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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



45%

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?



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👁 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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1

Scoping and Definition

Clearly delineating "rural" to reflect the heterogeneity of zones

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



2

Evidence Gathering

Collecting data early in policy development

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



3

Impact Assessment

Conducting ex-ante evaluations of draft proposals

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



4

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



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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



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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

Dedicated Unit

- ✓ 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



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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

Key Benefits

- 👁 **Data-driven policy**
- 🎯 **Targeted interventions**
- 👥 **Inclusive development**
- 📺 **Real-time monitoring**
- 🏠 **Resource optimization**

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

Education

- ✓ 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



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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

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



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- 📈 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