

# Employment Pattern and Extent of Under-utilisation of Manpower in Rural *Barani* Areas of Pakistan

SABUR GHAYUR

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *barani* (rain-fed) region accounts for about a fifth of the cultivated area in Pakistan. It has the potential to significantly increase crop production levels. Similarly, considerable scope exists in this area for the development of forests, fruit and vegetable gardening, pasture and stock rearing. Most of the natural resources are also found in this tract. Its hilly areas possess a vast potential for tourism. Besides, significant opportunities exist for irrigation and hydroelectric power generation. An optimum utilisation of all this potential, obviously, is employment-generating and income-augmenting.

Despite all such realisations this region as a whole, unfortunately, is identified as the least attended to area in terms of provision of socio-physical infrastructure, other development programmes and, even, research work. This led to a deterioration of the employment situation in the *barani* region as a whole. A poor information base and analysis thereof on employment and manpower related variables is also the consequence of such a treatment to this area.<sup>1</sup>

This paper, using the data of a field survey, tries to fill, though partly, the vacuum on employment and related variables in the rural *barani* region. An attempt is made here to record and analyse the labour force participation rates, employment pattern (main economic activities) and unemployment/underemployment levels prevailing in the rural *barani* areas of the provinces of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

## 2. THE DATA

This paper is based on a sub-set of data generated by a sample survey conducted during 1985-86 of the *barani* villages and households. The survey, on the basis of 0.05 percent coverage of rural households, yielded 845 respondents, 575

Sabur Ghayur is Scientific Expert and Programme Coordinator, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Pakistan Office, Islamabad.

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<sup>1</sup>Some of the policy initiatives and investigative work in the *barani* areas is the Report of Punjab *Barani* Commission (1976); Naqvi (1988); Mian (1981) and establishment of (i) Agency for *Barani* Areas Development (ABAD), (ii) Murree-Kahuta Development Authority, and (iii) Sindh Arid Zone Development Authority (ZARZDA).

from the Punjab and 270 from NWFP. The survey was conducted in such a manner that it surveyed 10–15 households from a village and covered at least one village from all the *barani* tehsils (sub-divisions). In all it covered 54 villages of 20 tehsils from the Punjab and 25 villages from 13 tehsils of NWFP.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. THE SURVEY RESULTS

#### Population and Labour Force

Compared to the national average,<sup>3</sup> the surveyed households indicated a lesser proportion, one-fourth, of their population as belonging to the child population, 0–10 years of age. As may be seen from Table 1, a similar proportion exists in both the provinces. An interesting observation about the age structure of

Table 1  
*Population, Literacy and Labour Force*

Variables	Punjab	NWFP	Total
Total Population	3,721	2,098	5,819
0–5 Years	661	293	954
6–10 Years	334	170	504
Over 10 years	2,726	1,635	4,361
Illiterates (Over 5 Years)	1,863	1,204	3,067
Labour Force	1,291	735	2,026
Employed	1,157	591	1,748
Unemployed	134	144	278
Crude Participation (%)	35	35	35
Refined Participation (%)	47	45	46
Dependency Rate	3.2	3.4	3.2
Number of Households	575	270	845
Household Size	6.47	7.77	6.89

the child population seems to lie in almost a doubling of children in the age group–5 years compared to those belonging to 6–10 years of age. This difference is comparatively larger in the Punjab. The only possible explanation for the transition of almost half of the children to the higher age group could be the prevalence of a

<sup>2</sup>For details about the survey and the main study see, Ghayur (1991).

<sup>3</sup>According to Census of Pakistan, 1981, the children belonging to 0–10 years of age were 35 percent of the total population, [Government of Pakistan (1984)].

high infant and child mortality amongst the surveyed households. This is indicative of the poor resource base of the respondents and, importantly, lesser availability of health care.

