

DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE

Pakistan

VOLUME 11 / ISSUE 3 | SEPTEMBER 2024



**Summit of
the Future**
Our Common Agenda

SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE 2024

Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow



DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE
Pakistan
VOLUME 11 / ISSUE 3 | SEPTEMBER 2024

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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.

**United Nations
Development Programme Pakistan**

4th Floor, Serena Business Complex,
Khayaban-e-Suharwardy, Sector G-5/1,
P. O. Box 1051,
Islamabad, Pakistan

For contributions and feedback, please write
to us at:
pak.communications@undp.org

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Bold Action Needed for a Sustainable Future

The path to bold action – as a global community and as a nation – lies in collaboration and solidarity, in being truly ready for a future that might be anonymized by data yet companionate enough to be human-centric.

The world is readying for the final stretch of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) journey, and only 17 per cent of its targets are on track. The SDGs 2024 Report reveals that progress has either stalled or reversed in almost half of the targets: 48 per cent of the targets showing moderate to severe deviations, and 18 per cent demonstrate stagnation or regression from the 2015 baseline.

Pakistan's SDG indicators have followed a similarly alarming pattern. According to UNDP's Integrated SDG Insights Report 2023, Pakistan is on track to meet only 35 out of 169 SDG targets. The country needs a substantial 'SDG Push' that involves high-intensity economic reforms and an estimated US\$52 billion, (equivalent to 16.1 per cent of GDP) to achieve the SDGs by 2030. So where can Pakistan get a 'push'?

The United Nations Summit of the Future this month offers one such timely and important space. Member States are called upon to reflect on how the world can achieve its Global Goals, as international systems and government policies and actions are clearly outpaced by today's challenges. The only way forward is through a renewed commitment to the principles of interdependence, international cooperation, and 'upgrading' the

multilateral system to meet today's needs.

World leaders have been deliberating thus far on an ambitious, transformational, urgent, accelerated, action-oriented "Pact of the Future" revolving around five themes: 1) Sustainable development and financing; 2) International peace and security; 3) Science, Technology, and Innovation (SIT) and digital cooperation; 4) Youth and future generations; and 5) Transforming global governance. Unsurprisingly, all five themes are critically important for Pakistan's own development ambitions, as well as for Pakistan's regional and global advocacy and voice. So, as this special issue of the DAP is dedicated to the Summit of the Future, we ask, how can Pakistan build and scale bold actions to achieve its SDGs?

This month's DAP contributors unanimously argue for adopting a future-ready, transformative approach to the remaining years of Pakistan's SDGs commitment that is grounded in equity and inclusion, premised on stability, multidisciplinary and concurrent in nature, and certainly reformed, efficient and effective in how it's governed. This approach resonates with the Summit's bold ambitions, while at the same time raising the stakes for Pakistan given the development challenges it faces.



By
Dr. Samuel Rizk
Resident Representative
UNDP Pakistan

At the Summit, the international community – Pakistan included – will surely place a premium on locally developed solutions, while not pretending that peace and prosperity can be achieved through isolationism or parochialism. And, while this DAP does point to key levers in Pakistan where work has already begun, it also points to the required next step toward a deeper, more deliberate, sustained, and irreversible pace of reform and political commitment to boost not only the country's own self-confidence but also global confidence in Pakistan.

Pakistan's Vision 2025 and the ongoing integration of the SDGs in its national policy and program frameworks shows that the country does not lack commitment to Agenda 2030. Pakistan Prime Minister's scheduled participation in the General Assembly and the Summit illustrates the government's commitment to revitalize support for the SDGs. The Planning Ministry's "5Es (Export, E-Pakistan, Environment, Energy, and Equity) Framework to Turnaround Pakistan" offers a forward-looking national plan to put the country on a path towards accelerated development, resonating with the Summit's agenda. For a country as populous as Pakistan, endowed with a youth, vast and diverse geography, abundant natural resources and human capital, there's little doubt that the scale of growth envisioned must crowd-in more stakeholders in society. The private sector and civil society are two such actors.

According to the Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce & Industry (OICCI) Corporate Social Responsibility Report 2022/2023, Pakistan's private sector is playing a key role in integrating SDGs into business strategies, spending US \$46.71 million¹ in 2022-2023 on SDG action and reaching 40 million people. Similarly, international financial institutions, such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC), are providing critical loans and grants for public-private innovative projects in areas such as climate action. To say the least, this is beyond corporate social responsibility in its traditional



sense. The private sector has recognized that it is possible to do well and do good at the same time.

Engaging civil society is also critical as we reimagine multiple roads to development that all lead to the same destination: a peaceful and prosperous society. Where many of the manifestations of poverty and exclusion, intergenerational estrangement, and social tension are local in nature, civil society organizations and community-based entities often bring in the reach, legitimacy, and nimbleness required for the last mile of development effectiveness. Recognizing this, the Summit will be preceded by two Action Days to bring in civil society voices from all over the world, and Pakistan's voice will be among them.

The Summit of the Future is an opportunity for the world leaders to shed the legacy of factious politics and forge new alliances of trust required to address our current and future challenges – from climate change, to spiraling inequalities, to violence and insecurity. The path to bold action – as a global community and as a nation – lies in collaboration and solidarity, in being truly ready for a future that might be anonymized by data yet companionate enough to be human-centric. The future appears to be paved with peril as well as promise – the path will be determined by us – all of us.



1. Arab News, 'Pakistan's overseas investors' chamber reports \$22.6 billion contribution to economy in 10 years', Karachi, 2024. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2563611/business-economy>

Breathing New Life into the Global Goals

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted, “We can’t build a future for our grandchildren with systems built for our grandparents.” Our outdated structures no longer reflect current realities and cannot effectively address emerging challenges.



By
Mohamed Yahya
United Nations Resident &
Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan

This September, the United Nations will host the ‘Summit of the Future’ to build a global consensus on how to address some of the world’s most pressing challenges. In an increasingly complex world, where some regions face growing fragmentation, efforts to strengthen global unity are essential to bridge the gaps in our current multilateral systems. Every month, we witness new natural disasters exacerbated by our collective failure to tackle the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Every week, we confront worsening economic turbulence. Every day, we hear about conflicts in which civilians suffer immensely.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted, “We can’t build a future for our grandchildren with systems built for our grandparents.” Our outdated structures no longer reflect current realities and cannot effectively address emerging challenges that no country can solve alone — such as the need to regulate artificial intelligence.

Ambitious targets demand real action. The Summit of the Future, taking place in New York on 22 and 23 September,

is our chance to get back on track. It will bring together global leaders to rebuild trust, reform and reinvigorate the multilateral system, and agree on joint solutions. This Summit builds on the Political Declaration adopted at the 2023 SDG Summit and aims to advance the Secretary-General’s ‘Six Transitions’ agenda. These are investment pathways designed to accelerate progress towards the 17 Global Goals, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including food systems, energy access and affordability, digital connectivity, education, jobs and social protection, and addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

The Summit will be a crucial moment to demonstrate that effective international cooperation can tackle poverty, hunger, inequality, and climate change. It is expected to culminate in an action-oriented ‘Pact for the Future,’ which Member States have been discussing since January, with inputs from civil society and the UN.

The Summit of the Future offers a critical opportunity for Pakistan to showcase its commitment to the SDGs and



The Summit of the Future is about the future we wish to create for people and the planet. It is an opportunity to ensure technology serves humanity, close the gap on financing for development, empower young people, and revitalize multilateralism to solve our greatest challenges.

play a significant role in the global dialogue on sustainable development. This is especially relevant as the country faces unique challenges and opportunities. Two years after the floods affected 33 million people, Pakistan still suffers from flood-related infrastructure damage. In addition, subdued consumption amid high inflation, a high debt burden, shrinking fiscal space, and high interest rates continue to hamper progress.

Despite some improvements, Pakistan falls short of the standards needed to achieve the SDGs. The country ranks 128th out of 166 on the Global SDG Index 2023, with a score of 59 percent. The Asia-Pacific region is not faring well either, as it is set to miss 90 percent of the 118 measurable SDG targets by 2030 unless urgent corrective action is taken.

However, there are clear pathways to accelerated progress for Pakistan:

- i. Transform education by implementing innovative strategies through digitalization and AI, especially in

light of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s announcement of an “Education Emergency” to enrol 26 million out-of-school children.

- ii. Scale up climate solutions through the government-led “Living Indus” initiative that aims to restore and protect the Indus River’s ecosystem, reduce pollution, and promote sustainable water management to ensure environmental health and climate resilience.
- iii. Implement the SDG acceleration agenda with a particular focus on transforming the food systems, energy transition, social protection, education, and digital transformation.

The Summit of the Future is about the future we wish to create for people and the planet. It is an opportunity to ensure technology serves humanity, to enhance financing for sustainable development, to empower young and re-energize multilateralism to help us solve our greatest shared challenges.

Prof. Ahsan Iqbal

Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives



To bring Pakistan back on track, we have spearheaded the 5Es Framework, with its five pillars including Exports, E-Pakistan, Environment, Energy, and Equity. The Framework defines our short to medium-term strategy to achieve economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability. It is a formal platform from where Pakistan can accelerate its progress towards achieving the SDGs.

What are Pakistan's major challenges in achieving its SDGs?

Pakistan faces several major crises that are exacerbated under the pressure of global challenges such as climate change. Pakistan's development has suffered due to persistent social, economic, and political pressures. This has included macroeconomic challenges as well as the lingering effect of natural disasters, especially the 2022 floods which washed away many gains made by Pakistan. Although Pakistan was among the first countries to adopt the Global Goals as part of its national agenda in 2016, it is on track to achieving only 19.7 percent of its SDG targets, according to the Sustainable Development Report. We have made limited progress on 42 percent of the SDGs, and unfortunately, we are doing worse on 38 percent of the targets.

Deepening inequality is also a major challenge in Pakistan that underlies all development issues. Pakistan's human development rankings have slipped, from 161 in 2021/2022 to 164 for 2023/2024. The UNDP Global Human Development Index (HDI) for 2023/2024 places Pakistan in the 'low' human development category. There has also been a notable 33 percent decline in Pakistan's inequality adjusted HDI. The figures demonstrate that the marginal and poor Pakistani's wellbeing is at its lowest with little chances of achieving a prosperous future. Moreover, the latest National Human Development Report (NHDR) for 2023/2024, published by UNDP Pakistan, reveals that the

digital divide is deepening pre-existing inequalities as the poorer and marginalized groups are left further behind.

To bring Pakistan back on track, MoPDSI has spearheaded the 5Es Framework, which is the cornerstone of the country's National Economic Transformation Plan. The 5Es are, i) Exports, ii) E-Pakistan: Knowledge Economy, iii) Environment and Climate Change: Water and Food Security, iv) Energy and Infrastructure, and v) Equity – Education, Health and Population and Empowerment – Youth and Women. This Framework defines our short to medium-term strategy for achieving economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability. The strategy is also a formal platform from which the country can accelerate its progress towards achieving the SDGs. It is important to emphasize that this inclusive Framework has been developed in collaboration with experts from all walks of life, line ministries, provincial governments, and civil society organizations.

The Summit of the Future will focus on finding bold and innovative solutions to achieve our Global Goals. What is the Government's vision on investments in science, technology and innovation that could accelerate development?

The E-Pakistan pillar under the 5Es Framework has made a commitment to invest in science, technology and innovation with E-Pakistan focusing on building a digital and



knowledge economy. The Government is working to accelerate development, innovation and economic growth through increasing investment in a digital economy by ensuring availability of accessible, affordable, reliable, universal and high-quality Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services and skills.

With a largely young population and rising share of working-age young adults in Pakistan, investments in technology and innovation can be the catalyst to improving Pakistan's future. We aim to provide access to technology, build technological infrastructure, and invest in new digital skills at all levels of government and for our citizens. Our aim is to increase IT and Telecom exports to PKR 1 trillion, invest in our telecom sector, digital skills and emerging technology. To ensure the rapid delivery of innovative digital services, incorporating the best of our science and technology, the Government has established National Information Technology Boards, National Incubation Centers for tech start-ups, National Centre of Robotics and Automation, AI, Cyber Security, Big Data, Cloud and Quantum Computing, and other initiatives to promote science, technology, and digital infrastructure across the country.

