

Changing Perspectives of Community Organizations in Balochistan: A Critical Review

Commerce

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Abstract

The main purpose of this review is to evaluate the changing nature of community organizations in an evolutionary manner & look at the reasons why there has been gap between theory & practice of participatory approach. The review, using descriptive analytical method, is also aimed to explore policy and research implications. The study confirms an improvement in the style & role of community organizations in the socio economic development of province & has found the current practice of collaborative approach better in many ways as compared to earlier ones. However, the overall performance of latest approach was found unsatisfactory in terms of its theoretical claims such as reducing poverty, vulnerability & improving empowerment & sustainability on durable bases. Therefore, the study suggests some changes in its approach & style of implementation especially with respect to the role of community organizations.

Key Words: Changing Perspectives, Community Organization, Collaborative Approach, Sustainable Poverty Reduction.

Introduction

The province of Baluchistan, being tribal society, has a long history of community participation in the rural economy. Over this period, it evolves many stages from informal to formal, top down to bottom up, approach & finally has improved in its new version in terms of collaborative approach. The role of sharing development has therefore, been broadened from shallow to deeply engaged environment of relevant stake holders in the important phases of development projects thorough relatively better effective participatory strategy. It has also been taking different implications for its existence under different development philosophies such as Basic democracies; Basic needs approach, integrated approach, Collaborative approach etc & thus shaping different organizational structure with different objectives within & across the community levels.

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Community organizations, with shared responsibilities for common interest, have now become the vital organ of community-based projects. It is playing a significant role in implementing & maintaining of multi- sectoral initiatives in the rural sector. It is also facilitating the qualitative change in the way of thinking through social mobilization at grassroots level under the support of government & development agencies. Currently, its importance is evident from the report of PSDP analysis (2015-2016), as eighteen foreign funded participation projects are in the process of implementation showing the positive policy response towards community based development activities.

However, unlike the findings of impact studies, the cursory review of regional scholarly studies emphasizes that performance of participatory projects is not up to the level of satisfaction and has yet to be further enhanced due to challenges & issues in the effective reduction of deep seated poverty & vulnerability in the province. What lessons we have drawn, & what should be the way forward to get it more effective are the important questions to be addressed in this paper.

The descriptive study based on the review of relevant literature is organized as under, following the introduction, different aspects of community role in the socio economic development of province will be evaluated in chronological order, and finally, key lessons learnt during the experiences of participatory projects will be produced in the form of policy and research implications.

Community Organizations under Different Perspectives

As already stated, community participation has remained the central concept in rural development projects. During this period, the community role has been redefined & re- conceptualized with the different perspectives resulting in the development of different participatory models. The historical background of such perspectives in the light of experiences will definitely help us to understand the problems and prospects of community organizations in the province.

a) Traditional Perspective

Baluchistan, being the tribal society, has deep roots in practicing community based social & economic activities. Informal community groups without any external support were bound by their customs & social norms to carry out their co-operative role. Institutional arrangements based on tribal system for collective communal resources such as (range land, dams & livestock) remained in fashion in the rural society for centuries and is still existent in some parts of the province. The economic activities especially in

irrigation & agriculture sectors used to be collectively conducted on self-help reciprocal basis. The practice of collective labor (Ashar) at harvest time & the granting of financial assistance (Bijar) to fellow tribesman are still in practice in major part of the rural areas of the province (Buzdar 1987).

Meanwhile, the primitive role of community organizations is under the process of rapid change due to technological advancement in irrigation & agriculture sectors. As for instance, boring of ground water by the tube wells have reduced the dependency on the centuries old underground channel system (karez) & mechanization of agriculture activities have changed the style of collective labor. These changes have also badly affected the social structure in the rural sector & thus, have weakened & disintegrated the centuries old community institutions in the province. (Daanish & Qazi,2007).

b) Governmental Perspective

It was realized, in due course of time, to reorganize the community for group action in order to meet the challenges of modern rural development. The initial sober effort seems to have been made by the government in 50s under the program of Village Aid during Ayub Khan Era followed by basic democracies in early 60s. The aim of these efforts was to engage the communities at grass root level. But the schemes under such system, by & large remained unsatisfactory mainly for the reasons of centralized & corrupt bureaucratic styles (Illahi 1993).

During 70s, a series of integrated rural development programs (IRDP) were launched in the province. These efforts were made under Basic Needs Approach. The philosophy adopted under such approach, was based on the fact that rural development is a multi-facet process requiring actions in multiple sectors by strengthening self-help capacities of rural community. As a result it produced more positive results than the previous rural development initiatives; however, its overall performance was not according to the vision and objectives of the basic need strategy as large number of people were found below the basic threshold of poverty.

In late 80s, a paradigm change was observed in the rural development strategies. An Integrated approach was introduced. However, the crop sector remained the dominant area. The important dimensions of strategy were its major focus on the durability of projects for strengthening the sources of livelihood in the rural sector. The objectives were redefined in terms of empowerment & motivation of the poor through participation. The approach required the ingenious people to be more active and engaged especially for fund management (Rafi Sharukh khan, 1999).

