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**EVALUATING THE ROLE OF PAKISTANI DIASPORA IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: REMITTANCES AND BEYOND**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The Pakistani diaspora has played a pivotal role in the national development of Pakistan, contributing significantly through remittances, investments, knowledge transfer, and socio-cultural engagements. This study evaluates the multifaceted contributions of the Pakistani diaspora, emphasizing the economic impact of remittances, which have become a critical driver of household income and foreign exchange reserves. Beyond remittances, the diaspora has fostered entrepreneurship, facilitated knowledge and skills transfer, and strengthened cultural and social ties between Pakistan and host countries. However, despite these contributions, there remains a gap between the potential and actual impact of diaspora engagement, largely due to inadequate government policies and institutional frameworks. The paper highlights the need for a cohesive national strategy to harness the full potential of the diaspora, including improved investment policies, capacity-building initiatives, and transparent mechanisms for diaspora engagement. By leveraging the diaspora's resources, skills, and networks, Pakistan can achieve sustainable development and strengthen its global ties.*

**Keywords:** *Pakistani diaspora, remittances, national development, knowledge transfer, entrepreneurship, cultural contributions, government policies, investment, socio-economic impact, diaspora engagement*

**Introduction**

Pakistan, much like a multitude of other nations across the globe, continuously endeavors to fully harness the remarkable potential that exists within its Diaspora to significantly contribute to national development efforts. In fact, Pakistan indeed stands out as an exceptional case when it comes to this phenomenon. Nations around the world have increasingly acknowledged and appreciated the growing significance of their expatriate communities. In light

of this recognition, they have launched a variety of innovative programs and strategic policies aimed at effectively utilizing the diverse skills, expertise, resources, and various assets of their citizens who are residing abroad (Kazmi & Abdullah, 2024). This strategic initiative is fundamentally dedicated to fostering the overall advancement and sustainable development of the state in various sectors. The main objective of this comprehensive essay is to thoroughly explore in detail the substantial contributions that the Pakistani Diaspora has made toward the growth and prosperity of their beloved homeland, Pakistan. To accomplish this objective comprehensively, the discussion will undertake a thorough analysis that encompasses several key areas: firstly, emphasizing the vital role of remittances sent by overseas workers, secondly, examining the numerous socio-economic contributions that overseas Pakistanis make to their families and communities back home, thirdly, considering the noteworthy investments made by members of the Diaspora that stimulate local economies, and fourthly, exploring other multifaceted forms of engagement that significantly enhance the connections and ties between expatriates and their native country (Qaisrani, 2022).

This entire examination will be conducted within the broader context of return migration. Furthermore, it will address the potential challenges that the Pakistani Diaspora may encounter as they look toward the future, which could impact their ongoing contributions. Moreover, while highlighting the significant achievements and contributions of the Diaspora, this paper will also delve deeply into a critical investigation that aims to clarify and understand the evident mismatch that exists between the immense potential contributions of the Diaspora and the actual impact they have made on the country's progress over the years. Since the very inception of an independent Pakistan, the nation has actively engaged in the global emigration landscape, with the initial migration flows predominantly directed toward the United Kingdom, which served as a key destination for many seeking better opportunities. As the 1970s and 1980s unfolded, Pakistan established itself as a major country of origin for migrants heading toward various Middle Eastern nations due to the booming economies in that region; these flow dynamics played a crucial role in shaping the Pakistani community abroad. However, these migration dynamics underwent a significant transformation following the economic crisis that greatly impacted the Gulf States during the late 1980s, ultimately prompting Pakistan to effectively redirect its migration flows toward the western regions of the world. This shift particularly saw increased movement toward the

United States and various European countries, which has had long-lasting implications for the Pakistani Diaspora in terms of integrating into new societies while still remaining committed to their homeland, their culture, and the increasingly important role they play in reinforcing the ties to their native land. (Abraha. Ghebrekidan, 2005)

