Research Idea

Contextualizing the Leadership Role of RIZQ Foundation (Food Bank) in the COVID-19 Epoch: A Vaccine of Compassion for Local Food Insecure Communities of Pakistan

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Abstract: In the South Asian region, liberal democracies have observed the latest shift towards a networked form of governance as an inclusive response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the post-colonial doctrine, South Asian region, particularly Pakistan, faces multifaceted policy problems, and “food insecurity” is one of them. In this study, we critically analyzed the leadership role of a food bank in this uncertain time of COVID-19. We inferred that the RIZQ foundation has a unique structural framework based on “collaborative governance.” This foundation is working on the philosophy of social change, food philanthropy, and community development. Particularly, in COVID-19, the RIZQ foundation worked 24/7 by launching its digital campaigns through social media platforms. Holistically, there is a way forward to make a mutual, integrated, and collaborative coalition to deal with this humanitarian crisis by engaging the public policy actors: public servants, politicians, civil society, the private sector, and most importantly, the ‘public.’

Introduction

In this era of global digital governance, we are moving towards new paradigms and institutional developments. In the COVID-19 crisis, the imperative of change management coupled with Neo-institutionalism demands holistic approaches, robust leadership techniques, and pragmatic, innovative solutions (Christopher Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2020). In VUCA-volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous working environments, the public sector and third sector have delivered their services to infinity. While COVID-19 exacerbates vulnerabilities worldwide, unsung heroes at all levels of society help the tide turn toward a brighter future. Unfortunately, in post-colonialism, there are multi-faceted public challenges in the South Asian region and specifically in Pakistan. In adverse circumstances of epidemic, we are battling the menace of food insecurity. This important policy problem has been addressed in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan by introducing the
participation of multiple stakeholders with a contextual focus on the third sector. The management and sustenance of food banks, social entrepreneurial ventures, and locally based philanthropic public projects advocating public awareness are crucial steps taken by South Asian liberal democracies. Comparatively, there is a need to address the issue of ‘food insecurity at federal, state and local levels of governance to cater to its future repercussions on social, political and economic dimensions.

Innovatively, a unique food bank - RIZQ foundation, brings forth an innovative approach to the world as they have been working on the national mission of hunger-free Pakistan since 2015. This philanthropic food venture has a unique social change model which works only in public collaborations and voluntary assistance. In the harsh situations of an epidemic, they worked tirelessly to reach the food insecure communities with the help of digital spaces. Thus, the thumping success of their digital campaigns is a practical example of collaborative leadership guided by collective consciousness and these relief efforts are turned out to be a vaccine of compassion for the public.

In a nutshell, this article has contextualized the collaborative leadership role of RIZQ foundation (food bank) and critically analyzed the general operations during a pandemic; also, this paper addressed the different manifestations of food insecurity, community leadership, social change, collaborative governance and sustainable development; moreover, it also explained the synergetic effect of multiple policy stakeholders which were the key enablers in the management of the humanitarian crisis of COVID-19; and suggesting a constructive way forward to solve the conundrum of reforms in the post-pandemic world for public leaders in South Asia, along with a comprehensive conclusion.

Literature Review

Both from an empirical and conceptual standpoint, in this study we reviewed diverse sources to get an overarching idea of food insecurity, food banks and their implications in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the inception of globalization and capitalism, emerging economies have been experiencing chronic food insecurity (Randall, 2021). To address this major policy problem, liberal democracies are taking measures because it is not limited to one nation; globally, every country faces it in different proportions and intensities. For this purpose, in 2015 world united to build a consensus on this global mutual challenge in the form of SDGs-sustainable development goals (Martins, Ferreira, & Braga, 2021). Goal 2 emphasized alleviating food insecurity to mitigate its drastic long-lasting effects on the socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Many scholars maintained that when public assistance fails to satisfy the public's basic needs, the third sector bumps in to support them. Similarly, in the context of food insecurity the local community showed civic responsiveness and sensitivity towards this human issue by introducing food banks, soup vans and community kitchens.
According to the findings of Van der Wal (2020), collaborative governance has assisted public managers in responding more effectively and efficiently in the VUCA- volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous working environments at a global level (Bianchi, Nasi, & Rivenbark, 2021). It is still in the explorative stage of which countries have adopted the best strategies to mitigate the pandemic, but literature is updating all the important facts for post-pandemic reforms. In the South Asian region, one of the key competencies of public leaders observed in COVID-19 is empowering and leveraging collaborative networks. Engaging all policy stakeholders in the pandemic was a huge challenge for public sector, but due to public cooperation and civic responsiveness, governments minimized the ramifications of the crisis.