What strategies is the Government pursuing to improve the socio-economic lives of Pakistan's vulnerable groups in underserved areas, especially women and youth?

Equity and Empowerment is the fifth pillar in the 5Es Framework which emphasizes empowering youth and women in particular. Under this pillar, the Government has made inclusive development its key priority. The Framework commits to empowering marginalized groups including youth, women, differently-abled people, and least developed regions to unlock their potential to achieve prosperity and growth. The 5Es Framework places special emphasis on providing equitable access to all marginalized groups through affirmative action where necessary.

MoPDSI launched a first of its kind 5-year development plan to uplift 20 poorest districts of Pakistan out of poverty.

At a cost of PKR 40 billion, this plan uses the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) to identify the poorest districts. Our objectives for these districts include reducing disparities, strengthening integration and harmony, promoting inclusive and equitable development, targeting investments in infrastructure and human development, and access to digital connectivity.

For young people, we have spearheaded several initiatives including reforming and upgrading Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), providing 75 scholarships worth PKR 4.7 billion across top 25 international universities, and the Ba-Ikhtiyar Naujawwan Internship Program to enhance the employability of young graduates. We also led the National Youth Internship Program designed to provide 60,000 internships to recent graduates. A special scheme for 10,000 internships for Baluchistan has been approved as well. Most recently, during the Prime Minister's visit to China, it was agreed with Huawei that training to 200,000 young Pakistanis will be imparted on IT skills. Similarly, the Government of Pakistan will send 1000 young Pakistanis working in the agriculture sector to China to build their capacity, enabling them to act as catalysts back home for transforming Pakistan into an agro-economic leader.

For women, MoPDSI has set up a Gender Unit to ensure that development projects are gender-sensitive. We have also developed the National Gender Policy Framework that sets strategic priorities aimed at empowering women and girls including closing the gender gap in primary and secondary education in partnership with the private sector, equipping women with employable and high-income skills, providing equitable access to employment opportunities and delivering gender-responsive health services. Another major step towards empowering women and making them financially independent is mandating 50 percent share for women in microcredit and small business loans and schemes.

Vision for SDG Implementation in Pakistan and the Role of Parliament

Parliament's role will remain central in ensuring that national, provincial, and regional stakeholders are aligned. This calls for continued coordination between legislative and executive branches, as well as meaningful engagement with civil society, private sector, and international partners.



By

Bilal Azhar Kayani

Convener National Parliamentary Taskforce on SDGs

Pakistan has been at the forefront of embracing the SDGs, demonstrating a national commitment to sustainable progress. Pakistan adopted the SDGs as its national development agenda early on, in 2016, and established a dedicated National Parliamentary Taskforce to prioritize these goals at the highest levels of the state.

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. The proactive efforts of a cross-party, bipartisan, and gender-balanced Parliamentary

Taskforce on SDGs help ensure a continued focus on the SDGs at various levels of government and legislature. Through collaboration with development partners, including the United Nations and its agencies, Parliament continues to demonstrate leadership in advocating for and advancing the SDGs.

While progress has been made towards achieving SDGs in Pakistan, a lot of work and challenges still remain. Our nation, like many others, faces pressing concerns such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and health crises. These issues demand sustained focus and comprehensive legisla-



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tive and executive action. At the same time, Pakistan's complex socio-political landscape, with its diverse regional and provincial dynamics, requires a nuanced approach to SDG implementation.

The 'Summit of the Future' in 2024 provides a critical opportunity for Pakistan to exchange experiences with other nations and reassess its SDG strategies. It is essential to reflect on the achievements thus far, address the shortcomings, and chart a bold path forward. Pakistan's Parliament is well-positioned to lead this effort by enacting policies that foster sustainable economic growth, social equity, and environmental resilience. Key areas that require enhanced focus include financing for sustainable development, technological innovation, and building capacities for data-driven decision-making.

Moving forward, Parliament's role will remain central in ensuring that national, provincial, and regional stakeholders are aligned. This calls for continued coordination between legislative and executive branches, as well as meaningful engagement with civil society, private sector, and international partners. In particular, addressing the data gaps in monitoring SDG progress will be crucial for informed decision-making and ensuring that no one is left behind.

In conclusion, Pakistan's Parliament must remain steadfast in its commitment to the SDGs, recognizing the vital role it plays in ensuring sustainable development for current and future generations. Through collective action, robust legislation, and continued international cooperation, we can achieve the ambitious goals set forth in the 2030 Agenda and build a more prosperous, equitable, and resilient future for all Pakistanis.

Quick Facts

Summit of the Future 2024

Why the Summit Matters?

The world is not on track to meet its Global Goals, nor is it addressing new challenges and opportunities effectively. **Effective global cooperation** is critical to our survival but difficult to achieve in an atmosphere of mistrust, using **outdated multilateral structures** that no longer keep up with a rapidly changing world nor reflect today's political and economic realities. The Summit of the Future is a chance to **get back on track**.

What is the Pact for the Future?

The Pact for the Future is an action-oriented document that will be negotiated and endorsed by countries in the lead-up to and during the Summit in September 2024. The Pact contains proposals on five key themes described on the right. The Pact places strong attention to **human rights, poverty, and gender** in all chapters and includes annexes on the **Global Digital Compact** and a **Declaration on Future Generations**.

What is the Summit of the Future About?

The aim of the Summit is twofold:

- **accelerate** efforts to meet our existing international commitments, and
- take concrete steps to **respond to emerging challenges and opportunities**.

The result will be a world – and an international system – that is better prepared to manage the challenges we face now and, in the future, for the sake of all humanity and for future generations.



Pact for the Future Key Themes

Sustainable Development and Financing for Development

- Scaled implementation of the **2030 Agenda**
- Invest in people with the goal to **leave no one behind**
- Step-change in **financing for SDGs**
- Accelerated efforts on **climate and the environment** including increased mitigation and adaptation and financing

International Peace and Security

- Updated collective security systems to prevent and resolve conflicts in **both traditional and new domains**
- Increased national **whole-of-society** prevention efforts
- Better **protection of civilians** in armed conflict and accountability for atrocity crimes and violations
- Scaled-up **humanitarian assistance**
- Revitalised disarmament and arms control efforts
- Realistic and responsible use of **peace operations**
- Implementation of commitments on **women and peace and security**
- More effective and preventative **counter-terrorism** efforts
- Avoidance and mitigation of weaponization of **emerging domains and technologies**

Science, Technology and Innovation, and Digital Cooperation

- **Reduced global and gender disparities** in capacity and access to technology
- Increased use of **science in policymaking**
- A **Global Digital Compact** to harness opportunities and manage the risks of digital technologies

Youth and Future Generations

- Expanded and strengthened **youth participation in global decision-making**
- **Safeguarding interests of future generations** through commitments and means of implementation enshrined in a **Declaration on Future Generations**

Transforming Global Governance

- A **Security Council** with an updated composition and working methods
- A revitalized **General Assembly**
- A stronger **UN Economic and Social Council** and steps towards a revitalized Commission on the Status of Women
- Strengthened **Peacebuilding Commission**
- A strengthened UN human rights pillar that is better resourced and coordinated
- Deepened **partnerships** between the UN and other stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, regional organizations, national parliaments, and local authorities.
- Advanced efforts to develop measures of progress on sustainable development **beyond GDP**
- **International financial architecture** that works for everyone and reflects the economic needs and political realities of today
- Improved **governance of space** sustainability aspects
- Protocols for a time-bound whole-of-system **Emergency Platform**

Sources: United Nations, Summit of the Future, 2024. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/about>
 United Nations (2024) Summit of the Future 2024: What Will it Deliver? At: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-summit-of-the-future-what-would-it-deliver.pdf>

Sustainable Development Goals Tracker

Global, Regional, and National Trends

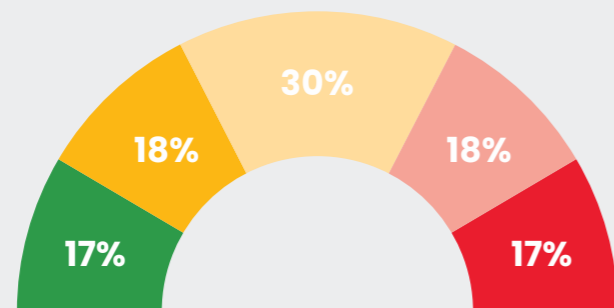
Global SDG Dashboard and Trends 2024

Only 17 percent of the SDG targets are on track. There is low to moderate progress for nearly half of the SDGs, and progress on over one-third of the SDGs has either stalled or regressed. Major shortfalls in progress for SDG 5: Gender Inequality, SDG 13: Climate Action, and SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions have been identified.



Major challenges: 1, 5, 13, 16
 Significant challenges: 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17
 Challenges remain: 3, 6, 10, 11, 12
 SDG achieved: 13
 Data not available: 10, 11, 12

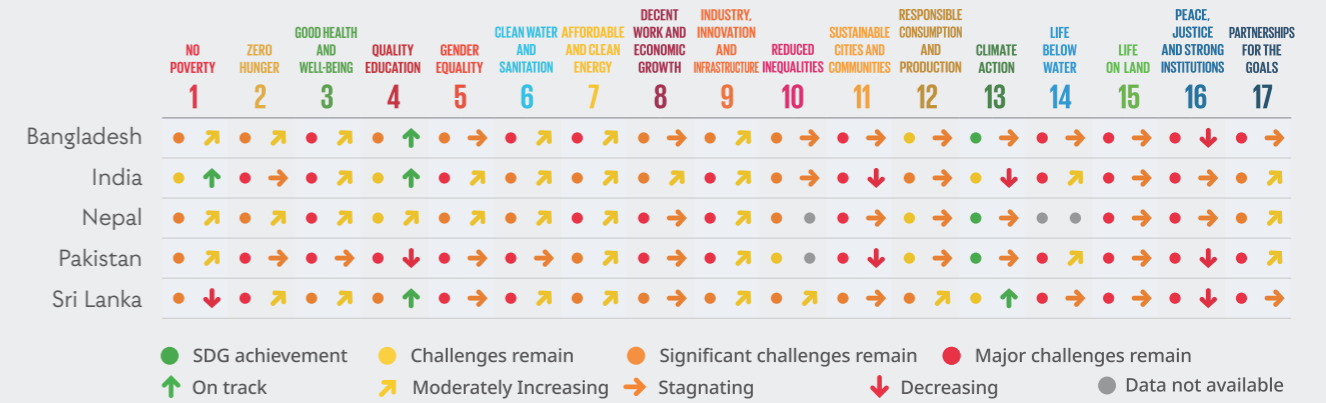
Overall progress across targets based on 2015-2024 global aggregate data



On track or target met (17%), Moderate progress (18%), Marginal progress (30%), Stagnating (18%), Regression (17%)

Sources: UNDP, 'The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024', 2024. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>
 UNDP, 'The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024', 2024. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2024/sustainable-development-report-2024.pdf>
 UNDP, 'Integrated SDG Insights Pakistan, SDG Push Insight Report', 2023. <https://sdgpush-insights.undp.org/reports/pak>

SDG Dashboards and Trends for South Asia 2024



Pakistan SDG Dashboard and Trends 2024

The SDG progress data for Pakistan shows that the country is on track to achieve only 35 out of 169 SDG targets. All five of the overarching SDG themes remain far from achievement, with partial progress on People (15%), Planet (17%), Prosperity (27%), Peace (8%), and Partnership (37%).

