

Poverty Eradication campaign in Saudi Arabia

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is not only renowned for its oil wells and lavish lifestyle but also for being the centre of Islam. The presence of the Holy cities has ensured that the Islamic influence in the kingdom is dominant. The clerics make sure that the Islamic rules and laws are strictly observed. This has resulted in huge gender disparities. Saudi women and men are brought up to adhere to strict gender roles in which many restrictions are imposed upon women and specific expectations are placed upon men despite the freedoms granted to them. It is important to acknowledge here that although the trends are changing there is still a very long way to go as far as gender disparities are concerned.



What many people fail to acknowledge, including the ruling class, is the existence of strong pockets of areas where poverty exists. Even though the kingdom offers free health care and education, there is no system for food provision nor financial assistance (Baker, 2013). In addition to the rural areas, cities like Riyadh also have its share of people who are living below the poverty line. These people depend upon the Islamic system of charity where people and Al Saud family donate money to people in financial need.

Despite the fact that Saudi Arabia is rich in oil, one in every four barrels, the reason behind the economic divide is the lavish lifestyle that people have become accustomed to. Furthermore, all oil related

jobs are mostly taken by foreigners. There is no harmony in the community as everyone is after making sure that their survival and lifestyle is observed. One more factor that creates division between people is religion. Even though all of them are Muslims they indulge in religious rigidity and sectarian divide/violence which has been further exacerbated by recent events.

As an individual growing up in Saudi Arabia, whose culture and societal norms are so distinct and inflexible, there are certain attributes that are cultivated in a person. To discuss the bio-psycho-social-cultural-spiritual being, it must be first understood that Saudi Arabia has a society which is strongly ruled by gender bias and

strict application of religious laws. As a human being, one's role in the society from everyday task to education, traveling, marriage and social orientations everything is decided according to the gender one has. If you are a man then even at a young age you are considered as a head of the household who should defend the honor of his family and earn. Many freedoms and powers are granted.

For women, on the other hand, from as early as birth the main worry is about finding a good match for marriage and maintaining the respect of a family are at the forefront of the parents (mostly mothers' minds). The mothers are charged with their responsibility of their daughters and they ensure the observance of the veil. The women are not allowed to travel without the men of their family, they are to have no jobs with too much exposure and they are to remain in their own circle of women, that is, no interaction with men (Qureshi, 2014). The psychological and social orientations are therefore also

moulded into one which justifies these actions and gender limitations so much so that after a while there is no need for someone else to make sure that one is adhering to the societal rules as the culture promotes it. One is respected for adherence to it because it is considered to be a part of religion or proof of one's spirituality.

The individual development can be analysed by observing the Maslow's hierarchy of needs in which there are five levels (Maslow, 1943). If one has to put oneself in a specific level then by observing the learning trend, changing views and set of values and resources at disposal it can be said that development lies somewhere between the levels of Esteem of Belonging, that is, not self-actualized. The two main organization which are a big part of an individual development or changing world view are mosque and university. Both provide very different sets of values and perspectives. One upholds moral and religious

philosophies whereas the others urges towards justice and objectivity. Mosques provide not only a place of worship but also a sense of belonging in a communal harmony. It teaches religious values and also allows one to be connected to fellow citizens or community members.

A university, especially if it's outside of Saudi Arabia, lets one experience the outside world where there is a strong emphasis on liberal rights like equality, basic necessities for survival, and economic development. It teaches objectivity, hard work and the power of knowledge. Both things focus on one thing though, and that is the importance of a community, a harmonious one at that. An amalgamation of the two, or careful observation, allows an individual to pick up the positive values and moral that would contribute to the alleviation of the ills in society. We see now-a-days things like economic crisis related to drop or rise in oil prices, youth unemployment and sectarian hatred and violence. Education

would help to practically employ the moral values that helps to cut down the negative impacts of these events.

In Saudi Arabia poverty is persistent not only in villages and rural areas, but also in cities. One cannot judge poverty by simply knowing the appearance of the location but rather the circumstances of an individual's life. The economic status is affected greatly by the oil prices as Saudi Arabia relies heavily on its export and sale. Mostly jobs are given to foreigners. This leads to youth unemployment which begets further economic decline. People refuse to help each other either because their own financial or family situation does not allow it or because of sectarian animosity. These poverty issues also lead people towards radicalization because of terror organization like Islamic State and Al-Qaeda attract these people using economic incentives (Zuhur, 2011).