### **Understanding Diaspora and National Development**

Diasporas and emigrant communities represent an incredibly diverse and multifaceted set of socio-economic networks that are instrumental in facilitating a wide range of specialized activities. These activities significantly impact national development outcomes in both the regions that send these diaspora members and the regions that receive them. The argument presented here is that in order to realize all the potential benefits that diaspora can offer, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of the development needs of the communities residing abroad. Additionally, it is equally important to grasp the conditions prevalent in the various home countries of these communities. (Gelb et al.2021)

This understanding is critical because different situations necessitate widely different types of intervention strategies tailored to meet those specific needs. This, in turn, leads to the acknowledgment that the diasporas should not be viewed as homogeneous entities sharing the same experiences or conditions. In seeking to effectively address both of these crucial issues, recent scholarship focused on triangular diaspora economies offers a powerful analytical tool for developing a systems thinking approach to globalization and development. Furthermore, various entry points through which to engage with these diasporas have been conceptualized in ways that take into account a systems perspective. This perspective is significant since it considers multiple time-scales, dynamic linkages between networks and sectors, as well as the larger global environment that influences these connections. Such a comprehensive understanding provides a method for evaluating and categorizing possible interventions in these complex systems (Garner and Kaplan2023).

These evaluations can become fundamental in shaping a more judicious and effective spending of funds in the future. In formal macroeconomic contexts, the term 'diaspora' is conventionally understood to encapsulate linkages that extend well beyond mere remittances. It also includes aspects such as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), portfolio investment, philanthropy, knowledge exchange, political influence, as well as various other forms of economic networking that take place between diaspora

communities and their home countries. However, the nature of the networks that form and the diverse motivations involved with diasporas, when conceptualized as a formal system, have often been rather simplistically represented in prevailing narratives. The consequence of this oversimplification is that the stated objectives rarely align with the real-life opportunities that exist within these complex interactions. Broadly speaking, one can discern three major levels at which diasporas and national development are fundamentally linked: the activities and unique characteristics of the communities themselves; the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions in the various sending and receiving regions and their corresponding impact on those communities; and the potential channels through which the activities of these diasporas may influence overall development outcomes. Each of these levels embodies significant economic, social, and political dimensions that intricately interact with one another. These interactions can both facilitate and hinder effective engagement between the communities based abroad and the structural transformations occurring within their home countries. At its most basic and immediate level, these relationships can yield direct and tangible results. Financial, human, or social resources emanate one way or the other between the diaspora and the country of origin, and this dynamic relationship creates an immediate and observable impact that is often significant in terms of development. (V. Gevorkyan, 2022)

### **Historical and Contemporary Context of Pakistani Diaspora**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, significant socio-political changes occurred in the South Asian region. Independence movements in Russian-held Baltic States granted independent status to certain countries. With independence, citizenship of these republics was automatically granted to their over-seas nationals. In response to the “protection” of their overwhelmingly minority populations, changes were made to citizenship laws resulting in the forced deportation of about 600,000 people and rendering an additional 200,000 state-less. The term diaspora has resurfaced in the post-independent era (Selvakannu, 2023).

This paper explores the diaspora history and system dynamics. The analysis is based on qualitative secondary data representing institutional responses and the citation count of semi-structured interviews undertaken. Analysis indicates that both pre-independence debt, fear and stress of new borders, and tension with close neighbors, and post-independence interaction and expectations of protection and prosperous development played a significant role in shaping the dynamic system. While the intent of

reunification during the USSR era was overly ambitious, the post-independence period's institutional approach has been one sided. (Robinson et al.2023) Little attention and concern for a people-centered approach to development and the associated stress and fear of existing communities is identified as the main maladaptation.

