



NEWSLETTER



Committed to people-centered policy making

Shahid Javed Burki Institute of Public Policy (BIPP) is proud to issue its 50th newsletter and would like to express heartfelt gratitude to its readers. Looking back at this arduous and eventful odyssey, BIPP has contributed to a host of crucial topics vis-à-vis Pakistan's kaleidoscopic policy terrain, such as working on the cotton and wheat policy along with agriculture policy for Gilgit-Baltistan. It continues to deliver on its unflinching resolve to advocate for rational, evidence-based and more significantly people-centric policy-making that is driven by sustainable development as well as equity. The policy institute has proactively delved into significant domains, raised vital questions and robustly provided sustainable pathways regarding policy inaction which directly impacts the welfare of the common citizenry.

To further delineate, BIPP has extensively researched on Pakistan's debt-ridden economy, highlighting course correction underpinned by a systemic understanding of seismic shifts in the climate and sustainable practices. Along with this, governance which has been a persistent Achilles heel of the state, its various facets have been diligently examined and value-driven policy actions that benefit the people have been recommended by the institute's experts over the years. BIPP also takes pride in its prioritization to find viable solutions to climate change conundrums and its receptiveness to the overriding need for across the board gender sensitive policy-making in Pakistan. In this regard, great emphasis on holistic measures and rational vantage points is evident through a series of seminars, policy papers, annual reports, workshops and various other projects. Additionally, the ebbs and flows of regional and international relations, the scourge of extremism, the woefully neglected education sector, the dire need for climate-smart agriculture, technological breakthroughs engendering challenges and opportunities, harnessing the dividends of CPEC, the chronically underfunded public health sector et cetera have

been subjects of BIPP's core research endeavors. In addition, as a tangible manifestation of its agenda of empowering women through access to higher education and amplifying their role in national and sustainable development, BIPP's scholarship programme through a need cum merit-based scrutiny, awards undergraduate scholarships to low-income and deserving female students. A total of 90 scholarships are given in different disciplines that are responsive and germane to the market needs, including MBBS, Doctor of Pharmacy, Information Technology/Computer Sciences, Engineering, Economics, Medical Imaging Technology, Medical Laboratory Technology, Biotechnology and Nursing.

Furthermore, BIPP has also been a center of different initiatives such as the Policy Hub which features notable policy specialists, development practitioners, civil servants, career diplomats and academicians. Similarly, to inspire thought leaders of the future, BIPP continues to have an exhaustive internship programme to especially expose policy students to the "mechanics" of a think-tank. Apart from this, the institute has also been publishing its flagship annual report on *The State of The Economy* in Pakistan accompanied by an area under panoramic focus; the 2022 report centered on *Frontline Stakeholders Reaping the Gender Dividend*. Moreover, BIPP has a rich history of meaningful partnerships with both national and international institutes, NGOs, universities and business chambers. Such joint endeavors have helped to fill the institutional void, professionalized the key public policy areas and identified policy measures for inclusive growth, socio-economic stability and sustainable development in tandem with profoundly capitalizing on the potential for regional and global integration. In a nutshell, BIPP aims to address the flawed situation of how the state policies and needs of the common citizenry have become an "oxymoron", conversely the needs of the people are supposed to be guiding precept for all policy formulation and public expenditure.

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Highlights

➤ From the Desk of Chairman

Focus Areas

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Modi's Ambitions on the World Stage

Under Modi, India has managed to achieve what smaller countries or those that don't border China would not have been able to do. It has drawn closer to the United States while refusing to follow some of the policies that are dear to Washington. The Americans would have liked to see most of its policy priorities to be reflected in the

declaration the G-20 was planning to issue after concluding its summit held in New Delhi on September 9, 2023. The summit was chaired by Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister. The Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Chinese President Xi Jinping stayed away from the summit while the United States President Joe Biden flew in and attended the meeting.

The final document was negotiated in a long session with the delegates conferring well into the night. As Katie Rogers put it in her report on the conference published in the New York Times, the final document was “an eye-opening departure from a similar document agreed to less than a year ago in Bali, Indonesia.” Then the leaders in attendance acknowledged different views over the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia but still issued a strong condemnation of the invasion by Moscow. The leaders asked the Russians to withdraw their invading troops. The declaration pointed to past United Nations resolutions and noted “the adverse impact of wars and conflicts around the world.” Oleg Nikolenko, a spokesman for Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry, said that the omission of Russian aggression was nothing to be proud of. He was referring to the New Delhi declaration.

President Biden and his associates who were present with him when the American leader went to the Indian capital focused on the new declaration and saw what it had achieved. It included new language on the issue of global debt and on overhauling international institutions like the World Bank Group to address the growing strains on poor countries.

They were also pleased with the invitation to the African Union to join the G20 and make it

G21. There was a push for a more financing to help vulnerable nations deal with the costs of climate change. The declaration underscored the potential of digital technologies to increase the developing world’s inclusion in global economies.

