

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY INSTITUTE
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Paper 1-A (Summary Version)

Architects and Contractors
Political Economy Analysis of Policy
Research in Pakistan

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¹ This is a summary version of a longer, background paper by Geof Wood, commissioned by DFID as part of a Landscaping of Policy Research Exercise in Pakistan, undertaken by Wood and Naveed, together with a team at SDPI, Islamabad during September-December 2012. DFID requested a shorter, more simplified version for wider circulation. In addition to our own original, primary research, these papers have drawn upon key secondary sources in Pakistan, especially by S. Akbar Zaidi ('Dismal State of Social Sciences in Pakistan', Council of Social Sciences, Islamabad 2002) and S. G. Khattack ('Research in Difficult Settings: Reflections on Pakistan and Afghanistan' Submitted to IDRC, August 2009) for our analysis. Wood is grateful to Arif Naveed for assistance in producing this summary version, as well as the inputs from commissioning staff in DFID.

Key messages

1. The decentralisation of many government functions and services (i.e. the 18th Amendment to the Constitution) moves the Planning Commission's role away from detailed command planning towards more indicative planning, with a focus upon inclusive growth and developing human capital and infrastructure. This shift will have a profound effect upon the research/policy interface, since so much of it is presently Islamabad focussed.
2. Participants in the study suggest the links between research and policy in Pakistan are particularly weak due to high levels of political insecurity and volatility which prompts short-term, highly politicised decision making rather than evidence-based choices and policy.
3. Our study findings indicate that this impact of research on policy is also weak because policy makers do not have the capacity or incentives to absorb complex analysis whether quantitative or qualitative. Policy makers do not, therefore, develop functional networks with researchers.
4. Respondents suggest that although the social sciences are a crucial underpinning of much policy analysis, especially across the sectors identified in this study, the social sciences are seriously neglected in Pakistan, and, outside economics, are especially weak. Qualitative forms of research (e.g. from anthropology) are not valued. Underlying social science capacity is weakened by parental preferences for students to follow more obviously lucrative subjects in engineering, medicine, management and other applied sciences. The resulting quality of teaching and research in the social sciences thereby suffers.
5. Participants in this study said that donors dominate the public policy research space through funding and commissioning, but they tend to have short term, projectised priorities across a range of thematic narratives and thus do not build long term capacity and relationships with the longer term, core development narrative of the country. Thus the work that they sponsor is often marginalised by central planners.
6. Overall, research outlets are relatively few and highly concentrated for a country of this size and complexity. While some of the economics-focussed institutions are closely allied with counterparts in government (especially Ministry of Finance and the Planning Commission), other disciplines and institutes, e.g. in agriculture, nutrition and social policy, tend to be allied with particular programmes like the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) rather than a core policy area.
7. There are numerous barriers to undertaking research and its uptake which are summarised in the main text and set out in more detail in the Appendices. Some of these barriers refer to the intrinsic weaknesses of the social sciences, others to socio-cultural sensibilities, and others to the security issues.

A- Context and scope

This study was undertaken as an assignment commissioned by the Research and Evidence Division, DFID London in conjunction with DFID-Pakistan. Its immediate purpose is to provide DFID with a database of policy relevant research activity in the country through mapping the overall landscape, as well as a political economy analysis (PEA) of the research to policy interface. This paper represents the PEA part of the assignment. It is therefore an important step to allowing DFID, and other research funders, to effectively design and

implement policy relevant research programmes. Research in general and policy research in particular could be defined in multiple ways. In this study, by policy research, we mean, ‘any activity focused on the generation of evidence and that analysis is the process of reviewing evidence in combination with other factors to identify the options for action’.

