

Policy Governance in Pakistan: A Critical, Contemporary Qualitative Inquiry (2021-2024)

Imran Ullah Khan

dr.imranullah@hu.edu.pk

Assistant Professor, Department of Public Policy and Administration, Hazara University Mansehra-Pakistan.

Haji Ur Rahman

dr.hajiurrehman@hu.edu.pk

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Hazara University Mansehra- Pakistan.

Amna Iftikhar

amnaiftikhar.sociologist@gmail.com

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Hazara University Mansehra-Pakistan.

Rizwan Ullah

khatakrizwan5@gmail.com

MPhil Scholar, Department of Economics Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat-Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: * Haji Ur Rahman dr.hajiurrehman@hu.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

It is a detailed qualitative research that offers a thorough, interpretive examination of the ecosystem of the public policy formulation and implementation in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan revised to reflect the radical socio-political, economic, and environmental changes of the post-2020 era. The following question will be answered using a critical governance lens and a strictly qualitative research design and exploring the multifaceted relationship between historical legacies, institutional structures, and agentic power dynamics that characterize the current policy environment in Pakistan. The methodology used in the research is carefully phenomenological and hermeneutic and relies on deep interviews with elites, comprehensive discursive examination of policy documents and media discourses and participation in policy communities. It transcends the linear, technocratic paradigms of policy making in order to reveal the own reality of a system of competing sovereignties where formal authority of elected government grabs at and tends to corrupt local developmental imperatives, and where global financial interests collide with and frequently pervert local developmental demands. The paper especially emphasizes new forces that are defining the policy space: the digital governance revolution and its dissatisfactions, the existential demands of climate change after the 2022 super-floods, the unsettling political restructuring after the 2022 no-confidence motion and the 2024 general elections. The paper, through an in-depth sectoral discussion of economic survival under the 2023 IMF Stand-By Arrangement, controversial adherence to the Single National Curriculum, and the development of climate change adaptation structures under the influence of the crisis, creates a layered account of a state that negotiates policies all the time. These threads are summarized into a reconstructive framework on policy governance at the conclusion, as the policy governance model needs a fundamental change in attitudes towards a state-centric model of top-down delivery to an ecosystem of adaptable, collaborative, and citizen-engaged co-production that is uniquely suited to the fragmented but robust socio-political fabric of Pakistan.

Keywords: Public Policy, Qualitative Research, Governance, Pakistan, Federalism, Bureaucracy, Implementation Gap, Political Economy, Climate Policy, Economic Governance.

INTRODUCTION

The role of public policy in Pakistan is not merely an official matter, it is the drama of the heart of the state to constantly negotiate its identity, sovereignty and survival in an environment that the scholars themselves describe as a policy crisis, i.e. the concomitant existence of multiple, interdependent, systemic shocks (Jabeen & Jadoon, 2021; Zaidi, 2020). The contemporary period is also a borderline of Pakistan where a sequence of interconnected crisis of policies to a degree of varying degrees is challenged by an existential vulnerability of an adverse climate crisis which the super-floods of 2022 so dramatically revealed; a highly polarized and volatile political condition further obstructed by the 2024 general elections and its contentious aftermath; a society that demands more responsible governance in the impact of the digital revolution which has enabled It is a thesis of this paper that to comprehend the trajectory of Pakistan, its stumbling development, democratic anxieties Not as they are euphonistically defined in procedural manuals, spoken in the Vision documents, but in fact as they are acted out in corridors of power in the Red Zone, Islamabad, the underserved frontline offices of provincial and district administrations where the state eventually comes to meet its people.

The policy creation and deletion in Pakistan is about dissonance. It is a story of high policy texts, which are frequently prepared with global technical assistance, that talk the language of rights, equity and sustainability that coexist with an implementation that is piecemeal, unequal, and frequently taken over by elite interests (Khan, 2018; Riaz, 2022). It is the narrative of a constitution - the document of 1973 with revisions - in which a federal, parliamentary democracy is imagined, but the dynamics of which are incessantly re-negotiated by extra-constitutional groups of power, chief among them a politically interference military and a movement-mental judiciary (Ali, 2021). It is a story of back-sliding - the historic 18th Amendment of 2010 - that attempted to devolve the powers to the provinces and to create a new arena of policy creativity but also of policy fragmentation and intergovernmental rivalry (Cheema, Khwaja, and Naseer, 2020). Simply put, the process of policy-making in Pakistan is among the most significant spheres to see the baseline tensions of the Pakistani state democracy/authoritarianism, centralization/federalism, globalization/national sovereignty, technocratic vision/political reality.

