

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AS A POLICY PROBLEM IN PAKISTAN



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Muhammad Arif Khan

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Planning & Development Board (P&D),

Civil Secretariat, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Email: info@pnd.punjab.gov.pk

Phone: 092-42-99059000

Fax: 092-42-99210308

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Introduction

Inequality is a serious challenge for humanity and it is a hot topic of discussion amongst academicians, journalist's politicians, policymakers, etc. However, some scholars try to justify it as a natural consequence of economic growth. They assume that issue of economic inequality will automatically be redressed as the economy grows. But in developing countries like Pakistan, inequality is growing into a serious



Source: news.psu.edu

policy challenge. Many problems of serious nature like extremism, terrorism, malnutrition, poverty, illiteracy are cropping up with the increase in the gap between the rich and the poor. In this short paper, I would try to establish that the failure to address the menace of economic inequality has disastrous consequences for Educational Policy in Pakistan. In the end, I would suggest what the government of Pakistan should do to redress the issue. There is no justification for the debate that inequality is the by-product of the free-market economy and in essence, it provides an impetus to the people with low-income groups to put more effort. (Chaudary 2008)

Pakistan Economic Spending

Pakistan is one of the countries that spend the least on education, As per World Bank statistics, the world percentage of spending on education to GDP ratio has increased from 4.2% in 2000 to 4.4% in 2012. (World Bank 2012). However, in Pakistan, the spending on education has decreased from 2.6% in 2000 to 2.1% in 2012. Pakistan's education spending is the lowest in South Asia. (Reporter 2016),



Source: dailytimes.com.pk

(According to fact sheet 2012, 501 million children are out of school. It is the second-highest in the world and around 34 million out of them are girls. It is stated in the report that 25% of children between 7-16 years of age have never joined a school and the number of out-of-school children varies with variation in economic status, gender, and region. The poorest of the poor girls are having the least access to education.

Impact of Economic Inequality on Growth

The impact of this gross neglect is that 33% of the young adults aged between 15-24 years of age, which has been considered the most productive age, have not completed even primary school education. Resultantly, a huge workforce i.e. 15 million young adults are without any skill. The unskilled workforce cannot compete in the market which pushes them further into the vicious circle of poverty and inequality. Around 50% of rural women in Pakistan have never attended school. Almost 63% of women are in the labour force. But men earn around 60% more than women and



Source: ipsnews.net

educated women earn 95% more than uneducated women. Education and skill can help decrease the level of inequality not only amongst women but also in all segments of society. The status of a Pakistani woman is sharply different from that of a western woman. Women lag behind men in almost every field: health, education, employment opportunities, economic condition and the disparity in male and female education stems from the ideological and social conditioning in Pakistan where a woman is assigned the role of a mother and wife and she is to look after the house and children whereas the man is the breadwinner. Hence the males get more opportunities for getting better education (ADB 2002).

Conclusion

Given the foregoing, it can be assumed that economic inequality, especially gender inequality of income in women, is a big policy challenge in Pakistan. Given the aforementioned facts and figures, it is clear that women that comprise 50% of a countries population cannot be left out, and considering national progress without women's productive participation may not be easy. Education increases productive potential. Pakistan, as much needed policy initiative, needs to enforce education emergency and girls and women should be imparted education. The investment in women means investment in human capital (Gerys 1962). On the other hand, gender economic inequality may have an adverse impact on valuable development goals (Chaudary 2007).

Furthermore, the menace of growing extremism is a big challenge for Pakistan. Illiteracy and Poverty are considered the best breeding ground for extremism. Poverty and economic inequality can be managed at tolerable proportions with the help of education that's free of gender bias. In the present day time when there is cutthroat competition in every field of life, the people are having far greater awareness about their rights and economic injustice. They have limited access to education which is meant to take individuals out of the vicious circle of inequality and poverty. Unemployment and poverty create an atmosphere that is suitable for the growth of extremist tendencies. (Ali 2010,p1)

As we have seen, economic inequality is a serious policy problem in Pakistan as it carries a host of other allied problems with it. Pakistan government as a well-thought-out policy initiative ought to invest in education with a special focus on investing in education for females. Education will not only empower them economically and help take them out of abject poverty but also make them useful citizens of the state. Furthermore, economic inequality caused due to lack of opportunity causes frustration especially in the youth which may lead to extremism and terrorism. All these issues are interlinked with one another.

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