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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Rural development agencies have been regarded as important performers in terms of influencing development policies and programmes in rural areas of the world. The main focus of these programmes is to uplift the living standard of the masses in rural areas through sustained growth in the rural economy. To improve the livelihoods of rural communities, the government has adopted various rural development programmes, but the majority of them left very little effect on the ground. Many of these programmes had been inspired by the western paradigm. Categorically the efforts to uplift the livelihood of the rural population in the North-Western Pakistan, have gained little success. According to recent reports, about one-third population of the mountainous region is still facing the problem of food insecurity, poverty and hunger which results in economic and political instability. Considering this, the government has launched many rural development programmes but almost all of them were terminated after gaining little success. Although the overall approach was institutional in nature but it failed to promote institutional aspect of rural development. Leading constraints to the rural developmental strategies include shortage of funds, dominated status of bureaucracy and lack of coordination among the implementing agency and local community. Besides state owned programmes for rural development, many non-government organizations (NGOs) are also involved in the theme of development that is participatory for decades. Among those initiatives, Agha Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) remained quite successful in northern areas of Pakistan. However, rural development through a participatory approach is still far behind the predicted results, and these organizations are facing problems in delivering welfare services to the rural poor as they are being blamed that they are working on the western agenda.

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INTRODUCTION

Rural development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and multidisciplinary area of policy and research. It is one of the major concerns of majority of the development organizations and practitioners around the globe (Saqib et al., 2019). The idea of rural development emerged in 1960s and 1970s. It achieved maximum momentum with increasing realization that although industrial and economic growth is important for the economic growth of any country (Ellis and Biggs, 2001). But, the development

of rural areas is also essential for any national sustainable developmental growth (Munawar et al., 2021). The primary reason behind the concerns of development organizations regarding sustainable development in rural areas is high rate of poverty in these areas, especially in the developing regions, including Pakistan (UNDP, 2020). In such countries, agricultural production is dominated by small landholders who are considered as most deprived and neglected masses of the society (Gautam and

Andersen, 2016). Prospects of economic growth in such countries are very low (World Bank, 2018). Research studies proved a close interlink and relationship between rural and agricultural development with special focus in developing regions where the country's national economy

largely depends upon agricultural activities (Luqman et al., 2021; Singh, 2007; Welteji, 2018). Rural development through agricultural activities plays a critical role in developing rural economies on sustained basis (Ward et al., 2005).