### **Remittances as a Key Economic Driver**

The remittances sent by the overseas Pakistani workers remained a significant addition to their home country's foreign exchange reserves and a principal contributor to the household income of the recipient families in Pakistan, since 1971. As the economic slowdown in the oil-rich Gulf region began to amplify and the population of the expatriate Pakistanis started to diminish, this study provides an updated analysis of the historical (1973-2017) and the recent (2012-2017) trends of the remittances received by Pakistan using the comprehensive data compilation. The wider view of the role of the Diaspora and the channels other than the remittances, through which the expatriate Pakistanis can play their part in the national development of the home country, is suggested (Awan & Waqas, 2022). Concerning the remittance flows, this analysis estimates that Pakistan's private sector in the year of 2012 has received the net inflow of US\$ 13.606 billion excluding the NGO remittances and similar international transfer. Such inflow corresponds to 4.71% of the country's GDP and nearly double the size of the foreign aid received by Pakistan. Along with the decrease in the gross remittances in the financial year of 2012-2013, it is also found that the households registered as the recipient of the remittances have experienced the retardation of the economic growth. The negative output growth is estimated for the secondary production sector in the year of 2012-13 (Ahmad et al., 2013).

The subsequent parts of this study include the global trend analysis of the Pakistani remittances, the remittance sent through the known and the formal channel, the flows of remittances from the model-recipient to the other model-based provinces in Pakistan, the literature on the study; and its those main findings and the conclusion/discussion. On a global level, Pakistan is amongst the top-most two dozen countries compelled upon the remittances. However unlike for the countries such as Lebanon, Haiti, Tajikistan, El Salvador, and Jamaica; where the remittances by and large dominates other form of the international financial resource, such as the foreign aid or the foreign direct investment; the private remittances received by Pakistan's private sector typically

counts for the one-tenth of the size of the aid received by Pakistan (Amjad, 2017).

### **Investments and Entrepreneurship**

The role of the Pakistani diaspora in national development, beyond remittances, is discussed. Fostering direct and financed investments is one way to generate development in the diaspora's home country. The diaspora can contribute to the development of the motherland also through venture capital. Transnational entrepreneurs often have both personal and professional ties to their countries of origin; in many cases they are more than willing to contribute to the economies of these territories. So, whilst the comparison between returnees and first generation diaspora reveals that the former are motivated to invest because of stronger personal ties to the homeland, the comparison between the first generation diaspora and non-diaspora investors indicates that the latter invest because they perceive superior market opportunities in conflict economies (Syrett & Yilmaz Keles, 2019).

Companies that emerge as a result of investment from the diaspora can generate development in a number of ways, job creation and technology transfer possibly being the most wide-reaching. Programs which are aimed at fostering entrepreneurship are essential in a country characterized by an extremely high and overwhelmingly young population. It is the case of the Pakistani economy, where one of the major challenges faced by those who start their own businesses is gaining access to credit, in a country where only 12% of the adult population has a bank account, and loans have interest rates of 28-30%. At the same time, hurdles of a regulatory nature, such as complicated and inequitable taxation, and the insecure environment deter potential entrepreneurs (Varma & Bagoria, 2012).

Networks also have the potential to act as mediators in knowledge transfer and as platforms of business collaboration. The development of Pakistan's ICT sector illustrates the potential that the connection to what is a global and rapidly expanding sector has. ICT4D projects have experienced growth and seem to be a promising domain for future relations between the diaspora and Pakistan, to the extent that the descents could help overcome the chronic problems of reducing the digital divide. Case studies on successful diaspora entrepreneurs in the telecommunications and ICT sector are presented.

### **Knowledge and Skills Transfer**

The process of transferring knowledge or specific skills from diaspora communities back to the home country is an intricate area of study. While remittances are a straightforward and

economically valuable transaction for national macroeconomics, discussions of how diaspora communities improve local capacities and foster knowledge sharing are thinner on the ground. While acknowledging the gross economic benefits of remittance flow, far greater good can be leveraged through a 'brain gain' originating from human capital development within less economically developed (LED) nations, not just in emigrant receiving Western economies (Irudaya Rajan & Ahsan Ullah, 2023). The ability to bring together sectoral specialists is of crucial importance and partners actively working in a particular country or sector were involved here in sharing their knowledge about best practice.

