

## **ACADEMIC CONSTRUCT OF SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES AND SOCIAL SAFETY NET**

**Waseem Ishaque<sup>1</sup>**

**Dr Saima Shaikh<sup>2</sup>**

**Dr. Akbar Ali Mahesar<sup>3</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*Interest in safety nets and social protection is developing around the globe manifold. Ways of consolidating them are called for in high-level statements, researched in academic articles, and implemented by practitioners. Such progresses are reassuring and ways to touch on the most sensitive human need and long-standing humanitarian and developmental challenges. However, the concept remains confounded, and there is compelling need to clarify several issues related to social safety. Poverty is one of the oldest monetary concerns in the history of human civilization that leads to host of socioeconomic problems. Generally, the developing countries but more specifically the under developed countries are predominantly suffering from this issue. The experience of developing countries reveals that lack of capital is not the main reason of slow development process instead such countries are fundamentally suffering from; absence of good governance, non-continuation of long run productive and developmental projects, political instability, corruption and inability of politicians etc, while underdeveloped countries have huge problems of insufficiency of resources and lack of driving programmes for poverty alleviation. In such situations, the Social Safety*

---

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

<sup>2</sup> Chairperson, Department of Sociology, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

*Net caters for most under privileged and needy people to sustain them on a respectable living standard and enable them to contribute as important social members of community and society as a whole. The scholars use the term Social Safety Net such that it encompasses private and public mechanisms that assist individuals in maintaining a minimum level of consumption. Examples of private Social Safety Nets include transfers from family members, friends, neighbors and community members and institutions, including NGOs, while those of public Social Safety Nets refer to the support which individuals can hope for from the government, through programs which generate assets or employment, transfer income, or provide basic social services, as a means of helping affected individuals from falling below the designated minimum standard of living. Social protection is not just a social but an economic and security need, and should be seen as a measure to promote inclusive human development and collective sense of security. This article will describe the academic construct of social safety net, criteria for efficient social safety net and how it can optimally benefit the needy people This is academic discourse, therefore views expressed are author's own.*

**Keywords:** *Social Safety, Social Protection, Human Security, Poverty Alleviation*

### **Introduction**

Social Safety Nets (SSN) are public interventions, mostly non-contributory transfers, aiming at preventing the poor and the vulnerable from falling below a certain level of poverty. These interventions can be public or generated by private sources in an organized (formal) or informal manner. Although there are conflicting views about the purpose served by the safety nets, yet the consensus seems to have been arrived that the social safety nets are doing much more than being only a welfare intervention to provide a cover to individuals from transient periods of poverty. Thus, it can be safely said that Social Safety Nets go much beyond the conventional relief to the immediate needy as they “also serve to

protect individuals from lifetime poverty that can arise from, say, lack of education and poor health, particularly in childhood". This far reaching effect of social safety nets should form the basis of the government's commitment towards allocating funds to the sector. Experts are of the view that the Social Safety Net is a stimulus that not only brings the poor out of the vulnerable position but also help stabilize the economies (Julie, V.D 2007). Pakistan is marred by various socio economic and socio political problems with deficit budget, endemic corruption and weak governance therefore, human development index is far below the timelines set forth by the United Nations Millennium Development goals. The phenomena of terrorism has severely curtailed government's capacity for spending on socio economic development as much of the funding was pumped in defeating this menace, leaving negligible budget for developmental activities. Despite all that, there is a silver lining which is keeping the Pakistani society in a well-knit manner. Both formal and informal social safety nets, contributions of philanthropists and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is commendable. SSN in Pakistan is quite mature and fairly developed which is aimed at providing economic and security need, and should be viewed as a measure to promote inclusive human development, reduce poverty, and help enhancing economic growth. Social protection can also play a vital role in poverty reduction as benefits of economic growth cannot reach the poor automatically and there is a need for a supporting system to make that happen.

### **Significance of research article**

The concept of social safety is quite elusive in Pakistan. Despite several debates, the academic construct of SSN and its manifestation remains an enigma. Social safety is linchpin towards human security, which is growing attention of the world as it has shifted its focus from traditional security in military domain. This article highlights academic construct of social safety net by giving its viable definitions, prerequisites and historical perspective for facilitating theoretical understanding of SSN.

### **Research Methodology**

The article has been completed by using qualitative research method.

