

Research Article



Assessing Perceptions of the Respondents Regarding Socio-Economic Factors Contributing in Economic Prosperity of Rural Communities: A Case Study of District Sargodha, Punjab- Pakistan

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Abstract | Rural sector provides a foundation stone for economy of Pakistan. The current concept of rural development is linked to economic welfare of rural people. It involves uplifting of certain indicators of development and satisfying the needs of fragile groups of rural communities. This study examined socio-economic factors of rural life which contribute in economic prosperity. A list of union councils and villages in tehsil Sargodha was obtained from local district office of the Population Welfare Department. All rural families live in tehsil Sargodha served as population in the study. Tehsil Sargodha was selected purposively. Of the 62 rural union councils, four were selected purposively and from each selected union council two villages were selected purposively. Hence, from each village 15 respondents were selected randomly which makes a sample of 120 respondents. During the study, demographic factors such as age, Education, family structure, and professions of the respondents were assessed. Complete regression model was applied with independent factors of educational opportunities, agri-business opportunities and training opportunities. The results were significant at 5% level of significance as $F(3, 119) = 140.74; p < 0.05$ and explained 78.4% of the variation in dependent factor of job opportunities for the respondents which is responsible for economic prosperity of rural communities. The results from second, third, fourth and fifth objectives respectively indicated that vocational education, cane food or auto workshop businesses, computer related job opportunities, and training in poultry farm management are the core requirements for economic prosperity of rural communities in the area. It is concluded that respondents were keen enough to get maximum opportunities to participate in economic activities in order to get financial independence and to promote rural business in the area. There is a dire need to invest in expert knowledge and vocational training opportunities to bring change in the skills level of the respondents in the study area. It is recommended to create job opportunities by boosting up educational and agri-business opportunities based on the needs, skills and by providing required training for economic wellbeing of the respondents.

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Introduction

Since the emergence of life on earth, human beings do not live alone. Human life exists on this

planet in the form of communities and societies like other species around the world. Unlike other societies, human life is controlled and governed by certain rules and regulations through divine process

and societal rules. Further these rules and principles are implemented by the members of civilized society or community. Like other species, human beings also live in different compositions such as in cities, towns, villages and in the form of small communities.

Generally, rural area is a geographic unit, located outside cities with poor infrastructures and lack of all modern services. Not only in Pakistan but also across the South-east Asia; small settlements with high population density are considered as rural areas. General perceptions are that rural areas have low literacy rate, lacking in health facilities, communication, business opportunities with poor living standard and fewer job opportunities. Rural communities are considered as agricultural based since majority of people work in agriculture and its allied professions to earn their basic livelihoods. Rural sector is still considered as foundation stone for the economy of Pakistan since it provides raw materials and skillful human resources to different types of industry in the country. It also has major contribution in exports (Ali, 2011). Generally, rural people are hard working in nature. They can work in extreme weather conditions to earn their livings for themselves and for their families. Culturally stated, the male head of the household alone is responsible for the growth and development of other dependents in the family. He has to earn and feed his whole family. Therefore, it is stated that male household has critical responsibilities of earning in rural communities of Pakistan. The earnings of the male household depend on his level of skills and training to support his family. However in return there is less economic prosperity for rural people. It is a time to find out the ways and means to increase income level of rural people to maintain accepted living standard in rural areas (Hira, 2008).

Sustainable rural development is referred to as improved quality of life in all respects with consistence growth and development. It could be achieved by government and community participation in health, education, building local infrastructure, access to markets, creating jobs and business opportunities, investing in produces of food secure products, and by establishing other small industrial units in rural areas. In addition, economic prosperity of rural people is also linked to empowerment and self-actualization. These are the ways to maintain life above poverty line and achieve maximum benefits. Well-off rural communities are those enjoy all necessary facilities of life with factors completely supports economic wellness of people.