B- Methods

This study draws upon large qualitative data gathered from three types of actors: a) research organizations/groups, including academic institutions and think-tanks in the public sector, non-government or private sector; b) public sector organizations such as Planning Commission, ministries and departments, engaged in policy making; and c) key international donor agencies often engaged in commissioning research and supporting policy processes. Data from over 100 institutions, supported by interviews in most cases², was collected during September – December 2012 and the process began with the development of lists of the organizations engaged in research under selected themes including education, triangulated with DFID and a Review Committee throughout the period of the study. In order to ensure the quality of the analysis, a Review Committee was formed consisting of four leading policy analysts covering: academia, think tanks and government.³

C- The wider institutional context for policy making – 18th amendment and planning commission

Understanding policy dynamics in Pakistan requires two recent institutional shifts to be placed at the core of the analysis. First, decentralization, led by the 18th Constitutional Amendment, which has devolved several traditionally federal functions to provincial governments providing the later unprecedented autonomy in policy making. Second, the paradigm shift at the Planning Commission evident through the replacement of the historic 5 Year Plans with the ‘indicative planning’ as evident from the New Growth Framework. Such paradigmatic shift has abandoned the decades old tradition of consultative working groups, the broad inter-face between research and policy, with Growth Strategy which has been a

² Based on these thematic lists, further data was collected through two pronged strategy: a) a detailed review of the websites of the organizations; and, b) semi-structured interviews with the heads (or second tier-leadership) of these organizations. Separate interview schedules were developed to collect data from organizations engaged in conducting research, organizations making policies in the public sector and international donor agencies having close interface with both research and policy.

³ Professor Aliya Khan, Chairperson School of Economics, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad; Dr. Khalida Ghaus, Managing Director, Social Policy Development Centre, Karachi; and Dr. Abid Qayyum Suleri, Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad. The Review Committee guided the study team in the identification of the key organizations and has reviewed the main outputs of the study. Dr. Tanveer Naim, ex-HEC and Secretary, Commission for Science and Technology, joined the review team.

more confined, technocratic process. This shift⁴ has, de facto, removed an element of ‘system’ from the relation between research, evidence building and sector-wise policy choice, and replaced it with a more haphazard, ad hoc commissioning relationship.

The abandonment of the federal 5 Year Plan modality of sectoral management, in effect passing on key sectoral planning and investment functions to the Provinces with as yet untested results, profoundly changes the role of the Planning Commission as the central formal site of policy discourse between sectors represented by Ministries, departments and external evidence providers. This decentralisation almost has a determining effect upon the Planning Commission re-defining both its own role and that of federal government more generally towards oversight of the macro economy and incentive management⁵ of a focussed growth strategy.⁶

D- Weak link between research and policy: the structural context of insecurity

The prevailing insecurity increases the discount rates of all actors and encourages short term problem solving rather than long term investment. This short term behaviour can be seen in excessive rent-seeking across the political economy and of course, palliative policy among political leaders in order to ensure some prospect of reproduction of their rent-seeking opportunities. This is not a conducive environment for developing serious, long range policy perspectives and commitments, and also weakens any desire among the political establishment and their immediate and incorporated (or politicised) bureaucratic advisors for evidence based thinking and formulated commitments beyond their discounted time preferences.

With such a weak link between research ‘supply’ and policy makers’ ‘demand’ for evidence based policy choice, the policy process loses rationality in favour of politicisation. We should be clear that policy anywhere is, and should be, always political. The issue is whether it becomes political (and maybe ideological) to absurd limits so that no rational underpinning in terms of any notion of public good can be discerned. Participants in our study suggested that Pakistan is towards the absurd end of that continuum. This helps to explain the universal refrain that politicians, their senior bureaucratic advisors and many other socio-economic actors in the society (from business people to *mullahs*) are not interested in research inputs to policy and ‘do not listen to research’.⁷ However the process is more subtle than the simple one of ‘rejection’ or ‘divorce’.⁸

⁴ This shift has been prompted by the 18th Amendment which effectively dissolved the Federal Plan in favour of Provincial ones, with federal budget allocation now in Annual Plan mode, which involves less ‘planning’ and thus consultation.

