Integrating Pakistan’s Tribal Areas into the National Picture

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Abstract

The tribal areas’ entire structure was largely unchanged. Somehow the basic assumption was that the gradual economic development of these areas would bring ultimate integration of these areas into Pakistan. The debate on the developmental paradigm of tribal areas is stuck around the colonial policy of isolation and nationalistic policy of incorporation and integration. This neglect of not incorporating the tribal areas into mainstream Pakistan has caused innumerable problems for the government and the people of Pakistan. Therefore, the need of the hour is that the Government of Pakistan (GoP) may take positive steps for re-organization and re-structuring the existing system of the tribal areas by adopting and implementing some new model like it has ensured for Gilgit-Baltistan.

Introduction

“Tribal areas are generally considered to be the areas having the predominance of tribal population. They are differentiated by geographical isolation, primitive traits, distant culture and economic backwardness.”

The tribes are an ancient social organization as explained by the Holy Quran: “O men! Behold, I have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another (49: 13).”

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“Tribalism is considered as a belief in faithfulness in one’s own kind, identified by ethnicity, language, culture and religion and even in the 20th Century this belief is strengthening itself and progressing.”

Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are located in Pakistan along the western border touching Afghanistan. FATA is comprised of seven administrative districts called agencies. Apart from these agencies, FATA has six Frontier Regions (FRs) which are administered by the neighborhood settled areas’ district administrations. Pakistan is not the only country having tribal areas. Many other countries have an ample number of such areas including India where they are administered through the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

The population of a war-hit area can be divided on the basis of traditional clan and tribal loyalties. The people adapt to manage their own affairs without outside interference. The agencies are directly administered by the Federal Government through the Governor as its representative the FRs are administered by the Provincial Government in collaboration with the Federal Government.

The tribal areas of Pakistan have a history of isolation and backwardness primarily because these were kept away from the mainstream by the Mughals, the British, and even by the Pakistani rulers for their own vested interests. The people of this region always defended their homeland against all sorts of external aggressions. With the passage of time, this attitude has made them passionately autonomous.

The British entered the tribal areas for the first time in 1894 and attempted to prevent these tribesmen from plundering their territory. With this mindset, the British tried to implement different policies to administer this area. After independence of Pakistan and India in 1947, the tribesmen expressed their popular will to become part of Pakistan.
The tribes and founding father of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, agreed on the agenda that agreements between the former and the British government would be kept unchanged. The British adopted the system of managing the affairs in tribal areas according to the customs and traditions of the tribesmen. Moreover, it ensured minimum interference from the Government thus satisfying the tribesmen’s ego.

Since the independence of Pakistan, the entire structure of the tribal areas was left largely unaltered. It was considered that gradual economic development of these areas would bring ultimate integration of the area with Pakistan. The debate on the developmental paradigm of tribal areas is stuck around the colonial policy of isolation and nationalistic policy of incorporation and integration. There have been strong calls advocating an end to the tribal status of this area and demand to bring this respective area into national mainstream.

Contrary to the former view, some scholars like Robert Nichols favor the tribal system and take the stance that it is not very easy to bring these tribal areas into the mainstream because of some notable reasons. Firstly, tribal areas has a specific judicial system i.e. Jirga while the settled area’s criminal justice system reflects a different strand which is unacceptable for tribal people. Moreover, he argues that civil, military, legal, and administrative institutions in commonwealth countries including Pakistan are somehow more or less based on the same model as put by the British. Therefore, singling out only FATA as a colonial remnant is a misleading rhetoric to divert attention from more substantive issues.

In short, Tribal Areas of Pakistan have a long and rich history and it would never lose their identity. Therefore, the need of the hour is that the Government of Pakistan (GoP) may take positive steps for re-organization and re-structuring the existing system of the tribal areas by adopting and implementing some new model like it has ensured for Gilgit-Baltistan.
Rationale

Militancy in the tribal belt is a serious threat to the regional security and stability of Pakistan. Neglected for decades on socio-political, administrative and judicial grounds, this area is one of Pakistan’s poorest regions. With the highest poverty rate, unemployment ratio and badly under-developed infrastructure that includes lack of economic opportunities. This condition breeds local alienation, resentment and provides the overall context in which militancy is flourishing. The major factor behind these problems is the isolation of tribal areas.