According to Moseley (2003), the concept of rural development is linked to economic wellness of rural people which needs proper actionable strategies. Rural development has central role in economic development and prosperity of countries like Pakistan (FAO, 2006; Ward et al., 2005). It involves investing in agriculture, education, infrastructure, health, capacity-building, and other related factors for satisfying the needs of fragile groups of rural communities (FAO, 2003). The essential rural-life based factors are education, agribusiness, livestock, poultry, forestry, fruit processing business, and non-farm activities which include self-employment, cottage industries, daily-wage employments e.g. technician, and agricultural field workers. In addition, other professionals like Veterinary Doctors, farmers' training experts, dairy management experts extensively contribute in economic prosperity of rural areas.

Training and education induce mental satisfaction and development, thus lead to introduction of new skills for performing certain jobs by an individual. Only trained and competent individuals can play their effective role in economic prosperity of any society. According to Jehan (2000) for skills development, rural individuals need vocational training and education to enhance their skills. There is still a large number of people in rural labor force which remain unemployed and under employed due to not having any specific skill required to earn their livelihood. The primary purpose of this research study was to assess factors contributing in economic prosperity of rural respondents of district Sargodha-Punjab, Pakistan.

Objectives

Following research objectives were explored during the study;

1. To explore demographic profiles of the respondent in the study area.
2. To explore mandatory educational opportunities which are helpful in economic prosperity of rural communities of district Sargodha as perceived by respondents.
3. To assess agri-business opportunities for economic prosperity of rural areas of district Sargodha as perceived by respondents.
4. To assess desirable job opportunities for economic prosperity of rural communities of district Sargodha as perceived by respondents.
5. To identify training needs of the respondents for specific job opportunities which are helpful

in economic prosperity of rural communities of district Sargodha.

ties, β_3 =Training opportunities, and α_1 = overall change that may be observed in the dependent variable of job opportunities for the respondents in the study area.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Sargodha district, Punjab province in July-August 2016. A cross-sectional survey research design was used for the study. The 5-point likert-type scale was applied for collection of data. The survey instrument was prepared for the factors to be studied. The contents and face validity of the instrument was checked. Following the recommendations of the panel of the experts from the rural development and Extension education; the instrument was revised and tested with a sample of 20 respondents in a pilot study. The reliability of the instrument was also checked from the data obtained from pilot study by computing the value of Cronbach alpha which was 0.83 for all factors of the study.

Population and sample

The study was conducted in district Sargodha, Punjab-Pakistan. The district has been divided into six tehsils such as Bhalwal, Sahiwal, Sargodha, Shahpur, Sillanwali and Kotmomin. Each tehsil has been divided into union councils and each union council further split into villages. The families those live in rural areas of district Sargodha served as population for this research study. In district of Sargodha, tehsil Sargodha was selected purposively and of the 62 rural union councils of tehsil Sargodha; four union councils were selected purposively. Next, from these four union councils; two villages per union council were selected purposively. On the next stage, 15 respondents per village were selected randomly. Thus, makes a sample of 120 respondents for the study.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through survey instrument. The collected data were later subjected to statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics such as Mean, Standard Deviation and Ranks were used to describe the analyzed data. In addition, inferential statistical technique such as regression model was applied in the study to get appropriate inference regarding change in available job opportunities using other factors such as education, agricultural business and available training opportunities for different professions in the study area. The model was $y = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3$ where y = job opportunities, α =Constant/slope in the model, β_1 =Educational opportunities, β_2 =Agri. business opportuni-

Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic Characteristics such as age, education and experience of the respondents were examined during the study since these are the variables which play significant role in defining any population. The results of the demographic characteristics of the respondents have been summarized in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents regarding their demographic characteristics.

