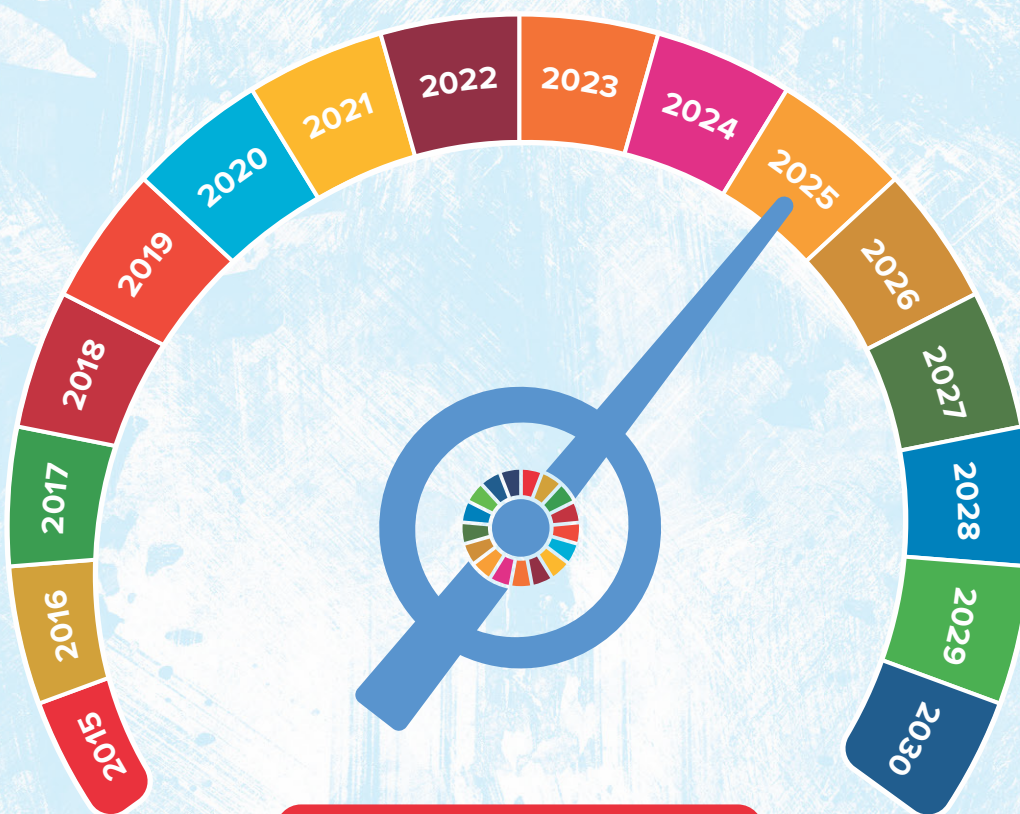


Development Advocate Pakistan

Volume 12, Issue 3 | September 2025
SPECIAL EDITION



AGENDA
2030

THE LAST MILE: Pakistan's Path to the SDGs

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THE LAST MILE: Pakistan's Path to the SDGs

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Development Advocate Pakistan provides a platform for the exchange of ideas on key development issues and challenges in Pakistan. Focusing on a specific development theme in each edition, this quarterly publication fosters public discourse and presents varying perspectives from civil society, academia, government and development partners. The publication makes an explicit effort to include the voices of women and youth in the ongoing discourse. A combination of analysis and public opinion articles promote and inform debate on development ideas while presenting up-to-date information.

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What Will it Take to Accelerate the SDGs?

With just five years remaining until 2030, the question is no longer whether acceleration is needed, but how quickly Pakistan can pivot towards bold, transformative action to deliver its SDG promise.

One year ago, through our Development Advocate Pakistan publication on the UN Summit of the Future, UNDP called for a collaborative, future-ready, transformative development approach to get back on track for the 2030 Agenda. Yet progress remains uneven. Globally, only 35 percent of the Goals are on track or making moderate progress, strained by geopolitical tensions and fractured multilateralism, widening inequalities, protectionist trade measures, climate pressures, and fragile governance.

Pakistan's development largely reflects this global trend: making noticeable gains in macroeconomic stabilization and reform, clean energy, and infrastructure connectivity, yet remaining vulnerable to climate shocks and recurring natural disasters, dipping development indicators, and geopolitical stressors. With just five years remaining until 2030, the question is no longer whether acceleration is needed, but how quickly Pakistan can pivot towards bold, transformative action to deliver its SDG promise.

The 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 80), aptly themed "Better together: 80 years and more peace, development and human

rights," comes at a critical moment. Global leaders will gather in New York to renew their commitment to multilateralism and shared action for people and the planet. For Pakistan, this is also a time to take stock—to renew political commitment, assess challenges, seize opportunities, and identify tipping points that can accelerate human development.

A decade ago, Pakistan demonstrated global leadership by becoming one of the first countries to unanimously adopt the SDGs in Parliament, supported by robust policy frameworks and mechanisms. That early ownership remains a powerful asset. In UNDP's recent high-level SDG Policy Dialogue with government and Parliament, consensus emerged around three game-changers: sharper development priorities, stronger data systems, and innovative financing. Together, these pathways show that acceleration is possible if Pakistan seizes the moment with urgency and scale.

Acceleration will also depend on subnational ownership. Provinces need fiscal space and political agency to deliver on the SDGs through region-specific strategies, citizen engagement and coordination, as underscored in the Policy Dialogue. Encouragingly,



By
Dr. Samuel Rizk
Resident Representative,
UNDP Pakistan



provinces have already identified priority themes—climate and gender (Sindh, Punjab), governance and energy (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), digital inclusion and social protection (Balochistan). The next step is to move from fragmented priorities to catalytic targets that cut across sectors, advancing progress across multiple Goals and driving transformational change. At its heart, acceleration must be about people—expanding opportunities for youth, empowering women, and restoring dignity through inclusive growth.

Financing remains the most serious challenge. Pakistan requires a comprehensive SDG financing strategy that aligns fiscal policy, global development finance, domestic resources, and private capital with SDG priorities. The Ministry of Planning's envisioned Sustainable Financing Framework is a vital step in this direction. Through it, the government can tap into non-traditional instruments such as blended finance, climate funds, diaspora bonds, and outcome-based partnerships with the private sector. The private sector—an engine of innovation and growth—must be engaged not only through a corporate social responsibil-

ity approach, but as a co-investor in national development priorities.

Since 2015, Pakistan has championed the SDGs, adopting them as a framework for national development planning, and laying solid foundations for their achievement. Despite challenges, the Goals remain within reach, buttressed by bold choices, strong development partnerships, and urgency. With the clock ticking, acceleration is not a choice; it is the only path forward. Undertaken with courage and conviction, the promise of Agenda 2030 can be realized, and UNDP is determined to walk this path alongside the people and government of Pakistan.

For Pakistan, this is also a time to take stock—to renew political commitment, assess challenges, seize opportunities, and identify tipping points that can accelerate human development.

Leadership Vision to Shift Gears Amid a Storm

By

Kanni Wignaraja

UN Assistant Secretary-General and
UN Development Programme (UNDP) Regional
Director for Asia and Pacific



The question is no longer whether we will reach the SDGs by 2030. It is: how do we accelerate in a world that has shifted so dramatically since we began this journey?

When The Development Advocate Pakistan first appeared twelve years ago, its mission was clear: to bring the country's development discourse closer to the people it serves. Today, that mission continues in increasingly turbulent and distracting times. So, just as the content of messages must adjust so must their amplification.

This September, as world leaders gather for the UN General Assembly, a deeply concerning message heard across countries and in multilateral fora is that several vital international commitments - on development, financing, climate action and more - have stalled and need accelerated commitments by political leadership, policy directive and investments at scale.

We have entered the final stretch of the SDGs in a world profoundly transformed from the optimism of 2015. Climate shocks, conflict, economic

stress, and pandemics have collided to create levels of uncertainty, unmitigated risk and destruction to life on this planet that has millions without adequate food, water, shelter and safety.

For many countries, including Pakistan, the space to maneuver feels like it is shrinking just as the need for bold, systemic and collective action grows. And yet, that is what the SDGs, development financing and climate commitments require. They remain a set of powerful directions that together is an essential roadmap for people and their governments and businesses, to find their way back to human security and human development. They are commitments to equality. To dignity. To a planet that sustains life.

The question is no longer whether we will reach the SDGs by 2030. It is: how do we accelerate in a world that has shifted so dramatically since we began this journey?

Global and national instruments that can deliver now - For countries on the climate frontlines or weighed down by debt, the choice cannot be between survival today and sustainability tomorrow. While we wait for global governance and financing systems to evolve to become faster, fairer, and more inclusive, practical more immediate mechanisms that can channel finances and technology to high impact countries, and within countries to the most climate vulnerable communities is a must. This might not bring in the full volume of resources needed all at once, but it will signal the shift that money and technology is moving to where it is needed most and that the returns to these mechanisms are closely monitored and justified. When countries like Pakistan advocate for global climate justice, it speaks not only for itself but for all climate-vulnerable nations. And when communities do so locally, they too speak on behalf of many more.

For countries on the climate frontlines or weighed down by debt, the choice cannot be between survival today and sustainability tomorrow.

More private capital directed to development - The current financial architecture that relies solely on public financing and ODA, cannot be sustained. This is already evident. The world's wealth and domestic wealth is concentrated in the hands of the private markets and large business interests. To attract private financing is to go beyond de-risking. It is to offer

expanded opportunity that blends public and private financing, deploys development bonds swaps, makes equity in development ventures more attractive. It also means meaningful attention to growing a productive skilled workforce and government investment in basic infrastructure including energy and connectivity that makes market access in less-served areas more attractive.

In Pakistan, SDG Investment Fairs and a priority to climate finance in national plans are on the table. These steps matter but more is needed to grow FDI confidence in the domestic market. And this goes hand-in-hand with global adjustments needed, such as re-channeling SDRs, revisiting current credit rating predispositions and capital adequacy reforms for multilateral development banks.

National innovation not by chance - Sustained progress comes when communities, businesses, youth, and local innovators claim this space as their own. Given the heightened global

market competition for traditional goods and services, it will take fresh thinking and capabilities that lift the new global offers, while ensuring a domestic middle-class prosperity that can carry the local economy. For Pakistan, as for others, this cannot be about a one-off bootcamp or a few awards. It requires a more systemic approach across multiple sectors that have a ripple effect. Select R&D, incentivizing a youth-led digital/AI economy, climate resilient engineering and other innovations that become the workplace norm and work ethic will be the test of the next generation winners.

This Special Edition of The Development Advocate Pakistan reflects both the urgency of this moment and the ambition it demands. It brings together ideas from across sectors—government, private enterprise, civil society, and global thought leaders. It speaks to the kind of leadership the world, and the country, needs and desires. It is a rallying call to finish what we started, and to finish strong.



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When Women Are Left Behind, So Are the SDGs



By
Van Nguyen
Deputy Resident
Representative,
UNDP Pakistan

As the world races toward the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Pakistan stands at a crossroads. The question is not just how far it has come, but who has actually benefitted. On paper, the country has progressive laws, social protection schemes, and decentralization reforms. In reality, nearly half the population – women – remain locked out of progress.

The result? Pakistan ranks last, 148 out of 148 countries, according to the Global Gender Gap Index 2025. At this pace, gender equality is not just decades away – it is centuries.

The Cost of Exclusion

Pakistan cannot achieve the SDGs while leaving women behind. Research shows that closing gender gaps directly advances dozens of SDG targets: girls' education reduces child mortality, women's economic participation raises household incomes, and female leaders strengthen climate resilience. Yet Pakistan lags across these fronts.

Only 22 percent of women work, compared to 80 percent of men. Of those who do, most are engaged in agriculture, with three-quarters unpaid. The gender wage gap remains deep: for every PKR 1,000 earned by men, women earn PKR 818.

Exclusion extends into public life.

Women hold just 20 percent of parliamentary seats, occupy one ministerial post, and represent only 0.3 percent of corporate leaders. While quotas have helped, systemic barriers – such as unpaid care responsibilities, safety concerns, and entrenched cultural norms – continue to push women out of public life.

Financial exclusion compounds these challenges. Only 13 percent of women have a bank account, excluding them from credit, savings, and digital transfers. Only 30 percent of women own smartphones compared to 58 percent of men, and more than 80 percent need permission to use a phone.

This exclusion is not just unjust – it is expensive. Closing the mobile gender gap alone could unlock vast opportunities for women in jobs, education, and finance – while generating an estimated US\$130 million in additional industry revenues.

Decentralization: Bringing the SDGs Closer to Communities

Decentralization has the potential to bring decision-making closer to communities and respond to women's needs more effectively. Evidence shows that when women hold office, they are more likely to allocate resources toward services that benefit women and families. The 7th National Finance Commission Award and the

On paper, the country has progressive laws, social protection schemes, and decentralization reforms. In reality, nearly half the population—women—remain locked out of progress.



Closing the gender gap between policy and practice requires stronger accountability mechanisms, investment in institutional capacity, and political will at all levels.

18th Constitutional Amendment were milestones in devolving power, increasing provincial shares of federal revenues from 47 to 57.5 percent. The aim was to make health, education, and social welfare programmes more responsive, accountable, and inclusive – especially for women.

But outcomes vary widely across provinces, shaped by institutional capacity and resources. Without stronger redistribution and capacity-building, decentralization risks widening inequalities rather than bridging them.

Laws and Enforcement

Pakistan has no shortage of laws promising women equality: inheritance rights, workplace protections, safeguards against harassment, even child marriage bans setting the minimum age at 18 in Sindh and, more recently, in the federal capital. On paper, it looks progressive.

But in practice, women are often denied their rightful property shares. Survivors of gender-based violence face stigma, low conviction rates, and patriarchal attitudes within institutions. Workplace protections are often ignored. Gender focal units inside government remain underfunded and ineffective. Closing the gender gap between policy and practice requires stronger accountability mechanisms, investment in institutional capacity, and political will at all levels.

Identity and Data: The Invisible Barriers

Legal identity remains a major barrier. More than a quarter of adult women lack a national ID card, restricting their access to banking, mobile services, and social protection programmes. Without a CNIC (computerized national identity card), women cannot open a bank account, register a phone, or access government services. In a digitalizing world, they are invisible to the state and excluded from opportunities to participate fully in civic and economic life.

Cultural norms compound legal failures. One in six girls is married before 18, cutting short her education and endangering her health. Educational parity has reached 85 percent but rural female literacy hovers around 41 percent, dropping to just 28 percent in places like Tharparkar.

Equally critical are data gaps. Pakistan has not conducted a national Time Use Survey since 2007, leaving unpaid care work invisible in official statistics. Reporting on gender-based violence is fragmented and inconsistent. Without



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Closing gender gaps directly advances dozens of SDG targets: girls' education reduces child mortality, women's economic participation raises household incomes, and female leaders strengthen climate resilience.

credible, timely, and disaggregated data, policies rely on averages that conceal inequalities. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics has announced plans for new surveys on unpaid work and gender-based violence, but these must be implemented at scale to provide an accurate picture.

2030: A Pledge or a Turning Point?

Globally, the World Economic Forum estimates it will take 123 years to close gender gaps. For Pakistan, ranked last worldwide, the horizon is even further away. This is not simply a failure of development – it is a national emergency.

Pakistan has no shortage of frameworks, policies, and laws. What it lacks is implementation, accountability, and the political will to confront entrenched patriarchy.

The future can still be different. Every girl who stays in school, every woman who gains legal identity, every survivor who secures justice, every leader who takes her rightful seat in parliament or boardroom brings Pakistan closer to the promise of the SDGs – because no country can achieve them with half its population left behind.

But time is running out. By 2030, Pakistan's story will either be one of

exclusion – or one of transformation. Choosing equality is choosing progress. The future depends on the decisions we make today.

For Pakistan, equality is not charity. It is survival.



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Reforming for Resilience: A National Commitment to Deliver the 2030 Agenda through URAAN Pakistan

URAAN Pakistan is our integrated blueprint to align economic reforms, institutional strengthening and investment priorities directly with the SDGs.



By
**H.E. Professor
Ahsan Iqbal**
Federal Minister of
Planning, Development &
Special Initiatives

Pakistan stands at a decisive crossroads. The countdown to Agenda 2030 is no longer a distant horizon but an urgent deadline. The challenge before us is clear: to build an inclusive, competitive and climate-resilient economy that leaves no one behind and to accelerate progress across all 17 SDGs.

The Government has embarked on a bold, reform-driven journey with the launch of the URAAN Pakistan Framework, a home-grown national transformation strategy anchored in the 13th Five-Year Plan (2024–29). URAAN Pakistan is built on its structured 5Es Framework: Exports, E-Pakistan, Environment and Climate Change, Energy and Infrastructure, and Equity, Ethics and Empowerment. It is our integrated blueprint to align economic reforms, institutional strengthening and investment priorities directly with the SDGs.

Export-Led Growth: Breaking the Boom and Bust Cycle

For decades, Pakistan's growth trajectory has been held hostage to consumption-driven booms that is then followed by balance-of-payments

busts. URAAN Pakistan reverses this cycle through export-led industrialization that will drive progress towards SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

Special Economic Zones under the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project are being operationalized to integrate Pakistan into the global value chains and diversify exports beyond the textile industry and into new sectors that include Information Technology, agro-processing, high-value manufacturing and engineering goods. Initiatives such as the State Bank of Pakistan's Risk Coverage Program are unlocking financing for small and medium-sized enterprises, while tariff rationalization and trade facilitation reforms are enhancing competitiveness, creating quality jobs and expanding fiscal space for SDG investments.

E-Pakistan: Digital Transformation for Inclusive Growth

Digital inclusion is no longer optional; it is a prerequisite for SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10

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E-Pakistan
Empowering Youth

Energy
Affordable & Efficient

Environment
Water & Food Security

5Es

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2024-2029

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(Reduced Inequalities). Pakistan's National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy 2025, broadband expansion, e-governance reforms and the Pakistan Startup Fund are enabling a technology-driven growth model.

