The Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance 56 (2015) 57–67

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/qref

Multidimensional deprivations in Pakistan: Regional variations and temporal shifts

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 24 November 2013
Received in revised form 9 October 2014
Accepted 20 February 2015
Available online 17 March 2015

Keywords:
Multidimensional poverty
Deprivation
Education
Health
Housing facilities
Developing countries

ABSTRACT

The political debate on poverty reduction has become more intense in the developing countries, and the conception of poverty has broadened beyond monetary measures such as income and consumption to include broader socio-economic dimensions of human wellbeing, such as health, education, housing, access to infrastructure and services etc., which together define human freedoms. Multidimensional poverty (MDP) – that encompasses capability failures and social exclusion – is a holistic and more comprehensive yet incomplete concept that has gained currency recently but only with handful applications for policy making. To advance the MDP model further, this study examine the regional variations and temporal shifts of poverty in 26 regions of Pakistan for five time periods, i.e. 1998–99, 2001–02, 2004–05, 2005–06 and 2007–08, using the multidimensional poverty approach based on education, health, and housing facilities. Standard methodological procedure developed by Alkire and Foster (2008) and recognized by UNDP (2010a) was employed. Temporal analysis shows that the MDP was higher in rural areas; declined by 7% in 2007–08 in rural areas compared to 1998–99 but merely by 1% in urban areas. Among the urban regions, Bahawalpur, Malakand, D. I. Khan, Mardan and Makran revealed a significant declining shift of 9%, 11%, 10%, 12% and 9% respectively in 2007–08 compared to 1998–99. Likewise, the rural areas in Faisalabad, Bahawalpur, Malakand, Kohat, Hazara and Sibbi showed a substantial decrease of 8%, 10%, 15%, 13%, 11% and 9% respectively in 2007–8 compared to 1998–99. Notably, Bahawalpur and Malakand showed higher temporal decline in MDP in both urban and rural areas, thereby showing a significant development in the provision of health, education and housing facilities to the people of respective rural–urban areas. However, the trend was inconsistent over time due probably to the haphazard development policies and political instability in the country resulting in higher socioeconomic deprivations. Regional analysis shows that considering both rural and urban areas, Kalat, Makran and Zhob lagged behind and remained among the poorest regions in all periods. Conversely, Karachi and Rawalpindi had least poverty in urban and rural areas. Pakistan's development trajectory is a classic case of economic growth and lagging human development. This study suggests the need for adopting an integrated approach to improve the socio-economic dimensions to meet the international standards of wellbeing such as the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. It further calls for tackling socio-economic deprivations through development interventions including improved schooling, access to technical education, non-farm enterprises, and more robust agriculture sector. Besides contributing to formulate above policy instruments conducive to poverty alleviation, findings of this study will also supplement theoretical and empirical studies on multidimensional poverty in other developing countries of Asia.

1. Introduction

Poverty has been a serious confront in the history of developing world, and considered as the biggest constraint to development for almost half of the world population. Conventionally, the

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.qref.2015.02.007
1062-9769/

problem of poverty is perceived as an income phenomenon having lack of command over the resources to meet the materialistic needs (Townsend, 1970). Likewise, World Bank (2000) conceptualized poverty as lack of income to put the individual or household above the established minimum threshold of wellbeing in the society. Similarly, Zaman and Khilji (2013b, 2013c) emphasized the growth in expenditure through improvement in income rather than actual growth to alleviate poverty. Therefore, poverty traditionally can be understood as an income deprivation to assess the finical ability of the people in accessing basic needs that can be measured either by expenditure or income approach (Laderchi et al., 2003). In this sense, poverty reduction encircles the improvement in earning assets and opportunities to increase the income of individual or household (World Bank, 1990; Zaman, Khan, Ahmad, & Shabir, 2012; Zaman, Shah, Khan, & Ahmad, 2012; Zaman & Khilji, 2013b). However, some researchers (i.e. Sharma, 2012) tied poverty to some specific type of dimensions, i.e. house poor or food poor or health poor. Approximately, one billion people of the world were living on less than one dollar a day and 2.7 billion on less than two dollars a day in the year of 2002 (UN Millennium Project, 2002).

The conventional approach for the assessment of poverty has been largely criticized in the recent literature due to insufficiency and inadequate measurement of the problem. Therefore, poverty debate progressed to the materialization of several non-monetric aspects of wellbeing. Although, income remains an important aspect, as determines the level of short-term capabilities (von Maltzahn & Durrheim, 2008), yet it cannot assess sustainable and reliable wellbeing status of individuals (Thorbecke, 2005). Cognizant of the importance of some other socioeconomic aspects, World Bank (1990) explains that the concept of poverty that goes beyond the income denial to lack of education, poor health, inadequate housing services etc. Siddiqi (2005) revealed that economic growth exposes inadequate view of wellbeing and inefficient to eradicate poverty as a sole indicator. Likewise, Anwar and Qureshi (2002) extended the connotation of poverty from the basic needs of the people to their participation in the social as well as economic activities to live sustainable life. Haq and Bhatti (2001) also criticized the money metric methods arguing that destitute people not only differ in income level, but also in other socio-economic spheres of life such as social, geographic, and physical characters. Thus, wellbeing is concerned, as satisfaction of minimum physical needs of food and non-food items to enable the people to engage in the economic activity. Therefore, the reliance on income achievement is not likely to reduce poverty in the long run and the issue requires a multi-strategic solution.

