

Participatory Interventions and Development of Social Capital: Evidence from Punjab Rural Support Programme

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Abstract

The admiration towards sustainable development and improved quality of life has been the critical subject matter since the beginning of the Anthropocene. The interconnections of individual and collective relationships regarding humanity and the environment are closely associated with affluent human development at individual, group, and community levels. In recent decades, numerous advancements that characterized improvement in quality of life, considered the reflection of exceptional actions and self-realization numerous national and international organizations intervening mainly in rural areas of Pakistan for mobilization of rural community to work for their betterment through participatory approach. This exploratory study tries to understand the development of social capital through these participatory interventions adopted by the Punjab Rural Support Program (PRSP). PRSP has awareness interventions in 22 districts of Punjab province. From these districts, five were selected randomly for this study. Then, one field unit from each selected district was chosen, and 50 respondents were taken through a convenient sampling technique. Therefore, the total sample size for the study was 250. The results of the study revealed that the participatory approach applied by PRSP brought some positive changes in the thinking behavior of the rural communities, which led to developing the social capital. The Government institutions should encourage the participatory approach and also review its policies.

Keywords: Participatory Interventions, Social Capital, Punjab Rural Support Program (PRSP), Participatory Development, Community Organizations.

Introduction

The admiration towards sustainable development and improved quality of life have been the key subject matter since the beginning of the Anthropocene. The interconnections of individual and collective relationships regarding humanity and the environment are closely associated with affluent human development at individual, group, and community levels. In recent decades, numerous advancements that characterized improvement in quality of life are considered the reflection of exceptional actions and self-realization by the United Nations (Addai et al., 2024). A widespread shift observed in favor of collective awareness since the 1990s endorsed the role of

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various national and international organizations, which play a major role in the transition toward sustainable development and social capital (Eisenberg et al., 2023).

Public and private organizations, among others, lead the nations in two ways: fostering awareness, behavior, knowledge, attitudes, rituals, values, actions, and skills (Karami et al., 2023). Similarly, promoting socio-cultural equity, enhancing economic conditions, enhancing prosperity, recognizing competence, developing civic skills for civil society & political system, and developing individual talents, among others, allow the advancement and sustainability of plans (Simmons et al., 2022). Globally participatory interventions and plans of action, such as the Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP), have carried various initiatives that have become the leading program for change interactions among individuals, families, and communities to their social capital and economic conditions (Caferra et al., 2023).

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, later on, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations impersonate the global agenda (2015-2030), especially for developing countries like Pakistan and make them better living places with improved livelihoods with healthy socio-economic environment than ever before (Gibson et al., 2023). All United Nation member countries formally adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, with broader actions and a set of areas for collective actions. The agenda of sustainable development goals (2030) is exceedingly broader and transformative, with 17 main goals and disaggregated into 169 targets, which also cover five interrelated dimensions such as plan, people, peace, partnership, and prosperity (Thompson et al., 2023).

Pakistan is one of the countries in South Asia which faced chronic social, economic, managerial, and administrative issues, among others, for a long. Many of Pakistan's population lives below the poverty line with meager access to basic human needs such as education, health, and electricity (Owais et al., 2023). This unprecedented situation in the era of science and technology frustrates the population, which is more alarming among the country's rural communities. Considering the need for time and the importance of the issue, numerous agencies are intervening, mainly in rural areas, to mobilize the rural communities to work for their betterment through a participatory approach (Katzir et al., 2023). Based on these efforts, people are showing a positive attitude towards work on a self-help basis. Due to this, their relationships, trust building within themselves and among other communities, and the sense of sharing of responsibility are developing (Ibita et al., 2023).

Generally, capital can be explained in three forms: economic, cultural, and social. Social capital is the "sum of social connections and obligations," and it is the aggregation of actual or potential resources that are linked to the possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition or, in other words, to membership in a group (Zhao et al., 2023). In general, social capital describes the network of reciprocal relationships between and among people and between and among groups based on trust and built on a set of shared values or norms. Social capital flourishes through the formation of the creation of emerging networks, trusting relationships, reciprocity, shared norms, and social agency (Akbar et al., 2020).

There are two types of resources an individual can gain access to and use: personal resources and social resources. Personal resources are resources an individual possesses and may include ownership of material and symbolic goods (e.g., diplomas and degrees) (Caliri et al., 2023). Social resources are resources accessed through an individual's social connections. Individuals have different social resources depending on the extensity and diversity of their social connections. Social capital also includes mobilized social resources. Generally, there are three elements of social capital:

1. The number of persons within one's social network who "are prepared or obliged to help you when called upon."
2. The strength of the relationship indicates readiness to help.
3. The resources of these persons.

