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## B. Only a Healthy Population Can be an Asset for a Country

### Outline

#### 1- Introduction

Thesis Statement: The health of a population is a key determinant of how a country utilizes its population. People cannot contribute to national life unless they enjoy good health. It is necessary for states to provide sound healthcare services to its people so that they can in turn be of service to the nation.

#### 2- The Correlation between a Population's health and its productivity

#### 3- The Current Status of health and population growth

- a- Food insecurity driven malnutrition
- b- Safety of the healthcare workforce amid conflicts
- c- ~~Poor~~ Poor health and low workforce participation
- d- SDG 3 and the basic right to health
- e- Status of health and healthcare in Pakistan

#### 4- Causes behind the deplorable health status

- a- Insufficient allocation of funds for healthcare
- b- A conflict-driven world that jeopardizes the health of populations
- c- The widening economic inequality

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d- Poor health status of women rendering them unproductive

5- The impacts of a poor population health

a- Strain on the governance structure in terms of meeting growing needs

b- Rising poverty rates which challenge governments

c- Lower economic output and participation in national life.

d- Growing social inequalities

e- Poor human development turning the population into a burden

f- How Pakistan suffers at the hands of a poor population health

~~How can the situation be improved~~

6- How the situation can be improved

a- Adequate resource and fund allocation for healthcare

b- Providing security to healthcare workforce in conflict areas and around the world

c- Meeting the SDG 3 targets

7- Conclusion

In the words of the late American historian and scholar for peace, justice and humanity, Howard Zinn, "To be hopeful in bad-times is not just foolishly romantic. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something." The current status of health is not impressive but it is still not beyond hope. By investing in health of the people, states can turn their populations into an asset. It is only a healthy population that can be a productive population. There are many challenges states are facing regarding the health security of respective populations. There is the challenge of food insecurity driving malnutrition and the challenge of insecure healthcare system amid conflict. A poor health status leads to a poor and non-inclusive workforce participation. The Sustainable Development Goals set up by the United Nations (UN) outline the importance of ~~health~~ the basic right to health. Healthcare in Pakistan is severely lacking on many fronts. Some of the major causes could be listed as a low allocation of funds for entering the health sector, conflicts around the world which hamper progress on health security, the ever-widening economic gap that gives rise to socio-economic inequality and the poor

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health status of women which renders them dependent and unproductive. The impacts of an unhealthy population are far reaching. It puts a strain on the governance structure of a state and also gives rise to poverty. Due to a poor health, populations cannot participate in national life which brings in its wake social inequality. A population with poor health becomes a burden on the state, as can be seen in the case of Pakistan. An adequate resource allocation, ensuring the security of healthcare systems and ~~need~~ meeting the SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) can significantly improve the health status of populations.

The right to health is a basic human right. The constitution of Pakistan secures this right for the people of Pakistan. Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) laid out by the UN to be met by individual nations by 2030 also dedicate its goal 3 (SDG3) for universal healthcare. It goes without saying that no population can be an asset to its state unless it enjoys sound health. Most of the countries which have failed in meeting healthcare goals regarding ~~its~~ their populations have also failed in turning their populations into a national

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asset. In Pakistan, women suffer from poor health where 41 percent of all women in their reproductive age (15-49) suffer from anemia, ~~this~~ ~~poor~~ ~~health~~ of ~~women~~ according to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This poor health status translates into a lower workforce participation in women which stood at 25 percent for the year 2022 based on International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates. This shows how health ~~correlates~~ correlates with the productivity of a population, deciding whether a population is an asset or a burden for the state.

Currently, the world is facing a major health crisis. Despite the fact that the world produces more food than it needs, there are millions of hungry people all over the world. A population lacking access to ~~nutritious~~ nutritious food cannot develop soundly. According to the World Food Program (WFP), there are 828 million hungry people globally. In Pakistan, according to the Pakistan Nutrition Humanitarian Overview (2022), there is an acute malnutrition rate of 17.7%. And an undernourished and malnourished population fails to become an asset for its nation.

Moreover, the world of

today is driven by conflicts and disasters. The sector most vulnerable to these conflicts and disasters is the health sector. A conflict and disaster ridden state fails to keep up with the health care needs of its population. According to the United States (US) based Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC), the year 2022 was the most severe year of attacks against healthcare globally and the most attacks committed in a single year in one country were in Ukraine which is currently ravaged by war. In Pakistan, the floods of 2022 wreaked havoc on people's health and the healthcare systems. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), at least 650,000 pregnant women were in dire need of maternal health services. ~~Therefore~~, in this way, conflicts and disasters test the state's ability to secure the health of its population.

