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An Assessment of Imran Khan Government's Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal-1

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Abstract: *Poverty is one of the most persistent challenges across the world, in general, and in Pakistan, in particular. In the context of Pakistan, to overcome this challenge, extensive research has been conducted on governmental measures, socioeconomic fortification reforms and the concerned issues. conversely, this research deals this issue through the lens of foreign policy economic engagements, to meet the United Nations Organization's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal-1 (SDG-1), No Poverty, in Pakistan in Imran khan's Government (2018-2022). The study evaluates Imran Khan's government foreign policy to determine whether it met to SDG-1, the relationship between Imran Khan's Government, its Foreign Policy, and SDG-1 Program. The research argues that foreign policy works as a vital instrument to eradicate poverty from Pakistan, however, its effectiveness depends on the soundness of institutional process, accountability measures, and integration with international economic ambitions to achieve SDG-1. The finding suggests that there is a need of parallel coordination between geopolitical balance, institutional building process, and effective economic diplomacy to shield and expand trade, investment, and, in return, bring aid and remittances to Pakistan to meet SDG-1. This research paper employs thematic analysis that identifies and analyzes themes within qualitative data analysis approaches.*

Introduction

Keynesian economic model underlines the government's starring role in instituting economic prosperity and general public welfare by enacting integrated economic policies, particularly in economic recessions. In line with this approach, Keynes (1936) argued that poverty alleviation entails a cohesive framework for economic growth, increased employment, and marginalization of revenue disparity through redistributive mechanisms. In the context of SDG-1, elimination of extreme poverty magnitudes, the preceding agencies incorporate increased public investment in infrastructures,

extended social welfare policies, and provision of subsidies to vulnerable groups (Todaro & Smith, 2020). In evolving societies, including Pakistan, such governmental interventions have a significant impact on the overall economic situation, as public spending spawns demand for goods and services, which leads to job creation and, in turn, increased household wages. Subsequently, the Neo-Keynesian School, emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, added more ideas, including expectations, price rigidities, and open economy dynamics, to the preceding concept by highlighting their importance and prerequisites of the time.

Based on these notions, Hicks (1973) and Mankiw (2019) view that international economic relations and collaborations deeply impact domestic economic outcomes in developing nation-states (Hicks, 1937; Mankiw, 2019). For instance, in a developing country like Pakistan, remittances, trade, and foreign aid contribute a lot to the national building process- they have been significant components of GDP, endorsing the Keynesian economic model by establishing cost-effective relations abroad. Stiglitz (2018) posits that adopting the Neo-Keynesian economic model, negotiating concessional loans, and getting a foreign market right of entry for export provide fiscal space for pro-poor spending, thereby openly backing poverty decline (Stiglitz, 2018). Therefore, the global economic alliance deeply influences national economic growth. Subsequently, the international trade theory upholds that nation-states enhance their overall welfare by focusing on sectors where they have relative economic efficiency (Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2018).

Conversely, trade liberalization, by providing access to an internationally expanded market, improved competition, and enhanced technological structure and exchange, collectively achieve productive economic gains to improve extreme poverty reduction (Winters, McCulloch, & McKay, 2004). Correspondingly, neoliberalism advocates for free trade agreements, liberalizing capital flows, and implementing structural adjustment programs established and promoted by international financial institutions; however, it warns of risks to equity and social protection (Harvey, 2005; World Bank, 2017). The preceding theoretical perspective underscores that the international economic framework is an effective mechanism to foster and shape the growth of the domestic socio-economic structure and improve poverty reduction. Based on the foregoing literature, it is derived that both diplomatic tools and foreign policy play a major role in establishing a strong global economic framework, helping to navigate domestic economic challenges and the extreme poverty situation.

