

The SDGs of Education and Health Sector in Pakistan:

Post Devolution Implementation Issues and Way Forward for Pakistan

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Abstract

The state of human development varies in every region of the world. Due to traditional and historic disparities, people inhabiting one part of the world can and do have lesser access to educational and health facilities and socio-economic opportunities as compared to people inhabiting other areas. In order to ensure that “no one is left behind” in terms of human development, the United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The global implementation of these 17 goals is being carried out with the help of the member states. Being one of the initial signatories of the SDGs, Pakistan had also committed to implementing the SDGs in the country. Hence while the commitment was made by the federal government of Pakistan in 2016, yet the provinces are also bound to honor the commitment of the federal government in terms of implementing the SDGs. This is in spite of the fact that all the subjects included in the SDGs pertain to the provincial governments in the post 18th constitutional amendment devolution. By way of its international commitment Pakistan is bound to implement UNSDGs. Therefore, there are some crucial social, economic and legal challenges that impede the implementation of the SDGs in the provinces in the post devolution environment. Although all the 17 SDGs are important, socially Goal # 3 relating to health and Goal # 4 relating to education are the most important. Hence, this research paper endeavors to explain the post devolution challenges in the

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implementation of these two goals. The present study explores the way forward for ensuring the quality education and health condition in Pakistan. However, all these challenges and impediments were overcome by undertaking suitable measures at both the provincial and federal levels in Pakistan. Dataset is taken from Economic Survey of Pakistan 2021-22 (Government of Pakistan, n.d.). With the help of synergetic relationship between all the stakeholders, Pakistan could effectively achieve the target of sustainable development thereby leaving no one behind in the overall development process.

Keywords: *Health, Education, SDG, Government.*

1. Introduction

Before the enactment of the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment in 2010, there was a 'Concurrent List' in the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan. This was in addition to both the Federal Legislative List and the Provincial Legislative List (The 1973 Constitution, 2020). This 'Concurrent' List contained 47 subjects on which both the provincial and the federal governments were constitutionally empowered to legislate simultaneously (The Constitution of Pakistan, n.d.). These subjects included health, drinking water, law and justice, rural development, etc. When the Concurrent list was abolished due to the enactment of the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment, all the above mentioned 47 subjects were devolved to the provincial governments. Ultimately, this resulted in the devolution of legislative and administrative powers from the federal government to the four provincial governments. Therefore, the overall powers of the provincial governments in Pakistan considerably increased as compared to the overall legislative powers of the federal government.

In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development unleashed 17 development goals also known as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Pakistan, n.d.). These UNSDGs include goals that are related to the subjects of poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, energy, economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequality, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, water, life on land, peace, justice, and strong institutions, and establishing partnerships for realization of the goals.

In order to be the part of international efforts towards all inclusive human development, the federal government of Pakistan signed and ratified the UNSDGs in 2016 (United Nations Pakistan, n.d.). The National Assembly of Pakistan passed a unanimous resolution for the adoption of the UNSDGs on February 19th, 2016. As a result of this resolution, federal and provincial SDG Support Units were established to ensure the implementation of the UNSDGs.

However, since most of the above-mentioned subjects fall within the purview of the provincial legislative list, it is generally considered a legal challenge for the federal government of Pakistan to ensure the compliance of the UNSDGs at the provincial level. This research paper will analyze the issues and challenges that are involved in the post devolution implementation of UNSDGs in Pakistan.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires that the signatory member states should implement the 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as oncoming development priorities in their respective countries. Since Pakistan is also a signatory to the UNSDGs, the country is under global obligation to implement these goals. However, after the devolution of powers from federal to the respective provincial governments after promulgation of 18th amendment, the national commitment towards achieving the global standards of SDGs has become a challenging task. Since the provinces are not directly state parties to the UNSDGs, there is a perception that they are not legally bound to implement the development goals.

1.2. Significance and Scope of the Research

This research study focusses on the important issue of human development. Since the implementation of the SDGs in Pakistan will result in uplifting living standards, it is important that these development goals should be implemented throughout the country. Hence, this research study is important in so far as the fact that it highlights the bottlenecks that could potentially hinder the implementation of the SDGs, especially in the post devolution legislative situation. From an academic point of view, this research paper will be helpful for researchers who intend to investigate the issues related to the implementation of this global action plan at the provincial level in Pakistan. Additionally, it will also be helpful to those who are at the helm of affairs at both the provincial and federal levels in Pakistan. Since the research paper will highlight the administrative, legal and operational challenges towards the implementation of the UNSDGs at the provincial level in Pakistan, it will also be of use to the policymakers.

Although the implementation of all of these goals is important, it is highly essential for a developing country like Pakistan to effectively ensure the implementation of the SDGs related to health and education. Specifically, this research paper analyzes the post devolution implementation issues of only two SDGs i.e. health (Goal 3) and education (Goal 4) in Pakistan. The paper does not analyze other UNSDGs in Pakistan.



2. Literature Review

As already discussed in the Statement of the Problem, there are numerous legal, administrative and legislative post devolution implementation issues in implementing UNSDGs at the provincial level. Since most of the subjects of the UNSDGs (like health, education, sanitation, clean drinking water, etc.) are now the provincial subjects, it is important that the provincial governments should also be on the same page in terms of implementing the UNSDGs.