The objective for the policy makers since 1947 has been an ultimate integration of these areas through gradual economic development into the mainstream of Pakistan. From one perspective, this objective largely, though not wholly, has been achieved as considerable economic activities have been generated into these tribal areas hence improving their position. From the other viewpoint, the “special” status\textsuperscript{10} of the tribal areas has still not been altered as they have not been converted either into a separate province, or otherwise like GoP has given to Gilgit-Baltistan by passing the Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009 that granted self-rule to the people of the region.

In addition to that, amalgamation of the tribal areas into KPK is a debatable issue as the administrative set-up and institutions in tribal areas are different from the settled areas. Moreover, the tribal culture and customs strongly resist any change in its local systems. Incorporation of tribal areas into the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK), as demanded by the political parties, is just to get numerical strength in the national legislation. However, the tribesmen are not in favor of integration with KPK because they believe that their own importance would be decreased in such a situation. Meanwhile, the social system of the tribal people is considerably different from that of the settled area. Majority of the tribesmen are in favor of having either a special status on the pattern of Gilgit-Baltistan, or to maintain their identity as Federally Administered Tribal Area.\textsuperscript{11}
This study is based on the fact that it is a unique attempt to look into the re-organization of tribal structure and its integration into the mainstream of Pakistan. It discusses the main reasons of non-integration while highlighting the administrative and governance issues in every aspect.

The book, *From the Black Mountain to Waziristan* (1912), by Colonel H.C. Wylly, critically examines the nature and psyche of the Pashtun society and their armed resistance against the foreign invaders. *The Way of the Pathans* (1972) by James W. Spain is a personal detail of his understanding with the Pathans and an attempt to enlighten Pakhtunwali and their proper code. He describes people and places based on his own visits to different areas along the frontier and to Kabul. He also takes account of traditional stories and elements of history. For example, there is a chapter on the warrior poet Khushal K. Khattak.

Another book by the same author, *The Pathan Borderland* (1963), is a methodical and scholarly treatment that covers the people, land, and culture of the area in a traditional ethnography.

In this book, the writer describes the politics and history of the area that starts from British reign and ends at the early history of Pakistan. He discusses the frontier unrest, Afghan wars, partition of India and other major issues. The book ends on the role of the area in the 1960s geopolitics.

*The Pathans* (1958), by Sir Olaf Caroe, is a marvelous piece of work on the history of Pathans. It seems that the writer has love for the Pathans due to their language, land, and code of conduct. The book is also an essential reading for anyone interested in the latest developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan. *Among the Wild Tribes of the Afghan Frontier* (1986) by T. L. Pennell is valuable evidence by a British officer, in-charge of a medical mission in Bannu. Owing to his close relationship with the tribesmen, he threw many appealing sidelights on the social and domestic as well as on the moral and religious, features of lives and characters.
of people. *The Romance of the Indian Frontiers* (1931), by Sir George Macmunn is a great piece of work that explains the frontiers under Turks, Afghans, Mughuls and the British. It’s a detail outlook about wars, armies and migrations in the frontiers of the sub-continent. In this book, he reviews the story of the India’s frontiers struggle and the great frontier uprising of 1897.

A book by Akbar S. Ahmad *Socio-Political Development in the Tribal Areas: 1972-1976* (1977), tells about the social and political development in the tribal areas during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s government. The book covers the developmental projects in the tribal areas but is silent about the political situation in the area.

Sana Haroon’s work, *Frontier of Faith* (2007), examines religious organization and mobilization in North West Frontier Tribal Areas. The writer tries to explain the creation and maintenance of the tribal areas, their colonial identification and definition of the Pashtun tribe.