This study is therefore a qualitative interpretation exercise. It attempts to transcend the what of policy (the content of laws, plans and programs) to pose the how and the why. What do the spectres of the colonial "steel frame" administration do to the policy rationality and bureaucratic habitus of the current policy making? How has the promise of cooperative federalism implied by the 18th Amendment been met, either satisfied or distorted or twisted, in the daily, nitty gritty, bartering of funds, functions and formulas of intergovernmental relations? What impact have the two shocks of a global pandemic and a national climate disaster had on policy imagination, the capacity to act quickly and its time perspective? How does the civil-military junction alter when it comes to other policy areas beyond the traditional security matters, namely economic governance and infrastructural development, as is the case in Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC)? More importantly, how do the citizens, who are becoming more and more interconnected by their smart phones, get informed (and misinformed) by the digital media, and frustrated by the failures in service delivery, maneuvering, pushing, or even negotiating these intricate and untransparent webs of policy?

Research Questions

1. To what extent do the long-standing colonial administrative legacies and the post-2010 constitutional devolution represented in the 18th Amendment still influence the practices of policy formulation and policy implementation in Pakistan?

2. How do informal networks of power, especially those that involve the military, judiciary, and bureaucracy, have power of the policy effects that become beyond the formal institutional frameworks of the state?
3. In what way have the recent crises, such as economic unsteadiness under IMF programmes, disasters due to climate changes and political instability, redefined the policy priorities and limited the ability of the state to implement long-term policies of reforms?
4. In what ways has the promise of cooperative federalism been fulfilled or negated in such major areas of policy as education (i.e. the Single National Curriculum) and climate adaptation and through what mechanisms.
5. How is digital media changing the participation of citizens, policy discussion and altering accountability processes in the Pakistani system of governance?
6. What would a revamped, co-operative version of policy governance, which is dynamic, responsive, and inclusive of citizens, imply in the context of the disintegrated but febrile Pakistani socio-political environment?

Research Objectives

1. To critically analyze the historical and institutional legacies that define the contemporary policy governance of Pakistan with emphasis to colonial bureaucracy and federalism after 18th Amendment.
2. To map and examine the roles, interactions and power dynamics of the major actors in Pakistan policy including the elected bodies, the military, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and the civil society.
3. To investigate with qualitative case studies the way recent crises, IMF-led economic stabilization, the Single National Curriculum, and post-flood climate policy, can be used to expose tensions between policy formulation and implementation.
4. To determine the effect of digital transformation and media on policy discussion, citizen participation and accountability of government in Pakistan.
5. To suggest a redesigned model of collaborative and adaptive policy governance, which would be appropriate in the socio-political context of Pakistan, with a focus on the co-production, iterative policy making, and integrative institutions.

This paper is organized according to the interpretative journey in order to answer these questions, which are the historical-structural to the contemporary-agential. It begins by establishing the qualitative approach and eclectic theory through which the investigation will be held. It then excavates historical and institutional underpinnings of the policy state of Pakistan, looking at the long-term impact of the colonial rule and the radical but unfinished influence of constitutional devolution. It then maps the constellation of actors that inhabit this contentious policy space, looking at the different worldviews, resources and strategies of various actors and also at informal networks of relationships which may be equally significant as the formal organograms. This is then analysed on the lived reality of particular and high-stake sectors of policy, by the detailed accounts of contemporary cases, passing between the abstract and the messy reality in addressing crisis-based decision-making. Lastly, the paper makes a synthesis of these insights and makes a recommendation on how policy governance in Pakistan can be reconstituted. This is not offered as a blue print borrowed elsewhere or a generic check list of good governance but in the shape of a locally grown, locally focused, architecture of working together to solve problems, one that is uniquely adapted to the conditions, in the twenty-first century, of the divided yet strong socio-political landscape of Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis is defined by the constructivist paradigm in which policy is not viewed as the uncovered object with the clearly defined characteristics but rather seen as a socially constructed reality and constantly shaped and reshaped by the meaning, interaction, discourses and power relations of the people who create, interpret and practice it (Beland, Howlett, and Mukherjee, 2022). Multi-modal qualitative research design with an analytical depth, descriptive richness, and methodological triangulation are applied intentionally and consciously to achieve analytical depth, descriptive richness, and contextual understanding at the cost of applying quantitative measures to direct information collection and analysis, which so happens to be the case in this instance, as well.