Age groups in (years)	Frequency	Percentage
20 --- 35	2	1.66
36 --- 50	101	84.17
51 --- 65	15	12.51
66 and above	2	1.66
Educational level		
Illiterate	37	30.90
Secondary	10	8.30
Higher Secondary	15	12.50
Graduate	22	18.30
Post-graduate	36	30.00
Family type		
Joint family	101	84.20
Nuclear family	14	11.70
Extended family	5	4.10
Occupation		
Agriculture	52	43.30
Government job	17	14.20
Private job/business	4	11.70
Labour job	37	30.80

The average age of the respondents was 45 years. The data indicated that majority of the respondents approximately 84% were in the age group of 36 to 50 years. The above results also showed that educational trend is encouraging from secondary to post-graduate level in the area and approximately 48% of the respondents hold higher education of graduate and post-graduate degrees. The same Table 1 further depicts that almost 84% of the respondents in the area spend their lives in joint family system. Moreover, it is also indicated that about 43% of the respondents were involved in agriculture and more than 30% earn their livings by doing labour jobs.

Educational opportunities for the respondents

During the assessment of second objective, mandatory educational opportunities which are helpful in economic prosperity of rural communities of district Sargodha as perceived by the respondents of rural areas were identified by asking 10 specific items. Five-point likert type scale was used ranging from “strongly not agree” to “strongly agree” for specific items asked during the survey. The results are appended below in [Table 2](#).

Table 2: Means, Std. Ds. and ranks for mandatory educational opportunities for economic prosperity as perceived by respondents of the area.

Type of mandatory educational opportunities	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Medical education	120	1.87	0.78	10
Engineering education	120	3.99	0.84	4
Agricultural education	120	3.78	0.94	7
General -Science education	120	3.80	1.52	6
Computer education	120	3.97	0.56	5
Arts education	120	3.27	0.78	9
Vocational education	120	4.44	0.74	1
Communicational and media education	120	3.58	0.74	8
Social and rural development education	120	4.13	0.65	3
Business education	120	4.15	0.73	2

***Mean: 1: Strongly not agree, 2: Not agree, 3: No opinion, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly agree.**

The results from [Table 2](#) indicated that highest mean score of “vocational education” was reported 4.44 which means that respondents were agree of the view that vocational education is helpful in economic prosperity of rural communities. On the other hand, ironically the minimum mean score was of “Medical education” as 1.87 that means respondents were in disagreement for medical education that has little contribution in the economic prosperity of rural communities.

The majority of the respondents had given their verdict for vocational education in specialized fields. This shows that respondents have good understanding about vocational education and they think that this type of education may play a significant role in economic prosperity of rural communities. Apart from that respondents were also in favour of other types of educational programs such as agribusiness education, social and rural development educational programs, technical or engineering education, computer education, agricultural education, general science ed-

ucation, communication and media educational programs. Overall it is said that respondents were overwhelmingly aware regarding importance of education for economic prosperity not only for the family but also for the society at large.

Agri-business opportunities for the respondents

To measure this objective, 10 specific items were asked regarding agri-business opportunities on five point likert-type scale ranging from “strongly not agree” to “strongly agree”. The results are presented in the following [Table 3](#).

Table 3: Means, Std. Ds. and ranks for desired agri-business opportunities for economic prosperity as perceived by respondents of the area.

Agri-business opportunities	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Rank
Dairy business	120	4.20	0.68	6
Poultry business	120	3.97	0.96	8
Seasonal vegetables and crops business	120	3.38	0.73	10
Cane food/auto workshop business	120	4.96	0.20	1
Sheep and Goat farm	120	4.50	0.50	4
Fruit processing business	120	4.79	0.41	2
Meat processing business	120	3.55	0.62	9
Textile and embroidery business	120	4.52	0.50	3
Home-made food preserving business	120	4.23	0.42	5
Small grocery/restaurant business	120	4.16	0.66	7

***Mean: 1: Strongly not agree, 2: Not agree, 3: No opinion, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly agree.**