From the E-Rozgaar Program and DigiSkills for youth initiative, to the digital tax and e-procurement systems, the government is bridging the rural-urban digital divide to improve transparency and mobilize domestic resources for SDG financing. The aim for us is clear: to build a knowledge-based economy where every citizen can participate and benefit.

Climate Resilience: A Core Development Priority

As one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, Pakistan views SDG 13 (Climate Action) as a survival imperative. The Five-Year Plan integrates renewable energy, green

hydrogen, flood resilience and ecosystem restoration into mainstream development.

The Government is advancing climate finance integration into public investment planning and accessing resources from the Green Climate Fund and voluntary carbon markets. These measures protect livelihoods, safeguard infrastructure and create green growth opportunities that are turning climate risk into a climate opportunity.

Energy and Infrastructure: The Growth Enabler

Reliable energy and modern infrastructure are essential for SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 9. Reforms in the power, oil and gas sectors such as privatization, loss reduction and clean energy adoption, are improving energy security and affordability.

Transport and logistics upgrades,

multimodal connectivity, and regional trade corridors are reducing the cost of doing business. This has helped to foster SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and enable Pakistan's integration into regional and global markets.

Equity, Ethics and Empowerment: Putting People at the Centre

At its heart, URAAN Pakistan is a people-first strategy. Social sector priorities such as quality education for all, expanding health coverage, nutrition, digital education and protection, and opportunities for women and persons with disabilities, are advancing SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

By closing human capability gaps, investing in skills and promoting ethical governance, Pakistan is ensuring that economic growth translates into human

For decades, Pakistan's growth trajectory has been held hostage to consumption-driven booms and followed by balance-of-payments busts. URAAN Pakistan reverses this cycle through export-led industrialization—driving progress towards SDG 8 and SDG 9.



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The Ministry of Planning is developing the Integrated National Financing Framework to align public and private financial flows with SDG priorities, ensuring coherence between policy and investment.

development and social justice.

Financing the SDGs: Strategic Public Investment for Maximum Impact

The 13th Five-Year Plan allocates PKR 21.9 trillion in public investment over five years, with 39 percent directed to infrastructure and 23 percent for social sectors. High-impact, pro-poor investments in nutrition, women's empowerment, skills development, and climate adaptation are prioritized for the greatest SDG returns.

Pakistan's financial sector is also moving towards sustainable finance. Green banking guidelines, Environmental, Social, and

Governance integration, and green and social bonds are creating space for private capital mobilization. However, to unlock the full potential, the Ministry of Planning is developing the Integrated National Financing Framework to align public and private financial flows with SDG priorities, ensuring coherence between policy and investment.

From Vision to Delivery

Achieving Agenda 2030 demands more than policy design; it requires institutional capacity, good governance and a results-driven culture. URAAN Pakistan's reform agenda is building exactly that.

The devastating floods of 2022 washed away many of our SDG gains. However, we are determined to catch up. By combining structural reforms with strategic investments, and aligning every rupee spent to the SDGs, Pakistan is not only keeping its commitment to the global development agenda, but also ensuring that development is sustainable, inclusive, and future-proof.

As we move towards 2030, our message is clear: Pakistan will not merely participate in the SDG journey; it will lead with innovation, resilience and a people-first vision.

Balochistan's Vision for the Final Stretch towards the SDGs



By
Zahid Saleem

Additional Chief Secretary (Development),
Planning & Development Department, Balochistan

Balochistan is committed to accelerating progress towards the SDGs by aligning its provincial development agenda with inclusive, resilient, and sustainable priorities. The journey towards achieving the SDGs began in collaboration with UNDP and progressed with the continued support of the UNDP provincial office in Balochistan. As the province progressed its 2030 Agenda, the SDG Units evolved into the SDG Section within the Planning and Development Department in Balochistan. The 2025-26 Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) and several other policies and plans embody this vision in their implementation. The program encompasses over PKR 1.65 trillion in total project costs, including PKR 271.6 billion of foreign project assistance. With a current year allocation of PKR 279.6 billion and a throw-forward of PKR 864 billion, the province is investing strategically in long-term development across sectors.

17 designated strategic projects with a combined cost of PKR 82 billion form the backbone of this approach. These include transformative initiatives such as the Command Area Development, Satellite-Based Cadastral Mapping, and Integrated Market Infrastructure, which directly advance SDGs 2 (Zero Hunger), 11 (Sustainable Cities), and 15 (Life on Land). With PKR 24.6 billion allocated in the current year and PKR 57.4 billion in forward liabilities, these strategic projects signal a serious commitment to sustainable, high-impact delivery.

Balochistan's institutional strengths, such as the SDG Support Unit and evolving interdepartmental coordination, ensures progress that is relevant locally. Yet, success hinges on stronger fiscal devolution, improved data systems and meaningful community engagement.

Provincial vision for the Final Stretch SDGs Agenda 2030



By
Adeel Shah

Secretary, Planning and Development Department,
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since the Government of Pakistan's endorsement of the SDGs in 2016, followed by the National Assembly's adoption of the SDGs as National Development Goals, the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has focused on making the SDGs central to its governance structure, while increasing resource allocations towards critical sectors including social, socio-economic, economic, environmental and governance sectors. In collaboration with UNDP, we have established SDG Support Units and have notified vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms, developed and approved the Provincial SDGs Framework from the Provincial Cabinet, developed district-level SDG scorecards for better insights into regional planning, initiated public expenditure tracking and mainstreamed gender equality across planning instruments.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, multidimensional poverty registered a downward trend from 49 percent in 2015 to 40 percent in 2019 while skilled birth attendance improved from 57 percent in 2014-15 to 67 percent in 2019, demonstrating the impact of our targeted policy and programmatic efforts.

The law-and-order situation, poverty, inequality and climate shocks pose substantial challenges in our path towards achieving the SDGs. These challenges not only reduce our development pace but often require repurposing our development budgets. Despite these issues, the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is determined to pursue its SDG commitment through continued implementation of policy guidelines and bringing in improvement to further expedite our efforts towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. We are working on all these fronts and utilizing our own resources effectively.

We are also effectively coordinating with a broad range of development partners. For the remaining period, we will build on this momentum and focus on improving governance. We will ensure that the SDGs are central to governance structures, financing for development, climate change financing and inclusive development. Finally, climate resilience, disaster preparedness and digital transformation are central to the province's forward-looking strategy to effectively contribute towards achieving its SDGs targets.

Punjab's Vision 2030: Delivering Sustainable Development through Strategic Transformation



By
Naeem Rauf

Chairman Planning and Development Department,
Punjab

As Pakistan's most populous and economically dynamic province, Punjab is uniquely positioned to lead the national effort in achieving the SDGs by 2030. The Planning and Development Board is at the forefront of this transformation, driving an inclusive, sustainable, and forward-looking development agenda aligned with the Chief Minister's vision for equitable growth and citizen-centric service delivery.

With less than five years left until Agenda 2030, our strategy is anchored in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. We are leveraging critical enablers such as skills development, climate resilience, digital transformation, agricultural modernization, industrial growth, and innovative development financing. These priorities are vital to addressing multidimensional poverty, enhancing human development outcomes, and advancing inclusive and sustainable prosperity.

Punjab's institutional capacity is rooted in a robust SDGs governance framework, reinforced by evidence-based planning and a results-oriented monitoring ecosystem. We are aligning policy actions with global development priorities while simultaneously optimizing public investment and mobilizing private capital to bridge financing gaps and unlock scalable impact.

As we enter the final stretch to 2030, accelerating implementation is imperative. This requires deeper institutional integration, innovative financing mechanisms, and strengthened cross-sector partnerships. Our commitment remains unwavering to improve service delivery, promote localized and adaptive solutions, and ensure that no one is left behind in Punjab's development journey.

We stand ready to deliver a future that is inclusive, resilient, and sustainable for all.

Vision Statement from Sindh



By
Najam Ahmed Shah

Chairman Planning & Development Department,
Sindh

Sindh envisions a prosperous, inclusive, and climate-resilient province where economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability go hand-in-hand. By 2030, we aim to integrate the SDGs into all tiers of planning, ensuring

equitable access to quality education, healthcare, and livelihoods. Strong governance, participatory decision-making, and innovative financing will drive progress. Our commitment is to leave no one behind in achieving sustainable development for all.

Challenges & Opportunities to Meet the SDG 2030 Agenda: Perspectives from Pakistan & the Global Community

There are grounds for cautious optimism in Pakistan as renewable energy capacity has expanded by 50 percent in 2023, climate finance collaborations have gained momentum, and technology transfer mechanisms have improved access to green and health innovations.



By
Shaista Pervaiz
Convener, National
Parliamentary Taskforce
on SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for SDGs, unanimously adopted by United Nations Member States in 2015, represents a global pledge to eradicate poverty, hunger, and inequality while safeguarding our planet for future generations. With its 17 interlinked goals, it envisions balanced progress across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. As we approach 2030, the urgency to accelerate action has never been greater, both for Pakistan and the international community.

Pakistan took an early and determined step by integrating the SDGs into its national development framework in 2016, aligning them with its Vision 2025 agenda. Under the coordination of the Planning Commission, a national SDG unit, and provincial cells worked to ensure policy coherence across all federating units. This commitment has yielded progress: poverty levels have declined significantly between 2001 and 2018; social protection mecha-

nisms such as the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) have expanded; education innovations such as Taleem Ghar have addressed learning disruptions; and renewable energy initiatives are gradually increasing the share of clean energy.

However, challenges remain significant. Pakistan currently ranks 128 out of 166 countries on the SDG Index 2024, reflecting persistent economic, environmental, and governance constraints. Climate change poses an existential threat, as demonstrated by the devastating 2022 floods that displaced millions and inflicted economic losses of over US\$30 billion. Fiscal pressures, a narrow tax base, and mounting debt servicing obligations restrict development spending, while gender disparities, social inequalities, and limited data availability continue to hinder evidence-based decision-making.

SDG progress is also under strain

globally. The SDGs Report 2024 notes that only 15 percent of targets are on track. COVID-19, geopolitical conflicts and worsening climate emergencies have reversed hard-won gains while developing countries face an annual financing gap of \$4 trillion. Nevertheless, there are grounds for cautious optimism as renewable energy capacity has expanded by 50 percent in 2023, climate finance collaborations have gained momentum, and technology transfer mechanisms have improved access to green and health innovations.

The path forward for Pakistan lies in harnessing opportunities for a green economic transition, advancing climate-resilient agriculture, scaling-up renewable energy, and fostering eco-tourism to create jobs and preserve natural resources. Digital transformation can bridge service delivery gaps in education, healthcare, and governance, while public-private partnerships and diaspora engagement can unlock fresh investment, expertise, and innovation.

At the global level, delivering on climate finance commitments, ensuring equitable transfer of technology, and



Photo Credit: pesp.edu.pk

reforming trade systems to provide fair market access for developing countries are critical for building momentum. These efforts must be underpinned by genuine multilateral cooperation and a renewed sense of shared responsibility.

The final stretch towards 2030 demands bold, integrated, and inclusive action. Pakistan remains committed to addressing structural weaknesses, climate vulnerabilities,

and governance challenges while advancing green growth and digital innovation. Achieving the SDGs is not merely a policy target; it is a moral imperative and a blueprint for humanity's collective survival and prosperity.

Together, with political will and global solidarity, we can still turn ambition into achievement.

Voices from the Assembly

Azad Jammu & Kashmir



By
Muhammad Rasheed
Minister Power Development Authority
Convenor AJ&K Legislative Assembly Taskforce on SDGs

We envision a dynamic landscape in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) where parliamentary engagement powerfully drives the SDGs, ensuring accountability, equity, and localized progress by 2030. Our legislative task forces will harness public-private partnerships, including the strength of the diaspora population, to leverage innovative resources and expertise and turn aspirations into tangible outcomes. By unveiling and maximizing the potential of legislative tools, we will strengthen our commitment to citizen-centric development through constituency-level action that amplifies community voices.

Regular biannual meetings will sustain our momentum,

which will be guided by robust data collection and meaningful evaluation. As we celebrate significant progress, with 60 percent of our indicators on track since 2015, we will confront challenges head-on and intensify efforts in critical areas needing improvement. Through a united front of elected representatives, line departments, and local communities, we aim to create a resilient, equitable AJK that exemplifies our unwavering commitment to exceeding the ambitious goals of the 2030 agenda.

Together, we will transform challenges into opportunities for sustainable growth.

Balochistan



By

Dr. Rubaba Khan Buledi

Advisor to Chief Minister Balochistan & Minister for Women Development Department & Convener, SDGs Parliamentary Task Force, Provincial Assembly of Balochistan

As we approach the final phase of Agenda 2030, the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan remains committed to translating the global goals into localized, equitable, and inclusive action. Through the SDGs Parliamentary Task Force, we are leveraging legislative tools to mainstream sustainable development across provincial policy frameworks—ensuring that marginalized voices, especially women and youth, are prioritized in budgetary allocations and program design.

"True progress lies in transforming global promises into local realities—where every law passed, every budget allocated, and every voice heard brings us closer to a just and sustainable future for all."

Constituency-level engagement in Balochistan has become a cornerstone of our SDG strategy. We believe that parliamentary ownership, supported by data-driven oversight and cross-sector collaboration, is essential to ensure no one is left behind. By bridging the gap between global ambitions and local realities, we aim to institutionalize accountability, deepen democratic participation, and accelerate progress in areas where it is most needed.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



By

Asif Khan

MPA and Convener, Provincial Parliamentary Taskforce on SDGs, Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa envisions a future where inclusive, transparent, and accountable parliamentary action drives progress towards the SDGs. Through robust legislation, effective oversight and informed policymaking, the Provincial Assembly is committed to aligning its development agenda with the SDGs to ensure a just, equitable and sustainable future for all.

As Convener of the Provincial Parliamentary Taskforce on SDGs, I envision a proactive, participatory and responsive parliament that integrates the SDGs into all areas of governance laws, policies and oversight. Our focus includes equitable access to quality education, healthcare, clean water, renewable energy, and economic

opportunities. We also prioritize gender equality, youth empowerment, and climate-resilient development.

We pledge to work in collaboration with fellow legislators, government departments, civil society, and development partners to localize the SDGs and monitor progress transparently. Strengthening Parliamentary Committees and creating platforms for youth engagement are key to amplifying diverse voices in the policymaking process.

Together, we aim to transform our commitment into tangible results, promoting prosperity, inclusion, and resilience in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. With dedicated leadership and collective effort, we will ensure that no one is left behind on the path to achieving the SDGs.

Punjab



By

Barrister Usama Fazal

Convener Punjab SDG Taskforce

As the Convener of the Punjab Assembly's SDGs Task Force, my vision is to harness the unique role of legislators, not only as policymakers, but also as representatives with direct access to communities. Each Member of the Provincial Assembly carries the voices, needs, and aspirations of their constituencies into the Assembly, acting as a bridge between grassroots realities and our global pledge under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Task Force works with standing and select committees to embed SDG priorities into legislation, link budget allocations to measurable outcomes, and ensure constituency-level needs shape provincial strategies. This approach turns parliamentary decisions into tangible results such as providing safe drinking water in rural

homes, creating better schools in underserved towns, and building resilient infrastructure in climate-vulnerable districts.

Our specialized caucuses on child rights, women's empowerment, minority inclusion, disability rights, and climate adaptation strengthen this vision and ensure equity is embedded in every policy.

As we approach 2030, our task is clear, we will use our legislative authority, grassroots reach, and facilitation role to deliver progress that will be inclusive, accountable, and measurable. In Punjab, the 2030 Agenda is not just a global target, it is our local promise to grow together, leaving no one behind.

Sindh



By

Pir Mujeeb ul Haq

Convenor PTF /Member Provincial Assembly

Sindh will lead the way in delivering on the promise of the SDGs by prioritizing the needs of our people at the heart of every policy and project. By 2030, we will ensure that every household gains access to quality education, healthcare, jobs, and climate-resilient infrastructure. Through strong political will, accountable governance, and public participation, we will transform development commitments into real change.

Our vision is a Sindh where progress reaches every voter, every community, and every corner of the province.

Multilateral Diplomacy for Sustainable Development: Advancing Pakistan's SDG Agenda through Strategic Global Partnerships

In 2016, Pakistan became the first country to integrate the SDGs into our national development agenda.



By
**Ambassador
Asim Iftikhar
Ahmad**

Permanent
Representative of
Pakistan to the United
Nations

I am honored to contribute to this Special Edition of Development Advocate Pakistan, which coincides with the 80th session of the UN General Assembly and the decisive final stretch towards the 2030 Agenda.

Adopted in 2015, the global development agenda was a triumph of multilateral diplomacy: nations, large and small, uniting around a shared blueprint for the people, planet, and prosperity.

For Pakistan, the SDGs are not just an abstract framework, they complement our national development priorities. In 2016, we became the first country to integrate the SDGs into our national development agenda. Since then, the presentation of two Voluntary National Reviews at the UN's High-Level Political Forum have demonstrated our continued political commitment to its implementation.

Domestically, Pakistan has pursued ambitious reforms to expand fiscal space, strengthen social protection, promote renewable energy, and build climate resilience. The Uraan Pakistan National Economic Transformation Plan

2024–2029 charts a roadmap for accelerated inclusive growth, built on five pillars: Exports, E-Pakistan, Environment, Energy and Infrastructure, and Equity. Social Protection Initiatives such as the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) are also advancing multiple SDGs simultaneously.

The Living Indus Initiative aims to restore ecosystems and protect one of the world's great river basins, supporting climate adaptation and biodiversity. Moreover, we are transforming Pakistan into a 'digital nation' by enabling a digital society, digital economy, and digital governance.

Yet, like most developing countries, we face challenges in our development journey. Limited fiscal space, recurring climate shocks, and unequal access to finance threatens to slow or reverse development gains. The 2022 floods displaced millions and caused damages exceeding US\$30 billion. Globally, developing countries face trillions of dollars in SDG and climate financing gaps.