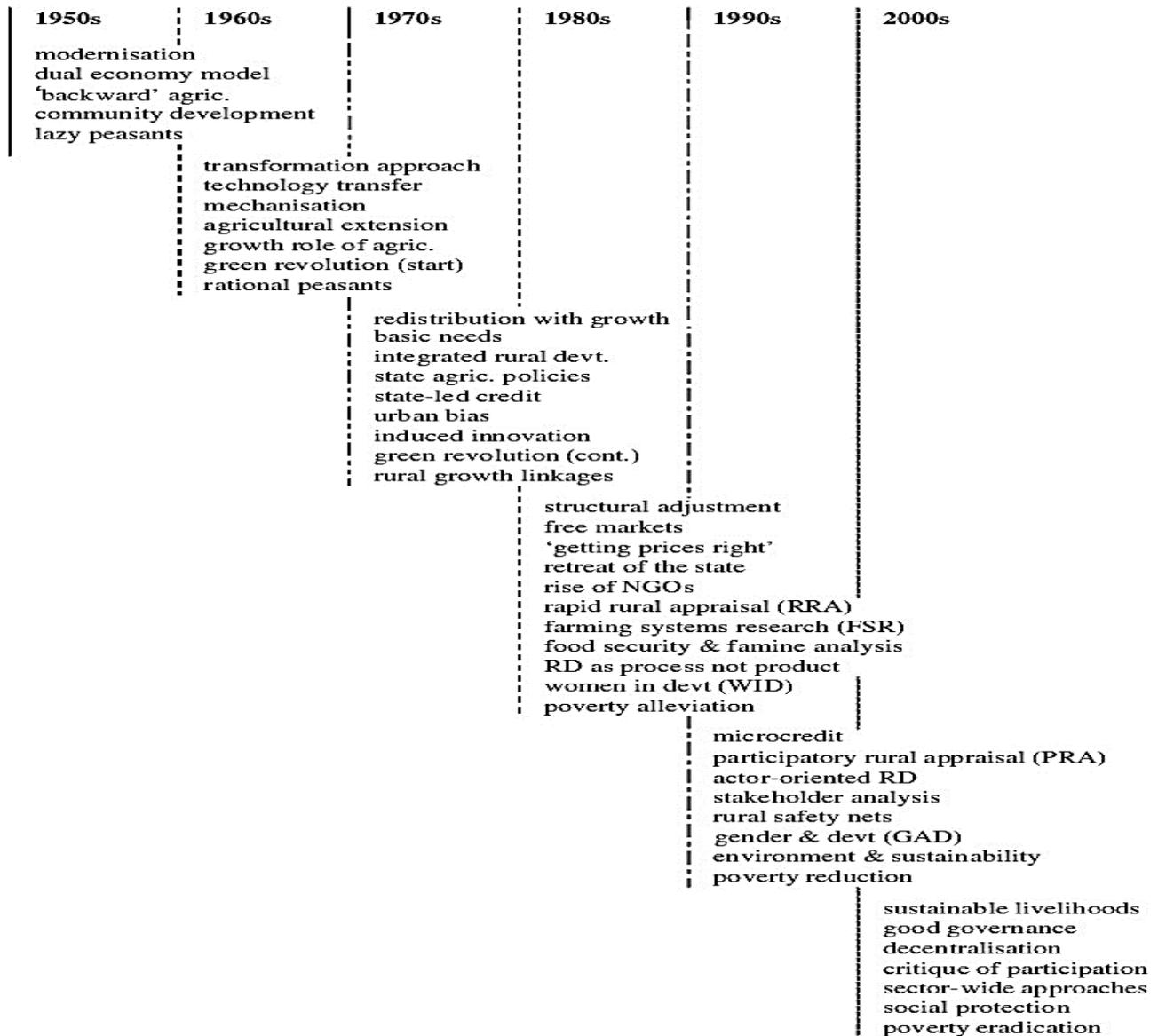


Figure 1. Rural development time-line in the global world (Ellis and Biggs, 2001)

In developing countries where a majority of the rural people used to live, the primary concern is on agricultural production through sustainable farming (Turunen et al., 2010). In addition to farming activities, non-farm economic activities in rural areas also play a significant role in rural development (Neglo et al., 2021; Rantšo, 2016). With special reference to South Asian region, rural poverty situation is severe. In such regions agricultural development initiatives are essential for the overall rural development process (Islam, 2007; Nadeem and Mushtaq, 2012). Agricultural extension services in these regions

serve as an essential tool for economic as well as general rural development (Akinola et al., 2011; Dragić and Živković, 2009). It enhances agricultural production through multiple rural and agricultural development activities (Ifeanyi-Obi et al., 2012). Different rural development policies, programmes and initiatives were in progress in different regions of the world during different regimes as described by Ellis and Biggs (2001)s. These initiatives are summarized in Figure 1. With this notion, there is a need to critically analyze rural poverty and its major reasons in rural areas of Pakistan, rational and

concept of rural development and the rural development initiatives being in progress by the public, private and voluntary sector in Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

The current research is based upon secondary data and critical reviews. Review of already published articles/ research papers, research reports of different development organizations like FAO, UNDP, IFPRI, etc., were thoroughly reviewed, keeping in mind the study's objectives. This review process was started in January 2021 and end in June 2021. The inclusion and exclusion of

research articles and research papers were completely based on the main themes of the research. Content analysis technique was applied for the analysis of qualitative data collected from the literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rural Poverty in Pakistan

Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and covers both income and non-income-based perspectives. Poverty may be dynamic or statistic, as explained by Ashfaq et al. (2009). Three dimensions of poverty as described by UNDP (2020) are given in Figure 2.

