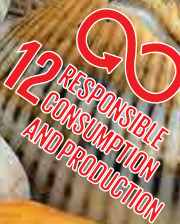


Leaving No One Behind: Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan



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Finally, dedicated to the loving memory of my beloved grandma who was left behind by the MDGs. And yet her undying struggle against acute poverty and deprivation ensured that I surely make it to have a say in a future framework that leaves no one behind!

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Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Learning from the past



Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set the stage for consolidating a vision of the global development within a singular framework. Despite some steps in the right direction, overall progress was disparate against goals across countries. The framework attracted severe criticism for grotesque failures of imagination, which eventually compromised the prospects and promise such a framework could have achieved. Some of such limitations included.

- Non-consultative process leaving many of the voices unheard and left behind, which resulted in lack of ownership.
- Focus on developing countries without an adequate baseline for differing starting points, country-specific challenges, and subsequent development priorities.
- No global mechanism was set up to translate global ambitions into national policy action, which led to fragmentation in both visioning and the implementation of the framework.
- Proportionate approach (measuring change in percentages) was adopted, which lead to development efforts concentrated in easily accessible areas further marginalizing the poorest.
- Siloed approach without a careful cognizance to synergetic ties and intersections across goals and targets resulted in a massive loss of strategic resources.
- Absence of right-based programing left out critical dimensions of dignity, equality and quality of development outcomes.
- No robust review and accountability mechanism rendering vast discrepancies in planning and implementation.

Despite average gains at the global level, MDGs progress review posed a critical question at the holisticness of the framework. The conceptual design of the Agenda 2030 factors in different learnings form the MDGs experience, however, the efficiency of such adaptations is yet to be measured to scale.

Agenda 2030: Transforming Our World



The ambitious Agenda 2030: Transforming Our World for Sustainable Development¹, adopted by 193 states in September 2015, set the highest benchmark for political consensus in the history of development frameworks. After extensive consultations involving various actors for three years, the framework is spelt across 17 goals and 169 targets focusing social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. Reckoned to be a game-changer for both people and the planet, the framework is an intricate merger of development and sustainability approaches - from universal healthcare requiring further investments unto responsible consumption emphasizing conservation of finite resources. Balancing the two will rest on seriousness of political will and subtlety of development programming to achieve the complex task of scaling up MDGs progress while not losing sight of the challenges confronting our future. The five Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships) in the preamble of the Agenda 2030² reinforce the need for prioritizing human dignity at the core of development visions through meaningful partnerships in a peaceful and prosperous world sensitive towards our planetary limitations. The taglines like Universal goals and Leaving No one behind clearly articulate the agenda's breadth and its transformative ambition for our collective future.

However, despite the agenda's universal mandate, the situation urges the need for balancing strategic priorities, especially in case of developing countries which may have very different starting points, variant available resources, and, unique sets of challenges. Besides, when approached as outcomes, the aspired achievement of these goals will depend on various critical factors like geo-strategic, macroeconomic and foreign policy aspects to attune to the mandate for realizing transformative change in the world. Moreover, Agenda 2030's success will depend on its ability to keep up with the benchmark set by normative frameworks in upholding dignity, equality and rights at the heart of development ambitions.

National Context: Country readiness for SDGs

Islamic Republic of Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world with an estimated population of 213.6 million.³ The country epitomizes the melting pot - a cultural reservoir encapsulating the heterogeneity of various cultural value systems including Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Bahais and Jews, among others. Bordered by India in the East, Afghanistan and Iran in the West, China on the North, and Arabian sea in the South with a coastline of 1,046 kilometer, the country is situated in South Asia right at the junction of Central Asia and Middle-East. Having adopted the Agenda 2030, the country has endorsed to institutionalize development pursuit in all three dimensions of the framework, i.e. Social, Economic and Environmental. By and large, it is a massive undertaking given the country's situation in these domains.

a) Social Development

Pakistan has had a long history of poor scores on the Human Development Index, ranked at 147 out of 188 countries, assessed in areas of life expectancy, access to knowledge (including expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling) and a decent standard of living (including GNI per capita).⁴ In terms of gender, decades of exclusionist patterns embedded in patriarchal norms have pushed the country to second worst at 143rd out of 144 on Global Gender Gap index.⁵ About 38% of Pakistan's population was classified as 'poor' during 2015-16 (with around 10% urban and rural differential). In terms of absolute numbers, there were 74 million poor in 2015-16 compared to 61 million in 2010-11 - indicating a regressive pattern despite commitments of poverty alleviation to the MDGs. The Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2015-2016 estimates vulnerability to poverty at an overall 51%, with the 'already poor' at an 80% risk of falling under the minimum threshold.⁶

Educational attainment of head of household is a significant determinant of vulnerability to poverty, with reduced risk tied to educational attainment of the spouse. Despite the positive correlation between educational attainment and poverty risk reduction, as many as 44% (or 22.6 million) children between the ages of 5 and 16 remain out of school, with striking provincial differences.⁷ Furthermore, inequitable financing and marginalizing governance continues to result in dismal health outcomes with country spending on per capita health at US \$36.15, way below WHO's low income countries' benchmark of US \$86.⁸ Marginalized adrift our policy focus, social development continues to be a tradeoff for economic growth in the race for international competitiveness. Diverting funds away from the social sector has been the norm in national budgetary processes, resulting in downhill stride of social development prospects in the country.