Going forward, poor health of a population results in poor workforce participation. A poor workforce participation means that there are more dependent cohorts.

Without enjoying good health, people find it hard to positively contribute to the national economy. The women in Pakistan have one of the

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lowest labor force participation at merely 25 percent in 2022 as per the ILO estimates primarily because of a poor health status. Only if people are in a good health can they prove an asset for the state they belong to.

Furthermore, the goal 3 of the UN's SDGs is dedicated to healthcare. This has shed international light on the importance of a population's health. Countries lack by huge margins, especially in the low-income nations, in moving towards universal healthcare. Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world and yet it faces a severe shortage of health workforce. Against 44.5 physicians, Nurses, Midwives (PNM) per 10,000 people, the global indicative threshold to achieve SDG targets on health, Pakistan had 15.7 PNM per 10,000 people in 2021 as per Pakistan's first 'Human resources for health vision (2018-2030)'. Failure of states to meet the SDG targets ~~have~~ has jeopardized their population's health status.

Taking Pakistan into consideration, the status of health of Pakistan's population is deplorable. Universal health coverage is very low. Despite social welfare programs like the Ehsaas program and the Benazir Income

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Support Program (BLSP) running in the country. Pakistan has one of the highest under 5 mortality rate at 63.3 per 1000 live births according to the United Nations Children's Fund. Some 53,000 children under 5 die every year from diarrhoea every year (UNICEF). Thus, the health status of people in Pakistan is not impressive.

One ~~some~~ of the major reasons why health status suffers in so many ways and in so many places is an insufficient allocation of funds or resources. Human development is one of the most neglected sectors when it comes to resource allocation especially in the case of low or middle income countries. Financing is a major issue for countries with limited resources.

Pakistan has one of the fastest population growth rates at 1.98 percent according to the UN world population prospects (2022). But a lack of resources means a lower fund allocation for health sector which fails in meeting the needs of this growing population.

According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan (2022-2023), Public health expenditure in fiscal year 2022 was a mere 1.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Therefore, a lack of resources is a major impediment

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to achieving national health.

Moreover, conflict in different parts of the world has far reaching effects. The health sector is not immune to the negative impacts of wars and conflicts ~~is~~ either.

Although the international law insulates the health sector from being used or damaged in wars, this hardly translates to the realities on ground. The example of the polio disease can be taken. Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only two countries where the polio virus is still not eradicated.

According to the us based SHCC, acts of violence in Pakistan in the year 2022 more than doubled from 7 in 2021 to 16 in 2022 of which 90 percent were against polio healthworkers. Half of the attacks against healthcare globally were in Ukraine and Myanmar (SHCC), both of which are conflict zones. Thus, conflict and violence ~~has~~ ~~severely~~ hampers healthcare services around the world.

Furthermore, poor national health means a widening inequality. Social, economic and gender ~~inequality~~ ~~are~~ inequalities come to the surface as a result of an unhealthy population. In countries where people have access to adequate healthcare, people enjoy a

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more inclusive environment. Pakistan despite being the 5<sup>th</sup> most populous country, was ranked 41 of the major economies in 2022 as per World Data. This is primarily because the state of Pakistan has failed in utilizing its female population which made up to 49.6 percent of the total population in 2022 according to the World Bank (WB). Moreover, the rural-urban divide in health and subsequently in economic participation is also of significance. In this way, unequal access to health translate to social and economic inequalities.

In Pakistan and in other low-income countries, a poor health status of women renders them unproductive and dependent. Women, despite being 49.7 percent of the global population, do not enjoy equal economic participation compared to their male counterparts. Women in Pakistan make up 49.6 of the total population (WB) but have only 25 percent of workforce participation as per the ILO (2022) owing to their poor health where 41 percent of women between the age of 15 and 49 are anemic (UNICEF). Women, therefore, need a better health status before they can be an

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asset to their respective nations.

A poor population health has many negative impacts. A population that is not healthy becomes a liability for the state instead of becoming an asset. The state of Pakistan is doing poorly on the Human Development Index (HDI) published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP's HDI). Pakistan is ranked 161<sup>st</sup> out of the total 192 countries. More and more people are dependent on the state for meeting their basic needs.

Furthermore, an unhealthy and unproductive population gives rise to poverty. A sound health is a prerequisite for economic participation and alleviation from poverty. The Covid-19 pandemic put the world in a health emergency where people all over the world had to halt their economic activities. People were unable to meet their basic needs as in the case of Pakistan where the poor were dependent on charity for meeting their household expenditures. In this way, health plays a significant role in curbing poverty rates nationally and internationally.