While domestic efforts are crucial, multilateral diplomacy and strategic



During Pakistan's tenure as Chair of the G77 and China in 2022, we placed the 'loss and damage' at the center of the climate debate.

partnerships are essential to mobilize finance, facilitate technology transfer, and engage the private sector.

Pakistan has consistently advocated across different multilateral fora for a more inclusive international financial architecture which effectively addresses debt distress, liquidity crises, and structural vulnerabilities across the Global South, including most recently at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development.

Moreover, we have amplified the voices of countries confronting the existential threat of climate change. One notable example was during Pakistan's tenure as Chair of the G77 and China in 2022, wherein we placed the 'loss and damage' at the center of the climate

debate, culminating in the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27.

Pakistan has also leveraged strategic partnerships with the UN development system to translate diplomacy into tangible outcomes. The SDG Investor Map and the SDG Investments and Climate Financing Facility, developed with UNDP and UNDESA, show how blended finance, technical expertise, and the convening power of the UN can help close critical SDG financing gaps.

As the UN marks its 80th Anniversary, the world faces rising inequality, deep divides, and intensifying climate threats. The risk of stalled or reversed development progress is real. Yet the multilateral system, reformed,

revitalized, and strengthened, remains our best hope for collective solutions. That is why it is important to ensure that the efforts for reform, including the UN Secretary General's UN80 initiative, should lead to a stronger, first for purpose UN, better able to deliver across all three pillars—peace and security, development and human rights.

Pakistan will continue to champion sustainable development and its inseparable link with peace and prosperity. Only through sustained collective efforts and enduring partnerships can we transform the 2030 Agenda from aspiration into a shared reality, honoring our responsibility to present and future generations.

Multilateralism at a Crossroads: UN80 & the Road Ahead

“The United Nations has never been more needed. Our values have never been more relevant. And the needs have never been greater.”*



By
Mohamed Yahya

UN Resident and
Humanitarian
Coordinator Pakistan

The UN was founded on a simple yet profound premise: cooperation among nations is the surest path to peace, prosperity, and dignity for all. Eight decades later, that vision is under strain. Today’s polycrisis including displacement, climate shocks, debt and inequality, is testing multilateralism. While trust is eroding globally, in Pakistan, the UN and government relations remain defined by confidence and continuity.

Since its inception, Pakistan has been a custodian of multilateralism, contributing to peacekeeping, disarmament, refugee protection and sustainable development; it continues to look to the UN as a trusted partner in moments of crisis and change. The question is not whether the UN remains relevant but how it can become more so. As the UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said: “The United Nations has never been more needed. Our values have never been more relevant. And the needs have never been greater.”

Multilateralism is humanity’s insurance against chaos, enabling countries to pool sovereignty to tackle challenges that no nation can face alone. It has delivered peace, human rights norms, and frameworks for trade, health and development. Therefore, weakening it

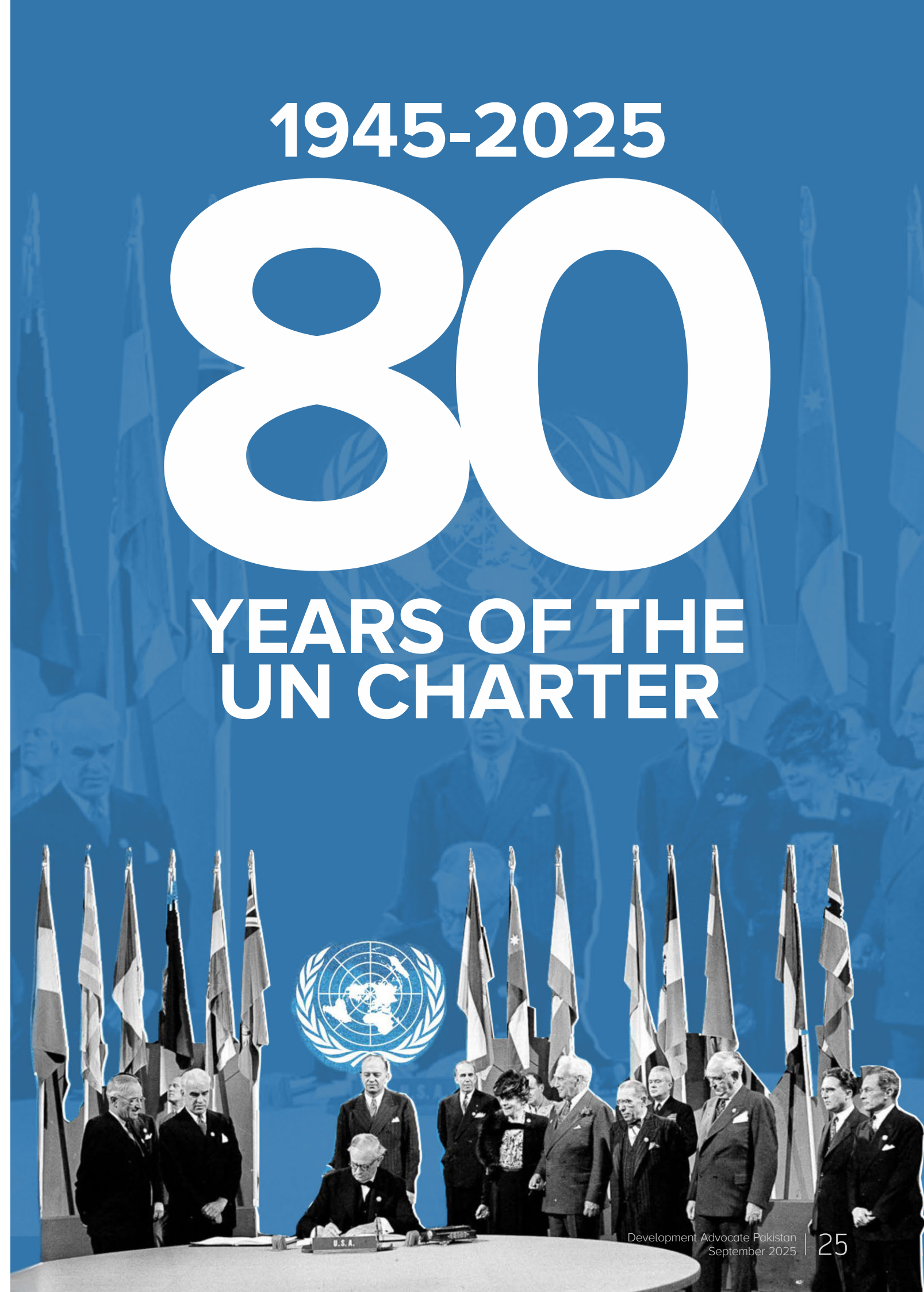
erodes our resilience, while protecting it secures our shared future.

The UN Secretary-General launched the UN80 reform in the lead-up to the 80th anniversary of the UN. This is a critical moment of renewal. It builds on the three-tiered reform trajectory initiated in 2018 that includes structural reforms to reposition the UN development system, efficiency reforms to maximize impact, and a comprehensive Mandate Implementation Review to align the UN’s work with present realities and challenges.

The Mandate Implementation Review calls for streamlining over 40,000 mandates, many of which have become overly prescriptive and underfunded. The UN80 reforms are aiming to make them more efficient, better resourced and outcome-focused for greater impact.

Why does this matter for Pakistan? Pakistan stands at a pivotal juncture. Despite macroeconomic stability achieved in the last two years, the country is confronting simultaneous development and humanitarian pressures including a narrowing fiscal space, heavy debt servicing and a growing population. Climate change is no longer a distant threat; it is a lived

* UN Secretary-General António Guterres on 12 March 2025, during a press encounter launching the UN80 Initiative in New York



reality, from record heatwaves, melting glaciers, to devastating floods. Women and girls are disproportionately affected as nearly 70 percent of women work in climate-sensitive agriculture and they make up the majority of those displaced by floods and other climate shocks.

In this context, the UN in Pakistan is aligning its work with the reform vision. Under the Sevilla Commitment¹ on Financing for Development, we are engaging with international financial institutions, development partners, and government counterparts to mobilize and better target financing for the SDGs. The Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) is ensuring that all the UN agencies operate as a cohesive system, leveraging comparative advantages, avoiding duplication, and responding jointly to national priorities. Efficiency measures, such as the

Common Back Office² (CBO) initiative, are streamlining operational services to free up resources for programs and enhance the overall effectiveness of the UN's work in Pakistan.

The UN is supporting the development of Pakistan's Energy Transition and Investment Plan. We are advancing the rollout of digital policy frameworks and launching initiatives to strengthen the resilience of food systems.

The UN80 reforms are not inward-looking; they aim to retool multilateralism for the 21st-century realities. For Pakistan, this means a UN that can help navigate debt sustainability, unlock climate finance, harness the demographic dividend and manage global megatrends. The reforms will ensure the UN Country Team can convene partners in crises, deliver integrated policy advice,

In an era of fragmentation, the UN remains as the only universal platform where all states can engage as equals, while the UN Charter principles serve as enduring anchors in turbulent times.



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1. The Sevilla Commitment was adopted at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), held in July 2025 in Seville, Spain, where Member States, UN agencies, and partners set out collective priorities to mobilize resources for the SDGs.

2. A shared service arrangement where UN agencies pool their administrative, procurement, HR, and IT functions



@TheDailyCPEC

The Mandate Implementation Review calls for streamlining over 40,000 mandates, many of which have become overly prescriptive and underfunded. The UN80 reforms aims to make them more efficient, better resourced, and outcome-focused for greater impact.

mobilize financing at scale and amplify Pakistan's voice in forums on climate, trade, and digital governance. In an era of fragmentation, the UN remains as the only universal platform where all states can engage as equals while the UN Charter principles serve as enduring anchors in turbulent times.

Multilateralism's future will be decided not in conference halls alone, but in the ability of institutions such as the UN to

deliver tangible results in people's lives. In Pakistan, as in many parts of the world, that means helping a farmer adapt to erratic monsoons, enabling a young woman to access digital skills, and ensuring that a displaced family can rebuild their lives with dignity.

As we mark the UN's 80th anniversary, the challenge before us is to renew the compact between nations and peoples, to show that even in a changing world,

we are united in purpose. The UN80 reforms are our opportunity to do just that.

Forging a Path of Sustainable Development Together: Practices & Insights from China-Pakistan South-South Cooperation

By

H.E. Mr. Jiang Zaidong

Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan



From the Millennium Development Goals to the 2030 Agenda, China has consistently supported global development, steadfastly practiced true multilateralism, and prioritized South-South cooperation.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of the UN. The past 80 years have been a period in which peoples of all nations have made relentless efforts and faced challenges together, it has also been a time of rise and growth for the Global South. From the Millennium Development Goals to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, China has consistently supported global development, steadfastly practiced true multilateralism, and prioritized South-South cooperation.

Taking the cooperation between China and Pakistan as an example, as essential members of the Global South, the cooperation between China and Pakistan focuses on livelihood issues such as infrastructure development, poverty alleviation, healthcare, climate change, and education. We have enhanced the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to become a key platform to achieve mutual

development, creating a model of South-South cooperation through consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits.

First, our cooperation has significantly strengthened the foundation for Pakistan's development. In 2015, H.E. President Xi Jinping made a historic visit to Pakistan and reached the critical consensus with Pakistani leaders to establish a '1+4' cooperation layout, with the CPEC at the center and Gwadar Port, transport infrastructure, energy and industrial cooperation being the four key areas, which paves the way for accelerating the development of the CPEC. After 12 years of construction, the CPEC has evolved into the earliest, most extensive, and most beneficial all-factor cooperation project under the Belt and Road Initiative. It has brought US\$25.4 billion in direct investment to Pakistan, created 236,000 jobs, built 510 kilometers of highways, added over 8,000 mega-

watts (MW) of electricity, and expanded 886 kilometers of core power transmission networks. These accomplishments have strongly promoted Pakistan's economic and social development and enhanced its capacity for independent growth. We will synergize development strategies with Pakistan and jointly build an upgraded CPEC to help Pakistan further solidify its development foundation and unlock its growth potential.

Second, our cooperation has effectively improved the wellbeing of the Pakistani people. H.E. President Xi Jinping has emphasized that China's policy towards Pakistan is always aimed at benefiting all the people of Pakistan, and he pointed out that the planning and layout of CPEC should consider all the regions of Pakistan and ensure that the development benefits all its people.

CPEC has always focused on enhanc-

We have enhanced the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to become a key platform to achieve mutual development, creating a model of South-South cooperation through consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits.



ing the livelihood of the Pakistani people, continuously bringing visible and tangible changes and benefits. Take the flagship project, Gwadar Port, as an example. The Pak-China Friendship Hospital, funded by China, has undergone a major upgrade, significantly improving the level of medical modernization, and the total number of patients who have been treated has exceeded 300,000. The China-aided seawater desalination plant has officially started operations, producing 1,000 tons of fresh water daily, effectively alleviating the local water shortage. The vocational and technical training institute built by China has been handed over and can provide training for 3,000 people annually. Additionally, the Faqeer School has gradually expanded from a primary school to a girls' high school, providing renowned quality educational resources in the region.

Since last year, China has donated 70,000 health kits to Balochistan, covering 23 districts and benefiting 766 schools. Meanwhile, we have actively collaborated with UN agencies such as the UNDP and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to implement a series of tri-party cooperation projects in Pakistan including COVID-19 prevention, monitoring and forecast of

meteorological disasters, distributing food and goods after catastrophe, and offering obstetrics and neonatal care services, among others, to help improve the living conditions of the Pakistani people. We will continue to implement more 'small and beautiful' livelihood projects, work with Pakistan to jointly build a 'Livelihood Corridor,' and continually enhance the sense of wellbeing of the Pakistani people.

Third, our cooperation has continuously supported Pakistan's green development. In recent years, Pakistan has been severely impacted by climate change, with floods, droughts, and other natural disasters, causing significant damage to social development and the livelihoods of the people. Severe smog has also posed a considerable threat to public health. As an ironclad friend, China pays close attention to Pakistan's challenges and has continuously assisted within its capacity. CPEC has always adhered to the concept of green development. Several energy projects, including the Karot Hydropower Station, the Dawood Wind Power Project, the Bahawalpur Solar Power Plant, the K2 and K3 Nuclear Power Station using China's Hualong One nuclear reactor, and the Suki Kinari Hydropower Station, have enriched Pakistan's energy structure.

These projects not only help Pakistan meet its energy needs but also prioritize environmental protection and green development. In 2023, China and Pakistan signed an MoU on South-South Cooperation for Climate Change, through which China provided aid in the form of household solar power systems, smart meteorological ground observation stations, and other equipment, and also offered capacity-building training to help Pakistan improve its ability to address climate change. Last year, three environmental protection experts from China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment visited Pakistan at the invitation of the Pakistani government. They provided a series of targeted policy suggestions on combating smog pollution and improving air quality. We will continue to work together with Pakistan to build a 'Green Corridor' and assist Pakistan in charting a path towards sustainable, green, and low-carbon development.

Looking to the future, China is willing to share the opportunities of Chinese modernization with other developing countries, including Pakistan, and jointly build a community of a shared destiny for the 'Global South' and contributing to the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Delivering SDG Impact through Innovation & Partnerships: A Swedish Perspective

By

H.E. Alexandra Berg von Linde

Ambassador of Sweden to Pakistan



Our long-standing partnership with UNDP in Pakistan is built on trust, shared values, and the belief that progress is strongest when it is inclusive.

As one of UNDP's largest core contributors globally, Sweden is proud to support the SDGs and the collective efforts to realize them in Pakistan. Our longstanding partnership with UNDP reflects our shared commitment to inclusive growth, democratic governance, and climate resilience. Our flexible funding allows UNDP to prioritize resources where the needs are greatest.

Pakistan faces a complex development landscape, including persistent poverty, vulnerability to climate shocks, gender inequality, and limited access to opportunities. Yet, within these challenges lie immense potential for progress—especially when relevant stakeholders work together in the spirit of innovation.

In 2024, UNDP's achievements in Pakistan offer a glimpse of what is possible; thousands of youth trained in green skills, hundreds of thousands reached through voter education, and

women entrepreneurs across Gilgit-Baltistan and Sindh, leading the way in climate-smart businesses. These efforts echo Sweden's development priorities: advancing gender equality, promoting sustainable livelihoods, and building resilient communities.

One of the key ingredients for delivering SDG impact is innovation, not just in technology, but also in how we build and sustain partnerships. Sweden is proud to support initiatives that bring together governments, development actors, civil society, and the private sector to develop creative solutions that address complex challenges.

The role of business is particularly important. Swedish companies operating in Pakistan are deeply committed to sustainability, ethical conduct, and skills development. Their presence in sectors such as packaging, energy, information technology, transport, and manufacturing contributes not only to economic growth but

also to job creation and the promotion of responsible business practices aligned with the SDGs. Sweden continues to encourage greater public-private dialogue to ensure that business becomes an active agent in building a fairer, greener, and more digital future.

Gender equality also remains at the core of Sweden's development policy. Pakistan's progress in 2024, reflected particularly in the support for women-led businesses and legal empowerment initiatives, is encouraging. Yet more needs to be done. Sweden is committed to continuing its support for programs that break structural barriers, promote women's leadership, and create inclusive economic opportunities.

Another vital thread in this partnership is governance. Strong, independent, and transparent institutions are key to delivering on the SDGs. UNDP's support to Pakistan in strengthening electoral

Sweden continues to encourage greater public-private dialogue to ensure business becomes an active agent in building a fairer, greener, and more digital future.



systems, dispute resolution mechanisms, and justice sector reforms helps ensure that development is not only impactful but also equitable and accountable.

"Our long-standing partnership with UNDP in Pakistan is built on trust, shared values, and a belief that progress is strongest when it is inclusive," says H.E. Alexandra Berg von Linde, Ambassador of Sweden to Pakistan. "By working together, we can create opportunities that not only drive

sustainable growth but also ensure that no one is left behind."

