URAAN Pakistan: Evaluating the Policy Architectures

Urooj Saif & Laiba Tahir

Abstract

URAAN Pakistan, launched under the 13th Five-Year Plan (2024–29), is a strategic policy initiative aimed at addressing Pakistan's persistent development challenges through a coherent, future-oriented framework. Branded by the government as the '5Es Framework': Exports; E-Pakistan; Environment & Climate Change; Energy & Infrastructure; and Equity, Ethics & Empowerment, the policy seeks to promote economic reforms, digital transformation, environmental resilience, and integrated national growth. Marking a departure from historically fragmented reform efforts, URAAN emphasises inter-sectoral coordination and long-term strategic planning. This paper evaluates the initiative's policy design through a qualitative, document-based methodology. It draws on policy design literature and Barry Buzan's multi-sectoral security framework to assess URAAN's internal coherence, institutional architecture, and strategic viability within Pakistan's socio-economic landscape. The analysis highlights notable strengths in the initiative's integrated vision and thematic coherence. However, it also identifies key gaps in institutional clarity, stakeholder engagement, and regulatory oversight mechanisms. These weaknesses could undermine implementation if left unaddressed.

Keywords: URAAN Pakistan, Policy design, Development planning, Institutional architecture, Inter-sectoral coordination.

Introduction

Pakistan's developmental trajectory has long been marked by paradox: immense potential hindered by systemic under-performance. Despite a youthful population, abundant resources, and a strategic location, past planning efforts such as the previous five-year plans, Vision 2010 and Vision 2025 struggled to drive structural transformation due to short-termism, fragmented implementation, and weak institutional coordination.

Launched under the 13th Five-Year Plan (2024–29), URAAN Pakistan represents a paradigm shift in national planning. It transitions from reactive crisis management to proactive, institutionalised development through a strategic framework centred on the novel 5Es: Exports, E-Pakistan, Environment & Climate Change, Energy & Infrastructure; and Equity, Ethics & Empowerment. These pillars are supported by enablers such as political stability, human capital development, governance reforms, and peace and security.[1]

URAAN aims to institutionalise continuity, coherence, and accountability through mechanisms like the National Economic Transformation Unit (NETU), promoting results-based management, inter-ministerial coordination, and agile implementation. It embraces inclusive consultation, data-driven policy-making, and citizen engagement through initiatives like the Champions of Reforms (COR) network to foster public trust and societal ownership.

With long-term goals of achieving upper-middle-income status by 2035 and becoming a top-ten global economy by 2047, URAAN aspires to strengthen institutionalised strategic planning for resilience, inclusive growth, and global relevance. This paper critically examines URAAN's design and implementation logic.[2]

The analysis of similar policy initiatives from other countries provides useful lessons for the policy makers in Pakistan. For instance, though Malaysia's *Vision 2020*[3] advanced industrial upgrading, education, and digital adoption, and achieved poverty reduction and export diversification; however, uneven regional

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1   Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, *URAAN Pakistan: National Economic Transformation Plan* (Islamabad: Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, 2024), 17-18, https://pc.gov.pk/uploads/uraanpakistan_book.pdf.

2   Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, *URAAN Pakistan*.

3   Mahathir Bin Mohamad, *Malaysian: The Way Forward (Vision 2020)* (Putrajaya: Government of Malaysia, 1991) https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/sites/default/files/vision%202020.pdf.

outcomes and limited institutional reforms reduced inclusivity.[4] Vietnam's long-term plans, on the other hand, show how disciplined five-year sequencing and export orientation can sustain rapid transformation, while also highlighting risks from overreliance on external capital and environmental stress.[5] These cases suggest Pakistan should combine ambitious targets with stronger institutional capacity, phased sequencing, and fiscal realism to avoid uneven outcomes.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilising document analysis and policy evaluation methods to assess the URAAN Pakistan strategy. The primary sources include the official URAAN documents, policy reports, and relevant academic literature. Data will be analysed using Barry Buzan's multi-sectoral security framework and Policy Design Theory to evaluate the coherence, institutional readiness, and socio-economic impact of the policy. The study uses qualitative policy analysis grounded in systematic document review.

Document selection:

We included URAAN and the National Economic Transformation Plan (NETP) documents, NETU/COR materials, recent government reports (2023–2025), peer-reviewed scholarship, and international policy analyses. The selection criteria was based on direct relevance to the five pillars, recency, and source credibility.

Coding process:

Documents were coded thematically against the five pillars and institutional categories using a codebook developed for consistency. Two independent coders cross-checked codes and resolved discrepancies through discussion, improving reliability.

Analytical framework:

The study integrates Barry Buzan's multi-sectoral security model (economic, environmental, societal, political, technological dimensions) with Policy Design

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4   Tim Bunnell, "WHERE IS THE FUTURE? Geography, Expectation and Experience across Three Decades of Malaysia's Vision 2020," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 46, no.5 (2022): 885-895, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.13105.

