**Development of Gilgit Baltistan, the way forward**

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Gilgit Baltistan which was formerly known as the Federally Administered Northern Areas or FANA is the northmost political entity of Pakistan. As per the constitution of Pakistan, Gilgit-Baltistan is a self-governing region and it is a home to some of the world’s highest mountains, including five of those mountains ranging over eight-thousand heights and number of mountains ranging about 7000 meters. With over 10 districts and average population of about 34 lacs, there are 7 major local languages beside Urdu and English.

For this purpose, government of Pakistan to improve the overall status gave this region a status of province with overall own legislation and is being governed by Federal government of Pakistan. The overall economic system of GB region depends on dry fruits, tourism, fishing and seasonal festivals. The overall revenue in the system comes through these factors.

Beside these factors, prime importance of GB is because of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as area has by road connectivity to China and goods can be transported in a specific season. Economic activities primarily do take place between March and September as in other periods climate induced migration significantly take place and survival in the harsh weather conditions without energy (gas, light and other heating system) becomes difficult. With changes in the regulations and constitution, Government of Pakistan in 2009, gave it a status of partial province status thus paving the way for development agenda. Post-2009 decision, there had been change in the overall framework and each government did played role in development of the area and tried to improve the overall service delivery structure. Though there had been improvements over the time but significant challenges were there to improve ranging from climate, social. political and economy.

Alternate energy system along with restructuring of the overall infrastructure framework is the key so that access to basic needs becomes easy task across all seasons

First and foremost, challenge which government in Gilgit-Baltistan is facing is the climate. During the winter season which actually starts from October, people start migrating towards downtown areas such as Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi and other major cities of Punjab and Sindh for living and doing economic activities. Thus, bringing in the challenges of displacement due to food insufficiency, infrastructure (electricity, gas and water) shortage and bringing in economic activities.

Second, challenge which in general is being faced by government of Gilgit-Baltistan and people is to continue the economic activities. The economic activities which are being carried out are difficult to continue in the winter season thus bringing in the shortfall in the revenue collection and shortening the business opportunities. This also therefore brings in more unemployment and less business and development opportunities.

Within the existing business and economic system, women also hold key to economic activities. There are markets specified in main Gilgit region where economic activities are being carried out by women. Stalls are being owned by women and most of the businesses are not registered but markets are owned privately by different people. Markets though have businesses by women but as far as infrastructure is concerned within the markets there are challenges such as shortage of energy and infrastructure related to market; access to finance; and access to raw material. The access to raw material has made business in Gilgit more inclined towards domestic market and thus making activities outside (including cross the border and international) difficult. Beside these challenges other challenge holding key in Gilgit region is the society which is more conservative in comparison to that of Hunza where social contraction is not significant thus opportunities for economic activities are more in that region in comparison to that of Gilgit.

Contrary to this business at Hunza are being carried out internationally. Key economic and business activities include sectors such as handicraft. Within handicraft sector there are 700 females making handicraft clothes at home with many having challenges such as disability. Due to the existing scenario of Covid-19 access to markets and access to community thus is the major challenge and this has resulted in stoppage of work. Though businesses in Hunza are much stable in comparison to those of Gilgit but access to finance remains a challenge because of winter season where earnings drastically decline. Within this access to finance challenge getting loans from the bank is one of the biggest challenges because of compliance involved.

Similarly, there are areas in the region where there is no equal distribution of Cash through the conditional cash transfer programs thus creating income disparity. This unequal distribution of cash through programs also brings in income disparity bringing in challenges for the community at lower level.

The above-mentioned challenges are across the gender but intensity matters as males of the society can get engaged in other activities thus playing the role in overall development.

To bring in development to the Gilgit-Baltistan system and sustaining it for the long run first and foremost thing which federal government need to address is the governance structure. For this purpose, government implementation needs restructuring and plans need to be revisit so as to make things workable. Further there is need to strengthen the overall framework and business model across the board and this regard different capacity building programs with the involvement of private investment needs a start and push. Private investment can also strengthen the businesses and make market more innovative and technology driven. This will help in attracting customers at sub-national, national and international level.

Also, there is need to control the climate related migration for this purpose infrastructure should be a key priority this infrastructure should be in the form of provision of energy and water. For this purpose, alternate energy system along with restructuring of the overall infrastructure framework is the key so that access to basic needs becomes easy task across all seasons. This will also help in improving the business model thus helping in reduction of unemployment and creating more business opportunities.

Alongside, infrastructure there is also need for cash transfer programs to increase its spread and need for revision of distribution criteria so that there remains an equal distribution across the region irrespective of the gender.

Thus, in short for development of Gilgit-Baltistan region, there is need to provide infrastructure to cater the demand in all seasons, finance and improved service delivery. This will enable overall system to develop significantly and improve overall living standards.

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