

Society
Action
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Empowering the

It is society's responsibility to pool a poverty because poverty creates problem for the poor but for the whole society, says IF

The people have suffered enough. They are trapped in the vicious circle of poverty. There is much to be desired in the health and education sector. The poverty trap makes things worse. Without indigenous, self-help programmes it may not be possible to remove or reduce poverty and consequently to affect improvements in health and education. Since disease and illiteracy negatively affect the work environment and ultimately reduce performance in agricultural and industrial sectors, an integrated comprehensive approach is needed to improve the socio-political indicators to better the economy and enhance quality of life.

But the suggested integrated approach is not likely to produce desired results in view of the existing, ever increasing, uncertainty, insecurity, corruption, mismanagement, bad governance, and high-handedness of officials and politicians.

The scenario that starts with search for (*rozi, roti*) employment/work and food often ends up in social evils and problems of social control. Situation so developing leads to a variety of complexities making the masses powerless to affect decisions regarding themselves. There is absence of the necessary support structure required to help initiate participation for positive action. People cannot get out of the vicious circle of poverty and the attitude of resignation.

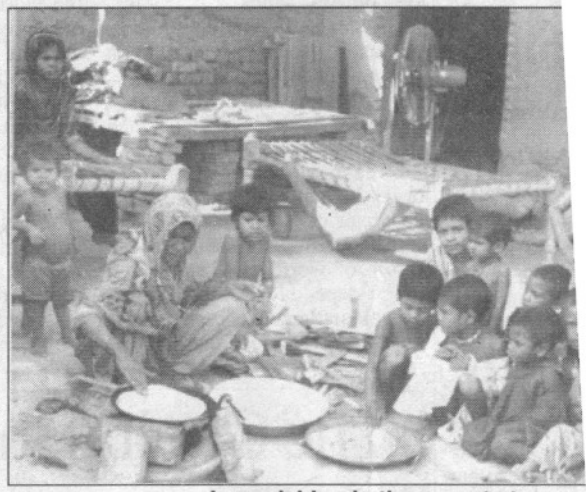
In theory we know that the unorganized masses can't exert a decisive power. Individually, the masses may be powerless. But collectively, no! similarly, in a democratic society there is the power of the mass markets, though not unlimited, and there is the mass veto-power through non-cooperation. The direct political power of masses based on their franchise to "throw the rascals out" may, sometimes be empty because both candidates hold the same values and serve the same interests. Researchers and scholars argue that the poor can utilize power and must be able to do so if their position is to be improved. They contend that the deliberate organization of the poor, stress-

ing whatever grievances are most keenly felt, can lead to positive action.

Researchers conclude from their findings that as the poor (acting as pressure groups in the community) achieve power, they can prevent exploitation, formulate positive programmes for their own welfare, and replace a helpless apathy with a sense of being able to control their environment. There is, perhaps, need to dispel the picture of the poor as helpless to effect decisions concerning themselves.

Efforts in the past to involve the poor in policy making and administration of the poverty programmes were not successful for a variety of reasons, including lack of participation by the poor and the absence of appropriate socio-political structure to provide essential support to efforts for organizing the poor.

Failings related to mobilising and developing real leaders from among the truly poor. Investigation into their phenomena led to the conclusion that possibly the poor can be better served by organizations including members of all classes than by organizations of their own. The mobilization of mass discontent is possible only in democratic and open societies. Elsewhere it brings a fast trip to the dungeons.



Languishing in the poverty trap

A government, which is inefficient, slow moving, democratic in name only, and in search of stability, may be heading towards dictatorship. Here the chance of success of programmes for empowerment of the poor, through the techniques of nonresistance, passive resistance, or nonviolent resistance may be very slim. Rather such efforts may be viewed unfavorably by government agencies. This is the reason that poverty, violence and terrorism are often mixed up. Actually it is politico-social discrimination, which if not acknowledged and taken care of, may lead to violence and terrorism.

The poor form a sub-culture in which, as a result of their common experiences they have developed certain attitudes and behavior patterns which have been transmitted from parent to child. These include the casual resorting to

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efforts to fight is not only for the KHAR AHMAD



physical aggression, an inability to plan for the future, a seeking of immediate gratification, weak impulse control, and a fatalistic attitude toward the future. In spite of its selective application, the culture-of-poverty concept gives a realistic description of how the poor find it difficult, if not impossible, to break out of the cycle of generation-to-generation poverty.

The subculture of the social classes—
er middle class children and the
ower class children are two en-
fferent worlds. There are obvi-
erences in behaviors related to
amily, and neighbourhood and
e difference in terms of
tion and induction of individu-
al roles in the society. In case
middle class children, the
inds them appealing and re-
children, while they find
omfortable and exciting place.
teacher says: "Study hard so
o well and become a success
this makes sense. For most
grow up means to complete
ed education and launch a

ntrary the lower-lower class
to school often unwashed
and meet a person unlike
eir social world. The teach-

er's speech and manners are unfamil-
iar. And when they act in ways that are
acceptable and useful only in their so-
cial world, they are punished. Teacher
thinks they are irresponsible kids, while
the children soon conclude that school
is an unhappy prison. They learn little.
The school soon abandons, any serious
effort to teach, brands them as "disci-
pline problems". This image of them is
everlasting. They have discipline prob-
lems in all walks of life later on.

It is the society's responsibility to
pool all efforts to fight poverty because
poverty creates problems not only for
the poor but for the whole society.
Helping the poor to come out of vicious
circle of poverty thus means helping
the whole society.

Poverty alleviation programmes re-
quire attention of all sectors and levels
of the society because these pro-
grammes are concerned with much
more than an economic problem. It
requires developing an enabling cul-
ture that motivates individuals to act,
involves the community in identifying
issues and developing leadership; helps
to develop appropriate socio-political
structure; and provides an effective
administrative system for monitoring
and control. Success or failure of pov-
erty alleviation programmes much de-
pends on the political roots of their
design. Planners and administrators
may therefore examine Pakistan's cur-
rent poverty reduction programme in
this context.

Without appropriate structural
changes and committed political lead-
ership, significant outcome cannot be
expected, as it is evident from the expe-
riences of many developing countries.
Pakistan's experiences of rural devel-
opment programmes and various mul-
tipurpose community development pro-
grammes indicate lack of political will
and treatment of the poverty issue only
on surface.

Need for political stability can be
met by food production and industrial
production. However, handling the pov-
erty issue is more important in the
sense that it can provide an environ-
ment for better future in terms of op-
portunities and strength.

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