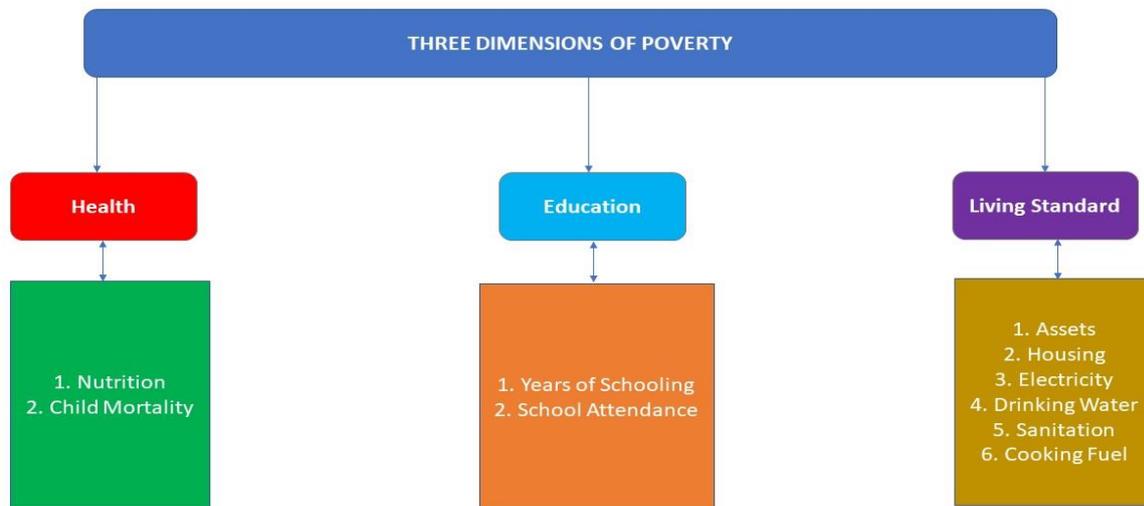


Figure 2. Dimensions of poverty (Source: UNDP, 2020).

Different researchers explain poverty in different ways. According to Janjua and Kamal (2014), it is a deficiency in the overall well-being of an individual. In terms of non-income-based poverty, it is the deprivation of an individual of his/her social, economic and cultural rights. Low level of participation in economic and social activities by an individual is referred to as poor (Bhutto and Bazmi, 2007). On similar lines, Ashfaq et al. (2009) concluded that lack of involvement in social activities by an individual (socially excluded) or powerlessness is the non-income dimension of poverty. This has been by a number of research studies that the majority of the poor and deprived masses of society reside in rural areas (Alkire and Foster, 2011; Hashmi, 2011; Shrestha and Upreti, 2011). There is close interlink and association between rurality and poverty (Luqman et al., 2018). The existence of a high rate of poverty in rural areas is due to the fact that there exists a close interlink between

rural poverty and agricultural growth (Hafeez et al., 2011; McMichael, 2009; Weber et al., 2005). In this situation, there is dire need to sustainable rural development policies for maximum poverty reduction from the rural masses.

Like other developing countries of the world, poverty in Pakistan is also referred to as a rural phenomenon. Research studies showed that people living in rural areas are commonly deprived of basic necessities of life. Minimum employment and income generation activities are found in rural areas due to which people of rural areas are experiencing high poverty rates than others (Chaudhry et al., 2012, 2006; Chaudhry and Rahman, 2009; Hashmi, 2011; Ikram et al., 2010). The poverty situation in rural areas of Pakistan is very clear from Figure 3, showing the multidimensional poverty index at the provincial and national levels explained by UNDP (2021).