Ricard Haass, a foreign policy veteran and former president of the Council on Foreign Relations, offered his assessment of the summit. He said that joint declarations often take on the characteristics of the host country. In this case of the G20 meeting held in Delhi, “the host was determined not to antagonize either China or Russia.” He called the Delhi declaration an example of “incremental diplomacy and not a forum where several conflicts involving the member countries could be resolved.”

What surprised international observers who studied the outcome of the G20 summit was the United States’ announcement that the country would lead the effort to create a rail and shipping corridor that would link India to the Middle East and eventually Europe. The project lacked key details including a time frame and the cost for implementing it. At the event presenting the initiative, President Biden shook hands with Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman who indicated that his country would support the project and provide a good part of financing it. This was one more initiative that countered the infrastructure development programs China was implementing in Asia. One of the most ambitious undertaking by Beijing was called the Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI, of which China Pakistan Economic Corridor was an important component. This was one more blow delivered by India affecting Pakistan.



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BRICS – A New Global Financial

The 15th BRICS summit hosted by South Africa from 22 August to 24 August 2023 in Johannesburg was a palpable reflection of the resolve of the member countries to define their role in reshaping and reforming the global economic system. Brazil, India, China and South Africa and Russia (the latter was represented at the ministerial level) in the 15th summit particularly addressed the current global financial and economic management system which, according to them is unjust and unequal, and required major structural reforms to rid the humanity from the enormity of the development challenges notably, poverty, hunger, disease, deprivation and exploitation.

Although BRICS is not a formal multilateral organization (no standing secretariat), like the UN, World Bank (WB) or the Organization of Petrol Exporting Countries (OPEC), it is politically very active to bring to fore and address major global issues such as peace and security, trade, finance, climate change, energy security, the dominance of the West in the world economic order especially through the US dollar. BRICS currently accounts for 23% of the global GDP, 42% of the global population (3.2 billion) and more than 16% of global trade. There are efforts underway for possible expansion of the BRICS by integrating a number of large countries to establish a new geopolitical and economic

block to counter the western hegemony. Around 43 countries including Argentina, Bangladesh, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Indonesia and Nigeria have already expressed an interest to join BRICS. Conservative estimates suggest that by 2040, the BRICS group will account for more than 50% of the global GDP.

There have been assiduous efforts on the part of BRICS group to create a new global (monetary) order, which essentially delinks the transactions in US dollars and encourage reliance on local currencies. The Group earlier in 2014 established the New Development Bank with an initial capital of \$50 billion and concluded Contingency Reserve Agreement to ensure liquidity of the member states in case of any eventuality. The central banks of three of its member countries i.e., Russia, India and China prompted the decision to make payments in local currencies to dilute the dominance of US dollar in the global financial system ever since the Bretton Woods Agreement of July 1944.

These initiatives are reflective of the intent and resolve of the BRICS group to safeguard the interests of the emerging economies and at the same time lay the foundations for alternative economic order to substitute the existing West dominated global financial system and institutions. The Group, however, has still to traverse a long journey in its endeavors to reform the global financial system, as the reality is that dollar continues to remain the main currency in global trade (88% international transactions were made in dollars by the end of 2022), global stock markets, markets of goods, bank deposits (around 60% of global foreign currency reserves are in US dollars), funding of development projects and loans.



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Sustainability and the Price of Warming

Climate Change is a recent addition to SDGs. Learning to mitigate and adapt to the effects of global warming is a necessary condition for a sustainable future. In this note, the estimated cost of Climate change in terms of percentage loss of GDP if countries are unable to fully meet the agreed conditions of the Paris Agreement of 2015. A preliminary Study (2020) of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) has suggested that climate-related losses would be higher for poorer, hotter countries and that colder countries could even see benefits from warming. Kamiar Mohaddes of the University of Cambridge, a co-author of the NBER Study compiled per capita Gross domestic product (GDP) and temperature data for 174 countries since 1960. They then projected that relation into the future to see how further warming could affect GDP.

If greenhouse gas emissions continue to grow along their current trajectory, about 7 % of global GDP will be lost by 2100. The table below presents the costs of warming for countries differentiated by income and size if the world does not meet the conditions agreed in the 2015 Paris compact.

The following table stats the cost of climate change in lost GDP

Country/Region/Rich/Poor	Percent change in GDP/capita	Paris Agreement conditions
	MET	NOT MET
World	1	7
Rich Countries	1	7
Poor countries	1	6
USA	2	10.5
China	0.1	4
European Union	0.00	4.5
India	2	10
Russia	+0.5	9

Source: - The Price of Warming by Andrea Thompson: - Scientific American, Climate Change: Collector Edition summer 2020

This GDP based aggregate analysis does not capture the costs that people will experience from forced migration, loss of homes, loss of citizenship, losses of lives. Even after meeting the Paris Compact –islands will disappear because seas will rise, climate will change dramatically in some regions—for example the Middle Eastern countries may have temperatures which make their regions unable to sustain life. Migration will create displaced persons by the millions.