*The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan Lawless Frontier* (2010), by Intiaz Gul gets its heading from President Obama speech made on March, 2009 which tells that for the American people the border region of Afghanistan-Pakistan (tribal area) is the most dangerous place in the world. The book declares FATA as lawless frontier. He explains that tribal areas of Pakistan are not under government control. Since the U.S attack in Afghanistan in 2001, Al Qaeda has set up its sanctuaries in these areas and changed it into a Taliban state. The writer questions American fundamental assumption that the militancy in Pakistan's border region would be the number one danger to the U.S. security. As the writer is well aware of the ins and outs of militant groups and their leaders, he questions the notion of bringing the Pakistani Taliban under control. He further inquires about the financing of militants and their associations to Al Qaeda, and if they are still supported by the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). Hence the book is a gripping and ultimate picture of a region that needs to be urgently understood.

**Analysis**

For this research, descriptive and analytical methods have been adopted besides the secondary sources. One of the authors is also a resident of Miran Shah, North Waziristan Agency (NWA), therefore personal observation and experiences have also been added.

One fact that needs to be kept in view is that FATA has a special area status under the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan. “The President may, at any time, direct that the whole or any part of a Tribal Areas shall cease to be tribal area, and such order may contain incidental and consequential provisions as appear to the President to be necessary and proper, However, before making any order, the President shall ascertain, in such manner as he considers appropriate, the views of the people of the Tribal Area concerned, as represented in tribal Jirga.”¹² The tribesmen still very faithfully stick to Pakhtunwali and Rivaj and are not used to the Anglo-Saxon law. The reorganization or integration must not fail to factor in their sensitivities and to capitalize on the social capital engendered by the Jirga system.
Before explaining the ways and means of mainstreaming the tribal areas, a bird’s view has been taken about the state of affairs in the country. There have been continuous efforts to remove the structural irregularity, bureaucratic malfunctioning, and delivery shortfalls; the common man is greatly weighed under the burden of an endless range of problems compounded by uncontrolled inefficiencies, widespread disequilibrium and imbalanced benefits tilted in favor of the powerful. The state institutions and actors are generally alleged to work only in the interest of the elite class and patently to the inconvenience and exploitation of the common man, for whom the things are only going worst. He supposes every declared reform effort as a race to the bottom.

With these conditions, there are no realistic advantages in disturbing the equilibrium of the tribal society by imposing a system which even fails to bring in place a way on delivery machinery that is responsive to the requirements of the tribesmen and suit their genius. Hence, the state institutions are already experiencing performance weakness and have their own coping problems. In this situation, these institutions need consolidation and re-engineering rather than diluting their energy by asking these to spread out into a new area. Thus an integrated, comprehensive, strategic, considered and forward looking approach for improvements in the tribal area system is needed, not having shortcomings of the settled areas framework or a displacement of that system. It should be built upon the tribal values, resources and social capital while avoiding an outsider’s approach.

The system of indirect administration of the tribal is linked with a few factors. The major irritant areas include (1) compensation for the extreme narrowness of the present administrative units as well as many other institutions; (2) division of the tribal areas into administered, protected, and un-administered areas; (3) speeding up economic development with such assistant interventions as fostering an agrarian base and land revenue administration and functioning local markets and commercial centers; (4) putting premium on the Jirga system and
consequent intact certainty of the Malik and the attendant system of indirect administration; (5) replacement of the system of ‘collective liability’ with that of ‘individual’ liability; (6) replacement of traditional structure by urbanization; (7) administrative reform; (8) legal reform; (9) social reform; (10) political reform; (11) local government institutions; (12) fencing of border parameter with Afghanistan to shield and protect the tribesmen from of continuous upheavals in that country and to exercise an efficient check on refugees, weapons, narcotics and human trafficking; and eventually, (13) mainstreaming the tribal areas with the rest of the country.

The tribal elders had expressed an aspiration to be placed under the control of the central government during the address of the Quaid-e-Azam to the grand Jirga at Peshawar in 1948. Accordingly, FATA was placed under the control of the federal government and a federal Ministry of State and Federal Regions (SAFRON) was created. Although SAFRON is still existing and operational, it has no active role with regard to FATA and acts only as a channel for routing federal government funds for FATA. The reason has been its back-seat position for a long time as it was largely manned by officers, who often had little or no knowledge of the tribal areas.

