



## The Predicaments of Rural Development Interventions in Coastal Region in Sindh-Pakistan: a Qualitative Survey

### Abstract

This ethnographic study was conducted in Coastal Region of Sindh-Pakistan with the aim of assessing the problems of rural development interventions during the last twenty years. The main objectives of the study were; to identify major intervention areas, examine community perceptions of government led interventions and examine overall challenges and prospects of the rural development option in Coastal Region in Sindh-Pakistan. The data for this paper was obtained from the Southern, Eastern and south eastern zones of Coastal Region. Field data was collected using qualitative research methods. The specific tools include, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and Case Studies. The findings of the study reveal that although there have been tremendous efforts and improved government commitment in Coastal Region in the post-1991 period, rural development has been impeded by a number of factors. The challenges identified include, compulsive agricultural extension system, erroneous incentive schedules and lack of proper devolution of power to the grassroots, hasty non-participatory implementation of projects, absence of functional integrations among development agents, lack of proper utilization of public funds, and problems related to evaluation and monitoring activities. Besides, it was evident that poor work ethic, the culture of overconsumption, low adult literacy, and lack of proper incentives to frontline workers were also identified as major problems. These together with the challenges emanating from ecological calamities (shortage of rainfall, land fragmentation and population pressures) have impeded rural development in the study area.

### Author(s)

#### Dr. Anwar Ali Shah G. Syed

Prof. Business Administration & Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Sindh-Pakistan

#### Dr. Ashi Zeeshan

Assistant Professor, IER-University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

#### Dr. Tariq Mehmood

Assistant Professor, IER-University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

#### Syed Abir Hussain Naqvi

Lecturer in Technology Management

#### Faiz. M. Shaikh

Assistant Professor, SZABAC-Dokri-Larkana-Sindh-Pakistan

Email: [faizanny2000@hotmail.com](mailto:faizanny2000@hotmail.com)

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### Introduction

Coastal Region is located in the South of Pakistan. It covers an area of approximately 64,572 sq km and has a total population of 4.33 million of which 82% live in rural areas (CSA, 2007). The region comprises a total of 34 rural Districts (districts), 06 urban Districts and 500 villages (sub-districts) (CSA, 2005).

### Objectives

The overall objective of the study was to assess the challenges of rural development interventions in Coastal Region in Sindh-Pakistan

The specific objectives include:

1. To identify major components of rural development interventions in the study area
2. To examine grassroots' perceptions of rural development interventions in the study area
3. To examine the challenges, weaknesses and strengths of major interventions
4. To suggest possible recommendations on the way forward based on inputs from farm communities in the study sites

### Materials and methods

The study was conducted in Coastal Region Sindh. Six specific sites were selected from the Coastal zones of the region on the basis of their proneness to recurrent drought and poverty status. The data for this paper was obtained from the Coastal Region i.e. Badin, Thatta and coastal regions of Karachi. Field data was collected using qualitative research methods. The specific tools include, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and Case Studies. Data was collected using qualitative approaches using ethnography as the dominant methods. This method was preferred to formal survey research because of the preliterate nature of the communities considered for the study and sensitiveness of the research topic. 31 Focus group discussions were held with a group of 6-12, community members representing different socio-economic categories (age, gender, wealth status,). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 38 key informants (opinion leaders) selected on the basis of their proven knowledge of agricultural extension and rural development related practices and interventions. Often, regular chit-chat with key informants followed by long hours of informal discussions in the farmers' own settings constituted a major

part of the data collection process. Cases studies were also conducted with adopters and non-adopters using in-depth interviewing. 12 Local administrators and district level officials (2 from each specific site) were also approached for structured interviews. The use of participant observation as an ethnographic helped the author to gain trust and get access to authentic feelings of the farmers. Secondary data was also used to augment empirical observations from the field.

## Results and discussion

### Coping with challenges to Productivity

The main crops grown in the study areas are cereals and legumes. Cash crops such as seasaum are also grown in the lowlands. The most prominent cereals grown in the region are sorghum, barley, wheat, maize, millet, peas, beans lentils. Generally, the areas suffer from shortage and erratic rainfall, sporadic pest infestations, livestock diseases including anthrax, black *leg and ovine pasteurellosis* as well as land fragmentation and resource degradation. Farmers have developed meticulous coping strategies in order to deal with harsh ecological conditions and lead viable livelihoods. Poorer households with limited assets depended on additional off-farm and non-farm incomes as a direct response to declining productivity. These include wage labor migrations, and involvement in petty trade. Vulnerable households often sold small stock animals (shoats). Kinship based economic support networks played a significant role in the provision of loans to the needy. However, the last two agricultural seasons (2010 and 2011) were exceptionally good in terms of rainfall amount and distribution. Farmers especially those who used inputs harvested a good deal of produce despite fears of possible outbreak of pests and erratic rainfalls during harvest periods (in December) which rarely occurred. The Coastal Region regional state has Agriculture and rural development bureaus that operate under the auspices of the federal ministry of Agriculture and rural development. Tentacles of the regional bureau for rural development extends up to the level While major policies are the same across the regions, the modalities for intervention may vary from one state to another depending on variations in resources and environmental conditions. The rural economy in Coastal Region is based on mixed farming which combines cereal production with animal husbandry. All livestock species are reared in the area but more importance is given to large stock animals particularly cattle as they are considered the source of household insurance and symbols of social status. However, livestock production is often constrained by the spread of diseases and the increasing shrinkage of pastoral resources which forced government authorities to discourage open and unregulated access to grazing land.