To attain the deeper and wider understanding of the issue, it is necessary to analyze the poverty through the various socioeconomic aspects of wellbeing (Bourguignon & Chakravarty, 2003). As the Chronic Poverty Research Center (CPRC) states that poverty is not simply about lowness of income rather it is about multidimensional deprivation i.e. hunger, under nutrition, dirty drinking water and other housing facilities, illiteracy, inadequate health services, social isolation and exploitation (CPRC, 2004). Being a partial proxy to explain all financial needs, income is necessary, yet it not a sufficient indicator of welfare that merely deals with one pillar for attacking poverty. The recent literature has extensively acknowledged the multidimensionality of the poverty (Alkire & Santos, 2010) particularly if over 114 million children are unable to attain basic education and 584 million women are illiterate (UN Millennium Project, 2002). United Nations (2004) exposed that 42% of the world population and 20% of South Asian region are deprived of the improved water sanitation, improved toilets and other facilities in 2002. According to Alkire (2007) poverty is the accumulation of several deprivations, which are direly important to estimate in overall poverty assessment methodology. Similarly, Naveed and Islam (2010) also highlighted the importance of estimation of socioeconomic deprivations. Taking into account such deprivations necessitates the estimation of poverty in the multidimensional spectrum (Bourguignon & Chakravarty, 2003). Therefore, it is necessary to enlarge the concept of poverty to enlist the manifestation of multiple denials that encompasses through provision of basic education opportunities, health facilities, housing services, and other attributes of wellbeing. As the poverty diagnostics has been advanced and widely accepted as a multifaceted issue by the international community of development economists (Alkire & Santos, 2010), the problem invites the attention of policy makers and researchers to take up the non-conventional methods.

To fill out the weakness of poverty alleviation planning and strategies emerging from the use of conventional poverty assessment approach, this study practices the multidimensional approach by drawing on the experience of Pakistan where historically poverty has been a serious problem showing fluctuations over decades. For instance, poverty was higher in 1960s and declined in 1980s, but again moved upward in 1990s before a rapid fall after 2000 (Awan & Iqbal, 2010). Likewise, in 1999, World Bank (2002) classified one-third population of Pakistan as poor with higher magnitude in rural areas. However, most of above studies have investigated uni-dimensional poverty in Pakistan whereas studies on multidimensional assessment are still rare. To the best of our knowledge some studies (Naveed & Islam, 2010; UNDP, 2010a) have been carried out at national or provincial levels, yet meso level studies (i.e. at administrative division/region levels) investigating multi-dimensional poverty are not presented in existing literature. According to Human Development Report (2011), Pakistan stands among the largest group of multidimensional poor countries, around 145th position out of 147 countries (UNDP, 2010b). After this evidence, there is dire need of investigation of multidimensional poverty at meso levels to reconnoiter regional variations and temporal shifts to effectively rearticulate poverty alleviation strategies targeting the socioeconomic deprivations to attain sustainable wellbeing of the population. The regional variations in the incidence and magnitude of poverty are often due to factors with spatial dimensions, such as natural resource endowments, and access to services such as health care and education (Henninger & Snel, 2002). An analysis and understanding of poverty from a regional and temporal perspective is, hence, a treasured contribution to the debates about the causes of poverty, and the action required to reduce poverty. Researchers have long analyzed the spatial dynamics of poverty, including pioneering work by Green (1994) in Great Britain and Kodras (1997) in the United States of America. Researchers from South Asia have, likewise, been long engaged in academic debate (e.g. Shrestha, 1997; Yapa, 1996) and empirical research on poverty, inequality and social division in society in both rural (e.g. Krishna et al., 2004; Kundu & Raza, 1982) and urban (e.g. Kundu & Sarangi, 2007) settings.

Cognizant of above facts, this study has been designed to investigate multidimensional at administrative regional levels for five time periods, i.e. 1998–99, 2001–02, 2004–05, 2005–06 and 2007–08. The study assesses regional variations and temporal shifts taking into account, separately, both urban and rural segments. It considers three main socio-economic dimensions, i.e. education, health and housing facilities, in poverty assessment method following the advancements proposed by Alkire and Santos (2010). However, these three dimensions further broken down into 10 variables such as number of years of education, reading and writing ability, immunization, safe drinking water facility, pre-natal consultation, house occupancy status, access to electricity, access to gas, access to telephone services and toilet facility. The study provides the findings to suggest an effective policy input to planners for better understanding and designing efficient poverty alleviation