Fighting Inequality by Promoting Diversity: Dialogue on Culture in the Post-Pandemic Time

In order to shape the young democracy of Pakistan from a multicultural and liberal view, culture should be considered a key part of sustainable development enforcing change for social and political inclusivity. What we learn from academic debates about multiculturalism is that it should be regarded as an 'attitude', 'tool of public policy', 'aspect of institutional design' or 'moral justification' (Hoffmann and Graham 2015: 337). Unfortunately, states are slowly neglecting the very basic function and original purpose of multiculturalism, which is to shape appropriate identity politics and policies that fit multicultural societies' needs.

There is now an increasing need to not only *respect* rights of minority cultural groups *morally* and *ethically*, but also *recognize* those rights by law and integrate them into policies. Countries such as Canada and Australia brought multiculturalism to the centre of public discussion half a century ago. This attention has not only included media images of different colourful customs, music and art of different cultures and ethnic groups, but also included actions to make the political system committed to cultural diversity in different legal and policy-making terms. Canada's 'Multicultural Act' in 1988 is one of those examples (Heywood 2017: 373).

In Pakistan, there have been great attempts to involve cultural diversity as a source of democratic power. However, the country has a long way to go to centralize multiculturalism in wider political debates and shape policies accordingly. Lack of political experience in applying multiculturalism is a crucial challenge in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The more recent COVID-19 pandemic is the latest difficulty that has brought changes to social life, education policies, religious practices, youth and gender issues, and consequently, culture. It is important to understand what these challenges have been; and what the main strategies are to deal with them and the ways forward are.

Jointly organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF Pakistan), this panel will discuss the role of culture in achieving (SDG 10: reduced inequalities) in the post-COVID-19 time. Both organizations have rich experience of focusing on the issue through different projects such as cultural diplomacy (Kamali-Chirani 2021) and cultural federalism (Chandio 2020).

In this regard, the panel will explore and address the following questions:

- What have been the key impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on cultural dimensions of SDG 10's progress in Pakistan?
- How effective have been public policies in applying multiculturalism and addressing challenges during the pandemic (specifically regarding reducing inequality in social and cultural terms)?
- How best can multiculturalism efficiently tackle social conflicts in Pakistan - through public policy, civil society, and involvement of citizens and social inclusivity or through all of these?
- What are key policy recommendations for accelerating sustainable development approaches and achieving the SDGs by 2030?

References
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Hoffmann, J. and Graham, P. 2015, *Introduction to Political Theory*, Third Edition, London: Routledge.

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