**Social capital**

BY N I A Z M U R T A Z A 2020-11-17

WHY do some states progress rapidly while others like Pakistan stagnate? The role of natural, physical, financial and human capital in this regard is clear.  
  
However, many analysts assign a key role to social capital too even if it is tougher to define, measure and show its links to national progress. Most define it as reservoirs of shared values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity in society. Such reservoirs help reduce the costs of social, economic and political interaction among people and groups, enhance predictability and reduce theloss ofresourcesinfriction.  
  
All this leads to greater national productivity and hence faster progress. But their absence creates societal conflict and makes it tough to even accumulate physical, financial and human capital or benefit fully from natural capital. Thus, for some, social capital is the key form of capital for national progress.  
  
But why is there greater trust and cooperation in some societies than others? Not much is available in the literature of this vexing question. But a comparison of successful and stagnant states gives clues.  
  
Those states that have progressed f aster are usually more homogenous while those that haven`t are usually more fractured along horizontal (race, ethnicity, faith, etc) and vertical (class and caste) axes.  
  
This makes conceptual sense too since the higher the internal divisions, the lower will be trust and cooperation in society. So most developed states (mainly Western and East Asian) are nation states (horizontal homogeneity) where at least 75 per cent of the populace belongs to one race, faith and ethnicity.  
  
Also, via revolution or social movements, most of them undertook land and social reforms that reduced ancient caste and class divisions. This homogeneity and higher social capital has led to rapid progress. But economic inequality, eg in the US, is again slowing progress.  
  
However, most South Asian states are diverse ethnically and stratified vertically along class and caste lines. Thus, progress has been much slower there. Yet some variations do exist regionally. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India have done better than Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan due to their fewer vertical and horizontal cleavages. Bangladesh comes closest in Saarc to being a nation state. These three states also undertook land reforms. Finally, they have seen greater democratic rule than other Saarc states. This has helped them build bridges of trust and cooperation across their natural cleavages, though exceptions exist inIndiaandSriLanka.  
  
Pakistan is much more ethnically diversethan Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and has failed to carry out land reforms. Thus, high vertical and horizontal cleavages continue to undermine trust, cooperation and social capital accumulation. In addition, it suffers from a larger democratic deficit, spending years under unelected regimes. Even when elections were held they were usually stolen. So, it has held about a dozen elections and three referenda at the national level since 1947. But credible bodies like the EU and Pildat indicate the establishment rigged 10 of them and politicians another one. Among the remaining, the results in 1970 were not accepted.  
  
Thus, instead of helping alleviate the frictions along the two basic axes, Pakistan`s political arena has helped increase them and reduced trust, cooperation and social capital in society. One can identify the culprits along the other two axes, such as politicians and urban and rural elites. But it is much more ticklish to do so for the political arena, for such analysis brings us quickly tothe doors of the selfappointed defenders of our imaginary ideological borders.  
  
Tongues stutter and pens paralyse a bit while discussing their input to Pakistan`s current mess, as stories of writers likeMatiullah Jan disappearing come to mind quickly.  
  
If Pakistan has to have any hopes of making even limited progress like the three better-off Saarc states, it will first have to reduce their heavy political boot prints. The resulting political arena consisting of even mere procedural democracy, free polls and civilian sway will help Pakistan first accumulate social and then the other forms of capital needed to ensure progress. All grand plans to attract investment and build human and physical capital will keep floundering if social capital and political stability are not developed.  
  
But there is little chance of a retreat f rom the political sphere soon. So while the parched national ego may thirst to hear a rosier conclusion, the scholarly compulsions of telling the truth dictate painting a grimmer one. Pakistan`s chances of even matching the limited progress made by some Saarc states remain low in the coming decades. The writer heads INSPIRING Pakistan, a progressive policy unit.  
  
murtazaniaz@yahoo.com.  
  
Twitter: @NiazMurtaza2