Governments must consider these human costs when making policy choices for smoothing the transitions to the new inevitable future. The world will have to learn with more cooperation. Failing in doing so, the adjustments may be by a large reduction in the human population. There is a projection which shows that human population (currently 8 billion) will rise during the next half century and then decline drastically to below 6 billion.



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The Unexpected Tiff between Allies

The killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar has been a flashpoint in the Canadian-Indian diplomatic relations. Singh was a Canadian citizen who had moved to this country in the late 90's. He had been declared a persona non grata by the Indian State on account of being a Sikh separatist leader involved in the Khalistan movement that supports carving out a separate state for the Sikhs out of the Indian Punjab region. The killing took place in June 2023 in Canada, and a footage leaked and shared by anonymous parties to the Washington Post suggests that the murder was orchestrated. On September 18, Canadian leadership disclosed that there was a potential link between agents of the government of India and the killing of this Canadian citizen. Canada came to this conclusion and opted to make a public accusation based on a shared intelligence of the Five Eyes partners from intercepted electronic communications among Indian diplomats. On the same day, Canada ousted an Indian diplomat, for whom Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly asserted was the Indian intelligence chief in the country. In response, India also expelled a Canadian diplomat.

The relations between the two countries have suddenly soured and are based up on the differences in their history and values. Sikh separatism became a concern of India in the late 1970s, when elements of the Sikh nationalist struggle began to militarize. India also believes that the Khalistan movement that

is enjoyed by the Sikhs living in the West has afforded Pakistan an opportunity to fuel the separatist movement in India as a proxy war. India believes that Sikhs in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States played important roles in arranging for cadres to travel to Pakistan, where they received financial and military assistance.¹ Also, India finds it hard to fathom the degrees of right of free-speech afforded by the Western countries where many Sikhs have taken refuge since the 1980's and onwards. These countries provide them with the opportunity to gather and galvanize the Sikh movement for self-determination and independent homeland. While at the same time, India's BJP government, stands accused of "carrying out an escalating crackdown on civil society, targeting activists, journalists, students, academics, members of religious minorities, and peaceful protesters using sedition and other draconian laws." According to the 2023 World Press Freedom Index, India has slipped again—this time to 161 out of the 180 countries ranked. Also, India scored 33 out of 40 for protections of "political rights" in Freedom House's most recent assessment, and merely 33 out of 60 for "civil liberties."

Same is the threat posed to India by the Kashmiris as Pakistan supports their right for self-determination and political and social safeguard. Although, India has revoked Kashmir's independent status and violating the constitutional rights of the people in 2019, it is still enforcing all kinds of lockdowns and blackouts upon them.

Pakistan can embark on this opportunity of rift between Canada and India and try to fill whatever gap that is being created in order to push its national interest without having to compromise much

¹ Fair, C. C. (2023, October 1). *The deep roots of the India-Canada Diplomatic Rift*. Lawfare.



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Pakistan's Outlook of Water and Sanitation

Clean water, sanitation and hygiene is a human right and the most basic human need. It is essential for health and well-being. Countries around the world face growing challenges linked to water scarcity, water pollution, degraded water-related ecosystems and cooperation over transboundary water basins. According to for Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) Annual Report 2023, it is estimated that in 2022, 2.2 billion people lacked safely managed drinking water, including 703 million without a basic water service; 3.5 billion people lacked safely managed sanitation, including 1.5 billion without basic sanitation services. Additionally, 2 billion lacked a basic handwashing facility, including 653 million with no handwashing facility at all. These issues being addressed through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal, particularly through SDG 6 which recognizes the fundamental importance of access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities. The targets set under SDG-6 aim to ensure safe and affordable drinking water for everyone by improving its quality and affordability, providing access to sanitation and hygiene with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable females, enhancing

water-use efficiency and safe water reuse while avoiding water resource pollution. Along with this, the aforementioned targets compel measures regarding preservation of freshwater supplies, emphasizing the significance of integrated water resource management and the protection of water-related ecosystems, focusing on expanding support for developing countries and engaging local communities in water and sanitation management.

The SDGs Annual Report 2023 portrays a dismal picture of Pakistan's performance in SDG-6 as depicted in the table below. Pakistan failed to provide data for three of the five selected indicators in the last few years. The available data for the remaining two indicators, namely the percentage of the population using at least essential drinking water and basic sanitation services, also shows a stagnant status since 2020. As for indicators like freshwater withdrawal as a percentage of available freshwater resources, anthropogenic wastewater percentage that receives treatment, and scarce water consumption embodied in imports ($\text{m}^3 \text{H}_2\text{O eq/capita}$), data is yet to be provided for the last couple of years. Although Pakistan achieved the last indicator in 2018, the lack of current data on this indicator makes assessing further progress impossible. This indicates significant gaps in monitoring and reporting SDG-6 progress, highlighting the need for improved data collection and evaluation for better policy implementation and achievement of the SDG-6 targets.