SDG Index Rank

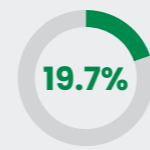
133/166

SDG Index Score

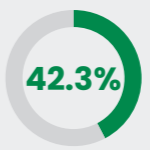


SDG achieved: 13
 Challenges remain: 10, 11, 12
 Significant challenges remain: 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17
 Major challenges remain: 1, 5, 13, 16
 Information unavailable: 10, 11, 12

SDG Targets Achieved or on Track



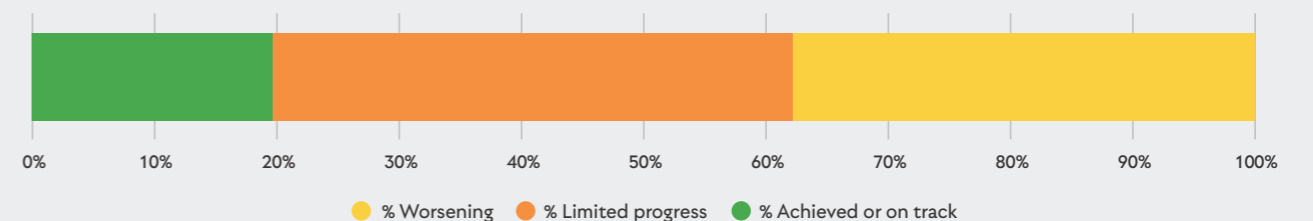
SDG Targets Limited Progress



SDG Targets Worsening



Status of SDG targets for Pakistan (% trend indicators)



Transforming Global Governance Prospects for Pakistan

While navigating years of international and regional geo-political tensions and contests, Pakistan carries both experience and respect within global governance platforms. Its policy commitment for the Summit of the Future's agenda is a continuation of its traditional foreign policy that is built on the pillars of multilateralism and diplomacy. Pakistan recognizes the U.N. as a core expression and pillar of a rules-based international system.



Ammara Durrani
Assistant Resident Representative
UNDP Pakistan



Muhammad Oves Anwar
Director Research
Research Society of International Law, Pakistan



Photo: UN Photo/ Christopher Herwig



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FOR YOUR SERVICE AND SACRIFICE



peacekeeping.un.org/service #ServingForPeace

Pakistan's national brand as a strong country representing the Global South has become vulnerable because of a downward country profile with low socio-economic and human development indicators.

The Summit of the Future 2024 is the highlight of the United Nations General Assembly's 79th session. It comes at a time of immense challenges to the international framework. The erosion of key principles that have historically upheld multilateralism is palpable, with international law being a particular victim. This degradation has led to a diminishing respect for the protections that international legal frameworks afford to individuals, be it through the weakening of the global human rights regime or the alarming disregard for civilian protections in armed conflict, as enshrined in humanitarian law.

Ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan exemplify these disturbing trends. The paralysis of the Security Council, driven by entrenched bloc politics, has exacerbated these crises, allowing for some of the gravest atrocities of the 21st century to occur unchecked. It is largely the Global South that bears the brunt of these failures. Without the guarantees of international norms such as the U.N. Charter, the International Bill of Rights, or the Geneva Conventions, neither state, nor citizen, nor soldier is secure.

On September 10th, Pakistan Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif made a video statement in a virtual live event titled "Summit of the Future Global Call": "Today, in times of unprecedented global challenges and escalating conflicts, we are at risk of permanently damaging the notion of 'we'. A collective 'we' requires a degree of equality and justice."

Legacy of a strong multilateral experience

Pakistan is the world's fifth most populous and militarily



Pakistan Foreign Office Spokesperson Ambassador Mumtaz Zahra Baloch

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powerful country that gained hard-won independence from colonialism in 1947. The country came into being not long after the U.N.'s formation in 1945, which gave a war-torn world a new international order based on human rights, justice, peace, and cooperation that has continued over centurial transition.

At the U.N., Pakistan holds the status of representing a very important voice for the Global South. It is currently serving its 11th elected term in the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), having also held the presidency. As a founding member of the G-77 and China, Pakistan has led it four times. Pakistan is a leading contributor to the U.N. peacekeeping forces and missions. In January 2025, the country will begin its 8th term as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council.

Pakistan has had no dearth of credentials in other global and regional multilateral forums such as the Commonwealth, SEATO, CENTO, NATO, SAARC, OIC, SCO, ECO, WTO, and Interpol. It is also a member of international financial institutions, such as the IMF, World Bank, ADB, IsDB, and AIIB. In November 2023, Pakistan formally applied for the membership of BRICs, a group representing nearly half the world's population, accounting for 30 per cent of the global GDP, and having 50 per cent of the world's oil and gas producers as its members.

While navigating years of international and regional geopolitical tensions and conflicts, Pakistan carries both experience and respect within global governance platforms. Its policy commitment for the Summit's agenda is, in fact, a continuation of its traditional foreign policy built on the pillars of multilateralism and diplomacy, and recognizing the U.N. as a core expression and pillar of a rules-based international system.

In the Summit's preparatory meetings held this year, Pakistan officially called for a "comprehensive reform of the international financial, trade, and technology architecture...necessary to ease the suffering of a billion people in the Global South, and achieve the [SDGs]." Based on years of excellent technical work done with allied countries and a principled position on the question of U.N. Reforms, Pakistan's diplomatic posture for the Summit is well-cut and articulated. These are critically required levers for effective multilateral diplomacy and leadership that Pakistan aspires for in rhetoric. However, the country is also facing particularly intense internal political and economic challenges that pose reputational risks and can undermine its hard-won international successes.



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Weak national indicators undermine international credibility and gains

Pakistan's national brand as a strong country representing the Global South has become vulnerable because of a downward profile with low socio-economic and human development indicators. Ranked at a 'low' 164 out of 193 countries on the 2023/2024 Human Development Index (HDI), and with 40 per cent of the population living below the poverty line since the 2022 floods, Pakistan has slipped from middle- to low-income country status.

Burdened by a mismanaged population explosion, the country is experiencing a protracted cycle of domestic political uncertainty, resurgent terrorism, a debt-distressed economy, growing urban-rural and digital inequalities, increasing climatic disasters, and shrinking civil rights, gender parity, and inclusion metrics. Years of shouldering the twin burden (refugees and terrorism) of war in neighboring Afghanistan has caused a geo-political fatigue. Absence of a thriving regional trade, high cost of living, low productivity, lack of investors' interest coupled with negative growth has eroded space and agency for economic dynamism. Pakistan has become permanently dependent on the IMF, multilateral banks, and lending countries just to maintain its fiscal solvency.

A crumbling educational and vocational skills system combined with a largely unharnessed youth bulge has left Pakistan in a state where it lacks the number and quality of trained human capital necessary to confidently swim

competitive international economic, financial, and political waters. Pakistan's outreach and influence in global politics and economy is undermined because of a state of economic disorder, governance incapacities, weak rule of law, and an unfulfilled young population at home. A 2023 World Bank study recorded Pakistan's Human Capital Index value lower than the South Asian average and more comparable to those in Sub-Saharan Africa: "Low human capital development could limit the realisation of [Pakistan's] ambition to become an upper-middle-income country by 2047. Human capital makes up 61 per cent of Pakistan's wealth, yet its levels of human capital are among the world's lowest."

Any country's richly experienced voice and influence on the multilateral stage is as good as its national content and weight behind it. Multilateral lobbying and negotiation on issues that are important for the Global South are being led by more stable and economically stronger countries, such as China, India, and emerging market-economies in East Asia and Latin America. Instances of multilateral influence are also coming from MENA and African countries, as well as the Small Island States.

Pakistan needs to study the internal policies and patterns of these new leaders of the Global South. These countries are burnishing their international credentials by building better national data-sets on economic and human development as well as investing in marketable national successes that are smartly aligned with global public intelligence, goods, and services.

Unlike the previous century when power was still located in geo-political and military might, measures of nation-state power and abilities have changed rapidly in the post-Pandemic, demographically altered, climate-impacted, and 5G-AI driven 21st century.

Unlike the previous century when power was still located in geo-political and military might, measures of nation-state power and abilities have changed rapidly in the post-Pandemic, demographically altered, climate-impacted, and 5G-AI driven 21st century. At the multilateral tables of today, countries are judged and engaged not for their military arsenals but for what they bring in real terms of green growth, innovation, sustainable development, actualized socio-cultural and human capital, pluralist political order, and transnational cooperation.

Progressive national action needs alignment with global goals

The inadequacies, disappointments, and failures of the existing multilateral system are the collective responsibility of all countries. The inherent inequalities between countries, on the one hand, and the Westphalian Nation-State's persistent behaviour of using aggression whenever it can on the other, exposes the dark chasm between Wilsonian ideals enshrined in the U.N. Charter and realpolitik.



Above all is the emergence of a global 'permacrisis' of mass displacements and migrations caused by wars and planetary changes, new diseases and pandemics, growing food and water insecurities, irreversible global inflation, destructive technologies, and an archaic but arrogant international financial architecture unable to cope with these shocks. UNDP's Human Development Report 2023/2024 best sums it up: "The human toll of mismanaged interdependence is huge – in lives lost or uprooted, in opportunities forgone, in feelings of despair. Aggression, conflict and violence are extreme realities when complex webs of interdependence

fester, especially against backdrops of prolonged power imbalances."

Following the 2022 floods, Pakistan's stellar climate justice diplomacy for climate vulnerable countries (Loss and Damage Fund at COP 28) is an example of multilateralism done well. It reminds us of the country's similar episodic successes achieved during the fight against terrorism, institutionalizing international consensus against Islamophobia, advancing international law to protect the right of self-determination, and facilitating world peace by bringing old adversaries together. But somehow, these achievements have not crystalized into durable dividends and processes for structural change that the country aspires for at home and abroad.

We see sporadic flashes of latent international leadership, but the 'potential' of Pakistan still remains unactualized. As the country prepares to convene with the international community at the Summit of the Future, it is also faced with a unique internal opportunity: a reimagining and alignment of a strong national future with international aspirations to impact transformative multilateralism. The key will be adopting and practising at home an unequivocally principled pro-people leadership backed by technical prowess and first-class governance and economic management abilities.

The 2024 elections followed by hard-won economic stabilization through a revived IMF program have brought Pakistan to a point of collective realization that the only way forward is surgical reforms quickly and effectively undertaken in key governance and economic sectors. Pakistan's policy commitment and advocacy demonstrates clarity on the necessity and substance of these reforms. But a smartly designed political and implementation approach to reforms also needs to be set in equal measure for actual success.

The below prioritized policy recommendations offer a strategic window of opportunity to align Pakistan's national needs and aspirations with the Summit's five key areas as well as emerging global trajectories:

- Back the climate and development financing narrative diplomacy with technically sound, data-evidenced and investment ready proposals. Bankable projects should clearly meet global SDGs and ESG benchmarks and offer innovative public-private partnerships.
- Let the private sector co-lead, and co-present with the government on multilateral platforms. They can win the



economic, financial, and innovation game for Pakistan, while also committing to the country's sustainability and human development agenda.

- Plug the national and international financial reforms debate and processes with highly competent and professional talent. Top and strategically important recruitments should bring market and policy experience, even if the talent is not from government service. This should include appointing outstanding professionals to chairships and country positions in IFIs boards, multilateral fora, international universities, and national financial and economic knowledge and policy institutions. Hire the right women and men for the right job.
- Create a new generation of policy leaders who are well versed in international law, global finance, and sustainable human development knowledge and practice. The current public service recruitment, training, and career growth processes and structures need an urgent and definitive reboot in this direction.
- Make it illegal to constitute any national or sub-national public or private committee, council, or body without 50 per cent of membership comprising of women at the table. Focus on the sectors of economic, financial, climate, social services, devolution of power, legislative governance, and national security and defence.
- Make national and international finance and private capital subject and accountable to law and public scrutiny. Coerce SDG and climate investments from international and national lenders as well as private capital – especially private banks -- in lieu of their fat interests and profits.

- Establish and ensure unhindered and unfettered access to and use of digital technology for all peoples of Pakistan. Fully harness digitalization's dividends for national development and global interoperability.
- Enrich, power and legitimize Pakistan's multilateral advocacy, lobbying, and action by partnering with national and international civil society organizations and thought leaders. The agenda of transformative multilateralism is too important to be left only to be managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Ensure parliamentary and public knowledge, information, and oversight for every international treaty, obligation, agreement signed for Pakistan.
- Reaffirm the commitment to human rights and civilian protections both domestically and internationally through enhanced detection and accountability mechanisms.
- Establish unhindered and inclusive corridors of regional dialogue and cooperation with all neighbors -- both immediate and distant -- in areas of climate change, green growth, culture, knowledge and education, digitalization and innovation, and gender and youth empowerment.

The Summit of the Future presents an opportunity to reaffirm our collective commitment to multilateralism's foundational ideals. It is a chance to reassert the primacy of international law as a shield for the weak and a safeguard for global peace and security. Pakistan has another chance to position itself as a strong and effective leader of a reformed global governance architecture – as long as its own house, economy, and human capital are well and thriving.

