

*Distinguished Lecture*

**Social Development, the Empowerment of Women,  
and the Expansion of Civil Society: Alternative  
Ways out of the Debt and Poverty Trap**

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In Pakistan's fifty-five years, most governments have terribly neglected the overall well-being of their people. When economic growth has occurred in the past, it has been grossly inequitable. For Pakistan to escape the debt and poverty trap in which it is becoming inextricably immersed, it must prioritise social development, the empowerment of women, and the expansion of civil society over economic growth strategies. Only then can there be balanced growth—not just growth for the élites—as knowledgeable people from myriad backgrounds feel vested in Pakistan's future. The process of globalisation has all but eliminated the possibility of a local economy being able to become competitive in the global market. Though by prioritising social development, enabling women to become full participants in the state, and expanding the power and possibilities that civil society groups can play, Pakistan will find that these are the most viable strategies to break free from the debt and poverty trap in which it finds itself today.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Thank you for inviting me to be a Distinguished Lecturer at the Pakistan Society of Development Economists' annual meeting this year. I am truly honoured. I am sure we share the same goals, that we all want to look to a strong future for Pakistan. I want us all to envision a time when every child will be in school, receiving a good education, and no one in this country suffers from physical ailments unnecessarily. When a women can make the choice to take a decent paying job, stay home with her family, or even continue on with her education after her marriage. When local community groups have the capacity to respond to local issues, which not only solves immediate problems but also fosters a sense of community and reciprocal obligations. I could spend the entire amount of time allotted to me elaborating on a history of what has gone wrong in Pakistan, but I refuse to do so here.<sup>1</sup> We must now move on, and recognise that *jo ho gaya, vo ho gaya* (what has happened, has happened).

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<sup>1</sup>I have written extensively on social development issues in Pakistan in other venues. See, for example, Weiss (1994, 1996, 1999, 1999a) and Weiss and Gilani (2001).

We have all come far in our understanding of the role that such intangibles as social development, women's empowerment and the expansion of civil society play in poverty alleviation; we realise that we can no longer talk about poverty alleviation without addressing such issues. In Pakistan, in particular, how these arenas mutually affect each other was minimised and neglected for far too long. I was gratified to read that the overarching objective of Pakistan's 2001–11 Development Plan is "poverty reduction in its income and human development manifestations" [Pakistan (2001: 91)]. The late Mahbub ul Haq, who championed the cause of prioritising social development, would have agreed with this, for is there indeed any *other* way for a state to escape from poverty?

In early September, I attended the launching of the President Musharraf's new 'Task Force on Human Developments' initiative. The Task Force's goals were to undertake a universal primary education plan and an adult literacy programme, primary health care plan, skills training and micro credit programmes, and the like.<sup>2</sup> But amid all the celebratory speeches, I also heard people saying the more conventional economists' mantra, that Pakistan, first and foremost, must prioritise economic growth. This prioritisation is misguided. We have seen little come of it in the last thirty years anywhere in the world. While economic growth rates may have increased, this has been at the expense of growing inequity within a given economy. On the other hand, we have seen that, throughout the world, when *people* are prioritised—through investment in healthcare, education, housing, and the like—a healthy, educated, and confident workforce results in a more productive society and economy.

For far too long, economists have focused on economic indicators and strategies to elevate them as ways to escape the debt and poverty trap that plagues many third world states. An impoverished country borrows money, but then is told by lenders, whether the World Bank, the IMF, private banks, or whatever, that they must restructure and streamline their economy in order to borrow more. But the recipe for streamlining the economy, especially in one like Pakistan's, is ill-conceived. We must not lose sight of the limitations of such strategies for poverty alleviation that are wrought by the processes of globalisation. If adjustment policies, in their effort to get a state to curtail its expenditures, generally include cutting funding to social programmes—education, technical skill development, healthcare, and the like—then how can we presume that an economy can somehow transform itself and become competitive? It is precisely in prioritising its people's overall well-being and empowerment that a state has the best chance to become competitive, in the long-term, in today's global economy. Where have adjustment policies actually worked effectively? The economic boom we have seen in East Asia and parts of Southeast Asia was not a result of adjustment policies, but rather the product of heavy-handed authoritarian regimes that were able to mobilise their workforces

<sup>2</sup>Refer to <http://www.httaskforce.com> for further elaboration of the Task Force's goals and subsequent activities.

effectively, but at the expense of participatory democracy. For many of these states, these are by no means examples of growth with equity. However, glancing at South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia, we can see that *investment in people* is what finally facilitated these economies to make a massive transition in the lives of the majority of their people.

Therefore, in this paper, I would like to make a simple argument:

*In Pakistan's fifty-five years, most governments have terribly neglected the overall well-being of their people. When economic growth has occurred in the past, it has been grossly inequitable. For Pakistan to escape the debt and poverty trap in which it is becoming inextricably immersed, it must prioritise social development, the empowerment of women and the expansion of civil society over economic growth strategies. Only then can there be balanced growth—not just growth for the élites—as knowledgeable people from myriad backgrounds feel vested in Pakistan's fate. The process of globalisation has all but eliminated the possibility of a local economy being able to become competitive in the global market. Though by prioritising social development, enabling women to become full participants in the state, and expanding the power and possibilities that civil society groups can play, Pakistan will find that these are the most viable strategies to break out from the debt and poverty trap that it finds itself in today.*

We must ponder: What should be the fundamental goals of development? They are associated, in large part, with our understanding of what we mean when we use the term 'development' itself. Isbister (1998: 236) has argued that almost everywhere, people only consider development in the context of growth, not limits, and that while people are now thinking about the larger issues of sustainable development, "few will consider the possibility that economic growth itself is limited". So the challenge is how to mix economic growth with sustainability, to understand what that growth will consist of, *who* will benefit from it, and what will be given up to obtain it. His conclusion is that:

It will probably not be possible for the world's poor to follow the economic trajectory of the world's currently rich. If the word *development* implies a common pathway to be followed by all, then it is misleading [Isbister (1998: 240)].

The World Bank's understanding of development tends to focus these days on policy choices. This is unique because in years past, their focus was solely on various dimensions of economic growth, consumption and production. The Bank, in various documents, emphasises the importance that political will plays at both domestic and international levels, making a strong bid, of course, for the Bank's own orientation towards free-market capital liberalisation. They do not raise any questions, however, as to whether or not trade liberalisation might harm some countries which have limited bargaining power in the global economic arena, or how perhaps prematurely

lifting all forms (or even some forms) of protectionism might feed into a state's complaint that they do not have the funds to invest in education, healthcare, infrastructure and technology. The latter, however, are critical to the possibility for a positive scenario to emerge.

The late Barbara Ward cautioned development theorists and practitioners to be attentive to the "inner and outer limits" of sustainable development. She saw environmental stress as setting the outer limits and inequality setting the inner limits, "the extremes within which social cohesion breaks down". [cited in UNDP (1998: 104).] Given these limits, a recent UNDP *Human Development Report* argues how local communities must discern their own priorities for themselves:

A progressive vision is needed. The focus and priorities of human development can contribute to such a vision, emphasising the need for people to be at the centre of the vision and for priorities to focus on enlarging the opportunities and human capabilities of all. Every country and community—whether rich or poor, large or small—needs its own vision of human development and needs to set its own goals as a framework for policy and action [UNDP (1998: 104)].

Immanuel Wallerstein's theory of the development of the modern world-system refers to the whole world-economy, which is characterised by uneven levels of development among groups of countries in the core, periphery, and semi-periphery. What occurs is that:

The ongoing process of a world-economy tends to expand the economic and social gaps among its varying areas in the very process of development. One factor that tends to mask this fact is that the process of development of a world-economy brings about technological advances which make it possible to expand the boundaries of a world-economy. In this case, particular regions of the world may change their structural role in the world-economy, to their advantage, even though the disparity of reward between sectors of the world-economy as a whole may be simultaneously widening. [Wallerstein (1974: 350).]