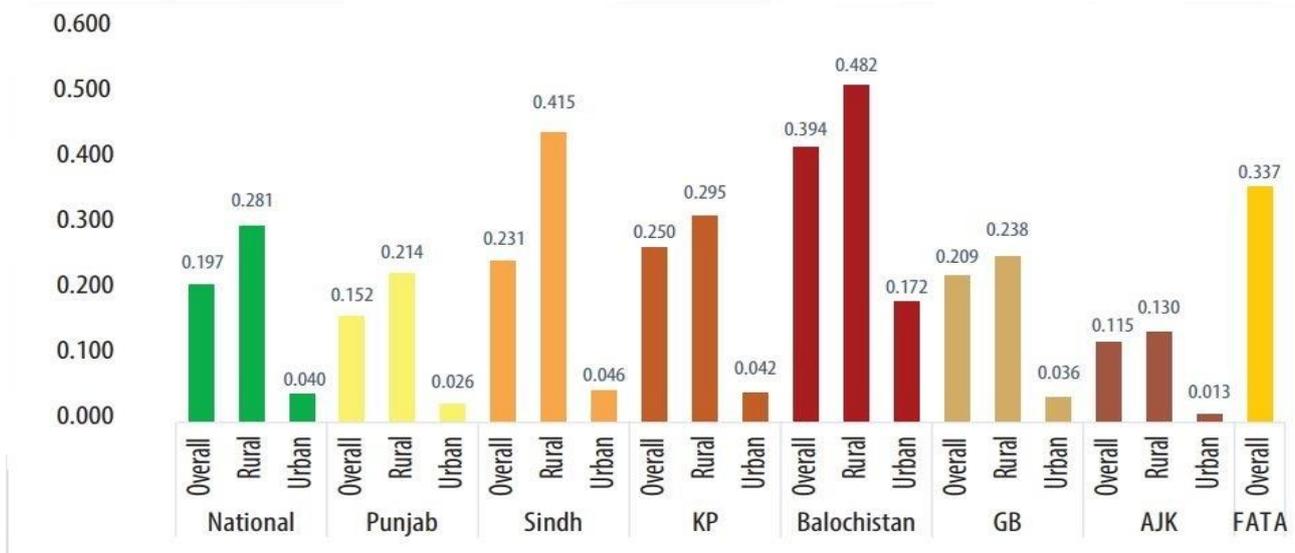


Figure 3. Multidimensional poverty index at the national and provincial level (Source: UNDP, 2020).

The reasons behind the high rate of poverty in rural areas with reference to Pakistan are multiple. Out of these, the small size of land holding possessed by a majority of the farmers is very much common (Ghafoor et al., 2010). Lack of technical knowledge and training, as well as availability of minimum infrastructure facilities, are also contributing towards rural poverty (Thapa, 2009). Low literacy rate, limited access to employment and other income generation activities to rural people are boosting the poverty level (Shahbaz et al., 2008). Unequal distribution of resources among different rural masses is also one of the major causes towards poverty in rural areas (IFAD, 2011).

Rational and Concept of Rural Development

The rational and real concept of rural development is well explained by a number of development practitioners in the world (Brennan, 2009). It is a complex, multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral phenomenon/process (García et al., 2008). It involves a number of concepts like local community empowerment, improvement in educational and health facilities, equality and participation in all the development activities by all sections of the society (Al-Jayyousi, 2009). According to Ekong (2010), rural development covers multiple needs of the rural community. Nlerum (2013) concluded that rural development is a continuous process of change in the entire behaviour and socio-economic status of rural community. According to Wandschneider and Davis (2003) rural development process is not limited to agricultural activities. It is a balanced combination of farming as well as non-farming economic activities (World Bank (2002). It is a holistic approach covering multiple sectors of the rural economy (Ward et al., 2005). On the similar lines Mashreque and Nasrullah

(2005) concluded that social, economic and physical development of rural community. In developing regions like Pakistan, the element of rural development is very much important and gain maximum importance due to the fact of high poverty rate in rural localities (Adisa, 2012). The overall economic development in these countries is highly depend upon on-farm as well as off-farm economic and development activities (Ngeh, 2013). Research studies proved that rural development activities play a significant role in the well-being of local rural community as well as also enhance the agricultural production that ultimately contributes towards national economic growth and development (Francis and David, 2012).

Rural Development Initiatives in Pakistan

From the archives, it is clear that accounting and providing plans for social welfare of the rural poor in Pakistan is long enough, and it continued since freedom involving multiple approaches and strategies executed by the state-led departments, but majority of them had little success (World Bank, 2007). In the global world, the impact of agriculture development on rural livelihood is obvious and it is among the major economic activities executed in the rural areas (Haq, 2003). The most important challenge in developing countries is to increase agricultural production on sustained and regular basis to eradicate rural poverty especially in rural areas (Ade Freeman et al., 2004) as big majority of poor households live in rural areas of the world (Islam, 2007). This situation exacerbates the poverty ratio in the adjacent areas, and individuals get involved in non-fruitful activities. It further impairs the national progress when a large number of individuals could not afford the services as well as goods to meet the basic necessities. Graph under explain the per capita poverty rate of Pakistan

of last 15 years and gives an estimation of next two years as well (Figure 4).

