

# A manifesto for reform

It aims to guide new government towards a holistic transformation that addresses root issues plaguing Pakistan's economic landscape



The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) building can be seen. — APP/File

In response to economic challenges, the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has launched a comprehensive 'reform manifesto'.

It aims to guide the new government towards a holistic transformation that addresses the root issues plaguing Pakistan's economic landscape.

The manifesto is not a document produced in isolation, but a result of an inclusive process. PIDE embarked on a comprehensive consultation process, engaging experts across diverse fields, people whose lives would be shaped by these reforms, and academia whose knowledge and insights proved invaluable.

PIDE also included provincial stakeholders, ensuring that the reform agenda reflects the unique needs and aspirations of various regions within Pakistan.

Through a series of discussions and debates, each proposed reform measure was rigorously examined, refined, and strengthened. This robust participatory approach has ensured that the manifesto is not just a top-down decree, but a reflection of the collective will and aspirations of the Pakistani people.

Each reform is also supported by evidence generated through academic research produced by PIDE and other national and international researchers.

The reform manifesto serves as a blueprint, outlining 10 key areas that require immediate attention to regain economic and social prosperity. The manifesto's first theme 'much-needed political stability' emphasizes the need to ensure political stability. The successful implementation of reforms depends on political stability.

A fractured political system hinders economic progress. We need strong institutions, respect for rule of law, and transparent governance to foster stability and attract investment. This theme discusses reforms in political parties, the electoral process and the governance system.

The next theme 'public administration for the 21st century' discusses reform in civil service, pension judiciary, and other legal institutions. It is a well-documented phenomenon that an efficient and meritocratic bureaucracy is the backbone of effective governance. Modernization, digitization, and a focus on service delivery are crucial. All are discussed under this theme.

Unlocking export potential requires an outward-looking trade policy, streamlined customs procedures, and a focus on developing competitive industries. The theme 'trade and openness: competing globally' emphasizes the need to introduce significant reforms in the external sector, such as removing anti-export bias, minimizing tariff cascading through trade policy reforms over five years, and ending import substitution.

Under the banner of 'social infrastructure', the manifesto prioritizes a technological revolution in the social sector, especially education. It envisions an education landscape where technology bridges geographic barriers through robust online platforms, merit reigns supreme with competitive teacher hiring and contemporary pedagogy training, communities empower themselves by taking ownership of schools, and higher education flourishes with a large-scale programme to attract top-tier professors.

The manifesto recognizes the importance of cities as the engine of growth under the umbrella of 'cities, engines of growth'. Pakistan's burgeoning urban centres must be nurtured as engines of economic growth. Sustainable urban planning, efficient public transportation, and investment in infrastructure are key.

The first measure can be to unleash urban potential by integrating spatial dynamics into policy, fostering denser, walkable mixed-use areas through zoning reform, promoting a vibrant rental market, and leveraging state-owned land for maximum benefit, while strategically reducing government footprint in prime city centres.

'Energizing the future' talks about the acceptance of renewable energy not only to combat climate change but also to secure stable energy sources for future generations. Lack of access to uninterrupted clean and low-cost energy always remains a binding constraint to growth and productivity.

The manifesto then focuses on 'developing markets'. Competitive markets breed vibrant economies. Reforms are needed to develop various markets including agriculture, land, media, and many others to unlock Pakistan's true potential.

The manifesto also talks about 'fiscal management'. Responsible budgeting, prudent debt management, and curbing corruption are essential to creating a sustainable fiscal environment.

The manifesto, under the theme 'changing the population paradigm', advocates that the issue is not population size per se, but its quality – skills, education, health, employability, and mindset. The reform focuses on opportunities, economics, employment, personal development, etc, to uplift society. Population growth will go down once the opportunity cost of having children increases, and that will happen with socio-economic development.

'Building a cohesive community and society' requires cultivating shared spaces and engagement. The manifesto envisions a network of vibrant community centres, buzzing with activities in repurposed schools, mosques, or universities. The manifesto advocates for easily accessible libraries, fuelling a love for learning. For our children, the manifesto envisions child-centred activities that raise awareness and equip parents with the tools and opportunities required to nurture the next generation.

PIDE's reform manifesto is not just a set of policies, it is a narrative of transformation, a journey towards a Pakistan where every citizen can thrive and contribute to a shared vision of progress. PIDE unveiled the 'Reform Manifesto' on Monday, January 22, 2024.

This is to urge everyone to become active participants and work together with us to transform our society, for in unity lies the strength to surmount challenges and script a story of success.

Together, let us embark on this journey of 'transforming economy and society', crafting a future where every Pakistani can thrive and our nation stands as a beacon of progress and prosperity.

The successful implementation of the PIDE reform manifesto necessitates a collective will – a commitment from politicians, dedication from the civil bureaucracy, and active participation from the people.

This endeavour might not require additional financial resources; in fact, it has the potential to lead to cost savings, redirecting funds towards more efficient and productive utilization.

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