If one wants to alleviate poverty then the few things should be kept in focus. The economy must be diversified,

that is, it must expand beyond oil. Corruption should be minimized (if not eliminated), gender disparity should be ended, religious tolerance and communal harmony must be observed and promoted. These few factors, should be the main focus but what one must realize is that it is important that for this strategy to be effective the government and civil society must work together. The reason for specifically mentioning these factors for effectively alleviating poverty is because oil has been the centre of almost all of Saudi Arabia export and government revenues. If the economy is expected to survive and develop like other economies of the world then it important that while Saudi Arabia takes advantage of its resource it does not become dependent upon it.

Similarly in this regard, care should be taken that citizens are preferred for local jobs so as to minimize the youth unemployment. It is high time that Saudi Arabia allows its women citizens to be a

productive part of the society and in the development of its economy because it is impossible for a country's economy to boost if all its resources are not used effectively, including people. One of the main reasons for poverty is corruption and if it's properly monitored then many of the resentment and money allocation problems can be minimized. In Saudi society the contemporary problems like religious intolerance has led to violence, economic decline and disunity in the society.

On the basis of reasons, the bond of community must strengthened so that the culture of helping fellow citizens can be reinvigorated, that is of charity. Only if the community, as a whole, decides to change the situation, can it happen. The lone aspirations or acts of civil society or the government cannot prove to be effective unless all parts of the society take action and responsibility of developing their economy and society in the manner to alleviate all problems in the kingdom inclusive of poverty. The kingdom and its

people should make development in moral as well as financial regards. The poverty alleviation programmes of Saudi government must be restarted and restructured in a manner that all previous loopholes and problems must be corrected. Philanthropy initiatives by the big domestic companies and MNCs must be encouraged (Ramady, 2010).

There are a few limitations to this strategy and its implementation which could hinder the result that it would reap. Poverty is a multidimensional problem and it can be cured by focusing on just one dimension of the problem. The population growth rates and the speed at which they are increasing would jeopardize or reduce the effectiveness of this problem as more and more people would put pressure on the allocation of already scarce resources'. There is also a direct link of poverty with food and water security that must not be overlooked. Other problems include limitations with respect to economic divide, women disparity, religious

discriminations, unemployment, and lack of data.

Reduction of poverty must be a prime concern for any responsible government as it leads to outcomes that are all too terrible. Poverty goes hand in hand with food insecurity, water insecurity, high mortality rates (both adult and child), malnutrition and violence. A proper poverty eradication plan would be helpful in maintaining peace and stability of a country. If left unchecked, poverty and the economic frustration coupled with fear for survival and anger upon economic disparity would lead to public unrest or civil war. To prevent the people from suffering, death rates from increasing and country from declining it is imperative that the basic necessities for survival are given to people along with opportunities for progress. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must be adopted and implemented to end poverty and marginalization (WAQAS, 2015).

As each and every community is included in the building and development process, social cohesion and economic development would increase. The civil society, government and citizens must all work together. Poverty eradication can lead to economic development. The socioeconomic divide can only result in violence as the recent events prove. People do not tend to turn towards violence if there is a strong sense of community and provision of all rights and services. The limitations to an effective social work mentioned above can overcome by

effective planning, economic incentives, flexibility in thinking and community building.

References

Baker, A. (2013, May 23). *Rich Nation, Poor People: Saudi Arabia* by Lynsey Addario. Retrieved from Time: <http://time.com/3679537/rich-nation-poor-people-saudi-arabia/>

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 370-396.

Qureshi, R. (2014). Human Resources Development and the status of Women Labor Force in Saudi Arabia A Critical Analysis. *International Journal of Current Research and Academic Review*, 144-155.

Ramady, M. A. (2010). *The Saudi Arabian Economy: Policies, Achievements, and Challenges*. Springer Science & Business Media.

WAQAS, M. (2015, October 21). *Challenge of poverty alleviation*. Retrieved from Arab News: <http://www.arabnews.com/columns/news/823386>

Zuhur, S. (2011). *Saudi Arabia*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

IJSER