

Progress towards Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Hunger: A Case Study of Quetta District

Social sciences

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Abstract

This study descriptively analysis the most important millennium development goal, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in Quetta district. The study can help the stakeholders to assess the progress towards achieving the MDGs. The research article is based on case study measuring the achievements with respect to the goal. The study has found the poor performance especially with respect to eradication of malnutrition and therefore, suggests way forwards to effectively dent the extreme poverty and hunger in the capital of province.

Key words: Development Goals, District Quetta, Poverty, Hunger, Malnutrition, Millennium

Introduction

Governments in the entire world are eager to improve the living standards of their masses. In this context, every nation has set some goals and made commitments to accomplish these goals within definite time period under the umbrella of United Nation. They have devised strategies to pave way for social sector development. Pakistan is the active member of United Nation and as such signed the Millennium Development Goals strategy of United Nations and taken steps to achieve social sector development. In this regard, SAP was initiated with active participation of the Federal and Provincial Governments, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), private sector and communities.

Public expenditure enormously increased in the key areas like health, education water & sanitation, and population welfare during this period. AS a result, some positive progress with respect to social indicators has been observed. But as per the MDGs report 2008, the achievements in these sectors are not uniform in all the four provinces. As compared to other provinces of the country, Baluchistan lags far behind that of national level progress reflecting severe challenges and constraints. The major challenges regarding the achievement of these goals include (a) shortage of fund (b) poor institutional capacity (c) Corruption and (d) lack of political commitment. Though Balochistan under the national commitment has started working on achieving eight specific goals with different targets set for the country, yet its pace is very slow rather poverty is rising at province level (Baluchistan Economic Report, 2008) which is matter of great concern. What is the status of goal, why we are legging behind and what should be the way forwards are important research questions of this research article to answer.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this research article is case study method. The scope of the study is limited to Quetta District only because of time and resources constraints. Measurable Indicators related to the above goal of MDGs have been addressed through the required secondary information.

The total geographical area of Quetta District consists of 265.3 thousand sq km. The reported area of the district is 139.8 thousand sq. km that is almost 53% of the total geographical area. The population of District Quetta as per 1998 Census was 759941 but after rapid influx of refugees and the migration of population from neighboring countries and from the interior of the province, as a crude guess, is quoted to be around 2.5 million (City District Government,2007). Quetta District has got significant and a very special position among the other districts in Balochistan. Quetta district is significant because the provincial capital lies within its boundaries and as such the district plays central function in almost all spheres of social life. This district is the hub of all social, commercial economic and educational activities, and is also the seat of the provincial government because the civil secretariat is located in Quetta. As a provincial capital, all the ministries and important public and private offices are hosted in Quetta District. The District comprises of two towns; Zarghoon and Chiltan, having 37 and 30 Union Councils respectively. This study focuses on the progress towards achieving MDGs of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and achieving universal primary education within these 67 UCs.

Results and Discussion

A) Reduction in extreme poverty

Poverty is one of the most important issues the contemporary world is confronted with (World Bank, 2004). Public expenditure enormously increased in the key areas like health, education water & sanitation, and population welfare during this period. Many nations are trying to reduce poverty and thereby improve the living standard of their masses. As such Pakistan is also the active member of world community and decided to improve the living standard of its people by eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The target is set for the country in general to reduce poverty and hunger. The target is to reduce poverty to half by 2015 but the situation in Balochistan is worrying and as a capital city of Balochistan, the District Quetta is lagging far behind the national statistics to achieve this goal. Information from the available sources do not depict any clear picture of the poverty levels in terms of percentage of people below poverty line of earning 1\$ per day, however, as per Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP,2003), around 47% population of Balochistan, and as a guess, 40% of population of District Quetta is below the poverty line. Extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition have become the hallmark and have caused economic stagnation during 1990s and are still continuing up-till the current year 2015.

B) Reduction in Hunger

In addition to poverty, indicators on hunger has also shown increasing trend during this period. Many constraints are responsible for impeding the progress toward the achievement of the first MDG. These include; the slow growth rate and low investment in significant pro-poor areas of the economy, lack of statistics on poverty due to failure in the collection of poverty data for poverty monitoring and evaluation, poor access to and the dearth of quality essential rural social and economic services, lack of opportunities of rural employment and the nonexistence of rural level industry, and the rising level of income inequalities etc.

The extent of mild malnutrition among children in the targeted area declined sharply from 32% to 18% between 1993 and 1997 and again increased to 41%. Severe malnutrition is although rare but not completely absent. According to MDGs, the percentage of children under-five who are underweight has to be reduced to half from 38% in 1989 to 19% in 2015. The

district currently remained out of track with regard to this indicator too. It seems difficult to achieve the target due to many constraints such as unfavorable investment, lack of proper planning and coordination etc. Apparently, no major gender differences exist in the nutritional status of children in the district.