As the 2030 deadline approaches, business as usual is no longer enough. We need new coalitions, bold ideas, and shared responsibility. Sweden's core and bilateral support to UNDP, totaling over SEK 1.8 billion (\$170.35 million) in 2024, reflects our belief that multilateral partnerships remain essential to tackling global challenges. In Pakistan, this means continuing to support the communities most affected

by climate change. It means championing human rights, especially for women and marginalized groups. And it means unlocking innovative solutions, whether through digital tools, green investments, or youth-led action.

Sweden remains a steadfast partner to Pakistan and UNDP. This partnership gives us the opportunity to support progress that is not only sustainable, but also shaped by and for the people of Pakistan.

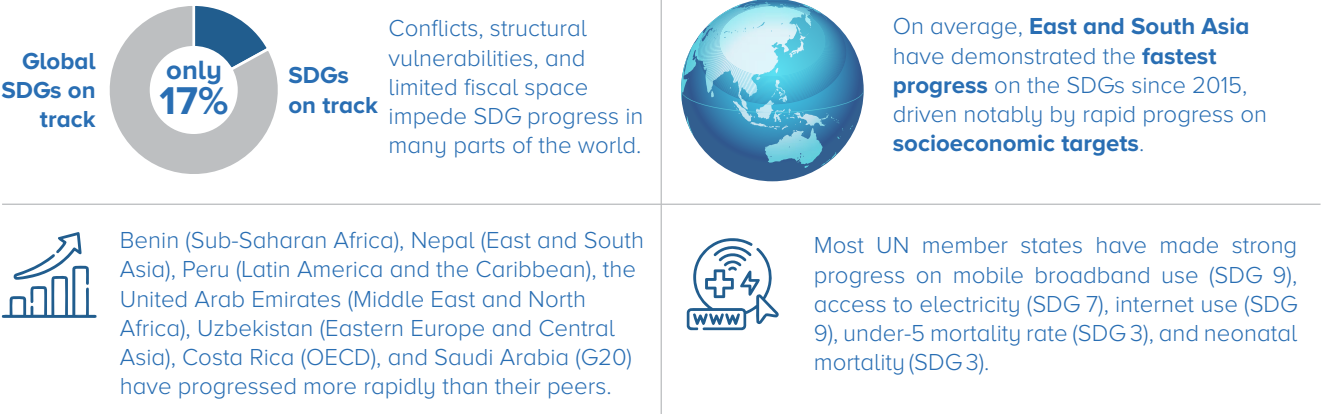


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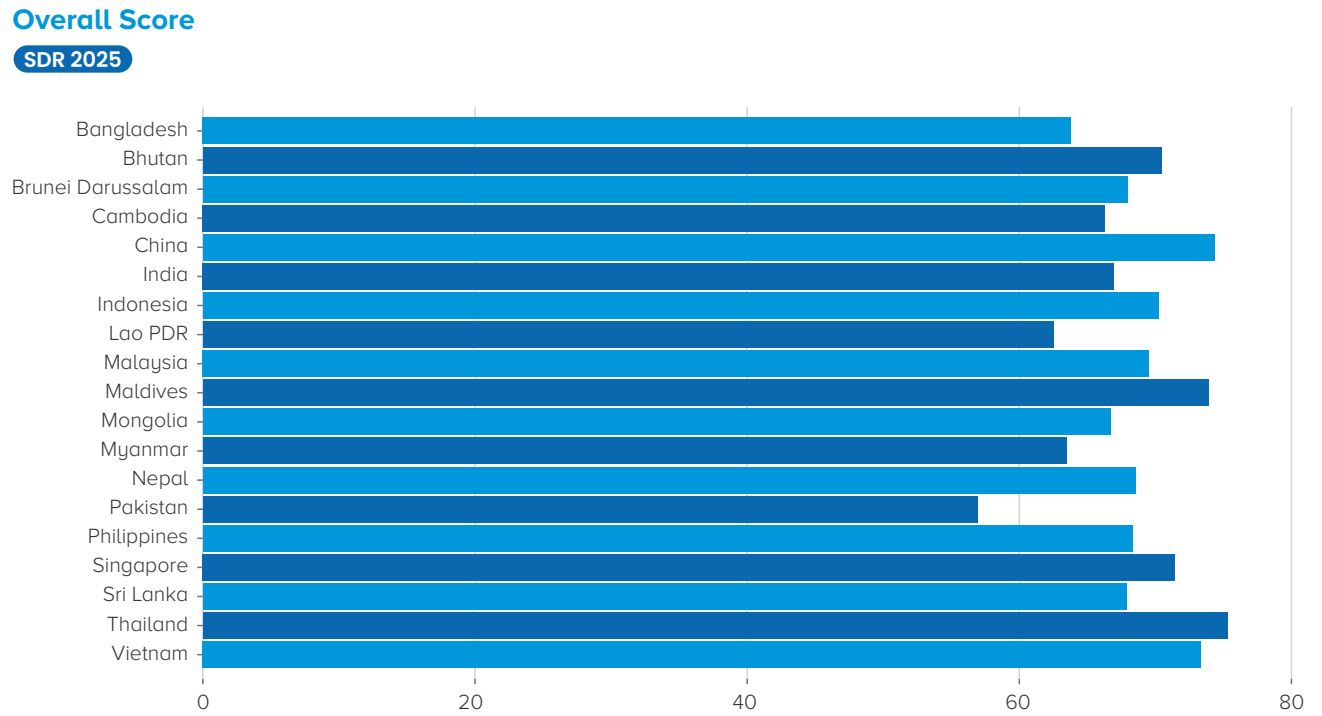
Tracking SDG Progress and Trends

By Shahbano Khan, SDGs Specialist & DAP Team

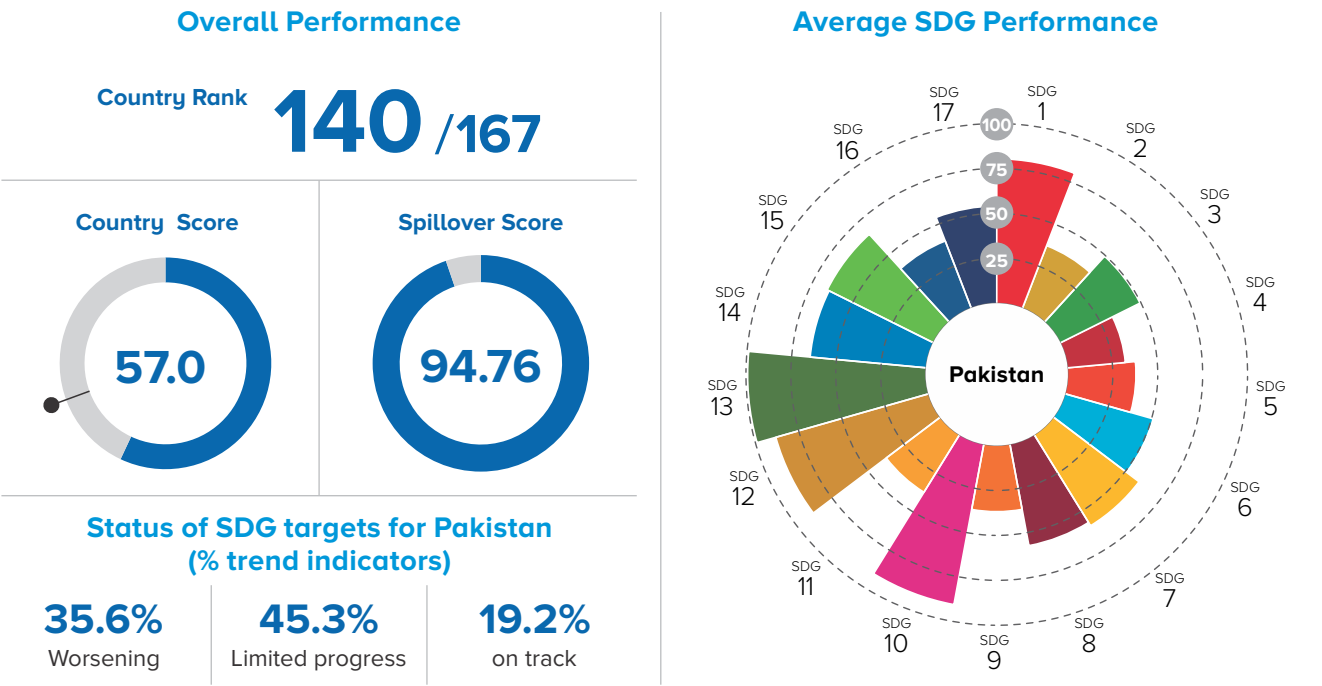
Global SDG Performance



Overall SDG Index Score in 2025 for South Asia and East Asia



SDG Status in Pakistan



Performance on SDG Targets in Pakistan



The Final SDG Push: Pakistan's Strategic Choices

The final push towards Agenda 2030 demands more than incrementalism. It requires reimagining the role of the political process, public finances and institutions.



By

Dr. Aisha Ghaus Pasha

Former Minister of State for Finance and Revenue, Government of Pakistan, Former Finance Minister, Government of Punjab, and Former Director, Institute of Public Policy, BNU, Lahore.

Pakistan enters the final five-year stretch towards the 2030 deadline for the SDGs, it faces a stark reality: its SDG ranking is 140th out of 167 countries; its score on the SDGs index is 57 out of 100, achieving an increase of only 7 percent over the last decade; it ranks the lowest in comparison to other South Asian countries (India 99, Sri Lanka 93, Nepal 85, Bangladesh 114, having an average SDG Index score of 66.8).

While there has been progress in some areas, persistent stagnation and major challenges continue in others. According to the SDG Dashboard, out of the 17 goals of the SDGs, Pakistan faces major challenges in 12 including Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 3 (Good Health), Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Despite a good framework and well-intentioned ownership of the 2030 Agenda, delivery on the SDG targets has been inconsistent, in fact, it has been poor. The key tipping points are: (1) strategic redirection of public finances—moving towards outcome-oriented budgetary frameworks; (2) governance reforms with citizen-

centered policy-making and (3) national ownership of the 2030 Agenda, including by the private sector.

Strategic Redirection of Public Finances

Public finances in Pakistan remain predominantly resource-driven and constrained by non-discretionary recurrent expenditures. In a country where debt servicing preempts 58 percent of federal spending and the total federal revenues-to-GDP ratio is just 11.6 percent, public expenditures, especially development allocations, are often spread thin across sectors and spatially, thereby limiting impact.

A radical reprioritization is required, centered on a few catalytic SDGs where measurable gains are still within reach. Some economists indicate that the primary goal should be Goal 1 on poverty. This will imply that emphasis will have to be placed on goals which help in the achievement of Goal 1. These include Goal 4 on education, Goal 5 on gender equality, Goal 7 on renewable energy, Goal 8 on good jobs, Goal 10 on reduced inequalities and Goal 13 on climate action. Achievement of the primary goal of poverty reduction will also facilitate the

انتخابات

کو کامیاب بنانا آپ سب کا جمہوری فرض اور قومی خدمت ہے۔



✓ پولنگ اسٹیشن سے ۲۰۰ میٹر کے احاطہ میں کسی امیدوار کی موافقت میں کنوینٹنٹ یا مخالفت میں پروپیگنڈہ یا مظاہرہ کرنا منع ہے۔
(دفعہ 177(ا) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ پریذائیڈنگ آفیسر۔ پولنگ آفیسر یا کسی پولنگ سے متعلقہ شخص کے فرائض کی ادائیگی میں مداخلت کرنا جرم ہے۔
(دفعہ 178(ج) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ رائے دینے کے لئے ناجائز اثر ڈالنا یا رائے دینے سے روکنا منع ہے۔
(دفعہ 179(ا) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ مذہب یا فرقہ کا واسطہ دے کر ووٹ مت طلب کیجیے۔
(دفعہ 180(ب) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ کسی دوسرے شخص کا نام اختیار کر کے رائے دہی کی کوشش کرنا ناجائز ہے۔
(دفعہ 180(ب) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ رائے دہندگان کو بغیر ووٹ دینے پولنگ اسٹیشن سے چلے جانے کی ترغیب دینا منع ہے۔
(دفعہ 187(د) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ ووٹ کی پرچی میں ردوبدل کرنا یا الٹے پولنگ اسٹیشن سے باہر لے جانا منع ہے۔
(دفعہ 172(ب) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ ووٹ کی راز دارانہ نوعیت کو ہر شخص برقرار رکھے گا۔
(دفعہ 185(ا) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ کسی امیدوار کے انتخاب میں کوئی سرکاری کارکن نہ تو مدد کرے گا اور نہ رکاوٹ پیدا کرے گا۔
(دفعہ 186(ا) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ قانون کی خلاف ورزی کرنے والے کی اعانت ممنوع ہے۔
(دفعہ 175، 176(ب) آئین پاکستان 2017)

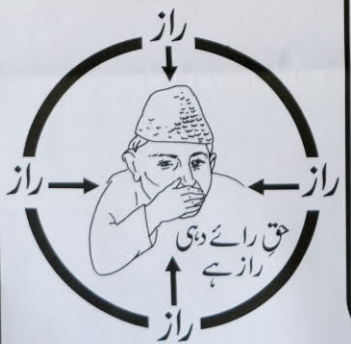
✓ پولنگ کے دن کسی بھی قسم کا ہتھیار (بشمول لٹھی، ڈنڈا، چاقو یا گلاباڑی) یا آتشیں اسلحہ کی نمائش کرنا قانوناً جرم ہے۔
(دفعہ 175(د) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ پولنگ اسٹیشن کے اندر یا نزدیکی فائرنگ کرنا، پٹاخاں یا دیگر دھماکہ خیز مواد کا استعمال کرنا قانوناً جرم ہے۔
(دفعہ 175(د) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ کسی بھی انتخابی الیکٹرانک یا دیگر سرکاری ابھار، جو الیکشن کے سلسلے میں تعینات کیا گیا ہے، پر کسی بھی شکل یا طریقہ سے تشدد کرنا قانوناً جرم ہے۔
(دفعہ 175(د) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ ڈالے گئے ووٹ کی موبائل فون یا کسی بھی دیگر آلہ سے تصویر لینا جرم ہے۔
(دفعہ 178(ج) آئین پاکستان 2017)

✓ پریذائیڈنگ آفسر اور پولیس کو اختیار حاصل ہے کہ وہ جرم کا ارتکاب کرنے والے یا ارتکاب میں مدد دینے والے کے خلاف کارروائی کرے۔
(دفعہ 183، 184(ا) آئین پاکستان 2017)



شائع کردہ: الیکشن کمیشن آف پاکستان

مطبوعہ: پاکستان سب سے پہلے پڑھیں اور پھر ایم ایم ایم

achievement of Goal 2 on hunger and Goal 5 on health. Therefore, consolidating spending into high-impact programs in especially deprived regions with clear results framework is essential.

There is also the need for localization of the SDGs. This means that with a focus on selected SDGs, individual targets may be fixed at a more realistic level for 2030 and interventions designed to achieve maximum outcomes.

Pakistan should transition to a results-driven budget process across federal and provincial levels, linking allocations directly to the SDG outcomes. This requires strengthening capacity within the planning departments and integrating real-time performance data into budget reviews. The Punjab government's past experimentation with performance-based budgeting offers an example.

It is also crucial to ensure allocative and technical efficiency in all public spending. To get the best value for money, proper unit costing of expenditure should be undertaken by all provincial governments for each service delivery to minimize wastage and corruption.

The provinces hold the bulk of implementation responsibilities for the SDGs post-18th Amendment but face

fragmented revenue streams and limited fiscal space. There is a sliding down of own fiscal effort, which is less than 1 percent of the GDP. Strengthening own-source revenues especially, property-related taxes, sales tax on services and agricultural income tax, will empower provincial governments to invest much more and sustainably in SDG-linked infrastructure and services.

It is also important to ensure that federal transfers to provinces (currently provinces receive about PKR 8 trillion as revenue sharing transfers from the federal government as per the 7th National Finance Commission Award) are not majorly diverted to other non-SDG sectors such as sharing federal functional responsibilities. However, the provinces should fully take on the functional responsibilities as devolved by the 18th Constitutional Amendment and finance them fully by their own revenues. This is essential for macro-economic stability.

Mobilizing Private and Climate Finance should be focused on as well. With Pakistan's public debt liabilities at an unprecedented high, traditional development finance is clearly inadequate. SDG Investment to Debt swaps can be employed, especially in the case of bilateral debt. Looking ahead, Pakistan should focus on blended finance mechanisms, ESG

bonds, and climate-related funding like the Loss and Damage Fund or Green Climate Fund, with clear frameworks for impact tracking.

Fiscal reforms will be ineffective without transparent and inclusive governance. Citizen engagement in budgetary decisions, gender-responsiveness in public spendings, and effective digital public finance management tools can facilitate sustained reform. Pakistan's cabinet has just approved the first National AI Policy. The policy should first be utilized to improve service delivery to ordinary citizens of the country.

Governance Reforms

Pakistan's SDG progress is a mirror of its institutional landscape—fragmented and under-resourced. The country has an opportunity to recalibrate its governance architecture to meet the 2030 goals. Success in institutional reform will determine whether the SDGs remain a distant objective or become a reality.

Institutional coordination has remained a challenge. Pakistan's SDG framework has suffered from duplication and unclear mandates across ministries and government departments. There needs to be clear lines of responsibility across federal, provincial, and local tiers for each SDG target to end the



institutional gridlock.

The establishment of SDG Units across the provinces was a move in the right direction, but these units must evolve into policy making, monitoring and data hubs with platforms for sharing good practices down to the local level.

The National Parliament of Pakistan has also taken a keen interest in increasing awareness about the SDGs and improving the performance across various indicators. Now, the Provincial Assemblies should follow suit. There is a need for the National Economic Council (NEC) to look at the proposed strategy for achieving the key SDGs and for it to conduct periodic assessments of the rate of progress on these targets.

