

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD IN PAKISTAN:
AN ANALYSIS OF COVERAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES

by

Bilal Muhammed Khan

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Supervised by: Dr. Rashid Amjad

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to take a new and extremely effective approach to understand and analyse the economic and social inequalities in Pakistan. This objective is achieved using Human Opportunity Index (HOI) developed by the World Bank. The HOI is based on the equality of opportunity principle which states that “an individual’s circumstances should not affect their access to opportunities to essential basic needs”. This research thesis measures and analyses the distribution of such opportunities for infants and young school age children in Pakistan. These opportunities range from access to healthcare, to educational achievement and basic infrastructure. This research aims to highlight (a) the areas with low basic opportunities to children, (b) the circumstances that affect the coverage of those opportunities, and (c) provides a better understanding of the nature and extent of inequalities and the factors that affect the coverage of opportunities. HOI is calculated on national and at the provincial level, while separating Karachi with a much higher human development index from the analysis of Sindh to avoid any bias in the results. To calculate the effect of different circumstances on the coverage of opportunities, linear and logistic regression models are used.

The study concludes that although the period of 2014/15 showed improvements in the coverages of most educational, health and infrastructural indicators, there were not any significant improvements, if any at all, in the HOI indicators compared to 2007/8. Results show that inequality of opportunity continues to persist and indeed in many cases increase. Notably this has happened after the passage of the 18th constitutional amendment in 2010 which shifted resources and responsibility to the provinces to spend on these very indicators is cause for considerable concern. There are also differences in the access of opportunities across provinces which the study brings out and which point to needed specific policy action. Notably the study shows that educational indicators of Punjab outperforms other provinces. Whereas, health

indicators for Sindh have not only improved over-time but they have low penalty figures which points towards a more equitable distribution across different groups. Results of KP for health indicators show that over-time the HOI of fresh drinking water has worsened off and its penalties have increased, which is a major cause of concern. Also, regression results point out that if the household head is male and literate then that can have a positive impact on the coverage rates of infrastructural opportunities.

Finally, the study proposes low-cost state-run schools and health centers across different rural areas of Pakistan to help bridge the inequality gaps. Study also suggests an increase in the federal and provincial budget for education and health, and regular monitoring of different government programs to ensure that these programs are an effective and other strategies and policies for alleviating the inequality gaps which emerge from our results.

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