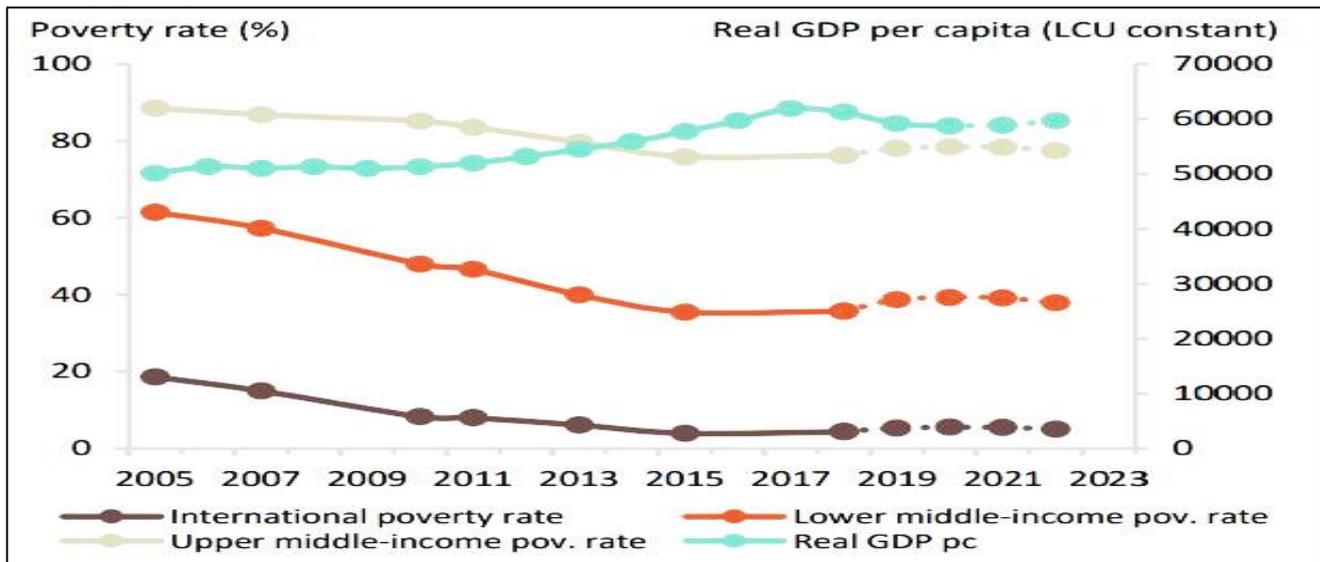


Figure 4. Actual and projected poverty rates and real GDP per capita (Source: World Bank, 2021)

Like remaining developing countries in Pakistan, agriculture is the single largest sector that contributes a lot to the national economy, and due to this reason, it serves as the backbone of national revenue (Government of Pakistan, 2021). Low income is not the only issue of rural people but they also lack basic needs such as education, clean drinking water, health, and proper sanitation, which excavate their capabilities, limits their chances to secure employment which results in social exclusion at the end (Hussain et al., 2003). To improve rural life through increased production and growth, the Government has tested various models and approaches to rural development. The first one among these rural development programmes was initiated in 1952. The name of the program initiated was Village Agricultural and Industrial Development Programme (Village-AID) (Tajima, 1994). The main objectives of this programme were to enhance the earning of rural people by adopting improved farming techniques and involving in cottage industries. This programme was designed to inculcate a sense of self-help among rural people so that they could solve their problems themselves. Coordination of developmental activities carried by the departments and agencies relevant to rural development and agriculture specifically was the focus of this program. They were, moreover, imparting welfare orientation gradually into the entire administrative structure of the government. In the start, this program accomplished considerable success but later became a target of political change in the country and departmental jealousies at a local level (Davidson and Ahmad, 2017).

The termination of the Village-AID program in 1961, Basic Democracies System (BDS) adapted the task of rural development in Pakistan. The BD system also faced the same fate as the predecessor program and could not achieve the desired results because the bureaucracy enjoyed the dominant positions in decision-making, planning and implementation of local rural development plans. Only the big landholders could take advantage of the production facilities like provision of inputs (fertilizer, seed etc.) at a subsidized rate, interest-free agricultural loans so that the rural economy can be improved on a sustained basis (Khan and Khan, 2001). In the first half decade of the 1970s, the "new" government abolished the BDS and brought into effect a new programme with the name of 'Integrated Rural Development Program' (IRDP). This programme envisaged to provide concerted support in multiple sectors, i.e., education, housing, health, water, and agricultural services, to make the rural community a productive unit of development at a local level with multi-sectoral facets. The results of this programme indicate that it helped in installing basic institutions and acquired some material gains, but its impact on the poor was minimal (Davidson et al., 2001). The major reason for its failure was the poor performance of agriculture sector and low level of institutional capacity. Rural works programme under BDS was running together with IRDP but was known with the name of People's Works Programme during 1972-80 (Chaudhary, 2002). This programme also terminated due to departmental jealousy and its top-down nature of implementation.