b) *Economic Growth*

With a GDP of \$279 billion (2017 est.)⁹ and in terms of Purchasing Power Parity at \$1.060 trillion (2017 est.),¹⁰ Pakistan is recognized as a lower middle-income country as per World Bank classifications. On the other side, State Bank of Pakistan reported country's total debt and liabilities to have reached up to Rupees 27 trillion (est. 2017) which is 74.7% of the GDP. The external debt, almost 37% of the total debt and liabilities, stands at about Rupees 9.8 trillion which is 27.3% of the GDP.¹¹ Other than weak revenue generation and constrained economic potential, heavy spendings in defense and debt servicing - the former allocated 21.5% and the latter 32% of the national budget for fiscal year 2017/18 - pose serious challenges for growth prospects in Pakistan.¹² Further, macro-economic pressures manifested through conditions of deregulation of markets, debt-consolidation and austerity measures, and subsequent cuts to key strategic sectors continue to cripple the prospects of sound social development strategies in Pakistan.



c) *Environmental protection*

Despite being one of the lowest emitters of Green House Gases (GHG) at less than 1%, Pakistan is ranked as the 7th most vulnerable country to climate change hazards on the Climate Risk Index.¹³ National Climate Change Policy cites erratic monsoons, intense floods and draughts, rising temperatures resulting in heatwaves and water-stress, Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), deforestation and increased intrusion of saline water in Indus delta as some of the major climatic threats confronting Pakistan's future.¹⁴ And yet, integrating climate change into mainstream planning and budgetary processes as part of Medium Term Budgetary Framework, a key recommendation of Climate Public Expenditure and Institutional Review (CPEIR),¹⁵ remains unlikely as evident of the meager allocation of Rs. 815 million for fiscal year 2017/18.¹⁶

Overall, ranked at 110th in Democracy Indexⁱ (2017),¹⁷ and 20th among Fragile Statesⁱⁱ,¹⁸ the country needs to prioritize democratization of state and social institutions at the heart of its pursuit of SDGs implementation. Prioritizing Goal 16 should lay the foundations for transformative visioning, efficient implementation and robust review - critical to the country progress against the bare minimum expectations of the Agenda 2030.

ⁱ Measuring political culture, democratic functioning and civil liberties

ⁱⁱ Measured through a comprehensive list of economic, social and political indicators

Translating Global Ambitions into National Actions: Way forward on SDGs implementation

The realization of the SDGs agenda demands synchronization of all the various parts and cogs to strategize holistic progress across social, economic and environmental domains of development. A stepped approach is needed, starting with benchmarking the contextual situation; setting national priority goals and targets; ensuring policy coherence; enacting effective governance; articulating implementation infrastructure; configuring synergetic ties across targets for equitable and smart financing; instituting efficient data-collection mechanisms; developing complementary indicators to measure qualitative change; and, setting up robust review processes for transparency and accountability. Simultaneously, the government ought to keep an eye out for potential trade-offs and spillovers for strategic concentration whilst in pursuit of specific goals and targets. Actions must be regularly reviewed for efficiency and responsiveness, with corresponding remedial measures, and consultative solutions involving diverse stakeholders, especially civil society.



Five Stage stakeholder Engagement Framework
Redrawn from: krick et al. (2005, 11)



a) Implementation Infrastructure:
i. Parliamentary Taskforces

SDGs framework institutionalized parliamentary interaction across tiers as part of the national infrastructure to implement the Agenda 2030. Federal government has constituted Parliamentary Taskforce and notified the establishment of four Provincial Taskforces (comprising mainly Parliamentarians and Provincial legislators). The formation of parliamentary task forces on the SDGs is encouraging provided they are able to effectively play their legislative and oversight role as per commitments to the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s mandate at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)ⁱⁱⁱ 2016.¹⁹ Albeit, the taskforce formation and membership needs to be revisited with a focus on merit, encouraging technical expertise in various aspects of development rather than merely relabeling MDGs taskforce members into SDGs taskforce. Civil society could play an instrumental role through capacity building initiatives for policy coherence, identification of strategic intersections between goals and targets, and enacting review mechanisms to facilitate the parliamentarians’ role at both ends of the spectrum.

Further, parliamentary institutional capacities and limitations must be assessed and catered to regularly to mainstream SDGs across policy mandates at the federal and provincial levels. This must follow equitable financing and sharing of strategic resources through engagement of government, private sector and civil society to ensure collective reflection and collaborative action for successful implementation of the SDGs.



ⁱⁱⁱ Universal intergovernmental forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive multi-stakeholder working methods of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The HLPF on Sustainable Development is the central UN platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda as well as other frameworks related to sustainable development (i.e. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, etc.).

ii. Planning and Development Commission

Planning and Development Commission (P&DC) is leading the charge with implementation against the Agenda 2030. Assessment shows that progress has been slow and uneven across provinces, with lack of clarity on mandates and how to address the intersections between goals and targets. The Commission needs to devise a coherent development strategy identifying opportunities for intersectional approach through enhanced coordination and inclusive planning among different departments. The implementation framework needs to delineate roles and responsibilities across governmental departments mandated to pursue specific goals while also identifying cross-cutting synergies. The exercise would pave way for smart financing to achieve progress on multiple targets and create the fiscal space needed for additional financing in the less prioritized sectors, especially reckoning the depleting Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds.