Yet the prevailing structures of today's global economy allow for such change in very limited instances. Sen (1999: 3) argues that development must be viewed as a process of expanding real freedoms for both men and women, and that it requires the elimination of "major sources of unfreedom including poor economic opportunities for women". Black (1999: 244) has argued that global capitalism itself structurally places people at comparative disadvantage. In her work on the Caribbean, she has shown that it is when people create new forms of local collective strategies that they can overcome the limitations that globalisation—and its proffered solutions of neoliberalism and economic restructuring—places upon them.

We should recognise, too, the importance and utility of a shared understanding existing between people in a modern state and its consequences for achieving sustainable development. The 18th century philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, argued that members of a society need to have an unwritten understanding—a contract—which binds them together, which structures their social expectations of each other and hence provides a foundation for social cohesion. In our recent edited book, my co-editor, Zulfiqar Gilani, and I argue that in today's Pakistan, longstanding bastions of power and authority are eroding, seemingly without any coherent challenges or alternatives and a social contract which can serve to bind Pakistanis together is barely distinguishable. What we see instead are social breakdowns and random acts of terrorism coupled with institutional inefficiency and corruption. The unprecedented social malaise prevailing today in Pakistan is due, in large part, to the ways in which Zia's government had sought to manipulate religion, to justify a dictatorship under the guise of applying Islamic law—particularly an interpretation of Islam that was not commonly adhered to in Pakistan—while rewarding corruption and taking no notice of nepotism and incompetence. The resultant cynicism has wrecked havoc with people's expectations of what the state will do for them and, in turn, what they can do for their society. By the late 1980s, people had become disillusioned with the economic and political functioning of the state; the real crisis unfolded in the early 1990s when this disillusionment overflowed into the social realm.<sup>3</sup>

Given, then, what we understand to be the powerful forces at play in the global economy, the question I am posing today is how Pakistan can get where it wants to be. I do not think the ultimate goal is under contention, which is for Pakistan to emerge with a qualified, confident workforce, a strong economy and a stable, participating polity. What *is* under contention is the route to be taken to get there, and particularly where priorities are to be placed.

I am reminded of Arturo Escobar's warning that a distinct discourse haunts the concept of development in many peoples' minds, and that this discourse has created "a space in which only certain things could be said and even imagined". [Escobar (1995: 39).] We have been so beguiled by the idea that opening markets, encouraging foreign investment, and streamlining government expenditures even at the expense of social programmes will be the path out of the debt and poverty trap that we are often fearful of offering alternatives to such formulas. But should not Pakistan be attentive to not losing its unique cultural attributes—its sense of community, place and reciprocal obligations, indeed, an overarching social contract—all in the name of earning foreign exchanges? Pakistan, in marshaling its human resources, can only then break through the invisible barriers that the global economy places in the path of all newer entrants.

<sup>3</sup>For further elaboration of this argument, see Weiss and Gilani (2001).

## II. PARTICULAR CONCERNS REGARDING DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN

At the outset, Pakistan's future held great promise of achieving such goals. Independence was the culmination of what had finally become a mass-based grassroots movement, extending out to consist of partisans from a range of ethnic, class and regional backgrounds, comprising male as well as female freedom fighters. The populist vision was of a country well-worth struggling for, as seen in the actions of the hordes of migrants who left everything behind as they boarded trains for the new country, Pakistan, that was to be a refuge for Muslims of the Subcontinent. The havoc and social chaos which became the legacy of partition—particularly the legacy of those trains—kindled a unifying spirit among many of the inhabitants of the new state. But not among all.

Therein has laid one of Pakistan's greatest social challenges: how to create a sense of citizenry amongst communities which have not historically regarded each other as 'a people' aside from most being adherents of the same major religion. Pakistan has also faced a range of other distinct social challenges. Various development strategies attempted in the past five decades have made minimal headway in improving the average person's life.

Pakistan's own history was to have been the modernisation theorists' 'example to the world' of what could occur with large infusions of foreign capital. The idea behind this was that the gap between rich and poor was greater in poor countries than in wealthier ones, so large infusions of capital into an economy would then serve to lessen the gap, and hence development would occur. Development is viewed by modernisation theorists and practitioners in a linear sense, and there is an implicit assumption that an evolutionary continuum exists between tradition and modernity. 'Development' would enable the developing countries to replicate the developed parts of the world as they shed their traditions and adopted the economic, political and social trappings of modernity.<sup>4</sup>

Economic growth and development priorities in Pakistan during the Ayub Khan administration is a salient example of this orientation. The Harvard Advisory Group came to Pakistan in 1959 and essentially retained a presence in Karachi until 1963. They argued that Pakistan's economy could take-off if given large injections of capital, either in the form of joint ventures or loans. But who actually benefitted from this assistance? Who could qualify for the loans or participate in joint ventures? Indeed, the 1958–68 period is deemed 'the Golden Age' of Pakistan's Development by the industrial élite of the country, those who benefitted from this aid. But ethnic and class divisions become so exaggerated in this era due to such uneven growth, with the rich getting much richer and the lot of the poor either hardly

<sup>4</sup>For an extended discussion of this, with particular reference to Pakistan, refer to Weiss (1991).

changing or getting worse, that the end result was the dismemberment of the country in 1971, separatist movements in Balochistan and the NWFP in the ensuing decade, and sectarian feuds overflowing into the national arena which remain to the present time.

Pakistan has essentially followed a conventional development path, as outlined by mainstream theorists, economists and policy-makers, but towards what ends? It need not necessarily be viewed as a poor country. The World Bank ranks its GNP in 44th place in the world, but this is the GNP of a country that is home to (at least) 135 million people [World Bank (2000: 275)]. In the 1980s, Pakistan's average GDP annual growth rate was 6.3 percent; in the 1990, it was lower but still at a respectable 4.0 percent growth rate. [World Bank (2000: 295)]. During this time, however, Pakistan's external debt rose dramatically; by 1998 it had reached 52.8 percent of Pakistan's GDP (approximately \$32,229 million). [UNDP (2000: 221).]

While in Pakistan today, far more people have access to the *tools* of development—education, capital, a political voice—than fifty-five years ago, the percentage of those with access has thus far consistently failed to meet targets laid out in the government's various five-years plans.<sup>5</sup> The *goods* which development was to have brought—better health, prosperity, greater diversity in making vocational choices, an overall betterment in the quality of life—remain out of reach for the two-thirds of the population which live at a poverty level of less than \$1 USD per day, or even for the 85 percent living below \$2 USD per day. Key social development indicators remain among the lowest in the world: adult literacy is at a dismal 44 percent (female adult literacy is even worse, at 29 percent); about 70 percent of the population still does not have access to proper sanitation; and Pakistan's ranking in the 2000 United Nations' Human Development Index (135) places it among other countries with far lower GDP per capita rates. Life expectancy for a child born in 1960 was 43 years; today it is over 64. Rates of children dying before the age of one have plunged from a high of 162 per thousand in 1960 to 95 per thousand in 1998. However, 38 percent of all children in the country under the age of five suffered from malnutrition in 1997. While television viewing—which enables rapid sharing of information—seems nearly universal to an urban observer of Pakistani social life, less than nine percent of the population owned a television in 1998. Automobiles and mini-buses transport people more swiftly than the tongas prevalent at independence until, of course, one gets stuck in a traffic jam in the megacities of Karachi, Lahore, or Faisalabad, collectively home to nearly one-fifth of the country's population. [World Bank (2001); UNDP (2000); Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (2000).]

<sup>5</sup>An earlier version of this argument appeared in Weiss (1999).

Urbanisation has been occurring at an unprecedented rate. In 1960, less than a quarter of the population lived in cities; today, that figure is about 35 percent.<sup>6</sup> Over half of all urban residents live in one of seven major cities; one-third of urban residents live in *katchi abadis* and other slums, lacking basic services. [Pakistan (2001: 249).] Limited opportunities for economic advancement and mobility in rural areas galvanizes migration to urban areas. The traditional hold—both economic and political—that local landlords enjoy in rural areas, especially in Punjab and Sindh, virtually ensures the continuation of ascribed status for residents who remain there.