As is widely known, before enacting the SDGs, the UN implemented the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000 (Kumar et al., [2016](#)). Since Pakistan was also among the 189 countries that ratified the MDGs, the country was under an international obligation to effectively implement the MDGs throughout Pakistan. However, the country was not able to do so. Out of total 33 indicators of the MDGs, the country under-performed on 25 indicators (Ghaus et al., [2016](#)). Reportedly, there were a number of reasons that led to such poor performance in implementing the MDGs at the national level. Some of these bottlenecks and impediments included the impotent institutional capabilities, political myopia, financial limitations, absence of coordination mechanism, dysfunctional process of policymaking, absence of effective monitoring mechanism and the dearth of the capable human resource to achieve the desired results (Hussain, [2022](#)). Numerous studies have explored the factors behind low quality of education and health condition (Aftab et al., [2020](#); Diemer & Khushik, [2020](#); Khushik & Diemer, [2020](#)). Hinduja et al. ([2023](#)) concluded that role of governance, communication, and logistic structure for ensuring quality education. Awan and Hussain ([2020](#)) highlighted the significant role of quality education for sustainable growth of Pakistan. Financial sufficiency was also considered crucial to boost education in Pakistan (Nadeem et al., [2021](#)). Moreover, monitoring of allocated budget was also highlighted significant for achieving SDG (Hussain, [2022](#)). Batezai and Kiazai ([2022](#)) conducted a study to analyze the role of accelerated learning programs (ALPs) for enhancing the SDGs in case of Quetta district. The study showed significant contribution of ALPs. Saqib et al. ([2020](#)) investigated the impact higher education for sustainable development in Pakistan. Findings of the study showed positive influence of higher education for quality education and sustainable development.

As per the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Index ranking 2022, out of 163 countries, Pakistan ranked at 125th. The overall score of Pakistan was about 59.3 percent (Sustainable Development Report, [n.d.](#)). However, as per the 2021 SDG Index ranking, Pakistan is at 129th. This shows that there is a slight improvement in the overall implementation of the UNSDGs in Pakistan. However, there are still a number of issues that are persistently impeding the progress of the SDGs at the national level in Pakistan.

In the report *Pakistan SDGs Status Report 2021 (n.d.)*, an account of the country's overall progress in implementation of the SDGs at the national level is presented. It is also revealed that the overall performance of Pakistan on SDGs shows a mixed picture under all the 17 subjects. Under the following subjects Pakistan has shown a moderate performance.

1. No poverty (Goal 1),
2. good health and well-being (Goal 3),
3. clean water and sanitation (Goal 6),
4. decent work and economic growth (Goal 8),
5. peace and justice strong institutions (Goal 16), and
6. partnership to achieve the goal (Goal 17)

On the other hand, under the following subjects Pakistan has made no substantial progress.

1. zero hunger (Goal 2),
2. quality education (Goal 4),
3. gender equality (Goal 5),
4. affordable and clean energy (Goal 7),
5. industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9),
6. sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11).

In fact, under the subject of life below water (Goal 14), the performance of Pakistan has shown signs of further deterioration. Pakistan's overall performance on SDGs dropped from 115 in 2016 to 124 in 2020 (Yousafzai, 2021).

Inter-provincial political rivalries, conflict and lack of professional expertise by the respective provincial governments mar the grass root implementation of the UNSDGs within the provinces. Hence, there is a crucial role of the federal government in terms of having forward and backward linkages (Khan & Ali, 2019). Therefore, without proactive engagement by the federal government in Pakistan, the provinces could not ensure the timely achievement of the development goals by the target year of 2030.

There is also a lack of institutional and skill capacity among the provinces of Pakistan to effectively implement the UNSDGs at the grass root levels (Khan & Ali, 2019). As a result of these capacity development issues and challenges, the provincial government could not unilaterally achieve the targets as set out by the UNSDGs.



The perusal of the available literature also reveals that due to the devolution of the powers by the federal government in Pakistan, the provincial governments were not planned and prepared to ensure the effective implementation of the UNSDGs (Government of Pakistan, 2019). Due to this lack of preparedness, the provincial governments were unable to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the UNSDGs. In addition to this, there is a lack of enabling environment among the provincial governments in Pakistan that hinders the implementation of the UNSDGs. Therefore, Pakistan needs to improve the governance system in order to attract the necessary resource mobilization required for the successful implementation of the UNSDGs.

Likewise, the devolution of the powers in the post Eighteenth amendment scenario has reinforced the discretionary powers of the provinces at the cost of the federal government (Brollo et al., 2021). As a result of this devolution, the provincial governments have secured more legislative and financial powers thereby considerably diluting the authority of the federal government in Pakistan. Hence, if it is desired to ensure the successful implementation of the UNSDDs in Pakistan, a complete coordination mechanism is the need of the hour.

3. Research Methodology

While responding to the above-mentioned research question, this research paper primarily involves qualitative analysis. In addition to this, the research paper also includes the collection of data from both primary and secondary sources. For the primary sources of data, a number of interviews were conducted both in person and telephonically. In addition to this, a questionnaire was also prepared and circulated among the respondents. Based on the responses from the respondents, the results were analyzed.

In addition to the primary data, the data from the secondary sources was also collected. This included the collection of data from the perusal of books, literature, research papers and online resources. In addition to this, a questionnaire was also circulated among few participants to select the two most important Goals out of the 17 SDGs. On the basis of their feedback, about four Goals were shortlisted. However, for the sake of meaningful analysis in this research paper, only two Goals were selected for further analysis. These two Goals were Goal 3 i.e. Good Health and Well-being" and Goal 4 i.e. Quality Education.