5   Ramla Khalidi, "Viet Nam's Significant Progress Takes Root in Strong Leadership, Long-Term Vision: UNDP," *UNDP*, October 31, 2025, https://www.undp.org/vietnam/blog/viet-nams-significant-progress-takes-root-strong-leadership-long-term-vision-undp.

Theory (instrument selection, sequencing, and feedback). This combined approach allows assessment of both securitisation language and operational design.

Early-Stage Implementation Evidence of URAAN Pakistan

Although URAAN Pakistan remains at an early stage of rollout under the 13th Five-Year Plan (2024–29), initial operational steps have been taken. NETU has started operationalising sectoral targets and provides quarterly progress updates to the Prime Minister's Office. By early 2025, three working groups (exports, digital transformation, and climate resilience) were convened to establish baseline indicators and identify institutional gaps.

The COR platform has initiated consultations with private sector actors, academia, and the diaspora; these produced policy notes on IT exports, skills development, and payment-gateway options that were forwarded to NETU. Sectoral signals include modest IT export growth in Q1–2025, preliminary Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) investor commitments, and National Clean Air Policy (NCAP) pilot clean-air projects in Punjab and Sindh. However, delays in certain transport projects and unresolved renewable financing illustrate uneven implementation and underline the need for robust monitoring and sequencing.

Research Questions

1. How effectively does the URAAN Pakistan strategy align with Barry Buzan's multi-sectoral security framework?

2. How does Policy Design Theory inform the coherence and feasibility of URAAN's strategic objectives?

3. What are the potential barriers to achieving URAAN Pakistan's long-term development goals?

Theoretical Framework

Barry Buzan's Societal Security Approach

In evaluating the URAAN Pakistan strategy, Barry Buzan's societal security framework provides a useful lens for understanding the multidimensional threats to national stability and cohesion, particularly in the context of climate change, water scarcity, and food security. Buzan emphasises that societal security concerns the preservation of identity, autonomy, and cohesion of a society, extending beyond traditional security threats like military aggression to include

threats arising from internal challenges such as socio-economic inequalities, environmental degradation, and resource scarcity.[6]

Buzan's theory identifies five sectors of security: military, political, economic, societal, and environmental. In the case of Pakistan, URAAN's focus on sustainable development, climate change adaptation, water security, and agricultural reforms aligns with the societal and environmental sectors of security. These initiatives are intended to mitigate internal vulnerabilities, specifically societal fragmentation and environmental stress that could undermine Pakistan's social fabric.

Policy Design Theory and URAAN Pakistan

Policy Design Theory, as developed by Michael Howlett, emphasises the strategic formulation of policies through the deliberate selection of objectives, instruments, and institutional arrangements.[7] In contrast to models that focus solely on decision-making or execution, Policy Design Theory prioritises the formulation stage: the strategic process of developing policy solutions that are coherent, context-aware, and administratively viable. It aims to comprehend how decisions are made concerning the kinds of tools (e.g., regulations, incentives, and partnerships), target groups, institutional setups, and governance systems that align best with a society's development requirements. This theory offers an essential perspective for examining if policies are consistent internally, match institutional capacities, and react to the socio-political and economic environment in which they function.

From a Policy Design Theory perspective, URAAN Pakistan's institutional framework represents an ambitious endeavour to develop an inclusive and responsive policy structure. By emphasising coordination, inclusivity, accountability, and strategic policy implementation, the initiative establishes a solid basis for systemic change. Nonetheless, obstacles concerning institutional preparedness, participatory involvement, and instrumental consistency continue to be considerable. Determining if URAAN Pakistan can achieve its long-term objectives of sustainable economic development, better governance, and enhanced public welfare will depend on how well these issues are resolved. Howlett's explanation of Policy Design Theory offers a useful framework for

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6   Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, Security: A New Framework for Analysis (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 7, 131–32.

7   Michael Howlett, *The Policy Design Primer: Choosing the Right Tools for the Job* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 3–4.

grasping these complexities and assessing how well the institutional structure and the policy's intended outcomes coincide.

URAAN Pakistan 5Es Framework

URAAN Pakistan is built on a 5Es framework comprising five integral pillars:

Exports:

The 'Exports' pillar of the URAAN Pakistan strategy represents a decisive shift in national development thinking: from reactive crisis management to a securitised, future-oriented economic vision. Rooted in Barry Buzan's notion of economic security, this pillar frames export stagnation as a systemic vulnerability threatening Pakistan's autonomy in global trade.[8] According to Buzan, threats to economic structures, such as limited market access, weak industrial capacity, or global competitiveness, can constitute existential risks if left unaddressed.[9] In URAAN, the export agenda functions as a securitising move that elevates economic diversification and international integration to the level of national security imperatives.

At the core of this securitisation is a multi-dimensional recognition of threats. These include Pakistan's narrow export base, low-value product focus, compliance gaps with international standards, and the limited international orientation of large firms.[10] For example, URAAN explicitly identifies that 'many large firms in Pakistan primarily serve domestic markets,' limiting export expansion and resilience.[11] Such diagnostics mirror Buzan's concern with internal economic structures being insufficiently robust to withstand external pressures.