The megacities in the late 1990s have tremendous infrastructural problems. In Lahore, for example, the city has expanded so far—Defense, Iqbal Town, and Township now being commonplace residential locales—that it has lost its sense of a centre. The deterioration of public transit networks and the proliferation of automobiles and private minibuses has caused unprecedented traffic congestion, bottlenecks and pollution. The growing usage of major thoroughfares as staging grounds for protests and demonstrations has made negotiating the megalopolis extremely difficult under even normal circumstances.

How can Pakistan most effectively extricate itself from such imbroglios? I offer three interrelated alternatives here: prioritising social development, the empowerment of women, and the expansion of civil society. I would now like to turn to each of these, in turn.

### III. ALTERNATIVE WAYS OUT OF THE DEBT AND POVERTY TRAP: PRIORITISING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The concept ‘social development’ seems to have emerged from UNICEF’s critique of structural adjustment programmes, and their elaboration, in various venues, of “adjustment with a human face”.<sup>7</sup> In 1990, UNDP (the United Nations Development Programme) brought out their first annual *Human Development Report* in response to the economic crises of the 1980s which stalled—or even reversed—earlier progress in human development around the world. The report states that:

we are rediscovering the essential truth that people must be at the centre of all development. The purpose of development is to offer people more options. One of their options is access to income—not as an end in itself but as a means to acquiring human well-being. But there are other options as well, including long life, knowledge, political freedom, personal security, community

<sup>6</sup>That there has only been a rise of ten percent residents in urban areas is somewhat misleading, as far higher population growth rates exist in rural areas than in urban ones. The higher numbers of young children in the countryside, therefore, skews this figure.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, the seminal work by Comia, *et al.* (1987) which assessed structural adjustment programmes’ effects on communities throughout the third world, and how only through community participation—at the local, national and international levels—could adjustment with a ‘human face’ occur, and that it is necessary not only for humanitarian reasons, but also that it makes good economic sense.



participation and guaranteed human rights. People cannot be reduced to a single dimension as economic creatures.... While growth in national production (GDP) is absolutely necessary to meet all essential human objectives, what is important is to study how this growth translates—or fails to translate—into human development in various societies [UNDP (1990) iii].

In the ensuing decade, there has been much clarification and elaboration of the goals of social development, including at the United Nations' Social Development Summit in March 1995. In Pakistan, members of the Federal Planning Commission involved with writing Pakistan's first 10 years Perspective Plan (along with the Seventh Five-Year Plan) in 1988 were thinking along the same lines for the local context when they wrote that the ultimate aim of development should be:

to improve the well-being of society as a whole and to ensure that the benefits of economic progress are distributed fairly over the entire community. The alleviation of poverty, the provision of greater opportunities, the containment of excessively high incomes and the achievement of a more equitable distribution of income and wealth all contribute towards the attainment of economic justice. [Pakistan (1988: 35).]

When we consider the steps to achieve that economic justice, however, the lack of allocating sufficient funds, consistently over the years, to programmes to empower its *people* has severely harmed Pakistan's chances of ever getting there. Indeed, social disintegration instead escalated in Pakistan during the 1980s and 1990s. The Soviet invasion into Afghanistan was a boon that the Zia government used fully for its own political purposes. However, while facilitating drawing in billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan, political turmoil on Pakistan's western border transformed itself into sectarian and economic strife throughout the country. The lack of true accountability of much of the aid monies contributed both to the cynicism held by many élites, and to the despair held by many of the poor. There was little local participation in identifying problems and concerns and hence limited community investment in the outcome of projects.<sup>8</sup>

Challenges stemming from the lack of a social contract—whether through disintegration or the surfacing reality that one had never truly existed—unfolded in myriad crises in the early 1990s. Disillusionment overflowed into the social realm in numerous ways, from the ostentatious wealth of a small minority parading in front of the poor and disenfranchised majority, to how educational examinations have been increasingly surreptitiously taken and passed, to the way jobs are acquired invariably through nepotism or friendship but seldom on the basis solely of skills or achievement. The latter resulted, nearly a decade ago (in September 1992) in

<sup>8</sup>The Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in Karachi and the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in Gilgit are notable exceptions. The Government of Pakistan, through provincial support projects, made various attempts in the 1990s to replicate the kinds of grassroots, participatory efforts responsible for the success of these two NGOs, but these attempts generally lacked the necessary political will and became irretrievably bogged down.

Pakistan's worst flood in a century, as most specialists have blamed the flood on human error. But was the 'human error' that local WAPDA (Water and Power Development Authority) technicians did not have the background or training to handle the emergency and know when to open the floodgates, or that these technicians were hired through such processes?

Indeed, the result of development planning in Pakistan thus far has been to enable the rich—and even some in Pakistan's rather small middle class—to enjoy the goods and experiences of the global economy, but in doing so, further disenfranchising the bulk of the population of the country. 'Trickle down economics' has been discredited throughout the world, though I agree we still hear it promoted by champions of the wealthy in the United States and Europe. Pakistan today needs a dramatic break with its past when conceptualising how it can emerge from the debt and poverty trap in which it has become ensnared. Recognising the structural limitations that the global economy places in the way of newer entrants as well as the social alienation that has resulted from past policies with misplaced priorities, we should turn now—as Pakistan should have done a long time ago—to the obvious place for a solution: to the people of Pakistan. They indeed hold the potential to be Pakistan's greatest resource, not in an exploitative way (such as farming cheap labour out to transnational corporations on global assembly lines), but in the substantive way of contributing to framing a future that holds more possibility for the vast majority of Pakistanis. To do so, however, requires investment, not in factories, lines of credit, roads or consumer durables, but in the human potential of people themselves.

Providing its citizenry with a substantive, well-rounded education that transmits knowledge and technical skills while encouraging critical inquiry is the single most important aspect—though not the only one—to promote social development in Pakistan. Indeed, planners and policy-makers have been aware of this for sometime; the section on education in Pakistan's Eighth Five-Year Plan nearly a decade ago, which targeted the years 1993–98, began with the statement "Education is an indispensable ingredient of development and a fundamental right of every individual". [Pakistan (1994: 299).] But if education is so indispensable to development—aside from being "a fundamental right of every individual"—why has Pakistan's investment and subsequent record in this arena been so abysmal? Why too, in a related domain, did the World Health Organisation's dream of "health for all by the year 2000" remain unrealised for two-thirds of the inhabitants of rural areas here?

Life expectancy at birth, literacy and the overall health of young children are useful indices which can inform us, in the words of Gunnar Myrdal, if there is a "deepening of the human potential" accompanying development and social change.<sup>9</sup> These indicators can be seen in Table 1. They reveal that while positive change has been occurring—

<sup>9</sup>Gunnar Myrdal (1968) defined development as implying a material betterment of the human condition and a deepening of the human potential, increasing access to many goods and services including higher literacy rates, better health care systems and freedom from poverty, famine and social injustice.

Table 1  
*Select Demographic Indicators 1997-98*

	Total	Males	Females
Life Expectancy at Birth (1998)	64	61	63
% of Adults who are Literate (1998)	45	57	33
Infant Mortality Rate Per 1,000 Live Births (1998)	95	–	–
% Malnutrition under Age 5 (1998)	38	–	–
% of Low Birth Weight Infants (1997)	25	–	–

Sources: UNDP (2000); World Bank (2000); 1998 Pakistan Census.

for example, nearly half the adult population is now literate—there remains a steep incline before the majority of Pakistanis will anticipate they can achieve their potential. Minimal public resources have been spent on education and health: only 2.7 of GNP was spent on education in 1990—as well as in 1997. Even less, 0.8 of GNP, on health in 1998. Clearly, priorities have been placed elsewhere. Military expenditures, as a percentage of combined education and health expenditures, were 393 in 1960, went down to 125 in 1991, but then rose to 181 in 1995.

