

Brainstorming Research Ideas

Governance and Public Policy

Session Report

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) held a session titled “Brainstorming Research Ideas - Governance and Public Policy” on March 29, 2022, in which Dr. Syed Tahir Hijazi, an academician, policy practitioner, and a member of IPS’ National Academic Council, gave a detailed presentation on “Why Governance Reforms and Research is so Important?”. The session was chaired by Chairman IPS Khalid Rahman and moderated by Naufil Shahrukh, General Manager (Operations) at IPS. Mirza Hamid Hasan, former federal secretary, was among other participants who were present on the occasion. The primary purpose of this session was to highlight the gap that exists between public policy and academic research and whose addressal can lead to revolutionizing higher education research in Pakistan. For this reason, IPS has been playing a vital role, Naufil Shahrukh highlighted, by facilitating university students, scholars, and academicians to promote governance and policy-related research, and has been working towards establishing a vital link between policy practitioners and policy researchers through its ‘Promoting & Indigenizing Policy Research Initiative.’

Chairman IPS Khalid Rahman, in his opening remarks, said that this initiative by the institute would serve as an important platform to enhance the role of academia in improving Pakistan’s governance and public policy arena. He also added that the IPS has been conducting different programs under ‘Brainstorming Research Ideas’ for five years now with an aim to make research work more productive and beneficial for policymaking in the country. He also expressed that one of the many setbacks of this

country is that the research work done in Pakistan has not been able to impact policymaking in a way it is idealized, as policymakers are not interested in lengthy research studies, while the academicians are not playing their due role. This is why, he added, there is a need to work on both these ends; on one hand, the researchers and academicians must improve their performance, and on the other hand, they should interact with policymakers so that their work becomes demand oriented. Therefore, IPS’ latest initiative will be a two-way interaction to engage academia and policymakers so that the interaction between these two domains can lead to an integrated program and research work can become valuable and relevant to our current needs and times. He ended his speech with optimism that Pakistanis do not lack the capability of producing great research, but an understanding of the research agenda needs to be explicated. Hence, a few pointers that need to be clear when conducting any kind of research in our country are:

- a) Agenda should be about Pakistan i.e., our value culture, system of governance, economy, and our society, and young researchers and scholars need to address topics related to our indigenous values and needs.
- b) A two-way interaction process should be established between academia and policymakers to help make research agenda and the research produced more useful for us. It is under this contextual backdrop that IPS aims to play a role, through its latest initiative, to bridge this existing gap and develop an integrated community. He also added that even though

Pakistan's public sector is generally considered corrupt, as shown by the Corruption Perceptions Index, however, this index does not project a whole picture and does not necessarily mean that the Pakistani society as a whole is corrupt. There is still a lot to hope for and look forward to in Pakistan's future.

Adding to the theme of the session, Dr. Shehzad Ali Gill, a dynamic professional of Islamia University Bahawalpur and an IPS associate who works in the areas of policy analysis and management, recollected his experience as a graduate and post-graduate student of public policy. He was forced to adopt the general research practice of using a model and changing a research variable in order to produce a research work for his degree completion, a practice which unfortunately prevails in most of our universities. Addressing the audience, he said that it was the opportunity at IPS LEAD – the Learning, Excellence and Development program of IPS, where he worked as one of the first few research associates. This expanded his research horizons, and he understood the importance of producing research on issues in real-time and incorporated the same methodology for his Master's dissertation too. Later on, he worked with Chairman IPS to design an indigenous research platform in which notable persons from various universities from all over Pakistan gave lecture series to engage scholars and young researchers with indigenous topics of real-time. Reflecting back on this initiative, he commented that even though all of the aims and objectives that had been set for this platform may not have been achieved, it however sets in motion the kind of research work that needed to be generated and a direction for IPS' future endeavors. A few years later, it was again his engagement with IPS that helped him produce his PhD research on Blue Economy, which is another field of research that is largely neglected in Pakistan and whose benefits are going to be profound for this country if it learns to incentivize those potentials. Wrapping up his commentary on the session's agenda, Dr. Gill was of the view that Indigenization of research is vital for the prospect of governance and governance issues and that research produced should not be for the sake of doing research but with the aim to convert it and commercialize it for implementation.

