic disparity. Political harmony needs political stability while socio-economic disparity can cause political instability i.e., violent demonstrations by the people, to show their distress, and increased political activism by the local leaders. All these elements when combined can reduce the prospects of political harmony among federation and provinces.

Governance Challenges:³⁸ The absence of good governance is a persistent factor in Pakistani society. To overcome the socio-economic disparity, governance is the most important element which needs to be focused upon. However, one of the key impediments in the implementation of governing principles is socio-economic disparity itself. For example, some of the main attributes of good governance include lack of corruption, accountability and provision of social justice, in addition to the rule of law. However, due to socio-economic disparity in society, the state organs have separate standards of delivering governance to two different segments of society i.e. rich and the poor. As mentioned by Dr Hafiz Pasha the concept of “two different Pakistans,” aptly applies here as the rich have money to pay/bribe to get away with their corruption and avoid accountability, whereas the poor class continues to suffer unabated. This way the socio-economic disparity doesn’t only hamper the process of good governance but, also contributes to the lack of good governance.

Economic Challenges:³⁹ A healthy economy enables socio-economic development of a state whereas socio-economic disparities hinder the economic progress. Pakistan is currently facing a significant economic challenge with total debt and liabilities reaching up to Rs. 53.5 trillion⁴⁰ and a record inflation rate of up to 24.9 percent in July 2022, the highest since October 2008.⁴¹ According to International Energy Agency (IEA), approximately, 40 million people in Pakistan have no access to electricity. Those who have access, are facing the worst kind of load-shedding due to

³⁷ Dawn, “Reducing Disharmony through New NFC Award,” February 17, 2003, <https://www.dawn.com/news/82412/reducing-disharmony-through-new-nfc-award>.

³⁸ Lt. Colonel Muhammad Aslam, “National Integration: Current Status and Future Strategy,” *National Defence College*, 1999-2000.

³⁹ Muhammad Tariq Niaz, “National Security Policy of Pakistan under Current Socio-economic Disparities,” unpublished MPhil Thesis, National Defence University, Year 2014.

⁴⁰ Shahbaz Rana, “Pakistan’s Debt Mounts to Rs53.5 Trillion,” *Express Tribune*, May 21, 2022.

⁴¹ Trading Economics, “Pakistan Inflation Rate,” *Trading Economics*, July 22, 2022, <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/inflation-cpi/>.

energy shortfall of 25 percent of the total produced capacity.⁴² This needs immediate attention of the policymakers to pursue economic policies that ensure sustainable and all-inclusive development, reduction of poverty and inflation, and management of foreign debt services and mitigation of the growing energy crisis.

Health and Education Challenges: Health and Education are two basic indicators of progress in society. The provision of high standards of health and education to all people in Pakistan is a huge challenge that is also aggravating socio-economic disparities. According to *Lancet Study*, Pakistan ranks 154th among 195 countries in terms of quality, accessibility, and affordability of healthcare.⁴³ There is a shortage of community hospitals as compared to the huge population that is currently 235,824,862. And there are only 1201 government hospitals. The literacy rate of Pakistan also presents some worrisome statistics. The current literacy rate of Pakistan is 62.3 percent which means that an estimated population of 60 million is illiterate in the country.⁴⁴ It should be noted that many of these hospitals and literate people are in developed regions of Pakistan whereas the less developed regions i.e., rural Sindh, Southern Punjab, Gilgit Baltistan and Baluchistan have only a limited number of government hospitals.⁴⁵ Moreover, the increased socio-economic disparity in rural Sindh and Southern Punjab, highlighted in the UNDP Report 2020, has the potential to further aggravate the security problems for Pakistan.