There is a fundamental axiom we should note here: people who receive a solid, viable education and are in good health are then able to interpret and synthesise issues and events for themselves, as well as act upon their knowledge in a range of circumstances (e.g., employment, health care, participating in democracy). Indeed, where does the greatest threat to Pakistan and to Pakistan's well-being truly lie: from a foreign enemy, or from within?

In 1994, the Government of Pakistan passed a Compulsory Education Act to achieve the goal of universal primary education, which is not close to being met. Somewhat modified goals have been proffered in the most recent plan: universal primary education for boys by 2004, and 78 percent literacy by 2011. [Pakistan (2001-21).]

More important, however, is the deterioration in the quality of instruction in public schools and colleges. When I was conducting field research a decade ago in five different girls' colleges in Lahore, not a day went by when significant numbers of teachers were not 'on leave'. Many—though by no means all—were unenthusiastic, disheartened teachers who were there to teach rote memorisation so their students could pass the annual examinations. When I encouraged these female teachers to hold seminars with me to brainstorm on ways to include materials about women into already existing courses in the social sciences, many saw this as threatening and subversive—though again not all. A submissiveness has permeated many teachers—though again, decidedly, not all—in Pakistan's public schools, probably a survival mechanism necessary under past governments, but certainly no longer necessary or appropriate today. This, however, is not the attitude I see in the

private schools, such as in the Grammar and Beaconhouse systems. Many teachers I have observed in such schools encourage their students to think for themselves, to expand their perspectives and envision new possibilities. These are the schools, however, which were set up for the children of the privileged. They were allowed to retain English as the language of instruction, unlike the public schools which were mandated to convert to Urdu over two decades ago. Students in the private schools are encouraged to ride the information superhighway; few Urdu-medium public school-educated students can compete with them. A linguistic apartheid has emerged in Pakistan, under state sponsorship. The result of this has been inequitable access to jobs, information and technology. A generation has now grown up on a deliberate unequal footing with élites, for the state had intervened to create a caste system, of sorts, in education. I was gratified to read that in the latest plan, attention is paying paid to the low quality of education in public schools in the country, and to improving teaching standards. Such goals, however, take both political will and financial commitment, and I hope that Pakistan continues to prioritise them.

Another ‘blowback’ result (unanticipated consequences) of the deteriorating condition of public schools in Pakistan has been the proliferation of *deeni madaris*, religious schools, throughout the country. After February 1979, when Zia ul-Haq had instituted his Islamisation programme, *deeni madaris* sprang up as alternative venues where poor children could receive an education without the burden of their families’ having to pay school fees or for school uniforms. The state encouraged them as Zia started patronising religious groups to create a constituency for himself. He compelled the University Grants Commission (UGC) to recognise certificates issued by such schools as the equivalent of a Master’s degree, despite the UGC having no practical control over their syllabi. A Pakistani journalist, Muhammad Ali Anwar, has written that:

Holy war against non-believers is one of the important teachings of the *madaris*, and this has indirectly led to the creation of sectarian hatred because each sect believe the other to be heretical. While it may be said that religious schools are meeting a need for education among lower-income families, that too is because the state has abdicated its role to educate the people. In the process, a lot of intolerance is being spread.<sup>10</sup>

So when the new ten year perspective plan [Pakistan (2001: 21)] states that “Education for All has to be the centre-piece of human capital formation,” we must question not only the quality of that education but also how the system can be restructured and reformulated to equitably deliver the kind of education that would enable the majority of Pakistanis to play substantive roles in their country’s

<sup>10</sup>Muhammad Ali Anwar (“Mushroom growth of deeni madaris” *Dawn, the Internet Edition*. May 24, 1997) writes that four sects have been the most prominent in creating such schools: Deoband, Barelvie, Ahle Hadith, and Ahle Tashi.

economic, political and social future, and how to ensure that these new systems will be sustainable.

To promote equitable social development for all, Pakistani planners need to ensure and be extra vigilant that programme—be they in education, healthcare, nutrition or other arenas of social development—once established, do not discriminate on the basis of class, gender, region, or religious affiliation. Note, too, that I am not including women's empowerment solely within the domain of social development; the empowerment of women in Pakistan is so central to how Pakistan can most effectively escape from the prevailing debt and poverty trap that I will now turn to it as a distinct arena.

#### **IV. ALTERNATIVE WAYS OUT OF THE DEBT AND POVERTY TRAP: THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

Pakistan is undergoing unprecedented social dilemmas and challenges, and the implications these have for women are profound. At the same time when traditional views towards women's roles in society are being championed in many domains, substantive changes are occurring throughout the country in social practices, orientations and values. Conflicting images regarding the place and power of women are having widespread social, economic and political consequences. I would like to focus here on three of these consequences, and show how they are directly affected by women's access—or lack of access—to power, and how they, in turn, affect Pakistan's economy. These concern women's labour force participation options, population growth rates, and how the necessity of renegotiating gendered power relations within the family may have an untoward effect on domestic violence which has a direct effect on the overall well-being of society.

A paradigm shift in woman's access to power is occurring today in Pakistan, albeit slowly and in limited quarters, engendering conflicting notions regarding the status and power of women throughout the society. How this translates into motivating and facilitating women to move out of the vestiges of the home into the arena of social life outside of it is, for many women, one of the most daunting challenges of their lives. To access power at any level, Pakistani women need to find a voice in both public and private spheres of life. While the participation of elite women has been gradually increasing in public institutions, this has not necessarily carried over to women of all classes finding a voice in the wider society nor in their own families.<sup>11</sup> Empowering women results in a range of social changes for a country, but to do so is not an easy task. Empowering anyone from previously disempowered, disenfranchised groups is never easy, for it indeed implies that they will now have some element of power and influence over what happens to their lives and generally results, too, in taking away some of the power and influence that

<sup>11</sup>This argument is elaborated further in Anita M. Weiss "Gendered Power Relations: Perpetuation and Renegotiation" in Weiss and Gilani (2001: 65–86).

members of other groups once held over them. This is, obviously, a highly controversial issue in Pakistan, and one which has been used—and manipulated—by differing political groups for their own agendas for some time.

In the lead-up to Pakistan's independence, it had appeared that the state would prioritise empowering women. In Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's oft-quoted speech of 1944, he admonished the past socially sanctioned negative treatment of women when he stated:

No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live [as quoted in Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987: 183)].

But this did not occur. I would not go into the background, here, of women's status and conditions in Pakistan, as well as the implications of Zia's Islamisation programme for women, as a great deal has been written about this and I would venture to guess that many in the audience today have also been actively engaged in working on various development plans in Pakistan which have incorporated the rhetoric of the empowerment of women.<sup>12</sup> However, for the first three decades of development assistance—the 1950s through the 1970s—hardly any attention was paid to the effects of development processes and projects on women's status, roles, power and the like, or on what happens to relations between men and women because of the effects of development policies and programmes. Women were generally left out of having input into development planning at local, national and international levels.

By the 1990s, and particularly now in the post-Beijing Women's conference era, the empowerment of women had become one of the most important, cross-cutting social issues in the international arena. This also coincides with sustainable environmental development on many fronts, and with sustainable, long-term development on all fronts. At the U.N. Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in September 1995, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto told the attendees that her government was “concentrating on primary education for girls to rectify [existing imbalances]” and that they were:

concentrating on training women teachers and opening up employment avenues for women....(as) discrimination against women can only begin to erode when women are educated and women are employed.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Duncan (1989); Kazi (1995); Shaheed and Mumtaz (1992) and Weiss (1992, 1996, 1999a).

<sup>13</sup>Address by Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of the Republic of Pakistan, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, September 4, 1995.

