
Role of NGOs in the Social Development of Pakistan: A Case Study of USAID

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Since 1945, cohesive Non-state actors especially Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been working in the world which has changed the face of different societies of the world. These changes were taking place in almost every aspect of the society such as politics, social fabric and economy. NGOs have become progressively tangled in providing health care, education and services to people. During the past two decades, nongovernmental organizations are working for the development of the states. These organizations primarily play the role to provide the welfare humanitarian aid and protection from the conflicts. In the recent years there is a rapid growth in the number and size of NGOs and now the working are of these organizations is also increased. These organizations through their growing influence directly intervening in the policy making and the decision making. This paper will provide an analysis of the roles that NGOs can play within the realm of social welfare/development, particularly in the field of education, women rights and alleviating poverty. This paper intends to evaluate the societal impact of these non-profit, non-governmental bodies in Pakistan, a developing country, where the majority of population still lives under the minimum wage and where the social problems have proved to be a huge impediment in the political and economic progress of the country. The paper focuses on United states Agency for International Development (USAID). Also, through descriptive investigation it has been inferred that how NGOs especially USAID affected the social fabric of Pakistani society. Moreover, it is suggested that if policy-makers on both sides move forward with trust and non-politicized behavior then significant social changes can take place.

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Introduction

The idea of "non-governmental organization" or NGO is any non-profit body, emphasis on voluntarism, self-governing and pursuing a mandate of providing development services, undertaking communal development work or advocating development issues. One detrimental effect of erosion of traditional state-centered borders lead by globalization is the focus it has brought on inequality between the developed and developing world. This increased connectivity has provided a physical foundation to the ever-present pathos of the civil society in underprivileged regions. With globalization has come the rise of non-state actors, mostly disguised as champions of the unprivileged classes, to overcome the failures on part of state administration and governmental bodies.

The most prominent outcome of the debate surrounding the shortcomings of state is the rise of non-governmental organization –or NGOs – as the alternative to governmental approaches towards the social development of citizens. These NGOs are claimed to be non-profit organizations intended to fill gaps on state policies by channeling international or local –depending on the type of NGO—funds towards the excluded sections of the society. With support by the West especially United States, these NGOs have risen exponentially all over the world in number and scope. This paper intends to evaluate the societal impact of these non-profit, non-governmental bodies in Pakistan, a developing country, where the majority of population still lives under the minimum wage and where the social problems have proved to be a huge impediment in the political and economic progress of the country. Keeping in mind the diversity of NGOs working locally and internationally for the benefit of Pakistani society, this paper bases its conclusions on the case study of United State Agency for International Development, USAID, and its role in the social development of Pakistan.

The literature surrounding NGOs suffer from a definitional and taxonomical dilemma where some classifying and defining them on the basis of their functional and organizational features (Vakil, 1997), with others emphasizing their nature as the ultimate answer to developmental shortcomings of the state (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). The expansion of these NGOs has been appropriated to their ability to address issue at grass-root level, their welfare-oriented nature and the distrust for public initiatives (Gill, 1997; Murray & Overton, 2011; Kamat, 2004). While many scholars accept the links between NGOs, empowerment and promotion of democratic ideals (Edwards & Hulme, 1999; Clark, 1998), many disregards the notion by concluding that even NGOs are self-serving in nature and their promotion of democratic ideals depend on their own agendas (Hudock, 1999; Ghosh, 2009).

Evolution and Expansion of NGOs

Evolution of NGOs has been largely claimed to be the direct cause of scarce resources and their mismanagement by the hands of states. Since the 1970s and

1980s the emphasis on these non-governmental bodies as the means to social development of communities has become more pronounced across the world. The civil awareness and activism has led to the creation of thousands of development-oriented NGOs with diverse agendas, scope, range and objectives (Banks & Hulme, 2012). Although tracing their roots in relief and charity organizations of the past and creation of UN specialized agencies in the 1940s, these bodies have reorganized themselves with a ‘development drive’ of 1980s led by US political thinkers of the times (Ronald Reagan, Margret Thatcher etc.). This reshaping of development NGOs owe their creation to the international political scenario of the time. According to Deborah Eade (2006) three prominent factors can be outlined for this reorganization:

