



THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL-4: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This research paper aims to analyze the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal-4 in the context of Pakistan. The study also provides an overview of SDG-4 from a regional perspective. SDG-4 is one of the seventeen goals of the United Nations Development agenda 2030. The SDGs are a global development framework adopted by UN member countries in 2015, comprising of 17 interrelated goals. This study aims to explore SDG goal 4, which aims to ensure quality education for all. SDG implementation in Pakistan holds great significance because Pakistan does not rank high in the Human Development Index (HDI) and Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). Implementation of SDGs could uplift Pakistan socially and economically. The education sector in Pakistan needs extensive reforms. In this context, the implementation of SDG-4 is of great importance for Pakistan. The world's countries agreed to adopt a framework for global development. The SDGs aim to wipe out poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity. The SDGs are a universal call to be achieved by the year 2030. The research has been



carried out through qualitative and quantitative method methods using secondary sources.

Key Words: United Nation, Sustainable Development Goals, Pakistan, Education.

Introduction

There is a close association between education and other dimensions of development. education in the Sustainable Development framework has a close relationship with other key sectors of development. In September 2015, countries agreed to adopt a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. The SDGs are a universal call that calls for achievement by the year 2030. The SDGs are comprised of 17 goals that are integrated and recognize that action in one area will have positive impacts on others. These integrated goals aim to balance social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

Focusing on inclusive and quality education for all underscores the significance of education for sustainable development. It reaffirms that through education, the goals of sustainable development can be achieved. Promoting quality education and education for all is key to the framework of global development. In addition, it aims to ensure equal access to reasonable vocational education, eradication of gender and wealth disparities, and promote quality higher education.

Education is central to the UN 2030 agenda for Sustainable development. Within the extensive framework of global development, education gets the most important place. SDG-4, the single stand goal which deals the education, is not limited to this goal only. Specifically, education is mentioned in other key targets including health and wellbeing, gender equality, economic growth, and linked to all goals of SDGs-2030 (United Nations, 2017). SDGs aim to overcome increasing inequalities across the globe. Moreover, it focuses on the global economic crisis, conflicts, and climate change (Sayed & Moriarty). Pakistan is one of the most affected countries in terms of multifaceted global socio-economic issues such as poverty, education, illiteracy, climate change, environment, health, etc. Many of these challenges have a direct or indirect association with education and economic growth (Khushik & Diemer, 2020). Pakistan, being one of the UN member nations, is committed to the 2030 development agenda. Pakistan has adopted SDGs and included to its national development through a unanimous National Assembly Resolution and mainstreamed SDGs in its national policies and strategies. In 2018, the government of Pakistan approved a national SDGs framework aiming at envisaging a national vision to prioritize and localize the global development framework (Government of Pakistan,



2019). Though Pakistan has implemented SDGs, it still lags other regional countries in terms of progress and achievement. This paper focuses on Pakistan's education sector in the context of SDG-4 and presents recommendations for the successful implementation of SDG-4 and the achievement of targeted goals under SDGs-4.

Literature Review

Qureshi & Khanam (2018) have explored "Building Knowledge Competencies" for sustainable development in Pakistan and other regional countries. The authors are of the view that to keep the country on a path of development, quality higher education can play a significant role by producing skilled human resources and achieving Sustainable Development using education.

Zaidi, Mirza, Hou & Ashraf (2019) believe that among SDGs goals, health, economic growth, quality education, and climate control are top priorities areas. Hence, for developing countries, it is necessary to successfully implement sustainable procurement which assists to reduce the health, energy, and environmental costs by introducing advanced technology through promoting quality education for next generations.

Khan & Khan (2018) in their study concentrate on Sustainable Development and its relevance with education. According to the authors, Sustainable Development in higher education is still in a nascent stage. The authors believe that the primary objective is to make possible a sustainable future for generations to come, ensuring their participation as a leader to lead the nation in all sorts of key areas such as environment, economic, social, and powerful culture.