Additionally, the Commission has set up SDG Units at the provincial level under Planning and Development (P&D) departments for implementation of the Agenda 2030. However, the Units are yet to devise coherent TORs articulating their focus and operational purpose. The Units need to be operationalized with well-articulated mandates backed by sufficient resources and tools to efficiently proceed with the mandate. Moreover, the Commission needs to mobilize strategic support from different stakeholders including civil society and private sector throughout planning, implementation and reporting phases for a holistic progress against the Agenda 2030.

iii. Bureau of Statistics

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) is responsible for reporting progress against the Agenda 2030 under the supervision of UN Statistical Commission. The government has adopted Inter Agency Expert Group (IAEG) recommended list of indicators against SDG targets. However, there are several gaps (see *Measuring Change: The Politics of Indicators*) in the current list related to availability of data, production of indicators, and reporting. The Bureau needs to engage civil society and other actors to bridge data gaps, along with development of national complementary indicators for qualitative assessment of development outcomes. Where it is important to avoid the overlaps and repetition in data collection, it is equally imperative to consolidate a list of indicators reported against different frameworks to ensure that data collection, indicator production, and reporting process is coherent and offers the room for strategic synergies across developmental initiatives and reporting frameworks. The government currently reports against various frameworks in isolation and SDGs could prove to be an instrumental bonding force in consolidating reporting processes for efficient and transparent measurement of change.



Besides, recent census could be utilized as a baseline for developing holistic and inclusive development plans in the light of an updated demographic profile. The process could also help ensure equitable distribution of resources among provinces, including the reconfiguration of National Finance Commission (NFC) award for parallel progress against the SDGs. It would also help address the perennial issue of socio-economic disparities across provinces for transformative change in critical areas where development continues to be an impoverished aspect.

iv. Civil Society

Civil society is recognized as a Major Group - an important constituency in development process endorsed by all Member States of the UN - and a central stakeholder for achieving sustainable development outcomes for the world. The actor has played a vital role in conceptualization and design of the SDGs framework at the international level and is expected to support implementation and the review process.

In Pakistan, however, civil society organizations' lack of in-depth understanding of the SDGs framework is another serious concern. MDG's drawback of siloed approach to development continues to haunt SDG's implementation. The organizations cannot afford to cherry-pick goals and targets, relevant to their thematic forte, without much attention to intersectional ties across the SDGs. It requires a concerted effort to understand the breadth of the framework with a clear view of strategic synergies where development efforts could be dovetailed for multiple gains. This presses for the need for civil society to alter the course from traditional watch-dogging to vigilant torch-bearing so that it helps the government with its strategic resources.

On the other hand, continued shrinking democratic spaces for participation, dialogue and accountability could seriously affect SDGs progress in Pakistan. Institutional mechanisms, therefore, need to be democratized to ensure civil society integration with the SDGs architecture recognizing the actor's vital role in the process. Moreover, the country needs to understand that an independent and robust civil society is absolutely critical to the transparency and effectiveness of development initiatives. Civil society's ability to efficiently contribute across planning, implementation and review processes is bound to have a huge bearing on successful implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the country.

b) Social Development for all

i. Standard of Living for all

Standard of living, measured in terms of real income per capita, access to essential services and poverty rate,^{iv} approximates the quality of life available to people of a specific socio-economic class or a geographic area.²⁰ One measure of Standard of Living is the United Nation’s Human Development Index (HDI) which covers life expectancy at birth, education and income per capita - where Pakistan is currently ranked at 147th out of 188 countries in 2017.²¹ Despite commitments to poverty and hunger eradication, enshrined in goal 1 and 2, the country progress is drastically off the mark ranked at 171 out of 188 countries in terms of GDP per capita (PPP) of \$5,400 (2017 est.) with almost 29.5% (2013 est.) population below poverty line.²² The official unemployment rate stands at 6% without factoring in statistics from informal economy which is estimated to employ 70% of the total workforce.²³ Such a massive amount of workforce employed in the informal sector sans social protection in the absence of efficient accountability frameworks to uphold labor rights. The statistics reveal huge disparities with the income share held by lowest 10% of the country at 4% (2013 est.) while top 10% of the population holds 26% (2013 est.).²⁴ Amid acute poverty and inequality traps, there is little hope that poverty alleviation strategies offer for the people deprived of basic human, physical and productive assets and restricted access to essential services.²⁵



^{iv} Along with measurement of gross domestic product, gross national income, political and cultural freedom, environmental conditions, safety and security.



This is partly due to the absence of a concrete social protection framework - the existing either being ad-hoc initiatives (temporary measures) or undertaken in compliance with requirements by international donors²⁶ - indicative of the lack of political will to eradicate poverty. It is further worsened by the absence of integrated development efforts and the meager availability of fiscal space to lift people out of poverty and hunger. This is evident of the allocations for social protection; 121 billion to BISP, 2.1 billion to Social protection, 6 billion to Bait-ul-Maal, and, 2 billion for Pakistan Poverty Fund - accumulating only 2.5% of the overall budget for 2017/18.²⁷ The flagship BISP program covers barely 2.6% of the population against the 29.5% (est. 2013) population breathing below poverty line.²⁸ Abysmal global rankings are indicative of decades of exclusionist patterns and marginalizing governance widening inequalities reflective of GINI index^v estimating 30.7 (2013 est.) inequality in Pakistan.²⁹

The country therefore requires its pro-poor growth policies to be consistent, cross-cutting across strategic sectors, equitably financed, and, efficiently regulated by effective governance to reach the most marginalized. Clear visioning of ensuring provision of essential services, especially education and health, could lead to strategic gains in social development ultimately raising the standard of living in Pakistan.

ii. *Universal Healthcare*

Enshrined in goal 3 of the SDGs, healthcare mandate in Pakistan is plagued by mal-governance and inequitable financing with little signs of improvement over the years. The government expenditure on health is 4.7% of the GDP,³⁰ lowest in the region, which includes recurrent and capital spending from government (central and local) budgets, external borrowings and grants (including donations from international agencies and



