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Q3 While wicked and unruly problems like social inequalities in health and education create an urgent need for policy innovation, policy makers in Pakistan are badly positioned to initiate, drive and lead this innovation. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take.

Introduction

Pakistan faces many serious problems including education and health inequalities. These problems require urgent innovations in policy to find root causes and mitigate their effects. However, the ability of policy makers in Pakistan to initiate the policy, drive it and lead the policy innovation is hindered by various challenges. Facts, figures and figures will be provided to support the statement. Public policy is hard to be implemented in Pakistan due to some constraints but not impossible, with some provided case-studies it is clear that there is a way of hope by joint efforts.

Hurdles in Policy Innovation

Pakistan policy-making process is constrained by several factors:

1. Institutional Constraints

Pakistan's policy-making is often hindered by institutional weakness, such as a lack of capacity resources, and autonomy (World Bank, 2018).

For instance, the ministry of Health's Budget allocation for 2020-2021 was only 1.2% of the total budget, indicating a lack of prioritization (Government of Pakistan, 2020).

2. Political Instability

Frequent changes in government and political instability can lead to the discontinuity of the policy and innovation (Daun, 2020). Since 1947, Pakistan has had 22 prime-ministers, with an average tenure of just 1.5 years (PIDE, 2020). Policy needs to be run for months in order to show its efficiency but due to political instability it is always disrupted.

3. Limited Engagement with Stakeholders:

Lack of diverse perspectives and expertise in public-policy is caused due to limited engagement of stakeholders. According to Khan, 2019;

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policy makers in Pakistan often fail to engage with relevant stakeholders, including civil society, academia and the private sector.

4- Corruption and Patronage:

Corruption and patronage can influence policy decisions, undermining the effectiveness of policy innovations. In the Corruption Perception Index 2020, Pakistan ranked 140 out of 180 countries in corruption.

5- Limited Access to Data and Research

Policy becomes inefficient when there is lack of full resource access, limited access provides limited benefits. In Pakistan policy makers often lack access to reliable data and research, hindering evidence-based policy making. For example, the last national health survey was conducted in 2017-2018 (NIPS, 2019).

Policy Innovation is not impracticable

Though there are challenges in policy innovations and implements, but there are positive signs of efforts to address these issues. Certain case-studies enlighten the practicalities of policy innovations and encourage work on policy innovation by showing practical examples.

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1. Lady Health Workers Program (LHW) case-study

The LHW program was launched in 1994 in Pakistan. It stands as one of the most successful public health interventions, particularly for marginalised communities. Targeting maternal and child health, LHWs deliver basic health services directly to rural and underserved populations, significantly reducing child mortality rates. Despite facing logistical challenges, the program has proven that community based interventions can succeed even when larger systematic issues persist. According to UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), as of 2021, over 100,000 health workers were part of this initiative, highlighting its wide reach.

2. Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP) case-study

The PESRP, implemented in the early 2000s, aimed to improve education quality, access, and governance across Punjab. By focusing on teacher recruitment, capable building, and introduction of digital monitoring systems, the program achieved a notable reduction in absenteeism and an

improvement in student enrollment and retention. This initiative demonstrated the potential of a large-scale education reform when backed by political commitment and evidence-based policy interventions.

3- Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) Case-study

BISP is one of the largest social safety net programs in Pakistan, designed to reduce poverty through cash transfer to low-income families, particularly women. The program has had a significant positive impact on improving access to education and health services, as families use these funds to invest in their children's education and health care. A 2019 impact evaluation reported a 7% increase in school enrollment for girls from households receiving BISP funds, showing that social protection can play a key role in addressing inequalities.

Guidelines to Reduce Hurdles in Path of Policy Innovation and Implementation

Strengthening and Investing on certain fields

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and reducing illegal activities can uplift the policy innovation and implementation in Pakistan, such as:

1. Strengthening Governance and Accountability

Innovation policy requires robust systems of governance and accountability. Improving data transparency, reducing bureaucratic delays, and minimizing corruption should be the corner stone of a new policy initiative. This ensures that the funds allocated for education and health reach the intended beneficiaries and that policy goals align with outcomes.

2. Inclusive Policy Development:

Policy makers must engage with wide range of stakeholders, including civil society, marginalized communities and local leaders. Such policy making ensures that the policy address the unique challenges of underrepresented groups, fostering long-term sustainability. The Pakistan National Human Development Report emphasizes that successful policies must consider the perspective of those directly affected by social inequalities (UNDP).

3. Investing in Data-Driven Solutions

Pakistan's government and NGO's must invest on data and research based works.

Research and data can better to reduce the gaps in education and healthcare.

Using real-time data to monitor the progress of reforms, track disparities, and adapt policies accordingly will allow for more agile and effective responses to changing needs.

Conclusion

While Pakistan's policymakers face numerous challenges in driving innovation to address social issues, there are certain case-studies like Lady Health Worker Program, PESRP and BISP which provide clear evidence that well-targeted interventions can make a substantial difference. The path to reducing social inequalities lies in leveraging lessons from these policies and ensuring that future policies are data-based, transparent and inclusive. Through stronger governance, collaboration and an unwavering commitment to the most marginalised, Pakistan can make meaningful

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strides towards a more equitable future.
