

MEDIA COVERAGE



PIDE and UNICEF Joint Conference on “*Shaping Policy through Evidence: Strengthening Systems for Children in Pakistan*”

December 18, 2025

The News International

<https://www.thenews.pk/print/1387496-true-development-lies-in-quality-of-human-capital>

Business Recorder

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40398011/talk-at-childrens-summit-ahsan-identifies-critical-development-challenges>

Pakistan Today

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2025/12/17/political-instability-not-policy-failure-holding-pakistan-back-ahsan-iqbal/>

APP Pakistan

<https://www.app.com.pk/business/pide-unicef-urge-evidence-based-policymaking-to-strengthen-child-focused-systems/>

Urdu Point

<https://www.urdupoint.com/en/business/pide-unicef-urge-evidence-based-policymaking-2104818.html>

<https://www.urdupoint.com/daily/livenews/2025-12-17/news-4652908.html>

Daily Independent

<https://www.dailyindependent.com.pk/2025/12/17/pakistans-progress-depends-on-stability-investment-in-children-not-just-policies-ahsan-iqbal/>

Global News Pakistan

<https://globalnewspakistan.com/2025/12/18/planning-minister-calls-for-human-resource-development/>

Khabarwalay

<https://khabarwalay.com/2025/12/17/pide-and-unicef-stress-data-driven-reforms-for-children/>

'True development lies in quality of human capital'

Rasheed Khalid
Islamabad

Federal Minister for Planning Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal has stressed that a nation's true measure of development lies not in physical infrastructure but in the quality of its human capital.

The minister was delivering keynote address at the conference on "Shaping policy through evidence: strengthening systems for children in Pakistan" hosted here by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) in collaboration with Unicef Pakistan.

Ahsan observed that Pakistan's long-standing focus on physical projects came at the expense of investment in education, health and nutri-

tion resulting in poor human development outcomes despite significant infrastructure spending.

Highlighting alarming indicators such as high stunting rates, millions of out-of-school children and Pakistan's continued struggle with polio, he called for urgent, evidence-driven investments in early childhood development and population management.

He urged policymakers, civil society and the media to close the "knowing-doing gap" by translating research into action and proposed the development of a Child Welfare Index of Pakistan to track child wellbeing and promote accountability at national and sub-national levels.

Rubina Khalid, Chairperson, Benazir Income Sup-

port Programme (BISP), emphasised the centrality of data and evidence in designing effective, inclusive, and gender-responsive policies. She highlighted BISP's National Socio-Economic Registry as one of the largest data-driven social protection platforms in Asia, covering nearly 90 percent of the country and enabling cash transfers to millions of women-headed households.

She shared key initiatives including nutrition-sensitive conditional cash transfers, the Benazir Taleemi Wazaif programme supporting millions of school-going children and the introduction of digital wallets for women beneficiaries to advance financial inclusion.

She stressed that adaptive, climate-aware and evidence-

led social protection systems are critical for protecting vulnerable children and households, calling for stronger collaboration between government, researchers, and development partners to move from evidence to action.

Pernille Ironside, Country Representative, Unicef Pakistan, reaffirmed that evidence is the foundation of equitable and inclusive development, especially in a country where children's outcomes are shaped by climate change, demographic pressures, urbanisation and economic volatility. She shared that between 2018 and 2025, Unicef produced more than 134 evidence products across key child-related sectors, identifying effective multi-sectoral ap-

proaches while also reveal-

ing persistent gaps in financing, coordination and equitable service delivery.

She emphasised that while evidence exists, it must be better institutionalised to influence policy, budgeting and large-scale implementation, and reiterating Unicef's commitment to partnering with government institutions to ensure research informs action for measurable improvements in children's lives.

Dr Muhammad Nadeem Javaid, Vice Chancellor, PIDE, highlighted the gravity of Pakistan's human development crisis, noting that nearly 26 million children are out of school while almost 40 percent suffer from stunting, with long-term consequences for health, learning and productivity.

December 18, 2025

PIDE, UNICEF Call for Evidence-Based Policies to Strengthen Systems for Children in Pakistan

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), in collaboration with UNICEF Pakistan, convened a high-level conference titled "Shaping Policy through Evidence: Strengthening Systems for Children in Pakistan," bringing together senior policymakers, development practitioners, researchers, and civil society representatives to advance evidence-based policymaking for children's wellbeing in the country. The event underscored the urgent need to translate credible research and data into sustained policy action to address Pakistan's persistent challenges in education, health, nutrition, and social protection.

Delivering the keynote address, Professor Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, stressed that a nation's true measure of development lies not in physical infrastructure but

in the quality of its human capital.