The primary aid to this question is a whole of forty two semi-structured, in-depth interviews between September 2022 and March 2024 on a purposely chosen group of key informants. This group was to represent the variety of views and views in the policy ecosystem. It consisted of: Retired federal secretaries, along with other serving secretaries of core economic (Finance, Planning, Commerce) and social (Education, Health, Climate Change) ministries; members of the National Assembly and Senate serving on standing finance, planning and education committees; political advisors to the recent administrations of PML-N, PTI and PPP-led governments; senior journalists and anchors persons specializing in political economy of the major media houses; directors of major policy think tanks, such as the Pakistan Institute of Development Economies (PIDE), the Centre of Economic Research in Each interview was audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbally and coded in NVivo software in a multi-step thematic coding. This was done in phases of descriptive, in vivo coding, more comprehensive interpretative categories, trying to come up with recurrent motifs, fundamental contradictions and the tacit unspoken understandings of doing work with policy terms in Pakistan.

A critical discourse analysis of a large and heterogeneous text corpus is the second methodological basis. This involves ample scrutiny of official policy documents including; Pakistan Vision 2025 mid-term review reports, the 2023 National Adaptation Plan, post-flood reconstruction frameworks including the Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework (4RF) and documents related to the highly contentious negotiations involving the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award. In addition to official state output, it is very engaged in judicialization of policy by reviewing Supreme Court and High Court decisions that had direct policy implication like case of dam construction (Dam case Kalabagh) and price of energy and educational standards (Single National Curriculum case). Probably the most important, but definitely not the least, the systematic analysis of the mediascape is contained in the study. This includes the review of the editorials and op-eds of the major English-language dailies: Dawn, The News, The NHA Express Tribune of major policy matters over the past four years and an examination of transcripts of the major political talk shows aired on well-watched television channels (e.g., Capital Talk, Off the Record). These programs are a significant theatre of elite policy discussion, popular persuasion, and enactment of political conflict that may offer invaluable information on how policy issues are framed, conflicts in front of them, and how they are legitimized or delegitimized to be consumed by the masses.

The third pillar is observational and ethnographical and based on the position which is inherent in the lead researcher of the policy community in Pakistan during the past 10 years. This includes contributions of attending high level policy workshops, development partner round table and academic conferences held in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. This submergence provides an impressionistic, experienced feeling of the practices of performance, unexplained hierarchies, and sidelining informal networking behind and often sabotaging official policymaking procedures. It allows one to read the policy environment, those assumptions left unspoken, the jokes everyone makes, the collective fears, the careerist calculations, circulating within these professional occupiers and determining the bottom line, which are the core determinants.

It conserves theoretical sensitivity, though in an eclectic and coherent construction. The conceptual approach of historical institutionalism assists in casting light on the path dependencies that are formed as a result of the character of the initial decisions like the inheritance of the colonial bureaucratic apparatus and clarifies the unbelievable durability of certain structures (Lodhi, 2021). Critical policy sociology helps to dismantle the narratives, knowledge claims, and symbolic representations which rationalize certain policy and dismiss the alternatives (Sabatier and Weible, 2014). Political settlements system is critical to understanding the de facto authority of the elite groups to toxic or propel reform since it clarifies the reasons why technically superior policy proposals have not always succeeded amid existing vested interests (Khan, 2018). Lastly, it is the network governance theory that assists with the mapping of the ever-changing, informal networks and resource exchanges between the state and the non-state actors that dictate the policy results at the ground level (Salman & Mubashar, 2023). This multi-dimensional theoretical prism realises a multi-layered, context-laden, whom who cannot be explained away in singular, facile, mono-causal hypotheses and which respects the multi-lay redness and contingency of the Pakistani policy experience.