From a policy design perspective, as theorised by Howlett, the *Export* E in the 5Es reflects a transition from generic to targeted instrument choice. It comprises demand-side incentives (e.g. FDI attraction), supply-side measures (e.g. small and medium-sized enterprise [SME] formalisation, innovation support), and structural governance interventions (e.g. National and Provincial Export Plans).[12] The use of coordinated clusters, certification systems, and R&D commercialisation

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8   Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*, 25–26.
9   Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 32.
10   Ali Mufti and Imran Ali, "Export-led Growth: Policy Framework for Sustainable Development in Pakistan," *SSRN*, July 10, 2024, http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4890578.
11   "'Uraan Pakistan' Sets Uplift Benchmark," *The Express Tribune*, January 4, 2025, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2519918/uraan-pakistan-sets-uplift-benchmark.
12   Howlett, *The Policy Design Primer*, 12–14.

mechanisms reflects a coherent design structure aimed at improving implementation fidelity.[13]

Nevertheless, a number of inherent trade-offs and conceptual contradictions become apparent. First, while the document sets ambitious export targets: USD 25 billion in IT and USD 13 billion in agriculture, it does not sufficiently explain the institutional or infrastructural sequencing required to achieve these numbers.[14] Second, though it mentions enhancing 'compliance with international standards,'[15] there is no embedded metric to track progress in global certification or non-tariff barrier resolution. Third, URAAN acknowledges the dominance of 'small-scale, family-owned enterprises,' yet does not offer concrete timelines or legal reforms to support their scaling and formalisation.[16]

Moreover, Howlett's criterion of 'instrument calibration,' the fit between means and policy goals, remains partially underdeveloped. For instance, export-led industrial clusters are a sound mechanism in theory but require integrated infrastructure and cross-sectoral coordination, which is only briefly addressed in URAAN's governance section without operational clarity.

The export pillar of URAAN represents a securitised, policy-relevant articulation of economic development, aligning well with Buzan's security ontology and Howlett's instrument logic. Yet, its effectiveness hinges on institutional follow-through, implementation clarity, and periodic evaluative metrics. Without these, the securitisation move risks remaining discursive rather than structural.

Key Takeaway:

Without institutional reforms (tax, trade facilitation, SME formalisation) and investor confidence, export targets may be difficult to sustain; Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should include export diversification index, SME export participation rate, and IT export dollar value.

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13   Naveed Butt, "Pakistan's \$60bn Export Target: Ministers Told to Craft Business Plans," *Business Recorder*, May 13, 2025, https://www.brecorder.com/news/40362412/60bn-export-target-ministers-told-to-craft-business-plans.

14   "Uraan Pakistan: Ahsan Iqbal Unveils Ambitious Plan to Elevate Exports and Digital Economy," *The Herald Today,* January 3, 2025, https://theheraldtoday.com/breaking-news/uraan-pakistan-boosts-exports-digital-economy.

15   Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, *URAAN Pakistan*, 23.

16   Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, 24.

E-Pakistan:

The E-Pakistan pillar of URAAN frames digital transformation as a matter of national security, consistent with Barry Buzan's expanded conception of security. Buzan argues that threats to technological capabilities, data sovereignty, or digital connectivity can undermine a state's structural resilience.[17] By positioning Information and Communication Technology (ICT) growth, including a 178 per cent export surge, as essential for future stability, URAAN engages in securitising discourse that elevates digital capacity to the level of existential priority.[18]

With 192–193 million cell subscribers and 135 million broadband users, Pakistan demonstrates significant digital penetration; yet, URAAN identifies gaps in digital infrastructure and skills that pose latent threats to economic and cybersecurity.[19] The formulation of digital deficits as security risks strengthens the stabilising narrative and primes public institutions for responsive action.

Employing Howlett's policy design lens, the E-Pakistan strategy exhibits a multi-instrumental approach featuring various tools. Infrastructure investment, vocational training programs, e-governance, cybersecurity measures, startup facilitation, and an Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy are outlined coherently. The inclusion of training, skill-building and freelancing centres further shows an interplay between capacity-building and market incentives tailored to URAAN's digital objectives.[20]

Nevertheless, some design shortcomings emerge. Howlett underscores the importance of achieving calibration through the alignment of policy instruments, actors, and goals. Yet URAAN sets ambitious targets such as USD 5 billion freelancing revenue and one unicorn start-up,[21] while failing to specify implementation actors, sequencing of infrastructure and skill programmes, or the institutional responsibilities tied to e-governance rollout. This weakens feasibility and hampers relational coordination across federal and provincial layers.

Furthermore, URAAN's scenario-based planning remains under articulated: it lacks systematic metrics for tracking digital resilience, for example, percentage of 5G adoption, cybersecurity incident rates, or AI integration across sectors. Wihtout

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[17]   Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*, 69–72.
[18]   Ministry of Finance, "Information Technology and Telecommunication" in *Pakistan Economic Survey 2022–23* (Islamabad: Ministry of Finance, 2023) https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey_2023.html.
[19]   Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, *URAAN Pakistan*, 30.
[20]   Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, 30-34.
[21]   Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, 31.

these evaluative criteria, policy effectiveness cannot be monitored or improved, risking incomplete securitisation.