Nhamo, Togo & Dube (2021) in their study investigate poverty in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The author further discusses leadership in implementing SDGs, and SDGs in service delivery and local government. The authors examine the initiative regarding the implementation of the SDGs across the world. This study provides a balance in terms of the agenda 2030 being rolled out for economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social protection.

Servaes (2016) focuses on Sustainable Development in Asia. In this study, the author has examined the UN Millennium Development Goals in the context of South Asia. Moreover, the author has discussed the changes and development from UN Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) and provides an overview of agenda 2030 and its impacts on South Asia.



Dodds, Donoghue & Roesch (2016) think that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a comprehensive set comprising of seventeen unified goals with 169 targets adopted by UN member states as an agenda of international development to be achieved by 2030. The authors, in this study, discussed with an inside view of the process and a unique entry into what will be seen as one of the most important negotiations and global policy agendas of the 21st century.

Ferguson, Iliško, Roofe & Hill (2018) focus on SDG-4. The authors are of the view that SDG-4 that deals with education are key to achieving other goals of agenda 2030. Education is key to development and prosperity. SDG-4 aims to ensure an inclusive and equitable society. Moreover, the goal aims to promote lifelong learning opportunities. The author furthermore states that quality education is fundamental for achieving the goals of Sustainable Development and the role of teachers, teacher educators, and the curriculum is crucial in achieving the goal of inclusive and quality education.

Research Methodology

For conducting this research, the researcher adopted qualitative data, which has been collected through secondary sources. The researcher used books, research journals, official reports of international organizations, and newspapers to gather relevant and credible data. The obtained data is then formally analyzed. In this study, a qualitative design was adopted because it enabled the researcher to understand the topic in-depth. This approach helps a researcher to collect secondary data from credible sources.

Sustainable Development Goals and Education

Education is one of the top priorities of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 agenda. Goal-4 seeks to ensure quality education for all and promote sustainable development. Quality education develops skills and values that enable people to contribute to the development and respond to challenges through education for sustainable development and global citizenship education (Rieckmann, 2017).



Source: Eurostat

The agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is an extensive framework that focuses on all people, leaving no one behind. SDG-4 aims to provide inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. The Millennium Development Goals, which is the predecessor of SDGs 2030 agenda, made significant progress towards universal primary school enrollment. The agenda 2030 aims to raise the ratios and bring broader change toward Sustainable development. Moreover, SDG 4 is integrated to all goals of agenda 2030. Access to quality education for all is an avenue for social mobility and dropping social inequalities.

SDG Four aims to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The emphasis under this goal is ‘universal coverage of quality education from pre-school through at least secondary education, and then on to more advanced skills training’” (n, 2021). SDG-4 is included in the agenda 2030 to build a world where each child could contribute to a just, tolerant, and inclusive world. Furthermore, the goal concentrates on the idea of education for all. Those groups are deemed to be insecure. In addition, focus on equal access to all and life-wide and life-long education. Hence, UN member states need to prioritize education, including targets under SDG-4 (FERGUSON, 2019).

The long road to Education for Sustainable Development has been effective because it has established itself in the educational environment, resulting in a plethora of official documents, both global and national, endorsing its implementation (Diemer, Girardin &



Marquat, 2015). UNESCO was tasked with heading the UN decade of education for sustainable development by UN Resolution 57/254, which was adopted by the institution in December 2002 (United Nations, 2021)

In 2005, UNESCO defined education as follows: "Education for sustainable development is the integration into teaching and learning of key themes of sustainable development, such as climate change, natural hazard prevention, biodiversity, poverty reduction or sustainable consumption. It involves the adoption of participatory pedagogical methods to motivate and empower learners to change their behavior and become actors in sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2021). That is because education for Sustainable development aims to promote the grooming of skills that allow the learner to develop their critical thinking skills, imagine future scenarios, and make common decisions (Diemer, Ndiaye, & Khushik, 2020).

