[Hassan Baig](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/hassan-baig)

April 21, 2021

**The development challenge**

Global wisdom is increasingly reaching the conclusion that the holistic model of human development is the real answer to the present and evolving challenges faced by the global community.

In recent years, a tremendous amount of research has emerged that demonstrates linkages between lack of human development and the unrest, insecurity and inequality experienced by large swathes of the developing world, especially Pakistan. Underdevelopment is a risk factor for violent conflict and it is assumed that low-income countries face a risk of internal conflict around 15 times greater than economically stable and developed countries.

As a result, national governments and international key stakeholders are now convinced that lack of investment in human development is a major impediment to sustainable development across the globe. These institutions are now progressively inclined to invest in human development that focuses on the education, health care and good governance in developing countries. However, the realization at the level of national and international organizations/governments is too slow to change the scenario within the desired timeframe.

Why is it so? Because the developed world and international donor agencies have proved to be tardy and parsimonious in their response to address increasing poverty and lack of human development rampant in the developing countries as a result of the unjust international economic order. At a summit in 2000, governments from around the world made a commitment to meet the MDGs, which were a commitment by global leaders to halve impoverishment and hunger, provide education for all, improve standards of health, halt the spread of major diseases such as HIV-AIDS and slow down environmental degradation by 2015. Unfortunately, these promises remain far from completely fulfilled.

In 2015, by the end year of MDGs, 195 nations around the globe agreed with the UN that they can change the world for the better and became a signatory to the SDGs. They committed to accomplish the 17 goals of development by bringing together their respective governments, businesses, media, institutions of higher education, and local NGOs to improve the lives of the people in their country by the year 2030. A vital aim of these goals is that the poorest countries can afford to achieve them.

If the world fails to act to meet these goals and current trends are allowed to continue, 55 million more children will die between now and 2030. While 97 million more children will still be out of school in 2030 and 53 million more people in the world will lack health, education and economic opportunities.

In Pakistan there is an urgent need to invest in human development. Pakistan is facing a human development crisis characterised by increasing social and economic inequality, communal violence, ethnic tension, violent extremism, environmental degradation, decline of foreign direct investment and reducing health and living standards.

The social and economic challenges confronting Pakistan are staggering with its ranking of 154th on the Human Development Index of the 189 countries as reported in the recently published UNDP Report on HDI. Pakistan’s population will double in the year 2055 if it continues to grow at the current birth rate of 1.8 percent, chances of which are imminent. The latest social indicators exhibit that more than 30 percent of Pakistanis live below the poverty line with 65 million in absolute poverty while another 87 million live in poverty. Only 30 million Pakistanis are well to do. The country’s basic health indicators are not encouraging with MMR of 200 per 100,000 populations and IMR of 57 per 1000 live births.

According to the PSLM Survey data (2018-19), the overall literacy rate (10 years & above) was 60 percent. The survey data reveals that more than one half of the population of ten years and older that has ever attended school is 61 percent in 2018-19 as compared to 60 percent in 2013-14. Almost 30.13 percent of primary age children are still not in school in the country, with this percentage being 58.98 percent in Balochistan. Of the approximately 25 million out of school children in the country, approximately 17 million children are out-of-school either due to lack of access to schooling because of poverty, lack of available schools nearby or due to working as child labour. One key issue in Pakistan’s education is the alarmingly high dropout rates at the primary level, which ranges from 31 percent to 48 percent. It is estimated that the pool of illiterates has accumulated to the level of as high as 70 million plus for ages 10-49 years by 2020.

Therefore, the country will not be able to fulfil its commitments of achieving human development related targets of SDGs with the current investment levels in education and health which co-relate to the economic indicators and contribute to the overall human development.

The dismal picture of human development in Pakistan as portrayed in the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) Report has indeed raised concerns across Pakistan but despite the low performance in achieving the desired targets, the government seems less serious about lending support to organizations like the National Commission for Human Development which was established in 2002 with the aim to improve and fill implementation gaps in social service delivery at the grassroots level in the sectors of education, health and poverty alleviation.

Despite being a relatively young organization, the NCHD has already established a niche for itself through the positive outcome of its interventions, its contribution for promotion of human development through literacy & volunteerism, and is being promoted as a model public private partnership (PPP) for replication in other developing countries.

However, unforeseen financial constraints have always restrained it partially from delivering vital services to the nation. After giving valuable services to government line departments, ministries, district and local governments for about 18 years, it is now time for the power corridors to support organizations like the NCHD for uninterrupted delivery of the needed services in the field of human development which will help the government achieve its international commitments on the SDGs and Vision 2025 in the next 10 years.

The writer is an economist.