Taking the floor to present a detailed account on Pakistan's current governance structure and issues, the guest speaker, Dr. Syed Tahir Hijazi, highlighted that the basic question that lies at the foundation of this topic is 'Why governance reforms and why research in governance is needed?' Building up on this argument, he said that the simple answer to it is that we have got a highly inefficient government system; on one hand, we are faced with problems at all levels such as pricing, inflation, transportation, judicial, while another major issue that we are challenged with is of corruption which promotes an incompetent government and vice versa. Showing statistics from the annual Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International in which Pakistan has been ranked 141 out of 180 countries, Dr. Hijazi noted that it is purely due to governance issues and a concern of great grievance because, being a Muslim country, we have surpassed most of the non-Muslim world in the corruption index rating. According to his compiled data, an estimated Rs. 9.5 billion is being paid by the public which generates corruption in government functionaries every day in Pakistan and begs another question: 'Who is the culprit?' Mapping down the Pakistani government structure for the audience, Dr. Hijazi described at great length how corruption is in continuous process at all state-institutions i.e., ministries, cabinet divisions, departments, sections etc., and that corruption would fail to thrive if the chief accounting officers in ministries are honest. The system is so weak that even if a department has honest officers, the lower staff is still engaged in corrupt practices which is why it's true that good governance leads to a stronger system. His compiled report deduces that it is the government servants who are the beneficiaries of the Rs. 9.5 billion estimate and is one of the main issues of governance in Pakistan. He further elaborated that the educational criteria and division of mindset among the members of recruited government officers i.e., cadre, non-cadre, and secretarial staff, is another pressing problem in governance.

He also pointed out that a moral deficit is a governance deficit, which is being driven by corruption. The lack of performance-relation-system has led to numerous undeserving recruitments, postings, and promotions which in turn has tarnished our government structure and system. Efforts for governance reforms have consistently failed because the bureaucracy does not

want to let go of its privileges. He said that governance reforms cannot materialize without the active participation of academia which is why a camaraderie between the two is essential.

Therefore, a few areas in need of extensive research in governance reforms and that need immediate attention are: government service structure, performance evaluation system, recruitment and selection of government servants, e-governance system, in-service and pre-service training system, transfers postings, tenure, civil establishment code, office procedures, tasks targets goals, compensation and benefits to government servants, police reforms, judicial procedural reforms, judicial law reforms, and pension and retirement benefits. To bring about these changes, the presenter highlighted that a few suggestions have been provided to the government officials in the past too in which foremost priority has been given to hiring specialists in different fields of governance. He explained that if an Economist is not part of the Economic Planning then we cannot assume great economic reforms. Moreover, in order to improve the country's remittance Economic Division would also need to work with the Foreign Office to understand which kind of job markets and professions are better paid so that those categories of Pakistani professionals are provided the opportunity, and in turn, boost Pakistan's economy. In this way, our state institutions need to have specialists, be proactive, and work together to make a better future for Pakistan's and comparative study research in this regard would be fruitful. The presenter also highlighted the state infrastructure such as roads, ports and airports, railway, energy sectors and utilities, education and health, social welfare, residential buildings, and the footpaths also requires specialists because people fail to understand their importance. Dr. Hijazi commented that a simple footpath can play such an important role in improving the overall health care of our people but it is unfortunate that no attention from the government is given to these minute details. He reinforced the idea that without a specialist's eye and grasp on their subject matter, these governance issues cannot be resolved amicably because those who are overlooking these institutions do not belong to the field.

Concluding his discussion, Dr. Hijazi explained that the topic of governance issues and reforms is a vast topic and requires research in many different fields, a

few of which he had brought to the audience's attention earlier in his presentation. He also reinforced that all the government institutions of our country are tightly gripped in corruption's claws and this is the most concerning governance issue. In order to improve our governing system, we may look at other government forms from around the world as models and rather than copying their governing system as ours, we need to evolve one of our own. The presenter remarked that it will be a slow and gradual process which would require an in depth analysis on focused areas from time to time, but, for the time being, he presented a general understanding of the session's topic for the audience.

In the concluding session, Dr. Inayat Ullah, Assistant Professor GPP dept, NUST, expressed his views regarding the induction process of civil servants. According to Dr. Inayat, the induction process has created a line between the public and private sectors. In the private sector, the advertisement clearly states the job description and all other skills requirements, which helps the applicant to understand the nature of the job and the workload which the applicant will have to face, whereas in the public sector advertisement lacks information. He said that if the government can further divide the occupational groups into more groups, then the induction of civil servants can be done as per the demand or relevance of each public sector organization. In the end, Dr. Inayat put forth a question in front of the guest speaker: "What are the government's constraints on conducting a professional exam instead of a typical induction process for the Civil Services?"

Mr. T.A. Bhutta, a Ph.D. GPP scholar from NUML commented that the solutions provided by the speaker were smart work. If we look at this in the context of SDGs, it may align with goal number 8, "Decent Work and Economic Growth." He pitched the question that "What is the solution to institutional decay, which is slowing down the performance of government departments over time?"

Mr. Uzair Hashmi, Assistant Professor GPP dept, NUST, commented that the CSS system was formed in the 1860s to manage the subjects. One of the main shortcomings of the recruitment process is that every subject is in English, which screens out competent people who do not have a good command of English. Civil service exams and our whole system are also

under the influence of the English language. When Pakistan came into being, there were people less than 4% who could speak or understand English. In my opinion, it is necessary to understand the depth of our

language because we are still carrying that colonial baggage that is deeply rooted in our culture and society.

Prepared by:

Muhammad Wali Farooqi
Research Officer,
Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad.

For queries:

Naufil Shahrukh
General Manager Operations
Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad.
naufil@ips.net.pk | www.ips.org.pk