Sustainable Development Goal-4 in the context of developing countries

The three main aspects of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) include health is comprised of sanitation, access to water, and access to health services. Secondly, the environment is linked with population density in urban areas. These societal issues are added to United Nations' recommendations: "Investments in the health and nutrition of young children will translate into an investment inequality and sustainability throughout life" (UNDP, 2021), into the basic curriculum of many national programs and the SDGs, thus introducing a final issue, education (itself reflected in SDG 4).

However, the education-related issues could not be limited only to the examination of the curriculum; the quality of education in many developing countries is affected by several factors including social, political, religious, and economic. For both students and instructors, getting to and from school can be time-consuming. Inequalities exist between urban and rural locations. In primary school, the number of students per class can reach 80.

Despite official documents in underdeveloped nations setting the number of students at 35 or 50, reality overwhelms the texts, making any of the pedagogical advances associated with education for sustainable development (e.g., critical pedagogy, mindfulness, project pedagogy) difficult to execute. Moreover, teachers' contracts exist in different ways. There are many contracts and skills in a large number which includes civil servant and teachers, that has been provided training with regards to education for sustainable development.



Notably, the last two decades have seen significant progress with regards to education, especially significant progress has been made in terms of primary education. In the year 2015, the total enrolment rate in developing countries jumped to 91%. Besides, the worldwide number of children out-of-school lessened by almost half. In some developing regions, due to a high level of poverty, progress remained tough. Armed conflicts and insecurities remain to be other barriers in achieving the goals of education in these regions. The ongoing armed conflict in Western Asia and North Africa has raised the number of out-of-school children, which remains to be a worrying trend. While the Sub-Saharan African region made significant progress in terms of primary school enrollment as compared to other regions, from 52% in 1990 up to 78% in 2012 (UNDP, 2021).

The enrollment rate in developing countries has reached 91%. However, there is a huge number of out-of-school children of primary level. The total number of out-of-school children of primary age is still around 57 million. The Sub-Saharan African region has more than half of these numbers. In terms of girl education, the situation is even worse where 1 in 4 girls is not in school. About of the out-of-school children of primary age live in areas that are affected by persistent conflicts. (UNDP, 2021).

Pakistan`s Education Sector & Sustainable Development Goal-4

Pakistan adopted SDGs in February 2016. In Pakistan, SDGs Units have been formed both at the federal and provincial levels, including Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir. The localization of SDGs is having been done through the UNDP approach of Mainstreaming, Acceleration, and Policy Support (MAPS). Education is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed under Article-25 A of the constitution of Pakistan. Moreover, the article guarantees that “provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law” (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

Pakistan`s Education System

Pakistan`s Primary school (1-5 years), middle schools (6-8 years), high school (9-10 years), higher secondary (11-12), and above is the higher education system. Another parallel education system in the country is religious education, which is an officially recognized education system, known as the Madrassa system. The Madrassa System gives religious education. Moreover, there are two types of institutions in the country, state-owned educational institutes and private institutes from primary to university level. Apart from private and public education systems, the medium instruction and education syllabus is another distinction in the education system of Pakistan. Hence, Pakistan`s



education has no uniformity, creating differences among nations on understanding the social and other issues as well as creating inequalities in Pakistani society (Khushik & Diemer, 2020).

Challenges to Pakistan Education Sector

Pakistan is faced with serious problems when it comes to the implementation of SDG-4. The number of out-of-school children aged 5-16 is around 22.6 million and the adult literacy rate is 57 in the country. Additionally, there are serious imbalances regarding access and quality education. Notably, gender gap, socio-economic status, and location, and the supply, training, and qualifications of teachers are not sufficient. Moreover, most schools lack a better environment, and early childhood education is not uniformly available. Lack of good governance, poverty, insecurity, and frequent natural disasters are other factors affecting the education sector in the country (UNICEF, n.d.).

