

Discourse Debates

In this edition of the Discourse magazine, the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics sought to initiate an open, transparent conversation on foreign aid effectiveness: its pros, cons, and grey areas. This is an editorial note to clarify that while it was a fairly straightforward process convincing someone to pen out their thoughts in opposition to the activities of international financial institutions and multilateral donor agencies, doing so for the other side – i.e. in favour – was not so easy. Despite having reached out to a minimum of 10 individuals from INGOs, IFIs, and international humanitarian bodies, unanimous hesitation was observed: whereby prospective contributors voiced career-related concerns about venturing into a 'political' discussion that may damage their stature in the industry and/or within their own organizations.

As an academic institution, we felt it was necessary to be transparent about this fact and to encourage our readers to ask why primary stakeholders within the foreign aid ecosystem are so reluctant to defend their own operations in Pakistan. It is a generally established fact within economics and other social sciences that policy is never apolitical: inevitably generating a set of 'winners' and 'losers' given a long enough time span. Why and how, then, is the donor community – which shapes the vast majority of research and governance – granted an exemption from the rule? They say knowledge is like jazz, in which much more than the notes that are played, it is the ones that are not which define the overall composition.

Going forward, we will continue to reach out to potential writers for our debate series and maintain total honesty with our audience – whom we respect and admire greatly! Stay tuned for the next one.

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