^v The Gini index measures the area between the Lorenz curve and a hypothetical line of absolute equality, expressed as a percentage of the maximum area under the line. Thus, a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.

nongovernmental organizations), and social (or compulsory) health insurance funds. The ratio plugged in by the government itself thus constitutes a much lower figure clearly reflective of private sector accounting for 77% of the total health care expenses. Out-of-pocket expenditure (56.3% as a percentage of total expenditure on health)³¹ is the largest source for health sector financing in the country.³² Such a high ratio of Out-of-pocket expenditure marginalizes the access of the poorest where only those who can afford, can seek healthcare. Non-recognition of health as a fundamental human right is a clear indication of lack of political will in healthcare.

It should start with the recognition of right to health in the Constitution followed by subsequent uptake across provincial mandates, in compliance with post-18th amendment protocols, as a primary function of local government. Universal healthcare coverage, spelt out under target 3.8 of the SDGs, is a strategic target where political will needs to be mobilized for multiplying gains across targets; reduction in poverty and improved per capita well-being through increased financing in healthcare can help reduce health inequities while also enhancing other aspects of social wellbeing, including addressing poverty and hunger. The government also needs to resist International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionalities of spending cuts, reduced subsidies and privatization in health sector to ensure enough fiscal space for strategizing universal healthcare.

Finally, a holistic analytical framework for health systems governance assessment need to be adopted with a clear focus on equity and quality of services. The frameworks need to recognize contextual realities where the presumption of a democratic relationship between state institutions and citizens may adversely affect the overall results.³³ District Health Information System^{vi} needs to be updated incorporating qualitative indicators for a holistic assessment and evidence-based reforms in healthcare sector.

iii. Universal Education

Bolstering educational outcomes in Pakistan has always been a challenge deepened by inequitable financing, weak governance, classified educational system and barriers in access to education of the most marginalized. This is evident of the country progress against MDGs where it could only achieve 58% literacy rate against the target of 88% by 2015.³⁴ Despite an increase in educational expenditure upped to 2.3% of GDP, the financing scores short of the targeted 4% of GDP by 2018³⁵ and the country continues to be 2nd worst in the world with 24 million children out of School.³⁶ Global Human Capital Report-2017 of the World Economic Forum ranked Pakistan at 125 out of 130 in Education and Skills development.³⁷ Moreover, the country's higher education was ranked as worst in the world in 2016.³⁸

^{vi} Data collection mechanism in health systems.



Education having been devolved, as a provincial subject, post-18th constitutional amendment, requires mobilization of strong political will followed by efficient governance reforms to ensure parallel growth across provinces. The reforms need to focus upgradation of our public education to bridge the divide of classified educational systems that continue to perpetuate inequalities. Other than technical reforms, the curricula require ethical revisions to eliminate fundamentalist and extremist views towards a progressive interpretation fostering appreciation of diversity not clash of civilizations. Distortion of historiography and maligning of different alterities needs to be discouraged in the curricula to save our national thought from being plagued by exclusivist narratives. This should be clubbed with systemized integration of socio-cultural, economic and political discourse with syllabi to enable our youth in making informed political choices amid complex challenges of globalization. Classrooms should serve as the best discursive spaces for democratic dialogue, albeit, with a prerequisite of peaceful political dissent and tolerance for difference of opinion.



Enshrined in goal 4 of the SDGs, enhancement of educational outcomes requires a perspective shift both at policy and implementation level. Universal Education needs to be approached as a fundamental human right, not a privilege, leading to structural reforms in the entire landscape. Education as the key to sustainable development requires injection of resources in the sector as a strategic investment in future - thereby lifting the prospects for progress against poverty, hunger, inequality and extremisms.

c) *Gender: A Major Constituency*

The history of integrating women as a major constituency amongst the nine important groups in society to reach sustainable development was recognized by all United Nations Member States in the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. Initiation of this discourse, however, goes back to Mexico in 1975, with the first World Conference on Equality, Development and Peace. Gender is also recognized as a crosscutting theme in the SDGs, which requires women’s human rights to be placed at the center of each goal for a more equitable and sustainable future.³⁹ Although the language of the SDGs dilutes some important aspects of women’s human rights, it does make references to them as critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda. It also makes references to preceding normative frameworks,^{vii} and other major international human rights commitments.



“We reaffirm the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits which have laid a solid foundation for sustainable development and have helped to shape the new Agenda. These include the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.”⁴⁰

It is important then to ensure that progress made against normative frameworks must not be forgotten or allowed to regress. This also brings up the important question of tracking and measuring regression alongside progress for sustained outcomes.

i. *Gender equality in Pakistan*

In Pakistan, a host of factors have contributed to dismal gender indicators which persist through decades of exclusionist patterns entrenched in patriarchal fundamentalism. The

^{vii}Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocols, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), and the International Conference on Population and Development and its Plan of Action (ICPD - PoA)



situation has pushed the country to the second-worst position (143rd out of 144) on the Global Gender Gap index.⁴¹ Low scores expressed in global ranking systems reveal exclusion of nearly half of the population (48.8%)⁴² from social, economic, and political domains leading to unequal outcomes for women and girls. Politico-religious actors^{viii} hold sway over Pakistan's constitutional and legislative frameworks and how they are interpreted. They influence state and social institutions by advocating a divinized control - evident of numerous regressive policy patterns and restrictive social practices. Women have borne the brunt of such throwbacks in the form of reduced civil and political rights, denial of access to education and health, and refusal to recognize or encourage economic activity. Further, lack of knowledge of constitutional guarantees among women, gender-based violence, feminization of poverty, reduced access and control over resources, mal-governance, and institutionalized discrimination have kept women far behind. Despite the passage of various laws advancing women's rights, the progress has been uneven across provinces.



