

Towards Inclusive and Resilient Social Services in Balochistan

A Policy Consultation



Executive Summary

On 16 February 2026, at Serena Hotel in Islamabad, a high-level policy consultation event was held from 1030 to 1600 focused on Balochistan's social sector roadmap. This event was primarily organized by the government of Balochistan with support from UNICEF Pakistan and included a range of stakeholders including from the government, the UN system, non-governmental organisations, private sector organisations, academia, the media, and civil society. The key objectives of the event were to: 1) foster high-level policy dialogue and consensus, 2) showcase and leverage innovative, community-driven initiatives, and 3) to establish a sustained coordination and monitoring mechanism.

Structure of the Event

It began with an inaugural session which consisted of a series of speeches by key stakeholders and an outline of the objectives of the day. This was followed by three plenary sessions consisting of a scene setting presentation and a panel discussion. Finally, there was a closing ceremony which included a summary of key themes and takeaways by senior government and UN representatives.





Inaugural Session

Mr. Zahid Saleem (P&DD, Additional Chief Secretary) provided an overview of Balochistan's circumstances in his welcome note. He noted that the province's development indicators are far below national averages, and that it is a difficult context to work in due to its scattered population, difficult terrain, and high service delivery costs. He said that Balochistan had the youngest population in the country and that its rapid population growth is both an opportunity and a risk. He particularly focused on the high number of Out of School Children (OOSC) in the province and on high multidimensional poverty rates. Mr. Saleem asserted that in response to these challenges, the government has been investing in education, health, social protection, and more. He closed by explaining that despite the increasing budget available to the provincial government, it falls short of the scale of the challenge; Mr. Saleem said that he is not calling for an exception to be made for Balochistan, but rather a response proportional to the scale of the challenge.

Ms. Pernille Ironside (UNICEF, Country Representative) agreed that Balochistan faces the most persistent and formidable challenges of any of the provinces while it also faces significant climate and geopolitical barriers; she praised the efforts of the government to address these challenges. Mr. Ironside emphasised the need to develop inclusive and resilient services and confirmed that UNICEF will continue to provide support to the government, especially in light of the fact that outcomes have not improved at the desired pace. She underlined the need for not just more funding but smarter funding, better governance, and increased accountability. Ms. Ironside closed by noting that addressing development challenges is not just a moral imperative but also sound economic policy.

Mr. Shakeel Qadir Khan (government of Balochistan, Chief Secretary) described his early experiences in his position, noting that there was little social infrastructure and slow progress, but that this has changed since then and efforts to address development challenges have taken off. He emphasised the role of international partners in both providing funds and in helping the government to spend it efficiently and sustainably without undermining other sectors. He acknowledged the security situation in the province and said that it was the role of the provincial government to be functional, to provide services, and in this way to earn the trust of the population. Mr. Zahoor Buledi (government of Balochistan, Minister of P&DD) closed the session by reporting some of the progress made in recent years and said that the government is moving from a project centred approach to a sustainable model which involves strengthening the performance of service delivery and not just on building infrastructure.

We must move beyond diagnosis towards concrete solutions. Let us keep children at the centre of all of our discussions and decisions

Ms. Pernille Ironside



This poverty does not come alone, it is not just economic, it has a multiplier effect – it restricts and drives educational outcomes away from us, deepens malnutrition, restricts healthcare access ... all of these things are interconnected.'

Mr. Zahid Saleem



Imagine when you start and 38% of your schools are non-functional along with half of all health facilities – there are no human resources or supplies and the citizens are dissatisfied. It has been a long journey.'

Mr. Shakeel Qadir Khan



High Plenary Session I



Current Landscape of Social Sector Development Priorities in Balochistan: Mr. Zeeshan Javaid (P&DD, Secretary Planning) began with a scene setting presentation that described in detail the difficult development situation in Balochistan in terms of poverty (40% below the poverty line, 60% multidimensionally deprived), health, education, child safety, and so on. He closed by asserting that the government has done well in the last 2 years through investments in service delivery and social protection related infrastructure and workforce and said that the government is committed to overcoming the challenges facing Balochistan.