Civil Society Voices for the Summit of the Future

By Development Policy Team, UNDP Pakistan

The UN Summit of the Future 2024 on 22-23 September 2024 represents a critical milestone in global governance, gathering world leaders to chart a course towards a better present and a safeguarded future. It will be preceded by Action Days (20-21 September) that bring together civil society, youth, academia, the private sector, and others to focus on 'multistakeholder partnerships and action paving a way towards the next chapter of multilateralism that is more inclusive and networked.' In the same spirit, the United Nations Country Team in Pakistan engaged with a group of civil society partners on 12 and 13 September 2024 to examine current development strategies but also to ignite meaningful dialogue and shape a vision for the future.

A Collaborative, Networked Approach to Global Challenges

The consultation was facilitated by Samuel Rizk, Resident Representative of UNDP Pakistan, Van Nguyen, Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP, and Afke Bootsman, Head of the Resident Coordinator's Office in Pakistan. Reflecting on the challenging global development landscape during which the summit is taking place, the conversation aimed at harnessing collective experience for a more peaceful, equitable and sustainable future in Pakistan and the role of civil society actors. Opening the floor for discussion, Dr. Samuel Rizk said:

"Against the backdrop of tremendous global challenges and a multilateralism in crisis, the Summit of the Future nevertheless offers an opportunity for reviving multilateralism and a renewed hope for global cooperation."

Key Takeaways from the Consultations

1. Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) and Digital Cooperation

The session on STI and Digital Cooperation highlighted the critical need to bridge Pakistan's digital divide. Participants identified major obstacles, such as low enrollment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, insufficient investment in research and development, and weak intellectual property protection, with the added risk of brain drain further undermining the country's potential for innovation. Global concerns such as the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in warfare and the need for international regulations to mitigate its risks were highlighted as important considerations that need to be urgently addressed. To empower innovation, participants recommended policy reforms, public-private partnerships, and improved digital infrastructure, while stressing the importance of closing the digital gap between the Global North and the Global South.

"Digitization and technological infrastructure need to be revised and adapted for developing countries."

- Sumaira Malik, UNESCO

2. International Peace and Security

Discussions on international peace and security underscored the importance of multilateral cooperation over unilateral actions, especially in combating violent extremism. Civil society representatives called for reforms to the UN Security Council to ensure representation from the Global South, which would improve its ability to maintain peace and address emerging threats. Other key discussion points



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in the session included Pakistan's rich cultural diversity as a strength to promote peace along with the importance of empowering women as mediators and peacebuilders, addressing cultural barriers that often hinder their involvement in conflict resolution.

"Without peace, development is not possible."

- Raza Shah Khan, Sustainable Peace, and Development Organization (SPADO)

3. Sustainable Development and Financing

Pakistan's challenges in closing its SDG financing gap were at the forefront of this conversation. The country faces a staggering financing gap of USD 348 billion that must be met by 2030. The challenges in narrowing this gap include slow economic growth, high inflation, and limited fiscal space. Bold economic reforms, investments in renewable energy, healthcare, and transport, and innovative financial instruments to mobilize climate and SDG-aligned funding were deemed essential reforms. There was a strong consensus on reimagining international financial structures to give developing nations like Pakistan the fiscal freedom they need to meet their development and climate goals. The session concluded with a global commitment to people-first economic reforms and inclusive growth to eradicate poverty.

"Reforming the global financial architecture, enhancing inclusivity within the SDGs, and ensuring affordable, equitable access to technology are crucial for the success of the Summit of the Future."

- Dr. Sajid Amin, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)

4. Transforming Global Governance

The urgent need to transform global governance to tackle today's most pressing challenges, from climate change to economic inequality, was recognized as a pivotal step toward a more equitable global model of governance. The in-



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creasing threats faced by civil society, marginalized communities, and human rights defenders, advocating for stronger protections and greater transparency in governance structures was among the major topics discussed in the context of governance. The call to action sought to rebuild trust between global powers, strengthen international cooperation, and protect the freedom of expression and civic engagement worldwide.

"Information asymmetry between the Global North and the Global South is a major obstacle to effectively addressing transnational crime and terrorism."

- Noor Fatima, Research Society of International Law (RISL)



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5. Youth and Future Generations

Empowering youth emerged as a central theme. Enhancing the decision-making capacity of young people, especially young women and girls, to address global challenges was highlighted as a crucial component of this theme. Education, innovation hubs, and international partnerships were proposed as key enablers of youth-led solutions to climate change, technology, and social conflicts. Participants stressed that a peaceful environment is a prerequisite for youth empowerment, with access to health, education, and economic opportunities being vital for progress. Addressing youth radicalization was also deemed critical, with participants emphasizing the need to engage young people in constructive and inclusive platforms to prevent future conflicts.

"Youth are their own best advocates, providing unique and compelling perspectives."

-Osama Ahmed Gillani - Mapalytics

The Islamabad Declaration: A Call for Action with a Vision for Tomorrow

The two-day consultative process culminated in the Islamabad Declaration, a collective call for action summarizing the key takeaways.

Van Nguyen, Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP,

concluded the event by stressing the importance of making "difficult choices aimed at actionable goals to achieve desired results."

The consultations in Pakistan had a clear message leading up to The Summit of the Future 2024; **the future is not waiting—it is ours to shape.**

UNRCO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNOCHA, IFAD, ILO, UNESCO

The following CSOs were consulted by the UN Country Team Pakistan:

T

- Hashoo Foundation
- Idara e Taleem o Agahi
- Aahung
- Employers Federation of Pakistan
- Pakistan Workers Federation
- Pakistan Alliance for Math and Science
- Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA)
- Mapalytics
- Indus Cultural Forum
- Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)
- Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)
- PRIME
- Research Society of International Law
- Sustainable Peace and Development Organization (SPADO)



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Digital Human Development in Pakistan

Key findings from the recently launched UNDP National Human Development Report 2023/2024: *Doing Digital for Development: Access, Adopt, Anticipate, Accelerate*

Leveraging digital transformation is Pakistan's fastest route to human development.



Almost half of Pakistan's districts have low digital development rankings.



Digital development in Pakistan's richest quintile is fifteen times greater than that in the poorest quintile.



83.5% of women report that their spouse or parents dictate their phone ownership.

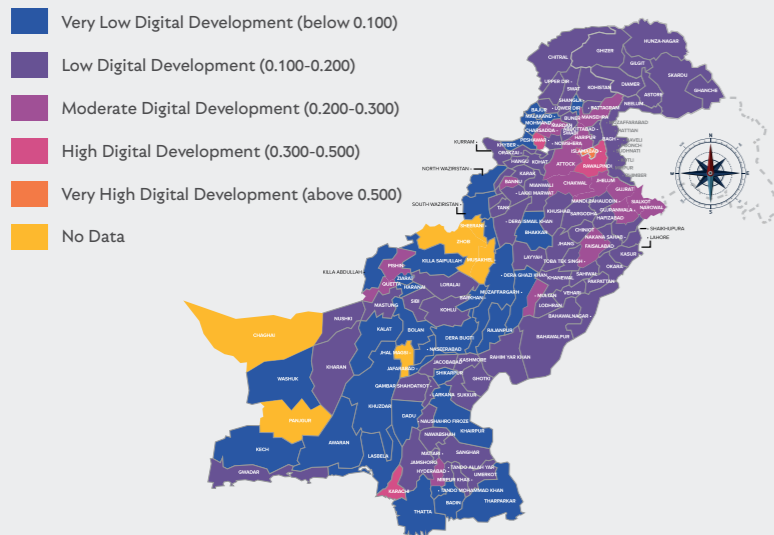


There is a strong correlation between districts that perform better on digital transformation and those that have higher human development outcomes.



Mobile wallets are a gamechanger for women. 61% of women report that mobile wallets were their primary bank account, of whom 30% used it at least once a week.

Digital Development Index*



130M
Broadband
127M are mobile broadband users



1%
Fixed broadband penetration
Lower than South Asian countries



43%
Mobile broadband penetration
Significant in Pakistan



84.6%
Teledensity
Increasing mobile connectivity

* The NHDR 2023/2024 team applied the Human Development Index methodology to formulate a first-ever national district-level Digital Development Index (DDI) measuring all districts' digital profile using national data sources. The DDI is structured on the NHDR 2023/2024's core normative framework of the four As of Access, Adopt, Anticipate, and Accelerate.



Unlocking Pakistan's Knowledge Economy Through STEM Education

Pakistan can accelerate its path towards a knowledge-based economy thanks to its growing young population. The government and donors must take the opportunity of its demographic dividend now and come together to invest in STEM education.



By
Abdullah Fadil
UNICEF Representative in
Pakistan

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education is at the heart of industries driving global economic growth from artificial intelligence and biotechnology to aerospace and renewable energy. According to an estimate by the Pakistan Science Foundation,¹ 75 percent of jobs in the fastest growing industries require workers with STEM skills.

STEM education equips young people with not only highly demanded technical knowledge such as data analytics but also essential soft skills including critical thinking and problem-solving. A robust STEM talent pool is critical for Pakistan's global market competitiveness and to create high-quality jobs for its youth at home.

Pakistan can accelerate its path towards a knowledge-based economy

through its growing young population. According to the 2023 Population Census, 18 percent of the country's population - approximately 44 million people - are between the ages of 15 and 24.² Therefore, the government and development partners must come together to invest in STEM education.

Pakistan ranked 164 out of 193 countries on the global Human Development Index.³ Over 26 million children are out of school, one of the highest numbers in the world.⁴ Even when children attend school, 77 percent of them cannot read and understand a simple text by the age of 10.⁵ A 2020 study by Generation Unlimited showed that 32 million children and youth aged between 10-24-year-olds in Pakistan were not in education, employment or training (NEET), with girls more likely to be left behind than boys.⁶

1. Pakistan Science Foundation, STEM, <https://psf.gov.pk/stem.aspx>
 2. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, '7th Population and Housing Census', 2023. https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2023/Key_Findings_Report.pdf
 3. UNDP, 'Human Development Report 2023/2024' 2024. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2023-24reporten.pdf>
 4. Pakistan Institute of Education, 'Pakistan Education Statistics 2021-22' 2024. <https://pie.gov.pk/SiteImage/Downloads/PES%202021-22%20reduced.pdf>
 5. World Bank and UNESCO, 'Pakistan Learning Poverty Brief', 2022. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099812207212211713/pdf/IDU0e0c38d0c0f77b04fa0a7ad0e2f4235d517a.pdf>



Over 26 million children are out of school, one of the highest numbers in the world. Even when children attend school, 77 percent of them cannot read and understand a simple text by the age of 10.

Pakistan's STEM education landscape is fraught with challenges. Current STEM education suffers from outdated curricula and a shortage of qualified teachers. In 2023, grade four students who sat in the National Achievement Test (NAT) achieved 49 percentage points on average in maths compared to 88 percentage points in foundation learning. For eighth graders, average Maths scores dropped further to 41 percentage points.⁷

Societal expectations often label STEM education as male-dominated, discouraging girls from participating. This gender stereotype is reinforced by the lack of female role models and mentors in STEM, perpetuating a cycle of under-representation. Among the 858,000 students enrolled in STEM education at the tertiary level, only 38 percent were female.⁸

Pakistan's digital divide is another obstacle for marginalized children and youth to access STEM education. Limited access to computers, high-speed internet and digital resources hinders students' ability to engage in STEM learning and research. According to the Digital Portal Reports on Pakistan⁹, internet penetration stands at 45 percent in 2024. While the rate has risen from 36 percent in 2022, more than half of the population still does not have access to the internet.¹⁰ Often children and youth who are out of school, living in remote areas, or enrolled in non-formal education do not have the chance to connect to the digital world, limiting their opportunities to acquire employable skills and decent work.