⁵ e.g. through overarching fiscal levers of: tax waivers, subsidies, tariff removal, loan repayment holidays, differential interest rate manipulation, steering of FDI, encouraging remittances into investment, stimulating domestic savings rates, steering investment towards infrastructure with multipliers and strong backward and forward linkages.

⁶ See ‘Pakistan: New Growth Framework’ Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, January 2011

⁷ Based on the views expressed by the experts and stakeholders including Deputy Chairmain Planning Commission, at the USAID/IFPRI supported PSSP conference in the Planning Commission. But also see Zaidi, Khattack and the vast majority of our informants across nearly 100 research outlets and think-tanks. This view is

E- Link between research and policy: donors and fragmented narratives

Pakistan has a substantial, semi-autonomous presence of donors who selectively support the domestically constructed priorities.⁹ They have thematic preferences for research and evidence and then their own programme preferences in key, selected sectors and purposes. However these sectoral priorities¹⁰ confine their research sponsorship to a selective variety of sub-narratives where they can see immediate outcomes from the work they have commissioned, according to their policy results chain. This shorter term, projectised, mode of aid can distort the landscape and undermine longer term research capacity focussed upon core policy problems. The complex structures of the two largest bilateral donors, USAID and DFID, for example, ideally requires coordination internally between their departments (i.e. between field and HQ, and between sectoral divisions), then between donors themselves in country, and then with counterpart departments in GOP, as well as with government as a whole. This is an enormous challenge and, despite best efforts, rarely achievable.¹¹

This problem of coordination leads to a process whereby the connection of research to policy is fragmented, non-systematic, involving a plethora of actors and institutions acting relatively independently of others, even competitively, and in partial ignorance of them. This appears to result in duplication, repetition, and a piecemeal rediscovering of wheels while overall strategic direction of government is neglected by the research community, thus removing prospects for accountability and constructive scrutiny. Since our mapping data shows that the bulk of commissioning policy related research is done by donors¹², this fragmented picture at least raises questions about the degree of coherence of the donor presence in Pakistan and their collective problem of efficiency both between themselves and in terms of confusing any prospect of policy clarity by any sitting government.

This fragmentation of narratives frames the commissioning process for policy related research, with a large number of commissioned, diverse, sectoral policy studies submitted to sponsoring or granting organisations and never seeing the light of day because they are not published in the public domain, not peer reviewed and thus not scrutinised for their validity in contributing to sound policy.¹³ In other words they make no contribution to the whole, i.e. an integrated development narrative for the country and hence coherent strategy.

also forcefully made to us from HEC, from senior leaders of the now defunct Science and Technology Commission. But no-one has tried to explain the problem in the above terms.

⁸ The 'divorce' point refers to some informants (especially old PIDE hands) having a 'golden age' view that research/policy linkages used to be better.

⁹ Nevertheless, Khattack argues that donors shy away from certain themes due to 'diplomatic sensitivities' especially in relation to women: rights; violence; autonomy in sexually reproductive health; and the problem of patriarchy generally.

¹⁰ Indicated for example by the sectors nominated by DFID for attention in the TOR for this exercise.

¹¹ Geof Wood has witnessed this at close hand in Bangladesh over several decades, having had roles inside the Government of Bangladesh, as well as among donors, think-tanks and NGOs.

¹² We find this difficult to estimate with our present data, but the study team agree from their primary data collection that the proportion lies in the region of 80-90%. To estimate this properly would require considerable forensic resources and a willingness of donors and research outlets alike to share such information, which can be commercially sensitive.

