

## ASSESSING PAKISTAN'S PERFORMANCE IN MDGS AND PROSPECTS FOR SDGS: EXPLORING THE MISSING LINK

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### ABSTRACT

*Like that of other global goals, the MDGs and now SDGs are seen as credible indicators for gauging societal advancement in selected sectors in a country. Scholars have also argued that when used as measures of national performance, the criterion of success should focus on the 'pace of progress' (outcomes) rather than on achieving the targets (outputs). This paper analyses Pakistan's past performance in achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and estimates the possible feat in meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Using a case study method, this paper analyses the pace of progress made in health and sanitation sectors in Gujranwala district, Punjab province of Pakistan. The evidence shows that Pakistan can achieve the country targets for SDGs better if the citizen participation in local governance is improved, despite of structural and political issues of resource management and political transitions.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, MDGs, SDGs, local democracy, citizen participation

### INTRODUCTION

In 2000, Heads of 189 states became the signatory of Millennium Declaration and showed their absolute commitment to meet the time bound targets of development called MDGs. The goals ranged from empowerment of women, environmental sustainability to ensure poverty eradication, hunger and disease elimination. In 2015, MDGs were expired and replaced by Sustainable Development goals (SDGs). World leaders, in September 2015, endorsed the 17 SDGs at UN headquarters (UN, 2014, para. 24; see also Scott and Lucci, 2015). SDGs has offered the new ways forward for policy development and its practices. Further, SDGs also emphasize on the broad range of global targets and goals which the then UN general secretary called as '*paradigm shift for people and the planet*'. Certainly, it is refreshing for development experts to do research and talk of environmental governance, holistic and inclusive approach and equity. Some scholars considered SDGs more comprehensive and integrated than MDGs (Le Blanc, 2015). This is also pertinent to mention that SDGs would be pursued by all the countries equally irrespective of their status as developed, developing and under-developed countries.

#### *Pakistan and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

In South Asia, Pakistan has shown its full commitment to SDGs targets so much that SDGs are declared as national goals of 2030. This has been argued that SDGs have the solution of Pakistan's three main challenges that includes defence, democracy and development. SDGs can repair this fragile triangle. Pakistan, if implement SDGs goals, may lead towards long term economic prosperity, environmental and human development. But apart from major external threats, the current score of Pakistan against 17 goals and 169 targets tells a complete different story of serious socio-economic crisis. That said, this is the time to analyze what may be the potential threats that may hinder the progress of SDGs in Pakistan specially those related to climate change adaptation, empowerment and poverty alleviation. Therefore, the crux of the problem that is been addressed in this paper is: why MDGs have badly failed in Pakistan while countries even in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have made substantial progress under the same agenda? What are prospects for Pakistan to achieve SDGs Goals? The available data shows that Pakistan was totally failed to achieve MDGs. Further in comparison with other South Asian countries, with the exception of Afghanistan, Pakistan lagged behind from all the region. Pakistan' government mentions different reasons for this failure that ranges from law and order situation to the heavy losses and expenditure incurred to curb militancy. Fight against terrorism cost Pakistan not heavily not only economically but also in social, infrastructural and human terms. The economic cost includes foregone investments, lost output, issues in collection of revenue, diversion of budget towards military expenditures. According to government estimates, Pakistan suffered a loss of US\$70 bn in a decade from 2001. In addition, government of Pakistan justified this failure to achieve MDGs by opining that Pakistan faced three major catastrophic disasters within a decade which killed more than 70,000 people and injuring more than 200,000 people while more than 2 million citizens were homeless. World Bank estimated that relief work would cost at least US\$2 and found a positive relationship. Also, Sharma and Mahendru(2012) included gold prices, inflation billion while another US\$3.5 billion was needed for rehabilitation. There is no doubt that Pakistan was hit by devastating floods in 2010 and 2011 that set back Pakistan's fight against

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illiteracy, disease and poverty. But on the contrary, another South Asian country Nepal also suffered from natural disasters, but its indicators were better in MDGs as compared to Pakistan. Nepal has surpassed Pakistan in many goals such as enrollment and gender parity. Apart from all these reasons, we are of the view that government of Pakistan did not feel the pressure to meet MDGs reason being the absence of active citizenship which permitted the officialdom to be scot free for 15 years. During this time span, the country was ruled by military and democratic dispensations but the result regarding MDGs was the same. We are of the view that Pakistani government, comprising of elites, intentionally kept Pakistani citizens unaware and ignorant of MDGs and its tracking so that they can reap benefit of state resources.

