



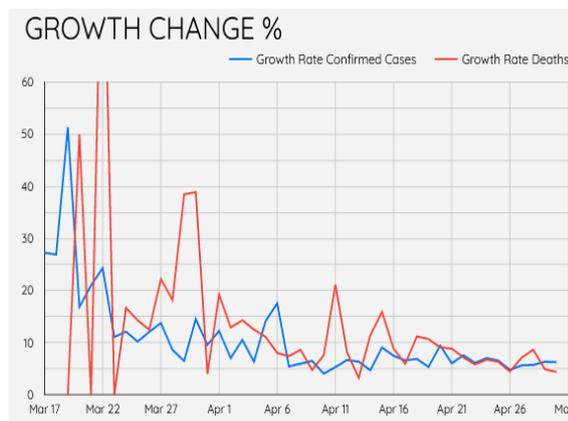
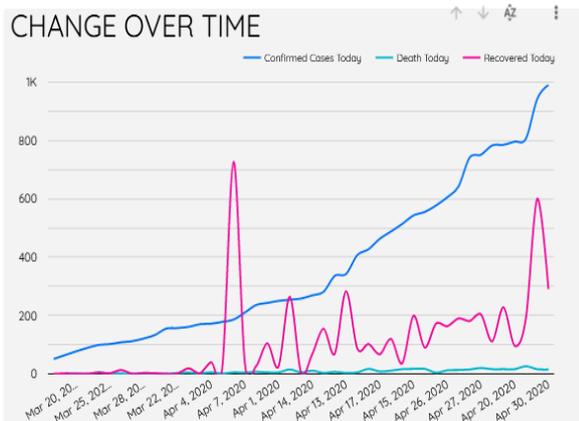
PIDE COVID-19 BLOG

No. 29

Mobilise the Social Mobilisers

The PIDE COVID-19 Blog 28 talked about the critical issue of *Coordination and Integration of All Stakeholders to Counter COVID-19*. It rightly finds that government alone cannot defeat the virus. It puts three key players upfront with their expected roles. These players are businesses, community, and the government with various suggested roles. The blog takes the discussion further on how the future might be different based on the historical experience of the past epidemics. Government on the other hand has moved towards an *EXIT* strategy based on the evidence of how the lives and livelihood are progressing. Experience of other countries, facing a situation similar to us, can provide us the much needed insight.

It is claimed that the tsunami of Coronavirus has not done as much damage as it has in many other countries, at least not as yet. But remember the PIDE COVID-19 Blog 25, titled '*COVID-19 and the Immunity Pardon*', which says, "As they say, common sense should prevail and here the common sense is that there is no immunity pardon. A human is a human be they European or African or Pakistani!". The latest position on the PIDE COVID-19 Dashboard gives a grim picture. The average growth rate post April 6th has not fallen and is around 7-8% per day with an increasing base. The good news is that the growth rate of deaths is steadily declining, meaning our health care system is fighting the battle well. With increase in hospital bed capacity through makeshift arrangements within existing system and developing new hospitals both by the federal government and provincial government are remarkable.



But we must move on, as the debate on *lives vs. livelihood* is gradually making its way into *lives through livelihood* debate. Secondly, this virus is not a short-term public health concern anymore. A study by the Harvard School of Public Health scientists titled "Projecting the Transmission Dynamics of SARS-CoV-2 through the Post-pandemic Period", published in the Science journal states that social distancing may have to be extended up to 2022 in order to minimise the next waves of this pandemic.

We do not have a Mike Tyson (vaccine) to knock it off in the first round rather it will have to be dealt like a Muhammad Ali-*fly like a butterfly and sting like a bee*. It's a long battle. Doctors can only prescribe what is available, so till that time the evidence-based consensus is pointing out towards a

very basic strategy; wash hands, wear a mask, maintain physical distancing, keep the most vulnerable group most protected and adapt.

Easier said than done. Dr. Pervaiz Tahir, basing his argument on the latest round of the PSLM and HIES 2018-19, writes in his newspaper article “...only 50 per cent of the households reported a specific place of hand washing with soap and water”. Further do we really believe the SoPs made for businesses would be even readable what to say understandable and adoptable by the majority in Pakistan. So, what to do now?

Let me go back to the PIDE COVID-19 Blog 28 and add another stakeholder which is tried and tested and appear under the banner of RSPN (Rural Support Programs Network of Pakistan). I believe that without social mobilisation the task of adopting simple, yet effective solutions seems almost impossible, the task in this case being adoption of public health measures. In democratic-developing-high deficit countries like Pakistan we have to embrace this tsunami with tools of our own.

Pakistan literacy rate is around 59%, we cannot have the same public health awareness tools as of the developed world. Having a social media campaign, or a print media campaign or even a bi-partisan ownership of awareness responsibility would not be enough. This takes me to more than two decades back when after a three days bus-walk-tractor ride I reached Skardu (Baltistan). I thought that the communities in this perilous and remote (yet a wonderland filled with natural beauty) region of Pakistan would be backward and unorganised. But to my surprise the dedication of Shoaib Sultan Khan had nurtured a dynamic and sustainable community setup through social mobilisation under the platform of Agha Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP). They knew the value of organisation, health-hygiene, community savings, community education, agro-processing and the list goes on. Field visits and living with the pioneers of this change made me realise the power of social mobilisation. This model of community based rural development was propelled through integration of such organisations into different ranks under the RSPN.

The need for social distancing would be required as long as the Coronavirus lingers and we have to quickly move to social mobilisation for handwashing, face masks use and physical distancing. Established organizations like AKRSP have a rich experience in mobilising the communities to adopt better livelihood methods. The same has to be done on a national scale for this pandemic. People need to be made aware and motivated to understand what the crisis is and what are the solutions, many of which are in our hands.

RSPN and RSPs are meeting government officials on mobilising local communities for awareness campaigns at a large scale. This must be made a part of the national plan of action. We have around 1,800 active LSOs (Local Support Organisations), in as many union councils who can do this awareness raising and can also develop SoPs for locals and monitor compliance.

It is time to mobilise the social mobilisers and win this war against the invisible enemy!

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