1. Firstly, the emergence of neo-liberalism and its focus on privatization of economy created a need for such bodies who would work to lessen the impact of these structural changes. Working for social welfare and reduction of inequalities among various sections of society became a major focus of NGOs of the era.
2. Working along with this economic liberalization, political liberalization also became a cause for the growth of NGOs leading to their increased representation of politically suppressed civil society. With the visible outcome of disintegration of USSR, these economic and development-oriented autonomous bodies were hailed as kind of ‘saviors’ in the societies of Eastern Europe and the South.
3. Third, during Reagan’s era much of the Latin America was embroiled in civil war against military dictatorship with US administration visibly backing the governments. However, with integration of USSR the focus of US attention shifted from this region. As a result, in the absence of external funding, and the collapse of socialism, the governments sought the peaceful mediation of NGOs to provide assistance and solution for building a new kind of state keeping in mind the political demands of their civil societies (Eade, 2006).

Further, these factors established the recent thinking among societies about the status of NGOs as drivers of development and growth of the underprivileged classes, reduction of poverty and champion of social issues otherwise neglected by the states. This explains the prominence of NGOs in contemporary times as a policy tool of influential external and internal actors. Due to their exponential growth in the current times, the classification of these NGOs has become an impossible task. For the purpose of clarification, the NGOs are usually defined by the attributes they do not possess (such as being non-profit and non-governmental) instead of the features they have. These NGOs vary vastly in their size ranging from small-scale community based units to high-profile big corporations with their scope leading up to international off-shore branches in developing countries. These bodies working on the grass-root levels provide innovative solutions for uplifting

the society. Their civic engagement and development agenda is mainly implemented through two approaches:

- As service providers
- Through advocacy and empowerment

While their service provider function is mainly concentrated on the gap-filling ability of NGOs to enhance the participation of those excluded poverty or disaster-stricken segments of the society for which states cannot devote sufficient time and resources. Their latter function developing recently is the more controversial one, where it works for those social issues that usually invite broad-level structural changes such as promotion of democracy and gender equality etc. With their self-governing autonomous nature these NGOs do not come under any coordinating body and do not have to provide accountability to anyone. The growth rate of NGOs, according to an estimate, rose up to 19.3% from 1990-2000 with their funding reaching up to US\$1246 million by the end of 2000 (Eade, 2006).

NGOs in Pakistan and their Impact on Society

In Pakistan, the growth of NGOs coincides with the creation of Pakistan as a separate political community for Muslims. The post-partition problems of this newly-created state caused the mushroom growth of various NGOs with humanitarian functions helping the government in the relief and rehabilitation of refugees and victims of communal clashes. With their initial focus on basic service providence in health, poverty reduction and education sector, the NGOs in Pakistan has gone through two reformations according to the external scenario, one in 1970s with focus on welfare of society and women empowerment and the second in 1990s in the rural areas of Sindh and Baluchistan. Being led by the wives of influential internal actors from bureaucrats, politicians and military personnel in most cases these NGOs are mainly perceived to be politicized bodies serving the agendas of these actors. The Pakistani government has over the years implemented five legislative bills for the registration and administration of NGOs which make it difficult to account for the actual number of bodies working here. These laws have their separate registry administration, provincial offices and outdated systematic collaborated data but according to a recent estimate of United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the registered NGOs in the country could be from 8,000 to 16,000 leading up to 25,000 to 35,000 with the inclusion of all the unregistered welfare bodies in the country (ADB, 1999).

Classification of Pakistani NGOs

There are four main types of NGOs working in Pakistan which differ in their functional approach to development of the society:

1. **Advocacy and Empowerment:** these NGOs are involved in social issues and have a high-profile agenda on education, human rights, gender issues,

- health and poverty. These organizations form the major part of Pakistani NGO count and get the most media attention. Headed by influential local actors, these agencies are usually focused on one social issue rather than advocating larger transformations. For Example, All-Pakistan Women Association (APWA), Family Planning Association of Pakistan etc.
2. **Policy Engagement:** these NGOs are usually backed by international funding and advocate for broader structural changes by engaging governments in debates about alternative and better policy options. These bodies promote problem-based extensive research and might work in collaboration with other non-profit bodies. For example, UNESCO, USAID, although these have overlapping function of all three types of NGOs.
 3. **Disaster, Relief and Emergency based NGOs:** the most reputable organizations in Pakistan are based on providing disaster relief, emergency and rehabilitation to the benefit of society. These include Edhi Foundation, Benazir Income Support Program, the Fatimid Foundation and Red Crescent etc.