The five-year national URAAN Plan, from 2025 to 2030, should have targeted the SDGs. The involvement of Parliamentarians, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and research institutions can bridge the trust gap that has cropped up in public institutions.

National Ownership of the SDGs

Ownership building of the 2030 Agenda through awareness creation, sensitization, and incentivization of the private sector and NGOs will ensure leveraging that is so essential to augment scarce public sector resources to achieve the SDGs. Corporate social responsibility can be a multiplier, as can the media, in terms of raising awareness, especially in the case of preventable diseases, family planning, and the impact of climate change.

To conclude, the final push towards Agenda 2030 demands more than incrementalism. It requires reimagining the role of the political process, public finances and institutions. Pakistan has five years to turn its fiscal and governance reforms, anchored in inclusion and innovation, as tools for transformation to sustainable development and visibly more progress on the SDGs.

The provinces hold the bulk of implementation responsibilities for the SDGs post-18th Amendment, but face fragmented revenue streams and limited fiscal space.

A radical reprioritization is required, centered on a few catalytic SDGs where measurable gains are still within reach. Some economists indicate that the primary goal should be Goal 1 on poverty.



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The Big Ideas for Transforming Pakistan’s Development Pathways

“What does success look like? Success looks like a Pakistan where innovation and local ownership drives inclusive growth and sustainability, poverty is reduced through community hubs, food and water systems are smart and equitable, healthcare and education reach every corner and women lead economically.”



By
Shahbano Khan
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A National Turning Point

Pakistan faces a generational opportunity - it can take a leap from incremental progress to transformational change. The SDGs offer more than just a roadmap, they represent a social contract. However, Pakistan’s current uneven development trajectory is insufficient. With innovation, equity, and local ownership at the core, the country must reimagine development not just as a policy priority but as a pathway to empowerment for its people. It is time to reimagine the actions required for each of the 17 SDGs. These goals can serve as a launchpad for bold ideas and innovative actions in Pakistan, supporting the pressing rationale that the country has to act now.

1 POVERTY Activate Local Prosperity Hubs

Over 19.4 percent of Pakistan’s population still lives below the poverty line. Despite decades of welfare programs, poverty remains embedded in geography and identity.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
A promising innovation is community-run prosperity hubs that integrate digital financial services, skills training, and social entrepreneurship in remote and urban-poor communities. When supported by public-private partnerships and scaled through district administrations, these hubs could become engines of sustained and locally driven poverty reduction. The Orangi Pilot Project exemplifies self-reliant urban development transforming an informal settlement into a functioning neighbourhood that enabled residents to avoid poverty traps linked to urban neglect.¹

2 ZERO HUNGER Build Smart Agro-Economies

With 18.5 percent of Pakistanis undernourished, hunger is not a problem of scarcity but of fragmented supply chains, low agricultural productivity, and increasing climate shocks.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION
Pakistan can invest in smart agro-economies that embody a combination of precision

agriculture, cold-chain logistics, and digital marketplaces. Linking small-holder farmers, particularly women, across provinces and regional markets through Agri-tech can ensure that food is not only produced but also accessed equitably.

In Pakistan, platforms like Tractors.pk deploy IoT-based soil sensors, drone surveillance, and AI-driven pest control, which can help farmers cut input costs by 20 percent and boost yields by as much as 30 percent. Innovations in cold chain logistics, led by companies like Cool Crop, have also reduced post-harvest losses by 40 percent through solar-powered storage systems, preserving perishable goods and improving farmer incomes.²

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING Rewire Community Healthcare

A child born in Pakistan still faces a 61-in-1,000 chance of dying before the age of five. This unacceptable reality demands decentralized health systems.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
Imagine a network of tele-health-enabled community clinics embedded in underserved districts, staffed by AI-supported health workers and linked to regional hospitals. Technology, when paired with trust, can bring quality care to those who need it the most.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP Pakistan partnered with Sehat Kahani to pioneer a telemedicine initiative that established 27 e-clinics nationwide. These clinics connected patients in underserved communities with qualified doctors through mobile and web platforms.³

4 QUALITY EDUCATION Launch a Learning Equity Mission

With just 47.5 percent of lower-secondary students completing school, Pakistan’s education system is in crisis—but there this is also opportunity for innovation.



Photo Credit: Arslan Mahmood/Sehat Kahani

5 GENDER EQUALITY
A Learning Equity Mission powered by data analytics, ed-tech tools, and local content in mother tongues that could help to close foundational learning gaps in marginalized districts. Every child not only deserves schooling but also the opportunity to learn.

UNICEF Pakistan in partnership with Microsoft launched the Learning Passport, a digital learning platform offering curriculum-aligned digital content to middle school students in underserved areas. In 28 public schools across Sindh, the platform reached over 4,000 students and distributed 970 tablets. Teachers report improved engagement and self-paced learning, especially among students who previously struggled in traditional classrooms.⁴

5 GENDER EQUALITY Back Women's Economic Movements

Despite comprising nearly half the population, Pakistani women hold only 20.5 percent of parliamentary seats and face severe economic exclusion.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
The next leap forward is to have women-led economic

clusters in both rural and urban areas of Pakistan, supported through digital platforms, mentorship, microfinance, and policy reform. Gender equality must move beyond targets and into power shifts where women control assets, narratives, and policy levers.

Kashf Foundation, supported by GuarantCo, issued Pakistan’s first gender bond worth PKR 2.5 billion in 2021. The bond aimed to expand financing for women-led businesses. It supported over 25,000 women entrepreneurs across Pakistan by combining microfinance, gender-lens investing, and regulatory support to strengthen women-led economic clusters.⁵

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION Innovate Water Governance

While 70.5 percent of Pakistanis have access to basic sanitation, water resources are dangerously overdrawn and withdrawal exceeds 162 percent of available renewable resources.

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
The solution? Decentralized water governance councils that use satellite data and citizen-led water audits to inform

1. Orangi Pilot Project, 'Orangi Pilot Project', Website, [n.d.]. Available at: <http://www.opp.org.pk/>

2. Namra G, 'Transforming Agriculture Startups in Pakistan', The Agricultural Economist, 14 April 2025. Available at: <https://agrieconomist.com/transforming-agriculture-startups-in-pakistan>
3. UNDP Pakistan, 'How telemedicine is helping in the fight against COVID-19 (and why it should be here to stay)', Blog, 21 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/blog/how-telemedicine-helping-fight-against-covid-19-and-why-it-should-be-here-to-stay>
4. UNICEF Pakistan, 'The Digital Transformation of Public Education in Pakistan', Blog, 18 January 2024. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/stories/digital-transformation-public-education-pakistan>
5. Kashf Foundation, 'Kashf Foundation and InfraZamin Pakistan Launch Pakistan's First Gender Bond', News & Events, 19 May 2023. Available at: <https://kashf.org/news&events/kashf-foundation-and-infrazamin-pakistan-launch-pakistans-first-gender-bond/>



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“What does success look like? Cities become green and resilient, waste is transformed into opportunity through circular economies while the youth actively restore the environment.”

allocation and conservation. Pairing technology with community accountability could reverse Pakistan’s looming water crisis.

To manage water resources, UNDP Pakistan has rehabilitated 317 irrigation channels totalling over 132 kilometres in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and engaging local communities, especially women and girls, in managing water resources. This decentralized approach has reduced water waste, improved crop yields and freed up time for girls to attend schools, demonstrating how community-led water governance boosts both livelihoods and education.⁶



Democratize the Energy Grid

While 94.9 percent have electricity, only 50.7 percent have access to clean cooking. A just energy transition must be both sustainable and inclusive.

Idea icon: Scaling solar-powered microgrids and introducing clean-cooking cooperatives for rural women can simultaneously reduce health risks, lower emissions and empower communities to take charge of their own energy futures.

In Pakistan, the Aga Khan Planning and Building Service's BACIP program has distributed more than 36,000 energy-efficient products, such as smokeless stoves and solar cookers, throughout GB and Sindh. The initiative has reached over 150,000 people, reduced biomass consumption by 15–60 percent and cut smoke-related illnesses by up to 60 percent. By involving women artisans and promoting clean cooking, it advances community-driven energy solutions in underserved regions.⁷



Build a Digital Labor Force

With only 21 percent of adults access-

ing formal financial services, large swaths of Pakistan’s workforce remain informal and excluded.



A national effort to digitally skill the country’s youth, linked to local and global digital labor markets, could shift this dynamic. If paired with gig-worker protections and portable benefits, this shift could redefine the informal economy.

UNDP Pakistan in 2025 was supported by the Government of Japan to train 600 youth (52 percent were women) from Kurram and Orakzai in digital skills. The digital skills training included development, web services, and content creation, through a two-month training and internship program. UNDP has equipped over 5,800 young people with market-relevant digital skills, with nearly 50 percent of participants being women. This has helped bridge the skills gap in the formal digital labor market and promoted inclusive economic participation.⁸

“What does success look like? Success looks like a Pakistan where innovation and local ownership drives inclusive growth and sustainability, poverty is reduced through community hubs, food and water systems are smart and equitable, healthcare and education reach every corner and women lead economically.”



Fuel Frontier Innovation Zones

Only 0.2 percent of GDP is spent on Research and Development in Pakistan, one of the lowest accounts globally.



To unlock growth, Pakistan must establish frontier innovation zones. These are clusters where academia, tech startups, and government co-create around key sectors such as climate-tech, biotech, and digital governance. Incentives, regulation reform, and talent mobility are key to making innovation work for development.

The National Incubation Center (NIC), a public–private initiative under Ignite at the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecom, runs eight innovation hubs across Pakistan. Over the past five years, NICs have incubated over 1,30 startups, created more than 126,000 jobs, attracted PKR 22 billion in investments, and generated PKR 13.85 billion in revenue. The program has also empowered over 2,300 women entrepreneurs, positioning NICs as a vital engine for inclusive innovation and entrepreneurship.⁹



Target Inclusion through Data

With a Gini coefficient of 29.6, inequality in Pakistan often goes unnoticed.



The next step is to develop a National Inclusion Index that maps access gaps in education, finance, and health across gender, region, and class. Making disparities visible can sharpen targeting, funding, and accountability in ways that conventional budgeting cannot.



Rethink Urban Resilience

Over 56 percent of urban residents live in slums and PM 2.5 air pollution that is prevalent in these areas are hazardous.



Pakistan’s cities need a bold shift. Globally, Urban Resilience Labs, which are multi-stakeholder platforms, can be a potential solution. These labs are established in major cities to coordinate green housing, air quality innovation and inclusive mobility.

In Greater Copenhagen, the Climate Adaptation Living Lab (CALL), employing the Urban Living Labs approach, functions as a structured platform that unites various urban stakeholders to co-develop and test climate adaptation solutions, particularly focusing on water resilience against sea-level rise and changing rainfall patterns.



Launch Circular Economy Districts

Pakistan's nitrogen emissions per capita stand at 21.7 kg, harming both people and the environment.



Pakistan can Pilot Circular Economy Districts. These are zones where textile, plastic, or agricultural waste is repurposed into value chains. Business models can be redesigned to eliminate waste, regenerate resources and create green jobs.

Kalundborg Eco-industrial Park in Denmark is an example and a global model for Circular Economy Districts, where industries exchange waste, heat, and materials, turning by-products into valuable inputs across sectors. Through this symbiosis, the district saves €24 million annually, avoids 635,000 tons of CO₂, and diverts 87,000 tons of solid waste, proving how rethinking consumption and production creates both resource efficiency and green jobs. Pakistan can draw on this model to pilot similar zones—particularly in textile, plastic, or Agri-waste clusters where harmful nitrogen emissions (21.7 kg per capita) can be curbed by designing waste into value chains.¹⁰



Activate Community Climate Stewardship

Although emissions per capita are low at 0.9 metric tons, Pakistan is among the top 10 countries vulnerable to climate change.



Youth Climate Stewards: This is a youth-led green service program that can support reforestation, mangrove restoration, and climate education on a large scale. The climate crisis must be addressed with climate leadership from within. Started by a 9-year-old in Germany, this global youth movement has mobilized over 100 million trees to be planted worldwide. It empowers children and youth through climate education and encourages them to take leadership roles in reforestation

6. UNDP, ‘Water access: Transforming lives of women and girls in Pakistan’, Climate Promise, 2023. Available at: <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/water-access-transforming-lives-women-and-girls-pakistan>

7. Aga Khan Development Network, ‘AKPBS Pakistan,’ Archived June 30, 2009, Wayback Machine. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20090530055552/http://www.akdn.org/akpbs_pakistan.asp

8. UNDP, ‘600 young people from Kurram and Orakzai trained in digital skills under Government of Japan-UNDP initiative’, Press Release, 2025. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/press-releases/600-young-people-kurram-and-orakzai-trained-digital-skills-under-government-japan-undp-initiative>

9. Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunication (Government of Pakistan), ‘Project Detail’, MOITT website, [n.d.]. Available at: <https://moitt.gov.pk/ProjectDetail/ZDZjYzY3ZDAiZTQ2OS00NGRhLTliNmItMzJmMzdiYTY3ZDE0>

10. ENGIE Impact, ‘Eco-Industrial Park Case Study: Kalundborg’, Case Study, 1 June 2021. Available at: <https://www.engieimpact.com/insights/eco-industrial-park-case-study-kalundborg>

“What does success look like? Success means a Pakistan where the state is supportive, communities lead, and systems are built to last.”

and advocacy efforts. Their “Trillion Tree Campaign” exemplifies how youth can lead impactful climate action.

“What does success look like? Cities become green and resilient, waste is transformed into opportunity through circular economies while the youth actively restore the environment.”

14 LIFE BELOW WATER
Enforce Marine Co-Governance

Only 14.6 percent of marine areas are protected while illegal fishing is depleting resources. Pakistan’s blue economy requires a revival.

Enable co-governance of marine areas by coastal communities, fishery associations, and local governments to promote sustainability while protecting livelihoods. Local milestones such as the designation of Astola and Churna Islands as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) demonstrate early progress, supported by organizations such as WWF and IUCN Pakistan. Drawing from the global models like Madagascar’s Velondriake or Zanzibar’s Menai Bay, Pakistan can expand participatory marine management to curb overfishing, regenerate biodiversity and create sustainable income through eco-tourism and fisheries reform.

15 LIFE ON LAND
Accelerate Ecological Regeneration

With a Red List Index of 0.82, species extinction is increasing in Pakistan.

Pakistan can launch a national ecological regeneration program that combines indigenous knowledge, AI-driven biodiversity mapping and incentive schemes for landowners to protect natural habitats.

Pakistan’s Living Indus is a holistic ecological restoration program covering the entire Indus River Basin. Declared a UN World Restoration Flagship, it integrates nature-based solutions, green infrastructure, and community co-governance to rehabilitate wetlands, recharge groundwater and revive biodiversity. Flagship efforts such as Recharge Pakistan focus on climate resilience and restoring critical habitats, combining traditional practices with modern planning for long-term sustainability.”

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
Scale Civic Tech Platforms

Pakistan scores only 29/100 on the Corruption Perception Index. A more open, accountable country can be achieved through civic tech platforms—digital tools for budget tracking, grievance redressal, and e-

participation. People must become co-creators in governance, not just passive recipients of services.

Launched in 2018 by the Government of Pakistan, the Pakistan Citizens’ Portal is a mobile application that allows citizens to lodge complaints regarding government services. It includes a grievance redressal system and a performance monitoring system to track and monitor the performance of government officials in addressing complaints. The platform was recognized internationally. It also came second at the World Government Summit in Dubai in 2019.”

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
Build a Data-Driven Development Pact

Pakistan’s Statistical Performance Index stands at 71.1—a solid foundation.

To supercharge implementation, the idea is a Development Data Pact. This is a platform uniting government, academia, the private sector, and civil society to co-create policy with real-time data. Without data, we are flying blind; with it, we can co-pilot progress.

“What does success look like? Success means a Pakistan where the state is supportive, communities lead, and systems are built to last.”

A need for conservation of one of world's rarest dolphins in Pakistan.

11. United Nations (UN), ‘Living Indus’, Publication, 06 September 2022. Available at: <https://pakistan.un.org/en/197982-living-indus>
12. Government of Pakistan, ‘Pakistan Citizen Portal’, Government Portal, [n.d.]. Available at: <https://web.citizenportal.gov.pk/>

From Charter to Change: Parliament's Leadership in Realizing the SDGs

The Parliament of Pakistan plays a pivotal role in guiding the nation's development trajectory, ensuring that the SDG agenda is promoted through both legislative and oversight mechanisms.



By
Ahmer Bilal Soofi
Former Caretaker
Federal Minister for Law
& Justice

The SDGs are realizable goals repackaged by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) from the treaty provisions primarily relating to environmental protection. These goals had earlier been recognized in the UN Charter and several specialized agencies were established with the objective of providing the fruits of these goals to the UN in an equitable and just manner. The UN and the UN Charter are the overriding law-making treaty which is binding for every country including Pakistan. The SDGs thus become an embedded and concomitant agenda of the UN Charter. Accordingly, considering the importance of treaty-implementation and observance in international relations, during my tenure in 2013 as the Caretaker Federal Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, I issued instructions for the establishment of Treaty-Cells in all federal and provincial departments and divisions.

Treaty execution and implementation in Pakistan has, constitutionally, been the responsibility of the Federation. An important change in the existing

conditions took place when the Concurrent Legislative List (CLL) was abolished through the Eighteenth Amendment of the Constitution in 2010. Scores of departments were devolved from the Federal Government to the domain of the provinces. This change left the execution of treaties in the domain of the Federation but their effective implementation in the hands of the provinces. At that time, I proposed a solution to this conundrum, which was published in the newspaper Dawn in 2018 titled, 'The Concurrent Bind'. In the article, I referred to a recent judgment of the apex court and suggested that notwithstanding the abolition of the CLL, the federation could still pass legislation binding on the devolved departments for implementation of a treaty. I have also highlighted the role the Inter Provincial Coordination (IPC) Committee can play for smooth implementation of the treaties for the federation and the provinces.

'Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth' is an initiative that aims to demonstrate how Islam can be a driving force for sustainable development and environmental care. It was launched as





an Islamic environmental charter at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi in 2024. I recently authored a book which introduces the Quran as having a covenantal structure. The importance of strict compliance of treaties, pacts and agreements under the Quran and Islamic law has also been underscored and highlighted in the book. In the same book, I have made a special effort to highlight all the verses of the Quran which dovetail with the objectives of the SDGs. These include verses relating to environmental protection, rule of law, reduction of poverty, social justice, administration of justice, healthy lifestyle, among others. The book emphasizes that Muslims should internalize all covenants of the Quran. This approach, in my judgment, will help in compliance with municipal and international law, the latter being comprised mainly of treaties and conventions.

In Pakistan superior judiciary has interpreted Article 9 of the Constitution (the right to life for all persons in Pakistan) very expansively. The jurisprudence began to develop in the

late 1980s and continues to date. The right to life has been held to include the right to a clean environment, access to justice, health, dignity, privacy, provision of electricity, and many more. The courts have consistently held that "The word 'life' has not been defined in the Constitution but it does not mean nor can it be restricted only to the vegetative or animal life or mere existence from conception to death. Life includes all such amenities and facilities which a person born in a free country, is entitled to enjoy with dignity, legally and constitutionally."

Pakistan adopted the SDGs as its national development agenda in 2016 and established a dedicated National Parliamentary Task Force to prioritize these goals at the highest levels of the state. For that purpose, the SDG Secretariat was established at the official level. The Secretariat has further established Provincial Task Forces to identify areas where gaps exist in relation to the SDGs and suggest measures, administrative and legislative, for remedying the situation.

‘Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth’ is an initiative that aims to demonstrate how Islam can be a driving force for sustainable development and environmental care.

The right to life has been held by the courts to include the right to a clean environment, access to justice, health, dignity, privacy, and provision of electricity, among other things.

The Parliament of Pakistan plays a pivotal role in guiding the nation's development trajectory, ensuring that the SDG agenda is promoted through legislative and oversight mechanisms.

While progress has been made towards achieving the SDGs in Pakistan, a lot of work and challenges still remain. Pakistan, like many other nations, faces pressing concerns such

as poverty, inequality, climate change, and health crises. These issues demand sustained focus, availability of resources, and comprehensive legislative and executive action.



Bringing Power to the People: Decentralization in Pakistan

The success of decentralization also depends entirely on the political goals of the regime at the center.



By
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Senior Research Fellow,
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Studies

In the Development Advocate issue published in January 2021 on Devolution of Power, I wrote a piece titled Goals of Equality and Representation: Does Decentralization Work? Here, I wrote about whether decentralization can help Pakistan achieve its SDGs. I concluded that decentralized governance could help. However, local governments needed to remain in place and be institutionalized as part of the logic and culture of governance. I was concerned at the time that the recent decentralization reforms (instituted around 2013 and redefined around 2019 in the various provinces) were once again being rolled back.

Five years on, Pakistan still lacks an institutionalized, functioning local government system. The question of Pakistan's experience with decentralization for SDG implementation is thus redundant, and in terms of what needs to be done for the final push towards achieving the SDGs by 2030, I would argue that the answer is fairly straightforward—create and institutionalize

local governments, enable localized governance and decision-making, foster local democracy and protect it all against arbitrary reversals. This is foundational to many of the development goals that Pakistan was meant to achieve by this deadline.

Decentralization is by no means a magic fix for poor governance. There are some compelling arguments in the literature for why centralized governance may sometimes be more effective. Smaller regions may not need decentralization. For some public services, economies of scale can be achieved through centralized management. In such cases, equitable goals for every region can be better served through centralized decision-making and resource distribution. However, for a country of Pakistan's size and diversity, decision-making that remains centralized in provincial capitals or even in Islamabad, will inevitably lead to uneven and poor outcomes.

Let me explain this by asking a few simple questions about the issues that

1. Full article available here: UNDP Pakistan, 'Devolution of Power: Pathways to Actualization', Publication, 23 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/devolution-power-pathways-actualization>



citizens face every day. The first draws on my earlier research on rural politics and governance in Punjab. When a rural citizen needs naalis (drains) or paved streets to be built to deal with monsoon rains—this was by far the most popular citizen demand in villages 15 years ago, and I imagine the situation remains the same across large parts of the country today—who can they speak to about these issues? And how quickly can they expect actions before the next rains? When their school falls into disrepair or teachers remain absent, what is their closest and quickest port-of-call to ensure their children continue to receive quality education?

Drawing on my more recent work in urban Lahore, who can women speak with to clean clogged drains before the next rains? Or ensure their streets are made greener in the scorching heat and their parks usable by their children? Or at the very basic level, make their neighborhoods safe? These are the very local everyday questions people have, and they are foundational to several SDG goals including quality healthcare, education, gender equality, and access to sanitation.

If you are tempted to say it should be the frontline workers of departments and municipal offices, you would not be entirely wrong. There is no reason for

The institutionalization of local government multiplies the number of elected offices, resulting in an increase in representative space and reducing entry barriers into politics for women, minorities, and lower-income groups.

centralized ministries who have the political will to eradicate poverty and inequality across the country, and who aim to ensure that quality public services are accessible to all citizens, cannot do so through country-wide administrative networks. However, in addition to the point on political will, you will have missed the point of decentralization. What we know from local government experiences around the world is that resolving the issues listed above is largely a matter of agency and decision-making.

There are at least two aspects of effective decentralization to highlight. First, effective decentralization that delivers results creates a structure of localized governance in which the power to make decisions lies with citizens in villages and neighborhoods across the country, and not with bureaucrats located at a distance in district or provincial headquarters. Second, decisions are aggregated and communicated upwards through thousands of elected representatives who sit in offices near their constituents



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and have the agency and funds to direct resources to where they are most needed. The institutionalization of local government multiplies the number of elected offices, resulting in an increase in representative space and reducing entry barriers into politics for women, minorities, and lower-income groups. This is central to the development of stronger, more inclusive, and accountable institutions (aligned to SDG 16).

The most successful examples of decentralized governance define and protect the powers of the bureaucracy, facilitating effective decision-making on resource divisions, using formulas that achieve equity across the country by earmarking more resources to poorer areas, the marginalized groups, or high-priority goals. Decentralized governance gives power to the people who know what they need and can decide how to allocate funds for their villages and neighborhoods. Therefore, if residents collectively agree that it is drains that are most needed this year, new teachers that need to be hired or neighborhood watch groups that must be created,

then that is where the money will be spent. There are other positive externalities associated with this—collectivization of interests, building mechanisms of cooperation (and negotiation) within communities and sometimes a reduction in clientelist linkages with higher-tier politicians seen as the only available port-of-call.

There is an obvious political economy of decentralization—a reform that will cause some to lose power and others to gain it—that has kept it off policy agendas in Pakistan. The success of decentralization also depends entirely on the political goals of the regime at the center. However, there are a few other effective options for ensuring that citizens across every part of the country, millions made invisible to decision-makers in distant centralized systems, can live dignified lives in thriving neighborhoods, with opportunities for social mobility through quality local education and healthcare.

Decentralization is central to the development of a stronger, more inclusive, and accountable institutions.

Politics of SDGs

The SDG Task Force paves the way for developing inter-party consensus on SDG legislation; it exercises implementation oversight and creates awareness of the SDGs among parliamentarians and provincial legislators.



By

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2025 marks an important milestone for Pakistan and the 193 members of the United Nations, as they reach the halfway point in their journey to achieve the SDGs. Sadly, the progress in the past ten years does not match the time elapsed, as the cumulative progress on the SDGs globally is merely 35 percent compared to the 66 percent of the time spent.

Pakistan's progress is also unsatisfactory in comparison with other countries. In terms of progress made over the past ten years, the Sustainable Development Report 2025 ranks Pakistan at 140 out of 193 countries, with a score of approximately 57 percent. The country's earlier progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—the predecessor of the SDGs—was also unsatisfactory. Pakistan achieved only 4 out of 16 MDGs by the time the program reached the finish line in 2015. The performance of lower-to-middle-income countries was also inadequate.

Despite the mixed performance of the MDGs and SDGs, one can recognize that setting these goals provides an increased impetus for countries, especially the Global South, to accelerate and align their development agenda with the rest of the world. The system of scoring and ranking countries based on their progress towards SDGs provides a sense of competition among them, allowing them to identify and

appreciate their policy and implementation gaps while reviewing their performance in comparison with other countries. Opportunities for global interaction through these programs also provide much-needed mutual learning.

Working on these programs, especially the current SDG activities, allows countries to recognize the need for reforms in development sectors, as progress becomes almost impossible without reforming the systems. Irrespective of the results, these programs pave the way for removing bottlenecks and modernizing their systems. Therefore, the SDGs and systemic reforms go hand in hand.

No reform agenda and hence progress on the SDGs can move forward without ownership of the political class, especially the elected representatives in democratic countries. Most reforms need legislation and unless parliament and top party leadership is not convinced, reforms cannot materialize.

Pakistan is a federal parliamentary democracy with a bicameral legislature at the center. Four provinces and a federally administered Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) form the federating units. Islamabad does not have a separate legislature; instead, the parliament serves as its legislature. Each province has its provincial assembly. Several political parties are represented in the two houses of



Photo Credit: Utenriksdepartementet UD/flickr

parliament and each of the four provincial assemblies. The federal government is ruled by a coalition led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), which also governs Punjab, the largest province, without a coalition. Sindh and Balochistan provinces have governments led by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is governed by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which former Prime Minister Imran Khan founded. PTI sits in the opposition in the parliament and at the Punjab provincial assembly. Although PPP, traditionally a political rival of PML-N, and a contender for governments in the federation and Punjab, supports the PML-N-led federal government, it has opted not to join the federal cabinet. The President of Pakistan and the Governors of the two provinces, Punjab and KP, however, are PPP nominees under an arrangement reached between the PML-N and the PPP before the formation of the governments in 2024. The Senate Chairman is also from PPP under the same arrangement.

The idea behind describing the administrative and political landscape of Pakistan and the provinces helps to appreciate the complexity of policy

formulation and decision-making at the provincial and federal levels. Developing consensus on reforms and new legislation can take a long time, and at times, it may not be possible at all.

Fortunately, the members of the National Parliament took the initiative early on in 2015 to form the SDG Task Force, represented by leaders from all the political parties in parliament. The rationale of an all-parties task force was to make the Global Goals a national agenda and to avoid party politics in legislation and reforms related to the SDGs. Subsequently, the All-Parties Task Force model was replicated in the provincial assemblies. Since 2015, although three national assemblies and four federal governments of different political parties and coalitions have come into power, the SDG Task Force has continued to exist, with amicable changes in office bearers every time the government changed. The Task Force paves the way for developing inter-party consensus on SDG legislation, it exercises implementation oversight, and creates awareness of the SDGs among parliamentarians and provincial legislators.

No reform agenda and hence progress on the SDGs can move forward without ownership of the political class.

Pakistan is divided into 266 national assembly seats with 593 geographical constituencies. It is a good idea to localize SDG progress in each of these constituencies, allowing elected representatives to assess progress within their own constituencies and make comparisons with other constituencies. This information will motivate legislators to push for more speedy action to achieve the SDGs. At the same time, voters in each constituency will also have another tool to engage with their elected representatives and assess their performance on this basis as well. These ideas, if implemented, may accelerate the pace of achieving the SDGs in the remaining five years.

Mobilizing the Next Generation of Change-makers

Mobilizing youth begins with recognition. Our youth must not just be viewed as beneficiaries of development, but rather as partners and co-creators of policy.



By
Izbal Zehri
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In the global pursuit of achieving the SDGs by 2030, Pakistan's youth stand out as a group with immense potential, but they have significant barriers to overcome. With nearly 64 percent of our population under the age of 30, Pakistan is at a unique demographic juncture. If properly mobilized, this youth bulge can be the engine of sustainable and inclusive development. However, bold shifts in policymaking, structural reform, and above all, youth-centric leadership are needed.

The SDGs are not meant to be an abstract development jargon. They are a roadmap to justice, dignity, equality, and environmental protection. For Pakistan, these goals reflect deep-seated aspirations: access to quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), climate action (SDG 13), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). While the SDG goals are universal, the pathways to achieving them must be rooted locally and youth-led.

The Role of Youth in Advancing the SDGs

Pakistan's youth are driving change through climate advocacy, technological innovation, social entrepreneurship, and grassroots activism. From rural Balochistan to urban Lahore, youth-led initiatives are tackling issues from plastic pollution to girls' education. The challenge is not the absence of potential, rather the lack of space to scale impact.

Mobilizing youth begins with recognition. Our youth must not just be viewed as beneficiaries of development, but rather as partners and co-creators of policy. We must institutionalize youth voices across governance, whether through youth councils, parliamentary fellowships, or advisory roles within ministries.

Barriers to Youth Empowerment

Despite the talent, young Pakistanis face serious structural hurdles:



- **Lack of access to quality education and skills:** According to the UNICEF report, The State of Children in Pakistan 2024, over 22 million children are out-of-school in Pakistan. Many graduates lack market-ready skills.
- **Unemployment:** Youth unemployment remains high, and informal work dominates the landscape, leaving millions without social protections.
- **Digital and gender divides:** Girls and young people from rural or conflict-affected regions frequently experience double marginalization, which limits their access to development opportunities. Women constitute nearly half of the nation's population, yet occupy a meagre 3 percent of managerial roles. This reflects a deeply ingrained patriarchal bias that holds the belief that men are inherently more capable in the public sphere. The agricultural sector paints an equally troubling picture. While women contribute nearly 70 percent of the labor in farming, only 3 percent of agricultural land in Pakistan is owned by women. Ownership is withheld under the cultural pretext that women 'cannot take care' of land. This is claim is baseless and discriminatory, systemically denying women's rights to property, autonomy, and dignity.

If these systemic issues are not addressed, we risk not just failing our youth but also missing the 2030

Bold shifts in policymaking, structural reform, and above all, youth-centric leadership are needed.

deadline for the SDGs.

A Political Lens to Mobilizing Youth

Pakistan's development agenda must recognize youth as a political force. The 2024 general elections witnessed unprecedented youth engagement, with voter turnout among first-time voters reaching record highs. Youth are redefining politics, not just through ballots, but through activism, digital campaigns, and solidarity movements. Policymakers must embrace this shift. Therefore, inclusion means funding youth-led organizations, reforming education to focus on civic and climate literacy, and supporting safe platforms for political dialogue. It also means



removing barriers for young women and marginalized communities to lead.

The Global Dimension

The SDGs are a global agenda, and Pakistani youth are global citizens. Through digital platforms, they are connected to movements from Palestine to climate justice. They are engaging with international platforms such as the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum or the UN Youth Delegate Program which helps young Pakistanis bring their local struggles to global attention. However, this must be supported by diplomatic and institutional pathways. The Ministry of



Photo Credit: University of Sargodha

Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives should actively integrate youth voices into UN delegations and SDG monitoring reports.

The Way Forward

To truly mobilize the next generation of changemakers in Pakistan, we must adopt the following steps:

- Institutionalize youth participation in policy and governance at all levels.
- Invest in education and skill-building, especially in digital and climate resilience sectors.
- Create funding mechanisms for youth-led innovation and advocacy.
- Champion inclusive representa-

tion, particularly girls, rural youth, and minorities. For a progressive Pakistan, women should be treated more than just tokens in photo-ops. We must restructure the very systems that keep women out of boardrooms and land registries.

- Forge public-private-youth partnerships to co-design and implement SDG solutions.

We are not running out of time, but we are running out of excuses. The world we inherit in 2030 will be shaped by the choices we make today. If we are serious about the SDGs, we must be serious about our youth, not just as tomorrow's leaders, but as today's most powerful agents of change.

To deny the youth their rightful place in decision-making and economic control is to deny Pakistan its future.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives should actively integrate youth voices into UN delegations and SDG monitoring reports.

Relational Inclusion for the SDGs: Looking Beyond Numbers

A relational approach means safeguarding public goods from capture, regulating powerful actors, holding institutions accountable to the people they serve and dismantling exclusionary norms.



By

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Pakistan's progress towards the SDGs remains uneven. While there have been pockets of improvement in areas such as education enrolment and poverty reduction, the country ranks low on the SDG Index. Persistent gaps remain in gender equality, decent work and environmental sustainability.¹ The dominant paradigm of inclusive development in Pakistan has broadly been understood in economic and social terms, such as expanding access to education, health, and employment opportunities, while reducing poverty and inequality.² However, this framing tends to overlook a critical pillar, the relational aspects of inclusion.

Relational inclusiveness, as explained by Gupta and Vegelin, focuses on the relationships and power dynamics of

different actors from local communities to global institutions and how these relationships create, maintain, or reduce poverty, inequality and environmental harm.³ This dimension aligns with the SDG commitments "to 'leave no one behind', gender equality and participatory governance."⁴ Research shows that without addressing these relational aspects, inclusion remains superficial.⁵ For example, access to mobile phones for Pakistani women may help them gain access to financial services, educational content and manage their businesses. Yet, because of patriarchal norms, 54 percent of women need spousal permission to own a mobile phone, resulting in the loss of transformative change.⁶

For Pakistan to make meaningful

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Relational aspects of inclusion are not a 'soft' add-on to development. They are foundational to achieving dignified living, equitable opportunities and social mobility.

progress on the SDGs, it must bring relational aspects of inclusion to the forefront. This shift must be embedded not only in policy debates, but also in the way policies are designed, enforced and evaluated. Initiatives that expand economic opportunities or deliver services without tackling the power imbalances that sustain exclusion, risk entrenching inequalities further. A relational approach means safeguarding public goods from capture, regulating powerful actors, holding institutions accountable to the people they serve and dismantling exclusionary norms.⁷ It also demands participatory governance so that marginalized voices help shape the rules.⁸ Done well, this can unlock multiplier effects, strengthening social cohesion, citizen trust, and the long-term sustainability of development gains.

