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‘DS View’, an academic activity in which students, researchers and faculty are encouraged to write short academic essays on the Development discourse, aims to generate discussion on issues concurrent to the times we are living in. The topical range may include academic debates on issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, conflict and human security. The essay for DS View can be expository, argumentative, persuasive or analytical.

The topic of third DS View is ‘**Development Agenda for Pakistan**’ written by Asad ur Rehman.

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## Development Agenda for Pakistan

Asad ur Rehman

Borrowing a phrase from Arif Hasan, it could be contested with a great bit of confidence that an “Unplanned Revolution” has happened in Pakistan. From the footholds of Himalayas to the deep waters of the Arabian Sea we see emerging social, economic and political realities. Underlying these apparent shifts in demography, social relations and political associations is the thrust of economic restructuring happened in the last couple of decades. A glance at the share of different sectors in national output of the country remind us that centrality of agriculture has been displaced by expanding services based economy. This increased share of services in national product is appended on the liberalisation policies pursued by state under the auspices of international financial institutions. Washington Consensus in Pakistan received a greater attention and patronage in early 90s. Asad Sayeed has argued that it was the strategy of elites to prop up state-society disjuncture threatening to unravel social fabric. Few more on the left have seen this shift as a testimony of the increasing domination of transnational corporations in deciding the ‘rules of game’ and state lost its control on levers of public policy. A comprehensive research agenda is required to empirically find out the exact statistics about the spread and depth of this transformation and the challenges that this transformation brings.

The development challenges confronting Pakistan need dynamic responses instead of body polity resorting towards simplistic resolutions. In order to provide policy reforms and frameworks to address key development challenges, acceptance of the core issues is imperative. In the following text I will briefly look at those challenges followed by remedial and coping measures. These measures may provide alternative theoretical and methodological frameworks to re-think and re-conceptualise these challenges. Among these challenges (as stated below) are included social and political fragility, ecological imbalances, lack of social protection and repercussions of extensive urbanisation.

The most staggering challenge is of social and political fragility. Common policy narrative envisages it as a problem of stagnant growth, low productivity, little Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) or corruption. Economic fundamentals are only abstractions and part of larger construction of social reality. Seeing economy sans its social foundations makes the observer prone to the mistake of identifying tree as a jungle. Functional inequality, old economic development strategy, and its modern variants are theoretically embedded within modernisation paradigm, which envisaged increase in per capita income and modes of employment leading secularly towards a shift in value system. Any form of economic justice was seen as too utopian and outlandish for sophisticated models

of capital accumulation. It is increasingly becoming imperative that lens of investigating the fragility should be molded towards more holistic elements. The biggest driver of fragility in Pakistan is of exclusion of majority population from the benefits of economic development. There is a greater need now to focus on economic and social development simultaneously and ending the practice of prioritising economic planning first. Efficiency is neither a synonym for equity nor a replacement.

The second biggest challenge for Pakistan is the lurking environmental catastrophe as South Asia is the most vulnerable region to climate change. Climate change has the potential to jeopardise the very existence of society through multiple channels of food insecurity, migration, displacement and could destroy the whole social fabric. Higher dependence of agriculture on climate asks for inclusion threat of climate change top of the list. Lack of constituency for this cause, evidenced through climate change at the moment is considered as a donor driven exercise. This perception needs to be eliminated urgently.

Urbanisation is another factor and urban development a challenge that requires urgent attention and long term planning by state. Housing problem has increased because of weak regulation. Bigger cities lacked reliable and affordable transportation system. Dysfunctional sanitation and waste management systems are also in need of urgent attention to keep urban centres peaceful and economically functional. Little attention given to these issues in the past is already making cities congested, infested with income and spatial inequality and littered with waste. A holistic urban development policy will also be helpful in reducing disease burden by targeting clean environment as a goal. There is a special need for developing new cities to transfer burden of population now migrating to cities with stagnation in Agri-sector of the economy.

Lastly, social welfare and protection needs to be given a central space to public policy discourse and development agenda. Evidence suggests that the rate of intergenerational mobility in Pakistan has grown slower, which indicates an uneven playing ground for those born in less economically well-off families. Globally, the reconstruction in economic policy displaced state subsidies and transfers with increased access to financial products. In Pakistan, unfortunately, we see both state welfare and invisible hand of market as non-existent. Quality concerns apart, a recent report states that about 24 million children are outside schools. What future holds for these children is not hard to imagine but certainly with a deep convulsion. Similarly, the condition of health delivery and access to healthcare is also getting worse with little or no attention of policy makers.

Global sustainable agenda has provided a generalised framework for a sustainable world. It includes everything that could be put into the basket required for enabling

development. History, however, teaches us that loss of specificity in any agenda could lead to issues of policy design with little concrete results.

Development is an objective, desire and goal fixed by history and transmitted through culture. The meanings and definitions of Development have gone through rapid transitions. Development as a process or development as an outcome has been a pulsing debate in this discourse. Lexicographer Paul Robert explicates development as an outcome oriented construct in which GNP per Capita, economic expansion, growth and extension are the final goals to achieve. Julius Nyerere, on the other hand, stipulates development as a process oriented phenomenon in which self-reliance and self-confidence are the focal points for peoples or communities to develop. Human Development Reports borrow theoretical framework of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to define development as the widening bandwidth of opportunities available to people for them to build their individual and collective capabilities. Some of these definitions are normative and others instrumental. In Pakistan the definitional, conceptual and processual lacunas have been persistent for the absence of local context, concerns and ownership for development did not pay any dividend in the past and there is hardly any future for Pakistan without it.

#### Reference

- A. Hassan. 2002. *The Unplanned Revolution: Observations on the Process of Socio-Economic Change in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

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