While actions have been taken to mainstream STEM in formal and non-formal education such as the Ministry of Federal



6. Generation Unlimited, 'Investing in Pakistan's Young People', 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/3311/file/Generation%20Unlimited%20-%20Investing%20in%20Pakistan%EF%BB%BF%E2%80%99%EF%BB%BFs%20Young%20People.pdf>

7. Pakistan Institute of Education, 'National Achievement Test', 2023, <https://pie.gov.pk/SiteImage/Downloads/NAT%202023%20Findings%20Report%2006.03.2024%20-Final-%20v6%20.pdf>

8. Pakistan Higher Education Commission (HEC), 'Annual Report 2022-23' 2023, [https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/HEDP/PublishingImages/Pages/Component-4/Annex%203%20HEDR%20Annual%20Report%20\(C4\).pdf](https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/HEDP/PublishingImages/Pages/Component-4/Annex%203%20HEDR%20Annual%20Report%20(C4).pdf)

9. Kepios, 'Digital in Pakistan', 2024. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-pakistan>

10. Kepios 'Digital in Pakistan', 2022. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-pakistan>



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STEM is perceived as male-dominated, discouraging girls from participating. The lack of female role models and mentors reinforce this stereotype, perpetuating a cycle of under-representation.

Education and Professional Training's national STEM and the English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) programme by the British Council with UNICEF, there is still a long way to go.

Greater investment in training and professional development for STEM teachers is urgently needed. This will enhance their curriculum development and pedagogical skills that are essential for quality STEM education. This will enable learners to practice community-based STEM projects and gain valuable experience.

It is equally important to facilitate interactive peer-to-peer learning in STEM programmes and build a supportive community to challenge societal norms and harmful attitudes towards girls in STEM. By spotlighting the achievements of Pakistani scientists and engineers, especially females, we can create role models who will inspire the next generation of youth to pursue STEM careers.

The government and private sector must increase investment in digital literacy programmes, particularly for women

and girls, and develop infrastructure in rural areas to increase access to digital learning, technology, and vital opportunities.

Finally, public-private partnerships can play a pivotal role in advancing STEM education in Pakistan. The government, private sector and civil society must collaborate to create a supportive ecosystem for STEM initiatives. With strong political leadership and an engaged civil society, the private sector can contribute knowledge, financial resources, and infrastructure, including technology and connectivity needed to bridge the digital divide. A well trained workforce with STEM skills can yield untold benefits for Pakistan's youth and economy.

Strengthening STEM education is not easy, but it is the smart thing to do. UNICEF is dedicated to this mission, creating equal opportunities for girls and boys to unleash their potential and contribute to technological leaps, innovation, and transformation for their country and beyond.

Innovation for Organizations of the Future

"Without innovation, there is no way we can overcome the challenges of our time."
 António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations.¹



By
Beenisch Tahir
 DAP Editor

With no country on track to meet its SDGs, the Summit of the Future asks, how can the international community accelerate impact and achieve its Global Goals? The nature of global challenges today such as the climate crises and the COVID-19 pandemic are complex, deeply interconnected and evolving at an unprecedented pace. The UN is calling for new thinking. The Summit argues that the UN, originally built for a world recovering from the World War, must reimagine itself to manage the uncertainty of today's challenges through international cooperation. As world leaders come together to endorse the Summit's commitments, UN agencies and development organizations must mainstream innovation into their programming.

There are several UN innovation programs exploring and testing transformative solutions for the SDGs. However, many innovation programs

continue to operate as stand-alone initiatives, this trend will need to change if we are to truly commit to the Summit's goals. Innovation must be at the strategic heart of programming. As organizations aim to become more innovative, they often conflate innovation with adopting new technology—this is not the case. It is important to have an innovation strategy so that there will be space to explore and test new technologies in the organization.

Innovation Does Not Mean Adopting New Technologies

The Stanford Business School, one of the pioneering schools on innovation, defines social innovation as, "the process of developing and deploying effective solutions to challenging and often systemic social and environmental issues in support of social progress. Solutions often require the active

To change business as usual, we must make innovation everyone's business.



1. Stanford Graduate School of Business, Defining Social Innovation, 2024. <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/experience/about/centers-institutes/csi/defining-social-innovation>

Social innovation is an organization’s toolkit to make sense of today’s global challenges and create transformative change, as envisioned by the SDGs.

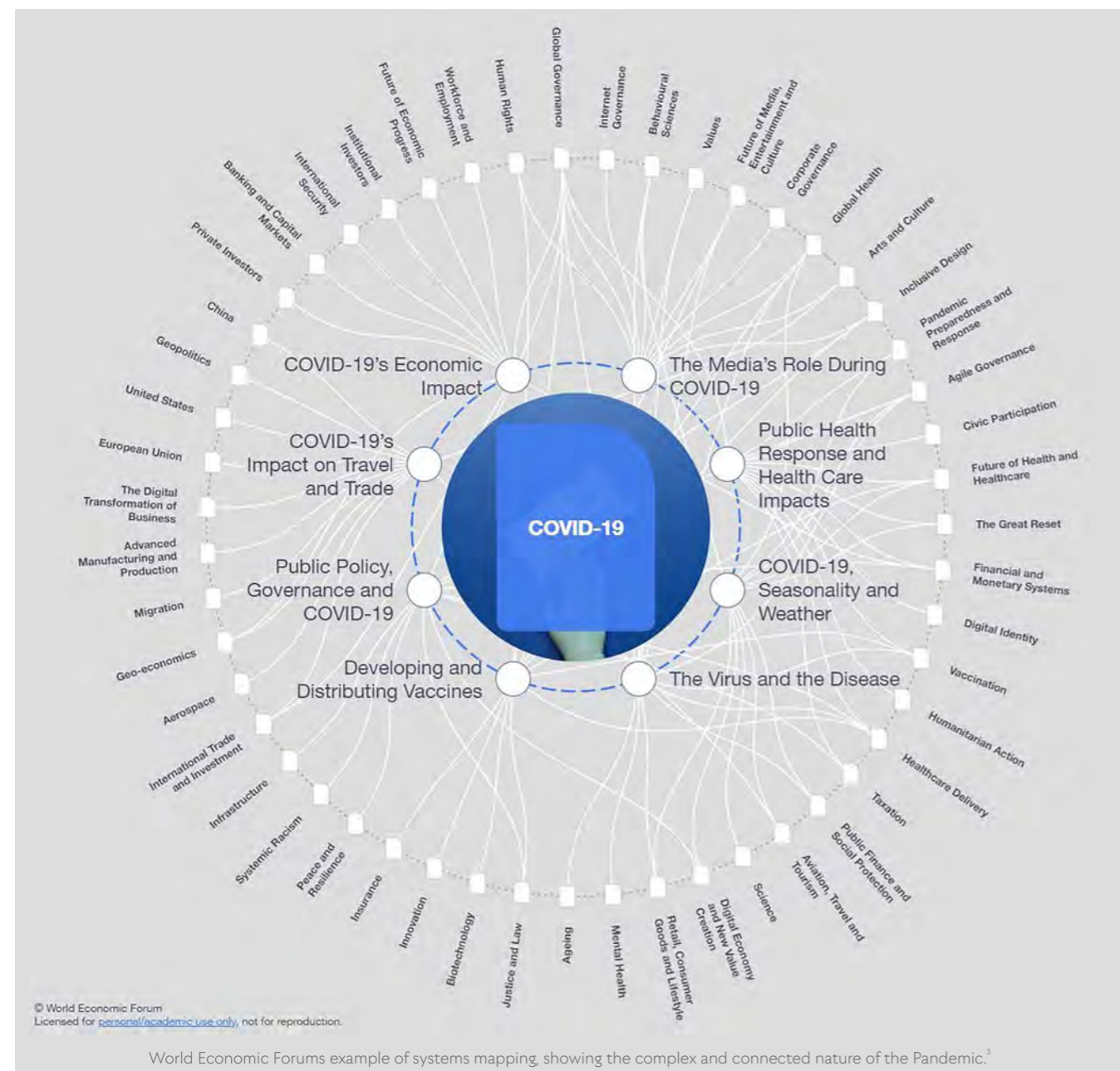
collaboration of constituents across government, business and the nonprofit world². Social innovation is an organization’s toolkit to make sense of today’s global challenges and create transformative change, as envisioned by the SDGs. These approaches are intensely collaborative, encouraging community, partners and several specialists to co-design programs together to ensure all voices and needs are addressed.

Therefore, to become an organization fit for the future, an

innovation strategy is essential. Below are three indicators to address while designing a strong innovation strategy and vision.

Big Picture Thinking

Moving away from reductionist thinking towards big picture thinking is the first step to manage nuance and ambiguity of global challenges today. Systems thinking does just that, it is an approach that views complex issues as parts of an overall



World Economic Forums example of systems mapping, showing the complex and connected nature of the Pandemic.³

2. World Economic Forum, Strategic Intelligence, 2021. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/what-systems-thinking-actually-means-and-why-it-matters-today/>
 3. UNDP, UNDP Signals Spotlight, 2024. <https://www.undp.org/future-development/publications/signals-spotlight-2024>

UNDP and the UN have set up foresight programmes aimed at imagining the unimaginable, by viewing emerging signals and trends that is followed by scenario planning.

system. Instead of focusing on individual components in isolation, systems thinking emphasizes the relationships, interconnections, and patterns that emerge when considering the whole system. All innovation teams from the World Food Program (WFP) Accelerator Lab, Unicef to UNDP’s innovation teams use systems thinking to reimagine issues and design innovative solutions –systems thinking is thus essential.

Imagining the Unimaginable

UNDP and the UN have set up foresight programs aimed at imagining the impossible by viewing emerging signals and trends that is followed by scenario planning. Strategy planning in its reductionist and linear thinking aims to make a bet on the most likely scenario, futures planning does the reverse. Using futures and foresight is not about predication but about identifying emerging trends, signals and imagining alternative solutions to make more effective policy decisions today. The UN Futures Lab, for instance, supports agencies to ‘embed’ foresight into strategy design and planning by working closely with country offices and senior leadership.

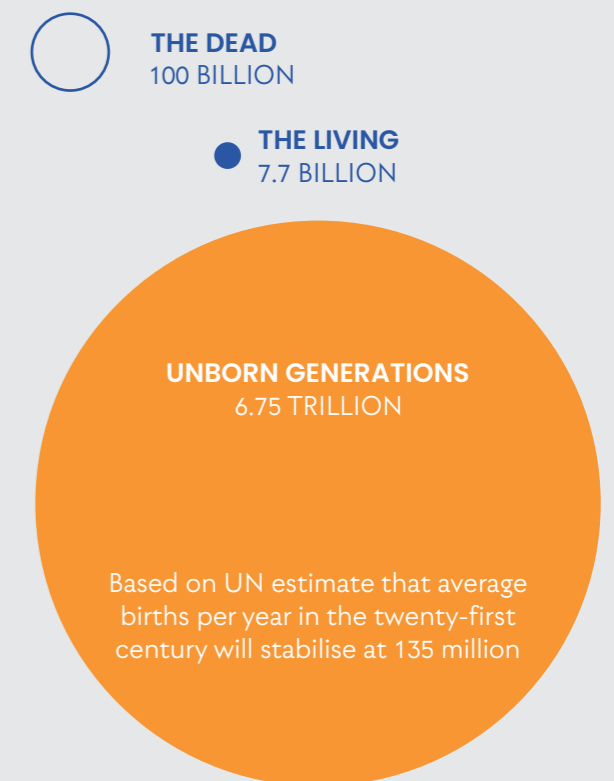
Experimentation

The government response to the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a good example of experimentation. There was no single solution to stopping the pandemic, it required multiple experts, testing several solutions from vaccine development to becoming remote, building solutions further to scale by failing fast and learning quickly. Similar principles apply to experimentation. Projects today must be interconnected rather than operating in silos, ensuring that each project has a compounding impact. When UNDP launched its Accelerator Labs in 110 countries, it created the position of Head of Experimentation to translate the concept of running experiments and scaling them in the UN. They have developed several toolkits after testing at the frontlines and learning valuable lessons in translation of these approaches within the UN and taking several experiments to scale.

It is important to recognize that a good innovation strategy alone is insufficient. People are important to the success of the strategy. For example, buy-in by leadership and its staff, along with building staff capacity and confidence in doing innovation and creating incentives for taking major risks are important to successful innovation mainstreaming. This is

THE SCALE OF UNBORN GENERATIONS

Looking 50,000 years into the past and 50,000 into the future - assuming that the twenty-first century’s birth rate remains constant - all human lives ever lived are far outweighed by all those yet to come.