If we mainly talk about Pakistan, the volatile and chaotic environment has damaged the policy frameworks, questioned the government performance, and faced the credibility crisis due to weak institutional capacities in crisis management. Additionally, nations' socio-economic and political developments are converging into global governance. The liberalization of democracies, inclusive trading, integrated advocacy networks, diplomatic political fronts, diverse public mechanisms, freedom of speech and expression, digitalization and open international relationships are paving a path to sustainable development (Bak, Cheba, & Lacka, 2020; Kinsey, & Rundle, 2020). Sustainable development negates isolationism. It promotes global governance and integrates donor countries with aid recipient countries. The global issues including wildfires, climate change, smog in South Asia, water depletion and inter alia, are mutual policy challenges and with special reference to the global pandemic the collective response of regions was truly a colossal victory against this human catastrophe (Huang, 2020). So, there is a profound connection between local community problems and contemporary global challenges; they are heterogenous but interrelated and have integrated patterns.

**Conceptual Framework**

In this case study, through empirical understanding, theoretical perspective, and academic support, the chief theory underpinning the significant findings is the ‘social change model’; profoundly explained by Komives and Wagner (2016).

**Figure 1: Illustrating the Conceptual Framework of the Case Study**

**Methodology**

In this discourse, the research methodology used was explorative and descriptive having epistemology of interpretivism and ontology of
constructivism. In accordance with the main research question, the case study method was preferred because in-depth investigation and analysis of the phenomenon can only be done by it. The food bank taken for extensive case analysis in this research was the “RIZQ foundation.” The data was collected by using the following protocols:

i. Semi-structured online interviews for 60 minutes,

ii. Participant observation technique—researcher volunteered in a digital campaign of RIZQ foundation named EHSAAKARO (BE EMPATHETIC) in March 2020,

iii. Online media tool kits, reports, official documents, and social campaigns’ data on digital spaces like Facebook, Instagram, and official website of a food bank.

The qualitative inquiry adopted the purposive sampling technique due to the specific orientation and perspective of the discourse. The unit of analysis (sample) comprised of management of food bank – owners, volunteers of RIZQ foundation, and community – post-graduate students. Additionally, the data was analyzed through thematic analysis. For reliable and valid results, this method is very effective in handling the data, which is mainly collected from multiple resources (Bryman, 2016; Yin, 1993).

Findings

1. Battling COVID-19 in Pakistan – A Pragmatic Response of RIZQ Foundation

RIZQ foundation stepped forward to help the underprivileged and affected communities of Pakistan. In difficult times of COVID-19, on 18th March 2020, they initiated the campaign named “EHSAAKARO” (be empathetic). It was the first youth mobilizing movement focused on alleviating the repercussions of COVID-19 on the downtrodden parts of the community. With the help of collective community efforts, they have managed to reach, feed, and sustain the 15,000 affected families for two months during the first wave of the coronavirus.

Table 1: Snapshot of EhsaasKaro Campaign during the First Wave of COVID-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution during 1st wave of COVID-19</th>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3000+</td>
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This movement becomes successful just because of the equal efforts of the stakeholders: corporations, local government, donors, logistic partners, institutional RIZQ chapters in different universities, and digital media. Thus, this was a collaborative, shared, pragmatic approach to crisis management.

2. Sustaining ‘Collaborative Governance’ by Robust Technology-Powered Communication Strategies during the Pandemic

Online activism has stimulated available digital spaces to reach out to affected communities. The embedded network of volunteers and RIZQ management utilized the technology-driven communication strategies to
make their inclusive efforts more effective and efficient in challenging times of COVID-19. In this study, the aspect of digitalization and its impact on community has been critically analyzed in this section.

- **The official website** (www.sharerizq.com) depicted a transparent approach to the food bank. To maintain the foundation’s credibility, the channels of communication between donors and aid recipients are visible and accessible.

- Creation of public awareness regarding the deadly virus on local TV channels and voiced the campaigns of RIZQ foundation.

- **Facebook** official page, this social media platform has a synergetic effect on boosting local campaigns and civic activism. They highlighted the issue on a larger scale by giving live sessions and updating the community about their response to the coronavirus.

- **Similarly, Instagram** has also assisted to channelize the general operations and diversifying their fund-raising activities.

- The application of **WhatsApp** – formal WhatsApp groups were managed to communicate and monitor the activities of volunteers.

- Also, the **print media** has equally participated in generating authentic ‘public information’ through pamphlets and food bank media kits.

Thus, it is inferred from the data that in COVID-19 health emergency, the food bank has galvanized the community to respond to the viral disease most logically and rationally through online activism and volunteerism. In a nutshell, they had managed the virus stress and tried to utilize the available, accessible, and attainable digital resources by leveraging technology for network governance in a critical pandemic state.