The tribal areas of Pakistan are surrounded in abject poverty, with widespread illiteracy and deficiency of social services along with opportunities of productive employment and livelihood. "The causes of the frontier problem are purely economic, in as much as these savage tribes living in un protective hills, which breed many but can feed a few, do not find sufficient maintenance in their native homes," observed Colonel Keene, adding that,"Being poor, the people in a barren country, which is inadequate to supply their needs, have lived largely raiding and lost."13 According to Lieutenant General Sir George Macmunan, “Their unrest is largely because of economic reasons, their stony hills; terraced carefully as they are with much fostering care of the water of the mountain streams, do not yield enough food.”14
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The Tribal Areas cover 27,220 square kilometers or 3 percent of Pakistan’s total area. About 8 percent of the total geographic area of FATA is cultivated, while more than 82 percent of the land is not arable. This puts intense pressure on available farmland, which supports an average of 18 persons per cultivated hectare and more than 40 persons per irrigated hectare.\textsuperscript{15} According to 1998 Census, tribal areas population was recorded at 3.18 million, 2.4 percent of Pakistan’s total population. Annual population growth in the intervening period of 1981 to 1998 is calculated to be 2.19 percent.

During the same period certain agencies and FRs bucked this trend, showing a decline. Population density stands at 117 persons per square kilometer in FATA as a whole, with variations between the agencies and FR.\textsuperscript{16} “In terms of quality of life and human development indicators, the tribal areas lag far behind both the KPK and the country as a whole. Overall literacy in FATA is as low as 17.42 percent for 1998, compared to 35.41 per cent in the KPK and 43.92 percent at the national level. Just 3 percent of females aged 10 years and above are literate in FATA, compared to 18.82 percent in the KPK and 32.02 percent across the country. While 29.51 percent of males over the age of 10 are literate in FATA, this figure trails the KPK (51.39 percent) and the national average (54.81 percent) by a wide margin.

Health care indicators are equally disappointing, with one doctor for every 7,670 persons in FATA, compared to 4,916 persons per doctor in the KPK and 1,226 persons for every doctor in Pakistan.”\textsuperscript{17}

The above figures indicate surprising proportions of poverty and deprivation in FATA. The fact that tribal people need special attention is standing out by their low social, political, economic, administrative and participatory indicators. Whether it is size of agricultural holdings or access to drinking water, maternal or child mortality, and even electricity, the tribesmen lag far behind the general population of the country. The shocking fact is that they have little access to economic assets due to which they always
remain below the poverty line with unacceptable high percentage. A survey conducted for poverty assessment described the common indicators of poverty across the tribal areas included “landlessness or ownership of just small areas of land; lack of livestock; little or no food; lack of nutritious food; tattered clothing and no shoes; poor quality or condition of house; unemployment; high dependency on others for food and income; women working to supplement household income; ill health and disability; increased risk of conflict; lack of access to public services; lack of influence and powerlessness; and belonging to a powerless tribe.”

Recently, a separate FATA Secretariat has been established to deal exclusively with FATA affairs. It is a step in the right direction, and if properly guided and monitored, the staff here will provide the developmental effects which the tribal belt needs. Presently there are 26 line departments at the FATA Secretariat, system of which has been extended down to the PA level, for the execution of development works. The Federal Government, through SAFRON makes allocation of funds for the tribal areas. FATA Secretariat has not been able to deliver the expected dividends speedily in some agencies, because the physical progress of development has not generated adequate speed.

The Political Agent alone identifies all the development works, basing on which the development funds are released. There is no organized body comprising elected representatives, which can identify their needs and prioritize the necessity of development works. In case of infrastructure development, funds are utilized on required basis whereas, funds for development of community services are distributed on ‘nikat’ basis in different tribal territories.

According to the system in vogue, the execution of projects has to be given to the tribesmen, nominated by the Maliks who, invariably keep their share and then sublet the contracts. Thus, during the process, a major portion of the allotted funds is not spent on the project, which results in sub standard work. In most cases, funds for community services are either not used on the
service at all (like in case of community schools, wells etc) or the project meets the same fate as already mentioned. Lack of effective monitoring and strict accountability has led to instances where funds have been inefficiently spent, illicitly consumed or have been repeatedly used on the same project. This may be one of the reasons that the physical progress does not correspond to the huge allocation of funds. Due to non availability of basic structure, social sector development could not take hold.