Impact of NGOs on the Development of Pakistani Society

The outreach and capacity of Pakistani NGOs seriously lacks in the development and policy implementation sector. Out of thousands NGOs only a handful can be termed as success stories. The difficulties faced by these NGOs at grass root levels create inefficient policy implementation and shorter life spans. Only a few has been around for more than a decade with credible administration and infrastructure. According to a report by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the number of well-organized NGOs in Pakistan is only about 100 with thousands of them classified as weak or small-scale bodies (ADB, 1999). Despite their shortcomings, the impact of these NGOs albeit small cannot be denied on the regions they work at. Some NGOs with focus only on one region with only one agenda have usually been effective in targeting those problem areas with positive outcomes. Some of the areas these NGOs target for the social development of Pakistani society are briefed below:

➤ **Rural Development**

The development of rural areas has been a major driving force in Pakistani NGOs. Under the rubric of the Rural Support Program (RSPs) almost one-third of total NGOs are working for the development of rural areas today. The forerunner of this initiative is Agha Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) whose effective role in the development of northern villages and successful collaborative projects for participatory communities led to the growth of numerous more rural development programs on the model of AKRSP. These include Sindh Rural Support Program (SRSP), Baluchistan Rural Support Program (BRSP), Sarhad Rural Support cooperation in KPK (SRSC) and a National Rural Support Program (NRSP) which

have undertaken many successful rural projects in their respective provinces (Bennett, 1998).

➤ **Domestic and Family Issues**

The Family Planning Association of Pakistan is one of the few successful NGOs dealing with domestic issues and population growth. Established four decades ago, this NGO has proved to be a successful strategy with collaboration with government and various national and international projects. Its outreach encompasses around 4,000 villages with professional staff of around 1500 and volunteers leading up to 70,000 engaged in 23 projects among different aspects of population dilemma faced by the rural communities (ADB, 1999).

➤ **Education**

Many NGOs have also initiated projects in the enhancement of civil societies through accessibility of education to everyone belonging to any segment of the society. A prominent name in this field in the Citizens Foundation (TCF) enterprise which has established around a thousand schools across Pakistan enrolling 126,000 students and employing 6,300 female staff for the teaching purposes. This creation of educational avenues has also contributed in creating 9500 jobs for engaging human capital of the communities these schools are based in (SEED Report).

➤ **Philanthropic and Humanitarian Enterprises**

Although numerically the most diverse NGOs are philanthropic in nature, many of these have a small and insignificant impact on the social development of their communities. Only few NGOs are reputable and professional enough to generate sufficient funds for any real contribution on the helping the genuine needs of the poor. While many hospitals have been supported by these NGOs, another NGO to deal with the domestic and financial needs of rural class is the Akhuwat Foundation, which has an exemplary micro-finance organization for the underprivileged classes. Its four core principles namely: interest-free money lending, use of religious places for its distribution, volunteering efforts and transforming borrowers in to donors has an innovative purpose of creating a sense of obligation in borrowers. This NGO has also gained the attention of international donor like World Bank and has been successful in its projects so far (SEED Report).

Apart from these obvious contributions, many NGOs have played prominent roles in other fields of social empowerment as well, for example in gender issues, honor killing, higher education, research and development projects, food and security, vocational training etc. these NGOs have are small-scale voluntary projects but they are contributing to our society nonetheless.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Pakistan Background

Pakistan has been an aid dependent country since its inception. One of the most important reasons for the alignment with West during the Cold War was an effort to receive aid to overcome its scarcity of resources and funds after the partition. Its geo-strategic significance has also captured the attention of major powers, for better or for worse, time and again. This aid however has not come without its own strings attached. Being the major donor of military and civilian assistance to Pakistan, US has in turn increasingly intervened in the political process of Pakistan and imposed sanctions according to its own demands.

