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Navigating Ineffective Leadership: Policy Approaches for Strengthening Governance in Pakistan

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by

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Introduction

"Until Philosophers are Kings or the Kings and Princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy… cities will never have rest from evil… no, nor the human race".[1] In this maxim, Plato stresses the timeless need for wisdom in leadership. Good governance, when practiced by effective leaders, helps them embody the qualities of philosopher kings by guiding societies with wisdom, justice, and integrity.

Leadership and Governance are interwoven in the fabric of an organization or a country's systems. The former affects the latter directly and in-depth. Leadership spearheads good governance towards accountable, consensus-oriented; effective and efficient; equitable and inclusive; participatory; transparent and responsive systems. As a result, the good governance ensures that corruption is decreased, the opinions of minorities are considered, the views of the helpless in society are addressed and everyone has their say in decision-making.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) describes the term governance as the "implementation of economic, political and administrative authority to direct the affairs of a country at all levels. It encompasses the mechanisms, procedures and establishments, through which citizens and groups express their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences". [2]

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[1] Syed Humayun, "Good Governance in Pakistan: Analysis of Threats and Opportunities," July 2, 2014, https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Good+Governance+in+Pakistan+Analysis+of+Threats+and+Opportunities. -a0379785395.

[2] Muhammad Imran and Dr. Rohaida Nordin, "GOOD GOVERNANCE in PAKISTAN: CHALLENGES and RECOMMENDATIONS ," September 15, 2018,

In the context of Pakistan, history has witnessed persistent governance challenges driven by ineffective leadership across political, bureaucratic and institutional frameworks. It has often led the country to corruption, weak decision-making, and an inability to implement critical policies. The lack of visionary leadership at various levels has deepened institutional dysfunction and eroded public trust in governance. Bad governance not only hinders economic growth and political stability but also social development. While efforts have been made to address governance issues, the root causes of ineffective leadership continue to persist. The political leadership is usually mired in a paralyzing fight that saps most of its energy and doubts arise about its effectiveness.

This policy brief outlines the key challenges posed by ineffective leadership in Pakistan and proposes a range of policy approaches to strengthen governance through reforms in leadership development, institutional capacity building, transparency, and public accountability.

Governance Issues Stemming from Ineffective Leadership

Pakistan has faced significant governance challenges over the years, many of which stem from ineffective leadership across various political, bureaucratic, and institutional sectors. Here is some key governance issues linked to poor leadership in the country:

1. **Lack of Accountability & Transparency**
   Accountability is used for surveillance and oversight of the exercise of power. The term "accountability" often refers to the discussion of public governance or its transparency.[3] Pakistan is ranked 120th out of 180 countries according to the Corruption Perception Index-2019 (Transparency International Ranking). Koppell has distinguished the concept of accountability in five different dimensions, i.e., transparency, liability, controllablity, responsibility and responsiveness.[4] Corrupt practices among leadership, both at the political and bureaucratic levels, undermine governance. It leads to the weakening of the state institutions. Without transparency and accountability, citizens cannot hold leaders responsible for their actions. The lack of transparency and accountability creates a cycle of poor governance and further deepening inefficiencies within government structures.

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343402677_GOOD_GOVERNANCE_IN_PAKISTAN_CHALLENGES_AND_RECOMMENDATIONS.

[3] Nasir Iqbal and Ghulam Mustafa, "A REVIEW of ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS: LEARNING from BEST PRACTICES," August 2022, https://file.pide.org.pk/uploads/kb-082-a-review-of-accountability-systems-learning-from-best-practices.pdf.

[4] Ejaz Ahmed. 2020. "ACCOUNTABILITY IN PAKISTAN: AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE". *ISSRA Papers* 12 (December):75-88. https://issrapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/view/52

2. **Corrupt Practices in Vogue**

Ineffective leadership has often paved the way for corruption in Pakistan, leading to the abuse of public resources.