The main panel discussion, with Mr. Sohail Abbasi (World Bank, Senior Social Protection Specialist) as the moderator, produced a number of insights. The importance of digitalisation, information systems, and monitoring software was discussed, as well as the need for improved monitoring and accountability in general. Three high-impact areas for investing were identified: 1) Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Early Childhood Education (ECE); 2) learning, not just schooling, every child; 3) empowerment of adolescents; and 4) Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH). The need to educate girls, end child marriage, and provide them with a pathway from education to employment was discussed. Some examples of successful models were shared, including a school meal programme implemented with WFP support that is being considered for replication in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Scaling up interventions, ensuring that private investments have spillover benefits locally, and building resilience at the community level were identified as priorities. It was acknowledged that human development and economic growth go hand in hand; that investments in health and education are also investments in job creation. It was recognized that the scale of current efforts is insufficient to address the scale of the problems in Balochistan and that greater coordination and solutions tailored to the context are necessary.



High Plenary Session II

Making Quality and Equitable Social Services: Health, Nutrition, and Education Accessible to All: The scene setting presentation for this plenary was delivered by Mr. Mujeeb Panezai (government of Balochistan, Secretary School Education). He noted that states draw their legitimacy from the services that they provide to their people, and that without this there will be no trust. He underlined the importance of not allowing people to fall through the cracks in social safety nets. Mr. Panezai said that the government is aware of this and went on to describe the challenges facing the provinces, including in health coverage, education, infrastructure, job growth, urban migration, and dependency on federal funding. He described some successes of the government in addressing this issue, including the building of education and health facilities, workforces, and systems. He said that it is vital that children have the skills needed for employment.





The main panel discussion was moderated by Dr. Simbal Khan (Crossroad Consultants, CEO). The scale of the OOSC issue was discussed as well as some of the measures being implemented in response, including upgrading schools, empowering Parent Teacher School Management Committees (PTSMCs), and building technical high schools. Educating mothers was recognised as an important strategy, as it is the single best predictor of how her children will perform in English and mathematics. The need to promote public schools was discussed, as the public often sees private schools as a better option even though that is not necessarily the case. The lack of discipline in the education system was identified as a problem, e.g. teachers being absent and not recording basic information about students but nevertheless it was noted that students want to attend school. Through a story-based approach, it was discussed how different the life trajectories of women and girls can be depending on if they have had their health, education, safety etc. needs met.

Deficiencies in the health sector were described through relevant statistics, including the fact that only 56% of the population has access to health services and that the health workforce density is only 20 per 10,000 people whereas the minimum is 44.5; it was reported that the Health Sector Transformation Plan is being implemented to bring about reform. Both the volume and spending efficiency of health financing was recognised as a concern. Leveraging innovative technologies linked for example to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Information Technology (IT) was put forward as an important avenue to explore across all sectors, particularly education and health. The need to align with national strategies and to avoid working in an adhoc manner was emphasised. The cross-cutting issues of wastage, abuse, and corruption were recognised as areas of particular concern. Moving from input-driven to output-driven budgeting was put forward as a focus area in the future.

High Plenary Session III

Building Adaptive and Resilient Social Protection Systems: Mr. Asmatullah Quresh (government of Balochistan, Secretary Social Welfare) provided the scene-setting presentation; he described the specific services provided by the government of Balochistan to vulnerable groups. Examples include funding treatment for the destitute, providing prosthetics for Persons With Disabilities (PWD), drug rehabilitation support, and targeted services for women (shelters, skills training etc.). He described the Non-Formal Education (NFE) and adult literacy programmes put into place as well. He closed by noting the gap between the available and needed resources.

Ms. Sadaf Zulfiqar moderated the subsequent panel discussion. The need for horizontal data collection and data from people with different needs was discussed. The vulnerability of Pakistan to climate change and the impact on people's livelihoods was recognised. Climate risk monitoring was recognised as a good target, but it was underlined that data collection, processing, and decision-making systems would need to be significantly enhanced in order to make this practical. The lack of effective monitoring in Balochistan, including on the outcomes of investments made, was highlighted as an issue and was linked to a lack of ownership and the difficulty of working in the context. Reframing social protection as a fiscal multiplier was noted to be an important step. Leveraging existing infrastructure, introducing scalable, package models focused on long-term deprivation, and bringing transformation at the community level was raised as necessary. The session closed with a recognition of the need to move from relief to resilience, to build adaptive resilience and not only disaster response e.g. by improving registries and investing in resilient infrastructure such as housing with raised plinths.