With the upsurge in terrorism and deterioration of internal security, policy thinkers in the US have accepted the failure of military-based assistance. The renewed focus is on civilian assistance and collaborative projects to create a softer image of US in Pakistani community and to promote democratic stability. This transition in US stance was brought about by the Obama Administration in 2009 with the passage of Kerry-Lugar-Berman (KLB) bill approving a dramatic increase in economic assistance to 7.5 billion dollars in five years. The fluctuating relationship between the two countries has marred the significance of civilian engagement projects. The USAID offices which were closed down in 1994 under Pressler Amendment, increased their reach for the implementation of KLB, but increased interventionist policies of US for counterterrorism purposes has negatively impacted on this project (CRISIS Report, 2012).

There has been a need of greater engagement of local policymakers and stakeholder for the successful culmination of USAID projects for the benefit of both sides. With a view to win hearts and minds of Pakistani people, USAID has concerned itself with many social projects targeting the major problem areas such as energy, agriculture, civic participation, education with a focus on women empowerment and humanitarian crises (of FATA and Baluchistan). Although in 2011 USAID downsized its projects and funding, it still has undertaken many projects in the five areas mentioned above.

The next section discuss the detail of USAID’s efforts in the social development of Pakistani community in these five areas



Figure 1: Source: USAID Pakistan Report, 2013

USAID Mission in Energy Sector

The Pakistani energy sector has been the subject of many national and international debates surrounding the social development efforts. Energy crisis and the problem of circular debt have invited many international collaborative projects with hollowed results. The efforts of USAID in energy sector goes back to 1950s with the infrastructural assistance of nascent Pakistani state. With the help of USAID, Pakistan has already completed two dams –Gomal Zam Dam in FATA, South Waziristan and Satpara Dam near Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan adding 1200 MW to the power grid. An ambitious project of 4500 MW has also been underway on the Indus River. With the help of Pakistan's Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), USAID has added around 700 MW to the thermal power plants of Sindh and Punjab.

In addition to these infrastructural developments, USAID is also working on the skill-building of human capital by establishing training and research centers in the energy sectors. Moreover, it has also voiced concerned over policy making regarding energy demands. The power distribution has become more effective after the involvement of USAID with WAPDA and nine other state-run power distributors to reduce power losses, revenue generation and customer care. It is also focusing its attention on water shortage and turbine development (USAID Report, 2013).

In Agriculture Sector

In agriculture sector USAID has undertaken many medium and small-scale projects creating job opportunities for both men and women in the rural areas. It has helped in reducing post-harvest losses in mango farming by 40% and 60% increase in exports of three processing units by investing US\$3.2 million for this purpose. Other successful projects include the Dairy Project and collaboration with Nestle Pakistan for training and educating of farmers for better milk yields of 6000 Pakistani farmers. With 3.4 million dollar investment for technical assistance and training the milks yield has increased by 19%, adding \$72 to the monthly income of farmers.

USAID has also recently undertaken the Pakistani Private Investment Initiative (PPII) to generate loans for individual farmers and providing cost-sharing alternatives for purchase of equipment and other agricultural needs. This initiative will not only provide base for attracting further foreign investment but also provide technical assistance to 625,000 farmers and 2500 agribusinesses. It has also pledged the irrigation of 1 million acres of land by 2016 contributing to the income of 250,000 rural households representing at least 2 million of the Pakistani population (USAID Report, 2013).

In the Sector of Education

Since 2009, the efforts of USAID projects has resulted in 600 schools all over the Pakistan enrolling 85,000 students and skill-building of 12,000 teachers by organizing workshops and training centers. The successful projects of Lahore

University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and Institute of Business Administration (IBA) in Karachi are now recognized as the chief educational institutions of Pakistan. With the recent launching of National Reading Program in 2013, it has intended to accelerate enrollment in primary schools especially in the rural areas.

Apart from establishing educational infrastructure, USAID also provides scholarships for need-based and merit-based teachers and students. This in turn increases higher education enrollment and exchange programs for better research output. Specialized Advanced study centers for professionals have imparted university education to nearly 10,000 students since 2009. By 2016, USAID estimates the addition of 8,000 students pursuing advanced studies (USAID Report, 2013).

Rebuilding Conflict-Ridden Areas of FATA and KPK

USAID has worked extensively to rebuild the communities affected by terrorism and militancy. It has worked in collaboration with the governments of FATA and KPK to provide assistance in more than 2,400 projects for the benefit of 8 million people. Their previous lack of trust in their governments has been replaced by reliance on their governments for resolution of their problems instead of the militants as reported by a study conducted in few agencies of FATA.