In addition, prioritising advanced digital technologies and AI involves significant trade-offs. It risks overshadowing the urgent need for comprehensive broadband access in rural areas, thereby underscoring a persistent tension between innovation and equity. Buzan underscores that securitisation must balance sectoral gains with broader public acceptance,[22] yet URAAN does not explicitly reconcile high-tech ambitions with inclusive rural service delivery.

Key Takeaway:

Long-term competitiveness depends on talent retention, regulatory clarity (data, cyber), and targeted investment in R&D and higher education.

Environment & Climate Change:

The Environment and Climate pillar of URAAN redefines ecological vulnerabilities as existential threats, an approach consistent with Barry Buzan's conceptualisation of environmental security. Buzan argues that climate-induced disruptions to economic, societal, or infrastructure systems constitute genuine security challenges capable of destabilising nations.[23] URAAN's emphasis on Pakistan's ranking among the most climate-vulnerable countries, along with quantified economic losses, engages in securitising discourse that justifies urgent, integrated policy action.

Pakistan ranked as the most affected country in the 2022 Climate Risk Index, reflecting record monsoon rainfall and glacial floods that claimed over 1,700 lives and caused an estimated USD 30 billion economic loss.[24] Such framing elevates environmental hazards beyond developmental concerns, elevating adaptation and mitigation into the core of national security planning.

Howlett's Policy Design Theory underscores the need for clearly calibrated instruments to confront such systemic threats. URAAN outlines eight strategic priorities, including water security, climate finance, adaptation, and disaster risk management, along with major initiatives like NCAP 2023, REDD+, IFRM, and a

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22   Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*, 63-66.
23   Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 108.
24   Lina Adil, David Eckstein, Vera Kunzel, and Laura Schafer, *Climate Risk Index 2025: Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events?* (Bonn: Germanwatch e.V., 2025), 11, https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Climate%20Risk%20Index%202025.pdf.

National Climate Finance Strategy mobilising USD 348 billion.[25] The multiplicity of policy tools reflects comprehensive design, yet their coherence depends on sequencing and metrification.

Trade-offs and tensions arise when initiatives compete for resources or lack quantification. For example, URAAN signals 81 per cent $PM_{2.5}$ emissions reduction by 2040 under NCAP 2023[26] but omits interim benchmarks or monitoring frameworks. Moreover, using Howlett's framework, one can identify only a partial calibration of policy instruments. The water security targets are concrete (10 MAF storage, 33 per cent conveyance loss reduction),[27] yet the framework lacks assigned agencies or funding clarity. This gap undermines the coherence and feasibility of implementation.

Buzan emphasises the importance of audience acceptance in securitisation. URAAN's disaster risk finance and integrated flood management, such as NFPP-IV and early warning systems, may gain traction among provincial actors due to flood experience, yet gaps remain. The disaster management authorities in Pakistan suffer from jurisdictional overlap, duplication of responsibilities, and coordination at all levels.[28] Without explicit roles for National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), provincial disaster management units, and line agencies, institutional uptake is uncertain.

To strengthen both securitisation and design, URAAN must embed evaluative criteria: annual air quality indices, flood event recurrence intervals, water-use efficiency metrics, carbon finance disbursement rates, and adaptation fund allocation tracking. These would create feedback loops, enabling recalibration of instruments mid-course and ensuring securitisation moves translate into measurable resilience outcomes.

Key Takeaway:

Ambitious mitigation/adaptation targets require strengthened provincial execution capacity and measurable environmental indicators (air-quality, water storage, climate finance disbursement).

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25   Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, *URAAN Pakistan*, 39.

26   Ministry of Climate Change, *National Clean Air Policy (NCAP) 2023: A Roadmap for Improving Air Quality in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2023), 9, https://mocc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/NCAP%20(28-02-2023)%20v1.pdf.

27   Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, *URAAN Pakistan*, 42.

28   Ikram Shah et al., "Institutional Arrangement for Disaster Risk Management: Evidence from Pakistan," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 51 (2020): https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2020.101784.

Energy & Infrastructure:

The Energy & Infrastructure pillar of URAAN frames systemic inefficiencies and structural fragilities in energy, mobility, and mineral sectors as existential threats, offering a framing of national vulnerabilities in line with Buzan's concept of structural security. URAAN reveals that although Pakistan has installed approximately 46,605 MW of generation capacity, over 55 per cent remains idle due to operational inefficiencies and circular debt.[29] These structural deficiencies pose threats both to economic stability and social welfare.

From a securitisation perspective, dependency on imported fossil fuels (50 per cent of consumption),[30] and the growing circular debt estimated at PKR 2.4–2.6 trillion,[31] are characterised as existential vulnerabilities requiring extraordinary reform. This narrative elevates systemic reform to a security imperative, mobilising political will for deep structural change.