3. **Vaccine of Compassion Encapsulated by Innovation, Civic Responsiveness, and Social Cohesion**

In this disaster, community leadership stood firm to fight back. They supported the philosophy of civic responsiveness and social cohesion. The public was cooperating in lockdowns and had followed the government’s guidelines. There were conflicts, different public opinions, and diverse suggestions to deal with this disaster. Still, all the stakeholders responded very wisely by sticking conclusively to only one mutual “common purpose”: to alleviate the future repercussions of COVID-19.

Holistically, the public leaders had tried to make robust policies to block the invisible enemy, it included safety measures, emergency preparedness, social distancing, wearing of masks, public awareness, initiation of a process of vaccination, availability of hospitals, especially the wards for COVID-19 patients, travel restrictions, and among other things; these public innovative solutions and strategic planning paved a path of immunity from this dangerous disease. So far, these colossal efforts have resulted in a low number of infections and deaths in Pakistan, particularly the
leadership role of the third sector in this regard, which has been hailed as an emerging new model of social change coupled with collaborative governance.


In this study, we explored a unique model based on NPG – New public governance stakeholder approach. Strategically, they engaged the corporations, local government, civil society, public, partners, and donors to contribute to this noble cause. RIZQ had also initiated its different chapters to mobilize the youth in a proper direction in different universities in Pakistan. So far, they have conducted 100+ seminars and lectures to create public sensitivity toward COVID-19, food insecurity, and food wastage. They are making a sustainable and secure food network through strategic corporate partnerships through bottom-up policy making. They made an inclusive social value chain to channelize the structure of collaborative governance. The 3 C’s - collaboration, compassion and cohesion- are their operations’ legitimate supporters.

5. Global Civil Society and Conundrum of Reforms in Post-Pandemic Epoch

As a collective response to COVID-19 world catastrophe, the global civil society has advocated the global mission to reduce the grim consequences of the virus. The imperative of transnationalism and the domestic policy arena in the global pandemic illustrates the notion of the international developmental projects mainly introduced by welfare liberal nations. For instance, the role of the World Health Organization-WHO in the mitigation of SARS-CoV-2. The practicality of this dimension pillared on the fusion of the global policies into the domestic programs through sustaining the transnational relations in the region. These facts are quite evident in the fight against deadly COVID-19. The cross-culture coordination and constructive participation of these institutions had an influential impact on its alleviation. Incorporating international health policies into local public programs and their inclusion into state policies was the collective and united response to the novel virus. This dimension has a trickle-down effect on multilateralism and regionalization.
Similarly, the engagement of partners and regional institutions in the COVID-19 epoch particularly in South Asia, SAARC- the South Asian association for regional cooperation has a potential role in involving the region to take timely preventive measures and avoid the detrimental effects of COVID-19; similarly, SCO- Shanghai cooperation organization has also guided its member states including Pakistan and India. Both these organizations focus on utilizing digital spaces by conducting virtual meetings, conferences, and seminars to find different perspectives and approaches to dealing with COVID-19. They are governing their regions in a positive direction to equip their public leaders and human resource with desired leadership tool kit. The significant findings illustrated the adaptation of the collaborative approach of these organizations to control, prevent and reduce the spread of the infectious disease by promoting policies of social distancing, travel restrictions, testing of SARS-CoV-2, preparedness of vaccination, quarantine protocols, symptom screening, masks and many more.

Recommendations – A Way Forward

For the ease of public leaders in the post-pandemic world, this case study has discovered some practical suggestions:

1. Understand cultural acceptability and adopt a proactive approach to the COVID-19 crisis.
2. Tackle the issue and its granularity with cooperation & collaboration.
3. Connect action to the evidence of impact in policy making and engage local communities in online activism.
4. Recognize social value and develop resilience in crisis management.
5. Rejuvenate the spirit of ‘humanism’ in state institutions and integrate the public policy stakeholders.

Conclusion – Resolving the Issue

In this neo-liberalism doctrine of globalism, nations are striving for public welfare and sustainable development. Concerning post-pandemic reforms in South Asia, institutional change is not always easy. It requires continuous efforts, an inclusive workforce, and diverse, innovative solutions. Therefore, the essence of administering state affairs relies upon the continuation of public programs, the willingness of administrators, the negation of sweeping & simultaneous reforms, and the adoption of collaborative leadership by giving equal opportunity for participation to each public policy stakeholder. In this study, the comprehensive case analysis of the food bank-RIZQ foundation has succinctly articulated the collaborative response to deadly disease by reaching out to less privileged food insecure communities of Pakistan through self-organized online activism and volunteerism. Rationally, they proved that coronavirus is a test for humanity, and we should have to promote the narrative of ‘humanism’ in our social structures and public institutions because the true moral values of compassion, empathy, and solidarity are enough to fight...
COVID-19 pandemic. In VUCA post-pandemic epoch, the guidance of collaborative governance is a ray of light for public leaders. If they work on the principles of self-accountability, public service motivation, philanthropic ideology, and social justice, then world societies will control the massacre of COVID-19 in the proceeding years.

References