Addressing the root causes of the alienation of these communities has also been a big concern for USAID which has worked on 600 km of road repairing and electrical transmission lines projects to connect these areas with the rest of the country. Moreover, during the disastrous flooding of 2010, USAID worked with public and private sector for rehabilitation of these communities. It undertook diverse projects such as:

- 7,500 scholarships to the IDP students
- Repairing and reconstructing 18 hospitals
- Establishing 150 schools in Malakand Division of KPK
- Providing assistance in infrastructural projects and engaging 170,000 Pakistanis for the purpose.
- Working for tourism in Swat Valley

Humanitarian Assistance and USAID

One-third of total USAID funding has been spent on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance in case of emergency which accounts for nearly \$1 billion. The 2010 flooding in Pakistan displaced 12 million people along with causing severe infrastructural damage and disease epidemics in the affected areas. With the help of USAID 7 million children in 30 flood-affected areas were vaccinated. The financial aid of USAID helped 60% of the displaced Pakistanis in their survival and rehabilitation. It also supplied:

- 15 million water purifiers
- Emergency shelter for 364,000 people
- Rescue boats, water filtration units and equipment to cut concrete.

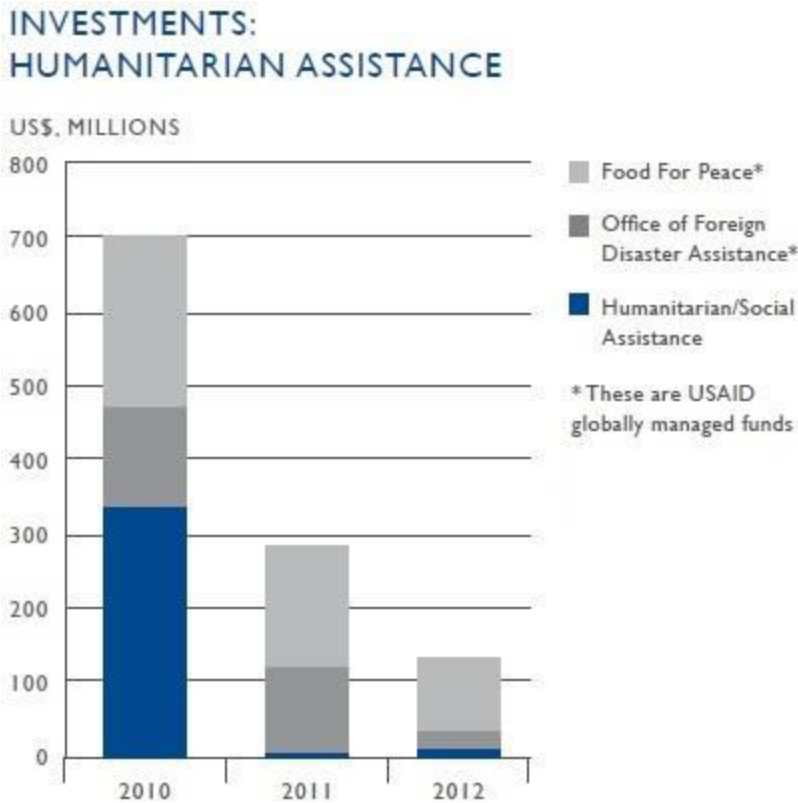


Figure 2: Source: USAID Pakistan Report, 2013

The contribution of USAID has been extended to other fields as well apart from these five areas. It has worked for increased civic engagement through The Citizens Voice Project (CVP), promotion of democracy and democratic institutions, empowerment of women and in the health sector etc (USAID Report, 2013).

Analytical Assessment of the Shortcomings of USAID Pakistan

The level of USAID engagement and its extensive projects has been the subject of much debate in Pakistani and US policy thinkers. Negative perceptions of US among Pakistani society has produced skepticism of USAID efforts while US policy makers are disheartened by rising internal turmoil in the security situation of Pakistan. Many scholars have pointed out the failures on part of US political thinkers for the insufficient input of USAID in the social development of Pakistan. Some of the shortcomings of these projects are:

- Failure to depoliticize the aid generated by USAID which is easily influenced by political events on both home and host country. The politicians having the say in the implementation of USAID projects in Pakistan suffer from lack of indigenous knowledge.

