

CONFERENCE REPORT: “PAKISTAN SOCIETY OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS”, DECEMBER 2005

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The 21st annual general meeting and conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE) was held on December 19th-21st, 2005 at Islamabad. The event was hosted by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). The theme of the conference was ‘*Skill-Development, Productivity and Growth*’. The Prime Minister, Mr. Shaukat Aziz, was the chief guest in the inaugural ceremony. Chairman HEC Dr. Ata-ur-Rehman was invited as the keynote speaker. Both, the Prime Minister and HEC chairman, emphasized the need for developing human capital as embodied in market skills for sustaining national economic growth.

Over hundred academicians and practicing economists and students attended the conference. The conference was organized around three technical sessions, each comprising of four sub-sessions and ten plenary sessions for distinguished lectures.

The number of technical sessions (3) in the total number of conference sessions (13) was low, much reduced from previous years. This gives the impression that the conference is becoming more of a sort of ‘public meeting’ than a ‘research platform’ for researchers in the field of economics. The picture looks even gloomier if we calculate the ratio of sub-sessions on the conference theme to total number of technical sub-sessions of the conference. Table 1 gives a summary of the number of sessions reserved for each theme. The fact that only one out of the total 12 technical sub-sessions was reserved for the theme of ‘Skill-Development’ gives an idea about the clear lack of focus on the conference’s main theme. This impression is also supported by the fact that out of a total of 38 papers presented; only 3 were directly related to skill-development.

Most of the lectures given at the plenary sessions by the ‘distinguished lecturers’ guests were also general in nature almost ‘off the cuff’ However the paper ‘*Social Capital and Economic Development*’ by M. Ali Khan provided important insights on the time honoured capital-controversy debate. He also raised questions about the possibility of measuring ‘human capital’, He mentioned that measuring depreciation in a manner analogous to the measurement of depreciation in physical capital was not unproblematic. He concluded his lecture with the contention that economic rationality alone cannot provide a comprehensive framework for explaining the whole range of human activities and, therefore, economists need to incorporate social dimensions into their analysis. This

idea has received attention, especially in the institutional economic literature since the early 1970s. Similarly, the paper ‘*Does Education Abroad Help to Alleviate Poverty at Home?*’ by Christopher Colclough was also stimulating. He explained that for most developing countries, net benefits of international education for poverty alleviation remain unrealized. The paper ‘Human Capital and Economic Growth’ by Mohsin Khan and ‘Skill Competitiveness: Can Pakistan break out of the Low-level Skill Traps?’ by Mr. Rashid Amjad were little more than after dinner lectures and therefore disappointing. The former paper provided no new insights about the contribution of human capital to ‘economic growth’ while the later provided no answer at all to the central very question posed in its title. Any ad’s paper discussed the possibility of breaking out of the low-level skills trap without any theoretical foundation whatsoever. The author concluded his paper with some unsubstantial policy-recommendations. The tendency of inviting very few domestic economists for distinguished lectures was also evident in the conference.

PIDE must be commenced for annually organizing such a large research event which is, of course, unique in its nature in the country. We suggest to PIDE authorities to hold this event to other cities of the country, especially Karachi and Lahore, rather than organizing it in Islamabad every year.

Table 1 : Themes of Technical Sessions

THEMES	Number of Sub-sessions
1 Skill Development	1
2 Population and Gender	1
3 Agriculture	2
4 Exchange Rate	1
5 Growth and Industry	1
6 Macroeconomics	1
7 Trade Issues	1
8 Banking and Finance	1
9 Labor Issues	1
10 Poverty	1
11 Governance and Environment	1
Total Number of Technical Sub-sessions	12

Table 2 : PSDE 21-Papers of Interest to Business

NAME	PAPER
A.R.Kemal	Skill Development in Pakistan
Muhammad Zahid Siddique & Javed A. Ansair	Skill Formation Strategies for Sustaining 'The Drive to Maturity' in Pakistan
Usman Mustafa, Kalbe Abbas and Amara Saeed	Enhancing Vocational Training for Economic Growth in Pakistan
Usman Haleem and Khalid Mushtaq	Estimation of Export Supply Function for Citrus Fruit in Pakistan
Muhammad Sharif, Umar Farooq and Waqar Malik	Domestic Citrus Marketing Systems : Constraints and Potential for Improvement
Karin Wagner	Productivity and Skills in Industry and Services--A British German Comparison
Abdul Rashid	Public Private Investment Linkages : A Multivariate Cointegration Analysis
Saadia Refaqt	Redistributive Impact of GST Tax Reforms in Pakistan 1999-00
Amir Shah and Tahir Hijazi	Performance Evaluation of Mutual Funds in Pakistan
Shabbar Jaffry, Yaseen Ghulam	The Impact of Regulatory Changes upon the Productivity of the Banking Sector in the In
Muhammad Azeem Khan	Sustainable Cotton Production through Skill Development among Farmers: Evidence from
Herman D Lohano and Fateh M. Mari	Testing Onion Market Integration in Pakistan

These papers can be downloaded from PIDE's website <http://www.pide.org.pk>