Employing the perspective of building reliable, broad relations, particularly in the context of dealing with domestic economic challenges and eliminating extreme poverty situations, this study focuses on Pakistan's foreign policy in Imran Khan's government (2018-2022) to see how much it influenced progress towards Sustainable Development Goal-1 (SDG-1, No Poverty). The questions at the core of this compound theoretical approach are to identify whether overseas diplomatic dealings, trade alliances, and financial relief addressed the nation's extreme poverty situations. Were the strategies compatible with the national socio-economic priorities? And how much do global power relations, trade agreements, and capital flows align with national development agendas? The study attempts to address these questions by evaluating the foreign policy of Imran Khan's government in the context of building effective global economic relations, providing an active national framework and direction to meet national economic challenges, and outlining strategies to overcome extreme poverty situations in Pakistan.

Methodology

To deal with the foregoing research questions and realize productive findings and outcomes, this study applies a qualitative research model, concentrating on a thematic analysis of the literature, constructing

and analyzing themes within the qualitative data. Firstly, themes, including the Imran Khan's government (2018-2022), its foreign policy, and the SDG-1 (No Poverty) Program, the role of Imran Khan's government foreign policy in realizing SDG-1 Goal-1, and the challenges to the foreign policy of the preceding government in accomplishing SDG-1 in Pakistan, will be presented systematically. Secondly, the themes will be analyzed to show the success of foreign policy regarding SDG-1 goals and challenges in accomplishing them in the Imran Khan Government. Thirdly, based on these analyses, findings, and outcomes will be underscored to meet the crux of the study. The study is derived from the primary and secondary data, including interviews, books, reports, and journal reports. This research is an academic effort to realize its objectives, yet it does not claim to cover the issue completely, and there might be some gaps to be addressed by other researchers and intellectuals.

Imran Khan Government (2018-2022), its Foreign Policy, and SDG-1 (No Poverty) Program

To navigate global challenges of poverty, inequity, and human development, the United Nations Organization's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development set 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) wherein SDG-1 (no poverty) aims to eliminate extreme poverty conditions, in all its dimensions, from developing nation states. In line with SDG-1, poverty signifies deprivation of basic fundamental rights, including education, health care, social services, and involvement in significant public activities (Sen, 1999). In evolving societies comprising Pakistan, realizing the preceding goal has been a central challenge due to their vulnerable socio-economic conditions (UN, 2015). In the context of Pakistan, it has been experiencing extreme poverty conditions, having 21.9% of its population living below the national poverty line (PBS, 2022). The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), a measure of poverty in education, health, and living standards, reveals that nearly 38.3% people in Pakistan are suffering from multidimensional poverty (UNDP & OPHI, 2020). These surveys reflect less economically focused interventions and emphasize integrated economic approaches to handle the extreme poverty situations in Pakistan. The COVID-19 pandemic added to this aggravated situation by reducing income opportunities, shrinking fiscal spaces, and retreating economic achievements (Mahmood et al, 2021; World Bank, 2020).

Domestic economic policies of various governments, in general, and Imran Khan's government, in particular, launched a series of relief programs to address the issue; however, the targeted goals have not been accomplished until now. In Imran Khan's government, the Ehsaas program, having more than 140 sub-programs, launched in 2019, aimed at wrapping out health, nutrition, employment, education, and financial inclusion effectively; however, Pakistan's trajectory towards SDG-1 remained extremely dependent on foreign policy decisions and abroad economic involvements (Nishtar, 2021; Rana & Khan, 2021). Thus, regarding a developing state, foreign policy brings vital national development outcomes by impacting trade flows, remittances, foreign direct investment, bilateral aid, and regional cooperation mechanisms (Rana & Khan, 2021). Seeing foreign policy as a way forward to achieve SDG-1 goals, the Khan's government adopted an outward-looking approach by linking foreign policy with economic achievements and welfare reforms. In this regard, the period has seen many productive reforms, including the reshaping of economic diplomacy, engagement of regional actors through strategic realignment, and other overseas enterprises, to leverage foreign partnerships to overcome domestic socio-economic challenges (Sial, 2021).

Reliance on international economic contributions to address the issue appropriately also brought many drawbacks. For instance, though the 2019 IMF Extended Fund Facility (EFF) flourished in handling a balance of payments crisis, it carried out austerity measures, causing a decrease in development expenditure and a hot economy, leading to negative impacts on low-income groups (Akbar & Husain,

2020). In other cases, such as the correlation of foreign economic policies and SDG-1 outcomes, led to a matter of policy coherence; however, sometimes, the scarcity of such coherence, based on geopolitical strains, had negative impacts on institutional capabilities, leading to resistance in realizing targeted welfare projects (Iqbal, 2021).