Table: SDG-6 Indicators and Pakistan's Performance

SDG-6 Indicator	Value	Year	Rating	Trend
Populating using at least essential drinking water services (%)	90.1	2020	Major Challenges Remain	stagnating
Population using at least essential sanitation services (%)	68.4	2020	Major Challenges Remain	stagnating
Freshwater withdrawal (% of available freshwater resources)	108.7	2019	Major Challenges Remain	Data not available
Anthropogenic wastewater that receives treatment (%)	0.1	2020	Major Challenges Remain	Data not available
Scarce water consumption embodied imports (m ³ H ₂ O eq/capita	256.6	2018	Achieved	Data not available



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How Can Trust be Restored in Pakistan's Democracy?

"For the people, by the people", as hackneyed it may sound, it captures the defining epithet of a democracy that it is supposed to be people-centric. Conversely, denizens in Pakistan are forced to live under the yoke of a kleptocracy where policies essentially solidify the elite capture, resultantly, there is widespread government-public estrangement. The intertwined Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a whole and not least SDG 16 "Peace, Justice and Strong Institution" call for value-driven and sustainable governments. Two ways how a democracy can become more inclusive, participatory, transparent and accountable are through a robust local government system and some semblance of participatory governance.

In Pakistan local government elections are an exercise of smoke and mirrors, where vires are never truly devolved to the fundamental tier of a decentralized governance structure. This basic unit of the government is indispensable to morph the shambolic dispensation of Pakistan into one that emphasizes and exercises rights based approach, development with equity and guarantees human security. The Pakistani leadership repeats parrot-fashion how China's model of growth is exemplary, but are deliberately obtuse to understand how the world's second largest economy and biggest exporter is amongst one

of the most the fiscally decentralized states in the world. In China 85% of the expenditure related decisions come within the ambit of local governments, while collecting 60% of the composite taxes. Whereas, in Pakistan, devolution of financial, administrative, political vires to local governments under Article 140A is yet to fully materialize.

Secondly, is the concept of participatory governance which renders credibility deficit dispensations vitality through civic engagement. The 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting prompted community dialogues centered on mental health, with participation of thousands of US citizens. Consequently, this led to earmarking of \$5 million in grants by local administration for first-aid training for mental health related incidents and community consultation. Similarly, participatory budgeting has been practiced in Brazilian city of Porto Alegre since the 1980s with a maximum of 50,000 denizens involved in the exercise to set priorities in public expenditure. In the US, it is estimated that around \$280 million got allocated via the process of participatory budgeting involving over 500,000 residents. Another manifestation of participatory governance and state-citizen synergy is the Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) in Nepal. The landlocked country nestled in the Himalayas, has around 13,000 CFUGs, mandated and sponsored by state as decentralized community driven resource management organizations.

In a nutshell, democracy takes a lot of flak in Pakistan as policies and public sector spending are by and large divorced from the ground realities. Through the establishment of local governments with actual decision-making vires and participatory governance practices, public spending as well service

delivery of the governments can become equitable and effective, diluting the widespread disillusionment with democracy and "kafkaesque system in Pakistan."



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The Dire Need to Prioritize Healthcare in Pakistan

The allocation of budgetary resources for healthcare is a crucial factor that directly impacts the Sustainable Development goal of maintaining good health for all (SDG 3). The 2023 healthcare budget has been a topic of discussion and scrutiny. Different amount of healthcare budget is allocated in the provinces and the federal level in Pakistan. The federal government proposed an allocation of Rs24.21 billion for the healthcare sector for the financial year 2023-24 as compared to Rs22.49 billion allocated during the outgoing financial year, while a sum of Rs13 billion would be spent to uplift the sector under the public sector development budget. The major chunk of the health budget, Rs16.59 billion, would be spent to maintain hospital services while Rs3.11 billion would be allocated for public health services. The key reasons for the minimal budgetary inputs to healthcare sectors are, insufficient funding, lack of prioritization of healthcare and inefficient budget execution.

The Sehat Card, which translates to "Health Card" in Urdu, is a healthcare program launched

in 2019 in Pakistan with the aim of providing financial protection and access to quality healthcare services to low-income families. This program offers a coverage amount of PKR 1,000,000 (approximately USD 5,800) per family annually. The generous coverage ensures that families can access a wide range of medical services without worrying about the financial aspect. Moreover, it is a significant step toward alleviating the burden of healthcare expenses, which often force low-income families into debt or prevent them from seeking essential medical care.

The Sehat Card program has made significant strides in improving the targets of SDG-3 and ensuring healthcare accessibility and affordability in Pakistan through Healthcare Equity and access. Even though of universal healthcare is appealing, Pakistan's economic woes don't allow for such a relief. There have been instances of treatment being denied to citizens via this card since the government failed to clear payment due to insurance companies. A more feasible option in this regard though unpopular, is to grant discounted or free treatment to firstly the most vulnerable and impoverished segment of the society, followed by and limited to the middle class, a formula similar to targeted subsidy. The current caretaker government in Punjab has already taken such measures cessation of free treatment for heart and gynecological patients in the province in order to reduce financial burden on the government.