Advocates of inclusive growth and green economy approaches argue for prioritizing GDP expansion with

environmental safeguards and equitable distribution.⁹ While these frameworks are essential, they often rely on traditional inclusion metrics such as poverty rates, literacy levels, or service coverage. These can mask entrenched social exclusion. In Pakistan, without challenging gender norms, caste hierarchies, or ethnic discrimination, such approaches risk entrenching inequality.¹⁰ Moreover, local governance systems remain episodic and politically constrained.¹¹ This limits the scope for community-led change.

These relational dimensions can be vividly seen in the everyday realities of Pakistani citizens. A village council may approve new water infrastructure. However, if the local elites dominate decision-making, marginalized groups may still find themselves excluded from access. A person with disabilities may receive a government stipend yet remain excluded from social gatherings and job opportunities. This underscores

the gap between formal provision and social acceptance. Minority communities may be recipients of development schemes but excluded from local planning forums where critical decisions are made. Women in some urban neighborhoods may, in theory, have access to public parks, yet harassment in public spaces makes these facilities unusable. These experiences reveal that without transforming power relations, ensuring recognition and nurturing belonging, development outcomes risk being hollow initiatives.

Relational inclusiveness refers to how power, recognition, participation and belonging shape the lived experience of inclusion. It shifts the focus from “who gets what” to “who decides, who is heard, and who is valued”.¹² In Pakistan’s context, this means designing policies that not only provide services but also democratize decision-making. It requires challenging discriminatory norms and building trust

For Pakistan to make meaningful SDG progress, it must bring relational aspects of inclusion to the forefront. This shift must be embedded not only in policy debates but also in how policies are designed, enforced, and evaluated.



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between citizens and institutions.

Internationally, countries that empower marginalized groups in decision-making, such as participatory budgeting in Brazil or indigenous co-management of natural resources in New Zealand, have seen improved service delivery, higher citizen satisfaction and stronger social cohesion.¹³ Similar approaches in Pakistan could create trust in governance. They could strengthen local problem-solving and accelerate SDG progress.

However, shifting towards relational inclusion is politically challenging. Pakistan’s local governance history is marked by discontinuities, centralized control and political resistance from provincial elites who fear losing influence.¹⁴ Bureaucratic dominance,

fragmented mandates, and fiscal dependency of local councils further constrain the space for participatory and inclusive governance.¹⁵

Relational aspects of inclusion are not a ‘soft’ add-on to development. They are foundational to achieving dignified living, equitable opportunities and social mobility. For Pakistan, embracing relational inclusion would mean reimagining governance from the bottom up. This would ensure that every citizen not only has access to resources but also the power, respect, and belonging to shape their futures.

Few other reforms could directly improve the quality of life for all while unlocking the collaborative spirit necessary to realize the SDGs.

Bureaucratic dominance, fragmented mandates, and the fiscal dependency of local councils further constrain the space for participatory and inclusive governance.

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From Survival to Resilience: Rethinking How Pakistan Finances Disasters

The National Disaster Risk Management Fund is fast evolving to play a catalytic role for piloting new financing instruments and fostering partnerships with insurers, development banks, and civil society.



By
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Just five years short of the finishing line in 2030, the global pursuit of the SDGs remains a story of uneven progress. Originally envisioned as a transformative framework for a better world, the SDGs were meant to stimulate coordinated action against poverty, inequality, social protection, and climate change, among other development goals. Yet the record so far has been patchy, particularly across the Global South, where structural constraints, limited fiscal space, and repeated climate crises have tapered progress.

Pakistan's trajectory exemplifies this shared struggle with the Global South. Ranked 137 out of 167 countries, its SDG performance has been mixed at best, falling behind many of its regional peers. However, beyond the numbers, the human costs of this underachievement are sobering: 40 percent of Pakistan's population, nearly 97 million people, remain trapped in poverty; 26 million children are out-of-school; almost half of the female population cannot read or write; and 40 percent of children under five suffer

from stunted growth. Women, as is often the case, bear a disproportionate share of these deprivations.

This reality exposes a persistent paradox. While Pakistan has recorded macroeconomic improvements in recent years, these achievements have translated into better living conditions for ordinary people in a limited way. The stabilization witnessed in 2024, with historically low inflation levels, was heralded as a sign of recovery. Yet it did not significantly dent poverty or lift vulnerable households out of impoverishment. Similarly, while progress has been recorded on climate action under SDG 13, it has been overshadowed by devastating floods, heatwaves, and other shocks that undo the very gains being reported.

In truth, Pakistan's development trajectory remains intensely fragile, easily unsettled by crises beyond its immediate control.

Few reminders of this fragility are as stark as the climate-induced disasters of the past two decades. The 2005



Photo Credit: REUTERS/Akhtar Soomro

earthquake, the super floods of 2010, and the unprecedented flooding of 2022 collectively affected tens of millions of people and caused tens of billions of dollars in damage. The 2022 floods alone impacted over 33 million Pakistanis and left damages and losses exceeding US\$30 billion. These figures dwarf the country's annual development spending. These events have not only inflicted widespread human suffering but have also systematically derailed Pakistan's economic and social progress. Each time, resources that could have been invested in schools, health systems, or renewable energy are redirected towards relief and reconstruction. Each time, the most vulnerable communities are pushed further into poverty. And each time, the cycle of development is broken and reset, leaving long term transformation further out of reach.

The costs of disasters in Pakistan thus extend well beyond the immediate humanitarian response. They disrupt fiscal planning, divert scarce resources from innovation and growth, and deepen structural inequities. For a country already grappling with limited fiscal space and competing development priorities, the recurrence of such shocks amounts to structural constraints on sustainable development.

Disaster risk financing incentivizes investments in risk reduction and resilience, ensuring that infrastructure, agriculture, and social protection systems are designed to withstand future shocks.

Unless resilience is systematically embedded into national planning and financing, the SDGs will remain elusive targets rather than achievable commitments.

This is where disaster risk financing assumes strategic importance. Unlike the traditional reliance on ad-hoc relief, disaster risk financing is built on pre-arranged financial mechanisms that deliver quick, predictable, and targeted

resources when disasters strike. Instruments such as contingency funds, insurance schemes, catastrophe bonds, and regional risk-pooling arrangements can provide liquidity at critical moments, sparing governments from destabilizing budget reallocations. More importantly, disaster risk financing incentivizes investments in risk reduction and resilience, ensuring that infrastructure, agriculture, and social protection



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585 feet Flood protection Gabion Wall, constructed in UC Rait Mohala at AJK, Neelum funded by NDRMF.

systems are designed to withstand future shocks.

In practical terms, disaster risk financing can mean that farmers receive compensation shortly after floods destroy their crops, schools and hospitals are rehabilitated without lengthy delays, and vulnerable households are cushioned from sliding deeper into poverty. It transforms disaster response from reactive charity into proactive resilience.

The National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF), supported by the government and development partners, has evolved to become the country's primary institutional mechanism for steering the agenda for financing resilience. Its previous portfolio includes building flood-resilient housing, strengthening embankments, installing early warning systems, and designing nature-based solutions that restore ecosystems while reducing disaster risks. The Fund is fast evolving to play a catalytic role for piloting new financing instruments and fostering partnerships with insurers, development banks, and civil society.

Yet Pakistan's challenge is not just to maintain such efforts but to scale them significantly. The frequency and intensity of climate-induced disasters are only expected to rise, and so will the costs. Meeting this challenge requires embedding disaster risk financing across all levels of governance and development planning, linking it with social protection systems, public investment programs, and fiscal frameworks. It also requires building a broader culture of risk awareness, where resilience is not treated as an afterthought but as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

Through smart scaling and implementation of Disaster Risk Funds, Pakistan can break the costly cycle of disaster and recovery. This would allow development gains to be preserved, investments to compound, and communities to thrive rather than merely survive. NDRMF is leading these efforts in collaboration with development partners, government support, and most importantly, in close liaison with communities on the ground.

The 2022 floods alone impacted over 33 million Pakistanis and left damages and losses exceeding 30 billion dollars. These figures dwarf the country's annual development spending.

Resilient Cities, Sustainable Future: Advancing SDGs through Urban Transformation

Pakistan is urbanizing at a rate of 2.9 percent per annum, with over 40 percent of Pakistan's 250 million population living in 225 cities and towns, contributing to nearly 55 percent of the GDP.



By
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As the world advances towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, urban Pakistan stands at a precarious juncture. Rampant urbanization across major cities echoes opportunities and challenges. Pakistan is urbanizing at a rate of 2.9 percent per annum, with over 40 percent of Pakistan's 250 million population living in 225 cities and towns, contributing to nearly 55 percent of the GDP.¹ Globally, cities generate over 80 percent of the GDP, which helps reduce poverty through better access to jobs and services.² Yet, unmanaged urban growth, climate stresses, and service delivery woes can deepen inequality and impede growth. Transforming urban areas of Pakistan as resilient, inclusive and growth-oriented, is both a global commitment and a national imperative.

Understanding the SDGs in the urban context is vital for resilient, livable, and

inclusive cities. While SDG 11 focuses on sustainable cities and communities, urban development also influences goals such as SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 3 (health), SDG 6 (clean water), SDG 7 (energy), SDG 8 (jobs), and SDG 13 (climate action). Aligning development with SDGs is critical but this is still challenging due to data gaps. The key indicators of SDG 11, such as housing, public transport, air quality, and disaster risk, are untracked, especially at the city level. To achieve inclusive, sustainable, and resilient urban development, provinces must localize SDG 11 through a pragmatic and context-specific approach.

Pakistan's Urban Vulnerabilities and Challenges

Pakistan's urban vulnerabilities and challenges comprise outdated infrastructure, poor sanitation, degraded air quality, and weak

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municipal services. In Lahore, vehicle numbers have doubled in a decade, mostly private cars and motorcycles, with the transport sector producing 83 percent of air pollution,³ and Air Quality Index levels above 300 are common.⁴ Karachi's 2022 floods displaced thousands, exposing chronic urban mismanagement.⁵ A large number of cities face climate change-induced intense heatwaves and flash floods, causing significant loss of life and damage to property each year. Nationwide, 47 percent of urban residents live in informal settlements,⁶ only half of the solid waste is collected and just 10 percent is recycled. Environmental degradation costs 6 percent of GDP annually,⁷ while 70 percent of households still receive contaminated water despite significant

Pakistan’s resilient and sustainable urban future hinges upon transitioning from fragmented, ad-hoc, and project-centric approaches to holistic, vision-driven policy and inclusive governance.

WASH investments.⁸ Urban green spaces remain below WHO standards, and public transport serves just 8 percent of Karachi's⁹ population and 20 percent of Lahore's.¹⁰

Without integrated mobility systems designed for last-mile connectivity, adversities will continue to exacerbate. Layers of institutions operate in isolation, with minimal coordination and little to no data sharing, leading to duplication of efforts. Moreover, urban governance reform efforts remain stalled in overlapping mandates, civic disengagement, and a lack of political will.

Pakistan’s Urban Infrastructure Investment Portfolio

Pakistan’s urban infrastructure investment portfolio has largely prioritized infrastructure projects. Over 60 percent of urban infrastructure financing prioritizes car-centric projects, with less than 15 percent allocated to the social sector, affordable housing, or climate resilience.¹¹ In Punjab’s FY 2025/2026 budget, US\$ 2.4 billion is allocated to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and \$2.5 billion to roads, yet climate risk assessment and alignment to the SDGs remain absent from its financial planning. Instruments such as green bonds and public-private partnerships are vital for closing financing gaps, but they remain underutilized. The international Monetary Fund’s (IMF’s) \$1.4 billion recent Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) tranche supports this shift by tying funds to structural reforms in planning, water, disaster response, climate policy, and

risk mitigation. However, a significant rebalancing of public spending at the provincial level is essential to align with the SDGs and build a climate-resilient and sustainable fiscal future.

Urban Sector Policy Landscape

Urban sector policy landscape in Pakistan remains inadequately aligned with the SDG and resilience agendas. The National Urban Policy Framework (2017)¹² and National Climate Change Policy (2021)¹³ emphasize sustainability while most urban sector spending remained focused on short-term infrastructure projects without incorporating resilience. The World Bank supported programs such as the Punjab Green Development Program and Sindh Resilience Program, and recently, the Punjab Clean Air Program has directed over \$500 million for improving urban environmental quality.¹⁴ However, these efforts often operate outside core policy frameworks, highlighting the need to integrate better resilience, SDGs, and climate-proofing into planning, financing, and budgeting.

Transformation for Resilience Building and Achieving the SDGs

Transformation for resilience building and achieving the SDGs hinges upon insight-driven policy formulation and a robust systemic governance reform. Empowering city and local governments with real authority, financial autonomy for decision-making, and robust capacity to deliver quality utilities is vital for effective urban management, service delivery, and resilience building. Metropolises like



Photo Credit: Sabir Mazhar/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images.

Karachi, Lahore, and Faisalabad require integrated regional planning to address cross-boundary challenges such as transit, climate, ecology, employment, and resource management.

Data governance and technology adoption are yet to gain substantial traction in urban governance. Federal and provincial statistical bureaus have aligned key surveys, such as the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM), Labor Force Survey (LFS), Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES), and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), with SDG indicators in health, education, poverty, and WASH. However, SDG 11 remains largely unreported. In Punjab, data exists for only 54 percent of indicators, with gaps in disaggregation.¹⁵ Sindh, KP, and Balochistan lag further behind. Weak data governance and poor technological adoption hinder urban management and SDG tracking, resulting in inadequate information on air quality, informal settlements, housing and climate risks. No city has real-time data

on hazard and climate vulnerability. Sub-national governments must invest in modern urban data systems such as geospatial and remote sensing tools, citizen reporting platforms, digital dashboards, climate and growth modeling, by establishing urban observatories and strengthening resource induction.

Pakistan’s resilient and sustainable urban future hinges upon transitioning from fragmented, ad-hoc, and project-centric approaches to holistic, vision-driven policy and inclusive governance. This requires empowering local governments with real authority, fiscal autonomy, and capacity, while embedding resilience and SDG targets in urban and financial planning. Globally, cities drive learning, innovation, and growth by attracting talent; in Pakistan however, unmanaged urbanization instead funnels poverty into cities. Financing should prioritize mid-tier cities to ease pressure on metropolises. Strong data governance, technology adoption, and SDG tracking demand interoperable government systems and real-time monitoring.

In Punjab’s FY 2025–26 budget, \$2.4 billion was allocated to WASH and \$2.5 billion to roads, yet climate risk assessment and alignment to the SDG remains absent from its financial planning.

Finally, robust governance also needs innovative financing, private sector engagement, and legislative reforms to turn urbanization from risk into opportunity.

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Pakistan’s SDG Policy Dialogue Sparks Unified Call for Reform, Investment & Resilience

Pakistan SDGs Policy Dialogue for Action 2025
Islamabad, 7–8 May, 2025

By SDGs Plus Programme Team

As Minister Ahsan Iqbal affirmed, “Let us reclaim development as a collective mission—where no one is invisible, and no dream is too ambitious.”

Bridging National Commitments with Provincial Realities

UNDP hosted a high-level SDG Policy Dialogue session under its SDGs Plus Program (2024–2030), titled ‘Accelerating Reform, Investments, and Economic Transformation Toward Agenda 2030.’ The event served as a key moment to assess progress and chart a forward-looking path towards SDG achievement.

Dr. Samuel Rizk, UNDP Resident Representative, stated that only 35 of 169 SDG targets are on track in Pakistan. The country ranks 137 out of 166 on the SDG Index and 164 out of 193 on the Human Development Index. He called for political and institutional ownership of the SDG and for Pakistan to adopt a bold, evidence-based reform agenda.

Mohammad Yahya, the UN Resident Coordinator called for fiscal reforms and highlighted that half of Pakistan’s budget is spent on debt servicing. He recommended debt relief and climate-smart financing to support resilient

development.

Ms. Sabina Qureshi from the Ministry of Economic Affairs presented the URAAN Program as an initiative aimed at SDG acceleration, with emphasis on AI, data, and key areas including exports, environment, energy, infrastructure, and equity. The Minister for Climate Change Musadiq Malik emphasized opportunity over despair, advocating for green economic clusters to promote sustainable growth.

Subnational Ownership with Diverse Contexts and Shared Goals

A major highlight was the active participation of provinces. The provinces called for the importance of localized SDG implementation. The key takeaways include:

- **Sindh and Punjab** would prioritize gender equity and climate resilience;
- **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** would focus on governance in merged districts and micro-hydel energy;

- **Balochistan** highlighted the digital divide and social inclusion gaps.

It was agreed that SDG progress requires region-specific strategies, citizen engagement, and inter-agency coordination.

Tools, Finance, and Systems for Acceleration

At the event, the UNDP SDG Push Diagnostic and Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) tools were also presented to assist the government in identifying high-impact actions and aligning resources efficiently. A case study on Punjab’s Regional Development Plan demonstrated how localized planning is informing national strategies such as the 20 Poorest Districts Initiative.

A session on SDG 5: Gender Equality highlighted Pakistan’s position at 145 out of 146 on the Global Gender Gap Index. Experts called for gender-responsive budgeting, data disaggregation, and federal-provincial



Pakistan has laid essential foundations including policy alignment, digital innovation, programs like URAAN, and growing provincial engagement. What is now needed is a national SDG transformation strategy built on data, inclusive governance and sustainable financing.

coordination to mainstream gender into all policies.

Parliamentary Oversight and Data Governance

Parliamentarians stressed the critical role of legislatures in localizing and monitoring SDG progress through initiatives like the SDG Caucuses and Women’s Parliamentary Caucus. However, capacity gaps in standing committees and weak citizen linkage were identified as obstacles to accountability.

On data governance, stakeholders addressed fragmented data systems. Currently, only 62 indicators are regularly tracked. Presenters emphasized the potential of AI-powered tools and the Data for Development (D4D)

initiative to enable real-time, harmonized, and policy-relevant data.