Currently, Pakistan is faced with serious challenges in the field of education. The education sector has been one of the neglected sectors in the country. The sector is facing multiple problems including inadequate financing, poor governance and lack of capacity, lack of required number of schools, teachers, low enrollment, lack of basic facilities in most of the schools, high dropout rate, etc. In Pakistan, there are around 39 million out-of-school children aged between 5-16 years. In addition, around 2 million children are estimated to be added every year (UNICEF, n.d.).

During the last two decades, Pakistan has made significant progress. However, education outcomes in the country remained to be low, particularly in terms of secondary and tertiary education. In Pakistan, the gross enrollment ratio at the primary level has seen a significant increase, from 73% in 2003 to 94% in 2018. However, there are still a large number of out-of-school children aged between 4-16. The total number of these children is still high in the country. Nearly, 23 million children are out of school. Furthermore, the gross enrollment rate, in terms of girl education, is even lower than males, particularly at the primary level the difference is even more. Average years of schooling have seen a gradual increase, from 3.3 in 2000 to 5.2 in 2018. These improvements have led to increases in the adult literacy rate, improving from 55% in 2011 to 59% in 2017 (Brollo, Hanedar, & Walker, 2021).

Poor Indicators of Education

In Pakistan, education indicators are low as compared to many other countries of the region. Approximately, 40% of citizens of the country are illiterate. About 64% of



women in rural areas cannot read and write. About twenty-two million children of age 5 to 16 are out of school. According to Pakistan Economic Survey (2016-17), merely 54% of children of age 5 to 9 are enrolled in primary schools. Pakistan is one of those countries which allocate less GDP for education.

In 2019, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) ranked Pakistan 152th out of 189 nations. It is evident from Pakistan's ranking by the global organization that Pakistan has made no notable achievements and key educational indicators such as literacy rate, gross enrolment ratio, and education budgets remain low in comparison with other regional countries. Additionally, Pakistan's literacy rate still stands at 57%, lagging behind most of the countries in the region. The dropout rate at the primary level is 22.7%, which is alarming for the country's educational sector (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

In 2018-19, Public expenditure on education was estimated at 2.3% of GDP, in comparison with 2.4% in 2017-18. Since 2014-15, expenditure on education is witnessing a gradual rise. In 2018-19, expenditure, related to education, increased by 4.7%. The provinces are also spending a considerable amount on education. In 2018-19, Punjab increased its expenditure on education from 371.8 billion in comparison with Rs 340.8 billion in 2017-18, showing an increase of 9.1%. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) also increased educational expenditure to Rs 152.7 billion, as compared to 142.6 billion. In the same way, Balochistan has increased its expenditure from Rs. 52.8 billion to 55.3 billion in 2018-19, with an increase of 4.8%. However, Sindh reduced its expenditure to 162.6 billion in 2018-19 as compared to Rs 166.0 billion in 2017-18 (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

Education seems less a priority in the GDP of Pakistan. Unfortunately, education remained a less priority for all the succeeding governments in Pakistan. It is evident from statistics of the last seven decades that expenditures on education remained a less priority. after the 18th constitutional amendment education became a provincial subject, but expenditures on education in all the provinces lag far behind the commitment Pakistan has made internationally. The federal government allocated about 2.5% as an average of GDP for the education sector in the annual budget (Pakistan, 2019).

The year-on-year analysis shows that gender equality in education has got little to no investment between the years 2015 and 2021. Punjab and Sindh provinces, for years 2021-2022, allocated 1.07 and 2.64% of their education budgets respectively for specific schemes exclusively aimed at reducing gender disparities under the scope of SDG 4.5 and enhancing girls' access to formal education. At present, only Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



province has partially adopted the practice of gender-responsive education budgeting. The other provinces in Pakistan have budgets disaggregated by gender. There is no feasible way of ascertaining whether the allocated funds have been allocated for girls' or boys' education and/or in what proportions (Dawn, 2021).