Now the SDGs, being more ambitious than MDGs, covers the broader range of inter-connected issues ranged from economic stability to public goods. To meet SDGs, an ambitious plan is needed which is not possible without the involvement of Participation of citizens. In this wake, there is a need to discuss the level of Citizen Participation in governance and readiness of government institutions to involve citizens and CSOs to see the future prospects of SDGs. In this article, we have reviewed the performance of Pakistan in meeting the MDGs in the past decades and extrapolate for the possibilities of meeting the goals of SDGs and suggest pathways for Pakistan to meet SDGs by 2030. Further, based on an in-depth case-study in health and sanitation sector for Gujranwala, a dense district in Punjab, this paper has explored the level of Citizen Participation to see if Pakistani administration and service delivery institutions are facilitating participatory governance or otherwise. Further, this article calls for urgent attention of policy actors and academic researchers and Citizens to come together to achieve the goals of SDGs. For all the rhetorical policy efforts regarding the potential of the Government of Pakistan to transform development, we argue that there are serious impediments in governing structures of Pakistan to make any real progress in terms of SDGs.

## METHODOLOGY

To analyze Pakistan's performance in MDGs and prospects for SDGs, we have all analyzed all the available data to do comparative analysis. Further, to assess the effectiveness of Citizen Participation in government institutions of Gujranwala, we have used face-to-face interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Four main themes were identified during data analysis. The findings are presented under the four main themes below. We argue that policy efforts to increase the level of citizen participation in local governance improves even by few degrees compared to the current, much progress can be achieved in terms of Sustainable Development goals in Pakistan.

## REVIEW OF PAKISTAN'S PERFORMANCE IN MDGS AND PROSPECTS FOR SDGS

Pakistan is house to 207 million people and 64% of population resides in rural areas. The population in Pakistan is growing at the rate of 2% (See Table 1). According to recent population senses and estimation, Pakistan would be the 5<sup>th</sup> most populous country by 2050 which is alarming keeping in view the country's scarce situation. The literacy rate is 49% (females 43%, males 56%) in the age group of 15-45 while life expectancy rate is 64.5 for females and 66.5 for males. Table 1 explains the demography of Pakistan.

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics

Population (in-million*)	207.0
Growth-rate, in Percentage*	2.0
Density, population/km <sup>2</sup> *	231.0
Urban, %*	36.0
Life expectancy, yrs*	
Male	64.50
Female	66.50
HDI rank <sup>†</sup>	146.0
Population living below international poverty line < US\$1.25 perday, in percentage <sup>‡</sup>	21.0

\*Pakistan Health and Demography Survey, 2017 <sup>†</sup>UNDP HDI Report, 2014; <sup>‡</sup>State of the World, 2014.

In this wake, Pakistan had adopted 41 different indicators and 16 significant targets for which progresses to achieve 8 goals of MDG were measured. Table 2 below presents the detailed analysis of Pakistan's performance to achieve MDGs

**Table 2:** Performance of Pakistan in achieving MDGs

No.	MDGs	Performance
1.	Eradicate Hunger and Poverty	Progress on all indicators of this goal is lagging behind and meek chances to achieve in the near future. By 2015 there still accounts for 15 million hard core poor out of 188 million total population ( <a href="http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/country/PAK">http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/country/PAK</a> )
2.	Achieve Universal Primary Education	Severely lagging behind of this goal: evidence show that literacy improved (58%) but clearly missing MDG target of achieving 88% by 2015.
3.	Promote Gender Equality & Women Empowerment	Achieved highest ratio of woman parliamentarians' in South-Asia Regions: Women representation in Parliament (22%)
4.	Reducing Child Mortality	Progress on all but 1 target, is also off-track the worst performers in child and infant mortality
5.	Improving Maternal Health	Progress lags on all of the indicators
6.	Combating Malaria, AIDS/HIV & other Diseases'	All indicators on track except Malaria.
7.	Ensuring Environmental Sustainability	Accomplished the targets of accessing to improve water resource met the target for land protection Lagged in all other factors
8.	Develop a Global Partnership for Development	Donor's commitment to provide funds were shortened. Targets related to connectivity showed improvement Exports of goods reduced