### **Research Questions**

The article has been constructed by finding answers to following questions;

Q 1: What is the importance of social safety net and how it contributes towards enhancing social security?

Q 2: What are the generally used terms defining the notions of social safety?

Q 3: What are the generally accepted prerequisites of good safety net?

### **Contributions of Social Safety Net towards Development of Society**

Safety nets are part of a broader poverty reduction strategy—interacting with and working alongside of social insurance; health, education, and financial services; the provision of utilities and roads; and other policies aimed at reducing poverty and managing risk. Safety nets redistribute income to the poorest and most vulnerable, with an immediate impact on poverty and inequality. Most societies hold strong convictions that adequate provision for the poor is required, though they may differ in how this should be achieved. Safety nets can enable households to make better investments in their future. In this role, safety nets basically act to remedy credit market failures, allowing households to take up investment opportunities that they would otherwise miss—both in the human capital of their children and in the livelihoods of the earners. Safety nets help households manage risk (Carlo, C & Renos, V, 2009). At minimum, safety net programs help households facing hard times avoid irreversible losses, allowing them to maintain the household and business assets, on which their livelihoods are based, and to adequately nourish and school their children. At best, they can provide an insurance element that lets households make choices about livelihoods that yield higher earnings. Safety nets thus both protect households and promote their independence. Safety nets allow governments to make choices that support efficiency and growth. An adequate permanent social assistance system can fulfill whatever redistributive goals the society has, freeing other sectors from the role and letting them concentrate on efficient provision of services. Thus, for example, energy sectors can price for efficiency, and trade policy can focus on growth rather than job protection. Short-term safety net programs can compensate those negatively affected by needed reforms or who may oppose and stall these reforms.

### **Theoretical Description of Social Safety Nets**

#### **Conceptual underpinnings of SSN**

Despite growing interest, the perception of safety nets remains abstract and problematic to comprehension. Part of this difficulty stalks from the burgeoning of vocabulary and methods, which has made the definition of safety nets particularly stimulating. As safety nets are part of most national public policy discussions, debates feed into broader issues of public versus market-based interventions. Especially pressing are the debates between stimulating productivity development and endorsing equity, and between enhancing the pie or dividing the pie.

**Social protection and social safety net**

There are no commonly acknowledged definitions of social protection and safety nets. Governments and donors or other voluntary associates embrace varying approaches. Most definitions are broad and comprehensive, but actors adopt a range of different viewpoints on the objectives, scope and configuration of social protection. It is extensively recognized that social safety nets (or simply ‘safety nets’) are a subset of broader social protection systems. Safety nets include classically the non-contributory transfers in cash or in-kind, which can be unconditional or conditional – such as conditional cash transfers, school feeding, food for work and cash for work – and on other interventions to improve admittance to food and basic essentials, such as price subsidies nets, whereas social protection also includes aspects of labour market policies and insurance options, such as contributory pensions and health insurance, and aspects of other sectoral policies for education, health, nutrition etc. This basic concept of social security thus addresses three crucial features, i.e. those of income protection, health provision and child associated benefits. The other important feature of the concept of social security is that it is administered or monitored by the state as part of statutory schemes. The two main components of social security are social insurance and tax financed social benefits. Tax-financed benefits are usually targeted on the needy and are generally awarded on the basis of a means test. Social insurance (Neubourg, C., Julie, C., & Roelen, R, 2007), on the other hand, is financed by contributions (usually statutory) by the employers and in many countries by the employees as well, and benefits are awarded in the case of a contingency.

**Formal and informal safety nets**

Formal and informal safety nets are, generally, distinguished by law enforcement: formal safety nets are those which legally pledge individual’s admittance to economic or social support while informal safety nets provide support to individuals to promise them of attaining or remaining above the nominated minimum standard of living in the absence of legal guarantee.

**Describing good safety nets**

Safety net systems are generally knitted with numerous programs which are aimed at complementing each other as well as supplementing other social policies. Scholars therefore describes a good safety net system as an combination of well-designed and well-implemented programs. The defined prerequisite also highlights applicability, adequacy, equitability, cost-effectiveness, incentive compatibility, sustenance and dynamism as the benchmark parameters for an ideal and excellent SSN.

**Appropriate**

The range of programs used and the balance between them and with the other elements of public policy should correspond to the particular needs of the country. Each program should be adapted which should best fit with the prevailing environment of that country.