¹³ Khattack, in the 'reflections' part of her paper argues that policy research is seldom in the public domain, not open to public scrutiny and is done within non-critical paradigms. She also argues that policy related academics

The danger for supply side, research outlets is that the availability of donor funding for policy related research is too attractive to ignore, but draws them away from core sovereign narratives, and marginalises them in the society by confining them to projectised objectives with short and unstable lifespans. Not all research is thus co-opted, but these are now the dominant policy research paradigms for donors, and certainly not just confined to USAID and DFID. Within these paradigm constraints, the preference for quantitative forms of analysis marginalises the potential qualitative social science contribution to policy.¹⁴

F- Poor social science base

With a few notable exceptions, the social sciences are weak in Pakistan in terms of quality of teaching provision at undergraduate and graduate levels¹⁵. The overall poor image of the social sciences is compounded by its partial association with qualitative methods in a context where evidence is only valued if quantitative. There are several problems with the social sciences in Pakistan.

The **first** is ‘patronage role of the state’ together with the ‘prominence of the bureaucracy’. This refers especially to the incorporation of economists from among the social sciences into bureaucratic positions within the state where increasingly they are drawn away from more fundamental, critical longer term analysis into shorter term cost benefit analysis of project choices and evaluations. Other social sciences do not even get a look in, in the sense that sociology, anthropology or political sciences cannot be practised as part of one’s bureaucratic role. And rewards either from prestigious, senior government positions, or from employment by international organisations (including donors) generates a distortion of the social sciences towards immediately policy relevant research, again favouring economists.

Second are perceptions around the value of social science and a culture of debate and critique. Confirming observations about mediocrity above (though excluding some notable economists e.g. with a career history at PIDE), Zaidi also observes that the stronger incentives about subject choice for higher education study are towards the more respected and income generating subjects like medicine, engineering, IT and other natural sciences, reflecting prevalent social and cultural valuation. In his view, this preference for more technical, apolitical, subject choice (our words) also reflects a cultural atmosphere in which free-floating discussion and debate is discouraged.

have no freedom to pursue longer-term, more fundamental agendas, that they are too projectised, and that they and their sponsors need to think beyond project deliverables.

¹⁴ Perhaps this is what Khattack (2009) meant by researchers being overwhelmed and distracted by policy communities.

¹⁵ For example, a statement made to us by a distinguished retired physics professor, who has recently joined the Global Think Tank Network at NUST. The Women’s Study Centre at Quaid-e-Azam University observes that many people having social science degrees are not capable enough to carry out research. Research and Development Solutions (RADS) hired MPH graduates from the Health Services Academy, but had many issues training them as they had such poor writing skills. Even Management Systems International (MSI, the USAID Evaluation wing) struggles to recruit local experts with good writing skills and need international staff to oversee their work.

Finally in this summary, Zaidi, with his deeper inside knowledge of how academic institutions operate, refers to the general decline (if ever there was a golden age) in standards of public sector institutions characterised by non-transparent, and thus non merit based, promotion and preferment, reflecting patron-client management. This undermines any prospect of a vibrant academic and intellectual community, and either traps individuals unhappily within institutions to be credible, prompting their moonlighting externally, or prompts their flight either into more flexibly managed think-tanks (and likely to be donor supported) or abroad, where, Zaidi maintains, some of the best Pakistani social science academics are to be found.

Much of this 2002 analysis is confirmed later by Khattack in 2009 in the Pakistan sections of her paper. She bemoans the erosion of existing institutions of higher learning and research, the re-location of trained researchers to other countries,¹⁶ the bias of parents as well as the HEC away from social sciences, the problem of bureaucratic hierarchies with HEIs, the limited freedom of researchers to publish critical findings, the biases introduced by NGOs and donors towards the ‘projectising’ of research within mainly western paradigms of ‘good’ development, though she also mentions religious NGOs and their ‘research’ agendas.¹⁷ Amidst her gloom, she, like the present Deputy Chair of the Planning Commission, regaled against the absence of public intellectuals, though both she and Zaidi singled out SPDC and SDPI as performing some of that function in questioning development frameworks.