The large size of the households, 6.89, conforming to the national average of 6.7 [Government of Pakistan (1984)] is found to be comparatively larger in the NWFP than the Punjab. The labour force participation rates, both crude and refined,<sup>4</sup> of these households, as may be seen from Table 1, are on the lower side and, importantly, contain no females. The crude participation rates, however, are the same for both the provinces, but the refined participation rates, though low overall, are comparatively higher in the Punjab than the NWFP. These rates, however, are indicative of higher dependency ratios thereby highlighting the need for a remunerative and gainful nature of work for each member of the labour force.

In contrast to the larger family size, lower labour force participation rates and higher dependency ratios, the *barani* areas seem to offer lesser work opportunities for its labour force. For instance, the survey revealed a high unemployment rate, 14 percent. It is considerably higher for NWFP, 20 percent than the one prevailing in the Punjab, 10 percent. These unemployment rates are significantly higher than the national unemployment rates which have remained between 3 percent to 4 percent for rural and urban areas during the last decade and a half. The absence of any social security system in Pakistan Co-existing with such an open unemployment level speaks of the vulnerability and resourcelessness of the concerned households as well as a worsening of labour market conditions. These rates, however, cannot be allowed to sustain over a longer period of time on social and equity grounds. Continuation of such adverse trends in the labour market also affects the proper development of human resources and their attitudes, in particular, their socio-cultural responsibilities.<sup>5</sup>

### Main Economic Activities of the Employed

A careful look at the main activities of the employed, Table 2, clearly depicts a gloomy picture of the employment scene in the rural *barani* region. The agricultural sector absorbs about one-third of the employed, even a comparatively larger proportion in the Punjab, despite the fact that the *barani* areas are characterised by small and fragmented land holdings, known low yields and the fact that agriculture is heavily dependent on nature. Timely and adequate rains can

<sup>4</sup>Crude and refined participation rates respectively are defined as proportion of the labour force to the whole population and to the population of more than 10 years, as is taken in the official statistics in Pakistan.

<sup>5</sup>Participation level of Pakistan's population, aged 15-29 years and belonging to both rural and urban areas, in socio-cultural, sports and political activities, presently, is dismally low. Except for sports, the proportion of those participating is a single digit phenomenon—For details, see Government of Pakistan (1986).

ensure a crop and also some livelihood, otherwise it even becomes difficult to make two ends meet.

Table 2  
*Main Economic Activities of the Employed*

Type of Activities	Punjab		NWFP		Total	
	No.	P.C.	No.	P.C.	No.	P.C.
Agriculture	431	37	185	31	616	35
Crop Sector	338	29	126	21	464	27
Livestock	24	2	15	3	39	2
Crop Sector/ Livestock	69	6	44	7	113	6
Production/ Casual Workers*	254	22	206	35	460	26
Service (Employee)	213	18	92	16	305	17
Business	155	13	74	13	229	13
Emigrants**	104	9	34	6	138	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,157</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>1,748</b>	<b>99</b>

\*Mainly construction workers, such as masons, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, painters, unskilled labourers, etc.

\*\*"Emigrants" as an economic activity has been included here to show the proportion of the labour force working abroad and consequently the effect on their families and areas.

This proportion, however, is significantly less than the national scene, where about half of the labour force is engaged in the agricultural sector. Within the agriculture sector, crop sub-sector is the major occupation. However, a significant proportion of the agriculturists are combining crop production with livestock breeding. This practice is comparatively more observed in the NWFP than in the Punjab. Such households, or the employed, would certainly have a comparatively better income and living conditions, as their farm incomes would have been significantly supplemented by livestock rearing.

About a quarter of the employed are engaged as production/construction casual workers, an activity characterised as less remunerative and irregular in nature. At times it often requires commuting. This occupation is practiced by more than a third of the employed in the NWFP. Although it is understandable that due to the rough terrain of the province cultivation is a difficult proposition, but it also emerges clearly that other non-farm activities are presently not significant. Besides, a work force with low literacy and skill levels finds this occupation easy to penetrate and eke out a living.