Broadly, to overcome these challenges and ensure effective implementation of SDG-3, several steps should be taken such as increased budget allocation, targeted outreach, infrastructure development, Public-Private Partnerships, transparency and accountability. Citizens, civil society, and the media play a crucial role in holding the government accountable for healthcare budget allocation and program implementation.



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How Online Feminist Platforms Revolutionize Gender Equality in Pakistan

Riddled with prejudice and plagued with bigotry, the socio-political culture chokes marginalized communities residing in Pakistan by the throat, with women remaining as the largest segment in society deprived of fundamental rights. Despite the virulence of misogyny putting the female community into an existential threat, the presence of digital culture enables the manifestation of online platforms that encapsulate the capability of revolutionizing gender parity in Pakistan especially in the context SDG 5 "Gender Quality".

Johan Galtung, a celebrated Norwegian sociologist, had first articulated the *Violence Triangle* in 1969; a three-pronged typology that illustrates how the confluence of malleable facets amalgamate with cultural/historical moments to architect conditions for the promotion of violence to function as normative. The paternal rhetoric that endorses sexism within Pakistani society aligns conveniently to Galtung's Triangle. From young girls denied education, acquiescing to early marriages and being systemically excluded from the work force and having limited participation in electoral polls to rape and acid attacks, violence against women (VAW) remains pervasive in Pakistan.

The online presence of *Women Action Forum*,

an association created in 1980s to resist the regressive laws passed under the Zia-Ul-Haq regime, has facilitated the promotion of the forum as a pressure group on legislation regarding violence against women. Women have built strong networks of solidarity and support. *Girls At Dhabas*, a feminist conscious initiative can be applauded for its aim to revive social mobilization in public places such as Dhabas, *Khokhas* and *Paan shops* where women are usually shunned. In addition, the *Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)* has become a forum for women to report crimes pertaining to cyber harassment.

The internet is a cardinal platform for the representation of communities ostracized in society as it catalyses the politico-social environment by enabling grassroot levels of activism. As the climate of fear impedes participation in civic culture traditionally, citizen journalism within digital spaces, allows women to vocalise and represent their demands through self-expression.

An egalitarian society cannot be constructed without female participation; hence the emergence of online activism allows one to hope for it. While such forums have truly acted as instrumental agents in transforming political-social environments, state involvement is necessary for safeguarding such initiatives for the sake of sustaining catalysis of gender empowerment in Pakistan. While adequate funding may further facilitate these initiatives to continue striving for balancing gender gaps, licensing would protect these forums from the risk of being removed or other prevalent cyber threats.



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Need for Holistic Policy for Economic Growth

The contemporary employment environment in Pakistan is characterized by problems, such as a high frequency of informal employment and a major section of the workforce working for insufficient wages. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the country's unemployment rate in 2019 was 4.5%. Pakistan has made economic development despite swings in GDP growth rates, which reached 6.49% in 2021. Increased investments in infrastructure, energy, agriculture, and services, as well as rising offshore remittances, all contribute to this boom. However, persisting obstacles include worries about security, governance, workforce education, and gender inequities.

Nonetheless, Pakistan has bright possibilities. Initiatives like as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), increased commerce with neighboring countries, and a thriving IT industry provide potential for future growth. Despite obstacles, Pakistan has made progress towards long-term economic prosperity. Notable milestones in Pakistan's SDG 8 journey include the adoption of the SDGs, the implementation of the Benazir Income Support Program, and the formulation of the National Employment Strategy, including development in both the agriculture and services sectors.

There are still challenges to overcome, such as

lowering informal employment, eliminating forced and child labor, resolving security concerns, boosting workforce education and skills, and reducing gender disparity. SDG 8 requires continued efforts from the government, businesses, and individuals in Pakistan to guarantee sustainable economic growth, job opportunities, and decent work for everyone.

Through green initiatives, Pakistan aims to achieve SDG 8 by balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability. The private sector has a critical role in fostering growth and decent jobs, with public-private partnerships at the forefront. Pakistan works with international organizations, neighbors, and donors to strengthen SDG 8 activities, receiving assistance and exchanging information. SDG 8 requires ongoing efforts from the government, corporate sector, civil society, and people to achieve sustainable growth, employment, and decent work.



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Environmental Sustainability in Pakistan

As a country blessed with a long coastline along the Arabian Sea, Pakistan recognizes the need of conserving its oceans and seas. It has diverse ecosystems and abundant marine life, therefore it is determined to achieve SDG 14 "Life below

Water".¹ The path to this goal includes a number of measures targeted at protecting marine habitat and ensuring the sustainable use of our coastal resources.

One major initiative undertaken is the development of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) throughout Pakistan's coastline. These protected areas provide sanctuaries for a wide range of marine creatures, from stunning coral reefs to endangered sea turtles. The Astola Island MPA, known as the "Island of Seven Hills," is a noteworthy example. This pristine sanctuary is home to a variety of marine life and serves as proof of the state's dedication to preserve coastal biodiversity.