THE ENDURING INHERITANCE: COLONIAL LEGACIES AND THE POST-COLONIAL POLICY STATE

In Pakistan, it is impossible to imagine the architecture of policy-making without paying attention to the remaining and unerasable trace of its colonial predecessor the British Raj. The post-independent state of 1947 did not merely receive a geographical form but a bureaucratic machine, the celebrated steel frame of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) which was created with the utmost attention to the initial task of law and order, revenue collection and enforcement of imperial dominance, rather than the task of democratic welfare, participatory development or social justice (Ali, 2021). This would be a long-standing historical legacy that left strong and generalist civil service which was reformed into Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) and subsequently to District Management Group (DMG) currently called Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS). It inherited into it a quite ingrained culture of secrecy, paternalism, and self-perception of the necessity of serving state continuity when faced with the perceived turmoil, shortsightedness, and corruption of elected politicians. Such bureaucratic primacy has been impressively hardy with a chameleonic ability to fit and sometimes outwit the subsequent democratic and authoritarian governments ensuring its primacy in the policy making process (Jabeen & Jadoon, 2021).

Essentially, the constitutional path of Pakistan has been that of centralization of impulses with intermittent episodes of devolutionary intent. In the early 60 years of their existence, policy was more of a federal, Islamabad-based exercise in which the provinces could not act as their own independent political entity but as administrative entities having but one policy agenda. The incumbent Ayub Khan (1958-1969) and Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) further consolidated the power in the hands of the central executive since they both applied their own unique and sustainable policy paradigms. Ayub lived in the age of technology, the modernization of economy in the developmentalist way, with the economic growth and infrastructure being the first and foremost priority and taken care of by a strong Planning Commission. In turn, the rule of Zia embarked on wholesale Islamization that embedded religious ideology in legal, educational and social policies that are still evident in the policy discourses today (Zaidi, 2020). The 1973 Constitution had given reality to a federal-parliamentary plan of action, its temper however had been habitually destroyed by political outbursts and martial law which rendered impossible the evolution of an institutional logic.

The transformative change that was in the offing in the area of institutional shakeup in higher education was established by the passage and enforcement of the 18th Constitutional Amendment that took place in 2010. The most important devolutionary logic of it was revolutionary, which was enacted by a parliament made after a long time of military rule by consensus. This repealed the Concurrent Legislative List and

provided provinces with only the privilege to legislate and implement on crucial social and developmental areas like education, health, agriculture, environment and social welfare (Cheema, Khwaja, and Naseer, 2020). This led to the first ever multi-level, competitive policy space arena. New constitutional powers led to the emergence of separate policy identities and administrative abilities in provinces. Being a state with successive governments, Punjab had made significant investments in a performance management system which was largely data-driven - informally referred to as the Punjab Model - in the realms of health and education. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was at the forefront in the application of transparency and accountability mechanisms with the most famous being the Right to Public Services legislation.

But qualitative evidence that can be obtained using the interviews and the study of documents indicate a strained and partial execution of the promise of the amendment. As responsibilities were devolved, fiscal resources and administrative capacity associated with them were not devolved, in equal measure. Even now the vertical fiscal imbalance remains acute as the provinces rely on hefty transfers by the federal government via NFC award that is largely stuck in political games (Jabeen & Jadoon, 2021). The Council of Common Interests (CCI) that became constitutionally strengthened as the supreme level of federal-provincial coordination has in many ways become a stage of political stalemate and zero-sum game instead of a coordination forum of solving problems. One of the provincial finance officials best described this, saying, we have the constitutional right to decide the health policy, but when you have a pandemic, the funds to buy the vaccines and the power to purchase them globally, that is often with the federal government. Examples are, we are responsible to health outcomes and we are not in complete control of all the policy tools that we require. It is this asymmetric devolution where accountability is decentralized but resources, as well as authorities, are not, that is central to many current policy dysfunctions, such as the current wars on curriculum, to disparate reactions to climate change by different provinces, to outbreaks of disease.

