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ASSESSING PROGRESS TOWARD SDG 16 IN PAKISTAN: GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Abstract
The study aimed to examine the progress of Pakistan towards achieving sustainable development goal 16 and identifying governance challenges that hinder its effective enforcement. Sustainable development goal 16 concentrated on peace, strong institutions, justice, and inclusive governance. Despite various institutional and constitutional reforms, Pakistan persistently faced the challenges of corruption, political instability, lack of institutional capacity, confined citizen participation, and provincial disparities that affect its development. Moreover, the study focused on analysing interaction among formal institutions, public participation, future governance preparedness and provincial disparities. Moreover qualitative research method has been used. The thematic content analysis and empirical evidences were employed to analyse institutional performances and provincial differences in achieving SDG 16 targets. The research concluded that enhancing public participation, strengthening institutional capacity, reducing provincial variations, and ensuring judicial independence and accountability are essential for attaining SDG 16 targets in Pakistan.

Introduction
Sustainable Development Goal 16 concentrates on encouraging peaceful, impartial, fair and inclusive societies through the efficacious, transparent, and accountable institutions. It emphasizes on the importance of strengthening the constitutionalism, revoking malpractices, promoting speedy access to justice and fairness, and developing inclusive political system as it provides basis for promoting sustainable development. At international level, SDG 16 is considered as a pathway to attain other sustainable development goals, however the progress remains very slow especially in developing countries mainly due to the consistent challenges pertaining to governance that includes poor institutional capacity, discrimination and conflict across the world (United Nations, 2024;UNDP, 2024).

In Pakistan, the development and efforts to achieve SDG 16 has been confined on account of various governance problems such as lack of institutional coordination, weak institutional capacity, poor accountability, and persistent political upheavals and turmoil. The SDG reports of Pakistan and evaluation of UN highlighted that despite introducing various reforms in governance

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system, there is gap between theory and practice that persistently hinders development at policy level (Pakistan Planning Commission, 2023; UNDP Pakistan, 2025).The analysis to indicate various governance problems and suggestions of future direction is mandatory in order to achieve the progress towards SDG 16 in Pakistan.

Literature Review

The author argued that corruption has been a prominent problem in political structure and governance of Pakistan, which adversely influenced institutional integrity, the fiscal development and practices of democracy. The corruption influenced the sustainable development goal 16 in strengthening rule of law, justice and peace in Pakistan. Despite NAB and FIA, corruption has inherited in companies, business markets and political organs. Weak law execution, political intervention in accountability mechanism and poor institutional transparency are the reasons that hinder the progress of SDG 16. The study evaluated anti-corruption measures and their strengths and weaknesses (Aziz, Hassan,& Magsi, 2025).

The author evaluated the citizens' feedback system in Pakistan in terms of achieving sustainable development goals 16 in Pakistan. Some feedback programs like CFMP collects large number of feedbacks but still remained slow to improve governance accountability mainly due to strong political intervention and weak follow up which confined their effectiveness. Only few citizens considered that the system reduced corruption and malpractices. Inclusion of marginalized communities and better implementation of programs can help improve efficiency (Khan, Israr,& Urooj, 2025).

The book discussed that governance system in Pakistan has been deteriorated due to weak rule of law, corruption and political instability, and poor institutional mechanism. The weak transparency and lack of institutional accountability hindered the effectiveness of SDG 16.However, democracy has prevailed in Pakistan but its execution remained poor practically. The author suggested strengthening rule of law and effective institutional reforms for the progress of SDG 16.(Zafarullah&Azmat,2024).

The book explained SDG 16 in South Asia region especially in context of Pakistan. The study evaluated that Pakistan has introduced e-governance and decentralization of power. Meanwhile, poor implementation and limited efficiency of institutions limited development of SDG 16 in Pakistan. The book recommended strengthening accountability of institutions and coordination can help ameliorate the attainment of sustainable development goal 16 ambitions in Pakistan (Hanif &Hanif, 2024).

The article examined the relation between civilian and military leadership and their effect on the institutional and political stability of Pakistan in terms of SDG 16.The study highlighted that the impact of military over judicial and political institutions played crucial role in weakening democratic practices and institutional accountability in Pakistan. The author recommended strong civilian institutions and independence of judiciary for the achievement of peace and justice in the society (Shaikh, Khan, Shar, & Bhaiyo, 2025).