Moreover, the insights from these discussions emphasize the desirability of a multifaceted approach to human capital and knowledge and skills transfer. In particular, national level policy interventions should focus on the formal development of curricula and units building the capacities of diaspora and non-diaspora professionals. At the same time, however, attention should not be removed from the valuable input that those working in the development of civil society can have on local capacity building. The narrative is structured around the sharing of knowledge and insight of the participants in relation to the mechanisms through which diaspora professionals can share knowledge and skills with their home country in a way that enhances local capacity development. Respondents were partly selected for their professional knowledge in a particularly relevant field. However, it swiftly became clear that the background and experiences of the diaspora professionals were also important. Questions of identity, integration and the role of chance in facilitating useful connections all emerged as key themes (Gibson & McKenzie, 1970).

Ultimately these areas of knowledge are all connected, and collaboration between partners actively contributing to a particular sector or country was indicated as being of particular value for cross-fertilization of ideas. Feedback from sixth months later indicated positive movement in understanding the mechanisms needed to facilitate knowledge transfer to benefit local capacity after funds invested. A current consultancy regarding the informal economy in the Balkans has been seen to benefit from these connections and has facilitated the practical exchange of knowledge between three partners. For example, a delegate from a recently-established business council was able to draw on existing resources covering for instance literature mapping/taxonomies of the informal economy from countries bordering on the EU.

### **Cultural and Social Contributions**

In addition to the widely-discussed economic remittances that have been essential for supporting families and communities back home, the Pakistani diaspora has been significantly contributing to the national development of Pakistan through their rich cultural and social contributions. However, it is noteworthy that the role of these cultural and social contributions made by the diaspora in enhancing national development has received relatively little scholarly attention compared to the discourse surrounding remittances; consequently, these contributions will be the focal point of this special issue (Ullah et al., 2024). The Pakistani diaspora has played an instrumental role in the development of their home country through various avenues aimed at cultural preservation and promotion, enabling a vibrant tapestry of cultural heritage, identity, traditions, and way of life, art forms, music, songs, films, literature, handicrafts, calligraphy, designs, and rich history to flourish. They achieve this through a variety of events, exhibitions, carnivals, fairs, workshops, pavilions, open debates called moots, forums, and seminars, all while expressing their opinions and producing films that reflect their cultural storytelling. It is within these vibrant cultural exchanges that the different culture(s) of Pakistan can coexist, fostering an atmosphere of harmony and peace.

Moreover, the social capital bonding have been actively fostered by the Pakistani diaspora residing abroad. This has been accomplished socially and politically through the initiation, establishment, and maintenance of a diverse range of relationships between the host countries where they reside and their homeland. These relationships encompass various spheres, including cultural, social, political, friendships, and charitable pursuits. Additionally, cross-cultural exchange programs have been pivotal in fostering understanding, harmony, compassion, peace, cooperation, and joint ventures between the countries of the host and the Pakistani land of origin. Programs dedicated to art, culture, education, film, information dissemination, historical exploration, literature appreciation, grassroots movements, music, dance, documentaries, livelihood improvement, family engagements, and sports initiatives have all contributed constructively to the socio-cultural landscape.

Furthermore, the contributions to social and community services extended by the Pakistani diaspora are significant. They partake in the foundation, building, sponsorship, renovation, repair, adoption, and continual maintenance of community properties such as centers, land, parks, libraries, reading rooms, reading halls, research centers, vocational centers, and schools. As a result,



strong social contracts, bonds, trust, and a sense of security can emerge in both the community and the country at large. This enriches lives and fosters collective harmony, tranquility, and serenity, enhancing communal peace. Moreover, the community can engage in recreational, sociable, educative, and informative activities, including events, competitions, community walks, exhibitions, cultural shows, and fairs that celebrate their heritage and promote unity. Ultimately, the socio-cultural, physical, and economic infrastructure developed through community initiatives contributes significantly to nation-building efforts and can lead to greater peace, adherence to the rule of law, improved health outcomes, enhanced human rights awareness, elevated quality of life, and overall prosperity for the nation (Wali & M. N. Renzaho, 2018).

