

Empowering Communities: Poverty Graduation in Pakistan

The Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), in collaboration with the Lahore School Economics (LSE), Duke University, University of Oxford, has undertaken a census study of third-tier organisations in Pakistan. In the session, a presentation will be made on endline study results reflecting on the role of community institutions in fostering social and economic empowerment. Community institutions provide a platform for vulnerable groups to voice their concerns and needs; ensure inclusivity in their programmes and initiatives; provide capacity building and skills development opportunities that empower individuals with the knowledge and expertise to improve their livelihoods and contribute to community growth.

The session will also highlight PPAF's journey with the Graduation Approach, which began in 2008 as a pilot project. The Graduation Approach offers a comprehensive pathway out of poverty, focusing on social protection, financial inclusion, livelihood enhancement, and social empowerment. Through statistically significant increases in consumption, income, and wealth, PPAF's programme has demonstrated the transformative impact on treated households (Science, May 2015).¹ The four pillars of the approach will be analysed showcasing the real-life impact through research and third-party evaluations, revealing how communities have uplifted themselves through the Fund's interventions. The session will consider how the graduation approach contrasts to the provision of cash transfers. It will also discuss how such interventions change the economic preferences of households – both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Additionally, discussion will be held on the inclusion of the Graduation Programme in the national agenda and its implementation across 23 districts and 386 Union Councils, facilitated by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) under the government's National Poverty Graduation Initiative.

The discussion will bring together experts to deliberate the impact of these approaches on the ground with the following objectives:

- Showcase the role of community institutions in fostering social and economic empowerment at the grassroots level.
- Explore whether the graduation approach can shift economic preferences, beliefs and voting behaviour of households.
- Present and explain Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund's Poverty Graduation approach, highlighting its importance in uplifting the lives of the most vulnerable and marginalised in Pakistan.
- Discuss strategies for scaling up the poverty graduation programme and building sustainable models that can continue to uplift communities beyond the project's duration.

Panel Organisers

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¹ PPAF was part of a global study under which six randomised trials in Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, India, Pakistan, and Peru with a total of 10,495 participants were conducted. The research was carried out by Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo, Nathanael Goldberg, Dean Karlan, Robert Osei, William Parienté, Jeremy Shapiro, Bram Thuysbaert, and Christopher Udry. The results were published in the May 2015 in *Science* 15; 348(6236):1260799, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1260799>.

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