The Prevention of Corruption Act-1947 (PCA-1947), the Pakistan Penal Code-1860 (PPC-1860), and the National Accountability Ordinance-1999 (NAO1999) are existing laws to deal with corruption in Pakistan. There are two Anti-Corruption Authorities (ACAs), National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) at Federal level and four Anti-Corruption Establishments (ACEs) operating at Provincial level, which are empowered to investigate into various cases of public sector corruption. There is a lot of hue and cry from different segments of society about the necessity of rationalizing the NAB. It has not been free from political influence and is perceived as a tool in the hands of sitting governments. [5]

3. **Poor Policy Implementation**

The issues of ineffective governance and corruption, particularly among politicians and civil servants, have also been described as a major obstacle to proper policy implementation in Pakistan.[6]

To Implement policies effectively has been a major challenge for political and bureaucratic leaders. The major reasons are political instability, lack of coordination, and short-term focus. The failure of policy implementation often ended in non-deliverance of key services, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

4. **Institutional Dysfunction**

A lack of strong, visionary leadership has eroded institutional integrity and made them to become inefficient and dysfunctional. The involvement of leaders in corrupt practices, damage the institutions and take away their ability to uphold the rule of law and deliver public services effectively.

5. **Erosion of Public Trust**

The continuous governance failures have left a negative impression on people's mind. They have trust deficit regarding their leaders. They believe that leaders are not good enough or merely self-serving to address their key issues like unemployment, inflation, and public service. It weakens the overall governance structure.

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[5] ibid

[6] Nasir Iqbal and Ghulam Mustafa, "A REVIEW of ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS: LEARNING from BEST PRACTICES," August 2022, https://file.pide.org.pk/uploads/kb-082-a-review-of-accountability-systems-learning-from-best-practices.pdf.

6. **Stagnant Economic Growth**

   Ineffective leadership undermines governance by stagnating economic growth. The poor fiscal management, inconsistent policies, and political instability deter foreign investment and hinder economic growth. Leadership's incapability to address issues like inflation, unemployment, and rising national debt has kept the country in a cycle of economic crisis, exacerbating poverty and inequality.

7. **Political Instability and Leadership Vacuum**

   Military dictatorships have never let Pakistan's political fabric to sustain. Pakistan's leadership has often been plagued by decade-long coups, political infighting and weak democratic regimes, which enfeebles governance. Political leaders are often engaged in power struggles that distract them from addressing the important issues facing the country. This creates a leadership vacuum, destabilizing the government and leading to governance failures. The lack of legitimate and credible leadership further fuels public disillusionment with the political process.

Policy Recommendations to Improve Effectiveness of Leadership

1. Counter Ineffective Leadership with Civic Education

Civic education refers to any educational initiative that purposefully seeks to promote the knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors amongst citizens. Civic education for youth has been advanced to strengthen democracy by increasing youth political participation and civic engagement and to establish a pattern of engagement that will last throughout adulthood. There is a growing focus on the inclusion of out-of-school activities for civic education as part of the school curriculum. Many U.S. schools have adopted "service learning," in which classroom work is combined with directed community service and reflection on that experience. [7]

Civic education is crucial to foster national development through the production of responsible citizens, who will contribute to the building of a democratic society. When the citizen's capacities and commitments are well developed through the curriculum and active learning, every citizen becomes conscious of his or her responsibility to the welfare of the nation. And it minimizes the effects of ineffective leadership. Therefore, Civic Education is vital to Pakistan's scenario, where good governance is a mirage due to ineffective leadership.

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[7] Rebecca Winthrop, "The Need for Civic Education in 21st-Century Schools," June 2006, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BrookingsPolicy2020_BigIdeas_Winthrop_CivicEducation.pdf.

2. Impact of Youth Leadership

Youth Leadership is crucial for countering ineffective leadership and fostering good governance in the country. Young leaders having fresh perspectives; innovative ideas and a strong sense of accountability, are a great asset for a country to fight challenges related to leadership and good governance. With involvement in political processes and civic engagement, Pakistan can be steered towards an equitable and more prosperous future.