### **Challenges and Opportunities for Engagement**

The multifaceted links between migration and development have attracted a growing research and policy agenda, focusing primarily on the home country and either examining how policy can maximize the development benefits of migration (knowledge-transfer, remittances, return investment, social investments), learning from the best practice policies developed by countries in the Global South for this purpose or discussing the socio-environmental impact on the sending country. Much less attention has been devoted to the role of transnational migrant engagement in the development policy cycle, though a growing number of studies claim that through their mandate the organizations can connect development policy and practice in the home and host countries and leverage pro-development change in the countries of origin (Elo et al., 2025).

Paradoxically, academic research has been even scarcer, as the review of the literature shows. Empirical research is limited, with the majority of studies on the subject relying on single or at most a small number of case studies. Theoretical considerations have been equally rare in the academic sphere as most of the debate has been taken by practitioner academia and trade stakeholders. However, existent academic discussions generally fail to adhere to the rigors and criteria of scientific analysis, thereby largely ignoring the more complex interaction certain know best practice can be learn despite migrant and diaspora boundaries.

### **Government Policies and Initiatives**

Although Pakistan has been remarkably successful in facilitating remittances through a diverse range of frameworks and systems, substantial gaps can nonetheless be observed across various critical areas, particularly concerning investments and other essential

aspects of diaspora engagement and involvement. As a direct consequence of these overlooked areas, remittances continue to dominate as the predominant form of economic contribution that comes from the diaspora and migrant labor. Given that Pakistan has been a prominent labour-exporting nation since the 1960s, this unwavering focus on remittances seems entirely natural and even expected due to historical context; however, at the present stage of its socioeconomic development, it is becoming increasingly clear that Pakistan may require investment perhaps even more urgently than it needs the remittances that have been so historically significant (Asafo Agyei, 2021).

Moreover, Pakistan stands in stark contrast to various other major sending countries, which are progressively harnessing numerous invaluable resources from their diaspora, including essential skills, practical know-how, valuable technological advancements, and beneficial investment practices that can stimulate economic growth and innovation. In this context, the current measures that have been put in place to facilitate investments can clearly be deemed as inadequate and insufficient to meet the pressing needs of the economy. A cohesive national strategy, which should ideally consist of well-equipped institutions combined with specific and targeted policies, along with robust and enforceable legislation, all operating under structured and effective coordination mechanisms that involve collaboration among various stakeholders, is patently lacking in Pakistan's governance structures. This troubling situation is further exacerbated by the poor capacity and ongoing inefficiency among existing institutions designed to manage these complex issues, the lackluster implementation of the administrative regime that is presently in place, and the overarching fact that the governmental approach continues to remain uncoordinated and largely ad hoc in nature (Sheikh et al.2022).

Furthermore, there are considerable concerns as well about the restrictive government policies that limit potential inflows of investment, and the bifurcated or sometimes conflicting policies imposed by varying state-level agencies which often leads to confusion and inefficiency. Additionally, despite six decades of consistent migration abroad, Pakistan still notably lacks any significant institutionalized mechanism that is designed explicitly to maintain or effectively utilize the financial resources that have been accumulated, the skills that have been acquired, and the networks that have been established by its extensive migratory communities. Even though connections with the diaspora have frequently been nurtured by various political regimes, or have been

initiated on the initiative of the diaspora itself, their effectiveness has unfortunately proven to be one-sided and short-term in nature, primarily focused on enhancing the bottom-up legitimacy of specific governments rather than fostering a more sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship with the diaspora itself (Qaisrani, 2022). Such an approach could lead to long-term gains for both the migrants and Pakistan as a whole, enabling a reciprocal relationship that aids not just the economy but also strengthens the cultural and social ties binding the diaspora to their homeland. This neglected potential for synergy represents a missed opportunity that, if properly addressed, could transform the economic landscape and create a more robust and integrated approach to diaspora engagement that goes beyond mere remittance flows.

