

## A Critical Analysis of Social Capital Building in the Development of Education in Pakistan

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### Abstract

*Social capital theorists have struggled for establishing a practicable perspective in policy and development realm. No doubt, the concept has proved its potential in offering promising prospects; however, its manipulation for personal interest may hinder the way of positive outcomes. Exploring the issue, effort is being made in this paper to highlight a dark side of social capital which was detrimental to school community links in Pakistan. The study exhibits that principals use personal- in the shape of links with local political elites- and institutional social capital- having good relations with higher authorities- for making corruption and maintaining autocratic atmosphere of their schools. The social networks serve as an umbrella for school administrators from any possible legal action of parents. In this way, few individuals exchange illegal benefits at the expense of desired social capital building through PTCs. Thus the dilemma of parents/community involvement in schools is marred by the perverse use of individual and institutional social capital for meager personal interest.*

**Keywords:** Social Capital, Schools, Parent Teachers Councils, Stakeholders, Synergy

### Introduction

Social capital has recently emerged in policy and development realm. Importance of social networks, once considered detrimental to human progress, bounced back in the world of ‘Bowling Alone’. Intense division of labor in postmodern society compartmentalized individuals to a static routine and a semi-automatic life style. In wake of this advent, most of the communal processes were taken over by the states where needs of individuals were addressed by potent institutions. However, the emerged gaps among individuals faced excuse from states’ machinery, and a retreat to community was made in development policy through social capital building.

However, here our concern is context specific; the ideal of community involvement may not be pregnant unanimously across cultures for complementing/supplementing state’s efforts: or some elements may manipulate it for personal vested interests. Furthermore, the dark side of social capital becomes much darker in a community thrived with low institutional performance due to lack of state’s interest, corruption, nepotism and lack of awareness/education. The story in developing countries like *Pakistan* attracted our attention to study the policy of introducing Parent-Teachers-Council at school level. Because we worked in a school for ten years and had thorough discussions with

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colleagues and community members/parents upon the development of education. Usually, these discussions encompassed the need and the scope of PTCs. As the policy of introducing PTCs was first implemented by the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in 1993 to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), however, its fruits are not realized in black and white on the ground. So the current study is focused upon the trend of social capital building in the shape of PTCs, and more specifically, the negative impact of social capital, inhibiting the would-be synergy of school and community for the development of education. It would unearth some realities why this policy could not sustain promising results in Pakistan. Before going to highlight the realities in the changed circumstances, let us see the concept of social capital and its promise in the field of development.

### **Social Capital**

The idea of social capital is not a novice initiative in the field of development process. The importance of social networks has long been recognized by Hanifan as early as 1916, theorizing that social relations always contributed to satisfy mutual needs and improve living conditions (Hanifan, 1916). However, it was until late 1980s that seminal research work of Coleman (1987, 1988, 1990) on education and Putnam (1993, 1995) on public participation and institutional performance catapulted the significance of social capital to high rank in development process.

Prior to such studies, the idea of social capital failed to present a holistic approach and was considered as a partial truth and, hence, failed to attract the attention of policy makers. The tautological reference to social ties in development literature, in the past couple of decades, is grounded upon general notion that we normally resort to relatives and friends in time of pressing needs or hard times of our lives. Similarly, we cherish and enjoy remembering our valuable and joyful hours talking to our neighbors, holding parties with our colleagues, helping strangers, taking part in religious rituals and working as volunteer in community developments (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

The repertoire allusion to the concept of 'social capital' in past reflects the diversity of approaches. It is defined by many social theorists in different forms that made it looked elusive and leading to diverging ends. The main three schools of thought in perceiving social capital have struggled to provide conceptual clarity in their own perspectives. For Coleman (1988, 1990), the neo-functionalists, connections among people offer embedded and unobtrusive benefit for each other in a reciprocal way. It contributes both in disseminating personal gains for those involved in reciprocity and caters for reflecting public goods.