Using Howlett's policy design lens, URAAN lays out a multi-layered strategy involving three sectors: energy, transport infrastructure, and minerals, with detailed instrument types including pricing reforms, network upgrades, foreign-financed pipelines (e.g., TAPI, Iran–Pakistan), and regulatory reforms. This reflects a well-curated policy mix spanning infrastructure, finance, and regulation.

Despite progress, coherence remains a concern. Key energy objectives such as increasing the share of renewables above 12 per cent and reducing primary energy consumption by 9 MTOE lack clearly defined sequencing, budget allocations, and designated governance responsibilities. Transport targets like increasing railway share from 5 to 15 per cent and 8 to 25 per cent for freight transport[32] depend heavily on mega-projects (Main Line-1 [ML-1] under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC]) that have stalled due to financing and implementation delays.[33]

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29 Ministry of Finance, *"Energy" in Pakistan Economic Survey 2024–25* (Islamabad: Ministry of Finance, 2025), 29, https://finance.gov.pk/survey/chapter_25/Highlights.pdf.

30 Afia Malik, *Managing Energy Imports to Save Foreign Exchange Reserves* (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, 2023), 2, https://pide.org.pk/research/managing-energy-imports-to-save-forex-reserves/.

31 Khaleeq Kiani, "Circular Debt over Rs 2.6 Tr, Surpassing Govt Commitments," *Dawn*, May 20, 2024, https://www.dawn.com/news/1834574.

32 Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, *URAAN Pakistan*, 51.

33 Shahbaz Rana, "Govt Seeks to Negotiate Loan Terms," *The Express Tribune*, November 8, 2024, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2508157/govt-seeks-to-negotiate-loan-terms.

This points to a mismatch between policy ambition and calibrated instrument design.

Trade-offs are particularly evident in the energy transition: while promoting coal can reduce foreign exchange pressures, it may undermine environmental objectives. This tension is acknowledged within the Energy pillar, yet URAAN fails to fully integrate in policy coherence. Buzan warns that securitisation without societal buy-in or institutional clarity leads to securitisation failure; URAAN does not fully align provincial capacities with national objectives.

To remedy this, URAAN must embed measurable benchmarks, specify responsible agencies (e.g., NEPRA, PPIB, Provincial DISCOs), and sequence interventions so that financial and regulatory reforms precede infrastructure build-out. Furthermore, establishing public–private partnerships (PPPs) e.g., coal utilisation, ML-1, under transparent contracts can enhance policy design fidelity and reduce risk.

Integrating additional renewable generation and modernining transmission will require clearly disaggregated capital (CAPEX), recurrent (OPEX) estimates and a sequencing plan. Costing should distinguish: (a) generation (utility-scale and distributed renewables), (b) grid upgrades and storage, and (c) energy efficiency investments. Financing options include government budget allocations, concessional multilateral finance, private investment via SIFC and PPPs, and green bonds. Prior reforms: tariff rationalisation, transparent procurement, and strengthened regulator capacity (NEPRA), should precede large procurement to improve bankability. Concrete milestones should be assigned with quarterly expenditure reporting to NEPRA, PPIB, and provincial DISCOs.

Key Takeaway:

Financial realism, tariff and regulatory reform, and phased investment sequencing are essential to make renewable and infrastructure targets bankable.

Equity, Ethics & Empowerment:

In the Equity, Ethics & Empowerment (EEE) pillar, URAAN adopts a securitising logic by presenting deficits in human development as systemic risks to socio-economic resilience. Drawing on Barry Buzan's framework, which extends security concerns to societal capacity and human welfare,[34] URAAN casts stagnating HDI

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[34]   Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*, 85-88.

rankings, rapid population growth, and rural inequality not simply as developmental challenges but as threats to resilience and sovereignty.

For instance, URAAN identifies Pakistan's annual population growth rate of 2.55 per cent adding nearly 5 million people each year, as a destabilising factor that strains public services and infrastructure.[35] This narrative escalates beyond demography, framing it as serious governance challenge requiring urgent but feasible policy attention.

From a policy design standpoint, however, URAAN's ambitious agenda, including reforms in education, healthcare, family planning, social protection, Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), and women empowerment, necessitates precise calibration of instruments, sequencing, and accountability. URAAN's strategic targets, like creating 1.5 million jobs annually, raising universal health coverage by 12 per cent, or cutting maternal mortality by 35 per cent demonstrate clarity in desired outcomes.[36]

Despite this, URAAN lacks detailed design mechanisms. Howlett emphasises the need for blueprinting instruments to match goals, specifying resource allocation, actors, and evaluation systems. URAAN, for example, announces intent to expand TVET, but omits a baseline of current enrolment, institutional budgets, or the nature of PPPs driving vocational training.

Trade-offs emerge sharply. URAAN commits to increased healthcare access in rural zones while also aiming to create 1.5 million jobs. Absent clarity on financing, whether funds are diverted from social protection, public health investments, or infrastructure, the coherence of these ambitions is questionable. Buzan warns that securitising social issues without instrument clarity can generate public scepticism and implementation inertia.[37]

Scaling TVET, primary health, and family planning requires a phased costing framework (per-student/per-facility unit costs), targeted pilot roll-outs in high-need districts, and clear recurrent financing plans. Financing may combine reallocated budget lines, provincial conditional grants, donor programs, and PPPs for vocational training centres. Assign the School Education Departments, Health Ministries, and Population Welfare departments explicit KPIs (enrolment, completion, coverage) and quarterly performance reporting. Link resource disbursement to measured outputs to ensure accountability.