Earlier, in his welcome remarks, Dr. Muhammad Nadeem Javaid, Vice Chancellor, PIDE, highlighted the gravity of Pakistan's human development crisis, noting that nearly 26 million children are out of school while almost 40 percent suffer from stunting, with long-term consequences for health, learning, and productivity.

Setting the global and national context, Ms. Pernille Ironside, Country Representative UNICEF Pakistan reaf-

firmed that evidence is the foundation of equitable and inclusive development, especially in a country where children's outcomes are shaped by climate change, demographic pressures, urbanization, and economic volatility.

Adding a social protection perspective, Ms. Rubina Khalid, Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), emphasized the centrality of data and evidence in designing effective, inclusive, and gender-responsive policies. She highlighted BISP's

National Socio-Economic Registry as one of the largest data-driven social protection platforms in Asia, covering nearly 90 percent of the country and enabling cash transfers to millions of women-headed households. She shared key initiatives including nutrition-sensitive conditional cash transfers, the Benazir Taleemi Wazaif program supporting millions of school-going children, and the introduction of digital wallets for women beneficiaries to advance financial inclusion.



PAKISTAN TODAY

December 18, 2025

Political instability, not policy failure, holding Pakistan back: Ahsan Iqbal

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday said Pakistan's struggle for sustained development is rooted in political instability and policy disruption rather than a shortage of ideas, strategies or technical expertise.

Speaking at a policy discussion, the minister said repeated breaks in governance and development planning have prevented Pakistan from building a solid socio-economic foundation, warning that investment in infrastructure alone cannot deliver progress in the absence of stability.

He said physical development loses its value when the social framework remains weak, adding that roads, bridges and buildings amount to little more than concrete structures if human development and institutional continuity are neglected.

Referring to past national frameworks such as Vision 2010 and Vision 2025, Ahsan Iqbal said continuity was clearly recognised as essential, yet none of the plans were allowed to run their course due to political upheavals. As a result, he said, Pakistan failed to convert long-term strategies into measurable outcomes.

Describing the present phase as a defining moment for the country, the minister said Pakistan must decide whether it wants to continue repeating historical mistakes or adopt a fundamentally different development trajectory based on stability and consistency.

He likened public policy to agricultural seed, saying outcomes depend not just on design but on conditions. Without political calm, institutional support and time, even the best policies cannot bear fruit, he said.

Drawing lessons from global experience, Ahsan Iqbal identified peace, political stability, long-term policy continuity and ongoing reform as the core pillars of sustainable growth. He stressed that development policies require a decade or more to show results, warning that premature disruption resets progress entirely.

He cited countries including India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Singapore as examples where extended periods of stable governance enabled steady eco-



omic transformation.

However, he cautioned that stability alone is not sufficient. Without continuous reform and modernization, he said, stability merely entrenches outdated systems instead of driving progress.

Addressing governance challenges, the minister said Pakistan suffers from a persistent gap between knowledge and implementation. He noted that government institutions are rich in research, reports and expert advice but poor in execution.

Quoting academic research, he said organizations fail not because they lack knowledge, but because institutional resistance, vested interests and fear of change block action. He said similar patterns exist across Pakistan's public sector.

Turning to human development, Ahsan Iqbal emphasized that education, child health and welfare must be treated as national imperatives. He warned that while Pakistan shows economic indicators comparable to middle-income countries, its social indicators remain alarmingly weak.

Citing the 2023 census, he said population growth has accelerated to around 2.55 percent annually, with more than 6.5 million children born each year. He questioned whether the state is adequately prepared to meet the educational and health needs of this growing population.

Without sustained investment in children and human capital, he warned, Pakistan risks falling further behind in an increasingly competitive global environment.

PIDE, UNICEF call for evidence-based policies

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), in collaboration with UNICEF Pakistan, convened a high-level conference titled "Shaping Policy through Evidence: Strengthening Systems for Children in Pakistan," bringing together senior policymakers, development practitioners, researchers, and civil society representatives to advance evidence-based policymaking for children's wellbeing in the country. The event underscored the urgent need to translate credible research and data into sustained policy action to address Pakistan's persistent challenges in education, health, nutrition, and social protection. Delivering the keynote address, Professor Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, stressed that a nation's true measure of development lies not in physical infrastructure but in the quality of its human capital. He observed that Pakistan's longstanding focus on physical projects has come at the expense of investment in education, health, and nutrition, resulting in poor human development outcomes despite significant infrastructure spending. Highlighting alarming indicators such as high stunting rates, millions of out-of-school children, and Pakistan's continued struggle with polio, he called for urgent, evidence-driven investments in early childhood development and population management. He urged policymakers, civil society, and the media to close the "knowing-doing gap" by translating research into action and proposed the development of a Child Welfare Index of Pakistan to track child wellbeing and promote accountability at national and sub-national levels. Earlier, in his welcome remarks, Dr. Muhammad Nadeem Javid, Vice Chancellor, PIDE, highlighted the gravity of Pakistan's human development crisis, noting that nearly 26 million children are out of school