The perusal and assessment of development initiatives under above strategies reveal community involvement for poverty reduction has always been recognized at the policy level. An assessment study conducted by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE, 2001) concludes that the living conditions of rural poor have not been improved as per objectives. It has not brought about a real qualitative change in the rural sector because most of the rural development strategies were based on political expediency & were not planned scientifically & thus could not achieve the intended targets of poverty alleviation (Chaudhry 1999). Assessing the issues of Community Organization under government schemes at the province, it was concluded that reliance on the informal village organization under the leadership of traditional village heads runs the risk of serving the village elites without much of a popular base (Sherani 1993). The general perception about the government role was come out as alienated, inefficient & therefore, the people lost their trust on the government sector.

c) Community Development through NGO Perspective

Meanwhile the role of NGOs, during the above mentioned period, strengthened the involvement of community organization. The volunteer organizations were formed as a common practice for wasted interests of individuals which became the source of mistrust on the NGOs or private sector in the common masses. The development agencies & civil society organization introduced the methodology of development through formation of village or community based organizations. In this context, the Pak German self help program may be considered as the initial milestone in emergence of NGOs in Baluchistan. Although this program was started in the eight decade of twenty century for some specific political objectives yet it encouraged the social activists & professional for formation of NGOs & Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) (Lately the program was converted as a NGO with the name of Baluchistan Rural Support Program).

d) Community Organization through Collaborative Perspective

The province experienced relatively better perspective of community organizations in terms of poverty focused approach through partnership. In late 90s, under this improved version, the Conventional Partial participatory approach was changed into complete participatory mechanism where stake holders were no more agents' rather have become active partners in sharing the responsibilities of managing the projects. While defining collaborative approach to rural development Oakley, (1991) says it is the joint action where government, foreign development agencies & non-government organization

remain the primary driving force and work together to improve the efficiency & effectiveness of participatory development at the grass root level. An increasing support to the collaborative development projects by international development organizations were also noticed during 90s (World Bank 1991, 2000, UNDP 1993).

Considering the importance of participatory development, Baluchistan government has taken a number of development initiatives with the collaboration of foreign aid agencies under poverty reduction strategy, 1993. Some of the worth mentioning major projects executed, during (2002/ 2015) include: Pat Feeder Command Area Development Project, Baluchistan Irrigation & Agriculture, Area Development Program Baluchistan.

The critical assessment of key findings based on the impact studies of above projects based on new version of collaborative approach during stipulated period reveals contrasting views about the performance of participatory approach. On the one hand, it indicates achieving sustainable improvements to income, food security and the environment to major development objectives such like reducing poverty, improving women's economic empowerment & increase in overall agricultural productivity including livestock (Saleem Khan 2007).

On the other hand, some studies reflect that most of the project benefits have not reached the poorest family but has mainly benefited the middle & large income groups. The reasons for such tendency are mainly attributed to a number of factors such as poor targeting, leakages benefiting non poor class, corruption, receiving mentality, absence of middle class & irrelevant interventions. The dormancy of community organization during & after the completion of projects was also raised. On gender dimension, the scholarly studies also show some negative impact on women income therefore, challenging the claim of Participatory Development on the Empowerment of Women (Korten D1980). The overview of regional literature brings out a paradoxical situation of women greater participation but less empowerment in the province due to cultural reasons (Rashid, & Zainab, summer, 2011).

Conclusions & Recommendations

The above review has found that community organization as an institution has been evolved from less to more functional and relevant. Consequently expansion & diversification in the role of community organization have been noticed. The province being tribal society has different mode of community participation under different social organizations facing some persistent challenges not only with the approach but also with its capacity. Given the socio-economic environment of rural Baluchistan, the current perspective of participation of stake holders was found more relevant

& productive than the earlier ones. However, the review found it to be less effective for alleviating poverty on sustainable bases due to factors like poor institutional capacity, structural rigidities & defective power structure. Moreover, leakages in the form of benefiting non weak are common with poverty alleviation projects suggesting targeted strategy. The recent findings based on the regional literature generally show gaps regarding the theoretical claims of participatory approach, Therefore, a number of scholarly inquires must be conducted into the questions why participatory approach, even in its new version, has been unable to achieve the intended benefits in terms of sustainable reduction in poverty & vulnerability in the province, how its effectiveness can be further enhanced in terms of empowerment, sustainability & social capital. In this regard, the available related knowledge based on the projects documents and research papers needs to be effectively utilized for future action research. The following specific community related policy & research implications may be drawn from the above review.

I. Developing more workable linkages

Community organizations need to be strengthened in terms of capacity .therefore; they should be connected with village organizations (VO) as well as with the net working at division, district and union council levels. More synergies & linkages have to be developed between government & other community organizations.

II. Reviving old organizations

Dormant Co's organizations have to be revitalized by follow up productive activities. However in case of forming new organizations, that should be done in the light of cultural and social capital of the area.

III. Categorizing & democratizing community organizations

Community organizations with categorization & specific treatment can be effective to the practice as the tribal society of province is in its transition period having primitive ways of thinking under old institutions still dominate the community in some rural areas of the province. Meanwhile, the regional studies confirm the emergence of new dynamics of rural development challenging the traditional power structure (BADP, 2010).

IV. Discouraging receiving mentality

Receiving mentality, a widely prevalent phenomenon in the rural area of province, may be defined as the psyche of people looking for benefits without cost. This culture prevails due to mainly top down government policy.

Heavy dependency on public sector needs to be inculcated by ensuring the cost recovery approach which is necessary for the sustainability of participatory projects.

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