**Adequate**

The Safety Net Schemes should overall covers the various groups in need of assistance—the chronic poor, the transient poor, those affected by reforms, and all the various subsets of these groups. Individual programmes should provide full coverage and eloquent benefits to whichever subset of the population they are designed to assist.

**Equitable**

The safety net should treat recipients in a nondiscriminatory and equitable way (Shadi, H, 2003). In particular, it should aim to provide the same benefits to individuals or households that are equal in all important respects (horizontal equity) and may provide more generous benefits to the poorest recipients (vertical equity).

**Cost-effectiveness**

Cost-effective programs conduit most program assets to their anticipated target group. They also economize the administrative capitals required to implement the programme in two ways. **First**, at the level of the whole safety net system, they avoid shattering and the subsequent need to develop administrative systems without realizing economies of scale. **Second**, they run efficiently with the minimum resources required to achieve the anticipated impact, but with adequate resources to execute all programme and functions well in meeting the ends.

**Compatible incentive**

Safety nets can change households' behavior, for better or worse. To ensure that the balance of changes is positive, the role of safety nets should be kept to consistent with appropriateness. The safety net system often include programmes that unambiguously help build assets or incomes of their individual clients or communities by linking transfers to required or voluntary programme. Public works programmes can provide physical assets to communities while conditional cash transfers build human capital of households. Links to financial, job search, training, or social care services may help households raise their incomes and eventually the living standards.

**Sustainable**

Judicious safety net systems are financially maintainable, in that they are pursued in a balanced manner with other aspects of governmental expenditures. Individual programs should be both financially and politically sustainable so that stop and restart cycles are eluded, which results in colossal loss of prospects for efficient administration. In low-income countries, programmes started with donor support are gradually incorporated into the public sector for sustainable development programmes.

**Dynamic**

A good safety net system will develop over a period of time. The suitable balance of programmes will change as the economy grows and changes, as other elements of policy develop, or when shocks occur. The management of specific programmes should also evolve as problems are solved and new standards set.

**Theoretical Linkage of SSN**

The concept of Social Safety Net (SSN) has a theoretical linkage with the terms as mentioned below.

**Egalitarianism**

Egalitarianism (Richard. A, 2002) (derived from the French word *égal*, meaning "equal"), is inclination of thought that favours equality of some kind in the whole process. Its general principle is that people should be treated as equals on certain dimensions such as religiously, politically, economically, socially, or culturally. Egalitarian principles maintain that all human persons are equal in fundamental worth or moral status. In large part, it is a response to the abuses of statist development and has two distinct definitions in modern English. It is defined either as a political doctrine that holds that all people should be treated as equals and have the same political, economic, social, and civil rights or as a social philosophy advocating the removal of economic inequalities among people or the decentralization of power. It is considered by some to be the natural state of society. Undoubtedly, social inequality is the cause of many social problems. Some specifically focused egalitarian concerns include economic, legal, political, gender based , racial inequality, and asset-based.

**Totalitarianism**

It is a political system where the state, usually under the control of a single political person, faction, or class, recognizes unlimited authority and strives to control every aspect of public and private life (Oxford University Press, 1999).

Totalitarianism is generally characterized by the coincidence of authoritarianism, where ordinary citizens have no significant share in state decision making.

### **Mutualism**

Is an anarchist school of thought, who envisioned a society where each person might possess a means of manufacturing, either individually or collectively, with trade representing equivalent amounts of labor in the free market. Integral to the scheme was the establishment of a mutual-credit bank that would provide to producers at a minimal interest rate, just high enough to cover administration. Mutualists oppose the notion of individuals receiving an income through loans, investments, **and** rent, as they believe these individuals are not laboring. Some of them argue that if state intervention ceased, these types of incomes would disappear due to increased competition in investment.

### **Essential components of social safety net**

To be effective, social safety nets must be designed on the basis of an understanding of the extent and nature of poverty. They must respond to the needs of those groups most likely to be affected by the process of structural adjustment. As such, there are generally at least three types of programs. The first is long-term financial assistance to those who are unable, more or less, permanently, to provide for themselves through work. This group includes handicapped and disabled people, orphans, widows, etc. The second type of program is designed for those who are able to work but whose incomes are low and irregular. The goal here is to smooth income and consumption in slack seasons. and the third type of programs target those people normally capable of earning adequate incomes but who are temporarily unable to earn a living because of shocks or downturns in the economy such as, in Pakistan, the prevailing recession.

