

Rural Proofing: A New Lens to Reimagine Rural Policy

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Rural-Urban Disparities in Pakistan



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61.18%

of Pakistan's population lives in rural areas but accounts for **less than one-third** of GDP



30%

lower average annual income in rural areas compared to urban counterparts



of Pakistanis live below poverty line — **75% of whom are in** rural areas



40%

broadband penetration gap between rural and urban districts



2×

higher maternal mortality rate in rural areas compared to national average

What is Rural Proofing?



O Definition

A **structured process** that integrates a "rural lens" into all stages of policy design, implementation and evaluation

A **guidance mechanism** ensuring proposed laws, regulations and programmes are appraised for their impacts on rural communities

Origin & Evolution

- Originated in the late 1990s across OECD countries
- Examples: Canada's "rural lens" and England's DEFRA model
- Now an **OECD-endorsed best practice** for place-based policymaking



Four Core Stages of Rural Proofing



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Scoping and Definition

Clearly delineating "rural" to reflect the heterogeneity of zones

- Peri-urban fringes
- Irrigated plains
- Arid plains
- Mountainous highlands



Evidence Gathering

Collecting data early in policy development

- **Quantitative data**: demographics, income, service access
- **Qualitative insights**: local stakeholder consultations



Impact Assessment

Conducting ex-ante evaluations of draft proposals

- ▼ Transport, health, education policies
- Agricultural programmes
- ✓ Identify **unintended disparities** or harness rural advantages



Adjustment, Monitoring & Accountability

Iteratively refining policies based on feedback

- **▼** Transparent indicators: rural poverty rates, travel times
- Defined responsibilities for follow-through

Current Rural Situation in Pakistan



Rural Population

61.18%

of Pakistan's total population lives in rural areas (as of August 2023)

→ GDP Contribution

29%

of GDP generated by rural areas despite having majority of population

Poverty Rate

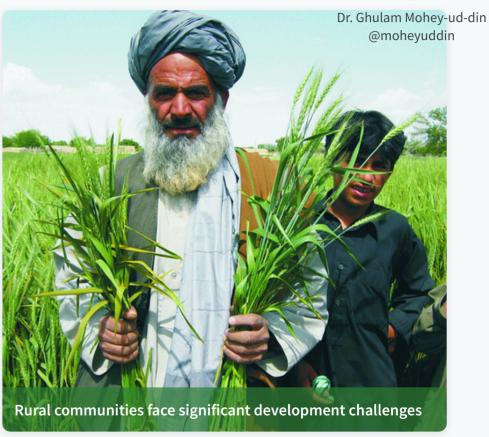
45%

of Pakistanis live below poverty line, with over 70% of multidimensional poverty in rural areas

Maternal Mortality

186/100k

deaths per 100,000 live births in remote regions — **double** the national average



Energy Access Gap

12% of villages remain off-grid for electricity, limiting economic opportunities and quality of life

Institutionalizing Rural Proofing





Legislative Backing

- Amend Rules of Business to require rural proofing in all regulatory impact assessments
- Mirror Northern Ireland's Rural Needs Act which legally obliges policymakers to demonstrate rural impact consideration



- Establish Rural Proofing Cell within Planning Commission
- Create mirror units in provincial planning departments
- Staff with demographers, geographers, and sector specialists for impact appraisals



"Institutionalizing rural proofing transforms policy from urban-centric to place-based development that addresses the realities of 148 million rural Pakistanis."

— Dr. Ghulam Mohey-ud-din

Strengthening Data Infrastructure



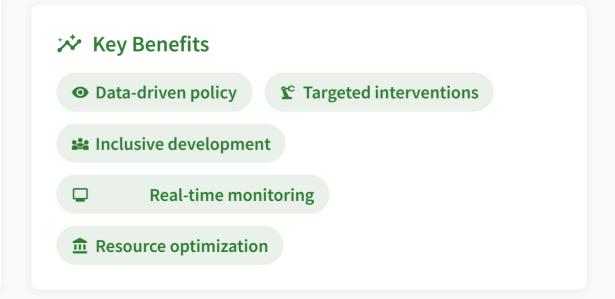
Geospatial Surveys

- Partner with Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and academic institutions
- High-resolution household and infrastructure mapping
- Leverage satellite imagery and mobile data collection
- © Update metrics on roads, school quality, and health facility catchment areas



Participatory Platforms

- Institutionalize village-level consultations through Union Councils and Panchayats
- Specific modules on women's livelihoods
- Focus on **youth employment** opportunities
- Track migration patterns and their drivers



Calibrating Sectoral Policies



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◌̃ Agriculture & Livelihoods

- Shift to **risk-adjusted crop insurance** calibrated for district-level climate profiles
- Expand mobile-based extension services for water-efficient irrigation
- Disseminate best practices in post-harvest storage techniques

Digital Connectivity & Finance

- Prioritize rural broadband with 20% of spectrum revenues for community Wi-Fi hubs
- Expand agent banking models to increase digital financial inclusion
- Create digital platforms for market access and price information

Health

- Incorporate mobile clinics in remote zones with regular schedules
- ✓ Implement **telemedicine** solutions for specialist consultations
- Rural-proof national health insurance schemes with expanded coverage

Solution

- Implement teacher recruitment quotas reflecting rural-urban population shares
- Provide incentives for postings in hard-to-reach areas
- Develop digital learning platforms for remote education access

Monitoring, Evaluation & Adaptive Governance



Rural-specific KPIs

Define clear rural-specific performance indicators

- → Rural poverty rate
- **☐** Travel time to health centers
- **⇒** Student-teacher ratios
- Publish quarterly scorecards for transparency
- Establish baseline measurements for comparison

Feedback Loops

- ✓ Implement mid-term policy adjustments when KPIs deviate by more than 10%
- Create digital dashboards accessible to policymakers and public
- Establish rapid response mechanisms for critical indicators
- Integrate community feedback through mobile surveys

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- **Rural Proofing Forums**
- Convene bi-annual forums with key stakeholders
- Include federal and provincial ministers, civil society, and private sector
- Review progress and recalibrate strategies based on evidence
- Document lessons learned and best practices for scaling

Transforming Rural Pakistan



- Rural proofing can transform the rural-urban divide into an **engine for inclusive**growth and resilience
- A formal rural-proofing framework grounded in robust data, participatory engagement and adaptive governance
- This place-based approach can unlock latent economic potential, reduce poverty, and foster balanced development