Development Challenges Confronting Pakistan is a collection of essays edited by Anita M. Weiss and Saba Gul Khattak, both seasoned and widely published practitioners and academicians in the field of development. The book was published by Kumarian Press in 2013.

Dr. Weiss is a professor in and head of the Department of International Studies at the University of Oregon. She has published many articles and book chapters on development, aid, gender, and social development. Her research is predominantly focused on the Indian subcontinent and related to the role of religion in these polities.

Dr. Khattak is an experienced practitioner in the field of development in Pakistan. She has worked with various national and international policy think tanks in the role of social policy expert. She is a member of the Planning Commission of Pakistan and Board of Governors Sustainable Development Policy Institute; a Pakistan-based advocacy group on social sector policy issues.

The book is divided into four sections. The first section addresses economic challenges and consists of three chapters; the second section focuses on infrastructure challenges and contains three chapters; the third section deals with human security and consists of five chapters; and the fourth and final section focuses on the ongoing militancy, insecurity, and political paths in Pakistan and consists of three chapters.

The first chapter is written by economist Shahrukh Rafi Khan about the economic challenges. Pakistan and India attained independence in the same year, and despite India’s better economic conditions due to its larger share of assets and resources, the two countries started as economic equals. The per capita GDP of both countries was similar in the 1960s, but after that Pakistan’s per capita GDP increased; a lead that was maintained until 2006. India’s per capita GDP, however, experienced a steady increase.
In this chapter, instead of using growth diagnostics—a tool to formulate growth strategies that requires more economic sophistication, the author applied weakness diagnostics. This broad-based and forward-looking tool uses current data to highlight the main problems rather than tracking the history to identify binding constraints, as characterized in growth diagnostics. The tool identifies the problems through tables that are constructed with suitable comparisons. The author has compared the World Bank indicators of Pakistan, India, and China from 2000 to 2011 and found that the problem lies in the low rate of literacy and quality of education along with low levels of technological upgrading and industrial diversification. The study prescribes an exploration of technology policies and policies to facilitate entrepreneurship. The study highlighted issues through comparative study but comparisons based on World Bank indicators do not give the whole picture. There are other political and social factors behind Pakistan’s higher per capita GDP. Pakistan has received large amounts of foreign aid which has certainly boosted per capita GDP. The data in the tables seem inconsistent, in that different indicators are compared in different years rather than in correct order.

Aasim Sajjad Akhtar contributed the second chapter, in which he identifies Pakistan’s dependency on foreign aid as a major developmental challenge. The political economy of aid has facilitated the gradual militarization of the state that encouraged dependence on external help rather than engaging in productive and efficient development apparatus. Drawing his conclusion from the framework of David Harvey, he argues that neo-liberal practices in Pakistan were imposed due to political rather than economic reasons. Using secondary data, he has tracked and compared the history of Pakistan’s political situation with the economic aid provided, and concludes that foreign aid was provided by international financial institutions (IFIs) and Western states to increase their power and influence in the region rather than to spread capitalistic practices. Furthermore, though this political economy of aid has increased external debt and dependence, it has bolstered the security apparatus of the state.

In the third chapter, a renowned economist, Abid Suleri argues that food insecurity is the cause of political instability, unrest, and disputes in the society; however political instability, societal disorder and conflicts in turn cause food insecurity, poverty, and marginalization. He argues that economic development is possible with the right set of policies. Furthermore, policies are right if they follow a people-centered development paradigm rather than the security paradigm that is exercised mainly through military means. Also, instead of providing individual security, policies are more driven towards achieving national, regional, and global security. Tracing Pakistan’s history with the help of secondary data, he argues that the interconnectedness of policies, unstable political situations, poor economic and social conditions, and natural crises resulted in individual insecurity.

In the second section of the book, “Challenges of Infrastructural Transformation,” authors have analyzed political, legal, and bureaucratic institutions of Pakistan. In the