3.1. Organization of the Paper

As far as the organization of the research paper is concerned, the paper is tetra-furcated in four sections. **The first section** will dilate upon the evolution, nature and scope of the sustainable development goals. It will also discuss the significance of the SDGs and Pakistan"s role in implementing the SDGs within

the country. **The second section** will discuss the concept of devolution and decentralization of powers from the federal government to the provincial government. In addition to this, this section will also exclusively discuss the status of the implementation of two SDGs viz- Goal 3 related to Health and Goal 4 related to education. In this regard, the overall performance of Pakistan will be evaluated. **The third section** will discuss the overall history of devolution and decentralization in Pakistan. Moreover, it will also highlight the challenges that impede the implementation of the Goal 3 and Goal 4 in Pakistan. In addition to this, this section also highlights some socio-economic impediments that hamper the implementation of SDGs in Pakistan.

4. Introduction of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

4.1. Historic Account of SDGs

In the year 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted one of its universal principles of "Leave no one behind" (LNOB) in the formulation of the Vision 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *n.d.*). This laid the foundation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals, commonly known as SDGs. These SDGs included 17 Goals that were considered essential for sustainable development. In order to ensure sustainable development throughout the world, the United Nations evolved these SDGs that could be implemented with the help of member states.

Since these UNSDGs are legally non-binding on the member states, there is no strict enforcement mechanism that requires the member states to strictly comply with the implementation of the UNSDGs. Since every national government has its own development priorities, this is the main reason behind the non-binding nature of the UNSDGs.

Here, it is also important to mention that the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were implemented in the year 2000 were succeeded by the launching of the UNSDGs in 2015. While drawing a comparison between the MDGs and the SDGs, the latter are much broader in scope in terms of their design, formalization, universality, planning and strategy formulation. Similarly, the former were divided in 8 goals coupled with 18 targets and 48 global indicators. On the other hand, the latter are divided in 17 goals with more specifically designed 169 targets and 231 global indicators. This statistical variation between the MDGs and the SDGs speaks volumes of the diversified nature of the latter.

4.2. Significance of the SDGs

An important aspect of the UNSDGs is that all the 17 Goals fulfill the criteria of SMART goals. Hence, all the 17 Goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable,



Resource-based and Time- Bound (United Nations Development Program, n.d). Being the pioneer of global efforts for sustainable development, it is also argued that the SDGs are the most ambitious plans by the international community to build a better world for the progeny (Sengupta, 2021).

In addition to this, SDGs promote a long-term approach towards the resolution of the global challenges. Unlike the governmental policies that usually last for 4-5 years, the SDGs offer a strategy to collectively address the longstanding economic, social and environmental issues by establishing a synergetic relationship between the partner member states. Owing to the nature of all the 17 SDGs, they are interconnected. Hence, the successful materialization of one SDG could lead to the successful materialization of the other SDG. Hence, by adopting this long term approach, it is intended to mitigate the chronic global issues by the year 2030 (Gurbo, 2017).

4.3. Pakistan and Sustainable Development Goals

On July 19, 2018, while addressing the UN General Assembly, Ms. Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's Permanent Representative at the UN stated that by localizing the SDGs in the form of adopting the a unanimous resolution at the National Assembly, Pakistan has become the first country in the world that has shown its un-dithering commitment towards the implementation and materialization of the SDGs in true letter and spirit.²

The government of Pakistan signed and ratified the SDGs and became the state party to implement SDGs in the country. Therefore, the National Assembly of Pakistan declared SDGs as Pakistan's National Development Goals by passing a unanimous resolution on 19 February 2016. In order to ensure the general supervision, the National Assembly has also established a special parliamentary SDGs secretariat at the federal level. The basic purpose of this secretariat is to oversee the implementation of the SDGs throughout the country in all the four provinces. Such a parliamentary provision to supervise the implementation of the SDGs makes Pakistan one of the leading UN member countries that have shown full commitment towards the implementation of the SDGs (Government of Pakistan, n.d).

In order to ensure that the SDGs are implemented throughout the country, the government of Pakistan established federal and provincial SDG Support Units. The basic aim of these SDG Support Units was to ensure effective coordination among the departments that were responsible for the implementation of the SDGs at the local levels.

² Statement by Ambassador Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, "Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations at the Oceans Conference" (2017)
<https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/statements/24612pakistan.pdf>

Another mandate of these SDG Support Units is to create an enabling environment where the SDGs could be easily implemented throughout Pakistan. These SDG Support Units were established in the respective Planning departments at both the federal and the provincial governments. In order to achieve coordination between them, there is a UN Development tool for Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) for SDG (UNICEF, n.d.). With the help of this MAPS project, the Government of Pakistan has been able to substantially plan the short term, medium term and long term approaches to support the nationwide localized implementation of the SDGs.

For ensuring effective implementation and rationalized allocation of human and financial resources, three priority lists are formulated by the federal SDG Support Units. These priority lists have trifurcated all the 17 Goals. The first priority list includes the Goal 2, Goal 3, Goal 4, Goal 6, Goal 7, Goal 8, and Goal 16. Similarly, the second priority list includes Goal 1, Goal 5, Goal 9, Goal 10, Goal 11 and Goal 17. Lastly, the third priority list includes the Goal 12, Goal 13, Goal 14 and Goal 15 (Government of Pakistan, n.d.).

4.4. Post Devolution Implementation of SDGs

In the words of Sanford Levinson, “The most interesting clause of the constitution is its amending clause that ensures the dynamic nature of the constitution.” Hence, it is the most inherent feature of any living constitution in the world.

4.4.1. Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment

In the post Eighteenth Amendment scenario, the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 has been amended thereby excluding the jurisdiction of the federal government to have any legislative authority over the subjects that are exclusively within the domain of the provincial governments. Before the enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment in the year 2010, there were two legislative lists viz- the federal legislative list and the concurrent legislative list (Shah, 2012). The former included all the subjects (like Defense, Foreign Affairs, Currency, etc.) on which only the federal government of Pakistan was legally entitled to legislate.