The UN secretary General's post-2015 special envoy, Amina Mohammad, referred to the SDGs framework as a floor and not a ceiling; indicating sufficient room for countries to set national priorities, analyze and respond to strategic intersections, and develop corresponding complementary indicators to build on the foundation set by the framework. Many quantitative indicators in the current Inter Agency Expert Group (IAEG) portfolio need to be supported by qualitative indicators to improve our understanding of, and response to the gender dimensions of each goal. Therefore, a higher representation of women in public life and decision-making positions should not be taken to indicate improved decision-making for women and girls across all dimensions of social development. For instance;

^{viii} Politico-religious forces commonly referred to as fundamentalists or extremists, purposefully seek to reduce dissent and debate within religion as well as civil and political spaces. They deploy religious ideology in pursuit of other, nationalist and populist, political goals across all religions and emphasize punitive actions for any transgressions of parameters imposed by them.

1. Despite increased representation of women in the parliamentary arena, gender outcomes continue to be at the whim of patriarchal fundamentalisms throughout various aspects of social development. The failure to legislate on domestic violence issue across province is a prime example in that regard. And, despite passage of National Policy on Homebased Workers 2009, both federal and provincial governments have failed to legislate on the issue which undermines the visibility and contribution of a huge chunk of population to the national economy.
2. Article 51 of the Constitution promoting women's participation in political processes, hailed as an affirmative measure, is structurally reductive as it offers *reserved seats* (emphasis added) for women. Reserved candidates have traditionally been typified as proxies, rendering them an undermined and voiceless position with token representation. On the flipside, only 09 women secured a general seat out of the total of 342 seats in the national assembly, compared to 60 women members on the reserved seats.⁴³

It is therefore imperative that measurement of qualitative change should be focused in countries like Pakistan with poor gender equality statistics. The country should aim to sustain and advance normative gains, as guiding principles not mere reference points, which should be measured and analyzed through integrated complementary indicators. Gender equality initiatives need to be considerate of the underlying causes to address systemic and social barriers to women's empowerment. Affirmative policy measures and institutional arrangements should clearly articulate state narrative, backed by strong political will, redirecting national consciousness towards a conducive physical, socio-cultural, economic, and political environment committed to gender equality. National priorities should build on the progress made during previous frameworks rather than going *one step forward, two steps back*.⁴⁴

d) *Economic Growth*

Despite being categorized as a lower-income country, Pakistan has a tremendous economic potential as reflective of Price Water Cooper House's report projecting the country to emerge as the 20th largest economy by 2030 and 16th largest by 2050.⁴⁵ However, statistics also reveal a bleak picture of the current economic context with increasing fiscal deficits at 4.2% of GDP;⁴⁶ decline in exports by 1.2%; rising imports by 14.1%; rocketing inflation at 4.8%; declining investment rates; and, falling official reserves currently at mere \$16.5 billion in 2017.⁴⁷ The situation requires fundamental reforms in our economic governance to address public debt management, fiscal and revenue generation, and, enhancement of our economic potential through diversification.



i. *Public debt management*

Under the patronage of International Monetary Fund (IMF), fiscal consolidation and austerity measures have meant increasing death traps on the way to universal healthcare, quality education and a decent standard of living for all.⁴⁸ Public debts and liabilities at Rs. 27 trillion (est. 2017), which is 74.7% of the GDP,⁴⁹ create an ever-surmounting fiscal pressure for the country. It urges the need for efficient management of public debt with a focus on borrowing for production not just consumption to create enough fiscal space for social development. Another important aspect is instituting controls on public and private borrowing where most of the borrowing has recently been from private banks, as a post-recession norm, at very high interest rates resulting in huge debt servicing (amounting Rs. 1.64 trillion) which consumed 32.3% of the national budget for fiscal year 2017-18.⁵⁰

Addressing the issues of fiscal deficits and debt management would also directly complement the stability of our foreign exchange reserves and create room for investments in the international market. Finally, the government needs to ensure that provision of conducive business environment for investors shouldn't mean the erosion of essential

consideration for labor and environmental standards. This policy imperative needs to constitute a critical element across trade negotiations to ensure a suitable balance between private sector interests and public interests - protection of the latter being the State's foremost obligation.



ii. *Fiscal and Revenue generation*

According to IMF's select issue paper, Pakistan's tax revenue gap stands at 11% recording a shortfall of Rs. 260 billion for fiscal year 2016/17 despite taxation reforms enacted by the Federal Board of Revenue. The country improved its tax effort³⁵ up to 0.49 in 2015 but is still significantly behind comparator developing countries' average of 0.64. Shrunken taxation base, underreporting of formal income, massive exemptions, low compliance in the informal economy, and intergovernmental fragmentation in tax administration characterize a weak revenue generation system in Pakistan.³¹ In terms of non-tax revenues, the country recorded a shortfall of Rs. 58 billion for fiscal year 2016/17.