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[35] Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, *URAAN Pakistan*, 57.
[36] Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, 60.
[37] Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*, 87-88.

Key Takeaway:

Commitment must be matched with budget realism and accountability mechanisms to convert targets into access, employment, and improved human development outcomes.

Institutional Framework of Policy

The institutional framework of URAAN Pakistan, articulated through the National Economic Transformation Plan (NETP) 2024–29, offers a structured approach to policy implementation with a goal of achieving sustainable economic growth and human development. The National Economic Transformation Unit (NETU) serves as a central coordinating body housed within the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. NETU constitutes a liaison between the Prime Minister's Office, the federal and provincial governments, and broader civil society to ensure coherent planning, cross-sectoral collaboration, and policy execution.[38] The transformation roadmap developed under NETP breaks the five-year plan into annual sectoral targets, clearly assigning responsibilities to ministries and provincial administrations. The KPIs are used to symmetrically track progress, and are evaluated on a quarterly basis. These evaluations are reported to the Prime Minister and reviewed by a high-level steering committee, ensuring top-level oversight and institutional accountability. With this structure, fragmented governance models give way to a system with quantifiable results, regular feedback loops, and data-driven decision-making.

A critical enabler of this institutional reform agenda is the Champions of Reforms (COR) network, which institutionalises citizen participation by integrating voices from the private sector, academia, civil society, and the global Pakistani diaspora into policymaking processes. COR embodies the vision of a 'Team Pakistan,' creating a formal mechanism through which professionals contribute expertise and provide policy feedback to public institutions.[39] Coordinated by NETU, this platform serves as a two-way channel: it informs citizens about government initiatives and reforms while enabling bottom-up input that enhances policy legitimacy, relevance, and public trust. Through COR, the URAAN initiative seeks to rebuild the state-society contract, especially in historically underrepresented or underserved communities, by making governance more participatory and transparent. This deliberate inclusion of citizens in the reform ecosystem helps reduce the democratic deficit, increases institutional responsiveness, and supports a more agile and people-centric state structure.

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38   Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, 66
39   Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*, 67

The institutional framework is strategically directed by the 5Es Framework, which emphasises five fundamental development pillars: Exports, E-Pakistan, Environment & Climate Change, Energy & Infrastructure, and Equity, Ethics & Empowerment. Each pillar is implemented through inter-ministerial collaboration and is associated with measurable targets that correspond with national priorities. For instance, the E-Pakistan initiative is designed to improve digital infrastructure and regulatory efficiency, while reforms in exports aim to enhance productivity and market access for domestic industries. The agenda for Energy & Infrastructure focuses on investing in renewable energy, modernising transportation, and exploring innovative financing for development. Social inclusion is promoted through increased investments in education, skill development, and social protection, with the goal of doubling education expenditure (from 2.1 to 4 per cent of GDP) and improving access to healthcare and housing. These initiatives are further supported by cross-cutting enablers such as political stability, peace and security, and human capital development, which are acknowledged as essential for achieving institutional effectiveness and long-term success.

In parallel, URAAN's policy framework utilises key transformation drivers to expedite reform. These drivers include the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), which aims to attract USD 29 billion in strategic investments from Gulf nations and other partners, concentrating on vital sectors such as agriculture, mining, IT, and energy. The revamped CPEC 2.0 enhances these initiatives by establishing five specialised corridors: Growth, Livelihood Enhancement, Innovation, Green, and Opening-up, each intended to stimulate regional development and technological progress. Looking to the future, the *Pakistan Centennial 2047 Lab* functions as a policy think tank and innovation centre committed to long-term strategic planning, steering the nation's evolution into a regional economic and technological leader by its centennial anniversary.

Through the incorporation of these strategic tools within the comprehensive URAAN framework, Pakistan is establishing a foundation for governance focused on outcomes, inclusive development, and preparedness for the future. Collectively, these reforms foster a culture of performance, accountability, and citizen participation, providing a feasible route to realise Vision 2047 and enhancing the state's ability to effect meaningful changes in the lives of its citizens.

Analysis of Institutional Policy using Policy Design Theory

Application of Policy Design Theory to the institutional framework of URAAN Pakistan, specifically through the NETP 2024-29, NETU, and the COR network, facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the policy's structural integrity, inclusiveness, and its capacity to tackle Pakistan's economic and governance

issues. This theory underscores the significance of aligning policy instruments with target demographics. The COR network exemplifies this by engaging a variety of stakeholders, including the private sector, academic institutions, and the diaspora, who actively participate in the feedback and design process. This engagement enables the URAAN framework to formulate policies that are more legitimate, socially accepted, and feasible for implementation. The plan's integration of overarching themes such as digital transformation (E-Pakistan), social inclusion, and climate resilience illustrates the application of integrative design, another key principle of the theory, which seeks to harmonise various instruments and sectors towards a unified developmental vision.