On the other hand, the Concurrent legislative list contained all those subjects (like Health, Education, Sanitation, etc.) on which both the federal and the provincial governments were legally entitled to legislate. However, in the post Eighteenth Amendment scenario, there was an abolition of the Concurrent legislative list and the provinces were legally entitled to legislate on all the subjects that were included in the Concurrent legislative list (Rana, 2021).

As a result of this legislative amendment, there was a radical transition on the overall role of the federal government from supervisory in nature to the mere advisory in nature. Therefore, the authority of the federal government to



legislate on the subjects like Health, Education, Sanitation, etc. was greatly diluted. Hence, in the present circumstances, the federal government could have only an effective non-binding coordination with the provincial governments to convince them to undertake legislation on the subjects that were included in the erstwhile Concurrent legislative list.

Since both the subjects of health and education fall within the purview of the legislative domain of the provincial governments, the federal government tries to have effective coordination with the provincial governments to enable the implementation of the Goal 3 and Goal 4 at the provincial level.

In order to have an effective coordination between the federal and the provincial governments, there is a crucial role of the SDG Support Units that are established at both the federal and the provincial levels.

4.4.1.1. SDG 3: "Good Health and Well-being"

The essence of this goal is that no one should be left in terms of enjoying good health. Therefore, this goal calls for the government's intervention in terms of improving the health situation in the country for the overall betterment of its people. The access to qualitative public and private healthcare is a serious challenge in Pakistan.

The health situation in Pakistan is alarming due to a number of historic reasons. Unfortunately, the government of Pakistan has failed to improve the health standards in the country to the international levels. According to the World Health Organizations performance report, Pakistan ranks at 122 out of the total 190 countries. Moreover, in terms of qualitative accessibility to healthcare, the country ranks at 154 (Aslam, [2022](#)). These figures are highly alarming in nature and call for immediate government's intervention. Although, in terms of total budgetary allocations, there is a continuous increase in the health budget of Pakistan, yet the country has still not been able to improve the standards of the healthcare over the period of time. Hence, the discussion about Goal 3 assumes a greater importance.

Since the Pakistan has the fifth largest population in the world, it was also the need of the hour to effectively learn from the best international practices to timely curb the spread of the Covid-19 in the country. Hence, it was crucial that both the federal and the provincial governments shall be on the same page in order to ensure effective policy making and Action Plans to deal with the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic. Another important reason of selecting this Goal is to analyze the impact of the government's spending on the health sector over a period of time towards improvements in health sector.

It is observed that the contents of Goal 3 (i.e. the Good Health and Well-being) are already contained in the statutory provisions of the Constitution of Pakistan 1973. According to Article 38 of the Constitution, the state of Pakistan shall

ensure the promotion of social and economic well-being of the people which also includes the health relief for the entire population of the country (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2018). In the light of this constitutional provision, there is a legal obligation on the government of Pakistan to ensure the health related well-being of the people. In order to achieve this task, the government of Pakistan has been constitutionally mandated to undertake all the administrative measures to promote good health for the public well-being.

It is also observed that since the launching of the UNSDGs in 2016, both the federal and provincial governments of Pakistan have allocated greater financial resources to the health sector. During the FY 2015-2016, the total allocation was Rs. 267,953 mn; FY 2016-2017 it was Rs. 328,962 mn; FY 2017-2018, it was Rs. 416,467 mn; FY 2018-2019, it was Rs. 421,778 mn; FY 2019-2020, it was Rs. 505,411 mn and during FY 2020-2021, it was Rs. 657,185 mn. In terms of the percentage of GDP, for each of the above FYs, it had been 0.8, 0.9, 1.1, 1.0, 1.1 and 1.2 respectively (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2018). Hence, it shows that the financial allocation to the health sector has been gradually increasing.

In the post Eighteenth Amendment scenario, the provincial governments are mandated to implement the health related projects for ensuring good health and well-being. However, the federal government in Pakistan has tried to implement the health related projects in the provinces with the help of the annual Public Sector Development Program (PSDP). The main essence of the PSDP is to ensure that the provincial governments are enabled to achieve the targets of the Goal 3. Hence, the financial allocation made in the PSDP is a means towards achieving the targets of the goal 3 and improving the overall health standards in the country.

According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2021-22 (Government of Pakistan, n.d.), there were about 60 new health related projects that were made part of the PSDP. This clearly shows the commitment of the federal government to enhance the national health standards to the level of the international health standards as set out in the Goal 3. Some of the noteworthy health related projects launched by the federal government include the Sehat Sahulat Program (SSP), Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), Polio Eradication Initiative (PEI) Program, National Health Information System (NHIS), Malaria Control Program (MCP), Tuberculosis (TB) Control Program, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/ acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) Control Program, and finally the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS).

All of these health-related projects were federal in nature. However, with effective coordination with the provincial health departments and the provincial SDG Support Units, these federal health related projects were effectively implemented at the provincial levels (Brollo et al., 2021).



In order to ensure the implementation of the guidelines provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the undertaking of the anti-Covid spread measures, the federal government of Pakistan established the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) (Junaidi, [2022](#)). The sole purpose of the NCOC was to issue health related advisories to the provincial health departments to undertake necessary measures to stop the spread of Covid-19 throughout Pakistan. During the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the NCOC played a pivotal role in implementing the policies like lockdowns, curfews, etc. just to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. However, the NCOC was abandoned this year after it successfully achieved its primary task of controlling the spread of Covid-19.

