Data and Evidence for Informed Policy-making and Planning in Social Sectors

One of the key strategies for development is the use of data and research evidence for policy-making. Some of the major causes of ineffective public policies over the past years in Pakistan are rooted in corruption, financial constraints, lack of skilled human resources and ineffective monitoring systems. Debates conducted on the issue have identified a lack of data and research on the one hand, and a failure to use data and research evidence for policy-making on the other.

Both Open Knowledge Foundation (OKFn) and Open Data Institute (ODI) have been reviewing national level data availability and ranking countries and regions against established criteria like data availability, machine readability and cost of data. Based on this, the Open Data Barometer ranked Pakistan at 67th out of 86 countries, under the category of countries which are ‘capacity constrained’ (World Wide Web Foundation 2015).

However, as the movement towards open data gathers pace, evidence generation and its use for policy-making is gaining importance day by day. This change has been brought about both through the Right to Information (RTI) legislation and in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, after which the need for setting up a concrete monitoring and evaluation framework has become a priority. The profound use of evidence and data for policy-making has great potential to improve outcomes and change the lives of people in Pakistan. Rational analysis and evidence-based planning entails that policies be derived on the basis of available data (which is transparent, representative and relevant). The success of policy-making decisions and reforms in the social sector is also subject to greater use of empirical data that can illustrate the extent of social issues such as disease burden, poverty and illiteracy in a country (Scott 2005).

Owing to the far-reaching impact on development practices, the potential for change brought about by evidence-based policies is accentuated (Sutcliffe and Court 2005) in developing countries. In this context, Alif Ailaan and SDPI have collaborated to form the Pakistan Data Portal (PDP), an online portal for easy access, public use and dissemination of education and nutrition data.

This panel seeks to explore how current policies were developed and how robustly evidence was used in the policy-making process in Pakistan. This discussion will also help to address data needs and to promote the use of existing evidence and data in policy-making, especially for the social sector. The following specific inquiries will be brought forth:

- What is the current view of evidence-based policy-making? Are policies credible, relevant and well-grounded in statistical knowledge of social issues (particularly health, education)?
- What is the process of policy-making (from formulation to implementation)? To what extent is the use of existing data and research evidence made inclusive in the policy-making regime?
- What are the implications of the emerging trends of open data and evidence-based policy-making for the social sector?
- SDGs will require diligent use of data to track changes for the monitoring and evaluation of health and education indicators. What steps need to be taken for public data collection in the social sector in context of the post-2015 agenda?
- Are there any lessons learned from both current and past practices in policy-making? What strategies must be developed to ensure that the existing scope of data usage is expanded and that currently available data and evidence sources are used to the best of their capacity for policy-making?
- Can increased data help deepen the devolution and fiscal decentralisation process (and how)?

References


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