

Book Review

Husain, I., Qureshi, A., Hussain, N., *The Economy of Modern Sindh: Opportunities Lost and Lessons for the Future*. 496pp., Oxford University Press 2019

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The Economy of Modern Sindh, by the eminent Dr. Ishrat Husain, the experienced bureaucrat Aijaz Qureshi and the young economist Nadeem Hussain, provides a vast collection of descriptive data on the many aspects of the economy of Sindh. Although the title might suggest that the book is concerned only with the ‘modern’ characteristics of Sindh’s economy, in fact it presents a great deal of historical data to provide readers with a broader, longer-term context. Wherever possible, the authors also compare Sindh’s economy with that of the Punjab as a comparative case. Overall, although the book compiles some much needed statistics critical not only to understanding Sindh’s economic position but also for devising policies, the authors choose not to model some of the important indicators, notably Sindh’s economic development, which might have been expected from economists.

The topics covered in the book are appropriate in breadth and according to expectations. The authors provide descriptive statistics for Sindh relating to demographics, education, health, labour participation, economic sectors and available resources, all subjects without which a picture of Sindh’s economy would be incomplete. Although there is no separate section that addresses the gender gap in Sindh’s economy, the authors segregate the data by gender wherever possible to show that significant gender gaps exist in education and labour force participation. It is commendable that the authors seek to cover the economy as it relates to the rural and semi-urban parts of Sindh since this is where the majority of the province’s population resides. More journalistic accounts usually focus on the urban economy where most of the province’s capital is concentrated. Indeed, special attention is paid to agricultural production, irrigation, food insecurity, and water distribution, providing data that helps us

understand the rural landscape. Looking at such data, the reader realises that there is an urban-rural divide in Sindh in terms of income equality, tax burden, food security and labour force participation in the different sectors of the economy. While some of the problems such as water scarcity are shared by both urban and rural areas, there are specific problems related to the primary sectors of the economy that are more prominent in the latter. It is also commendable that the authors try to compile data for subjects we know are important but for which usually we do not have good data at hand to be able to design effective policy. For example, we know that in Sindh there is a huge informal sector and we have often failed to make good policy for it simply because it is difficult to find data. However, the authors do not simply neglect the topic because of this challenge but rather try to provide us with the best information available. Of course, some of the data that the authors present on different topics is not the latest but the book compiles most of what is available.

Inevitably, I would have liked the authors to cover certain topics in greater depth especially as these relate to improving Sindh’s economy. At the very beginning they state that one of their primary motivations in writing this book was to *improve* the economic conditions of the poor. Bearing this in mind, we see relatively less in terms of recommendations and programmes for implementation, even though, to be fair to the authors, their last chapter contains advice for policy-makers. For example, they mention the problem of collecting agricultural taxes in Sindh, though they do not provide a template for implementing their policy alternative given that there is little political will to realise such a policy in the face of the large income inequalities that exist between urban and rural areas. Also, those familiar with the political economy of Sindh and who have conducted

fieldwork in the province know that for years issues related to security such as crime, land-grabbing, kidnapping for ransom, targeted killing and extortion payments have plagued both urban and rural areas (Yusuf and Hasan, 2015; Isani, 2017). These issues are not covered.

As mentioned at the beginning of this review, the authors do not try to causally model aspects of Sindh's economy such as economic growth. Given that they have amassed large quantities of data, estimating causal models could have provided more evidence to support their findings. Of course, there would be some data problems in doing this but as economists the authors should have been able to propose solutions for them. This would have widened the book's reach as we would then have been able to generalise from the case of Sindh to other contexts.

These shortcomings aside, the book as a whole is very welcome because there is very little work available on Sindh's economy, as well as a paucity of generally available statistics. It will therefore serve as the primary reference for many future studies on the subject and will hopefully aid policy-makers in designing and implementing more effective policy. In summary, this book may perhaps disappoint those who were hoping for a publication that deals explicitly with the 'political' economy of Sindh, or for others looking for cutting-edge economic modelling or a normative guide for policy-makers. But for readers content with a general depiction of the state of the economy of Sindh, this is perhaps the most comprehensive work available.

References

- Yusuf, Huma., Hasan, S. 2015. *Conflict dynamics in Sindh*. United States Institute of Peace.
- Isani, M. 2017. *Preventing the Spread of Extremism by Understanding Sindhi Rural Society*. Local Politics and Islamist Movements, POMEPS Studies Collection 27, pp. 74-77.
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