While publicly stating this, the PPP government did not actualise such programmes. If the top priority is remaining in power, then where can prioritising women's empowerment truly fit in? We have all seen how Pakistan's various five year plans have, for some time, used the rhetoric of inclusion, of empowering women, promoting group processes, and the like. The Seventh Plan (1988–93) initiated the process by incorporating goals to advance women throughout its cross-cutting social initiatives. In the Eighth Plan (1993–98), the Pakistan government enlisted representatives from women's groups for feedback on a range of important areas affecting women, resulting in a Plan that ostensibly supported rural democratisation, community development, and targeting affirmative action for women while working in tandem with the short-lived Social Action Programme. The Ninth (1998–2003) and Tenth (2001–04) Plans go even farther in addressing social conditions—and particularly the conditions of women—though we must remember that scant resources were dedicated in the past to implementing similar proposals. While some positive changes have indeed occurred, again, by not prioritising such programmes in deeds as well as words, valuable time has been lost.

Two decades ago, women in Pakistan were merely 23 percent of the adult formal labour force. Today, that figure is still a mere 28 percent, a statistic out of sync with the reality of women's experiences in many other parts of the world, and indeed, one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world. (Data is apparently nonexistent on labour force participation rates in the informal sector in Pakistan). Of the 132 countries surveyed by the World Bank, only five countries had female labour force participation rates lower than Pakistan's.<sup>14</sup>

With the dissolution of extended families concomitant with high rates of inflation, more and more urban women are engaged in working for remuneration. Despite such economic necessities, restrictions on women's mobility have resulted in highly limited ways for a woman to earn an income and still retain her *izzat* (honour) and *sharafat* (respectability) within her family and local community. In addition, concerns over traditional notions of propriety still often prevent women and their families from admitting that women are working and that a family is living off the labour of its women, which often forces women to seek employment in the informal sector where working conditions are unregulated and income far lower than in the formal sector of the economy. Indeed, there remains a great deal of confusion regarding the work which women actually do. On the basis of the predominant fiction that most women do not labour outside of their domestic chores, past governments have been hesitant to adopt deliberate policies increasing women's employment options and to provide for legal support for women's labour force participation.

<sup>14</sup>Data is for 1980 and 1999, respectively. Of the 132 countries surveyed in 1999, only Algeria (27 percent), Iran (27 percent), Jordan (24 percent), Saudi Arabia (15 percent), and Syria (27 percent) had female labour force participation rates lower than Pakistan's. *Source:* World Bank (2000: 279).

What does empowering women to enable them to actively participate in the labour force have to do with Pakistan escaping the debt and poverty trap? The answer to this question is self-evident on many levels, from women making substantive productive contributions to Pakistan's economy, to lowering Pakistan's rather high dependency ratio, to women being able to support their families financially if they need to—and if they just want to.

I would now like to turn to a related issues, that of Pakistan's high population growth rate, now estimated at 2.4 percent (1998–2015), down from 3.0 percent (1975–98), and how this is directly affected by the empowerment of women. While the fertility rate has declined from 7.0 in the early 1970s to 5.0 in the late 1990s, the contraceptive prevalence rate is an alarmingly low 17 percent. At the current rate of growth, the UNDP estimates that Pakistan's population—roughly 148.2 million in 1998—will be at 222.6 million by 2015.<sup>15</sup> Despite varied government and non-governmental efforts underway since 1952 with the birth of the Family Planning Association of Pakistan, little headway has been made in lowering the population growth rate substantially. Research conducted around the world has shown that increasing female literacy and labour force participation rates are significantly responsible for lowering population growth rates, and that literate women tend to have smaller, healthier families. The crux of the population growth issue lies ultimately in raising the status of women, for until a woman's status is determined by something other than her reproductive capabilities—and especially by the number of sons she bears—severe limitations to lowering population growth rates in Pakistan will persist.

The final arena I would like to address here concerns violence against women. Culturally sanctioned violence against women is pervasive in Pakistan, and the implicit threat of gender-based violence is particularly acute within the household in the form of domestic violence. However, domestic violence is seen as a private matter and therefore beyond the concern of the public spheres of policy-making and legislation. Laws enforced during Zia ul-Haq's Islamisation programme exacerbate prevailing culturally sanctioned violence. Marital rape is not a punishable crime under Pakistani law at this time. Due to the tendency to censure the victims of domestic abuse, women are often reluctant to discuss violent acts of abuse. Indeed, in Pakistan today, a women who claims to be a victim of rape but is unable to prove it can be charged with adultery (*zina*) and imprisoned. A common fear among women is that if they flee from their homes (as victims of abuse), they may be charged with *zina*. Additionally, they fear they will be separated from their children who, by law, are to be remanded to a father's custody under most circumstances, another reminder of their sense of powerlessness.

<sup>15</sup>The actual population of Pakistan is rather controversial. Based on the 1998 national census, the Pakistan government claims the population is 135 million. The UNDP and the World Bank have stuck to the higher figure on the basis that only a far smaller population growth rate than that existing in Pakistan could have resulted in the lower figure. The source of this figure is UNDP (2000: 225).



Violence against women within their homes is an extension of the subordination of women in the larger society, reinforced by religious beliefs, cultural norms, traditional practices, and—as is the case in Pakistan—actual laws. It is likely exacerbated by changing roles and expectations which men and women are experiencing coupled by the assumption held by men of the social expectation that they exert control over the actions of their women. The cultural structure of the family not only places women in a subordinate role, but also fosters gender-based violence and coercion. The prevailing family structure—particularly prevalent in Pakistan where a new bride moves into her husband's home with all his relatives—coupled with perceptions of women's dependent roles within the family and in society, create an atmosphere conducive to violence against women.

Population planning, growing numbers of educated women, and the nuclearisation of previously extended families have brought about important changes in the family as an institution in Pakistan. While the family still plays an essential role, its nature is rapidly changing as Pakistan moves from a culture based largely on ascription to one based more on achievement. Men's power within the family, once absolute in its control over women's mobility, is declining. Many women feel they can no longer rely on the men of their family as securely as they had in the past. They have seen men abandon their wives, go abroad to work leaving the wife virtually on her own, and increased drug addiction among men. Many feel that the education and work opportunities now available to women can help them take a tentative step towards independence. However, when a women becomes the primary economic support of her household, while she gains a stronger voice in influencing important family events, she by no means becomes an independent agent. In nearly all instances, she must still ultimately defer to men either from her natal family or her in-laws when faced with major decisions, such as arranging marriages for her children.<sup>16</sup>

In interviews with women from working class backgrounds in the old Walled City of Lahore, I asked them what they thought should be done to alleviate violence against women. From discussions with them and with men and women in rural areas of Punjab, I came to realise that there is a myth in Pakistan that more violence is perpetrated against women in rural areas than in urban ones. It is in the anonymity of the cities, where strangers are reluctant to interfere in domestic quarrels, that both public violence against women and domestic violence appear to be on the rise.<sup>17</sup> To return to my discussions with these women, two factors emerged which nearly all of the women perceived as being the most responsible for domestic violence in

<sup>16</sup> For further elaboration, see Weiss (1992).

<sup>17</sup> Najia Hyder Ali shows the correlation between Pakistan's history of economic restructuring, state-sponsorship of an Islamist ideology that reinforced women's subservience, and the rise of public violence against women in Pakistan. See "Islamisation and Economic Restructuring in Pakistan: Catalysts for Violence against Women". Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Oregon, March 2001.

Pakistan: lack of education among men and women alike (especially quality education) and domestic quarrels resulting from inflation and financial pressures. People, overall, seemed to be frustrated by a perceived lack of jobs, especially for men. As one man inside of Bhati Gate told me, urban areas are full of men with B.A. degrees who remain unemployed, frustrated, and beat their wives. As an extension of the subordination of women in the larger society, violence against women within their homes is escalating due to the economic turmoil which male workers confront as they move from rural areas to cities in search of employment. Their unexpected frustration of not being able to access any power within the economic system coupled with being physically beyond the reach of village support structures further exacerbates the problem.