From *The Good Ancestor: How to Think Long Term in a Short-Term World* by Roman Krznaric

Graphic design by Nigel Hawtin. Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND

because the spirit of an innovation strategy is to get comfortable with ambiguity and this must be an organization-wide effort, applied to programming and revising operational processes to accommodate new visions.

Simply, to change business as usual, we must make innovation everyone’s business.

Pakistan's Innovation Ecosystem Needs More Investment

The emergence of incubators and accelerators in Pakistan marked a shift towards innovation. However, there have also been several missed opportunities.



By
Jehan Ara
Founder & CEO
Katalyst Labs

The Summit of the Future is calling for countries to make commitments for increased access to innovation, technology and scientific knowledge to close the gap in achieving our Global Goals. In today's world where developments in technology and innovation move fast, it is critical that governments create significant space for innovation, and Pakistan is no exception.

Pakistan has made significant investments in innovation. The emergence of incubators and accelerators marked a shift towards innovation, beginning with the establishment of the NUST Incubation Center and Plan 9, an initiative of the Punjab government. The board of Plan 9 comprised prominent Pakistani entrepreneurs who contributed their time and expertise. Subsequently, the LUMS Centre for Entrepreneurship Lahore and The Nest I/O Incubation Center in Karachi, set up by P@SHA in collaboration with Google, Samsung, and the US State Department, accelerated interest in entrepreneurship amongst young people. This was followed by the Government of Pakistan setting up

multiple incubation centres across several cities through investment from Ignite. Ignite is funded by fixed-line operators, cellular operators and data service providers, funding startups and innovative projects that apply new technologies to solve Pakistan's development problems. Ignite funds have targeted projects and startups that are finding innovative solutions to some of Pakistan's biggest challenges in health, education, energy, agriculture, telecom, finance and climate tech. Ignite has also launched a programme to prepare one million people for the future of work.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan is an independent, autonomous, and constitutionally established public sector institution of primary funding, overseeing, regulating, and accrediting the higher education efforts in Pakistan. In recent times, the HEC has instructed all public sector universities in the country to set up incubation sectors to encourage research-driven entrepreneurship in all parts of the country. Although this has been a slow process in some cities, due to the lack of qualified personnel to

PatientFirst.AI, a groundbreaking healthcare startup from Pakistan, has emerged victorious in a prestigious Harvard University competition, securing a USD75,000 prize for its innovative electronic health record platform.



The country is enjoying a thriving startup ecosystem despite the challenging economic conditions in the country.

drive and run these centres effectively, it is progressing and should pick up speed over time. The HEC has also started to provide grants to young people with impactful ideas through a competitive process.

In recent years, Pakistan has made notable strides in several areas related to strategic investment in science, technology and innovation. The country has witnessed growth in the IT and telecommunications sectors with the emergence of services in digital banking, mobile wallets, and fintech solutions. The country is also enjoying a thriving startup ecosystem despite the challenging economic conditions in the country. The establishment of technology parks, incubators, and accelerators such as the National Incubation Center, Plan9, Plan X, Katalyst Labs and Invest2Innovate have provided platforms for entrepreneurs to transform their ideas into businesses and to connect with local and international investors.

However, the country has also faced several missed opportu-

nities. Investment in research and development (R&D) remains significantly lower than the global average, hindering innovation and technological advancement. The digital divide, particularly between urban and rural areas, limits benefits of digital technologies. The lack of well-defined national policies supporting the growth of the startup ecosystem and collaboration between academia, industry, and government has also slowed progress.

To achieve the SDGs in Pakistan, bold and strategic actions are imperative. Increased investment in R&D and robust digital infrastructure will ensure access to high-speed, uninterrupted internet nationwide. Recent restrictions, such as firewalls that slow down internet speeds or cause total inaccessibility, have posed significant challenges for businesses and freelancers and should be avoided.

Although there is increased emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) education in private educational institutions, strengthening STEM



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Innovation requires a multi-faceted approach including, providing access to finance for startups, creating a supportive regulatory framework and collaboration with academia, industry, and government.

education at all levels and especially in public sector institutions across the country is vital for building a knowledgeable workforce capable of driving innovation. Capacity-building training programmes and continuous skill development initiatives can enable Pakistanis with the necessary skills to thrive in a digital economy. Several such initiatives have already been launched by both the private sector and the government.

Creating a conducive environment for innovation requires a multi-faceted approach, including providing access to finance for startups and creating a supportive regulatory framework. Collaboration between academia, industry, and the government should be encouraged.

Investing in green technologies and sustainable practices can address environmental challenges while promoting economic growth. Innovations in renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture can contribute significantly to achieving the SDGs. Entrepreneurs working in

these spaces need a lot more support. Usage of data and analytics can improve decision-making processes and policy formulation. Data-driven approaches can enhance the effectiveness of development programmes and ensure that resources are allocated efficiently.

Simplification of processes by the Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan and the State Bank of Pakistan as well as friendlier policies for both inward and outward investments have helped. Initiatives such as the cybercrime and money laundering legislation, formulation of a new AI policy, and the development of a Data Protection Bill are positive steps. However, these efforts must involve greater multistakeholder input to ensure that they are beneficial for businesses and the country.

Moving forward, the youth dividend presents a significant opportunity, but the right policies and concerted efforts are necessary to fully harness it for the nation's benefit.

IFIs Key Role in Bridging the Public and Private Sector

The private sector has the potential to stimulate exports worth USD 88 billion, increase foreign direct investment to USD 2.8 billion and generate 7 to 8 percent GDP growth in Pakistan.



By
Zeeshan Sheikh
Country Manager for Pakistan & Afghanistan, International Finance Corporation (IFC)

The Private Sector: A Key Engine for Sustainable Development in Pakistan

Over the past decade, Pakistan has struggled with low, volatile, consumption-driven growth, fiscal mismanagement and structural imbalances that have impeded its progress towards the SDGs. After years of decline, poverty levels have also started to rise again due to macroeconomic conditions and extreme climate events such as the 2022 floods. A human capital crisis persists as well, with stagnant learning outcomes and health challenges that limit the potential of the young population, while only 25 percent of women participate in the labour force, despite making up 50 percent of the population.¹

Amid these challenges, the private

sector in Pakistan is becoming increasingly recognized as essential for sustainable development. World Bank estimates suggest that the private sector could stimulate exports worth USD 88 billion, increase foreign direct investment (FDI) to USD 2.8 billion, and generate 7 to 8 percent GDP growth.² This is key to creating jobs, boosting productivity and innovation and improving the delivery of essential goods and services.

International Finance Institutions (IFIs): Fostering Impactful Partnerships for Sustainable Development

As part of the World Bank Group focusing on private sector led development, the aim of the IFC is to understand key development challenges and help bring public and private sector

1. World Bank Group Database: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLFC.ACT.FE.NE.ZS?locations=PK>
2. World Bank Group, 'Reforms for a Brighter Future: Policy Note 3: Transforming Pakistan's Private Sector', 2023



IFIs play a key role in bridging public and private interests as they allocate resources and risks in sectors and regions with the greatest need.

players together to deliver tangible results on the path towards sustainable and inclusive development.

Based on IFC's experience in Pakistan and beyond, there are multiple ways in which IFIs can help countries meet their development objectives with the support of public and private sector players:

- **IFIs can help create markets and crowd in private investment to enable scalable initiatives that address critical development challenges:** IFIs are adept at structuring and investing in first-of-its-kind pioneering projects that can be scaled up and replicated, while catalysing investment and innovation from multiple investors and partners. Given their global expertise, IFIs are also better positioned to take on risks that are otherwise challenging for commercial financiers. This is how IFC structured and financed several pioneering investments alongside development partners in Pakistan, resulting in many firsts for the country such as a wind independent power producer (IPP) program, liquefied natural gas (LNG) import terminal, non-food bulk cargo terminal, hydro IPP, mortgage refinance company and private utility company.
- **IFIs can leverage private expertise to support improved public service delivery:** Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are important tools to leverage private sector efficiency and innovation to improve public service delivery. IFIs play a key role in bridging public and private interests and capabilities to structure PPPs that effectively allocate resources and risk in sectors and regions with the greatest need. Given prevailing public sector constraints on healthcare delivery in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, IFC is collaborating with the provincial government to develop a PPP for a state-of-the-art hospital in Peshawar that can serve up to 150,000 patients annually. IFC is exploring similar PPP models in agri-storage, transport, power transmission and distribution and water utility sectors.
- **IFIs can help boost financial access to underserved segments of the economy, a critical prerequisite for inclusive growth:** By mobilizing an extensive network of financial institutions, IFIs can provide unmatched access to finance for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and other underserved segments. They do this by designing innovative products and complementary platforms that enhance the risk appetite of financial



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File: Asim Hafeez/Bloomberg

IFIs provide access to finance for micro, small and medium enterprises and those most in need, by designing innovative products and complementary platforms that enhance financial institutions' risk appetite to lend.

institutions to lend to those most in need or with the capacity to deliver proximity solutions to the economy. A recent example of this is IFC's partnership with Standard Chartered Bank in Pakistan to launch an innovative risk sharing facility designed to enhance access to finance and working capital to its clients, particularly MSMEs across various export value chains.

- **IFIs can help build capacity and set standards to support the development of local financial and capital markets:** IFIs bring a wealth of technical expertise and global know-how, which they use to build the capacity of local markets to better navigate complex emerging challenges such as climate adaptation and mitigation, environmental and social (E&S) risk management, gender inclusion and capital markets innovation. This is crucial for countries like Pakistan, which faces significant challenges in these areas and has limited capacity and capital market depth to address them. One of the ways that IFC has done this is through a project with the State Bank of Pakistan which helped redefine existing E&S risk management frameworks, guidelines, and tools of banks across the country in line with international standards.

The Way Forward: Inspiring Future Projects in Pakistan

There are several systemic barriers that continue to hinder the private sector's ability and effectiveness in driving sustainable development. These include low private investment and weak export performance due to policy distortions and inconsistency, resource misallocations limited access to finance for SMEs, regulatory bottlenecks and complexity that discourage foreign investment, and the excessive presence of state-owned enterprises. Here, too, IFIs must continue to drive collaborative and innovative solutions from both the public and private sectors towards the common goal of sustainable development.

What has been successfully delivered can be replicated, and what has been achieved can be scaled up. Together, we can effectively harness the private and public sectors in service of developing economies.

Private Sector Driving SDG Action

Pakistan's private sector has reached over 40 million people, creating jobs, supporting green technology, advancing education and investing in the most vulnerable groups.



By **M Abdul Aleem**
CE/Secretary General,
Overseas Investors Chamber of
Commerce & Industry

The private sector is an indispensable force for sustainable development. The sector creates sparks for innovation, improves productivity, boosts economic efficiency, creates jobs and growth, which are all critical factors to ending extreme poverty and boosting prosperity. Given Pakistan's volatile challenges and immense opportunities, the role of the private sector in achieving the SDGs is particularly vital.

Pakistan's private sector is at the forefront of innovation as corporations are continuously developing new technologies and business models to enhance productivity and economic efficiency. For example, Pakistan's initiative to produce its own hybrid electric vehicle (EV) industry is a significant step towards sustainable transportation, reducing carbon emissions and promoting innovative green technology.