Social capital is a crucial resource to be innovative and, thus, to perform. Social Capital can be described as the network of connections among individuals based on trust, respect, appreciation, reciprocal appeal, integrity, transparency, and shared norms and values. Studies on organizational learning, innovation, and knowledge productivity indicate that how people work differs fundamentally from how organizations are designed. Significant learning and innovation processes occur within informal social networks or so-called communities. A synthesis by Freeman et al. (2022) proposes the following six dimensions for the participatory approach in development.

- Animation: Helping local people stimulate their critical awareness, encourage them to examine and explain issues in their own words, and help them realize what they can do to bring about change.
- Structuring: The development of internal cohesion, solidarity among people, and some form of structured organization.
- Facilitation is a service role that assists people in undertaking specific actions. These actions include acquiring particular technical and managerial skills, gaining access to available resources, or translating their own ideas into feasible projects.
- Intermediary: To serve as a go-between for other external services, establish contacts with existing services, and introduce people to the procedures and mechanisms for dealing with these services.
- Linking: To help develop links between people in similar contexts and facing similar problems.
- Withdrawal: A progressive redundancy of external intervention.

Study Objectives

- To understand the level of participatory interventions executed by Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP), in rural communities of Punjab province.
- To assess the impacts of Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP) interventions on the development of social capital among rural communities of Punjab province.

Research Methodology

Punjab Rural Support Programme is working in 22 districts of Punjab province and its focus is on rural areas, which are much neglected. PRSP is working for development of Human resource and trying to make them able to solve their problems through utilization of available resources. All these efforts arise in establishment and development of social capital which is much significant for the development of society.

Out of 22 districts where PRSP is working, the present study was conducted in five districts namely Faisalabad, Okara, Hafizabad, Gujrat and Pakpattan. For administrative purpose, PRSP divided these districts into sub units and called these units as field units. One field unit from each district was selected randomly such as Satiana Field Unit (Faisalabad), Hafizabad Field Unit (Hafizabad), Renala Khurd Field Unit (Okara), Kunjah Field Unit (Gujrat), Arifwala Field Unit (Pakpattan). From selected field units, total 50 Community Organizations (ten from each District) were selected and five respondents from each of these Community Organizations were selected to collect data. Therefore, total 250 respondents were approach for data collection.

The data was collected through well planned interviewing schedule. The pre-testing was done in order to ensure the validity and accuracy of interviewing schedule at 10 respondents. During pre-testing some ambiguities were identified and incorporated accordingly. The researcher himself conducted interviews and collected data that was analyzed by applying appropriate statistical techniques. The interviewing schedule was developed in the light of the objectives of the study. The interviewing schedule was prepared in the English but questions were asked in Urdu and Punjabi languages according to the situation.

Results and Discussions

The descriptive findings of the study presented in the form of tabulations and discussed according to the nature and objectives of the study. The following table 1 presented the distribution of participant's gender and education. Details are as under:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	150	60.0
Female	100	40.0
Total	250	100.0
Education		
Illiterate	83	33.2
Under Matric	60	24.0
Matric	49	19.6
Intermediate	36	14.4
Graduation & Post Graduation	22	08.8
Total	250	100.0

PRSP is working in rural areas of Punjab Province. Its activities carry out by formation of Community Organizations (COs). There are two types of COs, based on the gender (i.e. male and female). Data in the present study was collected from 250 respondents; from which male were 60.0% while female respondents were 40.0%. Moreover, table 1 shows that according to education indicators a large number of respondents (66.8%)/ two third were literate, while 33.2% (One Third) were illiterate. In rural areas of Punjab, agriculture is still a major economic resource of the people. Moreover, some kind of other activities such as enterprise, dairy and farming are also adopted by the people who do not have the land for cultivation.

Table 2: Respondents' satisfaction according to different aspects of Social Capital

	To Great Extent	To Some Extent	Not At All	Total
Distribution of respondents regarding their level of satisfaction about the view that through the activities of PRSP, the Bridging aspect (strength of relationship across the communities) of Social Capital has developed.	75 (30.0%)	123 (49.2%)	52 (20.8%)	250 (100%)

Distribution of respondents regarding their level of satisfaction about the view that through the activities of PRSP, the Bonding aspect (strength of relationship among members of same community) of Social Capital	51 (20.4%)	101 (40.4%)	98 (39.2%)	250 (100%)
Distribution of respondents regarding their level of satisfaction about the view that through the activities of PRSP, the Linking aspect (strength of relationship with other institutions/ departments) of Social Capital	49 (19.6%)	73 (29.2%)	128 (51.2%)	250 (100%)

Table 2 reveals that 30 percent of the respondents were highly satisfied with the view that through the activities of PRSP, the Bridging aspect (strength of relationship across the communities) of Social Capital has developed, while 49.2 percent of respondents were satisfied to some extent and remaining 20.8 percent said “not at all” in this regard. On the other hand, for Bonding aspect of social capital 20.4 percent of respondents were highly satisfied with the view that through the activities of PRSP, the Bonding aspect (strength of relationship among members of same community) of social capital has developed, while 40.8 percent of respondents were satisfied to some extent and remaining 39.2 percent said “not at all” in this regard.