Youth Councils

In the U.S. and the U.K., for instance, YCs act as advisory or advocacy bodies to the government or development community. Youth elected to these structures are expected to identify youth priorities, design policies, and contribute to their implementation.[8]

3. Leadership Training Programs

Training programs are crucial for impacting poor performing leadership in Pakistan. It is imperative for good governance too. There's a program 'Australian Public Service Leadership Academy (APSL)' in Australia to develop leadership skills at all levels of public service. It includes modules on strategic thinking, management, and governance that can help promote more transparent and accountable leadership. Such training programs should be designed in Pakistan to help leadership grow and perform effectively.

4. Active Civil Society

Civil Society is a major stakeholder in bringing good governance in country. The political landscape of Pakistan has been affected by authoritarian regimes, and civil society has always resisted against them. There are CSOs i.e. Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), the Free and Fair Elections Network (FAFEN), the Center for Peace and Development Initiative (CPDI), etc. active in Pakistan. They oversee the parliament and remarks against the policies, which can help strengthen transparency and accountability in the country. Hence, civil society is a back bone of Pakistan, responsible to affect ineffective leadership and bringing good governance in Pakistan.

5. Promote Accountability and Transparency

Effective leadership hinges on accountability and transparency. Strengthening these aspects will restore public trust and improve governance. Recommendations include:

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[8] Loubna Hanna Skalli and M.A Thomas , "What We Know about 'What Works' in Youth Civic Engagement and Voice, Youth Organizations, Youth Leadership, and Civic Education," June 12, 2015, https://www.youthpower.org/sites/default/files/YouthPower/resources/summary_of_findings_from_youth_and_drg_research_project.pdf.

a. Enforcing Anti-Corruption measures and the creation of independent bodies to monitor leaders' actions can help deter corrupt practices.

b. Mandatory public disclosure of assets by political leaders and government officials will enhance transparency and deter financial misconduct.

6. Enhance Merit-Based Appointments

To ensure competent leadership, merit-based selection processes must replace patronage or political favoritism, particularly in key government positions. This will enhance institutional effectiveness and integrity. Key steps:

a. Bringing selection process reforms in Public Service Commission can ensure transparent recruitment based on merit in the public sector.

b. Key appointments in the judiciary, bureaucracy, and other institutions should be free from political influence, based solely on qualifications and expertise.

7. Empower Local Governance

Decentralizing power and authority to local levels can enhance leadership effectiveness by fostering grassroots governance. Recommendations include:

a. Transferring more decision-making powers to local governments can ensure responsive leadership that understands community needs.

b. Investing in leadership development and governance training at the local level to empower community leaders and improve service delivery.

8. Promote Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is essential to address governance challenges. Leaders must uphold integrity and moral values in their decision-making and actions. Recommendations include:

a. Integrate ethical leadership training into educational programs for politicians, civil servants, and government officials.

b. Code of conduct is necessary to outline ethical standards for leaders in politics and government. It will ensure accountability for violations.

9. Encourage Political Stability and Consensus-Building

Political instability can be controlled by promoting inclusiveness in governance. Political and bureaucratic leaders must include stakeholders for consensus-building to ensure stable governance. Key recommendations include:

a. By encouraging dialogue and collaboration between political parties to build consensus on key national issues, polarization can be reduced.

b. Forums should be established where leaders from different political, social, and economic backgrounds can engage in dialogue and work towards national interests.

10. Leverage Technology for Governance and Leadership

The leadership should take advantage of technology to enhance governance effectiveness. It can improve decision-making, transparency, and communication between leaders and citizens. Key steps include:

a. Implementing e-governance systems can allow leaders to communicate with citizens and stakeholders more efficiently, promoting transparency and better service delivery.

b. Equipping leaders with tools to use data analytics for informed and evidence-based decision-making can also positively impact both leadership and good governance.