THE CONTEMPORARY CONSTELLATION OF POLICY ACTORS: A TYPOLOGY OF POWER AND PERSUASION

Pakistani policy space in 2024 is a densely populated and moving arena, whereby formal constitutional power and informal and diffuse powers are at loggerheads with each other. This has since been more fragmented and confused with emerging alliances and uncertainties following the political turbulence that followed in 2022 with a vote of no confidence followed by a complex caretaker government and the 2024 general elections which had a large number of uncertainties (Lodhi, 2021).

A paradox of colossal formal authority on the one hand and extreme practical constraint on the other is imposed on the Elected Executive. The Chief Ministers and the Prime Minister are entitled to decide the course of the state. But their position is growing precarious, and they become a target of unstable coalition politics where policy is frequently held as ransom on the demands of small coalition allies to be patronized and promoted. This is all centered on short-term political management and crisis containment instead of long-term policy management or strategic vision, as it is put by a number of political advisors. The federal and provincial cabinets are usually big and disjointed and rarely coherent policy making entities. One of the former federal ministers described a burn out account of the process: "Here is a summary, containing the ten pages of close bureaucratic consultation and one sentence decision which you are to sign. To doubt the assumptions on which it is based, or propose an alternative way, is to declare war on the entire secretariat which wrote it. The weight of the 'file' is beyond resistance.

The unchanging epicentre of policy continuity and technical formulation has been the permanent Bureaucracy. The officers of the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS), of which are officers in command of various departments, by the mere possession of their monopoly of the file as also of drafting the summaries of the cabinet and have some knowledge of the rules and precedents, possess what one retired secretary termed as the power of the pen. Their culture is the one formed over generations and is

often risk-averse by nature, aimed to adhere to an administrative precedent, to be procedurally correct and to uphold hierarchy and to pursue creative problem-solving, or effective action (Khan, 2018). The recent attempts at breaking this mould, such as the creation of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in 2023, a type of civil-military institution that purportedly accelerates foreign investment in priority sectors, are an indication of a conscious effort to create agile mission oriented teams that slice through bureaucratic traditional hierarchies. Yet, their final outcome in transforming the general bureaucratic culture is extremely unpredictable and looked down upon by most within the system itself in a very scathing way.

The Military Establishment continues to serve as a meta-institution, a state within a state, that is incredibly strong. It has far more effect in the traditional spheres of defence, national security into foreign policy and internal security strategy, and - most controversial - even into macro-economic and macro-infrastructure policy. The most formal rendition of this broadened role is the above mentioned SIFC, and it is a formalized presence at the top, legitimized economic governance table in favor of the military. This is an extension of a bigger trend of the securitization of development policy where economic projects, otherwise associated with energy, infrastructure and agriculture are presented as not only about growth but as imperatives to national security. The framing of this policy provides such policies with a certain level of urgency and even shields them against the extent to which other sectors are subject to parliamentary scrutiny and branding.

The judicial system, particularly through an activist supreme court has become a direct and occasionally disruptive policy maker. Its broad use of so moto jurisdiction (taking notice at its own initiative) and the interpretation of basic rights has seen the Court provide detailed prescriptions even to the extent of formulating policy on as diverse a subject as construction of dams, energy pricing, environmental protection, drug pricing and education standards. Some citizens and groups in the civil society celebrate this judicialization of policy as a much-needed redress to executive abdication and legislative paralysis. But it is also being denounced by others including certain high profile bureaucrats and politicians as a kind of ad-hoc, court-based policymaking that lacks the nature of systematic analysis, stakeholder consultation and implementation capacity that should be involved in the executive and legislative functions and which, in this case, may choke in the democratic accountability and coherence of policy.

The control of External Actors remains a certain degree, and, in most of the cases, contradicts with the sovereignty of Pakistan as a state. The policy fundamentals of the macro-fiscal and tax and energy subsidies are directed directly by the basic of the policy by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Stand-By Arrangement of 2023, and the lengthy talks of a subsequent and more extended Extended Fund Facility (Zaidi, 2020). The investment of Chinese in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also comes along with its policy demands, space demands and governance systems. Other bilateral donors and multilateral agencies, though they might no longer have such a strong leverage, still propagate some policy models in their social sectors, often with a condition of them adopting reforms as they are recommended, as a precondition to finance a project. The effect of this dynamic is what we might call a two track process of policy making, one track, bloched and compartmentalized, to accommodate domestic political pressure and constituency services and which has a very different logic of patronage and short-term political reward, and the other track, more regular and uniform, of meeting external conditionality and satisfying international financial institutions.