In case of linking aspect, 19.6 percent of respondents were highly satisfied with the view that through the activities of PRSP, the Linking aspect (strength of relationship with other institutions/departments) of Social Capital has developed, while 29.2 percent of respondents were satisfied to some extent and remaining 51.2 percent said “not at all” in this regard.

Table 3: Respondents’ views about different benefits of participatory approach

	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain	Total
Distribution of respondents regarding their view whether they are agree or not agree with the statement that due to their participation in these activities, their hidden potential carried out.	128 (51.2%)	66 (26.4%)	56 (22.4%)	250 (100%)
Distribution of respondents regarding their view whether they are agreeing or not agree with the statement that due to their interaction with PRSP the community is in more organized form.	147 (58.8%)	59 (23.6%)	44 (17.6%)	250 (100%)
Distribution of respondents regarding their view whether they are agree or not agree with the statement that, their participation in activities carried out by PRSP, convert their individual potential into social/ collective potential.	141 (56.4%)	44 (17.6%)	69 (27.6%)	250 (100%)
Distribution of respondents regarding their view whether they are agree or not agree with the statement that, through these participatory activities the community become more strengthen and energetic.	157 (62.8%)	39 (15.6%)	54 (21.6%)	250 (100%)

Participatory approach leads the community to find out the solutions of different problems by their own willingness and active participation in the process from the need identification to decision making. In fact people are not much aware about what they can do? They have much potential and qualities but there is need to explore their potential and trigger them to utilize their potential for their betterment and development. Table 3 reveals that 51.2 percent of the respondents were agree to their hidden potential carried out due to their participation in the activities of PRSP, while 26.4 percent were disagree and 22.4 percent were uncertain. In response of their organization, 58.8 percent of respondents were agree with that due to interaction with PRSP, the community is in more organized form, while 23.6 percent were disagree and 17.6 percent were uncertain. Moreover, 56.4 percent of the respondents were agree that their participation in these activities convert their individual potential into social/collective potential, while 16 percent were disagree and 27.6 percent were uncertain in this regard, 62.8 percent of respondents were agree that through these activities the community become more strengthen and energetic, while 15.6 percent were disagree and 21.6 percent were uncertain.

Conclusion

It is concluded that PRSP provides the grounds for collaborations, trust building, and sharing of mutual skills for developing and generating social capital as presented by Bicchieri et al., 2022 and Ferdous 2023. It serves as a basis for establishing an integrated social network of rural people to redevelop a culture of trust building and self-organization for strengthen the community (Ding et al. 2020; Gil et al., 2021; Stotten, 2023), which is beneficial for not only the individuals for their personal life but also for whole social setup.

The culture established through interventions of PRSP as well as the interconnectedness created through and participatory initiatives of local community lay the foundation for the bonding necessary for its members to attain the stage of self-reliance (Abdulai et al., 2023; Gessese et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2021). A consistent focus on participatory activities for developing local leadership and managerial qualities among the people creates a comparable environment that allows the overall community to develop social capital, which is a positive orientation towards achievement and to navigate the social development. As a result, society is able to create the bonding and bridging capital necessary for both retention and future success.

Recommendations

- For the betterment of rural community it is important to organize the members of community on self-help basis and for this purpose, they should be prepared and trained to work with participatory approach. So that they can use their available resources in best way with significant outcomes.
- Through different activities of PRSP, the rural community organized themselves and solved many problems. Their interaction and participation in these activities helped them to establish the trust among them. This trust is the key and basic force through which they can achieve some other targets for their betterment in future.
- In the light of data, it was clear that now people are organizing themselves to maintain a social forum from where they will be able to achieve the targets of their social development as well as their economic development.
- The social capital is increasing due to the activities of PRSP. Through a close interaction between community and PRSP, trust, linkages, sharing of responsibilities, accepting institutional norms, making and using of social networks are the main factors which are

developing with the passage of time and these are the actual assets of any society for its development.

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