Bourdieu (1997) regards social capital as interacting individuals in networks in more or less entrenched way. Such people can access certain benefits attached to these affiliations in the form of interchange. And the access to the resources is perpetuated through different mechanisms like family, class, tribe, school, or party etc. from generation to generation.

The third protagonist of social capital theory and the most prominent among them is Putnam. He delineates it as, “features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit” (1993: 35). He focuses upon the macro structures like organizations, clubs and formal institutions of today’s world. He paints the modern world in optimistic way where the changing mode of life style can be addressed through alternate resource - civic virtue and public engagement.

It was after the publishing of ‘bowling alone’ by Putnam (2000) that social capital fascinated the minds of policy makers. Among such initiatives, World Bank research group too started work on the implications of social capital theory in the process of development. And Micheal Woolcock and Deepa Narayan, members of the said organization defined social capital as “social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively”. They categorized different views upon social capital in four different perspectives highlighting the relationship between social networking and sustainable economic development (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

These perspectives are communitarian, institutional, network and synergy view of social capital. Proponents of communitarian view resort to local level organizations like associations, clubs and civic groups as a remedy to the ubiquitous malady and dissonance created by widespread corruption, individualism and diminishing social norms caused by ‘Great Disruption’ since 1960 (Fukuyama, 1999). They believe in Communities to be homogenous bodies distributing positive outcomes to all its members.

Granovetter (1973), a pioneer of network view, discussed both positive and negative aspects of strong ‘intra’ community ties in his famous research article ‘strength of the weak ties’. Horizontal links in a community (bonding) helps its members to be defensive and maintain the minimal existing resources to ‘get by’. However, it is vertical ‘inter’ communities ties (bridging) which are to be ‘offensive’ and ‘get ahead’.

The institutional view shifts the responsibility to formal institutions of states that creates congenial environment to emerging networks in a community. These formal institutions are responsible to translate its efforts in the form of ‘generalized trust’ in communities and they, in turn, will take advantage from government social capital. Hence the malpractices and inefficiencies at institutional level increases uncertainties in the masses inhibiting every effort to materialize civic social capital and, hence, hampers sustainable development.

### **The Synergy View**

This is a blend of network and institutional views on social capital. A conducive environment provided by institutions through better service delivery mechanism complements the community networks in the development process. Social organizations enhances states efforts manyfolds if a synergy is kept intact. Government’s determination alone will not suffice for the desired goals in the absence of bridging communal networks and vice versa. Hence, modern democratic states tighten their belts streamline the local people and link them to institutions for optimum results of development process.

However, States in transitions across the world face difficulties in establishing its writ in almost all fields. Education, among others, is the one where degeneration in formal structure led to stand at weaker wicket regarding performance indicators. At one hand, education added to the momentum of technological advancement in making a global village and, on the other hand, it failed to maintain support from community networks. Schools became more formal and people started using them as a leverage for upward social mobility. Nuclearization of family fueled by growing urbanization, lack of family attachment to certain area and both parents working as breadwinners changed the priority of child education/socialization. In order to revitalize the supreme importance of child, Birney founded Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA) on February 17, 1897, in Washington D.C. which spread throughout the world.

In *Pakistan*, parents and local elites were interlinked with schools in 1992 through the concept/practice of Parent Teacher Association (PTA) by the Federal Directorate in association with the then Multi-Donor Support Unit (MSU) of the World Bank. Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was the first that established Parent-Teacher-Councils (PTC), formerly called Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA), in all schools from primary to higher secondary since 1993. This concept meant to cultivate social capital, at grass roots in the shape of evolving close linkages between parents and teachers for assuming the responsibility of improving the standard of education. Further, the anticipated institutional based social capital aimed to inculcate the sense of community proprietorship, empowerment and more vitally, streamlining the social associations towards more responsive, development-oriented and democratic system.