In the period of 1985-88 the Prime Minister pinpointed five areas to promote the wellbeing and opulence of rural masses. The programme succeeded to a greater extent but its fate was also limited due to change in political power (Luqman et al., 2007). After this short span program in the year 1991, Tameer-e-Watan programme was launched in the country; elected members of the National and Provincial Assembly and senators also participated in this programme. Physical infrastructure development was boosted under the umbrella of this program but holistically, its contribution was not satisfactory. Sudden change in political power and corruption were the two main reasons for its lack of performance (Khan and Khan, 2001). Social Action Programme (SAP) with the support of international donors started in 1993 (Azizi, 1999). Due to change in the political scenario in the country, the programme was abolished and, again a new programme known as “Khushal Pakistan Programme” (KPP) was launched by the state to improve the living conditions of rural people, in two phases with the objective to provide basic services for the people living at the grassroots level. The main accent of this programme was given on infrastructure development. However, once again the change in political regime in the country, the Devolution of Power Plan was brought into effect (in 2001) to edify the economic status of people living in rural areas

through pooling their sources and resources at the ground level (Lodhi et al., 2006).

From the above said it is clear that the state efforts to provide adequate basic social and welfare services to the rural masses and the overall performance of state-led rural development programmes have been quite disappointing in terms of their ability to reach the poor and to produce a significant impact on the living standard of the rural population. It is a general fact that rural development in Pakistan is characterized by politically motivated short-term and inconsistent projects without any kind of feedback (Rehman, 2005). All the initiatives taken for rural development by the different Governments of Pakistan were abolished one after the other. Limitations and drawbacks at various levels caused the termination of each one of them. Lack of political stability in the country and situation of rivalry instead of coordination among the different government institutes are some of the major barriers for the failure of different strategies of rural development (Sadaf et al., 2005). Before 2008 it was a dream for Pakistan that there would ever happen the smooth transformation of political power. This scenario has left consequential impact on the sector which already faces natural disasters of multiple categories. Figure 5 gives an overview of the political stability situation from 2000s.

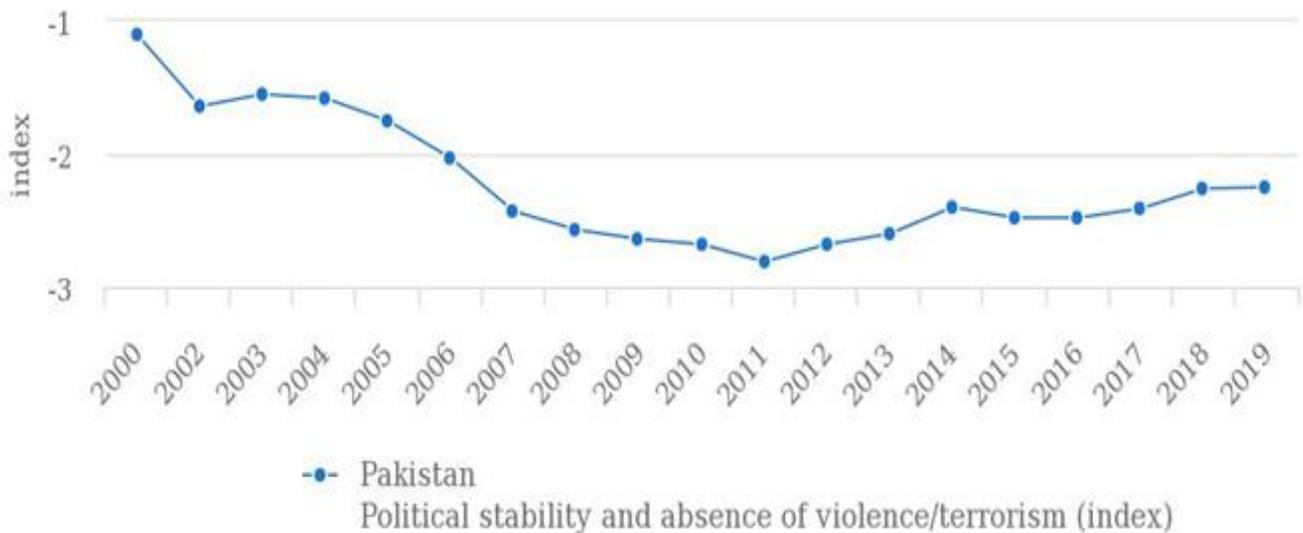


Figure 5. Political stability graph (Source: FAO, 2021).