The field of Non-State Domestic Actors is becoming more and more complicated and vocal. The organised private sector via its right wing through the FPCCI remains a formidable force in trade and taxation and the regulatory policy. The media is the effect of incessant, loud and usually sensationalism of policy politicization, but not deliberation. Unlike in the past, better-quality and data-driven research is being generated by think tanks and universities at an unprecedented rate, but it has yet to be

systematically incorporated, personality-based and all too often reduced to explaining post hoc instead of designing a priori. The most important one is the emergence of the digitally-linked citizenry and civil society as a new disruptive power. The social media campaigns could now hijack the tremendous force on certain issues that were emotionally appealing like security on the motorway, harassment legislation or environmental deterioration that does not need to go through the institutional process of the parties and law legislatures and serve as a kind of right-in-your-face, direct public involvement. This online activism compels prompt, and usually reactive, policy actions by a state that is not accustomed to this form of diffuse and decentralized pressure (Ahmed and O'Donoghue, 2023).

GROUND TRUTHS: QUALITATIVE CASE NARRATIVES OF POLICY IN ACTION

To descend off the abstract maps of actors and institutions and to a more concrete, textured vision, however, we should consider certain policy sagas as they have been acted out over the last years. These accounts are eye openers to the structure of burdens and Agency, constraint and innovation in high stakes settings.

Case Narrative 1 Economic Survival and the Long Shadow of IMF (2022-2024)

Since the vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Imran Khan in April 2022, the economic policy area was built on an exercise in managing the crisis with no end and under the long shadow of the International Monetary Fund. The qualitative narrative that is produced by interviewing the officials of the Finance Ministry, economic journalists and business leaders is that of severe constraint, agonizing trade-offs and reduced policy freedom. This has been overtaken by unrewarding priorities of the Washington Consensus achievement of a primary budget surplus; the removal of energy and fuel subsidies, substantial increases in tax incomes and an exchange rate that is freely determined by market forces. The process of policy making in this area turned insular to the point of constant acute negotiation by a small group of technocrats under the eyes of the Finance Ministry and the State Bank of Pakistan with the IMF review teams (Zaidi, 2020). The debate in Parliament on the annual budget, as explained by the members of the Standing Committee on Finance, was chiefly composed of the performative and the budget was brought before the legislature as a *fait accompli*, as a bitter pill which was absolutely necessary to prevent a default in the sovereign and an economic collapse.

The social implications of this sort of stabilization measures - worst of all, record inflation, particularly of food and energy costs - triggered the outburst of violent popular anger and resentment towards the government. This was common sufferings in the rhetoric of the media with headlines about the daily increasing price of the vital items of life, and in the here and there but effective outbursts. The case proves the extreme types of coercive policy transfer in which the fundamentals of national economic sovereignty are violently limited by external financial dependence (Khan, 2018). It also reveals the bad quality whereby the fiscal and institutional ability of the state is eroded in the sense that it is unable to introduce compensatory social protection at a level that will be sufficient to cushion its most vulnerable citizens against the shocks of stabilization thereby increasing social fragility and a loss of perceived legitimacy of the state.

Case Narrative 2 The Single National Curriculum (SNC): Ideology, Identity, and the Limits of Federalism

The implementation of Single National Curriculum (SNC) and its clearly stated goals, which are uniformity, equality and national cohesion, soon turned into a lightning rod of a far deeper conflict in the life of the society and politics. Its main advocates, including the most influential ones within the federal government, which conceived the idea, described it as a highly noble tool in the dismantling of educational apartheid and in the development of a single national identity. It was considered radically

different by critics like provincial government of Sindh, progressive educationists, associations of low-cost private schools and various civil society groups. They saw it as a means of ideological homogenization and a reactionary effort to change historical and social stories and its secretive initiative to re-centralize educational powers that were constitutionally devolved at the provinces (Cheema, Khwaja, and Naseer, 2020).