Very little has so far been achieved to align education budgeting as per the national and provincial SDG frameworks. Schools across the country need clean water, toilets, and hand-washing stations to keep the children safe. Provinces allocate low funds for infrastructure, which is problematic, particularly Sindh needs to invest higher in infrastructure development and maintenance because the province has the highest number of school buildings in need of repair the highest number of school buildings considered dangerous, and the highest number of schools with missing facilities (Dawn, 2021).

Pakistan has not been allocating enough budget for education. The government of Pakistan, in several policy documents and plans, pledged to increase the education budget, but expenditure on education remains low, practically (PILDAT, 2018). In addition, In the budget of the fiscal year 2021, the federal government and Balochistan announced no specific measures to increase girls' access to education. This is particularly worrying for Balochistan because the province has the highest rate of out-of-school girls (The News, 2021).

The way forward and Recommendations

SDGs are crucial to uplift the country socially and economically. Pakistan needs to take serious measures to ensure the pragmatic implementation of SDGs. We lag far behind other regional countries in terms of progress in the education sector. Based on Pakistan's current educational statistics, it is likely that the country will not achieve its target under SDG-4. To put the country on the path of development and prosperity implementation of SDG-4 is key.

The federal government has set up a non-partisan parliamentary task force comprising national and provincial legislators. This task force needs to work with the Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services More and more coordination is needed between the federal and provincial governments to bring improvements in Pakistan's education sector. Education should be prioritized to meet Pakistan's commitment to the international community.

There is an urgent need of strengthening coordination between the center and provinces. The coordination between the federal government and provincial governments is key to



meeting the targeted goals under SDG-4. The eighteenth amendment to the constitution of Pakistan devolved a range of responsibilities to provinces including education. The provinces are now more empowered to contribute to education for sustainable development. The federal government has set up SDG support units across the country to promote coordination between federal and provincial governments. This coordination needs to be further strengthened, mainly regarding gathering data to monitor progress towards the SDGs targets.

The education-related issues continue to be tackled in a manner that is at best disorganized. The government and political levels should eventually end to ensure hasty progress towards fulfilling Pakistan's international commitments under SDG-4. This is the only policy option to put the country on road to sustainable development through education.

Political parties play a key role in shaping public opinion and articulating policies. They intend to bring economic development, promoting education, health and well-being, and employment generation, etc. Education is key to achieving all these goals. Hence, political parties should play a role in the education sector of the country. Moreover, the achievement of targets of SDG-4 shall lead to enhanced employment opportunities, which is one of the main agendas of political parties as well as a constitutional obligation of the governments.

Conclusion

This research paper examined the UN Sustainable Development Goal-4 which is central to agenda 2030 for sustainable development. This paper discussed SDG-4 from a global perspective and highlighted Pakistan's educational sector in the context of SDG-4. The agenda 2030 is a comprehensive framework aiming at wiping out poverty, protecting the environment, and making an inclusive society for all. It is a universal call to be achieved by the year 2030. The framework is comprised of 17 unified goals to ensure social, economic, and environmental sustainability. The SDG-4 is considered fundamental for sustainable development and achieving other goals under the global development framework. Education has been included in the global framework with a single-strand goal, goal-4. The inclusion of education to SDGs indeed underscores the significance of education. Achieving quality education and education for all is one of the seventeen goals which aims to ensure that all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary education by the year 2030. Moreover, education is not only limited to goal 4 but also specifically mentioned in other goals as well such as health, gender, equality, economic growth. For some developing countries, such as Pakistan, SDGs are a long journey. Though Pakistan has adopted SDGs 2030 and localized it by setting up SDGs centers



across the country, the country is still struggling to bring a real change in society. The findings of the study show that Pakistan lags far behind other regional countries in terms of progress on SDG-4. The education sector in Pakistan still faces multiple problems. In many parts of the country, schools lack basic facilities. The education sector in the country continues to be neglected by the federal and provincial governments. Pakistan needs to prioritize education at federal and provincial levels to achieve the SDG-4 goal by 2030.



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