A significant proportion of the employed, 17 percent, are doing some sort of a job, mostly wage employment. It is done comparatively more in the Punjab than in the NWFP. Business is reported by 13 percent of the respondents, in both the provinces. These two types of activities, absorbing slightly less than a third of the employed, are considered to be remunerative. These two, along with the combination of crop production/livestock rearing activity, need to be developed for enhancing gainful employment opportunities.

Emigrants are also found to be forming a significant proportion of the employed, 8 percent. They are found to be more significant in the Punjab, 9 percent, than in NWFP, 6 percent. The financial resources and skills acquired through the process of emigration need to be effectively utilised for the development of the non-farm sector in the *barani* areas. This, however, needs the creation of a conducive environment in the region: the foremost being the provision of necessary socio-physical infrastructure. Otherwise, in the absence of some bare minimum facilities, most of the migrant families would tend to migrate to urban areas.

### Place of Work of the Employed

About a third of the employed find their work opportunities either out of their villages or out of the country. This implies that whatever low level of employment exists, a significant part of it originates out of the surveyed villages. A decline in such opportunities, as is the case with overseas migration, would further accentuate the labour market conditions. It is interesting to note, however, that a comparatively larger proportion of the employed in NWFP find their work within their villages. This phenomenon is not understandable in view of the: (i) existence of greater open unemployment, (ii) largest activity being casual/production work, and (iii) the general observation of greater tendencies of mobility amongst the NWFP workers. According to the survey, the work force from the *barani* Punjab seems to be more mobile both within and outside the country, but the *barani* areas are found to be providing inadequate work opportunities (see Table 3).

Table 3

#### *Place of Work of the Employed*

Place of Work	Punjab		NWFP		Total	
	No.	P.C.	No.	P.C.	No.	P.C.
<b>Working</b>						
Within Village	772	67	425	72	1,197	68
Outside Village	281	24	132	22	413	24
Overseas	104	9	34	6	138	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,157</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,748</b>	<b>100</b>

## Extent of Under-utilisation of Manpower

The extent of under-utilisation of the manpower in the *barani* region is manifested not only in the numbers and proportions of the openly unemployed. Although this proportion alone, a double-digit phenomenon, is affecting a fifth of the work force in the NWFP and a tenth of them in the Punjab. Despite its seriousness, this is only the tip of the iceberg. The true extent of the under-utilisation of manpower is easily discernible from the pattern of employment or the main occupations. The agricultural sector, employing 35 percent of the employed, 27 percent specifically in the crop sub-sector, is an area of the under-employment or under-utilisation of manpower. Together with this is the category of production/construction/casual work being pursued by a quarter of the employed. This work is irregular, less remunerative and more time-consuming, i.e. longer working hours. Taking account of all these facts, one could easily arrive at a discomfoting conclusion that in addition to the openly unemployed, the employed are being grossly under-utilised in the surveyed households. The overall situation of the *barani* areas, obviously, would not be very dissimilar. Continuation of such negative trends in the labour market is not only socially undesirable but would be counterproductive in the medium and long term.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The rural *barani* areas in Pakistan have, so far, failed to genuinely draw the attention of the policy-makers, development programme agencies/managers and research scholars towards their income and employment generation potential in the fields of crop production, pasture and livestock raising, fruit and vegetable gardening, mineral development and tourism. Besides the obvious lack of a meaningful data base on employment and related variables and their proper analysis, such neglect has led to a deterioration in labour market conditions of this region. In this paper an attempt has been made to record and analyse the employment and manpower utilisation situation of the *barani* areas on the basis of a sub-set of the data generated by a field survey of 845 households drawn from 75 *barani* villages.

Besides the existence of double-digit open unemployment in the surveyed households, about half of the employed were found to be employed in lesser remunerative/productive and irregular work. In addition, a third of the employed find their work out of the village/country.

Business, service and overseas migration, forming about a third of the employed, were the only areas giving some strength to the employed and through them to their respective areas.