How can these areas be brought into the national mainstream? The task of integrating tribal people into the mainstream of Pakistan’s political and developmental picture is extremely complex because tribal areas are one of the oldest unbroken societies of the world. They are the living picture of a thriving culture that has not been affected the modernizing influences. These areas lie in an unstable strategic belt and have been frequently involved in the diverse power scrambles both of regional and international level.

At present, the area is under an exceptional challenge of international pressure, severe criticizing their role in the war on terror. Moreover, there has been a gradual rise in the local Taliban militancy, which has disturbed the law and order situation not only in the tribal areas but throughout the country to varying degrees. This has put the government in considerable dilemma. In addition to all these, the major institution that could help for integration of these areas into the national mainstream is the ‘Maliks System’ that has rapidly deteriorated. The military's defeats in South and North Waziristan and associated peace agreements have empowered, enhanced, encouraged, and legitimized the social and political role of the mullah who has been the major obstacle in the integration of tribal area into the main stream.

On the economic and administrative ends, the factors that are acting as the barrier to the integration of tribal areas into the mainstream of nationalism are the difficult topography features that have kept this area largely undeveloped. Secondly, the region has also remained as a battle ground for a very long time during
the Great Game, Cold War and the War on Terror that destroyed the tribal areas’ infrastructure and encumbered the region economically, administratively and socially.

On the political fronts, the legal code was always put in the nutshell that prevented the development of civil society as compared to elsewhere in the country. The cycle of hostility that permeated the area until the end of British in 1947, also added to the political stagnation. The British failure to develop the tribal system of governance also contributed to the determination of the present day violence. The British created a frozen system that could not adjust itself with the social and economic change occurring in other regions. Following the British, administration of the tribal areas has been done under an environment of fear and romantic nostalgia. Officers serving in these areas consider themselves as heirs to the heritage, while power-brokers in the system believe that the people are inherently tribal and autonomous. In addition to all of the above, the political system is wholly dependent on the judgment of the Political Agents, who view their jobs through the lens of the tribal structure.

These are some of the problems that are major hurdles in the integration of these tribal areas into the national mainstream. These issues can be solved by the introduction of a well-organized politico-economic-administrative setup by the state in tribal areas that would be helpful in the integrating progression. If the GoP does not reform this system on urgent basis, this lack of political, economic and administrative will may not only make the integration process slow but shall also offer opportunities to the other forces to take advantage of the situation.

Thus the government needs to setup a strategy not only for her influence but also to change the mind-set of the people. The state already enjoys a gainful position due to the religious, cultural, and economic ties between the tribesmen and the state. Therefore, these commonalities can be presented as a better foundation for bringing new politico-economic-administrative reforms that are aligned with the needs of locals.
Secondly, the existence of different nations working with hidden agendas in these areas is alarming and is a source of stagnancy in the integration process. The problem is that if these areas come into the national mainstream, the interests of the existing elite in FATA would not be fulfilled. Thus the integration of the area demands a comprehensive plan to address this issue while consulting the tribal heads, asking their demands and fulfilling them so that they could resist the foreign powers effectively.

Thirdly, the international situation with respect to the tribal areas has changed significantly and it has provided an excellent opportunity to GoP to expand its administrative structure in that area. Surprisingly, the tribal elders and people are realizing the deteriorating effects of religious radicalism for their society. GoP can use this situation to initiate further progress and instill desired changes in the system. However, the reformation would only be sustainable if it is aligned with and matches the historical and traditional code of behavior of tribal people in all spheres of life.

Fourthly, The GoP should strengthen economic activities in the area as there is no alternate to it. Any aid for tribal areas from international community must be utilized properly. The government should provide basic public facilities and strengthen a workable economic system for the tribal areas so that it may be easy for them to join the environment of national mainstream.

The tribesmen must be encouraged to live in the settled areas of Pakistan. Simultaneously, well-built agricultural reforms must be introduced to draw the tribal population in more productive activities so that positive economic activity in the area may be generated.