According to the results presented in [Table 3](#), the highest mean response of the respondents was 4.96 for establishing cane-food/auto workshop business. The lowest mean score was 3.38 regarding seasonal vegetables and crops business which means that respondents show little interest in the business of seasonal vegetables and crops business and they expressed no opinion regarding role of vegetables and crops business in economic prosperity of rural communities. The results showed that many of the respondents were of the view to establish any kind of food business in the area whether home-made food preserving, or by running restaurant for selling cooked food items. The respondents were of the view that food business is the easiest way to get economic prosperity and they need little investment and few skills to establish as com-

pared to other businesses. However, they were also in favour to invest in other rural businesses like “textile and embroidery business” for women, “Sheep and Goat farm”, “Fruit processing”, “cane-food or auto workshop business”, “Dairy business”, “small grocery store business”, “Poultry business” and “meat processing business”. The results revealed that by encouraging agribusiness in the area, new jobs opportunities may be created for both males and females’ members of the family and hence the goal of economic prosperity could be achieved for the people of rural community.

Job opportunities for the respondents

Many job opportunities were identified and listed in the instrument to check the response of the respondents on five point likert-type scale. The results are presented in the following Table 4.

Table 4: Means, Std. Ds. and ranks for desired job opportunities for economic prosperity as perceived by respondents of the area.

Job opportunities for rural respondents	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Rank
Medical officer/doctor/paramedical staff	120	2.11	1.14	12
Engineer/technician	120	2.84	1.39	10
Agricultural expert	120	3.67	0.52	9
Vet. Doctor/paramedical staff	120	4.36	0.73	4
Teacher	120	4.02	0.85	6
Computer expert	120	4.66	0.73	1
Farmer’s training expert	120	3.90	0.76	7
Marketing expert	120	3.81	0.68	8
Dairy management expert	120	4.36	0.73	4
Poultry management expert	120	4.37	0.85	3
Tailoring and embroidery expert	120	4.50	0.74	2
Food processing and preserving expert	120	2.84	1.39	10

***Mean: 1:** Strongly not agree, **2:** Not agree, **3:** No opinion, **4:** agree, **5:** Strongly agree.

The results of Table 4 indicated that the highest mean score was 4.66 for computer expert which means that rural respondents also understand the use of computer and its related job opportunities those have significant contribution in economic prosperity of rural communities in the study area. The lowest mean score was 2.11 for Medical officers/ Doctors which means that the jobs of doctors and paramedical staff have least contribution in economic prosperity of rural communities as perceived by the respondents.

The results of Table 4 indicated that due to high literacy level in the area, respondents were keen to be hired in computer related jobs, no matter at home town or in urban areas. The respondents were thought that unless they adopt modern and technologically advanced ways of earnings, they might be lagging behind in economic prosperity as compared to other developed nations in the world. Moreover, respondents also had positive attitude towards job opportunities like “Poultry management”, “Dairy management”, “Vet. doctor and para-medical staff”, “Agricultural related jobs”, “Teaching jobs” and “Tailoring and embroidery jobs” for women. The respondents believed that these kinds of job opportunities help the masses to achieve desired level of economic prosperity.

Training required for vocational skills development for the respondents

The instrument was developed on five point likert-type scale to show the level of training requirement as perceived by the respondents ranging from 1 = Not required at all, 2 = required up to some extent, 3 = moderately required, 4 = highly required, 5 = extremely required. The results are presented in the Table 5 given below.

Table 5: Means, Std. Ds. and ranks for training required for development of vocational skills among respondents for economic prosperity in the study area.

Training required	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Technician/vocational/tailoring-embroidery	120	4.65	0.56	2
Teacher	120	3.73	0.48	6
Farmer’s training	120	4.57	0.54	3
Vet. Doctor/Dairy management	120	4.26	0.48	4
Poultry management	120	4.72	0.54	1
Food processing and preserving	120	4.14	0.84	5

***Mean: 1:** Not required at all, **2:** Required up to some extent, **3:** Moderately required, **4:** Highly required, **5:** Extremely required

These results are consistent with those obtained by Ashraf et al. (2012) and they described that by changing the level of available training opportunities the skills level of the respondents can be increased. Training improves inner potential of an individual. It is the responsibility of society to give equal opportunities to all of her citizens for self-actualization and training so they can be beneficial for others. Only trained and skilful individuals can play their role in economic prosperity of any community. The results of Table 5 showed highest mean score 4.72 for “Poul-

try management” and the second highest mean score for “technician/vocational/tailoring-embroidery. It means that respondents extremely required training in poultry management job or business opportunities and vocational training so they could play their role in economic prosperity of their families and rural communities as well.