As discussed earlier in the introductory section, Performance of Pakistan on MDGs endured very unsatisfactory in comparison with other countries of Asian region and the whole globe. We further investigated reasons for this meek performance of Pakistan. One of the major reasons was that Pakistan was facing different challenges regarding ownership, localization and constraint of resources regarding MDGs. Further, issues such as security and terrorism, political instability and missing of coordination among stakeholders and departments along with many natural disasters contributed towards the failure of MDGs in Pakistan. After the poor performance in achieving MDG goals as is evident, there comes the SDGs and the government bureaucracy and non-state actors in Pakistan seems determined to implement programs according to the goals of SDGs.

Compared to the MDGs, the SDGs focuses on all the areas of government that include education, health, poverty eradication and gender empowerment by the utilization of natural resources which is sustainable and tackling the climate change. For Pakistan to achieve SDGs, the bottom-line must be clear: Each Penny spent on SDGs from public expenditures must be tracked through transparent system and Citizens should be allowed to make government accountable. Citizens must have control over the resources. Unfortunately, Pakistan is suffering from an archaic method for the planning of budget. Over the past many decades, government of Pakistan has developed a very weak and notorious reputation of developing and implementing social sectors' projects that resulted into the global embarrassment for its poor indicators. In addition, provincial and federal governments need to make proper participatory and accountability mechanisms both at local and national level. Thus, we assume that without involving the citizens in development, planning and management, SDGs will follow the same fate as MDGs. Table 3 below gives comparison of all the SDGs and Pakistan's current baseline.

**Table 3:** SDGs and Current Scenario

No.	SDG	Current scenario
1.	Eradication of Poverty	21.04% of the total population earning \$1.25 which is the below poverty-line while 60% of the population is below line of poverty earning \$2.0

2.	End hunger and achieve food security	58.1% of the Households have food insecurity food deprivation intensity in Pakistan is 169 kcal/person each day
3.	Ensure healthy lives	(88 less than 5y) mortality-rate (per 1000 live births) Ratio of maternal mortality is around 170 out of 100K live-births
4.	Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education	Literacy Rate is around 58% Out of school children aged 5 to 16 are about 25.02 million.
5.	Achieve gender equality	Participation of women in economy ranked at 144 while Pakistan ranked 132 on education 144 rank on women economic participation 132 rank on women education attainment
6.	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	In Pakistan, 35% of the population don't have access to safe and clean drinking water. Out of total, 52% of the total population don't have any access to sanitation.
7.	Ensure access to, modern, sustainable, reliable, and affordable energy for all	Only 91 % of the Pakistani Population have access to the electricity and out of that, share of renewable energys is less than 1%
8.	Promote inclusive, sustained, & sustainable economic-growth	Rate of Participation of labor force is less than 53.2% while current rate of unemployment in Pakistan is 6.2%.
9.	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation	20.3% Industry's contribution in GDP 10.9% Population use Internet
10.	Reduce inequality within and among countries	30 Income Gini coefficient 1.55 Palma Index (ratio of consumption of top 10 % to the bottom 40 %)
11.	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	47% population that is urban live only in nine cities. 5.0 Cities population growth rate
12.	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	68.3% generation of electricity from fossil-fuels 25% loss of energy in all sectors
13.	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	310 m.t. of CO <sup>2</sup> eq Total GHG emissions 6% Budget allocation for climate financing
14.	Conserve and sustainable use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development	222 rank on global Ocean Health-Index
15.	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems	2.1% area covered by the forest 68 millions hectares of Lands affected by degradation and desertification
16.	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development	9000 Avg. deaths due to terrorism
17.	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development	3 million pending cases in the judicial system

It is evident that Pakistan is clearly at far in achieving SDGs. To see the possibilities, we have analyzed the factors that contributed to poor performance of Pakistan in achieving MDGs. The section below gives a detailed over-view.