### Social Services

The biggest achievements since the incumbent government took power are reflected in the massive expansion of schools (basic elementary school education), clinics and health posts. There have been huge investments particularly in those two sectors but not without trying challenges. Sending children to school had to be weighed against the role played by young boys and girls in supporting the family not only in domestic chores but also in income earning ventures. Local farmers often had to make better decisions especially in the wake of the fact that, being uneducated themselves; they hardly perceived education would bring any difference in their livelihoods. In fact, most local farmers felt education could possibly spoil children by cultivating feelings of resistance and rebellion against the statuesque in which long standing norms such as respect to elders and gerontocracy are entrenched. Despite such pressures from the grassroots, the government pursues child education as one of its top priorities and any attempt for blockade is often considered as a violation of the political order.

The health policy of the region is based on preventive care. More funds are now going to awareness campaigns and sensitization measures Household health packages have been introduced in recent years with a focus on maternal health care, child inoculation programs, environmental sanitation and personal hygiene. The deployment of more trained health professionals and equipment including ambulances (at least 1 ambulance for 2 sub-districts) has created a favorable condition in the villages although achievements are still far from the actual need; and demands are higher than supplies.

New roads and telecom facilities have also been constructed. However, the bulk majority of the roads linking rural villages with nearby market destinations at a Woreda and zonal levels tend to be dry-weather roads and hence may be inaccessible during the rainy season. Besides, while rural roads are fundamental to marketing efficiency, the mounting cost of transportation and existing high inflation have had negative impacts. Telecom services are also far from sustained. Each Taluka (sub-district) is provided with only one usually wireless gadget or/ and solar apparatus stationed in the administration. The network is often poor and not reliable while apparatus failures are common features.

### Present approaches to agricultural extension in the region

The approaches to rural development by the current regional government have exhibited major shifts over a period of time. In a bid to sympathize with the poor, some of the interventions that took place in the 1999's erroneously administered reward systems that were ultimately damaging. Aid and government support were rendered to those who prove to be very poor. This created the culture of

dependence on government resources and seriously hampered the motivation of farmers to economically prosper as a result of lack of incentives. This trend was later corrected with government incentives being allocated to model farmers who have demonstrated innovative advancements in terms of boosting productivity and designing of new income earning strategies that served as examples to others. The results reveal that food insecurity was still the biggest problem. Unemployment problem (particularly of the landless youth) was also a major concern for rural households besides the lack of water and health facilities. Although micro-dams have been constructed, the extent to which farmers make effective use of available resource, using appropriate irrigation technology was still poor. The rain water harvesting techniques introduced recently could not also make any significant difference in alleviating water shortages because of high evaporation rates and seepage. The government tried to tackle the problem of unemployment in various ways including the allocation of communally owned hillside land to the landless. Nevertheless, given the prevalent land degradation and shortage of rain water, it was hard to discern significant gains in the foreseeable future.

### Types of rural Agricultural interventions

#### Safety net Programs

There are two modalities for safety net programs in the area: Direct support for those who cannot contribute labor due to old age or poor health conditions; and Public works schemes in which able-bodied male and women farmers are involved in productive activities. Food for work projects were until recently being practiced in the area. This was conducted in response to policy advice towards downplaying the role of aid in development. Under this package, several activities related to watershed management, construction of micro dams, reforestation and other forms of environmental rehabilitations were carried out. Although some success stories of this approach were documented, there were also serious shortcomings, the biggest problem being the fact that food for work schemes discriminated poor farm households with shortage of labour.

The all-inclusive Safety-net Programs were introduced in many parts of the region especially after 2005 in order to overcome problems of marginalization. Safety net schemes were useful because long distance labour migrations by household heads could be avoided giving them easy opportunity for alternative non-farm income and facilitating proper land management thereby positively affecting productivity in the long term. Selection of beneficiaries is more transparent often carried out by committees composed of farmers, youth, community, and women's association representatives. Decisions are often discussed with local community in the villages before implemented. Although, in principle, everybody has the right to participate, the

poorest of the poor and women are given priority for enrolment given the shortage of funds. Appeals on inclusions and exclusion are also filed and processed in a transparent manner.

