

Policy Roundtable 01 – COVID-19, Basic Income, Digitalization & the Social Contract

Policy Brief

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGLgtJUj-kA>

As the Government of Pakistan rapidly announced and disbursed a multi-billion rupee relief package to those affected by COVID-19, Tabadlab convened a Policy Roundtable to shed light on this monumental undertaking. What measures must be adopted to ensure maximum inclusivity, transparency and efficiency through this process? And can a pandemic really allow us to revisit the Social Contract in Pakistan?



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Recommendations

- Extending the relief programme to maximum number of people
- Tuning the data to cover the lowest socioeconomic segment of society
- Reimagining what poverty in rural and urban settings looks like
- Enabling digital penetration in public and private sector processes
- Empowering local governments to deliver basic social services
- Utilizing this opportunity to rethink what states are capable of

Discussion Summary

● Funding

How has the government managed to allocate a PKR 144 billion relief package during COVID-19 and how will it sustain this in the face of the relentless pandemic? What assistance can be expected from international organizations and what will be the long-term ramifications of that relief?

● Eligibility

What is the criteria to determine who qualifies for Ehsaas Emergency Cash? How reliable is the data that informs these decisions and how is it compiled? Has the debate remained unfairly fixated on how to weed out “undeserving” applicants to the EEC?

● Exclusion

Our speakers argue that despite attempting to penetrate the lowest socio-economic rungs of the country, there is a significant segment left out of the loop. How can systems be built to include inaccessible rural segments of the population, undocumented refugees or simply those without CNICs?

● Universal Basic Income

Has the current crisis expedited the need for a long-sought debate on Universal Basic Income? Our panel sheds light on the nuts and bolts of how to build such a program, whether it can be made sustainable and what macroeconomic repercussions it could have.

● Digital Transformation

Pakistan may have drastically increased its digital outreach in the past decade, but is this an opportunity to leap forward several spaces? With smartphone penetration, mobile wallets, e-banking and digital commerce becoming commonplace, is it time to allow the inefficiency of existing systems to be replaced?

● Social Contract

While the role of nation states has been increasingly questioned in the past few decades, can a post-COVID world reframe relations between the citizen and the State? Will citizens view the capacity of their governments through a new lens and learn to expect more from them?