Moreover, Pakistan is an active participant in regional collaborations to tackle the epidemic of illicit, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Collaboration with neighboring countries and international organizations ensures the sustainability of marine resources, preserve livelihoods, and promote sustainable fishing practices.

While Pakistan's efforts towards SDG 14 are admirable, the country can learn from the likes of Vietnam which is working to ensure marine conservation and sustainable coastal development. Vietnam, like Pakistan, is a developing country that has achieved significant progress in several areas. One of Vietnam's most notable successes is its co-management system in marine protected zones. Local communities actively participate in managing and protecting their maritime resources under this system. The success of programs like the Bai Tu Long National Park, which encourages responsible tourism and the protection of coastal habitats, has relied heavily on community engagement.

Furthermore, Vietnam has made significant steps to prevent marine plastic pollution, a

major worldwide concern. The nation has banned single-use plastics in several regions and created detailed plans to adequately manage plastic garbage. These projects are in line with SDG 14's goal of reducing marine pollution.

As Pakistan progresses towards SDG 14, the nation remains committed to safeguarding marine habitats and sustainable coastal practices. The country is working to improve the efficacy of the marine protected areas, improve rules for responsible fisheries management, and develop international cooperation.

The participation of coastal communities is critical in this endeavor. Their active participation in sustainable practices assures that our coastal conservation activities will be successful in the long run.

Reference:

1 ["Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life below Water in Pakistan," United Nations, accessed September 22, 2023.](https://pakistan.un.org/en/sdgs/14)
[https://pakistan.un.org/en/sdgs/14.](https://pakistan.un.org/en/sdgs/14)



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SMEs and Agriculture Help Reduce Poverty in Pakistan

Various economic and social factors have led to deep fluctuations in Pakistan's poverty rate. In 2018, the poverty rate was estimated to be

around 24.3% (World Bank), as compared to almost 9% global poverty rate in 2018 (World Bank PIP). Rural poverty can be significantly higher than urban poverty due to limited access to economic opportunities, education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure. Thus, Pakistan is facing a multidimensional poverty crisis, with a poverty index of 38% (2019, UNDP). However, to reduce poverty as part of the SDG 1 "No Poverty", it is important to focus on two key components that contribute to the GDP: small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and agriculture.

SMEs, constituting a significant portion of the Pakistani market, represent 90% of businesses according to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2004 report. Small businesses employ 5-19 workers, while medium-sized enterprises employ 20-99, and their nimbleness allows them to quickly adapt to changing market conditions and customer preferences. These enterprises drive industrialization, create value, and promote employment due to their labor-intensive nature. Recognized as a key driver of economic development by the Pakistani government, SMEs spur growth, foster competition, and boost entrepreneurship. They also invest in employee skill development, enhancing productivity and employability to help individuals escape poverty. However, to thrive, SMEs require the establishment of formal financial markets to address sectoral constraints.

Moreover, Pakistan is considered an agriculture-based country, with this sector contributing 22% of GDP (2022, World Bank). However, the country has witnessed unstable agricultural growth especially due to climate change and rural inequality. To counter this, the 7.4 million subsistence farmer (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2021)

require attention as they have the potential to contribute more as they are higher in number.

First, the elite farmer strategy should be replaced with the small farmer strategy. Second, the irrigation system should be improved with enhanced focus on drip and sprinkler irrigation, which is highly water efficient. The government should encourage rainwater harvesting and help small farmers build water storage facilities. However, institutional constraints to agriculture remain, such as reduced water availability and increased water requirement per acre (due to more salt deposits in topsoil).

A viable solution includes the development of resilient seeds, which can only be achieved through dedicated research. Take wheat for example – a crop highly sensitive to temperature change. An increase of only 2°C can result in lower yield of ~10-16%. It is pertinent that researchers seek new findings to create heat resistant seeds. Regular interaction between farmers and researchers is critical for implementation.

To conclude, Pakistan can achieve economic stability by prioritizing two key areas. Firstly, by supporting agriculture, the backbone of the economy, through measures like subsidized inputs (seeds, fertilizer, and machinery), affordable electricity, and improved irrigation. Secondly, by nurturing SMEs, which play a vital role in job creation (informal and formal), especially in a country with a low literacy rate. This can be accomplished through interest-free loans and fostering entrepreneurship.



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Educational Equity in Pakistan: Navigating Challenges Toward Sustainable Development Goals