It is inferred from the above results that respondents were keen enough to get training in poultry farm management either to invest in as a business or to get a job in already established business. Respondents were thinking that poultry farm business is flourishing in rural areas in the country providing excellent opportunities both for business and jobs. Hence this type of activities generates economic prosperity in rural areas. They were also in favour of training opportunities in other professions like “Technician/vocational/tailoring-embroidery”, “food processing and preserving”, “farmers training”, “Dairy management and Vet. clinic training”, and “Teachers’ training”.

Finally, complete regression model was applied with independent factors such as educational opportunities, agri-business opportunities and training opportunities. The results of the model from Table 6 were significant at 5% level of significance as $F(3, 119) = 140.74; p < 0.05$.

Table 6: Analysis of variance.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1289.266	3	429.755	140.744	0.000
Residual	354.201	116	3.053		
Total	1643.467	119			

The Table 7 showed the results for explained variation which is 78.4% in dependent factor of job opportunities for the respondents responsible for economic prosperity in the rural communities of district Sargodha-Punjab, Pakistan.

Table 7: Model summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.886 ^a	0.784	0.779	1.747

The Table 8 describes individual coefficients analysis in the model which indicated that educational, agri-business and training opportunities in different vocational trades were strong predictors in the model

and need to exert more emphasize on these factors to improve job opportunities for the respondents in the study area to boost up economic activities so that respondents could feel economically more prosperous and financially independent.

Table 8: Regression coefficients.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	-66.725	9.255		-7.210 0.000
Edu. opp	.838	0.100	0.511	8.354 0.000
Agri. busi. opp	1.077	0.176	0.337	6.109 0.000
Training opp	1.368	0.197	0.451	6.958 0.000

a): Dependent Variable: Job opportunities, b): Predictors: (Constant), Edu. Opp., Agri.Business opp., Training opp.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the study concluded that respondents were keen enough to get maximum opportunities to participate in economic activities in order to get financial independence and to promote rural business in the area. There is a dire need to invest in expert knowledge and vocational training opportunities in the area to bring change in the skills level of the respondents. Similar conclusion was drawn by Ashraf et al. (2012) in their study while assessing in-service educational needs of Agricultural Officers for adaptation of remote sensing technology for implementation of precision agricultural practices in Balochistan, Pakistan. It is also concluded from their study that training is the way forward for respondents to get desirable new knowledge and become more skilful to play their role in the development of the community.

Following are few recommendations for policy makers to start more economic activities in rural areas and to discourage migration towards cities.

- Educational opportunities are helpful for economic prosperity of rural communities. All types of vocational education need to be provided at the door steps of the respondents.
- Agri-business opportunities must be created for economic prosperity of rural communities. It is recommended to provide training to develop business skills in all type of business opportunities for local respondents based on their needs.
- Business always creates job opportunities. Therefore, it is recommended that rural based jobs op-

portunities through establishing rural businesses need to be created to curtail urban migration.

- Local leadership need to be developed in rural areas so that problems of local population could be solved at village level.
- Equal opportunities for growth and development must be provided to all citizens of rural areas without any discrimination of colour, race, ethnicity and social status.
- The state should take over the responsibility for provision of education and health services to all of their citizens rather than diverting this responsibility to private sector.

Author's contribution

Ejaz Ashraf has conceived the idea, supervised the overall research work, prepared the final manuscript and incorporated the changes suggested by the reviewers. Bushra Hassan, Hafiz Khurram Shurjeel and Shafique-ur-Rehman contributed in preparation of survey instrument and data collection and prepared the initial draft of the study. Nadeem Anwar contributed in data analysis and interpretation of the results. Thanks also go to field staff of Population Welfare Department for their support in preparation of lists of respondents for the study.

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