The notion of PTC is glorified and exhibited in educational policy; however, its anticipated outcomes have not been practically grasped as much on the ground. It can be apprehended by the overall literacy level in *Pakistan* which is still 74% in urban areas and 48% in the rural areas. Many educationists (see Epstein, 1995; 1997; Epstein et al, 2002) have researched the topic and have revealed the connotation of such organizations. Despite the alleged improvement in literacy rate in *Pakistan* through different educational policies, more recently of Pervez Musharraf, who fancied 80 percent literacy level to be achieved till 2015 under the general reforms and Literacy For All (LFA), the supposed aim looks a far cry. Among many steps, the policy of introducing PTCs was hasty and less socially engineered decision. It was idealized and painted in high colors without making efforts to infuse in local culture. Hence, an ample gap was entrusted to street level bureaucrats i.e. principals to mold the concept in their own liking and disliking. United Nations Development Group Report 2006 describes that most of school management committees (SMCs) were inactive even in big cities like Karachi, Hyderabad, Multan and Peshawar. Apart from disinterestedness on behalf of schools' administrators, there might be cases of unlawful repercussions of renovated idea i.e. PTCs. Hence, this paper is designed to dig out negative practices emerged due to improper implementation of the policy.

### Methodology

As the present study intends to look for dark sides of social capital prevalent at institutional levels, hence qualitative research method i.e. interpretivist approach was adopted to unveil a detailed, subjective and panoramic picture of the phenomenon (see Cresswell, 1998; Bryman, 1984; Kincheloe, 1991). As the subject of this research looked contrary to the vested interest of the street level bureaucrats and local elites; therefore, it was decided to use ethnography. It helped in understanding the reality through direct interaction and observations in the field (see Fraenkel and Wallen, 1996). Furthermore, peeping into hidden corners of the phenomenon provoked for selecting multiple case study design in order to comprehend deep-rooted patterns of reality in different socio-cultural communities (Black and Champion, 1976; Burgess, 1988; Cresswell, 1994; Hakim, 1989). For reliability (Blumer and Warwick, 1983), validity (Taylor and Bogadan, 1984) and cross-checking of data, triangulation of tools i.e. individual, group interviews and personal observations in field were used. Four schools/communities were selected purposively in two districts i.e. *Shangla* and *Karak* on the basis of their different socio-culture environments. District *Karak* has one of the highest literacy rates (41.9%) (District Census Report 1998) with more bridging links. In contrast, district *Shangla* has the lowest literacy rate (14.70%) in the province (District Census Report 1998). Many positions of teachers in schools in the district were vacant exhibiting its fragile position in delivering better performance. The communities consisted of mostly poor families relying on their bonding nature of social capital. Principals of the schools, PTC members of the respected schools and four parents were included for data collection. In order to cross check the data, Director of education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Executive District Officers of the two districts were also interviewed.

### Analysis/Discussion

Generally, the idea of PTC was welcomed by all stake holders like principals, teachers, and community members/parents across the two districts. However, its implementation was restricted to marginal, stereo-typed performance in most of the areas. The communities were characterized with low socio-economic status, disembeddedness in power structure, absence of state's will in the shape of low institutional performance, misapprehension of state's institutions as public goods, authoritative/street level bureaucratic style of principals and above all, the misconception of PTC as a Western agenda for corrupting the principals.

The objectives of such councils are documented in the PTC guide but actually the essence of PTC was delimited to utilization of its funds. The Principals, Executive District Officers and the Director accentuated the successful projects completed in collaboration with the communities. The Director of education explained that government decided to increase PTC fund from .15 million PKR to .8 million PKR because of the lower cost and optimum benefits. This aptitude of stereo-typing the councils for monitoring the physical development projects in schools socially engineered a conflicting zone in community-school relationship. Thus the idea of community involvement in decision making process at school transgressed from development of education. Once stereo-typed by the high officials, street level bureaucrats had the opportunity to

manipulate PTCs further. Most of the time, Principals formed pseudo PTCs or even maintained fake records. In two communities, the fathers of students elaborated that they didn't know what was going on in the school. A father in district *Shangla* flatly condemned principal of the school for loose administration in these words:

“The principal is not interested in providing better educational standard at all. He and his teachers are always busy to make money through unfair means. He has gathered few friends in PTC without informing the community. These members willy-nilly approve what they are asked to do.”