One of the most direct impacts of a nation's population's health is on the economy of a nation.

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Poor health ~~means~~ means poor economic participation. This applies to both the mental and the physical health of people. Taking the example of Pakistan, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 20,000 Pakistanis committed suicide in 2021. 1 in every 5 persons suffers from a psychological disorder (WHO). Mental health is one of the most neglected sectors even within the ~~the~~ general healthcare system in Pakistan. With such a mental state, populations can hardly prove beneficial for their nations.

Moreover, ~~the~~ poor health of a population gives rise to social inequalities. Divisions form on social, gender, economic and ethnic lines. A lack of resources gives rise to an unhealthy competition amongst the masses. Pakistan ~~suffered~~ suffers from a clearly defined gender inequality where women hold an inferior position to their male counterparts. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Parity Index (2023) ranks Pakistan at 142<sup>nd</sup> place out of the total 146 countries ranked. Women suffer from poor health in Pakistan which ~~is~~ results in poor economic and political participation of the women. Therefore, health and

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Healthcare are crucial determinants of how inclusive a society would be.

Furthermore, ~~poor~~ countries with a population of poor health do poorly on human development indices.

Human development is closely related to the basic human rights of which the right to health is an integral part.

The world is currently facing multiple humanitarian crises. According to the 2023 Hunger Funding Gap Report,

1 in 10 worldwide are undernourished and as many as 50 million in 45 countries are on the verge of famine.

Hunger and malnutrition has serious consequences for an individual. As per the UN's HDI (2022), human development has declined in 9 out of 10 countries.

Hence, healthcare and health status of a population plays a significant role in human development of a nation.

Unfortunately, Pakistan is suffering from a national health crisis. Poor economic performance has led to inadequate resource allocation for the health sector in Pakistan. Women and children are bearing the brunt of the healthcare failure in Pakistan. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan for the year 2022-2023 (ESP 2022-23), the

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Government allocated a new 1.4 percent of the GDP for health sector for the fiscal year 2022 (FY22). Pakistan has one of the highest maternal and under 5 mortality rates at 154/100,000 births and ~~63.6~~ ~~63.3/1000~~ 63.3/1000 live births respectively as per UNICEF. Therefore, Pakistan's performance in ensuring good health for its population is not impressive.

In the words of Albert Einstein, "We cannot solve a problem with the ways of thinking that created it". In order to improve the status of health of populations around the world, some necessary changes need to be made. Without adequate ~~from~~ finance, status of health cannot be improved. Health sectors face severe shortage of workforce globally. Incentives should be provided to attract more people to the field. In Pakistan, the resource allocation needs to be raised to at least 4 percent of the GDP to for taking to a population of more than <sup>and finance</sup> 241 million (2023 national census). Resource is the lifeblood of any sector and the same goes for the health sector.

Another important step to be taken for ensuring the provision



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of adequate health services to the people is improving the security situations in different countries regarding health services. If the healthcare workforce does not feel safe, it would be impossible for it to provide health services to others. In Pakistan, acts of violence against polio vaccination drives have made it necessary for polio workers to be escorted by a police or Army personnel. This has proved a major hindrance in the way of eliminating the virus in Pakistan. Hence, it is of immense importance that healthcare providers enjoy complete security even in conflict zones.

Last but not the least, the SDG 3 target on healthcare to which the world has committed itself should be met. The SDGs were adopted unanimously by ~~the~~ all the UN member states ~~by~~ but nations have failed in meeting their targets so far. There is a ~~an~~ need for all the nations to recommit themselves to the SDGs so and especially to the SDG 3 so that people can live a life of dignity and prosperity. The developed world should help ~~develop~~ the ~~developing~~ developing countries ~~like~~ like Pakistan in reaching

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their set targets.

To sum it all up, despite its immense importance, the health sector globally is the most neglected one due to which populations have failed to enjoy good and sound health which would allow them to contribute to their respective nations in a positive manner. The world is ravaged by conflicts which has compounded health vulnerabilities of people. An insufficient allocation of funds, a shortage of healthcare workforce, economic inequality and gender inequality have led a poor health status among populations.

This has resulted in poor economic and social growth, a rise in poverty rates, poor human development which in turn puts a strain on the governance structure of a country where the population becomes a liability for the state. ~~Ady~~ However, adequate resource allocation, providing security to healthcare systems and workforce and moving towards achieving SDG targets can help improve the situation.

The health of a population is a key determinant of how a country utilizes its population. People cannot contribute to national life unless they enjoy good health. It is,

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