Existence of human deprivation to such an extent in the absence of any social security mechanism is not only socially undesirable but would prove to be counter-

productive in the medium and long term. Policy initiatives, however should be based on the results of a set of well-designed policy-oriented research work. Such a proposal, however, seeks a medium-term solution. Immediate interventions, in the meanwhile, also cannot be overlooked. In the short term, initiation of works programmes and provision of social infrastructure through community participation would be a possible remedial measure.

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Comments on  
"Employment Pattern and Extent of Under-utilisation of  
Manpower in Rural *Barani* Areas of Pakistan"

I am pleased to be a discussant on Mr Ghayur's paper. Having done research in a *barani* village myself, this paper provides yet another perspective on the underdevelopment of *barani* areas. However, I feel that although the topic "Employment Pattern and the Extent of Under-utilisation of Manpower" is an interesting one, the paper lacks both content and clarity. My major concerns regarding the paper lie in the areas of (1) research methodology or the techniques used for data collection and (2) the author's lack of conceptual and empirical definition of employment and unemployment.

The paper based on a subset of data generated by a field survey conducted during 1985-86 (perhaps by the author himself or at least under his supervision—there is no mention of this in the paper) of the *barani* villages and households in the Punjab and N.W.F.P., surveyed 10–15 households from a village and covered at least one village from all *barani* tehsils. I would like the author to specify the techniques used for the selection of sample households from each village and most importantly the basis of village selection itself.

The selection of just one village from each tehsil makes one question the representativeness of the sample and authenticity of the presentation. In my suggestion it would have been better to concentrate on fewer tehsils and interview a larger number of households from each village rather than select one village and 10–15 households from each tehsil.

Not only does the author's definition of employment and unemployment remain vague, one also gets no idea as to who the respondents were from each households, what sets of question were posed and how responses were elicited. This brings us to another crucial point.

The author states and I quote "the labour force participation rates both crude and refined of these households are on the lower side and importantly contain no females". Low recorded rates of female participation in national surveys have been attributed to:

- (1) Inadequacies in data gathering techniques;
- (2) definitional problems;
- (3) conceptual biases of enumerators/enumeration;
- (4) lack of access of male enumerators to female respondents; and
- (5) cultural perceptions of work which identify men as the main bread winners.

The survey apparently having interviewed no females and having excluded their work and existence altogether has not been able to avoid any of the above mentioned pitfalls. The author identifies the *barani* areas as the least attended to areas in terms of research work. I would bring Freedman and Wais' work on gender and development in the *barani* areas to the author's notice. The study discusses at length the gender division of labour and the productive roles of women in the *barani* villages. In addition, my article in *The Pakistan Development Review* titled the "Cultural Context of Women's Productive Invisibility: A Case Study of a Pakistani Village" might also provide some additional insights to the author. Moreover, the report of Punjab *Barani* Commission, cited by the author also states high labour force participation rates for women in the *barani* areas.

Emigrants as an occupation has been included in the survey to "show the proportion of the labour force working abroad and consequently the effect on their families and areas". Unfortunately, the author does not push his argument any further in this direction. One needs to have qualitative assessment of remittance income and the impact of migration on the labour market and also importantly on the changing gender division of labour. Numerous studies conducted in the *barani* areas point to the fact that the processes of male migration and emigration have become instrumental in involving women intensively in these areas of economic activity such as farm and livestock tending activities that were heretofore considered largely male domains.

Although not intentional, the paper gives the impression as if treating the entire area of the N.W.F.P. and Punjab as having very similar problems and therefore requiring similar development planning. The two regions,—different in terms of topography, ecology, climate, soil, and land use patterns, natural resources, have different problems and opportunities and for purposes of planning have to be demarcated into distinct and separate area units. Last but not the least, in my opinion the paper could be strengthened by comparing labour force participation rates, employment patterns, unemployment/underemployment of these areas with non *barani* areas. In this respect the author would be on a stronger platform to both present and analyse the grave socio-economic disparity between the less developed and the more favoured regions.

**Tassawar S. Ibrar**

Pakistan Institute of  
Development Economics,  
Islamabad.