G- Commissioning of research

Research sponsors and users do not follow any single standardized research commissioning process. Research commissioning also differs among different research commissioning bodies. The government research commissioning agencies, such as Planning Commission and Higher Education Commission, generally support the research institutions which are affiliated with public sector universities and research councils or function under federal or provincial ministries. Whereas, the international donor agencies, such as USAID, DFID and World Bank rely heavily on widely reputed and established research institutions. Overall, The research commissioning in Pakistan can be broadly categorized into two forms: 1) the **formal** research commissioning including bidding/open competition, program support funding, and core funding for research; 2) the **informal** research commissioning mainly done through networking, personal connections, pick and choose, and lobbying.¹⁸

¹⁶ This point was confirmed to us by, for example, the Institute of Public Policy –Beacon House National University (IPP-BNU) in Lahore, attributing this exodus to lack of funding and incentives in Pakistan. The Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (ISPS) in Islamabad points out that employees are normally appointed on 3 principles of competency, honesty and nationalism, but the competent ones usually leave the country and pursue careers abroad. However, in contrast AERC in Karachi now reports that it is benefitting from some returning PhDs.

¹⁷ Zaidi too is highly critical of NGO sponsored research which for him is really just legitimizing evaluation of organizational programme preferences.

¹⁸ To support the typology offered here, the reader should also consult Appendix 2 as well as the Landscaping Paper which also contributes to this exercise.

There are standard modalities under each category. The modalities under **formal** research commissioning are: long term budgetary support; core support for capacity building over fixed period of time; negotiated fixed-term support for research to policy/advocacy institutions; open call formats for competitive bidding. The credibility of researchers and strong professional networking seem to have a very significant role in **informal** research commissioning. Cutting across many of these modalities above, we should recognize that individual reputations count for a lot. Often it is not the institution per se which is being recognized but the individuals within it.¹⁹ Work and opportunities are more likely to follow individuals, especially if they remain institutionalized rather than just individual freelancers.²⁰ We need also to recognize that the relationship between the suppliers of funds (sponsors) and the providers of research and evaluation services is often a multi-period transaction with implications for compliance and conformity and thus for critical innovation in policy and practice rather than path dependency.

H- Culture and governance

The perceived value of research and evidence in a rationalist policy model is further compounded by interconnected issues of culture and governance. Leadership in Pakistan, and thus political and bureaucratic leadership, is a function of class and status within well understood hierarchies of power, privilege and deference. While merit and personal achievement may be a factor determining who rises to the top within these privileged elites, the opinions and judgements of ‘seniors’ is not easily challenged by ‘juniors’ even if supported by objective evidence. Instead, loyalty is expected.²¹ Thus, internally within a Ministry, even if ‘juniors’ (i.e. policy advisory roles) are equipped with policy relevant evidence, they face cultural difficulties in trying to represent and deploy that evidence in policy discussions. Observers with government experience also say that this is not just a hierarchy problem, but that sector specialists always find it difficult to challenge senior level generalist bureaucrats. The Punjab Education Assessment System (PEAS)²² argues that bureaucrats are sitting in positions where technical experts with PhDs should be sitting. For example, in the Punjab Education Fund and Punjab Textbook Board, there is a need for technical expertise and thus technically qualified staff, but instead generalist bureaucrats are in control. The externalised relationships between political and bureaucratic leaders on the one hand and research organisations are more complex. While loyalty cannot so easily be expected, excessive criticism with evidence challenging preferred policy stances is not welcomed. It can either be ignored altogether or selectively used, or the validity of the evidence counter-challenged.²³

¹⁹ An observation made to us many times by informants, but also confirmed by the judgements of both Zaidi in 2002, and Khattack in 2009.

²⁰ Again, a judgment confirmed by Zaidi and Khattack, namely that credibility relies upon having an institutional affiliation rather than being freelance.

²¹ Zaidi makes this point also, and Khattack refers to limited freedom to publish critical findings.

²² A unit within the Schools department of the Punjab Ministry of Education.

²³ See Khattack’s analysis on this point.