Other reasons given for domestic violence concern changing expectations that men and women have of each other. Women who are now better educated and more aware of their rights will not put up with men's infidelity as they did in the past. They will argue about the 'other woman' and deplore the double standard of sexuality that has prevailed here for centuries. Men, in turn, are increasingly suspicious of their wives' actions amid increasing mobility. Unrealistic expectations (often glorified) that both men and women hold of future spouses also contributes to manifestations of domestic violence. This is exacerbated by: (i) the widespread prevalence of arranged marriages in villages and among working and middle class urban families; (ii) the precipitous rise of a consumer-oriented culture; and (iii) media portrayals (especially prevalent in satellite transmissions) of consumerism, ideal lifestyles and ideal wives and husbands.

Importantly, negotiations of gendered power within families do not consistently result in spiraling domestic violence. An alternative result is the family encouraging a girl's empowerment, the path towards which is seen to be the acquisition of a good education. The lack of others physically present within a household leaves open the heightened possibility of escalated domestic violence. Increasingly, however, the absence of close extended family members coupled with the rise of female primary education is resulting in a significant shift to school friends becoming a replacement support system. However, while a schoolfriend may have become a fictive kin for a woman, the friend cannot wield the same degree of influence over a woman's husband that a member of his extended family can. There is no longer any viable social control over men's attempts to subdue their wives by the use of physical (and/or psychological) force. Often, this fear of domestic violence has replaced the former willing acquiescence by women to male and familial control.

Indeed, *family* control over female mobility has lessened significantly, particularly in urban areas. Power issues between spouses is constantly being renegotiated: in many cases, women have indeed gained power by now having the right to make some of their own choices. In other cases—whose ranks are steadily shrinking—rigid tradition-based restrictions still apply to women. But in seemingly

more and more instances, an ambiguity is now prevailing where before there was more clarity. Ambiguity, however, can be empowering in the family, especially if it means that it is a move away from a previous rigid conformity to norms.

There are a number of efforts now underway in Pakistan to promote the empowerment of women, such as attempts to refine the National Plan of Action (NPA), develop microcredit plans and enhance the Khushal Bank's scope, implement the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and finalise Pakistan's CEDAW report, place greater importance on the mandate and work of the National Commission on the Status of Women, and finally articulate and institutionalise a National Policy on Women. Indeed, the current plan states that the "Enhancement of the status of women is essential not only on grounds of equity and human rights *but also to meet the goal of sustained growth, human resource development and poverty alleviation* [emphasis mine]. [Pakistan (2001: 211).] But there are a great number of forces working against this as well. I am sure that not everyone in this audience is convinced of the argument for empowering women and enabling them to have and make choices. In response, I want to underscore the statement made a few years ago by the UNDP and which has been incorporated into planning documents worldwide: Development, if not engendered, is endangered [UNDP (1995)].

## **V. ALTERNATIVE WAYS OUT OF THE DEBT AND POVERTY TRAP: THE EXPANSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

Civil society groups promote organisational pluralism and have played a formidable role in nurturing sustainable development throughout the Third World for the past thirty years. However, as the term "civil society" is often misunderstood and misused, I would like to clarify my usage of it. I am borrowing the concept from Alexis de Tocqueville who wrote that civil society is composed of the intermediary social institutions that exist between the family and the state.<sup>18</sup> Antonio Gramsci regarded these autonomous groups and associations that function apart from the state as either supporting or challenging state power. Hence, these intermediate institutions, free from both church (i.e., mosque) and state, operate within a pluralistic framework as a bulwark against the state amassing unbridled power. NGOs (Non-Government Organisation) either emerge as such institutions or can play pivotal roles in supporting them.

Mustapha Kamal Pasha considers that civil society groups in Pakistan have emerged in a unique manner,<sup>19</sup> and he argues that:

<sup>18</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville's observations of the social practice of pluralism in the U.S., which is at the heart of civil society, is recorded in his 2-volume work *Democracy in America* ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

<sup>19</sup>He argues that there are three "constellations" of the concept civil society: as a market-driven social order; as associational life covering an entire spectrum of social life outside the state; and as civilised society. I am using the concept in the context of his second constellation. See his full discussion in Weiss and Gilani (2001: 22–31).

it is not as much the absence of civil society in Pakistan but rather its entanglement with ‘savage capitalism’, which gives it a distinctive character. Forms of wealth creation, distribution, and the state’s (often) feeble efforts to harness economic development become quite intelligible once a determinate link between savage capitalism and postcolonial civil society can be established [Pasha (2001: 20)].

Civil society groups facilitate the existence of a group of people who have a vested interest in their success. [Fisher (1998: 13)] argues that since vested interests usually help sustain *inequitable* institutions, “creating vested interests among the poor may be an equally powerful way to promote the institutional sustainability” of organisation’s efforts. Civil society organisations generally promote political rights and civil liberties, often emphasising bottom-up democratisation. She contends that:

NGOs strengthen the institutions of civil society that mediate between the individual and the state, both on their own and in conjunction with governments. This, in turn, can promote increased governmental responsiveness and accountability. [Fisher (1998: 2).]

Therefore, the strength of civil society “is roughly related to the sheer number of functioning intermediary organisations between the citizen and the state”. The importance of the actions of NGOs in the process of social development and participatory democracy cannot be overstated. Fisher (1998: 17) contends that as “the vanguard of civil society in the third World, NGOs not only enlarge its available space but also help create and enlarge the political commons where state and civil society, broadly defined, interact”. Susan Waltz has shown how NGOs in North Africa have had a disproportional impact on democratisation by challenging the “rules of the political games” as they worked to promote participatory democracy and human rights.<sup>20</sup> A related example in Pakistan can be seen in the actions of the women’s movement when it began to lodge protests against the Hudood ordinances in the early 1980s. Relatively small groups of women were bending together—separate from the government—and took significant stands on democratic principles and the state. They were moral witnesses, citing how Zia’s Islamisation programme was not the only legitimate way of interpreting Islam. They were also democratic witnesses, adhering to the fundamental principles of participatory democracy which requires that citizens take an active role in the construction and maintenance of a democratic state.

There is indeed a global social revolution occurring today, one in which NGOs are truly coming into their own and gaining wider acceptance. Today, no one talks about development without also addressing such issues as collaboration

<sup>20</sup>For further elaboration of her argument, refer to Susan Waltz (1995) *Human Rights and Reform: Changing the Face of North African Politics*: Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

between local leaders, researchers, human rights advocates, and social activists. They can play formidable roles in facilitating such issues as capacity-building, advocacy, monitoring, and expanding human rights networks. The focus of many civil society groups around the world is placed on identifying the legal, cultural and economic impediments to human rights, and to propose targeted approaches, to develop activist strategies, and to train local groups to advocate before international and domestic governmental bodies for policies that recognise both women's rights and the larger arena of human rights for all.

The UNDP considers that five different groups need to mobilise together, in concerted action, so as to effect positive change in the world. These are individuals and households; community organisations and NGOs; private sector producers; governments; and international institutions. The UNDP (1998:101) contends that states can encourage the expansion of civil society by their active support of such collaboration, and that:

Each of these groups is already involved in some actions in most countries. But the result is often much less than could be achieved with more synergistic interaction among the actors—combining the push for change from individual decisions with collective action from civil society groups, producers operating in the market and the government at local, state and international levels.....The power of each group of actors to force a change reflects their comparative advantages.

With the rise in literacy rates and educational levels in Pakistan, these new literates will be demanding a voice just as the new literates of another era became the backbone of the independence struggles against the colonizers in the past. As more and more people hailing from greatly diverse backgrounds are questioning what Pakistan's future should look like, in unprecedented ways and numbers people are making the effort to share their visions as they become involved in participatory, civil society. Hence the proliferation of NGOs that we have seen in the past decade. This must be viewed as a good thing, for the more people care to become actively engaged and participate in civil society groups, the more ensconced pluralism will become in Pakistan. Pluralism not only allows for competing views in an acceptable context, but it also facilitates the sense of a population being fully invested in what happens in the larger society around them. To put it simply, the "they" becomes "we".