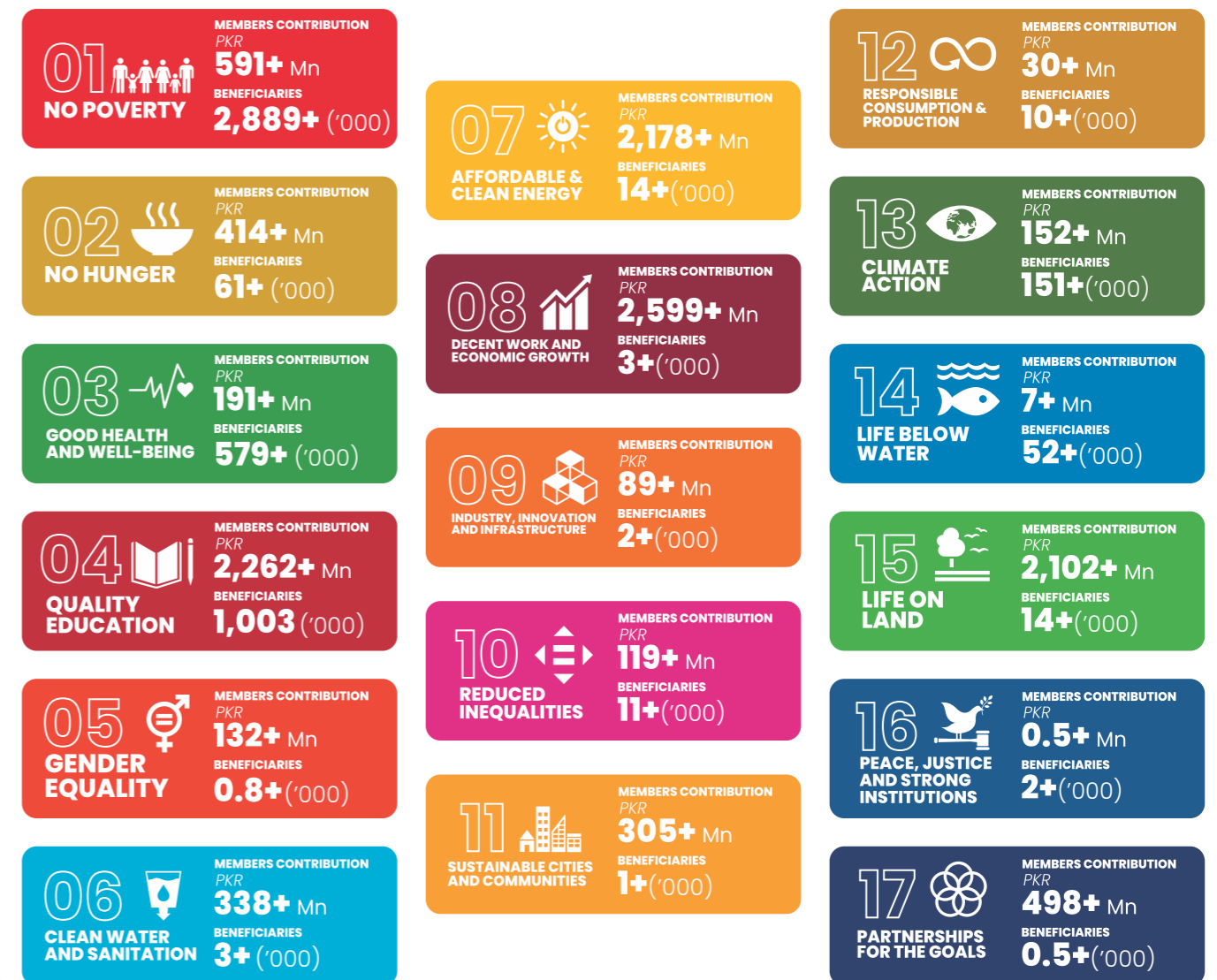
Pakistan's private sector is committed to reducing poverty and achieving Pakistan's SDGs. Foreign investors and Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce & Industry (OICCI) members have contributed nearly PKR 13 billion for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in the fiscal year of 2022/2023, according to the OICCI's CSR Report.¹ These initiatives have played a critical role in driving economic growth including job creation and providing opportunities for millions.

Climate change and enabling climate action has been a major focus for the private sector in Pakistan as it has adopted internationally accepted business disclosures and reporting frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards. The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has released draft guidelines on

OICCI members contribution

in respective UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Our members' contributions span across all 17 SDGs, notably towards **Quality Education, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Life on Land.**



1. Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI), Corporate Social Responsibility Report 2022-23. 2023. <https://www.oicci.org/app/media/2024/07/CSR-Report-2023.pdf>

Foreign investors and OICCI members have contributed nearly PKR 13 billion for Corporate Social Responsibility in 2022/2023.

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) disclosure, encouraging listed companies to enhance their ESG disclosures transparently on a voluntary basis.

The SDGs require transformative initiatives which are only possible through public-private partnerships and collaboration with other organisations. Initiatives such as renewable energy projects and smart city developments are prime examples where the private sector can drive significant change. Ensuring sustainability within supply chains is not only about a company's operations but also about holding suppliers accountable. This holistic approach ensures that sustainability practices spread through the entire supply chain, promoting long-term environmental stewardship.

Upskilling employees and providing an enabling environ-

ment fosters innovation and productivity, the private sector is also looking inward as it is supporting its employees by providing them education and capacity building. The CSR initiatives of OICCI members are a testament to the private sector's commitment to sustainable development. In the fiscal year 2022/2023, these efforts benefited over 40 million individuals nationwide with significant contributions towards Quality Education (SDG 4), Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), and Life on Land (SDG 15).

With approximately 23 million children in Pakistan out of school, representing 44 percent of the population from the age of 5 to 16 years, OICCI members contributed PKR 2.3 billion in 2023 towards education and skill development to support vulnerable children through collaborations with



OICCI Delegation at Pakistan Pavilion, COP28, Dubai



UNDP-OICCI MOU signing ceremony, Karachi

The private sector can influence policy by actively supporting and lobbying to promote transformative practices and advocating for the SDGs.

organizations like The Citizen Foundation and Akhuwat Foundation.²

The private sector can significantly influence policy by actively supporting and lobbying for policies that promote transformative practices. Corporations can help shape a more sustainable future by advocating for the SDGs. By taking proactive steps to mitigate their carbon footprint including developing renewable energy sources or investing in carbon sequestration technologies, companies can make substantial contributions towards achieving net-zero emissions.

The private sector has supported programmes to empower marginalized and vulnerable groups. These initiatives are crucial to integrating them as valuable partners in economic development. From mitigating the impact of climate change to empowering women and supporting people with

disabilities, these efforts contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society. Events such as the Chamber's Women Empowerment Awards as well as its Diversity and Inclusion Conference highlight the private sector's commitment in promoting women and people with disabilities and fostering diversity in the workplace.

Pakistan's private sector is poised to play a pivotal role in achieving the SDGs through innovation, climate action, education, policy advocacy, and empowering marginalized communities. By continuing to invest in sustainable practices and technologies, collaborating with government and other stakeholders, and promoting transparency and accountability, the private sector can drive significant progress towards a prosperous future for Pakistan. What is needed is positive support from all segments of society in pursuit of a brighter future for the youth of Pakistan.

2. Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI), Corporate Social Responsibility Report 2022-23. 2023. <https://www.oicci.org/app/media/2024/07/CSR-Report-2023.pdf>

Investing in Future Generations

The Summit of the Future's 'Declaration for Future Generations' is a call to action for current generations to take bold actions so that young people can thrive and ensure that transitions to a green economy are inclusive and equitable.



By
Dr. Mohsen Gul
Regional Policy Specialist,
UNDP Asia Pacific

In the lush landscapes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a young environmental activist, Marfa Naseem, has embarked on a mission to combat urban environmental challenges through sustainable practices. Her innovative project titled "Sustainable Systems for Households" integrates rainwater harvesting and vertical garden systems to address water scarcity and food security issues in rapidly urbanizing areas. This initiative reflects a broader trend of youth-led eco-entrepreneurship in Pakistan, crucial for the country's sustainable future.

Pakistan's youth demographic is a powerful force that has the potential to drive the nation's progress toward the SDGs. With over 68 percent of the population under the age of 30 and a significant portion residing in rural areas, the potential for transformative change is immense. Yet, the path to

realizing this potential is fraught with challenges. Ranked 137th out of 166 countries on the 2024 SDG Index,¹ Pakistan struggles in critical areas, such as quality education (SDG 4) and decent work (SDG 8), which are essential for youth empowerment.

Digital connectivity remains a major hurdle, with Pakistan ranking 45th out of 52 countries in the World Internet Development Index 2023.² Despite these challenges, Pakistan's tech sector has seen remarkable growth, driven by a young and digitally-savvy population. Initiatives like Swag Kicks, founded by Nofal Khan, exemplify how young entrepreneurs are leveraging digital tools to solve pressing social issues, such as sustainable consumption and waste reduction, through innovative business models that support a circular economy.

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a key



1. Sachs, J.D., G. Laforune and G. Fuller. The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Dublin, 2024. [Avhttps://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopmentreport/2024/sustainable-development-report-2024.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopmentreport/2024/sustainable-development-report-2024.pdf).
2. Weisheng, Xiong. Pakistan ranks 45th in world internet development index: blue paper. WUZHEN, 8 11 2023. http://en.ce.cn/Insight/202311/08/t20231108_38783790.shtml.

Pakistani youth are optimistic about their future but remain politically passive and disillusioned with the current political system.

pathway for young Pakistanis to lead local solutions and strengthen community resilience. The UNDP National Human Development Report 2023/2024 emphasizes the importance of 'Doing Digital for Development,' advocating for a more accessible digital ecosystem that can empower youth entrepreneurship across the country.³ This digital transformation is critical for a just transition to a sustainable economy, especially for vulnerable groups, including women and rural youth.

The 'State of Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in Pakistan 2024' report by UNDP, co-created with young social entrepreneurs, highlights several challenges, such as a lack of awareness about beneficial policies, inadequate infrastructure and barriers to accessing international markets.⁴ Equitable financing remains a significant issue, particularly for those pursuing social entrepreneurship, which is vital for sustainable development.

The Summit of the Future and its 'Declaration for Future Generations' underscore the need for intergenerational equity and a just transition to a sustainable economy.⁵ This declaration is a call to action for current generations to create an environment where young people can thrive, ensuring that the transition to a green economy is inclusive and equitable. Initiatives like Trawah, founded by Bebo Haider, which provides employment opportunities for marginalized transgender communities, exemplify the inclusive spirit needed for this transition.

Another critical aspect of the future that Pakistan's youth must shape is their involvement in governance and decision-making. The 'Next Generation Report 2023' by the British Council reveals that while Pakistani youth are optimistic about their future, they remain politically passive and disillusioned with the current political system.⁶ Despite their potential to drive social change, only a small percentage



3. UNDP, 'Pakistan National Human Development Report', 2018. <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/pakistan-national-human-development-report>
 4. UNDP, 'State of Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in Pakistan 2024', 2024. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-04/ycl-syee_pakistan-report_0.pdf
 5. United Nations, A Declaration on Future Generations, 2023. <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/declaration-on-future-generations#:~:text=In%20its%20decision%2077%2F568,September%202024%20in%20New%20York>
 6. British Council, "Next Generation Pakistan 2023." 2023. https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/next_generation_pakistan_-_9_june_2023.pdf.



Young people must have a seat at decision-making tables. Establishing youth councils that contribute to national policy discussions can ensure that the next generation's voices are included in shaping their future.

actively participate in the political process. This highlights the urgent need for more meaningful youth engagement in politics and policymaking.

generation's voices are integral to shaping the future.

To turn this vision into reality, bold actions are required:

1. Pakistan must move beyond traditional education to embrace digital literacy, critical thinking and entrepreneurship. Schools should be incubators of innovation, preparing students to be job creators rather than job seekers.
2. Expanding access to resources for marginalized groups is essential. Programmes tailored to women, rural youth, and green entrepreneurs can drive both economic growth and environmental sustainability.
3. Young people must have a seat at decision-making tables. Establishing youth councils that contribute to national policy discussions can ensure that the next

4. Investing in digital infrastructure and literacy can empower Pakistan's youth to participate in the global digital economy, accelerating progress toward the SDGs.

The stories of young leaders like Marfa, Nofal and Bebo are not anomalies—they reflect the deeper potential within Pakistan's youth. However, realizing this potential requires a collective commitment from all sectors of society. Governments, private sector entities, and international partners must work together to create an environment where young people are not just surviving but thriving.

In the spirit of the Summit of the Future, the decisions made today will profoundly impact future generations. Investing in youth is not merely a strategy for future leadership; it is a necessity for present action to build a sustainable, equitable, and prosperous Pakistan for all.

Including Youth in Policymaking

Sustainable development in Pakistan must be owned and led by young people because they have the greatest stake in the country's future.



By
Hamza Hasan
Program Analyst,
Poverty Reduction and
Inclusion Unit, UNDP Pakistan

The UN Summit of the Future in September 2024 will redefine the Global Development Agenda through strengthened multilateral governance aimed at tackling existing threats and leveraging emerging opportunities. A focus on youth and future generations will be part of a renewed international 'Pact for the Future' that will expedite member states' progress towards Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. As one of the youngest countries in the world, Pakistan can leverage this focus on collaborative action for development, which offers opportunities to form international partnerships and devise solutions that enable young people to fulfil their rights and potential. However, to benefit from these solutions and play a vital role in redefining the new agenda for development, Pakistan must give voice to millions of young people who are

excluded from outdated structures that regulate economic growth, political participation, and governance in the country.