With the help of the social sector development projects, the government should come out with a plan to build up a canal based irrigation network in the area by constructing at least one water dam. Accessible feasibility studies should be carried out with the
international community for the timely release of funds necessary for generating the agricultural activities in the area. The affirmed principle of ultimate integration of the tribal areas with the national mainstream predicts extending development repayment to bring them at par with the settled areas. In a nutshell, GoP should work on the following lines:

• The government should provide satisfactory and appropriate agricultural support and irrigation services.
• Policies for managing of natural resources should be made on merit, as they are very important to reduce poverty in tribal areas.
• The government should make strategies and policies to ensure equitable access to natural resources.
• To support and strengthen livelihoods and reduce poverty, government should not focus exclusively on one type of asset.
• Along with agricultural assistance, policy makers should also train the tribesmen for the sustainable use of mineral resources and medicinal plants.
• Education and healthcare facilities must be provided and should be equal for all.
• Quality of basic services must be monitored and improved.
• Adequate and affordable access to safe drinking water must be ensured.
• Up to date formal safety net provision should be enhanced by increasing funding, accountability and transparency.
• Possible mechanisms for providing social protection, including support for traditional tribal mechanisms should be examined.

Fifthly, tribal areas of Pakistan are where most of the people live in remote conditions that do not match the advancement in the rest of the country. To date, no central government has been able to deliver these remote tribesmen the benefits of modern statehood. Tribesmen need to recognize that creating genuinely
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democratic institutions is not a betrayal of their faith but is the most efficient path to the fair and just society that Muslims are commanded to create. Democracy, the process of choosing the most capable leader and then holding him accountable is the system of government that can free Pashtun from corruption, tyranny, and oppression.

Sixthly, The GoP has not only failed to educate the public in general and women in particular about rights and freedoms laid down in the constitution and state law, it has also failed to remove widespread misperceptions that Islam sanctions crimes of honor.

Education curricula that teach non-violence, conflict resolution, human rights and gender issues should be included in elementary and secondary schools, universities, professional colleges, and other training settings. Violence against women can be prevented and eliminated only when the underlying causes of violence are addressed and cultural norms and attitudes are challenged. A more fundamental problem is that the girls’ enrolment in schools has to be addressed by governments alongside curriculum reform.

Moreover, the system of local government should be extended to FATA as an alternative to the present system. The so-called Agency Council that is totally powerless and unrepresentative cannot be an alternative to the proper local government system. It is interesting to note that under the present agency council system women are absolutely excluded from the elections and functioning of the system. Constituencies of Jirgas for the nomination of agency council member were not based on territory but were clan based. This retrogressive measure was aimed at pushing back FATA society to clannish basis where it was emerging to some extent from the tribal identity to territorial identity.

Seventhly, most of the tribal areas are still in a pre-modern state of development and it is inappropriate for these to bring immediate introduction of the settled area’s administrative structures and institutions. The reason behind the fact is that the
settled areas have well developed commercial, agrarian, urban and political structures which are properly integrated with the systems of administration and other institutions but the case in tribal areas is totally different. There are strong voices within tribal areas for accelerated reforms. Therefore, GoP should adopt the policy of gradual development and modernization of the areas as it will not disturb their natural and historical balance, and will pave the way towards the process of integration. Moreover, government can introduce low level schemes like the development of cottage industries, vocational training and other small businesses in the furthest areas.

Conclusion

The socio-economic and political deprivation in Pakistan’s tribal areas is attributed to the absence of government’s consideration. The successive failures in addressing these issues eventually led to the outbreak of a very harsh reaction in the shape of militancy. Need of the hour is to consider all the proffered solutions and provide the tribesmen with the sustainable options for the restoration of peace, education, attainment of basic human rights, economic and social development of the area, and an extension of laws to FATA, so that the region stands strong on its own as a province and a vital component of the national picture.

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7 Dr. Pervaiz-Iqbal Cheema and Dr. Maqsoodul Hassan Nuri, *Tribal Areas of Pakistan, Challenges and Response* (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2005), 42.


11 Based on personal observations, interviews with Maliks, FATA Parliamentarians, Common Tribesmen including student of higher education from the tribal areas.

12 Article 247(6), The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan.


15 Land use data from 2003–04 (GoKPK, 2005a).


17 GoKPK, 2005a; GoKPK, 2005b; GoP, 1998a; GoP, undated (b).


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