This requires fundamental reforms revamping the entire monetary and fiscal policy focused on widening and deepening of taxation net, curbing tax evasive corridors, cutting down patronized exemptions, and, enacting private sector regulations to ensure its contribution to ensure sustainable economic growth enshrined in goal 8 of the SDGs. Moreover, the country needs to entwine progressive taxation as a model, proven as the most efficient socially-just redistributive policy measure, to decrease wealth and income gaps for inclusive and sustainable economic growth.³² Pakistan also needs to enhance its non-tax revenues by enacting efficient regulation to comply with Addis Ababa Action Agenda's recommendations of economic self-reliance through domestic resource mobilization to navigate the challenges amid decreasing Official Development Assistance.³³

³⁵ The ratio between actual revenue and tax capacity

iii. *Diversification of Economic potential*

The country has a rich and versatile economy with diverse sectors capable enough to land the country among top economies of the world. It would, however, require a holistic approach to strategize reforms ensuring equitable financing across sectors. In the agricultural sector, constituting 21% of the GDP,⁵⁴ the key issues of inadequate agricultural subsidies not reaching out to the small farmers and concentrated on specific crops⁵⁵ need to be addressed. This would also require redirecting political will to enact fundamental reforms in agricultural governance starting with restructuring land distribution. Industrial sector, contributing above 20% of the GDP, requires the redress of incoherent industrial policies,⁵⁶ inadequate investments, inefficient industrial research and development, insufficient technical skills⁵⁷ and corruption. In the services sector, constituting a GDP share of 59% in 2016,⁵⁸ upgradation of training institutions compatible to international standards through adequate investments in skill development, innovation and technology, and, strengthening of academia-industrial linkages should be emphasized to leverage the country's prospects to emerge as a knowledge-economy.



Finally, the decisions of aid, trade and debt are not just about revenue and growth; they have implications directly affecting the State's capacity to advance human rights. In the name of international competitiveness, governments continue to engage in a race to the bottom offering lower taxes and cheap labor to attract investment.⁵⁹ It is imperative to decouple economic growth from human development, while ensuring that cultural, social, economic and political rights for all should be at the heart of macroeconomics. To meet the expectations set by goal 8 and 10 of the SDGs, Pakistan requires a clear visioning of its economic priorities, uniform growth strategy across sectors, efficient governance for regulation and quality assurance, and, a socially-just redistributive policy ensuring that the growth is inclusive - where the poorest of the poor share its benefits and do not get left behind.

e) *Environment Protection*

Climate change over the past two decades (1997-2016) has resulted in 141 extreme weather events including cyclones, storms, floods, GLOFs claiming 10,462 lives in Pakistan and economic losses worth \$3.8 billion^{x,60}. Some of these events, like the all-sweeping floods across the heartland, severe droughts in Thar and Baluchistan and recurrent heatwaves in Karachi, have touched millions of lives across Pakistan causing displacement and dismay. Despite the apocalyptic potential of such hazards, implementation of National Climate Change policy continues to be a challenge amid inequitable financing and mal-governance disavowing country's commitments to Paris Agreement.^{xi}



Other than climate change being an environmental issue, it is also a deeply political and ethical issue both nationally and globally. In the absence of emphasis for climate change as a cross-cutting policy focus, environmental degradation has traditionally been a tradeoff for industrial and development projects in Pakistan. The failure to enact robust regulation is a testimony to the lack of political will on climate change mandate resulting in several ill-planned trade and investment agreements circumventing environmental considerations. The Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) is reduced to a mere formality, rendering the efficacy of the constitutional instrument toothless in upholding environmental standards, evident of several projects including Orange Train project,^{xii} Port Qasim Coal Power Project^{xiii} and Thar Coal

^x In direct costs only

^{xi} Landmark framework on Climate Change

^{xii} Politically patronized project aimed to modernize transport infrastructure in Lahore at the expense of national heritage sites.

^{xiii} \$2.09 billion energy project where Sindh Environmental Protection Agency's review on project's EIA report was ignored. The two coal thermal plants release CO2 equivalent to 1.2 million cars on the road to produce each 1,000 MW of energy. A United Nations simulation drill concluded that deforestation of 205 hectares of mangrove trees alongside delta to make way for the coal-fired projects has increased Karachi's susceptibility to tsunami that could wipe it out within an hour and half.

Project.^{55v} Another crucial element here is the absence of private sector accountability against Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) disregarding massive social and environmental costs to the locals and the land alike. The deterioration is visible through environmental threats, prevalent air and water pollution, depleting natural reservoirs and decaying terrestrial ecosystems in Pakistan. Several precedents reveal that protests from the local communities - disproportionately affected by the calamities of disasters - have been met with coercive policing bent on protecting corporate interests. Upheld by goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, climate change mandate requires efficient governance and strong political will in Pakistan to meet country commitments against SDGs. Equitable financing for climate change adaptation coupled by a coherent communication strategy for raising consciousness about environmental protection is a national imperative for Pakistan. Financing needs to be clubbed with strong governance and integration of developmental policies factoring in environmental considerations to preserve forestry, wild and sea life, minerals and other such reservoirs.

At the national and international level, Climate Justice must be seen as a policy consideration recognizing a people and planet centered approach to development through policy imperatives rooted in equality and justice.⁶¹ The international community needs to uphold the aspirations of the common people in line with article 7/5 of the Paris Agreement:

Parties acknowledge that adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate.⁶²

It is essential for developed countries (mostly responsible for GHG emissions and subsequent climate changes) to play their due role in climate change adaptation in compliance with the principles of equity and Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDRRC) of the Paris Agreement.⁶³ Beyond the politics of aid, it is a moral imperative deep into the ethos of the international community to recognize that those mainly responsible for climate change should commit the most of their finances and technology required for adaptation measures. Developing countries require immense support in capacity building, financing and technology transfer to control GHG emissions, set up early-warning systems, mitigation strategies and response measures to ensure sustainable development.