With over 64 percent of its population under the age of 30, Pakistan has an unprecedented opportunity to develop its human resources for economic growth and progressive social change. To capitalize on this, the country must renew its commitment to inclusive growth by meaningfully involving young people in policy formulation and decision-making. This involves creating structures that enable youth participation in political processes, leveraging emerging technologies for economic empowerment, and providing access to quality education. Recognizing the deep interconnections between social and economic development is essential for formulating and implementing



Failure to invest in young people can potentially turn Pakistan's youth bulge into a liability with adverse consequences for economic growth and political stability.

frameworks that foster meaningful youth engagement across the economy, society, and politics. This approach will help overcome policy discourses that address challenges with technical solutions while ignoring their inherently social and political aspects.

The Pact for the Future under the Summit of the Future will offer unprecedented opportunities for international collaboration for youth development. Pakistan can localize and implement these international best practices to address its own development challenges while contributing to a cross-national community of learning and knowledge-sharing. This will be instrumental in charting the future trajectory of development in Pakistan, which must be owned and led by young people who have the greatest stake in the

future of the country. Challenges like economic growth, peace and security, climate change, women's empowerment, and social inclusion all require input and leadership from young people in Pakistan who may feel alienated and disconnected from the developments around them.

Failure to invest in young people can potentially turn Pakistan's youth bulge into a liability with adverse consequences for economic growth and political stability. In recent months, the profusion of protest movements around the world points to the potency and effectiveness of youth-led action for change; they reflect young people's exclusion from structures responsible for consensus-based politics. The continuation and further entrenchment of this scenario can be a serious challenge for countries like Pakistan that are



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The Prime Minister's Youth Program remains an effective entry point for youth-focused programming with its focus on providing education and employment.

facing intersectional development challenges pertaining to economic development, climate change, and peacebuilding. The continued exclusion of young people from dialogues and decision-making on these issues, which have a profound impact on their lives, can pose serious challenges for Pakistan.

There is genuine recognition of these issues at the state level in Pakistan with successive governments pledging commitment to young people's social and economic development. The Prime Minister's Youth Program remains an effective entry point for youth-focused programming through its focus on providing education and employment opportunities. Continued collaboration between the programme and international partners points to the government's openness to learning and integrating internationally tested development solutions, making it an effective platform for state-led investments in youth development. UNDP remains committed to supporting the Government of Pakistan in these efforts through its recently concluded flagship programming on youth empowerment and its continued efforts to

integrate young people as empowered participants in all development interventions.

As we head towards an increasingly uncertain world marked by a disregard for multilateralism, the growth of isolationist political movements, and deteriorating global peace, the Summit of the Future lays the foundation for a more integrated and collaborative world. This is especially vital for the youth who are poised to inherit the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. Cross-national collaboration can create a more inclusive and progressive approach to tackling global threats and challenges. Pakistan must seize this opportunity by aligning its national development priorities with the global agenda to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, ensuring that the aspirations and innovations of young people are at the heart of this effort. By empowering youth and integrating their perspectives, we can build a future that is not only sustainable but also driven by the fresh ideas and dynamic energy of the next generation.

Peace & Security: A Paradigm Shift

Any change in human development directly impacts insecurity in society.



By
Aarish U. Khan

Research Analyst
Institute of Regional Studies,
Islamabad

The 9/11 terrorist attack was a turning point in the global response to terrorism emerging out of the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although distinguishable in terms of its scale, scope, and level of destruction, it was part of a long continuum of such attacks traced back to this region. While the US forces, along with its NATO allies, left Afghanistan in 2021 after spending USD 300 million a day for 20 years to counter the threat, the regional terrorism landscape is not very different from the 1990s as the Taliban are in power again.¹

Since the Taliban's takeover of the Government in Kabul in August 2021, attacks by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—a group primarily responsible for terrorist attacks in Pakistan and with a presence in the Af-Pak border

region—in Pakistan's bordering Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province have intensified.² While currently focused on terrorist operations in Pakistan, the TTP is capable of expanding its reach beyond the region in collaboration with Al-Qaeda as Afghanistan's Taliban government remains tolerant towards both.³ The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K), the regional arm of ISIL, has already exhibited its reach beyond the region through the audacious Crocus City Hall attack near Moscow in March resulting in 145 deaths and continues to retain the potential of launching such future attacks in Europe.⁴

Since the military withdrawal from Afghanistan, the West appears to remain focused on isolating itself from the threat through more effective

1. The White House, Remarks by President Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan, Pres Briefings, State Dining Room, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/31/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-end-of-the-war-in-afghanistan/>
2. Islamabad Research Policy Institute (IPRI), 'Recrudescence of TTP Violence its Causes and Possible Remedies', Islamabad, 2024. <https://ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/TTP-FULL-PDF-8-AUG-2024.pdf>
3. United Nations Security Council, 'Thirty-fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team', 2024. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/191/91/pdf/n2419191.pdf>
4. Ibid.



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Development Advocate Pakistan

A deregulated socio-economic environment that ensures a level playing field for all, establishes social justice, and addresses public insecurities and grievances, must be an integral part of the counter-terrorism strategy in Pakistan.

controls at home. However, the history of terrorist violence in the region and its potential to strike any soft target globally, coupled with the tenacity of the violent extremist ideology at its root, calls for a more comprehensive approach than the piecemeal counter-terrorism operations. The use of a coercive counter-terrorism approach appears to play into the hands of the terrorists, as these areas have low human development. In these areas, social injustices are prevalent, polarizing socio-political discourse is widespread and communities lack awareness. Such a response fits into the historian Yuval Noah Harari's comparison of terrorists with the fly that gets into the ear of a bull in a china shop.

UNDP's Human Development Reports published in 2021-2022 and 2023-2024, establish that insecurity feeds into polarization within and across societies with the potential of escalating into longer-term and larger-scale conflicts spilling

across countries. Since there is a strong correlation between human development and human security, any change in the situation of human development of any society strongly impacts the perception of insecurity and, thus, provides an enabling environment for violent ideologies to flourish.

A comprehensive response to the threat in the region, and one that the region poses to the world, will need to be cognizant of the existing socio-economic landscape that allows the terrorists to thrive. Pakistan and Afghanistan are the two countries in the Asia-Pacific with the lowest human development. Both countries have volatile economic situations with income and gender inequalities high, the situation is compounded by climate-induced natural disasters.

While the National Security Policy 2022-2026 of Pakistan put



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Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy requires a paradigm shift that moves from control to trusting citizens.

human and economic security at the heart of national security, the government's policy remains largely driven by conventional security compulsions, often at the cost of the population's economic well-being.⁵ The internet disruption in August caused by the government's efforts to improve surveillance and control over the flow of information, which led to economic losses of up to USD 300 million, is a recent case in point.⁶ Voicing dissent whether online or in the form of street demonstrations like the ones seen in the town of Bannu, KP and Gwadar, Balochistan in July provides the population with a non-violent avenue of interaction with the centres of power in a given society. The shutting of such avenues, inter alia, enables the terrorists to push segments of population towards more violent avenues.

A paradigm shift is needed that moves from control to trusting citizens. In addition, a deregulated socio-economic environment that ensures a level playing field for all, establishes social justice, and addresses public insecurities and grievances should be an integral part of any counter-terrorism strategy in Pakistan. Instead of a military, legal, and judicial overdrive against terrorism, an approach that prioritizes rule of law, social justice, and human security will not only pave the path to peace but also address the sense of injustice that feeds into extremism, which is at the core of terrorist violence.

5. National Security Division, Government of Pakistan, National Security Policy 2022-2026, 2022. <https://nsd.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/NSP%20summary.pdf>

6. Manik Aftab, Pakistan's Attempt to Tamper With the Internet Is Leading to Economic Turmoil, The Diplomat, 21 August 2024. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/pakistans-attempt-to-tamper-with-the-internet-is-leading-to-economic-turmoil/>

Why Gender Equality Must be Pakistan's Top Priority



By
Van Nguyen

Deputy Resident Representative
UNDP Pakistan

At the U.N. Summit of the Future 2024, gender equality is positioned as a driver for meaningful change. The Summit agenda emphasises: "None of our goals can be achieved without the full, equal, and meaningful participation of all women and girls."¹

Pakistan stands at a crossroads, where the pursuit of gender equality has never been more urgent. As the country grapples with economic challenges and social disparities, the issue of gender equality stands out as both a critical concern and a potent opportunity for transformative change. Despite being one of the most legislated countries globally, Pakistan faces a stark reality: regression in closing the gender gap. The 2024 Global Gender Gap Report presents a sobering reality: Pakistan has plummeted to 145th place out of 146 countries. This drop from 143rd in 2023 is not just a statistic but a wake-up call that threatens to derail the social and economic progress, particularly in education and health—areas where most countries are making significant strides toward parity.

With less than six years remaining to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the need for immediate action to reverse this trend cannot be overstated.² Pakistan's simultaneous decline in the Sustainable Development Report 2024 — from 128th place in 2023 to 137th in 2024 — underscores the gravity of the situation. At this current pace, Pakistan is a staggering 152 years away from achieving gender parity.³

The Imperative of Elevating Gender Equality in National Policy

Gender Equality (SDG 5) has been placed in Category II as part of Pakistan's SDG prioritization. Given that gender equality impacts more than 53 of the 251 SDG indicators, deprioritizing SDG5 will hinder progress across multiple goals. Elevating gender equality to a top policy is a critical step Pakistan must take, as it will help the country ensure a more effective allocation of resources and targeted interventions to close the gender gap.

A two-pronged approach is required here. First, Pakistan must transcend development "as usual" and leverage data innovation. This involves advocating for a system that accurately captures incremental progress. With 71 percent of Tier 2 indicators under SDG 5 currently excluded from the rankings, the SDG Secretariat must consider refining its methodologies to recognize progress in these indicators, ensuring that countries are not penalized due to data limitations.

Simultaneously, Pakistan must develop its Gender Equality Index that reflects its uniqueness toward women's empowerment. Achievements such as increased gender parity in higher education and civil service, or reductions in violence against women, should be recognized. This will help chart policy pathways to establish a social and economic justice compact, harnessing the potential of half of



Pakistan's population -- the second prong of the approach.

Women's Contributions and the Costs of Gender Inequality

The informal sector, where a significant proportion of Pakistani women are employed, requires comprehensive reimagining. Global trends show an increase in flexible and informal employment due to cost-cutting measures. In Pakistan, the female labour force participation rate rose to 35.57 percent during 2018-2019.⁴ However, women's contributions in this sector often go unnoticed and unsupported. While the Sindh Government's recent bill to recognize home-based workers is a step in the right direction, its effective implementation remains to be seen.

In the formal sector, the situation is equally concerning. Women hold only eight percent of senior managerial roles — the lowest share globally. Moreover, they constitute only three percent of board directors in the country's leading companies, according to the Pakistan Business Council. The cumulative wage loss in Pakistan due to the gender pay gap amounts to approximately PKR 500 billion (USD 1.7 billion).⁵

The cost of gender inequality is multi-dimensional, transcending both the formal and informal sectors. A comprehensive evaluation of human rights violations against women reveals a profound impact on the national exchequer — not only in lost opportunities but also in the essential response services required to address these issues. For instance, child marriage — a persistent barrier to gender equality in Pakistan — have profound social and economic consequences. Between 2019 and 2020, early child marriages cost Pakistan's economy USD 0.8 billion, or 0.42 percent of its GDP.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

Pakistan's social and economic future hinges on its ability to close the gender gap. Advancing gender equality is not just an ethical mandate but a vital economic strategy, with the potential to add USD 91.5 billion annually to the economy.⁶ Bold actions are required to shift social norms, eliminate discriminatory practices, promote gender equality, and drive transformative change in Pakistan.

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United Nations Development Programme Pakistan

4th Floor, Serena Business Complex,
Khayaban-e-Suharwardy, Sector G-5/1,
P. O. Box 1051, Islamabad, Pakistan