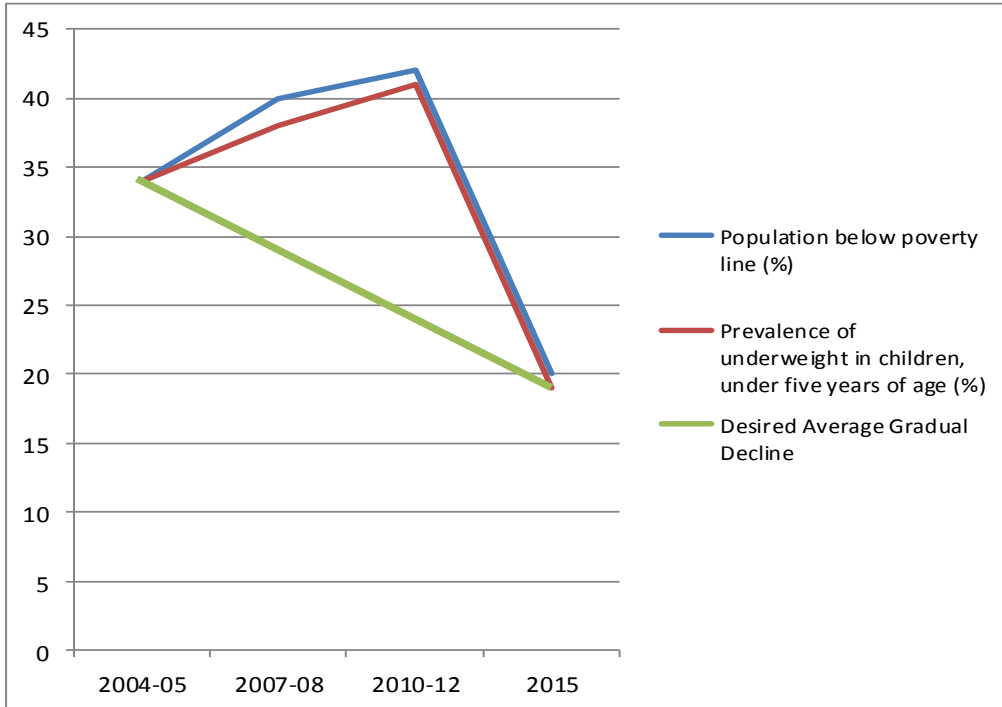
For gauging the nutrition among children, UNICEF used weight for age criterion in the past but that standard is no more valid and changed because it does not serve the purpose. Recently, UNICEF has introduced a new weight for height criterion which is considered to be useful and appropriate. A research study named as 'Nutrition Survey' conducted by UNICEF and provincial Health department in 2007 indicated that the moderate to severe malnutrition in the six districts i.e. Quetta, Kharan, Awaran, Musa Khel, Nasirabad and Jaffarabad ranges between 39% to 75% and the average of severe malnutrition is close to 40%. The national average for moderate to severe malnutrition is 38%, while for only severe nutrition, the average is 38%. The sources of feeding program include the efforts undertaken by Tawana Pakistan and under UNICEF.

The descriptive data regarding the goal is given in table 1, below.

Target: Halve by 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day (values in % or otherwise stated)						
Indicators	2004-05	2007-08	2010-12	2015	Status of	State of
					Progress	Supportive
						Environment
Population below poverty line (%)	34	40	42	20	Worsening	Un- satisfactory
Prevalence of underweight in children, under five years of age (%)	34	38	41	19	Worsening	Un- satisfactory
Income level of the people over the years	-	-	-	-	In-sufficient Data	Un- satisfactory

Source: *Balochistan at a Glance, 2012. Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, 2012.*

Figure,1 The graphical representation of the table is given in the following diagram.



As per the goal set for the year 2015 to reduce the extreme poverty and hunger, the average decline from 2004 to 2015 per year must have to be almost 1.4% to achieve the desired level of progress but the situation has further worsened and now we have to achieve 2.2% progress to reach our goal that seems to be very remote and unachievable. The reasons behind the failure to achieve the goals set for 2015 to reduce extreme poverty and hunger by half in Balochistan in general and in Quetta district in particular are political instability, unequal opportunities for education, health, insufficient urban infrastructure to support poor and marginalized segment of the society, sudden influx of afghan refugees, restraining the earning opportunities, corruption, inflation specially of food and the nonexistence of private sector in the district.

To achieve the desired level of progress towards achieving the goal of reducing extreme poverty and hunger requires for the strengthening of socio-economic infrastructure, initiating pro-poor policies, provision of basic social amenities, promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), agriculture and livestock and encouraging private sector to invest to create more jobs for poor.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Millennium Development Goals are set for the year 2015 to give a clear line of action to the nation to gradually improve the socio-economic condition of the masses. These goals are adopted by the nation under the umbrella of United Nations Development Program to take them as a challenge. These goals give clear performance benchmarks to the nation as a whole and to its constituent parts. Quetta district where the capital city of Balochistan resides is the hub of commercial and economic activities. The indicators of extreme poverty and hunger are slightly better than the provincial indicators but the general trend in the district is showing deterioration rather than improvement suggesting to revisit the strategy. So it simply indicates that we are moving away from our goal of reducing extreme poverty and hunger by the year 2015.

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