Policy Recommendations

Based on review of existing literature on slums in Pakistan, analysis of findings from field research, and the observations made during interviews, there is a paucity of accurate information on slums and its residents. To mainstream slums in terms of how they are seen, the (mis)conception regarding those residing in these settlements and their range of experience of modern discrimination in comparison to the rest of the population, some policy recommendations across different spectrums are made here.

Media transformation

To begin with, digital media can be used to reshape our images of slums and to accurately depict the intersections of marginalization and exclusion in all their forms. This also means expanding coverage of slums in traditional media to more regular intervals. So far an assessment of news coverage of slums in Pakistani media seems to be spread intermittently over a few months or years, gaining attention in times of Covid-19 pandemic, demolitions of these settlements, and to cover education projects aimed at helping children residing in slums. The lack of representation of slums in media limits the exposure of public and policy makers to the situation of these slums. Regular and diversified cover stories in media with the collaboration of community leaders and locals NGOs can help educate the public and others on the wide array of challenges faced by the residents as a population that is left behind from the dividends of development.

Mohsin Ilyas, an activist working on the issues of slums residents through his Minority Protection Trust, emphasized the utility of media. While addressing the experts from Pakistan Institute of Education, UNDP and other organizations present at the panel discussion, Mr Mohsin stressed the need for stakeholders to create space for residents of informal settlements in critical discussions and using media to bring light to their plight. Agreeing with the responsibility of organizations in inviting people from slums areas to the forefront of discussion, Mr Umer from UNDP equated these efforts as critical to bridging the gap between the marginalized groups and policymakers. Not just that, media offers a highly unique and proven ability to reach all segments of the population. Which showcases another impactful use of media tools to popularize NGO schools, accelerated learning programs, medical camps, scholarship information, virtual and moving libraries and much more. From discussion with slum residents, school administration, government

bodies and NGOs, it is apparent that there is a huge opportunity loss experienced by slum residents due to lack of access to this information.

Media in its various forms can exponentially aid in educating the residents of these settlements as well in spreading information about useful resources and government welfare initiatives that they can gain access to. These include the Bait-ul-Maal initiative to help with medical aid, information on the network of technical and vocational institutes operated by Pakistan government across Pakistan and Islamabad, educational programs and scholarships and more. NGOs and other stakeholders alike are finings creative ways to expand their efforts through use of media technology. Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi shared one such initiative with us which is the works. With the ability to generate real-time data to take prompt action, IDTA is taking a big step in the future with a pre-pilot program that involves mobile application that will allow them to assess literacy rates through online assessments and interviews. In an effort to similarly utilize the power of digital medium one such measure is being taken by this group in creating a webpage and a social media page to use new age media to disseminate articles, infographics and other resources on slums and SDGs in Pakistan.

Academic policy practitioners

Observing the studies conducted by Pakistani scholars, the trend seems to be largely focused on approaching slums settlements from the health and nutrition perspective. Though social issues, education and slum upgradation are not non-existent, the proclivity towards a more health-focused approach highlights a gap in understanding slums, especially vis-a-vis SDGs. The residents of slums that have been downgraded in the minds of policy makers, there is space from government bodies to consolidate their national datasets on education and share them with other agencies. This will allow these statistics to become a value-add by enabling government agencies and local bodies to design context-based measures for this segment's unique needs and challenges.

Furthermore, there is a clear need for dedicated research into the phenomenon of slums to precisely understand their circumstances and needs. Hence, to generate accurate and timely data on slums settlements and SDGs, Ministry of Education should collaborate with government and private policy institutions to study urban slums of the country thoroughly, with academic sources serving as an authentic information pool with propensity to produce cross-sectional and geospatial data

and analysis addressing slums. The temporal and multidimensional frameworks of these studies can also produce unique data and trends that can help policy makers in departments like urban planning, sanitation, education, public welfare, health, technology, etc. design policy initiatives that serve all citizens, especially addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.