Policy Design Theory highlights the necessity of establishing clear feedback mechanisms and accountability structures within the policy design to ensure adaptability and evolution based on real-world results.[40] In the context of URAAN Pakistan, the implementation of KPIs to track sectoral advancements serves as a tool for ongoing evaluation of the implementation process. However, despite the presence of regular monitoring systems, concerns arise regarding the ability of institutional actors at provincial and local levels to effectively interpret and respond to these KPIs. Policy Design Theory emphasises that the timely adaptation of policies informed by performance data is essential for the attainment of long-term objectives. In this case, URAAN's institutional framework might benefit from stronger mechanisms that facilitate continuous policy learning and adaptation, particularly at lower levels of government.

Yet, from a Policy Design Theory perspective, URAAN highlights certain aspects where the coherence of design may be questioned. Although the institutional ambition is evident, issues such as the lack of clearly defined budget allocations for reform, insufficient inter-ministerial coordination in the initial phases, and limited provincial involvement during the formulation process raise doubts about instrumental consistency and administrative preparedness, critical factors in policy design analysis.[41]   Furthermore, the absence of a published monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework and baseline indicators undermines the feedback loop that is vital for adaptive design.

In sum, Policy Design Theory provides a comprehensive framework for rigorously evaluating the structure of URAAN Pakistan, enabling an assessment not only of the objectives being pursued but also of the intentionality and effectiveness of the

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40   Michael Howlett, *Designing Public Policies: Principles and Instruments*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 8-13.

41   Michael Howlett and Ishani Mukherjee, "Policy Design and Non-Design: Towards a Spectrum of Policy Formulation Types," *Politics and Governance* 2, no. 2 (2014): 57-71, https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v2i2.149.

design process. It aids in determining whether the policy mix, mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, and institutional arrangements are appropriate for achieving the transformative objectives of inclusive growth, innovation, and governance reform.

Challenges in Policy Design

The NETP (2024-29) of URAAN Pakistan encounters significant obstacles in policy design and formulation that may hinder its effectiveness. A major concern is the inconsistency among policy instruments and insufficient coordination across sectors. The 5Es Framework: encompassing exports, E-Pakistan, energy, environment, and equity, necessitates cohesive planning among various ministries and agencies. However, existing policies are deficient in operational guidelines, legal structures, and explicit inter-ministerial protocols. The responsibilities of NETU, the coordinating entity, are not clearly defined, and there is a lack of strategy to align federal initiatives with provincial development frameworks, especially in areas constitutionally devolved, such as education, health, and local governance. This fragmentation undermines the integration that the 5Es Framework seeks to accomplish.

Institutional readiness poses another significant challenge. Numerous organisations responsible for implementing URAAN, including NETU and sectoral ministries, do not possess clear mandates, sufficient budgets, or adequate human resource capacity. There has been minimal investment in capacity-building, rendering these entities unable to handle complex reform initiatives. This disconnect between policy aspirations and institutional capabilities hinders progress and jeopardises the realisation of URAAN's objectives.

Additionally, the policy design process exhibits deficiencies in stakeholder engagement. Consultations with stakeholders like provincial governments, academia, and the private sector occurred post-policy announcement, restricting the variety of insights during the drafting phase. Furthermore, the absence of a robust M&E framework raises concerns regarding accountability and progress tracking. For URAAN to succeed, it must enhance coordination, bolster institutional capacity, involve stakeholders early in the process, and establish a comprehensive M&E system.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework

To strengthen accountability, URAAN requires a structured M&E system. This should include baseline indicators for each of the five pillars, quarterly reporting cycles, and annual performance reviews. KPIs, such as export diversification ratios, renewable energy share, broadband penetration, and health coverage expansion, must be assigned to specific agencies. Independent audits and citizen feedback via the COR can enhance credibility. Such a framework ensures adaptive policymaking, enabling course correction and evidence-based progress tracking.

Assessing the Policy Effectiveness of URAAN Pakistan

URAAN Pakistan represents an integrated development framework designed to overcome the country's systemic socio-economic, institutional, and environmental challenges. The following key dimensions offer a comprehensive lens to assess the effectiveness and implementation capacity of the initiative:

Institutional Coherence

One of the major weaknesses in Pakistan's past development strategies has been fragmented governance and weak inter-ministerial coordination.[42] URAAN addresses this through the establishment of NETU, which serves as a centralised body to harmonise efforts across federal, provincial, and sectoral levels. By promoting clear institutional mandates, performance monitoring, and result-based accountability, URAAN aims to build institutional coherence critical for policy implementation.[43]

Economic Competitiveness

Pakistan has historically relied on low-value, export-dependent sectors, leaving its economy vulnerable to external shocks and limiting global integration.[44] URAAN responds by prioritising export diversification across high-value sectors such as IT, agriculture, minerals, and services. Through the E-Pakistan pillar, the strategy seeks to build a knowledge-based, digitally empowered economy, enhance

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42   OECD, *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development 2018: Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018), 18, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264301061-en.