Social Challenges: Pakistan's society is in constant flux, though still dominated by traditional norms. Ironically, the period of late 1970s and 1980s witnessed mushrooming of militant religious outfits in Pakistan. The visible decline in the cultural norms and radicalization of society along with adoption of state sponsored religious indoctrination sowed the seed of grave social challenges. This resulted in an upsurge in extremism, terrorism, and sectarianism, in addition to the weaponization of the society, which worsened the societal mosaic. It can be ascertained through observations that socio-economic disparity when combined with radicalization instigates the locals towards or extremism or terrorism. Therefore, addressing these social issues in addition to the provision of education, health security, employment and speedy justice are essential to avert the alarming ramifications of socio-economic disparity in the

⁴² IEA, "Pakistan: Key Statistics 2019," <https://www.iea.org/countries/pakistan>, (accessed on August 24, 2022)

⁴³ The Frontier Post, "Pakistan Ranks 154 among 195 Countries in Healthcare," *The Frontier Post*, <https://thefrontierpost.com/pakistan-ranks-154-among-195-countries-in-healthcare/> (accessed on August 26, 2022)

⁴⁴ MOFEPT, "Adult Literacy," (accessed on August 26, 2022) <http://mofept.gov.pk/ProjectDetail/>(accessed on August 26, 2022)

⁴⁵ Dawn, "DHQ Hospital at Gilgit," *Dawn*, October 15, 2008, <https://www.dawn.com/news/877100>.

country. Another social challenge is the demographic imbalance across major cities of Pakistan like Karachi, Lahore, and Faisalabad among others. People from marginalized segments of Pakistan come to these cities for better opportunities for employment, education, and health. This results in overpopulated cities which in turn affect other segments of society i.e., increased crime rates, inflation, noise pollution, air pollution and ill-management of resources.

The Way Forward

Socio-economic disparity is a widespread phenomenon witnessed across time and almost across every part of the world. The difference is related to its intensity. It can be understood with a simple example of a person. Whoever leaves his home is liable to confront multiple risks i.e., road accidents, expected robbery, or even murder. However, the intensity of risk is increased when there is a situation of inevitable risk to life or money. This risk will then define one's course of action as either he will stay home or call the police for safety and security. Similarly, socio-economic disparities were present in Pakistan for long but the current situation is alarming as they are now threatening Pakistan's national security. Thereby, there is an urgent need to take concrete steps that can mitigate the socio-economic disparity in Pakistan. These include as:

Enhanced National Cohesion and Political Harmony: National cohesion plays a critical role in making a state strong. There is a need to pursue policies that promote 'unity in diversity' and patriotism by valuing our ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity. For example, policies that ensure wholesome participation from all segments of Pakistan and strict laws adherence to prohibit violation of basic rights of minority groups by the majority ethnic, religious or lingual groups. Furthermore, there should be endeavours to strengthen Pakistan's federal nature by observing democratic principles and ensuring harmony among federating units and territories. Given the provincial system of Pakistan, harmony among all provinces is indispensable for prosperity. Therefore, the only way to eradicate socio-economic disparity is through provincial harmony that will ensure the just disbursement of resources among the masses and enduring solutions to the issues i.e., water discords, Baluchistan crisis, etc.

Good Governance: The quality of governance is a key determinant of good economic performance, not foreign assistance.⁴⁶ The provision of basic needs, equal rights, rule of law and swift social justice to the people must be considered the sole responsibility of the state.⁴⁷ There is a need to

⁴⁶ Dr. Ishrat Husain, "Governing the Ungovernable: Institutional Reforms for Democratic Governance," (Oxford University Press: July-September, 2018).

⁴⁷ Brigadier (Retired) Shaukat Qadir, "Can Good Governance be Simplified for Pakistan," *Strategic Thought* 2, no.1 (July, 2020)

effectively implement the already established policies which promote transparency, and efficient and equitable delivery of public services to strengthen the social contract between the state and the citizens.

Educational Reforms: There are several reforms needed in the education sector as it is the key to overcoming the effects of socio-economic disparity. Education helps to diminish the sense of deprivation among the less-privileged masses. In addition, it reduces the chances of exploitation of people by external actors. The initiative of “Single National Curriculum”⁴⁸ by the former PM Imran Khan’s government has envisioned equal education opportunities for every segment of Pakistan. If implemented properly, it will serve the purpose. Moreover, there is a need to draw a proper facilitation plan for the primary, elementary and secondary school teachers who are the main enablers of an educated society. Affordable and accessible provision of education to all citizens will further arrest the socio-economic disparities in society.