while almost 40 percent suffer from stunting, with long-term consequences for health, learning, and productivity. He emphasized that Pakistan does not lack policies or data, but rather suffers from a disconnect between evidence and implementation. Stressing that evidence uptake is an institutional challenge rather than a purely technical one, he called for stronger systems that embed research into policy design, budgeting, and delivery mechanisms, particularly for child-focused interventions. Setting the global and national context, Ms. Pernille Ironside, Country Representative UNICEF Pakistan reaffirmed that evidence is the foundation of equitable and inclusive development, especially in a country where children's outcomes are shaped by climate change, demographic pressures, urbanization, and economic volatility. She shared that between 2018 and 2025, UNICEF Pakistan produced more than 134 evidence products

across key child-related sectors, identifying effective multi-sectoral approaches while also revealing persistent gaps in financing, coordination, and equitable service delivery. She emphasized that while evidence exists, it must be better institutionalized to influence policy, budgeting, and large-scale implementation, reiterating UNICEF's commitment to partnering with PIDE and government institutions to ensure research informs action for measurable improvements in children's lives. Adding a social protection perspective, Ms. Rubina Khalid, Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), emphasized the centrality of data and evidence in designing effective, inclusive, and gender-responsive policies. She highlighted BISP's National Socio-Economic Registry as one of the largest data-driven social protection platforms in Asia, covering nearly 90 percent of the country and enabling cash transfers to millions of women-head-

ed households. She shared key initiatives including nutrition-sensitive conditional cash transfers, the Benazir Taleemi Wazaif program supporting millions of school-going children, and the introduction of digital wallets for women beneficiaries to advance financial inclusion. She stressed that adaptive, climate-aware, and evidence-led social protection systems are critical for protecting vulnerable children and households, calling for stronger collaboration between government, researchers, and development partners to move from evidence to action. Following the inaugural plenary, the conference featured a high-level panel discussion titled "From Evidence to Action - Embedding Research in Policy and Practice," chaired by the Vice Chancellor of PIDE and moderated by UNICEF Pakistan. The panel brought together senior experts from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Population Council, UNDP, IBA Karachi, UN Women, Gavi, and the World Bank to reflect on how research and evaluation are currently used in shaping public policy and programmes in Pakistan. Panelists examined institutional and political barriers to evidence uptake, discussed successful sectoral models, and explored emerging innovations including digital systems and artificial intelligence for data-driven policymaking. The session emphasized the need to move from fragmented pilot initiatives toward institutionalized research use, improved accountability for results, and stronger linkages between evidence, budgeting, and implementation, followed by an interactive question-and-answer session with participants.

پاکستان میں دو کروڑ 60 لاکھ بچے سکولوں سے باہر، 40 فیصد نشوونما میں کمی کا شکار

مستقبل محفوظ بنانے کیلئے بچوں میں غذائی قلت ختم، اکی دہائی دہائی ملازمتوں کو بروئے کار لانا ہوگا، احسن اقبال

اسلام آباد (جنور ہائی) پاکستان میں دو کروڑ 60 لاکھ بچے سکولوں سے باہر ہیں جبکہ 40 فیصد بچے نشوونما میں کمی کا شکار ہیں۔ پاکستان کی آبادی کی شرح نمو بڑھ کر 2.55 فیصد ہو گئی اور ہر سال 65 لاکھ بچے پیدا ہو رہے ہیں، پاکستان اعلیٰ ترقی یافتہ ممالک میں شامل ہو سکتا ہے اور بھارت کی مشرقی رپورٹ میں پاکستان کے بچوں کی زندگی میں بہتری لانے کے لیے شواہد کی بنیاد پر نظام کی

مضبوطی سے متعلق موثر پالیسیاں مرتب کرنے کی سفارش کی گئی، اس حوالے سے اعلیٰ سطح کا نظریں میں پاکستان میں تعلیم، صحت، سماجی تحفظ کے چیلنجوں سے نمٹنے کی فوری ضرورت پر زور دیا گیا، کانفرنس سے خطاب کرتے ہوئے وفاقی وزیر منصوبہ بندی احسن اقبال نے کہا کہ بچوں پر فوری اور مسلسل سرمایہ کاری کی ضرورت پر زور دیتے ہوئے کہا کہ

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