4.4.1.2. SDG 4: "Quality Education"

The Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals support quality education for all and is designed to remove inequalities existing in the educational field. Again, the essence of the Goal 4 is that no one should be left behind in terms of getting quality education. As far as the education scenario of Pakistan is concerned, Pakistan's education system is experiencing two problems viz-Access to Education and Access in Education (Wasif, [2022](#)). The former refers to the lack of necessary infrastructure for education in Pakistan whereas the latter refers to the lack of quality education in Pakistan.

The literacy rate of Pakistan is only 59.13 percent (Akhtar, [2023](#)). Hence, it means that almost half of the country's population is illiterate which does not augur well for the overall human development in the country. There is no doubt that education plays a pivotal role in the nation building. There is no country in the world that has achieved development without achieving high standards of education within the country. Hence, if a Third World country like Pakistan intends to excel in terms of human and economic development, every child within the country should be enabled to have access to quality education. Therefore, if the federal government of Pakistan embarks on the mission to promote quality education in the country as required by Article 25-A of the Constitution, it needs to implement the targets set out in the Goal 4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This will also enable the government of Pakistan to learn from the international best practices to promote education in the country. It is observed that the contents of Goal 4 (i.e. the Quality Education) are already contained in the statutory provisions of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973. According to Article 25 of the Constitution, it is one of the fundamental rights of every citizen of Pakistan to have access to quality education. Article 25-A of the Constitution reads as "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all the children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law" (National Assembly of Pakistan, [2018](#)).

Hence, in the light of this constitutional provisions, it is binding that the state of Pakistan shall ensure the access to education to every child in the country. Hence, it is very clear that this constitutional requirement on the government of Pakistan could be greatly achieved if the government of Pakistan effectively implements the Goal 4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the country.

It is also observed that since the launching of the UNSDGs in 2016, both the federal and provincial governments of Pakistan have allocated greater financial resources to the education sector. During the FY 2015-2016, the total allocation was Rs. 663,356 mn; FY 2016-2017 it was Rs. 699,222 mn; FY 2017-2018, it was Rs. 829,152 mn; FY 2018-2019, it was Rs. 868,022 mn; FY 2019-2020, it was Rs. 901,013 mn and during FY 2020-2021, it was Rs. 988,032 mn. In

terms of the percentage of GDP, for each of the above FYs, it had been 2.02, 1.97, 2.12, 1.98, 1.90 and 1.77 respectively (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2018). Hence, it shows that the financial allocation to the education sector has been gradually decreasing.

Over the period of time, the government of Pakistan has not been able to effectively work towards universal coverage in education. A testimony to this fact is the low expenditure on education. During the FY 2021-22, the government's expenditure on education was just 1.77 percent of the GDP (Government of Pakistan, n.d.). However, after the ratification of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2016, the government of Pakistan is endeavoring to ensure the transformation of the education system into a high-quality international market demand-driven.

This strategy is also in line with the overall requirement of the Goal 4 i.e. the quality education. In order to implement the standards of Goal 4, the government of Pakistan has also introduced a number of initiatives. Some of the initiatives include establishing new schools for increasing overall enrollments, up-gradation of the existing school network, improvement of the learning environments, ensuring the digitalization of record in the education institutions, preparing the education institutions for facing the emergency situations, introducing the culture of distance learning, enhancing the capacity building of the teachers, and recruiting teachers with specialized skills in science and technology (Government of Pakistan, n.d.).

In addition to this, the government of Pakistan has also introduced the Single National Curriculum in Pakistan in August 2021 (Naqvi, 2021). In Pakistan, there are broadly three tiers of education viz-public, private and religious Madaris. In order to overcome the inequalities in the field of education, the government of Pakistan has introduced this Single National Curriculum (Single National Curriculum, 2022).



In addition to this, the government of Pakistan has also endeavored to enhance technical skills by providing additional resources to the National Vocational & Technical Training Commission (Government of Pakistan, n.d.). Moreover, the government of Pakistan also launched the National Skills for All Strategy in order to enhance the skills set of the youth throughout Pakistan.

5. Post Devolution Challenges in SDGs' Implementation

Since Pakistan also has a living constitution, it is subject to amendments from time to time. In a somewhat recent legal history of Pakistan, the constitution was amended in April 2010 by inserting the 18th constitutional amendment in the nation's constitution. The basic essence of this constitutional amendment was the fiscal, legislative and administrative decentralization and devolution of bulk of the powers from the federal government to the provincial government. Ultimately, the legislative powers on the subjects like the health and education were transferred from the federal domain to the exclusive provincial domain.

5.1. Devolution of Power in 2010

It is important to mention that the 18th constitutional amendment was enacted in the year 2010. At that time, Pakistan was implementing the MDGs that were implemented in the year 2000. Therefore, when the 18th amendment was enacted, there was a massive devolution and decentralization of administrative and legislative powers from the federal government to the provincial government. Since both the subjects like education and health were devolved to the respective provincial government in the year 2010, there was a beginning of the capacity and institutional building at the provincial levels to effectively deal with the decentralized and devolved subjects. Therefore, when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were implemented in the year 2016, both the federal and the provincial governments were having considerable capacity and institutional building. Hence, in the aftermath of the implementation of the SDGs, both the federal and the provincial governments were having the roadmap to effectively achieve their task. However, the effectiveness of the roadmap varied from province to province.

Since the UN Sustainable Development Goals talked about nation's firm commitment in terms of their implementation throughout the country, the national governments were made responsible for implementing the SDGs. In case of Pakistan, since the federal government voluntarily accepted the implementation of the SDGs at the UN in 2015, it is bound to ensure the fulfilling of its commitment in true letter and spirit.