Most of the time, it is perceived that majority of the community that state institutions are ravaging and ineffective in providing basic social services such as education, sanitation, health, water and shelter to the common people which results in rising role of civil society

organizations (CSOs). These organizations in the form of religious groups, professional associations and other locally rooted organizations flourish to compete and make the state institutions more accountable (UNAIDS, 2001). Besides state institutions, many programmes for

supporting rural areas are striving at the verge to meliorate the rural livelihoods but in vain and poverty still exists in the country (Majeed et al., 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

From the above discussion and critical review analysis of different rural development plans and strategies implemented by Government and Non-Government organizations, it is concluded that rural development programmes in Pakistan failed due to many reasons. Political instability, corruption, top-down oriented development schemes and jealousy and rivalry among

allied departments are some major causes of the failure of these development plans. In the light of the literature review and shortcomings and problems in the existing rural development strategies, it is recommended that in the planning and implementation procedure of rural development plans, the participation of local people should be encouraged. Moreover, western and foreign-funded NGOs should be involved in rural areas' development process, including religious groups who engaged in the social welfare work in the area. Conclusively, the rural development time-line in Pakistan is well summarized in Figure 6.

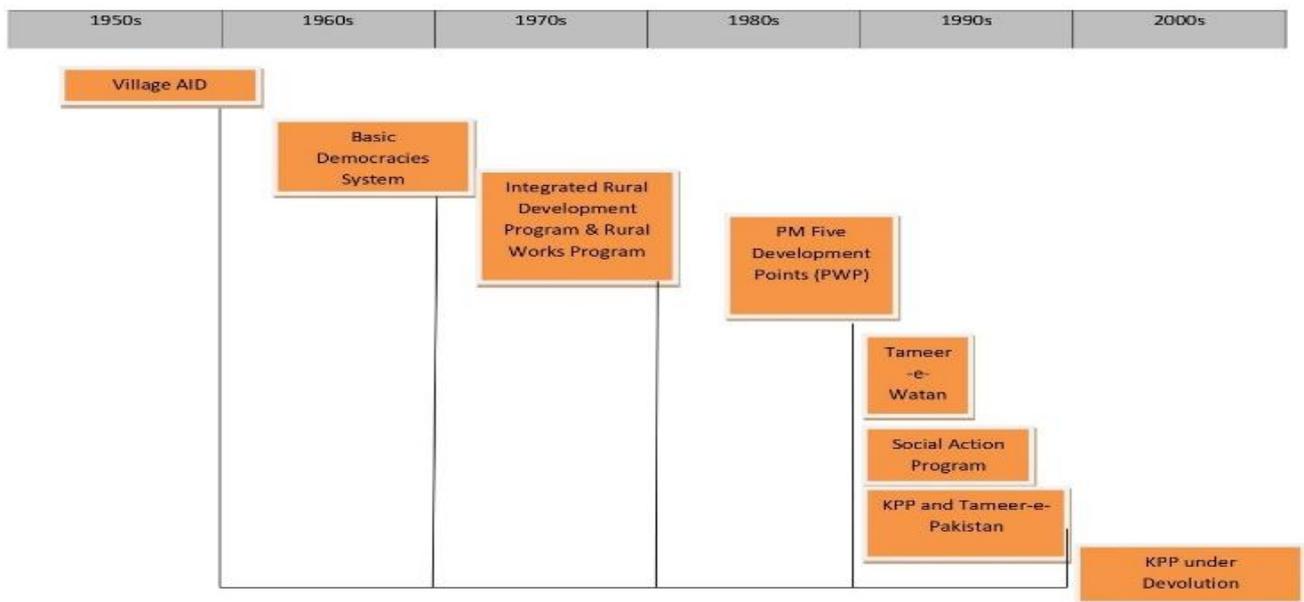


Figure 6. Rural development time-line in Pakistan.

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