I- (In)dependence of research – contractors and architects

The main, ‘populist’, accusation is that donors have a disproportionate influence through their superior commissioning power and that, inevitably, their preferences and agendas for the society prevail.²⁴ This populist, ‘sovereignty’, stance is certainly prompted by the overwhelming presence of donors in the funding of policy relevant research across the main research outlets of Pakistan. While not historically contributing to the evolution of research capacity and its infrastructural underpinning²⁵, donors together are generally understood to represent 80-90% of the present research activity of the institutions identified by us for this study, with USAID featuring most prominently and pervasively, although not with a monopoly over the strategically most significant sectors, with, for example, DFID supporting the International Growth Centre in Lahore via its programme grant to LSE in London. Thus for this analysis, donors are a crucial part of the contextual landscape.

The ‘independence’ question then has to be refined to distinguish between different types of relationship between donors and their ‘client’ research outlets in the country. In some cases, donor support is designed to support the critical independence of the recipient institution. The grant support of IDRC to SPDC and SDPI might be considered in this way, insisting only upon quality outputs. But other cases of donor support involve very tight specifications by donors when issuing calls for bidding, almost relegating an institution to the status of survey contractor, and then on-going negotiations about report content and findings. The Society for Advancement of Education (SAHE) in Lahore reports that donors sometimes change a project entirely during its functioning, or even abort it. A single institution might combine different streams of longer term unrestricted core and shorter term restricted project support, probably coming from different donors but in some instances the same ones. In nutshell, research organizations, by and large, act more like ‘contractors’ with donors functioning as the ‘architects’ of policy research.

J- Policy knowledge communities

Different policy groups can advance the merits of their respective positions by recruiting research and evidence to support their case, and this will lead them to adopt favoured institutional clients to supply that supporting analysis. In Pakistan, specialist institutions are more allied to corresponding specialist ministries and their policy positions in negotiation with other ministries, the Ministry of Finance and the Planning Commission. In Pakistan, we are witnessing vertically segmented policy networks or communities involving patronage from different parts of government and across donors with their respective, perhaps regular, client research providers.²⁶ And this means that research confronts research, and that think-

²⁴ The Applied Economic Research Centre (AERC) in Karachi assert this quite strongly.

²⁵ With the exception of USAID more recently supporting HEC at scale in providing PhD scholarships.

²⁶ We outline some of these commissioning modalities below.

tanks and other research outlets gain a reputation for themselves working within certain ideological limits and policy prescriptions in opposition to others.

This structural pattern can be a function of sectoral identity. Thus PIDE with its economists, or IGC in Lahore, now²⁷ broadly supports a growth led strategy in conjunction with the Planning Commission, while the social policy oriented SPDC is focussed more upon direct poverty interventions entailing transfers and other forms of affirmative action (e.g. incentives to encourage families to invest in girls' education), with many other interventionist oriented parts of government and research institutions also allied, for example in health, women's health, food security, nutrition and so on. SDPI is currently more eclectic, with new appointments likely to embrace the new framework for growth while trying to stay in touch with past traditions of sustainability and distributive welfare. Thus the commissioning of research does not just reflect a classic, 'horizontal', divide between policy needs and research capacity, but also more closed, intimate, loops between favoured research providers and their 'clients' in government or among donors, based on known synergies.

K- Barriers to conducting research

The barriers to undertaking policy research can be summarised into following categories:

Accessing funds: The lack of access to funds appears to be the largest barrier to the conduct of research faced by organizations interviewed. Most of the research organizations lack any core financial support to meet their fix and recurring costs. While some organizations, public sector think-tanks and universities receive funding from the government, most of the organizations are solely dependent upon the international aid agencies. Being donor dependent often results in the research agenda driven by the donors. As networking is essential for accessing funds, organizations lying outside Islamabad often suffer from geographic disadvantage. The unreliable financial inflows results organizations hiring short term consultants instead of developing their own core teams of researchers.