5.2. Challenges in SDGs' Implementation

Hence, the post devolution implementation of the Goal 3 related to Health and

Goal 4 related to education was posed with certain challenges as there was a constitutional paradigm shift in the overall legislative powers in the subjects like health and education. In this section, there will be a brief discussion about the post devolution SDGs' implementation challenges in Pakistan. Some of the most important post devolution challenges are discussed below.

In the post devolution of powers, the first and foremost challenge was the localizing of the implementation of the SDGs at the provincial and district levels. In order to address this challenge, the federal government and the provincial governments, with the technical assistance from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Pakistan, undertook steps for adopting a localized approach towards implementing the SDGs (United Nations Development Program, n.d.).

As a result of the 18th constitutional amendment, an Article 25-A was inserted in the constitution. According to this Article, it was made mandatory for the State to impart free and compulsory education to all the children from 5 to 16 years of age. As a result of this newly inserted constitutional provision, there was a challenge for both the federal and the provincial governments. In order to address this challenge, the provincial governments have enacted laws related to right to education. By enacting these right to education laws, the respective provincial governments are killing two birds with the same stone. On one hand, they are fulfilling their constitutional obligations under Article 25-A of the constitution. On the other hand, they are meeting up the required indicators of the Goal 4 i.e. imparting of the quality education.

For ensuring the implementation of the Goal 4 i.e. the quality education, there is a crucial role of the educational syllabus. Hence, one of the most important challenges of the post devolution is the formulation of the educational curriculum. In the 18th constitutional amendment environment, the formulation of the national curriculum was the responsibility of the federal government exercised through the Ministry of Education. The Ministry exercised the curriculum formulation functions under the Federal Supervision of Curricula, Textbooks and Maintenance of Standards of Education Act of 1976 (The Pakistan Code, n.d.). However, in the post devolution period, the responsibility of formulating the syllabi has been devolved by the federal government and therefore, now it rests with the respective provincial governments. Since there are four provinces, each provincial government has formulated its own syllabus thereby introducing four syllabi within the nation. This multi-syllabi approach is fraught with the dangers of causing ideological differences among the people. This approach could also potentially threaten the imparting of the quality education in the country thereby impeding the implementation and materialization of the Goal 4. In order to overcome this challenge, the government of Pakistan endeavored to introduce Single National



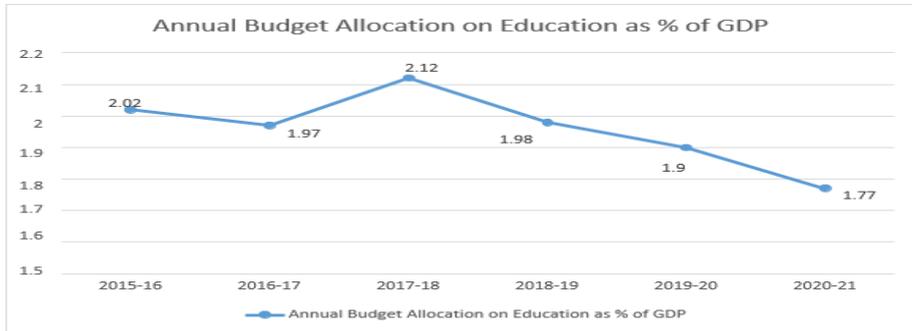
Curriculum (SNC) in the country in the year 2021 (Government of Punjab, n.d.). The basic aim of the SNC was to extend equal and fair educational opportunities to the entire children of Pakistan from grades I to XII (i.e. children of ages from 5 to 16 years) so that they can have access to quality education. It was also one of the core objectives of the SNC to ensure the materialization of the Goal 4. The SNC was designed to be carried out in three phases. In the Phase I starting from March 2021, the SNC and textbooks were supposed to be developed for the grades Pre I to V. In the Phase II starting from March 2022, the SNC and textbooks were supposed to be developed for the grades VI to VIII. In the Phase III starting from March 2023, the SNC and textbooks were supposed to be developed for the grades Pre IX to XII. However, since there is a change of political dispensation on the country in March 2022, there are apprehensions in the government sector that whether the implementation of the SNC throughout Pakistan would be the priority of the government or not. This in itself poses a new challenge towards the implementation and materialization of the Goal 4 in the country. The critics of the Single National Curriculum have also considered it as a recipe for disaster as it might result in further school drop outs due to its arduous nature (Vinayak, 2021). Although, education is a provincial subject, the introduction of the Single National Curriculum was a quantum leap towards infringing upon the constitutional rights of the provinces. However, the government of the Punjab complied with the Single National Curriculum and implemented it throughout the province. In Pakistan, Higher Education Commission (HEC) was established in 2005 to improve the imparting of qualitative education in the country. HEC was also mandated to assist the higher education's institutions throughout the country. However, in the post 18 constitutional amendment period, the HEC's responsibilities were also devolved and therefore, all provinces were required to establish their own provincial Higher Education Commission. This tetra-furcation of the erstwhile HEC's responsibilities also posed a challenge in the post devolution period.

Another post devolution impeding challenges for the implementation of the SDGs in Pakistan is the reduced financial allocations to the education sector development in the country. Since the SDGs were implemented in the 2016, the cursory look at the overall figures in terms of annual budgetary allocation reveals that there is a gradual decrease in the expenditure on education when compared in percentage of the GDP. The following graph shows the emerging trend regarding the financial allocation for the education sector development in Pakistan from the FY 2015-16 to 2020-21. As a result of this reduction in development budget on education, the overall literacy rate in the province of Sindh in 2014-2015 was 60% whereas it has become 58% in the FY 2019-20. In addition to this, the General Enrollment Rate (GER) also declined in all the provinces of Pakistan. In Sindh, it declined from 79% (2014-2015) to 71% (2019-

2020). In Punjab, it declined from 98% (2014-2015) to 92% (2019-2020). In KP, it declined from 92% (2014-2015) to 89% (2019-2020) and in Baluchistan, it declined from 73% (2014-2015) to 72% (2019-2020). The NER of Pakistan also declined from 91% (2014-2015) to 84% (2019-2020).