^{55v}The project enjoys impunity from environmental scrutiny. Other than roofing up GHG emissions, the oxides released during coal combustion could cause acid rains in Thar (Sindh). Besides, the construction of Gorano dam and ponding of saline water would mean precarious implications for ecology, morphology, biodiversity, underground water levels and weather conditions in water-scarce Thar.

f) *Measuring Change: The politics of Indicators*

The current IAEG list of indicators, adopted by the government, reflects various data gaps in Pakistan. Only 58 out of 231 national indicators have data availability while there is no data against 173 indicators (See Annex II for detailed recommendations). Additionally:

- Many indicators need to be adequately parked against related targets - especially mixed global indicators with national in the current list need to be decoupled.
- Language changes need to be made for domestication of various indicators.
- Complementary indicators need to be plugged in to cover different aspects of specific targets where the IAEG may have covered only one aspect.
- Indicators need to be developed to measure the extent of government protection and fulfillment of women's rights and to track reductions in inequities across all spheres and levels of society.
- Indicators must include enforceable legislation, institutional/systemic arrangements; fiscal allocations, human resources, technology and partnerships for transformative outcome-focused actions and the advancement of the rights of women and girls.



g) Vision 2025: Un-blurring the prospects

Pakistan's Vision 2025, a policy guideline document, tagged as the national blueprint of SDGs needs to be aligned with SDGs in spirit. Despite the Vision's recognition of Pakistan's dismal performance on human development indicators, and emphasis on human development as a pre-requisite to sustainable development, some propositions in the Vision further blur the prospects for transformative outcomes in development. For instance, proposed growth strategy's focus on rationalization of subsidies; cuts to governmental expenditure on public sector; emphasis on privatization schemes; and, absence of accountability framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) inherently contradict the ambition of Gross National Well Being that the Vision seeks to achieve.

In the wake of depleting ODA funds, private sector accountability becomes central to domestic resource mobilization to cater for development needs. The Vision, therefore, should focus on an efficient accountability mechanism to ensure CSR compliance rather than proposing deregulatory measures which limit State policy space and cement corporate capture. The vision must ensure a careful configuration of tradeoffs, and not center everything around economic growth at the expense of labor rights, social development and environmental protection. The vision must be further unpacked into targets and measuring indicators against the 25 goals set out



for its realization. To synergize these with SDGs, the government needs to prioritize national targets, not just by tying the Vision's pillars to SDGs, by clearly aligning IAEG indicators complemented by freshly developed qualitative indicators. The vision also needs to be attuned to normative principles laid out in ICCPR, ICESCR, CEDAW, BPfA, ICPD and ILO conventions, for holistic progress towards development, dignity and rights. Finally, the Vision needs to recognize civil society as a central stakeholder in SDGs implementation and ensure its representation at the Board, Steering Committee, and Secretariat level of the Vision 2025 implementation infrastructure.



Means of Implementation

The Means of Implementation (MOI) in goal 17 of Agenda 2030 encompass development financing; capacity building; technology transfer; trade; and systemic issues including the creation of an enabling global macroeconomic and policy environment, to facilitate the realization of SDGs. However, MOI is silent on addressing the structural inequalities in the current model of global economic governance serving the interests of the rich - keeping the poor at bay. Against a collective aid amount of \$130 billion a year,⁶⁴ developing countries pay around \$2 trillion a year (in trade mispricing,⁶⁵ debt service,⁶⁶ and trade mispricing⁶⁷) to the



developed world - revealing the dark side of development models pegged on neoliberal principles. The current system offers room for tax evasions to multinational corporations and forces the governments to cut down spending on social sector and enact massive privatizations all adding to widening inequalities, within and among countries. And yet, the MOI faced severe contestation throughout the inter-governmental and agency negotiations, where developed countries preferred to minimize the elements involving Official Development Assistance (ODA) emphasizing economic self-reliance for developing countries' pursuit of the SDGs.⁶⁸ The process has led to several ambiguities, with no indicators agreed upon against MOI targets, and critical concerns around debt-restructuring and distress reduction for developing countries remain unaddressed. In line with the aspirations of goal 17, the developed countries need to mobilize strategic resources and technical support to help advance development outcomes in the developing countries, not as a benevolence but an obligation.

The contentions around Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) and subsequent cuts to the ODA place developing countries like Pakistan in an uphill battle against the ambitious aspirations of the Agenda 2030. AAAA’s recommendations of altering the course towards progressive taxation, SDGs’ emphasis on widening the taxation net,⁶⁹ and the need for socially just redistributive policy measures require fundamental changes at home. The structural lacunae in the existing set-up offer room for tax evasions recording a tax revenue deficit of Rs. 3.3 trillion;⁷⁰ illicit outward flows with the shadow economy⁵⁷ estimated at 36% of GDP⁷¹ and massive corruption leading to increased fiscal deficits (currently at 4.6% of GDP)⁷² further restricting the country’s ability to fulfill developmental needs. The anomalies are further compounded by the absence of an effective accountability framework to ensure private sector’s contribution to social development. The country needs to uphold transparency and accountability at the heart of its structural reforms, as upheld by goal 16 of the SDGs. Similarly, the government needs to ensure that human rights and development take precedence, pre-requisite for the GSP+ agreement with European Union,⁵⁸ to complement development outcomes in the country. Sound policy-frameworks, equitable financing, and gender-just development strategies must be prioritized at the national level to ensure that the marginalized can get the services that they need, not the ones that they can afford.