43   OECD, 11.

44   World Bank, *Pakistan Development Update: Fiscal Impact of Federal State-Owned Enterprises* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2024), 15-18, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/140b30353b40dbb294cca42bcb86529a.

innovation, attract foreign investment, and integrate Pakistan into global markets, thus improving overall economic competitiveness and resilience.

Social Inclusion and Equity

Deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities, gender disparities, and exclusion of marginalised communities have undermined national cohesion. URAAN introduces targeted interventions in education, healthcare, skill development, and economic empowerment to integrate marginalised communities and promote inclusive development. By expanding access to social services and promoting inclusive growth, the initiative aligns with global development standards and fosters greater social stability.

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience

Environmental degradation, water scarcity, food insecurity, and climate change pose serious risks to Pakistan's socio-economic stability.[45] URAAN integrates climate action across its development pillars by promoting renewable energy, modernising water infrastructure, and implementing climate-smart agriculture. It emphasises resource management and climate adaptation, recognising that long-term development is unattainable without environmental sustainability and disaster resilience.[46]

Policy Continuity and Responsiveness

Frequent political transitions and policy discontinuities have historically disrupted reform implementation in Pakistan.[47] URAAN's design incorporates institutional mechanisms, including quarterly performance reviews, stakeholder engagement platforms like the COR, and clear KPIs to ensure sustained progress beyond electoral cycles. Additionally, the strategy emphasises adaptive governance,

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[45] Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security*, 22.
[46] Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Pakistan: Climate Risk Profile* (Washington, DC: ADB, 2021), 26, https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/700916/climate-risk-country-profile-pakistan.pdf.
[47] Sakib Sherani, *Institutional Reforms in Pakistan: The Missing Piece of the Development Puzzle* (Islamabad: Institute of Development Initiatives, 2017), 1-3, https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/13947.pdf.

allowing policies to evolve in response to socio-economic shifts and global uncertainties,[48] such as global oil prices and geopolitical tensions.[49]

Through these interconnected mechanisms, URAAN Pakistan seeks to correct structural deficiencies, promote inclusive development, and build national resilience, offering a credible pathway to achieving Pakistan's long-term development aspirations.

Conclusion

URAAN Pakistan represents an ambitious recalibration of national development strategy, seeking to institutionalise policy coherence, economic revitalisation, and societal resilience through the 5Es framework. The initiative aligns conceptually with Barry Buzan's multi-sectoral security framework by framing economic underperformance, digital exclusion, environmental degradation, and human development deficits as existential threats requiring securitised policy responses. Furthermore, URAAN exhibits an overt application of Policy Design Theory, demonstrating deliberate efforts to align objectives, instruments, and institutional arrangements.

However, the critical assessment reveals notable design inconsistencies and institutional vulnerabilities that question the initiative's feasibility. Despite the securitisation of development pillars, URAAN's operationalisation suffers from gaps in instrument calibration, ambiguous sequencing of reforms, and insufficient metrics to track progress. This disconnect raises concerns about whether the securitising discourse will translate into tangible resilience, or remain aspirational.

In terms of institutional architecture, while NETU and the COR network introduce promising mechanisms for coordination and societal participation, their effectiveness remains contingent on provincial integration, fiscal clarity, and capacity building, areas that remain underdeveloped in the current design. The limited involvement of provincial stakeholders during formulation, coupled with undefined resource allocation, undermines administrative preparedness and

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48   Prime Minister's Office, *Institutional Reforms in the Federal Government: August 2018-August 2021*, Vol. I (Islamabad: Prime Minister's Office, 2021), 3-4, https://ishrathusain.iba.edu.pk/pdf/icr-volume-i.pdf.

49   Mian Ahmad Naeem Salik, *Uraan Pakistan: A Five-Year Economic Transformation Plan*, (Islamabad: Institute Of Strategic Studies Islamabad, 2025), 5, https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-uraan-pakistan-a-five-year-economic-transformation-plan/.

threatens the viability of policy implementation, particularly in constitutionally devolved sectors such as health, education, and local governance.

Contradictions also persist within the framework itself. Ambitious targets for exports, renewable energy, and digital transformation stand in contrast with Pakistan's constrained fiscal space and limited institutional capacity. Centralised oversight through NETU promises coordination but risks undermining provincial autonomy. Likewise, the emphasis on rapid technological adoption may deepen rural–urban divides if equity and inclusivity are not prioritised. These tensions illustrate the gap between aspiration and implementation that must be addressed for URAAN to achieve credibility. By integrating evidence-based policymaking, robust M&E systems, and participatory governance, URAAN can evolve into both a national framework and an internationally relevant model for strategic development.

Urooj Saif is pursuing an MPhil in International Relations and works in Development Communication at the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. Email: uroojsaif01@gmail.com.

Laiba Tahir holds a BS in Economics and works in Development Communication at the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. Email: laibatahir011@gmail.com.