Figure 1.

Senior Management Course



Note: 31 Senior Management Course, NIM Islamabad, Economic Survey of Pakistan 2021-22 (Government of Pakistan, n.d.)

On the contrary, the expenditure on health has experienced a gradual increase over the period of time. The following graph shows the emerging trend regarding the financial allocation for the health sector development in Pakistan from the FY 2015-16 to 2020-21. In the post devolution period, the federal Ministry of Education was also abolished and its responsibilities were devolved to provinces. In the pre-devolution period, the Ministry of Education was administering 17 subordinate organizations, 2 attached departments and 6 autonomous organizations. After the enactment of the 18th amendment, a new ministry was established at the federal level to coordinate the efforts among the provinces. The newly established ministry was called the Ministry of Education and Training. In the post devolution period, the Ministry of Health at the federal level was also abolished and a new Ministry i.e. Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination was established in 2011. The basic aim of the Ministry was to ensure good health and wellbeing of the people of Pakistan throughout the four provinces of Pakistan.

5.3. Socio-Economic Impediments in Implementation of UNSDGs

Pakistan's progress towards implementing the SDGs has been quite slow and stagnant (Rashid, 2021). Over the period of time, the implementation of the SDGs at the provincial level has not been like a knife through butter. Both the literature review and field research have clearly revealed that the implementation of the SDGs in Pakistan poses some serious socio-economic



challenges. As a result of these socio-economic challenges and impediments, the country may not be able to achieve the indicators.

In this part of the research paper, there will be a discussion about different socio-economic challenges that impede the smooth implementation of the SDGs in Pakistan.

Pakistan is experiencing a burgeoning population pressure. It is increasingly becoming difficult for a Third World country like Pakistan to cater to the socio-economic needs of the increasing population. Due to rapid population growth, Pakistan also has a bulge of young population that makes the situation even more badly. In this scenario, it becomes a challenging task for the government of Pakistan to allocate huge financial resources for implementing the Goal 3 (i.e. Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 4 (i.e. Quality Education). In the absence of any mechanism to effectively carry out population management strategy, it will be an economic challenge for every government in Pakistan to ensure the implementation of Goals 3 and 4 in true letter and spirit.

Another important impediment towards the implementation of the Goals 3 and 4 is the socially parochial mindset prevailing in Pakistan. This parochialism impedes the effective implementation of both the Goals in the country. In terms of implementing the Goal 3 (i.e. Good Health and Well-being), this social parochialism appears in the form of opposing the vaccination drives during both the Polio and Covid-19. Unfortunately, the parochial mindset in Pakistan considers such vaccination campaigns as ploys of the western governments to achieve their hidden agenda against the country. Despite the effective media campaigns to publicize the positive effectiveness of such campaigns, the sections of society with parochial mindset offset such moves by the government. Ultimately, Pakistan along with Afghanistan is infected with the endemic of Polio internationally (World Health Organization, [2019](#)). Similarly, the parochial mindset towards women education also impedes the implementation of the Goal 4 (i.e. Quality Education) in true letter and spirit. In a number of areas within the country, women are considered as domestic workers and are assigned the household tasks instead of encouraging the female education. In some areas, there is a strong resistance against the women going to schools and colleges.

Another important challenge impeding the Goal 4 in Pakistan is the prevalence of the Madrassah education in the country. Since the implementation of the UNSDGs is the responsibility of the government, the privately owned and religiously doctrinated Madrassahs are not bound to implement the standards of the Goal 4. Although the Government of Pakistan has coordinated with the Wafaqul Madaris, the religious seminaries are not ready to readily implement the indicators of the Goal 4 within their Madrassah education network ([Bilal, 2019](#)). They have also not allowed the implementation of the Single National

Curriculum introduced by the Government of Pakistan. A number of their student remain unemployed despite knowing the being fluent in Arabic language.

One of the important challenges in the achievement of highest educational standards is the existence of feudal and tribal lords in Pakistan. Since the essence of the feudalism and tribalism consists of ensuring the unconditional and blind subservience of the general populacetowards the feudal and tribal lords, the promotion of education among the populace is generally considered a threat (Wasif, 2022). Hence, both the feudal and tribal lords make sure that there are no educational facilities in their respective geographical areas so that their subjects should not be exposed to awareness. Most of such areas with feudal and tribal lords are situated in the provinces of Sindh and Baluchistan.

Both unplanned and mushrooming growth of urbanization in Pakistan has resulted in intense pressure on both the health and education facilities within the country. In addition to creating slums, it also spreads infectious diseases thereby causing massive health hazards in the country (Ahmed, 2021). As a result of these challenges, the government of Pakistan is hampered to ensure the good standards of health and education in the country.

It is also observed that there are some inherent capacity building challenges on the part of the provincial governments to effectively implement the SDGs. Although, the 18th Constitutional amendment was enacted in 2010, yet the provinces have still not been able to achieve the capacity building in order to successfully implement the SDGs (Khan & Ali, 2019). As far as the materialization of these goals at the provincial levels is concerned, the degree of professionalism is badly lacking.