⁵⁷ The sources and outlets for illicit flows

⁵⁸ A special incentive arrangement for Sustainable Development offering tariff-free exports from Pakistan to the European Union.



Follow up and review

Weak follow-up & review along with equivocal accountability mechanisms were key barriers to MDGs' success. With the 2030 Agenda, pursuing consensus ahead of impact, has once again affected the formulation of an articulate review mechanism restricted to *voluntary reporting* by governments on progress towards the SDGs. Follow-up and review mechanisms need to be well defined and rigorously observed at all levels in ways that ensure that different stakeholders effectively fulfill their respective roles. This means allowing state performance to be assessed against their starting points in 2015, and tracking meaningful and equity-based progress over the years across Goals and Targets. Learning from the MDG experience, measuring outputs against inputs may not be sufficient, and the development and roll-out of qualitative indicators for data collection are imperative to gauge equity in progress.⁷³ Moreover, it is imperative to institutionalize the review of systemic barriers, i.e., patriarchy, fundamentalisms and neo-liberalism, to address the current patterns of inequality in Pakistan.

Finally, shrinking democratic spaces for civil society, evident of the country's ranking at 139 out of 180 countries in World Press Freedom Index 2018,⁷⁴ require altering the course to widen the scope for dialogue, democratic dissent and accountability. It is imperative that the government plays a proactive role in collaboration with the civil society in setting national priorities, developing indicators, setting up robust implementation mechanisms, and establishing an effective review process for translating the slogan of *inclusion* and *transformation* into tangible results for people and the planet alike.



Annexure

Recommended National Complementary Indicators

SDG target	IAEG/Government Indicators	Alternative (Alt)/ Additional (Add) Indicators
Target 1.1: By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.	1.1.1 Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural).	Alt: Proportion of population below the international Ethicalⁱⁱⁱ poverty line disaggregated by sex, age, location and employment status and other disaggregation.
Target 5.6: Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.	5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15-49 years access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, information and education.	Add: Proportion of the total population of women and girls aged 10-49 years accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare, information and education, per province.
Target 5.c: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.	5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment.	Add: - Country ranking in Gender Inequality Index; - Gender parity in social, political and economic activity, per province, and by rural/ urban location;

ⁱⁱⁱ The EPL is comparable to the \$2-a-day poverty line increasingly quoted by the World Bank.



SDG target	IAEG/Government Indicators	Alternative (Alt)/ Additional (Add) Indicators
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enforceable legislative measures on key issues around gender equality including various forms of violence against women, per province; - Public expenditure for gender equality and women’s empowerment as a percentage of total development budgets, per province.
Target 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.	10.2.1 Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by age, sex and persons with disabilities.	Add: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minority representatives in public offices as a proportion of total public sector workforce; - Judicial precedents offering fair trial to minorities especially in cases related to blasphemy as a percentage of all reported blasphemy cases.
Target 10.3: Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and	10.3.1 Proportion of the population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed within the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited	Add: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of prosecuted cases of forced conversion/ abduction of minority women and girls as a percentage of total reported cases in the last 12 months;

SDG target	IAEG/Government Indicators	Alternative (Alt)/ Additional (Add) Indicators
action in this regard.	under international human rights law.	– Number of cases reported on favouritism, illegal appointment and gender pay-gap.
Target 10.7: Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.	10.7.2 Number of countries that have implemented well-managed migration policies.	Add: Proportion of internally displaced people whose basic needs like health & hygiene, water & sanitation, shelter, and education are met.
Target 10.a: Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements.	10.a.1 Proportion of tariff lines applied to imports from least developed countries and developing countries with zero-tariff.	Alt: Proportion of tariff lines removed over imports from Pakistan, by country. Add: Proportion of total income derived from tariff-free exports to international market allocated towards social development budgets, disaggregated by sex, socio-economic status and programme.
Target 16.4: By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets	16.4.1 Total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows (in current United States dollars).	Add: Comprehensive legal framework and accountability mechanisms to combat illicit financial



SDG target	IAEG/Government Indicators	Alternative (Alt)/ Additional (Add) Indicators
and combat all forms of organized crime.		flows and ensure the recovery of money in current USD. Add: Total value in current USD recovered as a percentage of total illicit outward flows.
Target 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.	16.10.1 Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months.	Add: Cases of kidnapping, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates where state has intervened for recovery as a percentage of total such cases in the previous 12 months. Add: Number of civil society organisations whose registration/ no-objective certificates (NoCs) has been revoked/ denied in the last 12 months, by reason/ grounds and area of work.
17.19.2 Proportion of countries that (a) have conducted at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years;	Not available.	Add: Number of benchmark indicators based on the census, at max 10 year old, as a percentage of the all

SDG target	IAEG/Government Indicators	Alternative (Alt)/ Additional (Add) Indicators
and (b) have achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration.		SDGs/development indicators.
<u>Indicators requiring language changes to adapt to the national context</u>	1.5.2; 1.5.3; 5.6.2; 5.c.1; 11.5.2; 10.7.2; 10.b.1, 11.b.1, 11.b.2; 13.1.1; 13.2.1; 13.3.1; 13.3.2; 14.b.1; 14.c.1; 17.12.1; 17.13.1; 17.19.2	
<u>Global indicators reflected as National in the government list and require changes</u>	5.a.2, 7.a.1, 10.a.1, 17.5.1; 17.10.1; 17.11.1; 17.16.1;	

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