Closing Ceremony

Mr. Mohamed Yahya (UN Resident Coordinator in Pakistan) shared some strategic reflections, beginning with a reaffirmation that the provision of social services is the foundation of trust between the people and the state. He asserted that viewing Balochistan only through the lens of deprivation is inappropriate as it ignores the opportunities present and praised the strength and resilience of the people of Balochistan. He emphasised the need to focus on key priorities; to improve coordination; and to integrate social protection instead of making it a parallel strategy. He closed by affirming the UN's intentions to continue its support. Mr. Saleem reiterated the need to move from relief to resilience, and for a proportionate response to the development challenges in Balochistan.

The chief guest Capt. (R) Abdul Khaliq Khan Achakzai (Balochistan Provincial Assembly, Speaker) delivered the closing remarks. He reaffirmed the political commitment of the government of Balochistan towards improving social indicators and overcoming challenges. He emphasised the learning that infrastructure alone does not transform into outcomes. He ended his address by inviting development partners to support the government in three areas: 1) programmatic implementation, 2) human capital investment, and 3) climate resilience.



“ Social services such as education, health, social protection, and nutrition are not just sectors in a policy document; they are the difference between a life of vulnerability and a life of dignity.
Mr. Mohamed Yahya ”





Key Strategic Takeaways

Balochistan's Human Capital Challenge Is Structural, Not Marginal

As the largest province geographically, with dispersed settlements, difficult terrain, limited fiscal space, and the highest multidimensional poverty rate nationally, service delivery costs are inherently higher and access barriers more complex. The province's development challenge therefore requires proportionate and context-sensitive responses rather than uniform national approaches.

A Young Population Presents a Decisive Policy Moment

With nearly half the population under 15, timely investment in children and adolescents is critical to unlocking long-term economic growth, prevent intergenerational poverty, reduce long-term dependency, and strengthen economic resilience.

From Dialogue to Action: Partnerships and Fiscal Alignment Are Critical

The priority now is aligning fiscal planning, partnerships, and implementation mechanisms to ensure that public and development resources translate into tangible improvements in human development outcomes and to sustain reform momentum.

Shift from Infrastructure Expansion to Measurable Outcomes

Restoration of facilities and service access must now translate into improved learning, reduced maternal and child mortality, lower stunting, and stronger community resilience. The next phase requires a clear focus on quality and results.





Integrated, Whole-of-System Approach to Service Delivery

Interlinked challenges across poverty, education exclusion, health inequities, nutrition, and climate vulnerability demand coordinated planning, interoperable data systems, and aligned fiscal prioritisation to maximise impact.

Adaptive and Resilient Social Protection as a Development Investment

Social protection systems must evolve from short-term relief to shock-responsive and scalable mechanisms that strengthen resilience, protect vulnerable households, and support long-term human capital formation.

Greater Efficiency and Strategic Use of Public Resources

Sustainable progress depends not only on increased allocations but on smarter spending, strengthened governance, digital monitoring, and results-based budgeting to ensure every rupee delivers measurable development gains.

Proportionate, Sustained and Strategic Investment to Match Structural Realities

Sustainable progress requires not only adequate allocations but smarter, better-targeted spending aligned with Balochistan's structural realities along with strengthened governance, digital monitoring, results-based budgeting, and context-sensitive financing to ensure every rupee translates into equitable, measurable, and durable development gains.



“ We are committed to reform, transparency, and cost efficiency.
Let us work together to ensure that the investments of the last
dec-ades transform into real progress at the end.
Capt. (R) Abdul Khaliq Khan Achakzai ”

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Resilient Social Services in Balochistan



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The UNICEF logo is a blue circular emblem featuring a stylized figure of a mother holding a child, surrounded by a laurel wreath. The text 'unicef' is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, and 'for every child' is in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font below it.