**Covid and displacement**

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The advent of Covid-19 is having a profound impact on the everyday life experiences and well-being of displaced families, who are still struggling to recover from the grave socio-economic setbacks of displacement.

There is no doubt that displacement induced by infrastructure projects is increasing due to a rise in urbanisation as each year 10 million people are forcibly displaced by such construction projects. In the case of the Orange Line Metro Train (OLMT), displacement commenced in the year 2016, wreaking havoc on the wellbeing of the affected people. The compensation funds proved to be inadequate, especially for the marginalised groups. To date, the displaced people are enmeshed in situations of prolonged dislocation as well as permanent dispossession in terms of their economic assets and social networks.

The situation was further aggravated by Covid-19, not only multiplying the existing risk factors for the displaced families but also posing a great threat in terms of accessing basic necessities of life. The vulnerability of the displaced families during this pandemic stems from the fact that they are already situated at the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder and are trapped in a deprivation spiral -- the reverse of the sustainability cycle. They have been relocated in densely populated areas and unsuitable environments, where communicable diseases spread rapidly. In such deprived circumstances they are only able to gain marginal access to already overstretched local health systems.

Moreover, the lack of precise data on the displaced in Pakistan has hampered accurate assessments of how they are being influenced by this pandemic, and how their circumstances are comparable with those of non-displaced people. The limited testing capacity, in many areas, has also significantly impacted their wellbeing. To gain an insight into the impact of Covid-19 on the already marginalised displaced families, I visited the affected families and conducted in-depth interviews. The most pronounced feelings that seemed to resonate in the responses of the displaced families related to the loss of livelihood and income; health insecurity; poor housing conditions; disruption of education and disintegration of social cohesion. Such sentiments were echoed a number of times during interviews, thereby pointing towards an overall decline in their well-being.

The findings also suggested that displaced families reflect a reversal of the sustainable development cycle. They are at risk of extreme forms of economic instability, an inability to gain new skills through re-training, are more vulnerable to falling into absolute poverty, have increasing morbidity rates and disrupted education. But the most severe form of the cycle of deprivation resulting from the pandemic is related to the disruption of their networks of social cohesion, leading to greater social isolation and marginalisation, especially for women and children.

Against this backdrop, the fundamental concern that surfaces is the role of government in this regard. Addressing grievances and ameliorating difficulties during this pandemic is the need of the hour. Although, in response to the evolving Covid-19 situation, a holistic National Action Plan (NAP) 2020-21 has been drafted by the government of Pakistan (GOP), the main objective of which is to ensure the pandemic is contained and responded timely and efficiently; policies are general in nature and doesn’t specifically target the marginalised sections of our society, for instance displaced families.

It is obvious that the health system is buckling under pressure in the wake of Covid-19 and the vaccine rollout still remains low when compared with richer nations. It is mandatory to address the concerns of displaced families at the grassroots level. They are fundamentally engulfed with apprehensions regarding the vaccine. Many are uneducated and have no access to internet and social media, so there is a dire need to create awareness among displaced families related to the containment and prevention of Covid-19. The government should deploy health workers with proper guidelines to clarify all ambiguities related to this pandemic, specifically in terms of the vaccine because several myths pertaining to it have stemmed, which is limiting its national administration and rollouts.

To sum it up, the state must play a prudent role in addressing the concerns of displaced families in a synergised manner by providing them with all the necessary facilities during this pandemic. This will, to some extent, result in restoring their social cohesion and thereby motivating them to cope up with these adversities in a sustainable manner and subsequently put a halt to further deterioration in their wellbeing thus maintaining the social quality of their lives.

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