Quality education in Pakistan, as guided by Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), stands as a critical pillar for the nation's advancement. Despite some progress, the educational landscape in Pakistan presents formidable challenges. Access to quality education remains unequal, with rural and marginalized communities facing persistent disparities. The quality of education is a pressing concern, marked by outdated curricula, a scarcity of qualified educators and inadequate infrastructure. Moreover, gender imbalances persist, with boys consistently outnumbering girls across all levels of education. Cultural barriers and security issues in certain regions continue to deter girls from attending school, leading to a substantial number of out-of-school children (OOSC), particularly girls and those in conflict-affected areas, totaling approximately 22.8 million. Additionally, the absence of vocational training opportunities hampers the employability of many young individuals, disconnecting them from the expectations of the job market.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges require a comprehensive policy approach. Proposed solutions encompass investing in early childhood education (ECE) to ensure

readiness for school, expanding alternative learning pathways (ALP) to bring out-of-school children, particularly adolescent girls, into primary education, and strengthening connections between higher educational institutions and industries to enhance professional education quality. Adequate funding, with a focus on increasing the education budget from its current 1.7% to the recommended 4% of GDP, is crucial to implementing sustainable quality education in Pakistan. Moreover, comprehensive teacher training programs and efforts to recruit and retain qualified educators, particularly in remote areas, are necessary to elevate education quality. Initiatives to promote girls' education through awareness campaigns, incentives and female teacher recruitment are essential for creating safer and more inclusive learning environments. Upgrading curricula to align with modern educational standards and incorporating practical skills relevant to the job market is also pivotal. Public-private partnerships can further expand access to quality education and vocational training, while the development of vocational programs matching job market demands is essential for reducing unemployment rates. Finally, expanding access to digital learning resources, especially in remote areas, can bridge the digital divide and promote e-learning, furthering the cause of SDG 4.

In conclusion, the journey towards achieving SDG 4 in Pakistan is a formidable undertaking, but not insurmountable. Through concerted efforts, the implementation of robust policies and collaborative engagement of all stakeholders, Pakistan can make significant strides towards providing equitable and quality education for all its citizens. This article serves as a call to action, urging meaningful change in Pakistan's educational landscape to pave the way for a brighter future.



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BIPP Round-Up

On the 15th of August, 2023, The Shahid Javed Burki Institute of Public Policy at Netsol (BIPP) in line with its mission of empowering deserving female students, awarded scholarship certificates to 5 recipients from the Department of Pharmacy, University of Punjab. The event commenced with a heartfelt acknowledgment from the Prof. Dr. Syed Atif Raza (Principal, Pharmacy Department) expressing gratitude for BIPP's generous scholarships and dedication to enable female students. Mr. Shahid Najam (Vice Chairman of BIPP) illuminated the institute's mission and impact, emphasizing its role as a transformative force in education and policy development landscape.





Similarly, BIPP took another initiative towards to foster academic excellence by facilitating bright minds as on the 31st of August, 2023, the policy institute awarded 5 scholarships to female students selected from the School of Biochemistry & Biotechnology, University of Punjab. Mr. Shahid Najam, Dr. Ejaz Sandhu (Director Operations at BIPP) and Dr. Muhammad Khurshid (Head of Department, School of Biochemistry & Biotechnology) presented scholarship certificates to the recipients. BIPP understands the importance of investing in the future of Pakistan, and believes that education is a powerful catalyst for positive change. These scholarships represent BIPP's commitment to nurturing talent and supporting students in their pursuit of knowledge.



In the same vein, on the 28th of September, 2023, BIPP distributed 7 scholarships to female students from the Nursing Department, University of Lahore (UOL) under the Shahid Javed Burki Scholarship Program. Prof. Dr. Shahid Munir, (Chairman of the Punjab Higher Education Commission - PHEC), graced the occasion with his presence. Moreover, Dr. Ejaz Sandhu and Mr. Awais Raoof (Chairman, University of Lahore) also featured in the ceremony. Scholarship certificates were presented to the diligent students who have demonstrated their passion for nursing and their commitment to making a difference in Pakistan's healthcare system. The ceremony was attended by esteemed members of UOL including the Board of Governors, the Rector, and the Principal of the Nursing Department.



Apart from this, the new episode of BIPP's *Policy Hub* was also uploaded on YouTube in September. It featured Mr. Shahid Najam elucidating the concept of "Climate Smart Agriculture" (CSA). He analyzed formidable challenges faced by the agriculture sector in

Pakistan and helped to understand the difference conventional agriculture and CSA. Mr. Najam also contextualized the aforementioned concept within the framework of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, he walked the viewers through the impediments in the adoption of CSA. The complete episode can be watched on BIPP's YouTube channel:

https://youtu.be/3CX2FErhFdM?si=L4oCV4E968c__3vu



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Embrace Technology and Innovation for Sustainability

Investment in infrastructure and innovation are key drivers of economic growth. As more than half of the world's population moves into cities, mass transit, renewable energy, the creation of new industries, and information and communication technology all gain importance. Technological progress is crucial to provide long-term solutions challenges linked with the economy and environment, such as encouraging the creation of new jobs and promoting energy efficiency. To encourage sustainable development, it is essential to make investments in science, innovation, and sustainable industries. 90% of individuals without Internet access today are from the developing world, which has a population of more than 4 billion. In order to ensure equitable access to knowledge and information, the digital divide must be bridged.