Closing the Financing Gap

Perhaps the most critical bottleneck discussed was financing. Pakistan requires an additional 16–18.5 percent of GDP annually to meet its SDG targets. Tools like the International Monetary Fund SDG FiT Tool, public expenditure reviews, and climate finance mechanisms were highlighted as pathways to mobilize funds. The UNDP Talk to Transact Tool, which identifies investment-ready SDG projects, was also showcased in preparation for Pakistan’s participation at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in Seville, Spain.

From Dialogue to Delivery

The High-Level Policy Dialogue session made it clear that time is short, but action is still possible. Pakistan has laid essential foundations including policy alignment, digital innovation, programs like URAAN, and growing provincial engagement. What is now needed is a national SDG transformation strategy built on data, inclusive governance, and sustainable financing.

As Minister Ahsan Iqbal affirmed, “Let us reclaim development as a collective mission—where no one is invisible, and no dream is too ambitious.”

The South Punjab Regional Development Plan: A Model for Subnational Planning

The South Punjab Regional Development Plan 2030 is a comprehensive framework to address entrenched disparities through an inclusive, data-driven and rights-based approach.



By

Dr. Muhammad Aman Ullah

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Background

South Punjab is home to nearly 40 million people and spans 45 percent of Punjab's total land area, however it significantly lags behind in development indicators compared to the rest of the province. Despite its agricultural potential and strategic location, connecting all four provinces of Pakistan, South Punjab's human development indicators remain among the lowest in the country. Poverty incidence is 2.5 times higher and the Human Development Index (HDI) is 32 percent lower compared to the provincial average. The Government of Punjab responded with technical support from UNDP Punjab SDGs Support Unit by launching the South Punjab Regional Development Plan 2030. The plan is a comprehensive framework to address these entrenched disparities through an inclusive, data-driven and rights-based approach.

Problem Statement

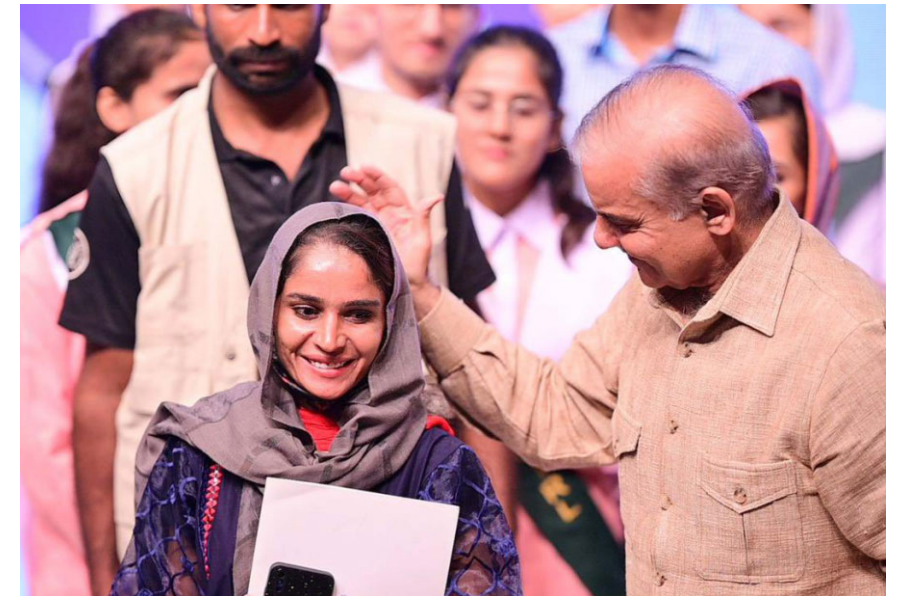
South Punjab's development has been constrained by structural inequities, misallocation of resources and governance gaps. The region faces stark disparities in key human development indicators. For instance, nearly 44 percent of children suffer from stunted growth, while availability of hospital beds are 61 percent lower than in other parts of Punjab and the number of out-of-school children is 2.2 times higher. Access to piped water is 40 percent

lower, and literacy rates, particularly among women and rural populations remain low. These challenges are compounded by the region's high vulnerability to climate-related events, a heavy reliance on informal labor, underdeveloped infrastructure and industry sectors. Together, these challenges continue to limit South Punjab's overall socioeconomic progress.

Approach

The South Punjab Regional Development Plan 2030 was developed using a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative insights and participatory engagement. Key informant interviews were held with government officials, civil society actors and private sector stakeholders to gather expert perspectives on the regional challenges and opportunities. Focus group discussions engaged youth, marginalized groups and university students to ensure that the voices of underrepresented communities were heard. Guided by Punjab's development vision, the 2022 High-Level Deep Dive on South Punjab and the 2030 Agenda, and the South Punjab Regional Development Plan provides a strategic framework to inform policy and drive inclusive development. Additionally, the Regional Development Forum held in 2023 with targeted civil society consultations have played a crucial role in validating the findings and integrating diverse viewpoints into the

Programs such as Zewar-e-Taleem and the Punjab Human Capital Investment Project target vulnerable girls and poor households with conditional cash transfers and integrated health and education support.



final framework. These engagements informed the plan's five thematic focus areas that are included below:

- Regional Connectivity and Infrastructure
- Human Development and Social Protection
- Industrial and Value Chain Development
- Local Governance
- Climate Resilience and Disaster Management

Interventions

The South Punjab Regional Development Plan introduces several key interventions:

- **Infrastructure:** Investments in roads and digital connectivity have improved linkages. Projects like the Multan-Sukkur Motorway and ML-1 Railway under CPEC are expected to further improve regional mobility.
- **Health and Education:** Interventions include expanding basic health units, improving maternal and childcare health and revamping district health authorities. Education initiatives focus on reducing the out-of-school children ratio and mainstreaming marginalized

groups through projects like trans-education programs.

- **Social Protection:** Programs such as Zewar-e-Taleem and the Punjab Human Capital Investment Project target vulnerable girls and poor households with conditional cash transfers, and integrated health and education support.
- **Industrial Development:** The plan proposes agro-industrial clusters, special economic zones and public-private partnerships to capitalize on the region's agricultural output, especially in mangoes, cotton, sugarcane and dairy.
- **Governance and Climate Resilience:** Empowering local governments with financial and operational autonomy is a priority. Climate adaptation efforts focus on sustainable water management and disaster risk reduction.

Outcomes

The South Punjab Regional Development Plan envisions:

- Economic parity with the rest of Punjab by 2030;
- Enhanced human capital and public service delivery;

South Punjab's human development indicators remain among the lowest in the country.

- Stronger climate resilience, especially in flood-prone areas;
- A coordinated and participatory governance model bringing together government, development partners, and local communities.

Conclusion

The South Punjab Regional Development Plan 2030 is a flagship model for subnational planning in Pakistan. By aligning the Regional Development Plan with the SDGs and prioritizing vulnerable populations, it offers a replicable framework for inclusive and sustainable regional development. Its success depends on continued investment, multi-sectoral collaboration and robust monitoring to ensure that no one is left behind.

Strategic Prioritization of SDGs in Pakistan

Pakistan’s success will depend on the strategic prioritization of its SDG targets.



By
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With less than five years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Pakistan’s success depends on the strategic prioritization of its SDGs. Pakistan must create an opportunity to offer high-impact synergies to generate broad and cross-sectoral benefits. In other words, Pakistan must aim to “get many birds with one stone”.

Recognizing the limited time and resources available, the Planning Commission of Pakistan, in collaboration with UNDP, has developed the National Framework for SDGs (2018) to identify and prioritize SDG targets that can deliver the highest impact. The aim is to apply a comparative criteria model that ranks SDG targets using the following indicators: population affected, severity, multiplier effect, urgency, resource efficiency, feasibility, and provincial relevance. This step is followed by categorizing SDGs into three tiers: high priority (Category I), medium priority (Category II), and long-term priority (Category III).¹

Category I SDGs such as SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) are identified as having high potential for short-term gains and strong interlinkages. For example,

improving water quality not only enhances health outcomes but also boosts educational performance, agricultural productivity, and economic resilience.

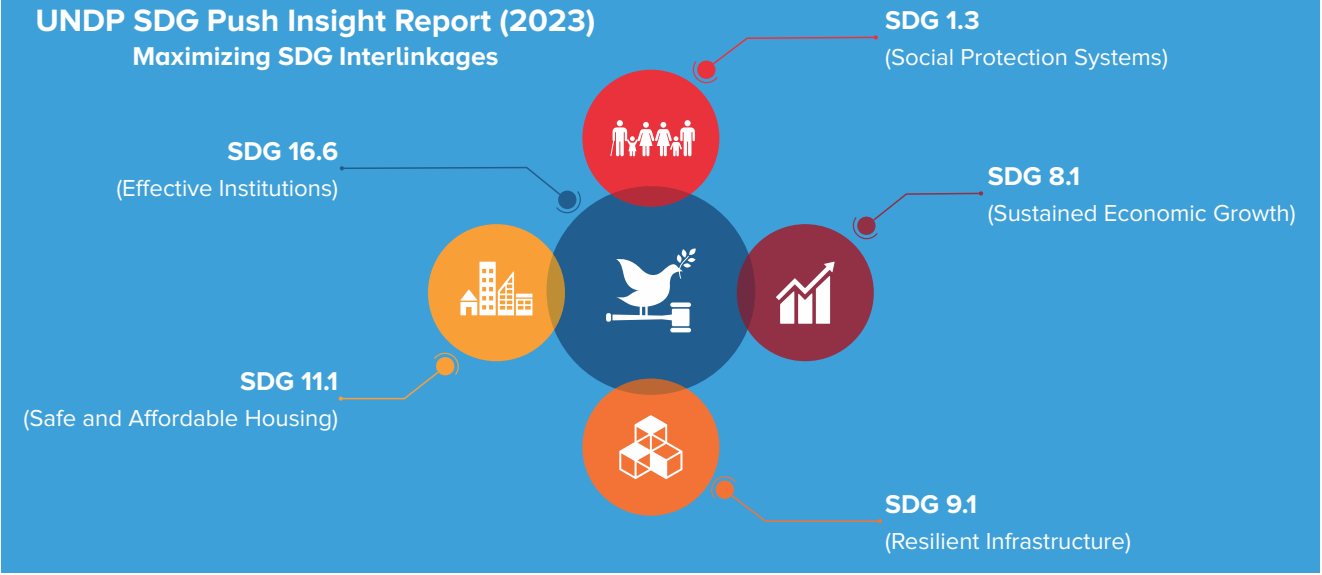
Category II SDGs include SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), with equally significant interlinkages. For example, SDG 5 for gender equality contributes to better family health, education, and economic outcomes, while SDG 9 for resilient infrastructure supports climate adaptation, economic growth, and service delivery.

Category III goals such as SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water) demand long-term commitment and systemic reforms. Although their gestation periods are longer, they have significant multiplier effects. Climate resilience, for example, safeguards agriculture, health, and livelihoods, while marine conservation supports food security and biodiversity.

The UNDP SDG Push Insight Report 2023 reinforced this approach by mapping interlinkages among key SDG targets that are particularly relevant to countries’ development contexts. For Pakistan, it identified the following targets:²

1. Government of Pakistan, ‘Pakistan’s Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Voluntary National Review’, 2019. Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/233812019_06_15_VNR_2019_Pakistan_latest_version.pdf

2. UNDP, ‘Integrated SDG Insights: Pakistan’, SDG Push Insight Report, 2023. Available at: <https://sdgpush-insights.undp.org/reports/pak>



- **SDG 1.3 (social protection systems):** as it expands social protection, enhances resilience, and supports multiple SDGs simultaneously;
- **SDG 8.1 (sustained economic growth):** inclusive and sustainable economic growth can catalyze progress across other SDG targets;
- **SDG 9.1 (resilient infrastructure):** infrastructure investments have ripple effects on health, education, and livelihoods;
- **SDG 11.1 (safe and affordable housing):** urban planning integrates housing with services and can uplift marginalized communities and reduce inequalities;
- **SDG 16.6 (effective institutions):** this is foundational for all the SDGs as transparent and accountable governance enables efficient service delivery, policy coherence, and public trust.

Other countries have adopted different approaches. Some countries focus on all 17 SDGs, while others prioritize specific goals. For example, Colombia uses a holistic strategy that aligns its national development plan and investment projects with all the SDGs. Mexico employs SDG-tagging with a significant portion of its budget linked to

SDG 16, prioritizing governance and anti-corruption. Finland focuses on the impact of taxes and subsidies on its environmental SDGs, while France incorporates green budget tagging to support environmental goals. Mongolia prioritizes SDG 3 on health, while Kenya targets hunger, health, economic growth, and inclusive cities (SDGs 2, 3, 8, and 11).³

The policy imperative is not merely to prioritize SDG targets based on urgency or feasibility, but rather, to strategically select targets with systemic leverage that act as accelerators across multiple SDG development priorities.

However, Pakistan faces persistent structural challenges including fragmented data systems, limited institutional capacity and weak policy coherence, that constrain its ability to operationalize SDG interlinkages effectively. Addressing these gaps requires a shift towards integrated, data-driven governance. By concentrating efforts on high-impact, cross-sectoral goals and fostering institutional collaboration across federal and provincial tiers, Pakistan can unlock compounding benefits across the SDG framework.

The next five years are pivotal. Leveraging interdependencies through advanced analytics, coordinated planning, and digital transformation (including AI technologies) will be essential to achieving the SDGs.

The Planning Commission of Pakistan, in collaboration with UNDP, has developed the National Framework for SDGs (2018) to identify and prioritize SDG targets that can deliver the highest impact.

No Time to Stall: Pakistan's Post-FfD4 Action Plan

Mobilizing private capital brings innovation, efficiency, and long-term financial sustainability.



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Closing the Financing Gap: A Shift

As the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) concludes, one lesson stands out: the era of relying on unfulfilled pledges to bridge the financing gap must come to an end. The path forward depends not only on aspirational commitments but also on concrete, action-oriented partnerships between governments, multilateral institutions, and the private sector.

Mobilizing private sector investment is essential for achieving sustainable development and the SDGs. Public resources alone are insufficient to meet the growing investment needs in infrastructure, energy, health, education, and climate resilience. Mobilizing private capital brings innovation, efficiency, and long-term financial sustainability. It helps to bridge financing gaps, support job creation, and foster development and inclusive economic growth. Moreover, private sector financing for development helps in bridging investment gaps which can result in global partnerships. Bankability, scalability, and alignment with government policies are some of the key factors investors focus on while making investment decisions in projects.

Mobilizing Private Capital for Sustainable Growth

Investors in Pakistan have raised several key concerns, including exchange rate risks, repatriation of profits, and security issues. Addressing these concerns is crucial to unlocking the potential for private sector financing

for development. To effectively tap into this potential, it is essential to create more bankable projects and implement bold policy measures that foster an enabling environment for business. Sustained investment in the capacity of the local private sector is also critical. By nurturing these conditions, we can drive inclusive growth and meaningfully contribute to the sustainable development agenda. With global capital flows shifting away from the US, investors are increasingly looking to Europe and Asia for returns, with governments eager to support growth through investment-friendly policies. Investors are particularly interested in funds such as the Energy Transition Fund, which is dedicated to financing impactful projects.

To effectively address these concerns and unlock the potential for private sector financing for development, several solutions can be put into place. First, hedging mechanisms such as forward contracts or options can be offered by governments and financial institutions to mitigate exchange rate risks, providing investors with the ability to lock in favorable exchange rates and reduce currency fluctuation uncertainties. Additionally, investment guarantees, including political risk insurance, can be provided to protect against security risks, expropriation, or regulatory changes, thereby enhancing investor confidence. To address repatriation concerns, governments can establish clear frameworks for profit repatriation, offering legal assurances and currency convertibility guarantees. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can further reduce risks by enabling the government to share part

Investment guarantees, including political risk insurance, can be provided to protect against security risks, expropriation, or regulatory changes, thereby enhancing investor confidence.

of the investment risk, especially in large infrastructure or sustainable development projects. Lastly, targeted funds such as the Energy Transition Fund can be introduced to pool capital from various sources, providing long-term financing at favorable terms and minimizing individual investor risk exposure. By implementing these measures, we can mitigate investor concerns, foster a more secure investment environment, and drive sustainable development forward.

Pakistan's Strategic Commitment to Sustainable Development

Pakistan's participation at FfD4, which took place in Seville, Spain, from 30 June to 3 July 2025, underscored its commitment to fostering sustainable development through impactful financing solutions. The nation presented a portfolio of bankable, high-impact projects focused on green financing, renewable energy, and water management aimed at addressing the climate change challenge and advancing infrastructure development. These projects were showcased to attract international investors and development partners, positioning Pakistan as an attractive investment destination.

Side Events: A Platform for Transformative Projects

Alongside the main events, side events



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were also conducted, providing an additional platform for promoting impactful projects. During the Pakistan Side Event on 30 June 2025, a range of transformative projects were highlighted, including ventures in waste-to-energy and wastewater treatment projects. The event demonstrated Pakistan's dedication to securing investment for projects that drive environmental and economic change. Additionally, investment roundtables on energy transition, sustainable food and water management, saw significant dialogue on bankable projects. Major investors such as JP Morgan, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and Lazard, along with other European investors, participated in roundtables and showed interest in several bankable projects, further reinforcing Pakistan's strategic push to become a leader in sustainable development.

The Next Step: A Bold Commitment to Progress

To keep advancing these initiatives, bold action is required. Pakistan must take concrete actions and launch follow-up efforts that maintain the momentum from FfD4. These measures would include developing more investor-friendly policies, strengthening partnerships with international development agencies, and driving innovation in financing solutions.

With global capital flows shifting away from the US, investors are increasingly looking to Europe and Asia for returns, while governments are eager to support growth through investment-friendly policies.

Only by committing to these next steps can Pakistan fully realize the potential of its development projects and maintain its position as a key player in the global sustainable development agenda.



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