In Pakistan, the National Health Vision 2016-2025 (n.d.) regulates the health policy. Although the national health vision entails compliance with the Goal 3, yet it is silent over providing a policy framework to deal with health emergencies like the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination (MNHSRC), Government of Pakistan, plays an inactive role in terms of providing policy framework to deal with the issues of implementing the SDGs at the provincial level.

Although financial allocation to health has increased over the period of time, the performance audit of the health sector in one of the provinces of Pakistan depicts an entirely astonishing result. In a survey conducted by the University of Sindh Jamshoro in December 2021

in five important districts of the Sindh province (i.e. Hyderabad, Jamshoro, Sanghar, Matiari and Sehwan), it was found out that regarding the presence of the general health facilities in the district hospitals, about 21% respondent showed satisfaction, about 68% were unsatisfied and about 11% stated that



they prefer to visit private hospitals over the public hospital due to their past bitter experiences (B. Memon, personal communication, August 24, 2022). Again, regarding the provision of free medicines in the hospitals, about 79% respondents stated that they were not provided free medicine at the hospital, about 12% received the free medicines and about 9% didn't even ask for the free medicine from the hospital authorities. Similarly, regarding the availability of the doctors in the public sector hospitals is concerned, about 43% respondents stated that they were not treated by a senior doctor, about 18% responded that they were treated by a senior doctor and about 39% respondents returned from the hospital without seeing any doctor.

6. Conclusion

Based on the foregone analysis about the status of SDGs related to education and health, it has clearly established that the post devolution implementation of the SDGs in Pakistan has not been up to the mark. As a result of the devolution of powers from the federal government to the provincial governments, there has been an overall deterioration in the quality of the education and health indicators throughout Pakistan. Despite enhanced financial allocations, the country has not been able to effectively perform in achieving the standards of all the SDGs within the country.

Since there are a number of legal, social and cultural impediments that hamper the implementation of the Goal 3 and Goal 4 at the provincial level, these Goals have not been implemented at the grass root level in true letter and spirit. Thus, it could be safely concluded that the in the post devolution era in Pakistan, the implementation of the SDGs has not been encouraging in nature. Unfortunately, policy failures, resource wastages, myopic visions, capacity issues, financial and resource constraints have adversely affected the implementation of the SDGs in Pakistan in true letter and spirit.

7. Recommendations

In order to ensure that Pakistan could effectively deal with the implementation and materialization of both the UNSD Goals regarding education and health, following set of strategies and recommendations are made. Broadly speaking, these strategies and recommendations are trifurcated into short term, medium term and long term.

7.1. Short Terms Strategies:

Some of the most important short- term strategies (2-4 years) are discussed below.

- In order to immediately address the health-related issues, frequent meetings of the Council of Common Interest (established under Article 153 of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan) should be arranged.

- The government of Pakistan should continue the scheme of Sehat Insaf cards within the provinces of the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to ensure the access of the poor to the developed health facilities in the country.
- Increase the budgetary allocation for both the education SDG 4.
- Sign Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) with the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to run the public sector education institutions.
- Public Interest Legislation to declare child labor as a criminal and cognizable offence and to ban the private practice by the doctors in the public sector.
- Launching of community driven vaccination programs.

7.2. Medium Term Strategies:

Some of the most important medium term strategies (4-6 years) are discussed below.

- The Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination (MNHSRC), Government of Pakistan should be made to play a proactive role in terms of providing policy guidelines to the provinces towards implementing the Goal 3 at the provincial levels.
- Budgetary allocations for the development of both the health and education should be increased incrementally.
- Both the public and private healthcare infrastructure in the country should be improved and be made compatible with the international standards.
- The government of Pakistan should establish a body like National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) at the federal level to coordinate efforts with the provinces for the implementation of Goal 3 related to health and Goal 4 related to education.
- The federal government of Pakistan, by coordinating with the respective provincial governments, should address the accessibility issues for the patients and therefore, arrange transportation and ambulance services for the hospitals and healthcare units in both rural and urban areas.

7.3. Long Term Strategies:

Some of the most important long-term strategies (6-8 years) are discussed below.



- Revisiting the National Health Vision 2016-2025 to include the emergency provision of
- healthcare related measures to counter the non-traditional threats like Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Government of Pakistan should encourage the women participation and community involvement towards implementing the SDGs in both the rural and urban areas of Pakistan.
- Mainstreaming Madarassah students by finding them jobs in the Middle East countries as they are already fluent in the Arabic language.
- For ensuring capacity building of the health professionals, there should be holding of workshops and training programs on frequent basis. In these capacity building courses, the indicators of Goal 3 and Goal 4 shall be discussed in detail to increase the awareness about the sustainable development goals and the global expectation from Pakistan's health and education sectors.
- All the healthcare and education related projects at the federal and the provincial levels should be subject to continuous monitoring & evaluation. Similarly, the Auditor General of Pakistan should be specifically tasked to ensure the provision of the PC-V of all the completed projected that related to both the healthcare and education. If any concerned Project Director (PD) does not submit the required PC-V of the project, necessary legal action should be initiated against the PD.

Encouraging the public-private partnership and Joint Ventures (JVs) in the projects that deal with Goal 3 and Goal 4.

- Holding of a comprehensive dialogue among all the stakeholders to effectively address the issues and challenges in the implementation of the SDGs in the post devolution period in Pakistan.
- The best strategy for population control is women empowerment. The menace of feudalism could be controlled by spreading social media and improved means of communication in those affected areas.

Pakistan is experiencing a youth bulge. If this youth bulge is not properly directed and regulated, this youth bulge could become a liability instead of it being an asset. Hence, it is the need of the hour to ensure the capacity building of the youth by acting in complete coordination with the provincial governments. In this regard, the National Vocational & Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) could play a pivotal role.

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