This study, in the preceding context, explores how foreign policy initiatives launched by Imran Khan's government matched with the objective of poverty elimination; to what extent the abroad engagement, based on trade diversification, utility diplomacy, regional partnership, or diaspora organizations, contributed to or undermined efforts to realize SDG-1 outcomes. The majority of literature in Pakistan focuses on the presentation of national governance and policy execution subjects; however, this study, concentrating on the foreign economic engagement mechanism, examines the role of the Imran Khan Government's foreign policy in shaping domestic development trajectories, the relationship between Imran Khan's government, foreign policy, and national economic outcomes/particularly in the context of the SDG-1 program.

The role of Imran Khan's government foreign policy in realizing SDG-1 Goal-1

Many initiatives of Imran Khan's government's foreign policy had tremendous potential to address the SDG-1 goals, to eliminate extreme poverty conditions from Pakistan. In this phenomenon, the foreign policy is to be evaluated in the context of a means to domestic development by accessing vital resources, trade routes, markets, and engaging diaspora instead of considering it as a geopolitical instrument to promote strategic goals, security, and alliances (Nye, 2004; Keohane & Nye, 2011; Vickers, 2020). Under this conceptual shift, the Khan's administration introduced the geo-economic version, a shift from security-driven foreign relations to productive economic-based foreign alliances; integration into international economic affairs to strengthen domestic economic development (Sial, 2021). The central objective behind this geo-economic orientation was to enhance international diplomacy to attract foreign investment, expand trade, and elevate inclusive development to meet SDG-1 objectives in Pakistan.

To realize this goal, the Economic Diplomacy Division was established in the portfolio of foreign affairs. Under this division, the Pakistan embassies and high commissions were to serve as platforms to attract and invite foreign investments, establish trade links to boost domestic development by facilitating local industries to remove poverty from the country. This initiative was employed to make economic channels with Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia to ensure multibillion-dollar investments in the energy and infrastructure sectors. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) phase-II was also concluded to add to economic cooperation by establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) as hubs for industrial zones and workforces. Mahmood and Ahmad (2021) argue that in the changing economic world, the shift of foreign policy serves as an instrumental tool for domestic economic development and the eradication of poverty in all dimensions (Mahmood & Ahmad, 2020). Focusing on regional connectivity, Khan's government made various economic agreements, including Pakistan engagement with China, Afghanistan and central Asian Republics, and their subsequent agreements, such as Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) and Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement (QTAA)—involving Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan—was revealed as a crucial step toward regional economic integration, on the one hand, and domestic development and, in turn, poverty elimination in Pakistan, on the other. Such expanded trade linkage matches with international trade theory that provides opportunities for competitive specialization (Krugman, Obstfeld & Melitz, 2018).

Then the Look North and Look West policies reengaged Pakistan with Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, and subsequently they emerged as potential trade partners providing export opportunities and employment

avenues in the agriculture and textile sectors. This diversification fosters resilience in evolving economies (Bhagwati, 2004). Similarly, the Roshan digital Accounts gave potential to the overseas to add to national economic development through legal banking channels and bring billions in foreign exchange. Similarly, through Debt and Aid Diplomacy, the Khan's government's negotiation with the IMF secured the Ehsaas budget from cuts, paving the way for poor protection within tough economic adjustment. This effort has been organized by the International Monetary Fund itself (IMF, 2021). Conversely, the partnership with multilateral developed institutions, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank, was a crucial step toward domestic economic up-gradation and poverty elimination. The preceding initiatives act as a stimulant for aggregate demand, employment generation, productivity growth, and poverty elimination; however, all these initiatives depend upon the proper homework of domestic institutions and effective governmental organization.