Curriculum Development

Education is a key tool that shapes people and collective societies and also acts as a core determinant of socio-economic transformation. To make progress in achieving the SDG goals and ensuring that the slum population advances at par with the rest of the population, a transformative approach is needed that addresses the masses at the grassroots level. Education is a key medium to bring about such changes and to reinforce the lifelong learning possibilities for all, as well as to raise responsible citizens who can strive for this initiative of sustainable development. The dual role of education, hence, makes it an integral area for policy change. Rightly stated by experts invited for the panel discussion on the research topic, social activist, and those from the development and education sector agreed that the there being no provision for universal education beyond age of 16 as stated under the Constitution is responsible for low rates of highly educated individuals from the slums. In an effort to ensure that primary and higher education is accessible to all and generates a high success rate in terms of outcomes for students and graduation statistics, it is necessary to ensure that curriculum is designed towards the needs of Katchi Abadis. Therefore, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan can work with academic scholars, schools, and universities to work towards producing data on slums and SDGs. There are numerous ways in which the Ministry of Education can reorient efforts towards creating different pathways towards equitable and sustainable development. Methods can include:

a. Addressing slums in social studies and Pakistan studies curriculum by including information from peer-reviewed and academic sources.
b. Creating a new course for students from the elementary to 12th grade that is aimed at the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; a framework that educates on SDGs as a whole, with a prime focus on SDGs in context of Pakistan, addressing achievements and challenges encountered by the country to achieve sustainable development.

c. By introducing voluntary service requirements from 7 to 12th grades, similar to compulsory community service for an undergraduate degree. The curriculum and the civic practices can be geared towards encouraging citizens to strive towards a more equitable and sustainable society.

d. Occasional school visits to slum areas can play a magnificent role in raising awareness among the developing minds of regular or more formal population of the country. Such visits will help the students understand the ground realities of people living in underprivileged areas.

e. Offer skill development classes that are compatible with the local market and largely considered employable. The success stories coming out of Karachi's Azam basti build a strong case for schools and NGOs collaborating with local stakeholders and connecting with local industries like waste management, fishing farms, IT sector and garment factories to tailor classes that incorporate these skills.

f. Setup mentorship programs for professionals and university graduates to take children from Katchi Abadis under their wing and give them guidance to maximize their potential.

g. Need for universities to take up the program proposed by HEC for 'adopt' nearby Katchi Abadis to help transform them gradually through various social welfare activities targeted at sustainably improving living conditions of the residents.

h. For Federal and Provincial education institutions to introduce special quotas, scholarships and loan opportunities for children from Katchi Abadis to ensure that these students are able to pursue their dream of pursuing higher education.

i. Citizens can thus develop the knowledge, values as well as the soft and technical skills needed to support and build pathways to a diverse world where there is equality for all and no one is left behind or excluded. By understanding the purpose behind the SDGs and learning what these goals aim to achieve, students can appraise existing efforts towards this end and can be active participants in this effort. The emphasis on diversity, harmony and equity coupled with community service inculcated in the school can promote peaceful societies and stronger institutions.

Housing and Urban Planning

In order to uplift the status of slums in light of SDGs to produce sustainable and thriving communities, the CDA and Ministry of Housing and Works should implement a comprehensive slum upgradation program. The program should focus on the basic yet highly important features,

including infrastructure development, community engagement and livelihood improvement. Under infrastructure development, a multi-phase approach should be enacted to renovate/upgrade existing houses and ensure the provision of basic amenities such as water supply, proper sanitation and electricity. Additionally, roads and streets should be improved for easier mobility, enhanced connectivity and to facilitate access to basic services. Moreover, CDA should work with Ministry of Housing and Works to integrate green spaces in the vicinity of slums, launch a cleanliness drive and build durable and resilient infrastructure around the passing nallahs to avoid environmental hazards in future. Collaborating with financial institutions to provide microfinance opportunities for small businesses, facilitating job placement services, and encouraging entrepreneurship will empower residents economically, leading to improved living standards. Such initiatives would provide the employment opportunities and livelihood of the residents.

Improving health and primary, secondary and vocational education should not be overlooked; setting up clinics and vocational training institutes within or near Katchi abadis will provide accessible services and increase vocational literacy in the residents, making them eligible for skilled based jobs. To ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives, regular assessments should be conducted, measuring the impact on the living conditions of slum residents. Feedback from the community should be actively sought to make necessary adjustments. Data analytics should be utilized to inform decision-makers, identify areas of improvement, and ensure efficient resource allocation.

In terms of implementation, a detailed plan with clear timelines, responsibilities, and budget allocations should be developed. A task force, comprising representatives from CDA, the Ministry of Housing and Works, local government bodies, NGOs, and community leaders, should be established. Collaboration with international organizations and donor agencies should also be fostered to secure additional funding and technical support for the program.