The activities associated with the productive safety net programme, which is often carried out between December and June include, soil and water conservation, gully treatment, the construction and renovation of schools and roads. Results of the series of focus group discussions indicate that community members were generally satisfied with the type and quality of the activities because such public works have improved the community's access to schools, market links and other social services. Pregnant and lactating women are advantaged because they can enjoy pay without work for about 6 months as per the guidelines in the project implementation manual. However, Safety-net Programs operate under a set of challenges: according to some informants, the inclusion of the right people into the program remained flawed for many years. The safety net scheme was designed for the resource poor. In reality, people representing the poorest of the poor were sometimes still systematically left out in many instances. Besides, women were assigned to the same type of tasks as that of man which puts them in difficult positions.

#### Household asset development

The extension system in Sindh Province after the 1990's was based on the Green revolution policy started by the PPP Government followed by Nawaz Sharif government to boost up the agriculture sector. Extension worker gave prior attention to the diffusion of new technologies and outputs into the farming system. New seed varieties, fertilizers and other inputs and services were introduced. Blanket recommendations on ways and means of addressing rural poverty were the hallmarks in rural areas of Sindh. According to informants, the introduction of new seed varieties and fertilizers (such as UREA and DAP which are identified by local farmers as black and white) were initially met with persistent resistance from farmers. Firstly, farmers felt the new inputs were not suitable to the agro-ecological conditions in their respective localities and had low level of performance in terms of resistance to drought. Secondly, the price of such inputs was also unaffordable. Farmer's dissatisfactions were reflected in many ways ranging from failure to attend consultative meeting with local administrative authorities to direct voicing of grievances to relevant bodies. Farmers' resistances had been met with tough sanctions by local administrators particularly at grassroots level who often put adoption of the extension system as a precondition for enrolment in safety net programs.

The economic empowerment of rural people through credit packages constituted a major part of the rural development interventions in the study area, besides providing saving

facilities, aimed at fostering thriftiness, the local microfinance institution in the Coastal Region plays a significant role in providing credit to farmers with the aim of helping small producers to become financially independent and enhance their capacity to produce thereby promoting food self sufficiency. Credit is provided not only in the form of input supply (improved seed, fertilizers, pesticides, etc.) but is also targeted towards organizing micro enterprises. Microfinance institutions have a program on general loan services for income generating activities in agriculture, handicrafts and services. The regional bureau of agriculture and rural development has also a share in such efforts. Inclination towards specific types of package varies across gender. Men usually engage beehives, dairy cows and animal fattening schemes while the women would generally like to participate in shoats, poultry and cash for petty trading.

There is little doubt that these packages are playing a significant role in tackling rural poverty. However, the presence of some social and cultural hindrances means that it is hard to reap the fruits in the short term. Farmers' risk averse behavior together with poor saving culture, unhealthy consumption and expenditure pattern and some administrative inefficiency were identified to be the major challenges. Specific problems identified by focus group discussants include; mounting increase in interest rates, increasing prices and shortage in such inputs as fertilizers, seed varieties, modern beehives fuel(for water pumps), and lack of proper veterinary services. Frontline extension and rural development agents sometimes lacked the motivation to stay in the villages and farmers reported about the high attrition rates. Many of them left the villages in search of other jobs or moved to towns for education and training purposes. Recently, incentives in the form of opportunities for further training have been put in place; but the push factors seem to be more pronounced than such reinforcement schedules.

## Conclusions

The Coastal Region faces serious poverty and food security challenges. In spite of the regional government's efforts to ensure rural development through various pro-poor policies, programs and strategies, rural development still remains elusive. Although some positive developments have been observed, the impacts on rural livelihoods tend to be

generally low. The lack of capital and modern technological inputs coupled with crippling cultural values (poor work ethic, overconsumption, overpopulation, etc.) were some of the constraints of rural development in the area. Community members in the study areas expressed very little doubts (if at all) about proper policy making at higher levels. However it was noted that serious problems arise when policies were translated into action. Hence, the challenges outweigh the achievements. Nevertheless, the achievements so far made could be used systematically to build on the social capital and motivate people to put more efforts towards achieving sustainable development. The study found out that there are already encouraging developments in terms of creating an enabling environment for various self initiated rural development ventures. One of the biggest challenges in the years to come is not only to sustain such efforts but also to look for other innovative ideas for rural development. There is also a need to devise programs which target women farmers as they are the ones who pay the highest price in poverty situation.

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