Pakistan's new Plan recognises that there has, thus far, been inadequate investment in civil society groups in the country. The recently completed local election process has resulted in an important devolution of power to civil society groups at the local level. Continuing efforts to decentralise power and resources from the central government to municipalities will further strengthen Pakistan's fledgling civil society institutions, and result in a greater mobilisation of local

resources, particularly the active participation of private sector and community organisations.

## **VI. ESCAPING THE DEBT AND POVERTY TRAP: EXAMPLES FROM THE GROUND**

I would like to conclude by highlighting some examples from Pakistan that are already serving to promote social development, the empowerment of women and the expansion of civil society, and show the positive benefits such efforts are already having for Pakistan to break out of the debt and poverty trap. We must recognise that Pakistan is now at a pivotal juncture. It is confronting its greatest challenge with the demise of a social contract between Pakistanis while simultaneously facing the greatest possibilities with the rise of a civil society and the proliferation of non-governmental organisations eager to make a difference on the social landscape.<sup>21</sup> At the same time as it faces a social crisis, Pakistan today also faces extraordinary possibilities as greater numbers of people are participating in building a new society—invited or not. In unprecedented ways, more and more Pakistanis are taking it upon themselves to commit to a cause, which in Pakistan's history has been fairly rare outside of kinship circles. There is a marked proliferation of NGOs in the past decade dedicated to the various social concerns addressed earlier as well as to others, including democratisation, human rights, community organising, and low income housing. Autonomous civil society groups have been trying to make a difference on the social landscape irrespective of the ephemeral idiosyncracies of the national government. Social activists working together with government planners are collaborating on creating new visions of how positive transitions can occur. A civil society is emerging in Pakistan, one neither engineered by the state nor by élite groups, but emanating from the enthusiasm, commitment and perseverance of individuals agreeing to work together to achieve envisioned goals. It is their actions, promoting the rise of a civil society, which holds the greatest promise for Pakistan's future and which can ensure a new path to break out of the debt and poverty trap which can defy neoliberal economics.

An instructive example can be seen in how different groups are cooperating together to promote women's empowerment in the country. An alliance has emerged between NGOs, donor agencies and the state, which had relied heavily on NGO activists in developing its draft National Report for the U.N. women's conference in Beijing and in clarifying Pakistan's position on the then-proposed *Platform for Action*. The Beijing Follow-up Unit (BFU) later became a collaborative effort to maintain the energy and momentum for women's empowerment that had characterised the preparatory process. NGO Consultative Committees in each of

<sup>21</sup>For a deeper elaboration of this argument, refer to Weiss (1999, 1999a), and Weiss and Gilani (2001: Introduction).

the four provinces, consisting of provincial planning ministries and local NGO representatives, collaborated on developing action agendas to follow up on commitments made at the Beijing conference which were later incorporated into the NPA (National Plan of Action). Today, they have become the basis of a nationwide, interactive, decentralised effort underway to integrate women's concerns into the wider governmental bureaucracy at both the provincial and national levels.

A second example can be seen in the transformation now underway of the women's movement itself in Pakistan. In the late 1980s, women's groups began to expand their scope and meld their more traditional social welfare activities with more comprehensive projects that emphasised women's empowerment through social development. Different women's groups increasingly supported small-scale projects throughout the country, becoming involved in such activities as instituting legal aid cells for indigent women, opposing the gendered segregation of universities, and playing an active role in condemning the growing incidents of violence against women and bringing them to the attention of the public. For example, the Business and Professional Women's Association opened a women's literacy and income generation project inside Yakki Gate, in the Old City of Lahore. Shirkat Gah expanded its offices and its scope, penning reports on female labour force participation and environmental challenges that contributed to framing the National Conservation Strategy and the Eighth Plan. Groups such as AGHS, the Aurat Foundation, Bedari, Pattan, and Simorgh initiated a great deal of activist research, much of which is concerned with improving female education, the rise in domestic violence, or increasing women's political participation [Amnesty International (1995); Jahangir and Jilani (1990); Shaheed and Mumtaz (1993) and Weiss (1999a)].

Popular concerns with sustainable, environmental concerns are relatively new entrants onto Pakistan's sociopolitical landscape. For over a decade, Pakistan has enjoyed three major success stories in community organising leading to sustainable development which have only recently attracted efforts at duplication: the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme headquartered in Gilgit, the Orangi Pilot Project located in a Karachi slum, and SUNGI in the NWFP. At the outset, each of these NGOs refused much external support, careful not to compromise its goals and principles. They are comprehensive in scope and include requirements for local participation in development projects, underscoring a philosophy of non-reliance on other entities to provide for community needs. In the Pakistani context, this is exceptional: no longer needing to rely on people with power or access to power opens up the potential to overturn existing priorities and implement development agendas that actually seek to improve people's lives.

The final path that Pakistan's planners, policy-makers and politicians adopt to escape the debt and poverty trap must not lose sight either of the formidable power that globalisation exerts to maintain the prevailing hegemony of states within the

global economy nor of local concerns to develop systems that will result in sustainable, equitable development for *all* Pakistanis. Breaking out from the limited vision of neoliberal economics and broadening this to promote sustainable development, the empowerment of women and the expansion of civil society may very well result in the benefits that Pakistan has thus far found to be elusive by its following of a more conventional path.

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## Comments

### 1.

Professor Weiss's central contention is that in order to get out of its debt and poverty trap, social development, empowerment of women, and expansion of civil society should be given priority over economic growth strategies. This is a therapeutic contention for development economists who for over 50 years have believed that the only way to maximise welfare of society is to maximise growth. Pakistan's case has shown that you can have 5 percent to 6 percent GDP growth rates without significantly improving social indicators. Yet the problem is that you cannot have social development and overcome poverty without economic growth. The issue is not economic growth or social development but rather the *content* of growth.

She has made an important proposal in broadening the concept of development to include the access to and improvement in health and quality of education, particularly for women. Most important, development, as she says, must include changing the gendered power relations in favour of women both in society as a whole as well as within the family. Similarly, as she suggests, reduction in violence against women and expansion of civil society institutions for a more participative democracy could become important elements in a new index of development.

However, there is a lingering sense in her paper that an exclusive focus on social development is all that is required and we can do without economic growth. By contrast, it can be argued that *Incomes and employment of the poor and of women are important and requires economic growth*. For example, the advanced capitalist countries increased their share of world income from 24 percent in 1870 to 76 percent in 1914. This was accompanied by unprecedented social development: improvement in incomes, health, and education of the labouring classes. There was a transformation of the Dickensian world of emaciated and disease-ridden children to a 'labour aristocracy', with an improvement in life expectancy from 47 to 73 years.

In her critical comments on growth, she has suggested that there are limits to growth in the context of sustainable development. (This presumably refers to the limits to the loading capacity of the planet). But surely this means lowering of the overall average output growth rate of the world as a whole. This notional sustainable world output growth rate would presumably take account of the maximum loading capacity of the planet, of technical change towards new "green technologies", and finally of a realistic rate of adoption of green technologies. Whatever this sustainable average growth rate of world output may be, surely the developing

countries cannot be expected to limit their GDP growth rates to this average level. If they did that, then many developing countries, which already have an inadequate capacity to provide food and minimum health and education services to their people, would be condemned to mass starvation, increasing disease and illiteracy rates.

The developing countries must accelerate their GDP growth apart from improving its content, if they are to pull out of poverty. What does this imply for the developed world then, in the context of a maximum average sustainable growth rate for the world? These countries would simply have to keep their growth rates below the world average. If such a politically unlikely event were to occur, then it would mean, in effect, a net transfer of real resources from the developed to the developing world.

The issue for the developing countries, then, is not growth versus social development, or even growth versus environmental conservation. It is really a question of changing the *content* of growth. The imperative is to restructure growth so as to enhance its capacity for poverty alleviation. In this context, three dimensions perhaps need to be addressed.

