**The Grueling challenges faced by the urban poor In Pakistan**

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Developing countries are ordinarily experiencing burgeoning growth in urbanization. With the dilating exodus from rural areas into the urban suburbs, in an extensive search of better livelihood and career prospects, the modest levels of poverty and rampant unemployment continue to escalate in big cities. While generally contemplated less stringent than rural poverty, urban poverty typically provides the industrious poor with a host of separate issues. The demographic explosion in urban areas has led to pervasive issues such as overcrowding, congestion, pollution, housing shortages, high rents, poor urban living conditions, weak infrastructure, expensive transport, poverty, unemployment, poor sanitation, poor social security and a very high crime rate. The drainage infrastructure is inadequate leading to overwhelming difficulty in accessing the local roads and an impending threat of flood disasters in some developing countries. In the sufficient majority of the developing countries, the local administration has invariably failed to adequately provide social services to the low-income strata of urban society.

In developing countries like Pakistan, the urban poor is unjustly deprived of the basic amenities of life. They typically have to deal with cramped road networks, power outages, a paucity of social security services and an inadequate supply of water. An estimated 38% of the total population lives in urban areas with a spiraling 3% annual growth rate. With such a staggering growth rate, the local administration is struggling to efficiently deliver public services and inevitably generate productive jobs. The urban landscape in the country is mainly shaped by families settling in substandard housing. In this connection, the regulatory authority for low-cost housing finance has estimated that across all the major cities, urban housing was approximately ten million units short of demand in March 2019 promptly leading to a massive number of the population living in informal settlements. Likewise, the demand for new houses is around seven hundred thousand houses per annum and only half of this demand is met. As a result, the urban poor barely has access to basic services: water, proper sanitation, power and waste management. As per Asian Development Bank Report, almost 90% of water schemes in Pakistan typically provide hazardous drinking water, further unemployment and Illiteracy are taking a toll with the elected government still to devise a well-directed policy in this regard.

Urban poor is no different than the rural poor. They have to withstand a plethora of issues, which need to be addressed through well-directed policies and a far-sighted approach

The urban poor of Pakistan predominantly settles in slums and typically bears the exorbitant social cost. They primarily work in the informal sector as they lack the necessary skilled education and the necessary capital to survive economically in the formal system. They are akin to the rural areas in the form of remittances, periodic visits, socio-cultural and economic ties. Being disgracefully neglected, on the one hand, and being victims of misguided policies on the other the urban poor has so far endured grave challenges. They bear the acute stress of migration from rural areas to urban slums. They experience exploitation in the local workforce, primarily in the informal sector, where they are overworked. They stoically endure economic hardships, and generously provide inexpensive labor and invaluable services to manufacturing industries and do not reap any tangible benefit in imminent return. They are helpless victims of industrial pollution and have significantly higher mortality rates. Similarly, with their impaired health, they are least likely to contribute positively towards their local ecosystem.

This unprecedented urbanization presents an imminent threat to the country as 50% of its population is young and under 25 years of age. The occupants of slums are remorselessly denied their fundamental rights of health and education which is imperative for any meaningful development to take place. They continue to be trapped under the vicious circle of poverty and ignorance and may disrupt the social fabric of the society through indulging in drugs, crimes, and extremism. It is the need of the hour that policymakers launch schemes directed to uplift the urban poor and improve their standard of living by taking care of their fundamental needs. The neighboring country India, for example, is harnessing the potential of technology to launch smart cities project for accelerating economic growth, strengthening governance and enhancing the quality of life of people. Their scheme strives to improve the living standards of underprivileged strata of the urban populace by installing water connection and sewerage to each household. In a similar vein, new houses will be constructed all over India to address the shortfall in housing. Although the Naya Pakistan Housing Scheme initiative is laudable yet the government of Pakistan needs to take the necessary pertinent measures to foster an enabling environment where businesses and private investors are incentivized to invest in urban infrastructure and services. To succinctly summarize, urban poor has to grapple with severe issues that can be addressed exclusively if they find their discourse in public policy formulated by those occupying the corridors of power.

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