Human resources constraints: Given the weak basis of social sciences in academia, the lack of appropriately qualified human resources has appeared to be the second major barrier to doing research. As highlighted by the Chief Executive of the HEC, policy research is essentially an inter-disciplinary field which is not popular in the academia in the country. The lack of human resources thus exists at all levels of skills and experience. Fresh graduates seriously lacked the research capability. There is an overall shortage of mid-career researchers with appropriate set of skills. The historic process of brain drain has particularly affected the availability of highly qualified resources who prefer to stay abroad.

The lack of human resources particularly affected the organizations struggling for financial resources as their trained researchers often move on to better paying organizations with job security. The high turn-over, particularly at the junior and mid-level, adds to the recruitment and training costs for the replacement hiring. Such organizations rely upon short term

²⁷ Looking at the PIDE output over the last 4 decades, it had periods of favouring more state re-distributive welfare strategies partly for social protection reasons, but usually linked to capacity underpinning of a changing workforce linked to employment growth.

consultants which continuously postpones their prospects for institutional development. Moreover, the engagement of short term consultants, at times, results in the conflict of interests as consultants simultaneously work for several organizations. Similarly, there is also a sense of ‘thinning’ of human resources as the good quality researchers/consultants are approached by multiple organizations, procure multiple projects/assignments simultaneously beyond their capacity thus compromising the overall quality of their work.

The state of human resources in universities seems to be improved given HEC’s high investment in HRD over the last decade and foreign trained PhDs are now joining the faculties. Nonetheless, the teaching load over the qualified teachers remains a constant pressure leading to less time for research.

Restricted access to statistics and updated literature: The lack of needed and reliable secondary data is the third major challenge faced by every research organization. For certain organizations, the secondary data collected by the government agencies does not fulfil their needs (health, nutrition, strategic/peace studies). Most of the organizations report the government data to be of poor quality. They also report the inconsistencies in the data collected by various sources. Panel data is particularly missing. Almost all organizations report the difficulties in acquiring the data from the public sector organizations that are mainly responsible for collecting and disseminating the statistics. Very rich data on poverty and social protection collected by the national census under the Benazir Income Support Programme, for example, is not accessible for the researchers. Moreover, there is a strong culture of informality that surrounds these data ware houses and accessing data involves a strong networking with public officials.

In addition to statistics, access to the updated literature particularly the peer reviewed journals remains a serious challenge for all institutions. While there is still lot of room for improvement, HEC has worked towards increasing the access of universities to the journals. Institutions of policy research and policy making, outside academy, have no access to the updated literature.

Security issues: The poor law and order conditions in certain parts of the country appear to be one of the major factors constraining research organizations. Primary data collection is the only choice for most of the projects given the lack of secondary data on certain issues. However, the mobility of field researchers to the areas like FATA, some parts of KPK and Balochistan is very restricted thus limiting the scope of data collection activities. The most affected organizations are the ones working on the issues of peace and security.

Islamabad centric policy research networks: Given the historic concentration of policy making in Islamabad, until the recent devolution, policy discourse has largely been confined within Islamabad. This is further exacerbated with the presence of international donors almost exclusively in Islamabad. Consequently, almost every part of the ‘results chain’, including setting up research agenda, accessing funds and dissemination of results remained concentrated in Islamabad. While the 18th Amendment has redefined the roles and responsibilities in terms of policy-making, the desired shift in the institutional landscape of policy research is yet to take place. With the exception of Lahore, policy research continues to suffer from geographic disadvantage in all other provinces.

In addition, other barriers noted by our informants to conducting policy research in Pakistan are: gender culture inhibiting data collection in certain areas as well as the direct participation of women in the research process; language issues due to the linguistic diversity of the country, often posing challenges for data collection and adding costs due to separate teams for separate language groups. Other issues such as political neglect and donor volatility are already significantly discussed in the paper.

L- Portals/opportunities of the uptake of policy research

However despite our overall critique of the research to policy linkage in Pakistan, which is the overwhelming central ‘story’ from our data, we should not overlook some examples of more successful linkage and ‘portals’ to policy. We give an education example here due to the centrality of this sector in DFID’s current Pakistan portfolio especially in Punjab province, but more sectoral examples are provided in the background paper for this summary.