Another father gave similar comments in the community while exploring the issue and held that the principal was involved in embezzlement in PTC fund. When we went through the record of PTC, we found that it was not maintained properly. Complete list of parents with their contact numbers was missing altogether: although the principal categorically endorsed that he had been contacting parents/community members in annual meetings. Ironically, he blamed parents for showing little interest in their children's education; that is why most of them never bothered to attend meetings. Talking about the selection procedure of PTC chairman/members, he told that selection had been made, instead of holding election because every father was not capable to understand requirements of an institution: therefore he selected proper team among the efficient community members. Interestingly, the principal only relied upon a retired teacher, an ex-councilor and a local elite and had been selected as members of the council. No single father was included in this team.

Consistent with the above finding, two fathers in district *Karak* leveled the same allegation against the principal of their children's school. When we asked the chairman of PTC, who was an ex-District Education Officer (EDO), he vividly declared PTC as a source of income for principals and nothing else. He expatiated that:

“We, the cabinet of PTC, are rubber stamps; we can do nothing. The principal withdraws funds with fake signatures. The higher authorities know everything but they do not want to rectify the system because they have their own vested interest in it. Basically, PTC is a Western agenda for making principals corrupt.”

The same chairman further mentioned that the high-ups of education department and political representatives of the district were responsible for degenerating standard of education. The respondent further held that state agencies were not serious enough to obtain the desired results and hence, local administrators (street level bureaucrats) had an ample chance to follow their interests. He quoted a local axiom, “A cowboy will never love your cow; nor will a peasant love your farm”.

It was observed that the principal of the school had intriguing relations with Member of provincial Assembly (MPA), who provided an umbrella to safeguard him from any legal action. Same situation was reported by fathers in district *Shangla* instead of chairman

PTC, because the chairman and principal shared political affiliation with a political leader.

Such findings clearly exhibit that community members/parents were unhappy with the institutional performance of the schools on the one hand and they could not gather courage to undertake a movement against the inefficient school's administration, on other hand. Because principals of schools were in better position to safeguard their illegal activities by maintaining strong bonds with high ups. They utilized their statuses for providing illegal favor in electoral process to political elites like rigging in election. It is pertinent to note that principals perform as presiding officers in electoral process. In turn, the elites gave them free hand to the schools' administrators for following autocracy in their institutions. A father portrayed the situation by quoting a local axiom: "Power determines the level of evil doing".

Another principal in district *Karak* approved the perpetuation of political interference in educational institutions as the major factor in degenerated standard of education. He told that they might had succeeded in improving education if they were only made responsible to the community. It means that some of the principals utilized institutional social capital for personal vested interest which, in turn, hindered the way of network social capital building.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It was observed that in homogenous communities cherished with abundance of bonding nature of social capital, few individuals might exploit his/her bridging/linking social capital for personal vested interests instead of working as agents of development. Usually a protest against such exploitation is taken as personal attack and, therefore, masses abstain from it in order to sustain working relationships with the authorities. In other words, they wish to maintain bonding social capital to 'get by' at the expense of embarking upon new enterprise for 'getting ahead'. The findings highlight the negative impacts of dark side of social capital upon the institutional performance and proposed networks between school and community through PTCs. Consequently, the policy fails to achieve the desired outcomes in such cases because of gaps in its implementation strategy. Hence, it is recommended that without eulogizing the theoretical repercussions of any development policy; it must be systematically put in black and white with the help of supplementary tools. Like PTCs should have been further vitalized by giving a comprehensive program based upon Epstein six types of parental involvement. This step would have given a clear vision to the schools' administrators and parents for mutual coordination.

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