#### ***Factors contributing to weak performance of MDGs:***

Analysis of the data regarding different indicators related to MDGs shows a very weak performance by Pakistan. There are different factors that contributed to this menace. We are of the view that more than the provision of resources, it was the absence of participatory governance to manage the available resources to eliminate poverty and achieve other MDGs targets. Apart from that other factors such as lack of Citizen Participation more specifically in local government institutions, rising income disparities, weak confidence of citizens on government and dearth of active citizenry contributed to make MDGS more of an expensive gimmick than anything else.

In align, we are of the view that International Development Institutions (IDIs)' role to meet MDGs and end poverty was not convincing. For instance, UNDP provided an update regarding poverty level in Pakistan

annually, but it failed to convince Pakistan's policy makers to adopt specific guidelines to eradicate poverty. Most of the IDIs were dependent on bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of Pakistani government. We are of the view that after doling out money to government and NGOs in last 2 decades by IDIs, the baseline indicators of education, health, sanitation and poverty are stagnant at alarming rate in Pakistan. To find more evidence, we analyzed economic surveys of Pakistan that showed that in last 15 years, foreign debt and liabilities have been amounted to the whopping 89 billion \$. So, the question arises where does all these dollars go? Thus, keeping in view, the performance of Pakistan regarding MDGs, it is naïve to suppose any positive progress if the government is running in the current fashion. So what may be the way forwards? Is it due to the lack of Citizen Involvement, transparency, poor service delivery, accountability or otherwise? The next section has provided the detailed over-view.

#### ***Participation of Citizens and role of Local government to meet the goals of MDGs and SDGs***

Citizen Participation is one the pre-requisite for any society to develop according to their own mode of development. Exclusion of CP in Pakistan has contributed to the failure to address the needs of people. The literature has argued that local people are not consulted to know their needs (Nikku and Rafique, 2018). We have argued elsewhere that the nexus between the political representatives, the local elite and bureaucracy need to be challenged and citizens should be involved in decision making in the activities that affects the lives of the people (Rafique & Khoo, 2018). Further, local government institutions ensure the citizens' rights and entitlements. Fascinatingly, the performance of local hospitals, school, sanitation and water providers will determine if SDGs goals (goals 11, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2) are met. Thus, there is need to explore that how can we make local government more pro-poor to meet SDGs in Pakistan. We further believe that to meet SDGs, there is need to make local government institutions more inclusive, transparent and accountable to needs of local citizens. Citizen participation may not be the exact answer, but it will definitely have a major influence on the operations of local government. Further, it can make local government more accountable, transparent and responsive to public needs.

#### ***Performance of SDGs in Health and Sanitation Sector: Evidence from Gujranwala district***

In the local governance system, important stakeholders are comprised of local government officials, CSOs members, Citizens and political leaders. Braun and Clarke (2006) has devised a framework of thematic analysis which has been used by the researchers to find out themes and interpretation of data. Further the data was analyzed using thematic analysis tools and following themes have emerged: a) decision making; b) local governance system, c) pattern of Citizen Participation and d) level of Citizen Participation. Identified themes are as under

#### ***Theme A: Influencing Decision-making***

This theme sums up the stakeholder's views on the capacity of CSOs and Citizens to influence the decision making of local government. For a better and clear understanding regarding the assessments of different stakeholders, the researchers have divided the expressions of all the respondents in three different categories that included undecided, negative and positive expression. The under-mentioned table presents the findings

**Table 4:** Influence Decision making

<b>To Mobilize Involvement of Citizens</b>	<b>Positive(+ve) Expression</b>	<b>Negative(-ve) Expression</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
Integrating Citizens value into Decision-making	11	57	3
To improve the quality of decisions	10	51	10
Average	15%	76%	9%

*Source: survey data*

The findings show that most of the respondents were of the view that CSOs including Citizens are failed to impact the decision-making of local governance in Gujranwala, Pakistan.