### **Comparative Analysis with Other Diasporas**

The Pakistani diaspora represents one of the largest and most widely spread communities in the world. Historically, the majority of this diaspora originated from Pakistan and Pakistan-held Kashmir, but in more recent times, there has also been significant migration from the Northern Areas, which are now referred to as Gilgit-Baltistan. This diaspora is characterized by its multi-ethnic and diverse composition, leading to a complex relationship between these various communities residing in the UK and other parts of the world and their counterparts in the Pahari-speaking rural heartlands (Hussain et al.2022).

The classic example of engagement within the diaspora is primarily manifested through remittances. These remittances have become a crucial component for the economic development of Pakistan, underscoring their importance. However, it quickly became clear that focusing solely on remittances introduces other challenges and problems that arise from that dominant and perhaps one-dimensional narrative. After conducting a comprehensive survey that assesses both the nature and the size of the Pakistani diaspora, this post provides an insightful explanation of how alternatives to remittances can often prove to be more feasible and sustainable for other diasporas around the world (Batool et al.2022). It explores why the Pakistani diaspora has successfully chosen a particularly effective path in securing necessary support for its own developmental needs and objectives. Moreover, it offers critical reflections on what lessons can be gleaned from different diaspora models that might be applicable for the Pakistani context, presenting opportunities for growth and collaboration that extend beyond traditional remittance streams.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Pakistani diaspora has been serving Pakistan in a multitude of diverse forms through the various linkages that arise from the extensive networks established both within and outside of the country. After thoroughly reviewing the fundamental roles that the Pakistani diaspora plays in contributing to national development efforts, it can be confidently stated that since its independence, the Government of Pakistan has been actively encouraging and enabling the flow of resources into the country. This has been achieved by deepening the active engagement of the Pakistani diaspora in its development initiatives and efforts. Similarly, various social organizations could be formed in the shapes of voluntary associations, interest groups, and other types of networks to provide invaluable socio-cultural and professional assistance to one another. This would help supplement and enhance the multifaceted support that the diaspora can offer in relation to national development activities carried out abroad. Although the diaspora diligently fulfills its obligations to the country it left behind through an appropriate mechanism, it is also critically important for the home country to demonstrate accountability.

Furthermore, ensuring clear transparency regarding how the funds and investments remitted by the diaspora are spent and utilized for the targeted groups or initiatives is essential. However, there remains considerable uncertainty regarding how effectively the country has been able to transform the overseas engagement of its nationals into a productive and effective network that positively impacts development. The Government of Pakistan established the Overseas Employment Division in 1971 with a clear objective: to effectively regulate the deployment of Pakistani workers seeking employment opportunities abroad and to actively explore and identify job prospects for them, particularly in the rapidly developing Gulf States. As time passed, the idea of international migration evolved significantly, and the concepts of employment promotion and poverty alleviation began to take on a much broader and more inclusive meaning. This evolution was marked by the establishment of various overseas offices and the launch of comprehensive Programs for Overseas Employment in countries where Pakistani workers were seeking opportunities. Driven by an enhanced awareness that Pakistani nationals who had settled abroad for extended periods could play a vital role in contributing to their home country, the Government of Pakistan recognized the potential for these individuals to significantly improve their socio-economic conditions. Consequently, the government's policy concerning the Management of Overseas Pakistani workers

became increasingly dynamic and responsive, resulting in a faster-paced approach and more strategic initiatives in these critical areas. In a landmark decision, the Government took steps to implement new and diversified projects and methods specifically aimed at attracting a greater inflow of investment, particularly from Professional Pakistani nationals who were either residing abroad or actively doing business in foreign markets. This strategic shift led to a remarkable increase in investment flows from just 159 million in 1980 to an impressive total of 5.202 billion by the year 1988, reflecting the success of these initiatives.

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