### **Islamic Concept of Social Safety**

In Islam poverty is a multi-dimensional concept. Term used in Islamic literature for a poor person is "*Faqeer*". A person is considered to be a Faqeer or Poor who do not have sufficient material wealth in hand to satisfy his/her basic needs (Shirazi N, 1996). The inbuilt instruments in Islam are Zakat, Sadaqa and Qarz-e-Hasna which are deliberated further in succeeding paras.

### **Zakat**

Zakat means 'purification' and 'growth'. (Mohammad, 1991) It is compulsory for every Muslim who possesses over a approved limit of wealth for at least one year to pay a definite amount to poor. The Zakat proceeds are to be distributed among poor and needy. To protect the self respect of poor Allah S.W.T has declared that

Zakat is the “right” of poor in wealth of rich. Payers of Zakat do not oblige poor by giving Zakat rather they just give them their due “right”. Islam has attached so much importance to Zakat that it is one of the five pillars of Islam. Zakat is due on accumulated wealth that has been in the ownership of a person for at least one year. The dynamics of Zakat are completely defined in Islamic Jurisprudence. The recipients of Zakat are also defined in Quran and cannot be paid out of defined classifications.

### **Sadqa**

Zakat imposed by Islam can easily be enough to solve the problems of poverty and malnourishment in the Islamic society in particular. However, Islam has adopted a multi-dimensional poverty reduction approaches by encouraging Muslims to give charity in addition to the compulsory Zakat. Islam has given so much importance to social safety and care for others. For example, the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) once said that the person who sleeps full while his neighbour sleeps hungry is not a true believer. Islam has promoted charity and giving in ways like if one Muslim is not able to fulfill his Islamic duties he is required to feed certain number of poor people. For example, for the persons who are not able to fast in Ramadan, they are required to feed some poor people for each day they do not fast.

### **Qarz e Hasna or Microfinance support**

Islam and Microfinance are by no means comparable. Islam is a complete code of life and a divine revelation while Microfinance is just a tiny part of human life and in current form is a human invention. These two are by no means compared, rather, just to find out the common objectives. The underlying assumption is that Microfinance objectives tried to be achieved in Islamic way will be huge success. Core Objective of Microfinance is to eradicate poverty i.e. to raise income levels and to broaden financial markets by providing financial and non-financial services to the financially excluded people. Microfinance targets the poor and the economically active poor in the society to assist them create wealth, accumulate assets and raise income to smooth consumption.

### **Conclusion**

Poverty affects over a quarter of Pakistani population, and vulnerability estimates suggest that many more households, approximately 56% of the population are vulnerable to remain or fall into poverty. Poverty and vulnerability levels are highest among rural households, particularly those employed in the agricultural sector or those with no access to land or other productive assets, and among large households and children. They are also positively correlated with low human

capital, making the low level and high inequality of health, nutrition, and education outcomes in Pakistan particularly worrisome as they contribute to perpetuate intergenerational poverty. Thus, in addressing welfare, it is useful to factor in both poverty and vulnerability to poverty. The concept of social safety is not commonly understood in Pakistan as it generally stays in the back burner. This article has highlighted notional definitions of social safety for facilitating theoretical assimilation of Social safety, which if understood and adopted well will have profound impact on overall poverty reduction in Pakistan.

### **Reference**

- Carlo, C & Renos,V. (2209). Risk and Vulnerability Considerations in Poverty Analysis: Recent Advances and Future Directions.
- Julie, V. D. (2007). Reaching the Poor and Vulnerable: Targeting Strategies for Social Funds and other Community-Driven Programs.
- Mohammad, F. (1991). Prospects of Poverty Eradication Through the Existing Zakat System in Pakistan. *The Pakistan Development Review*.
- Neubourg, C., Julie, C., & Roelen, R. (2007). Social Safety Nets and Targeted Social Assistance.
- Oxford University Press.(2006). Totalitarianism definition and concepts.
- Richard, A.(2002). Egalitarianism. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from the website *Stanford Encyclopedia of Education website* : [www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/egalitarianism](http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/egalitarianism).
- Shirazi, N. (1996). *System of Zakat in Pakistan: An Appraisal*. Islamic Research Institute Press, Islamabad.
- Shadi, H. (2003). An Islamic Alternative? Equality, Redistributive Justice, and the Welfare State in the Caliphate of Umar. *Monthly Islamic Journal*