Challenges to Foreign Policy to handle SDG-1 in Imran Khan's Government

The Imran Khan government, through foreign policy engagements, made multiple efforts to alleviate poverty in Pakistan by focusing on achieving SDG-1 goals and conducting diverse economic initiatives; however, there have been intricate interactions between foreign policy decisions and socio-economic outcomes, posing many challenges to achieving SDG-1 goals and dealing properly with poverty elimination in Pakistan. One of the major factors that broke up the process was that promises of investment and trade expansion were made; however, they fell short due to structural failures and poor follow-through, disturbing the envisioned poverty elimination process. The development was further hindered by diplomatic tensions and economic costs, unpromising and bleak links with key international partners, and challenges to realize compliance standards under regimes, including the European Union's GSP+ program, which caused economic interruptions frequently and had negative impacts on low-income communities. Thus, Imran Khan Government's provocative stand with the West narrowed down the space for concessional joint trade. (European Commission, 2021; Hussain & Ai, 2022).

The procedure of short- term structural solutions through the government by emphasizing on seeking immediate crisis management to meet SDG-1 goals and employing temporary economic inflows, emergency diplomacy, and conditional bailouts discourage the government's efficiency to prepare and execute long-term foreign policies planning to enable it to systematically eradicate poverty by diversified trade, stable investment flows, and effective diaspora engagement (Rodrik, 2014; Stiglitz, 2015). Leaving the proper plan for structural uplift and depending largely on China's short-term liquidity without sustainable livelihood and Saudi Arab's aid led Pakistan to present its dependency model in international politics instead of utilizing this bond for sustainable development projects at the national level to enhance domestic economic structure, curtailed its efforts to materialize SDG-1 targets (Rafiq, 2022). Failure in the execution of policies also denoted the gap between policy rhetoric and practical implementation.

A fragile coordinated system between various organizations, institutional inability to handle the assigned responsibility properly, and bureaucratic gaps and hindrances diluted the influence of foreign policy initiatives regarding collective security and financial empowerment programs (Rodrik, 2018; Jamil, 2021).

The challenge of managing contending global interests, particularly between the US and China, also led Pakistan to compromised policy autonomy that resulted in missing opportunities for strengthening foreign relations for poverty decline (Hurley, Morris, & Portelance, 2018; Kugelman, 2021). The responsibility gaps in foreign policy monitoring underlined structural failure in transparency and the

government's control over the actions. In addition, the lack of parliamentary participation, weak monetary system, and the concentration of decision-making power empower foreign policy to work independently regardless of developmental priorities, leading to breaking its potential to work for the economically marginalized population of Pakistan (Bovens, 2007; Brinkerhoff, 2004; Keohane, 2002). It is derived from the preceding literature that when foreign policy is employed as a strategic tool for poverty elimination, it is essential to have cohesion between diplomatic endeavors and sustainable development goals. Geopolitical limitations, governance insufficiencies, and execution hurdles disconnected Pakistan's foreign policy from its socio-economic initiatives for impoverished communities in Pakistan between 2018 and 2022.

Conclusion

Findings signify that many foreign policy initiatives in Imran Khan's Government worked well to achieve SDG-1 by providing employment opportunities, growing investment, and facilitating market access through various international engagements. These include diaspora engagement, trade diversification efforts, particularly the launching of CPEC-Phase II, access to central Asian markets, Look African Policy, and engagement with Middle Eastern states, which mobilized economic inflows, employment opportunities, savings, and flow of remittances, facilitating investment in the domestic sector to meet the SDG-1 goal of eradicating extreme poverty situations in Pakistan. However, many factors comprising structural failures and poor follow-through, diplomatic tensions and economic costs, short-term structural solutions by seeking immediate crisis management, huge dependency on foreign aid, failure in the execution of policies, and handling international contending interests were the main challenges to the foreign policy of the under study government to accomplish SDG-1 to overcome poverty in the country. It is recommended that in an evolving economy, foreign policy must be shaped as an instrumental tool for sustainable development to meet its central objective of eradicating poverty in all its dimensions from Pakistan. This needs a parallel coordination between geopolitical balance, institutional building process, and effective economic diplomacy to shield and expand trade, investment, and, in return, bring aid and remittances to Pakistan to meet SDG-1.

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