Economic Opportunities for Youth: The level of employment ratio among the people of indicates the state of economy of a country. Unemployment, when coupled with poverty and high inflation, is one of the key factors that accentuate the socio-economic disparities in Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, over 31 percent of Pakistan's youth are currently unemployed, out of this, 51 percent are females, 16 percent are males, with many of them holding professional degrees.⁴⁹ If the youth is provided with essential tools and an environment for employment opportunities, it will immensely help in addressing economic challenges. To manage the current employment situation there are some long-term and some short-term policy measures:

- The long-term policy measures include better reforms to attract FDI that will in turn not only provide a financial advantage to the state but also employment opportunities to its people and diversify exports that will provide employment opportunities to the people of Pakistan.⁵⁰ An important factor that must be incorporated in this regard is the provision of entrepreneurship skills to the locals so that they can benefit from these endeavours i.e., entrepreneurship skills to the people, specifically near Gwadar so that they can have their constructive share from the dividends of CPEC.

⁴⁸ Dawn, “Punjab likely to Roll Back Single National Curriculum for Middle Classes,” *May 3, 2022*, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1687977>.

⁴⁹ “31% of Pak Youth Currently Unemployed, Many with Professional Degrees: Rpt,” *Business Standard*, <https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/>

⁵⁰ Sakina Lavingia, “Attracting Foreign Direct Investment in Pakistan: The Role of Governance, National Security and Global Investment Trends,” (Oberlin: Oberlin College, April 11, 2016): <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>

- The short-term policy measure can be providing the people with skills that can equip them to generate income even if they do not have any government or private job. In the age of e-commerce, the government must take practical steps to provide expert training to the people so that they can have better employment opportunities. According to a report published, in 2020 Saudi Arabia exported crude oil worth \$113.7 billion while India exported software services worth \$133.7 billion.⁵¹ Moreover, Pakistan has an e-commerce potential of \$15 billion by 2025. Pakistan was the 37th largest market of e-commerce with total revenue of \$5.9 billion in 2021 and is expected to reach \$7.66 billion by the end of 2022.⁵² This shows the potential of the IT sector for uplifting the state's economy. The service sector has the most export potential but it is yet to attract the government's attention as 'the next big thing'. These steps, if managed properly, can help alleviate the socio-economic disparities in society.

Improvement of Healthcare Facilities: There must be better health facilities for the people of Pakistan. It is suggested to not only improve the standards of health facilities but also provide equal access to the health facilities. The initiative of 'Sehat Card' by the previous government is a worthy initiative that is likely to raise health standards by providing health insurance to deserving citizens. In addition to the 'Sehat Card' program,⁵³ the number of community hospitals must be increased. It is because in remote areas of Pakistan, the sole reliance is on community hospitals and there is a negligible number of private hospitals there.⁵⁴ There are several rural areas of Sindh, Baluchistan, KP, and Punjab where community hospitals hardly exist. Although initiatives like 'Sehat Card' are fruitful as they will ensure health security and curb socio-economic disparity, there is a need to improve the health sector both qualitatively and quantitatively. This will further strengthen the citizen-centric approach of the state.

Strengthening Social Sector: Challenges in the social sector are manifold, however, those which widen socio-economic disparities can threaten Pakistan's security by contributing to radicalization and weaponization of society, and rising extremism. Education along with comprehensive

⁵¹ Gitconnected, "Software is the New Oil," *Gitconnected*, February 6, 2022, <https://levelup.gitconnected.com/software-is-the-new-oil-4a698409f296>.

⁵² Itrat Bashir, "E-commerce Market Projected to Generate \$ 7.7bn Revenue in 2022," *Bussiness Recorder*, April 30, 2022, <https://www.brecorder.com/>

⁵³ Sehat Sahulat Program, "Sehat Card," *Sehat Sahulat Program*, <https://www.pmhealthprogram.gov.pk/> (accessed on August 26, 2022).

⁵⁴ Mahmood, Mohammed & Moss, J & Karmaliani, Rozina, "Community Context of Health System Development: Implications for Health Sector Reform in Pakistan," *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*: 464-71.

awareness campaigns will promote tolerance and abidance of legal norms. The awareness program by Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Pakistan can assuage the curse of increased drug usage.