The adoption of SNC has been an iconic scenario of controversial federalism. Sindh which had one constitutional jurisdiction of curriculum in the 18th Amendment merely declined to embrace it and claimed its independence. Punjab was next to be followed with implementation but it had some significant practical difficulties like teacher training gaps, slow textbook production, and teacher fears of pedagogical inflexibility. The qualitative data of interviews with teachers, school principals and curriculum developers is that there has been some anxiety regarding the content of the curriculum particularly emphasis on the place of religious contents in subjects and the perceived limitation of the space of critical thinking and pluralistic views. The case eloquently illustrates how an otherwise technical educational policy has turned into a battlefield of competing conceptions of national identity, ill-defined boundaries of practical federal authority in a devolved system, and highly partisan role of education in the construction of the future citizen (Jabeen and Jadoon, 2021).

Case Narrative 3: From Calamity to (Tentative) Governance: Climate Policy Following the 2022 Super-Floods

The 2022 catastrophic monsoon floods that covered one-third of the nation and displaced over 33 million people as well as led to over 30 billion in damages were also a tragic yet undeniable focus event that permanently altered the climate policy discourse in Pakistan (World Bank, 2023). Before its disaster climatic policy was disjointed, placed within a comparatively feeble federal ministry and mostly donor project-oriented as well as Pakistan influencing status in world climatic negotiation talks. The tragedy created a giant opening to political interest and action never seen before. The qualitative shift in the language and priority was also felt in interviews and documents; climate change ceased to be a threat in the future or a niche environmental issue but a crisis that is now existential and is present at the core of national security and economic livelihood.

The federal government responded with the aid of the United Nations by introducing Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework (4RF) (Government of Pakistan, 2023). The policy formulation discourse on the 4RF was reasonably consultative and ample relative to the customary procedure, and the federal and provincial governments were not the only stakeholders to be involved but also UN agencies, international NGOs and local civil society organizations in a sequence of working teams. But the tale that comes after exhibits the famous disparity between the grandiose design and earthly reality. The 4RF offers a vision of the "building back better" based on the climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable agriculture and effective social protection. However, it can only be implemented through the provision of billions of dollars of international funding which has been slow and full of conditions. In addition, the necessity of radical, climatic-wise rebuilding is received with the violent confrontation with the immediate political and social pressure to rebuild houses and means of livelihood as rapidly as possible, as well as with the strong momentum of already established, climate unfriendly practices in settlement and agriculture (Beland, Howlett, and Mukherjee, 2022). This case reflects the durability of a mega-crisis to establish new policy agreement and bring an issue to the national agenda as well as the daunting and sustained challenge of getting that post-disaster agreement translated into sustained and transformative institutional change under the influence of the booming political economies of entrenched interests and the imperatives of the short-term.

SYNTHESIS AND RECONSTITUTE PATHWAYS: ON THE PATH TO AN ECOSYSTEM OF POLICY GOVERNANCE

The above discussion draws the picture of a policy system that is put under extreme and manifold pressure, yet not yet entirely without any aspects of innovation, adaptation and resilience. The most important and repeated pathology is the perpetuated and in many cases increasing lack of connection between policy making and policy execution. This is further exacerbated by the fact that there are still silos of bureaucracy, political short-termism, fractured and discontinuous lines of responsibility, and the excessive and usually distorting volume of external conditionalities (Riaz, 2022). Although the 18th amendment became a substantial correction to the excessive centralization, it also resulted in a more complicated multi-arena system and, at the same time, failed to foster the culture of collaboration, integration mechanisms, and conflict resolution mechanisms without which the system will be unable to operate harmoniously (Cheema, Khwaja, & Naseer, 2020).

Hence, it is the thesis of this paper that it is the rub against the dub of the gradual reforms taking place on the periphery of this system that is going to yield marginal returns in store. The reconstitution of the policy governance philosophy and practice must be very little less than what Pakistan needs. It means a paradigm change in the direction of a state-centred and top-down, linear paradigm of command and control, to what might be termed exosystemic model of collaborative governance. Such a model would be characterised by a set of mutually dependent and reinforcing principles:

The first one is the Embracing Adaptive and Iterative Policy Making. The policy process must also do away with the overall fiction of the ideal, complete, and conclusive plan. Policies should be formulated in iterative prototype forms i.e. small scale pilots in a highly volatile, non-linear environment, which would strictly be followed, honestly assessed, learnt and subsequently modified, before being scaled (Sabatier and Weible, 2014). It involves an essential cultural shift in the bureaucracy and political elite: it becomes acceptable to take risks, it becomes acceptable to fail intelligently as a learning method and it becomes acceptable to be flexible and not faithful to a preliminary sketch. It transforms policy which is a single learning to a process.