What can we conclude from these results? Why do citizens perceive that the role of CSOs is weak and there is no role for these CSOs in decision making? Further, the local government is not functioning properly. If this is a fact how to account for the funding that these CSOs receive to enable citizen participation through awareness building; access to information and through training programs.

#### ***Theme B: Local government system and Citizen Participation***

The second theme emerged out of the data is regarding the local government system. There were two questions regarding justness i.e opportunities for local citizens created to participate in local government activities that we asked in this research. The first question was related to Local Government Act of 2013 and implementation

of Citizen Participation rules and laws at local level. The responses were categorized into three types of expression, positive, negative and undecided. Table 5 gives an explanation.

**Table 5:**Prospects for citizens in the local government system

The rules and acts of governments deliver improved opportunities of participation for the citizen in local governance system.

Stakeholders	Positive Expression	Negative Expression	Undecided
Local-Politicians	1	6	nil
CSOs-Members	4	4	1
Local Administration	1	7	1
Citizen	4	32	10

Source: Fieldwork survey

From the above, this can be established that stakeholders are not clear about the importance of participation.

### **Theme C: Patterns of Citizen Participation and engagement with policy and programs**

The third theme that emerged from the data is Citizen Engagement with policy structures. Three patterns of citizen participation were seen: 1. consulting, 2. involving and 3. empowering people to make their own decisions that affect their livelihoods. We further describe these patterns:

#### **Pattern 1: Current Mechanism to Consult Citizens**

Local administration had the point of view that they have consulted people for any developmental project. All the stakeholders are taken into the confidence before the start of any project. But it was observed that most of the middle level officials were not able to differentiate between collecting information and consultation with people. It was observed that local officials were taking information from people only and not consulting them actually to take decisions. Therefore, this can be argued that administration of the local governance system only consult with the citizen only if this is made pre-requisite by the federal government and IDAs.

#### **Pattern 2: Current Mechanisms to involve People**

As per the citizens, they don't have any direct involvement in local service delivery mechanism and local development plans. Further, local government officials also opined that they have not involved citizens directly. As per local government officials, people are involved through 2 different ways. Firstly, people can interfere through their local elected representatives. Secondly, there are Citizen Action Committees, CSOs, Citizen Community Boards (CCBs) and other local committees which are elected by citizens. The citizens can intervene through these bodies.

On the other hand, local citizens told the researchers that they were unaware of the functioning of local government institutions and their existing mechanisms to involve citizens in the decision making. Thus, from this, it can be opined that there is no defined mechanism to involve or even inform local citizens or other stakeholders about the functioning of local government institutions. This was further found that local administration only involves the other stakeholders in the projects which are being funded by the federal government or international donor agencies and to involve local citizens in one the pre-requisite.

#### **Pattern 3: Existing Mechanisms of Empowering People.**

To be more empowered, citizens need more collaborations with local administration. But, this was found that local officials are not interested to empower local citizens and maintain a fair distance with citizens. When local administration was asked if empowerment of people can result into responsive service delivery, better management of resources and effective accountability, they responded in negation. The data analysis made it clearer that local beneficiaries are not empowered on local government programs and service delivery that impact them. There is no direct citizen participation. All programs and projects are implemented without the consent of citizens. Further as most of the citizens consider government institutions as very authoritative bodies, they are afraid of regulations and rules of local government institutions. On the other hand, local officials are of view that local service delivery and management are the sole duty of management and the representation of citizens comes through their elected representatives which is enough. Conversely, representative claim they don't have any controlling power in local government affairs and funds are controlled by local bureaucracy. Thus, actually in practice, government institutions are only informing representatives and citizens about the service delivery of local governance system and projects which is an authoritarian model of governance.

### **Theme D: Level of Citizen Participation**

The analysis was geared to understand the correlation between the level of citizen participation in Water and Sanitation programs implemented in Gujranwala district. Many scholars have written about the ladder of participation discussing citizen participation, citizen control and quality of participation.