- The reliance of USAID projects on US employees and policy thinker instead of local stake-holders invite criticism from host country and contributes in the trust gap between the two countries. Local NGOs having grass-root knowledge can provide better and cost-effective solution to the challenges these projects maybe facing
- There is no any real reduction of militancy and terrorism in the areas affected by War on Terror. USAID personnel have limited advantage over those communities and very few projects are completed in those areas. An example of it is the Guddu thermal Project, where it was unable to produce effective capacity building
- The funding of project has been slow, causing the completion of projects beyond deadlines. The actual disbursement of 1.5 million US dollar aid was only \$179.5 million in 2010. Another visible complaint of Pakistani government during the construction of Gomal Zam Dam caused the US government to increase funding to expedite the construction process (Haq, 2011).
- There is a lack of knowledge and research based approach in USAID projects for domestic and women empowerment programs. These projects have limited success due to various cultural and religious constraints.
- There is a need for increased collaboration between local NGOs and other public and private sector bodies for successful implementation of projects in the areas of FATA and KPK.
- USAID projects lack transparency and accountability for disbursement of funds elevating the skepticism in donors and lack of transparency in mission and project agendas causing trust deficit in host country.
- The initial integrated Af-Pak approach caused the muddling of USAID agendas and objective in Pakistan from the start (Birdsall, 2011).
- The staffing and authority of USAID with a focus on US employees are given tenures for a very short-term which breaks the consistency and smooth implementation of USAID projects
- The contribution of financial aid through USAID has been very insignificant amounting to only 0.28% of Pakistan's per capita income (Haq, 2011).

These shortcomings have been emphasized by various factors which challenge the effective implementation of these projects. These factors have been outlined below:

Factors Causing Failures

1. Political instability and the disruption of democratic process time and again has proved challenging for the effective utilization of US financial assistance and completion of USAID project with political interference.
2. The rules and regulation created by Pakistani government for normal functioning of NGOs are strict and calls for a relaxation. The bureaucratic

- class has also caused many challenges especially during the power devolution project undertaken by Musharraf Administration.
3. Corruption and self-serving agendas of major internal actors resist the change in status quo, therefore providing hurdles for tranformatory USAID projects.
 4. Being a disaster prone area without any effective strategy to minimize the risk of natural disasters, the success of USAID projects has also been hampered by this factor. Especially projects in northern areas of are affected by frequent earthquakes, land sliding, road blocking, flooding etc.
 5. Frequent rotation of leadership on part of USAID also affects the consistency of the project progress.
 6. Some of the USAID projects have environmental costs which were not calculated during the structuring of the project. These projects had to shut down because of their detrimental impact on the environment.
 7. The institutional capacity of Pakistani state machinery has limited reach and means to fully implement ambitious USAID projects
 8. The upsurge in terrorism and vulnerability of some areas has refrained USAID personnel to undertake projects which hamper their own personal security. Frequent kidnappings of US staff and a general trust deficit for American people has resulted in abandonment of controversial projects.
 9. Downsizing of financial capability if USAID Pakistan has also resulted in transparency and accountability in its projects

These factors can be assumed to play role in the success and failure of many social development projects undertaken by development NGOs like USAID.

Conclusion

The role of NGOs has been increasingly linked with development in modern times. The focus of contemporary NGOs on development, research, empowerment and advocacy has made them into champions of the poor and unprivileged classes, providing voice to the unheard and representation to the politically excluded segments of the societies. With the globalized world creating space for such non-governmental, non-profit organization, many small-scale organizations have cluttered the so-called objective of social welfare. Only a few of these NGOs, however, have any real impact on the development of Pakistani society. USAID is one such influential international NGO based in US and working with local Pakistani NGOs for joint projects in energy, education, agriculture, women empowerment, civic rebuilding and humanitarian efforts. But the project taken up USAID has more skepticism attached to them than hope. Policy-makers on both sides suffer from trust deficit and highly politicized relationship which can be affected by insignificant political changes. Many internal and external factors challenge the effective contribution of USAID which has been till now insignificant to bring any real and visible changes in the social development of Pakistan.

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