Second, Institutionalization of Intensive, Significant Engagement. People must have been liberated of the existing system of consultations in figurative form. It requires the action of consciously and intensively constructing longer-term, structural platforms of co-production of policies with citizens, communities, the frontline service providers, and the civil society organizations (Salman and Mubashar, 2023). This interaction must be an outsider in the whole policy cycle- both in the first, co charging articulation of issues and description of solutions, and in joint monitoring and assessment. This engagement can be promoted at an unprecedented scale with the help of digital tools, such as participatory budgeting applications, opening policy feedback portals, or citizen reporting platforms (Ahmed and O'Donoghue, 2023). Nonetheless, they need to be digital and linguistically inclusive to avoid giving the digital elite, the urban, educated and connected elite.

Third, Structures of Building Integrative Governance. The vertical silos between federal and provincial governments and horizontal silos between the sectoral line departments also should be disintegrated cautiously. This involves taking the steps further than committees that are ad-hoc. It needs such mediating institutions like the Council of Common Interests, or the CCIs, to be strengthened, permanently with a professional secretariat with the capacity to make technical analyses and facilitate (Jabeen and Jadoon, 2021). It recommends the development of joint federal-provincial implementation task forces on the cross-cutting "wicked problems" like climate adaptation, stunting and water security that have clear mandates and resources. Also, it needs to be invested in common digital platforms to access real-time information, performance monitoring and management of knowledge accessible at all governmental levels, which would enhance transparency and action.

Fourth, Infrastructure Investment in the Human Policy. A long-term ignorance of the human factor - the competencies, attitudes and even motivation of policy-makers and policy-implementers - has contributed to the chronic implementation anemia of the state in no small degree. There should be a parallel reform of the civil service in order to reconstitute it. Reformation must go way beyond pay increments to recruitment, training, performance assessment and promotion (Khan, 2018). The solution is to have a mind change about being a regulator and the follower of precedents to being an enabler, the facilitator and the creative problem solver. It requires immense, consistent and contextual capacity building of provincial and local authorities which take a larger portion of service delivery roles. At the same time, it involves developing a vibrant, independent, and professional policy analysis community in universities, think tanks, and within the media - a community that values local and case-based evidence, the value of context over blindly applying international 'best practices' to the local setting.

Fifth, Nurturing a New Story of Public Policy. The policy discourse master is primarily one that has never ceased being of unremitting crisis, scarcity and external dependency - the narrative of what Pakistan does not have and cannot do (Zaidi, 2020). There needs to be a deliberate effort to reinterpret a complementary story of endogenous agency, innovation and collective responsibility, through a reconstitute method. This implies a strategic planning, telling and telling of local policy successes, collaborative problem solving, whether it is in a Union Council in Gilgit, or in a municipal project in Karachi. It needs to build a popular culture, via the media and education, of valuing long term stewardship, evidence based debate and the common good over short term patronage, populist rhetoric and zero sum competitiveness.

This reconstitution is not a technical repair that should be imported or a checklist that should be completed. It is a profound political, institutional as well as cultural venture that spans generations. It means political leadership courageous enough to think outside the electoral cycles and to invest in the institutional capital, a bureaucracy that is ready to divide power and accept some new kinds of accountability and a citizenry that is not only empowered but also motivated to be constructive with the state. It is, in a sense, the basic task of constructing a State, not only administratively competent but also democratically legitimate, socially responsive and resilient to the challenges of the twenty-first century which are enormous and interdependent (Lodhi, 2021). In tracing out those fruitful lines of the prevailing disorder and those fragile, new opportunities, this is to contribute a rooted, critical and optimistic point of view to that significant, continued and necessary project of the nation.

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