Government of Punjab, Pakistan states that it commits to promote citizen participation as is evidence in policy documents. Bureaucrats of Gujranwala district like to promote CP, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) invest their resources and claim that they have achieved highest levels of CP. If these claims and aspiration are true, why was Pakistan not able to achieve the target of MDGs? Table 6 below gives a self-explanatory over-view of the level of participation

**Table 6:** Paricipation level of Citizens

Among the Empowering, Involving, Consulting, and Informing, levels of Participation of citizens, how will you rate this

Stake-holders	Informing	Consulting	Involving	Empowering
Local Political representatives	5	1	0	0
CSO Staff	6	3	0	0
Local bureaucrats	1	6	2	0
Citizens	34	11	1	0

Source: Fieldwork survey.

Surprisingly, it was found that Pakistan is practicing an authoritarian model and stage of Citizen Participation is only at 'informing stage'. The government programs and policies and CSO interventions are only able to mobilize citizens at the very first step of the citizen participation ladder. It needs concerted efforts and political will to increase the level of CP from information sharing (token level) to empowerment stage in which decisions are taken collectively for the common good of the communities rather than driven by popular agenda or profits. If we sum up the findings, the figure given below gives an over view of the current status of Citizen Participation in Pakistan.

We further investigate is low levels of citizen participation a valid reason for the failure to achieve the goals of MDGs by Pakistan? Is this theoretical underpinning of this paper be validated? We further investigate these tenets in the following sections.

## WILL IMPROVEMENTS IN PARTICIPATION AND MODE OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE MATTERS TO ACHIEVE SDGS?

Research literature has opined that governance and participation are interlinked. The research literature suggests that challenge to improve patterns of development and social wellbeing of citizens require active participation. As discussed earlier, we have assumed that Participation of Citizens in the decision making of development programs and service delievery is a kery to achieve better results and pertinent solutions. Participation of Citizens allow the actions of government to be more accountable and transparent and thus getting rid of corruption and other unwanted behaviors but in Pakistan's case, the low level of Citizen Participation is resulting into an authoritarian government which failed in achieving MDGs.

The importance of participation can be judged from the fact that this principle in the Rio Declaration, on which SDGs are based, outlines some basic components that must be present in all participatory democracies. To meet SDGs, Pakistan needs to adopt a very bold roadmap based on sustainable and inclusive growth. There is no doubt in that to fulfill 169 targets o SDGs, Pakistan needs more inclusive approaches to social economic and environmental policies. But this would not possible without the engagement and participation of different sectors of society that solicit independent and vibrant platforms for citizens and civil society that are entirely missing in Pakistan. We are of the view that collaboration of stakeholders is pre-requisite for the success of SDGs in Pakistan. Initiatives, such as Open Government Partnership (OGP), can help to meet the objectives.

### *Way forward for Pakistan:*

This article attempts to find out the reasons for Pakistan to fail in achieving the goals of MDGs. Further, it also looks of prospects to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs). We have argued that what matters the most is outcome instead of outputs. We have found out that if the same trend of low involvement and empowerment of citizens would continue, the desire to achieve SDGs will meet the same fate of that MDGs despite heavy support from external players. If Pakistan is serious to perform well to achieve SDGs, we are of the view that level of participation in service delivery, project planning and implementation needs to be changes from merely informing the citizens to empower them. Pakistan's policy makers and professional hierarchy must realize that it stands to gain with the rest of society if development is broad-based. This is fact that government which pursues development hand in hand with active participation has the better chance of

improvement. Pakistan has many opportunities left to realize these goals as community is still cohesive and willing to work with the governments in power.

This is the fact that Pakistan was failed to meet the MDGs. This can be judged from the fact that Pakistan has more then 9.8 million children with stunted growth that makes Pakistan the 3<sup>rd</sup> most affected country. Further four out of ten Pakistanis are poor and literacy rate is lowest in the whole region. Learning lessons from the MDGs experience, the government must devise an over-arching policy by liaising with all the stakeholders.

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