There is need to promote the development of reliable, strong, dependable, and high-quality infrastructure systems in countries like Pakistan that include both regional and transborder connectivity. The strategic goals of these infrastructure projects are to advance economic development and improve the standard of living for the country's population. Moreover, with the specific goal of significantly boosting industry's contribution to both employment and gross domestic product (GDP) by the year 2030, the growth of inclusive and sustainable industrialization must be prioritized. Apart from this small-scale industrial and other businesses should have easy access to financial services, including affordable loans, with a focus on promoting these opportunities in developing countries like Pakistan and eventually this could lead to smooth integration into larger market ecosystems and global value chains in order to promote sustainable economic growth and prosperity.

There should be investment in massive infrastructure renovation projects by 2030 while also reviving industry to fit with sustainability standards. This change will involve increased resource efficiency as well as a wider embrace of environmentally friendly industrial practices and clean technology. Every country must take strategic efforts in accordance with its unique capabilities to achieve global progress, driving the world toward a greener, more sustainable future. Along with this, the bar should be raised for scientific research and industrial sector technological capabilities on a nationwide scale, with a special emphasis on achieving these objectives. The objective here is to promote innovation by 2030, while also substantially increasing public and private spending in research and development and the density of research and development of employees. This multidimensional strategy

highlights commitment to supporting a strong and progressive knowledge economy.

Increased financial, technological, and technical support is required to enable the promotion of resilient and sustainable infrastructure development, especially in the Global South. This commitment specifically includes unshakable assistance to least developed provinces, landlocked developing cities, and tiny developing areas. Furthermore, National technology development, research, and innovation projects in under developed areas of a country must be encouraged. For example in order to support the IT industry by enhancing Pakistan's fundamental infrastructure, the Pakistan Software Exports Board added seven (07) Software Technology Parks during the first three quarters of FY2023. These parks are located in Faisalabad, Gujrat, Jamshoro, Karachi, Multan, Peshawar, and Rawalpindi. This effort comprises, among other things, creating a supportive policy environment with the intention of promoting industrial diversification and increasing the value-added portion of commodities.

Lastly, in 2023, the Internet is being used by 5.4 billion individuals, or 67% of the world's population, in comparison to 1.7 billion individuals in 2018, indicating a growth of 45% in 2023. Nevertheless, 2.6 billion individuals are still unconnected as a result. The number of internet users in Pakistan is estimated to be around 95.75 million in 2023. There is utmost need for universal and affordable Internet connectivity in the least developed areas especially in the Global South, which will significantly increase access to information and communications technology (ICT). This coordinated effort will demonstrate dedication to closing the digital gap, giving these areas access to the transformative power of contemporary ICT infrastructure, and ensuring equal participation in the digital economy.



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Energizing the Future: EVs Paving the Way to Energy Sustainability

Pakistan is heavily dependent on imported fuels for energy generation which makes its energy sector vulnerable to due price fluctuations in the international markets. According to data from OEC and the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Pakistan's imports of petroleum products, natural gas liquefied, and petroleum crude amounted to \$9.7 million, \$3.8 million and \$3.5 billion, respectively. This surge in imports, coupled with the steep increase in fuel prices driven by IMF conditions tied to a \$3 billion loan, has placed a substantial economic burden on Pakistan, impeding its short-term fiscal recovery efforts.

With this overriding crisis and the current advancement of technology, electric vehicles (EV) may be the answer to the problem. As the EV technology is in the early stage of product life cycle in developed countries, the question arises that can developing countries like Pakistan be able to manufacture EVs especially in line with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of *Access to Affordable* and *Clean Energy and Climate Action* (SDGs 7 and 13). As China has made an agreement with Afghanistan to trade Lithium, the said trade will take place through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which brings Pakistan into the equation. China, a global leader in EV production, can provide technological

expertise and manufacturing capabilities to Pakistan. An agreement with Afghanistan, a country rich in lithium resources, could facilitate a secure and sustainable supply chain for lithium-ion batteries, a critical component in EV production for Pakistan. This collaboration would not only bolster economic ties but also promote regional stability and to maximize the impact of EV adoption. Pakistan should prioritize the electrification of public transport as a starting point. Initiatives like electric buses and shared mobility services can pave the way for broader EV adoption while addressing immediate transportation needs. Whereas the neighbouring country India has also decided to make it mandatory by January 2024 that all new tourist vehicles, rental cars and rental bikes to be electric.

EVs are not only more energy-efficient but also produce fewer emissions, although high upfront costs make them inaccessible to many, while limited charging infrastructure and unreliable power grids hinder adoption. However, the shift can help Pakistan make substantial progress in curbing air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, addressing the global challenge of climate change. Additionally, enhancing air quality, especially in densely populated urban centers like Lahore which has one of the poorest air quality indexes in the world. Similarly, by transitioning to electric vehicles, the country can reduce its oil dependency, stabilize its trade deficit, and allocate resources towards domestic innovation and development.



Mission Statement

BIPP's mission is to improve the welfare of the citizenry with particular emphasis on identifying policy measures that will lead to inclusive, people-centered growth with equity, political stability and sustainable development besides fully harnessing the potential for regional and global integration of the country. BIPP primary areas of interest encompass social, economic, environmental and political development and security, trade and foreign policy-related issues.

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