- (a) Increase the employment elasticity of output growth, and accelerate productivity growth in those sectors where the poor are pre-dominantly engaged. Thus accelerating the growth of micro enterprises, small-scale industries, and the small farm sector are the means towards this end. Also, through skill training of the labour force and a change in the composition of investment, the labour force could be induced to shift from low-wage, low-skill sectors to high-wage, high-skill sectors.
- (b) The poor, especially poor women, should be enabled to organise themselves—acquire skills and credit, and increase incomes, savings, and investment. In this way, the poor as they shift out of poverty could also contribute to a higher and more equitable economic growth.
- (c) The government needs to spend a much larger amount on social development, as GDP growth and government revenues increase. Equally important is the restructuring of the public sector institutions to achieve greater efficiency, transparency, and improved targeting of public sector social development projects.

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## 2.

It is a pleasure to be a discussant on this Distinguished Lecture by Professor Anita Weiss. I congratulate the PSDE for placing this important theme in the place of eminence it deserves. Themes such as National debt, poverty, and empowerment of women are most topical and crucial to Pakistan's development today.

Essentially, I have no quarrel with parts of Professor Weiss's thesis, or rather her premise that Pakistan has indeed neglected social development at the expense of pursuing economic growth strategies—at least until the 1990s. I also agree with her prescription that for Pakistan to escape the poverty-debt trap (in which it is becoming inextricably involved), it must *prioritise social development, empowerment of women, and expansion of civil society over economic growth strategies.*

Arguments in favour of “balanced growth” of investments in human or “social capital” have been in vogue for some time now—in this very Society's meetings for almost 7-8 years starting with Lawrence Summers' paper and as recently as last year's lecture by Gavin Jones. There is *no* dispute, no doubt, social development has to take priority; even centre stage; women and girls have to be empowered and have equal access with men and boys to the benefits of development, particularly to education, health, and employment.

But while I agree with Prof. Weiss (as would probably everyone in the room) that gender equality is at the core of development objectives, I do not agree with the majority of statements in her paper, which support this debate. This is particularly because they are not based on logic and firm empirical evidence (which I do believe she could have used) to make a more convincing case.

Let me offer some positive suggestions to address.

First of all, a framework would have been helpful in guiding us through the paper in how Prof. Weiss proposes to fulfill the rather large agenda of Alternative Ways out of the Debt and Poverty Trap—through Social Development, Empowerment of Women and Expansion of Civil Society? While certain associations and causal chains are better known—such as the negative sequelae of “neglect of social development” and neglect of women's within social development—the arguments for such catalysing investments leave alone solving largely institutional and political issues such as the debt trap, are less well known. Dr Weiss has left us thirsty for details and empirical arguments on this most critical point. In particular I would have liked to have had better arguments to convince me at least that economic policies, without accompanying changes in institutional arrangements, without political will and force would provide the opportunities to escape debt servicing arrangements with which we are paralysed today.

*Secondly*, Prof. Weiss does not use existing empirical data and at least a decade or two of rather extensive research, which does exist in Pakistan on social sector development and on empowerment of women to support claims in her paper. If the paper is to have an impact particularly on hardened planners and economical and financial policy-makers it must make use of these data and research. Hardly any reference is made to local literature, to recent articles in *The Pakistan Development Review* to PSDE proceedings etc. Let alone policy-makers, even a person like myself who is utterly convinced of the importance of gender equality and social development is left unconvinced of the broader claims in the paper mainly because of this discomfort.

Much of the “evidence” used as springboard for arguments about change in the society, such as “family control over female mobility has lessened significantly” and “many women feel they can no longer rely on the men of their family as securely as they did in the past”, is based on conversations with individuals in Lahore. But Lahore is not Pakistan, nor is Pakistan Lahore, and this paper, which is prescribing a serious solution to a very serious national threat, the national problem of rising debt, and poverty, *cannot* restrict itself to a microcosm of even a large city like Lahore and generalise from it.

Pakistan is in the process of major economic upheavals and social change. It is also very heterogeneous and many streams are flowing in different and even conflicting directions. I know of some in my restricted confines of the social sectors and will just elaborate on them to illustrate my point.

Let me take up the case of women’s employment, which I do believe is at the crux of the argument for development policies that prioritise social development, women’s development, and empower women. What is the route to securing more opportunities for women if there is no economic growth and there is increasing unemployment among men also? What about the increasing evidence that women are in fact entering the labour force but taking up very marginal—and menial—jobs to supplement household income in the face of increasing poverty? While both statements may appear contradictory, they are both a reality in Pakistan. My plea is that we use empirical evidence and analyse these trends to answer crucial questions such as “what types of employment for women are associated with their empowerment” and then design policies and interventions accordingly. What might be available in the way of opportunities for work and what might to be the “levels” (the state, community or household) where most decisions will be taken will matter tremendously.

Dr Weiss brought up another institution which is the Family. This is critical for discussion related to women, particularly women’s employment, girls’ schooling, and domestic violence (which are all touched upon in Dr Weiss’s paper). Family structures are perhaps among the most directly affected on account of current economic trends. Economic problems, distress and changes are causing families to

migrate, to relocate, to separate, to nucleate, and to diversify their economic profiles and *these all present a break* with traditional values and cultural traditions, particularly those related to women and girls.

There is important research available about the choices families are making about sending girls to school, about when to migrate, who should migrate, who should work, etc. But these have to be stratified by socio-economic and residential factors on whether households are urban or rural, Punjabi or Sindhi, landed or not, asseted or assetless, and only then can Prof. Weiss support general claims like women in Pakistan have become more mobile, that domestic violence is on the rise in rural areas, etc.

On domestic violence alone I would like to argue that it is not only a manifestation of deterioration of women's power in the nuclear household—nor easily explained by societal changes. After all, women in developed countries such as the US also face violence in the home without our huge national debt and without expanding levels of poverty. Similarly, evidence points to development in urban areas and among middle class families to be quite dominant also. The case I am making is that Prof. Weiss has to recast her dice. She, has to choose her instruments more carefully based on empirical facts, and offer us a more rigorous analysis of the factors which will offer the route out of the vicious cycle of debt and poverty and into empowerment and involvement of civil society.

Professor Weiss does offer, right at the end of the paper, two or three routes out of the poverty trap—through empowerment of women and involvement of civil society. Unfortunately, I do not think they bear the proportion of effects that she is claiming for them. Factors on which she lays hope such as women's movement and policy reforms, such as the National Plan of Action, are largely donor-driven. Initially, it has taken 4 years to plough through a process of consultation. I do not any recall mention of the National Commission on the Status of Women, which is in fact a significant landmark. The work of NGOs, such as Shirkat Gah and Simorgh, is important the impact is limited and hardly perceptible in larger society. Similarly, the NATREP of the Beijing conference (in which many of us in this room were involved) was just the contribution of a group of dedicated, educated, and privileged women in the end. So many of the markers that Dr Weiss is setting store by, as success of progress, are but drops in the ocean. These do not affect the main stream of Pakistan's women. Perhaps the outsider's optimism is being challenged by the insider's cynicism? I would attach less importance to such drops in the ocean and assess whether women are getting more of a *voice* through government positions and through local representation than through movements restricted to government papers. I think Dr Weiss would be much better off evaluating the other impacts of OPP and AKRSP, which are less dependent on donors for sustainability, and the largely gender-equitable agendas as lessons learnt, rather than the NGOs focusing narrowly on gender.

Overall, Professor Weiss attaches significance to policies and plans which we know are documents with the best of sentiments but hardly amount to much more than written words. The major questions facing Pakistan are the breakdown of or lack of any social contract between people and the state and the restructuring of systems and society. Policies assume a response and changes in behaviour in areas such as domestic violence, where customary law is quite different from the laws on paper. The context in which the laws are passed and the motivation for them are much more important. Ultimately, I would like Prof. Weiss to look at issues of governance and accountability—particularly the access to and quality of services available to women and girls. To assume that mere language can prevail over such systemic problems and institutional constraints can only limit her future work.

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