DFID commissioned the Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Centre previously in Islamabad, now in Lahore, in association with the University of Cambridge, to explore the link between educational outcomes and poverty. This Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty (RECOUP 2005-2010) used inter-disciplinary, mixed-methods to examine: public-private partnership in education; health and fertility; skills acquisition and utilization; disability; and, youth, gender and citizenship.

The findings of this project (particularly related to labour market outcomes of education, gender discrimination, returns to public/private education, returns to cognitive skills and the acquisition and utilization of vocational and technical skills in the informal sector) informed the 10th Five Year Plan’s chapter on Employment and Income Distribution. Its Pakistan team leader had been invited as a Working Group member for this sector in the Plan. The Working Group recommendations on resource allocation for investments in education (more specifically of women) and vocational and technical skills development, as means for poverty eradication, drew heavily from the RECOUP study. The RECOUP research also informed the development of the National Skills Strategy 2009 of the National Vocational and Technical Education Commission. Similarly, the findings of the RECOUP research also informed the Business Case of DFID’s proposed aid to Punjab Government for the Punjab Education Sector Support Programme 2012-17.

This represents a clear case of collaboration between government, donor and a Pakistani think-tank, supported externally by further expertise (i.e. from Cambridge). The work was openly and formally commissioned, conforming to UK bidding standards, and has informed both government as well as donor agendas. The study played a role in establishing an argument for the Punjab government to receive large programme support from the donor over this 5 year period. However, this has been a fixed period study now completed, though some PhDs were gained through the study which, if retained in Pakistan, may lead to further research based policy inputs of this kind, but no explicit provision has been made for longer

term sustained institutional capacity in Pakistan to pursue these research agendas not only in Punjab but elsewhere in the country.

Conclusion

While most government policy anywhere can be regarded as incoherent and even chaotic, reflecting a natural collision of interests and accidents, most observers agree that the particular conditions of Pakistan pushes it towards the absurd end of that incoherence continuum. In addition to ‘normal’ chaos, this ‘absurdity of incoherence’ is partly a function of domestic instability and insecurity, and partly a function of the significant presence of external donors in commissioning and sponsoring policy related research to provide evidence for some rational basis for policy. The research for this paper reveals a strong domination of donor commissioned research in the overall policy related research landscape.

Policy related research occurs significantly, though not exclusively in the social sciences, especially for many of the sectors identified for this analysis. But social sciences have a severe image problem in Pakistan. The qualitative social sciences in anthropology, sociology and political science are concentrated in a tiny number of research outlets, and often the better applied academics are pursuing their careers abroad or in international organisations within the country. Thus these kinds of research outputs are not really valued in the society.

Within bureaucracies and academia, there is a culture of knowledge and power that is resistant to open debate and the formation of new thinking. As result of this defensiveness, policy does not develop beyond the immediate interests of power holders. The non-transparency which occurs as a result of this translates into a governance problem.

A fundamental issue for critical policy related research is its independence. Some research outlets essentially function as insider ‘contractors’ following specified agendas with their findings confined to confirmation or refutation. This can be in the context of government agendas, or within prescribed donor priorities. Is there space for ‘architects’ who can freely design questions and initiate challenging data and still be heard in the policy process? The research to policy interface is more characterised by contractors than by architects whose work remains within the confines of academic discourse and peer review. This reduces the prospects of critical, and open, public debate around policy options and choices, thus disempowering essential voices from all parts of the society. Without these voices, this multiplicity of architects, ideas cannot be generated and tested through constructive engagement. We conclude that the more technical or contractual economics/growth arguments and agriculture/food security research probably has the most influence on the policy process. On the other hand, there is a surprising lack of focus and capacity across the country on governance issues, given that it is such a central problem in the society. That is why the balance between architects and contractors needs to be altered.