After reading numerous research articles and renowned books, the several areas found that were further needed to explore and were under researched. Preliminary, existing literature lacked detailed evaluation of the overall detailed development of the country towards achieving all dimensions of SDG 16.Secondly, confined attention has been pay to the interaction between judicial, administrative, political, and accountability institutions in moulding and shaping SDG 16.Thirdly, the previous literature lacked empirical evidence of provincial differences and disparities in execution of SDG 16.Fourthly, the efficiency of public participation and accountability mechanism in ameliorating outcomes of governance was underexplored. Fifthly, low considerations were paid to future

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Volume 4 • Issue 7 • November 2026

governance directions and institutional preparedness for procuring SDG 16 goals by 2030.

Theoretical Framework

Various scholars has proposed theories on governance according to their own experiences and criteria. Some important theories are as follow:

- Good Governance Theory by Daniel Kaufmann
- New Institutionalism Theory by Douglass North
- State Capacity Theory by Joel S. Midgal

The first theory, good governance was proposed by Daniel Kaufmann who was Swiss born economist. It explains governance through various formal perspectives of institutional accountability, constitutionalism, transparency and effective political system. The theory discussed how effectively different institutions overcome corruption and render services. It aligned the quality of governance with outcomes of development directly (Kaufmann, Kraay,&Mastruzzi,2010). It is helpful for evaluating SDG 16 in Pakistan in respect of fragile governance and performance of governance system.

The second theory, new institutionalism was developed by Douglass North who was American economist. It discussed that political institutions mould political behaviour of citizens through formal rules and regulations and informal norms. The theory emphasizes the implementation gaps on policies at theoretical level and their practical Implementation. Weak governance institutions resulted in poor governance performance (North, 1990).The theory is helpful for determining the challenges occur during SDG 16 implementation in Pakistan.

State capacity theory was developed by Joel S. Midgal who was American Israeli Political Sociologist. It concentrated on the capacity of state to enforce rules and laws, implement policies and maintain law and order of institutions in Pakistan. Meanwhile the states that are politically vulnerable have high chances of policy implementation failure. The theory focused on administrative efficiency and control capacity (Midgal, 1988). This theory can help discuss SDG 16 in terms of weak law implementation and effectiveness of state.

Material and Method

The study employed a qualitative research method. The data was gathered through secondary sources including UNDP publication, various research articles, and World Bank reports on SDG 16.The information was examined through thematic content analysis to evaluate the institutional performances. Furthermore, empirical evidence was used to compare the governance outcomes of SDG 16 across all provinces. The study was limited by only the use of secondary sources. Moreover, ethical considerations were maintained by proper citations and avoidance of plagiarism.

Result and Discussion

Comprehensive Assessment of SDG 16 in Pakistan

Pakistan has attained remarkable improvement in internal security as compared to past few years. The initiatives of counter-terrorism operations and strong military coordination and strengthening of law implementation mechanism have overcome oppressive incidents. Moreover, border security concerns, residual terrorism threats and sectarian atrocities consistently hinder peace and security of the country.

The justice and fairness mechanism restricted by various structural malpractices and inefficiencies that included late proceeding, expensive litigation and confined legal assistance services. The poor and marginalized groups cannot have easy access to justice despite legal and institutional reforms (UNDP Pakistan, 2025).

The malpractices, corruption and poor institutional accountability remained on top problems in governance. The existence of anti-corruption institutions have failed to reduce

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Volume 4 • Issue 7 • November 2026

political intervention, poor low enforcement and weak accountability and transparency mechanism (International Monetary Fund, 2024).

Pakistan made numerous endeavour to introduce institutional reforms including digital service delivery and e-governance. These measures have reduced administrative inefficiency in few regions, but, low institutional capacity and poor policy enforcement mechanism confine governance efficacy (UNDP Pakistan, 2025).

Pakistan introduced electoral reforms and gave reserved seats to women and minorities in assemblies. However, public participation remained slow mainly due to vulnerable grassroots institutions that reduces inclusive governance in Pakistan (United Nations Pakistan, 2026).

Even though constitutional rights became weak enough so human rights challenges continue for poor citizens, women and other marginalized communities. Various issues persistently prevailed in Pakistan such as gender discrimination, low access to justice and fairness that persistently weaken democratic continuity (UNDP, 2023).

The government has formulated right to information laws at different levels of governance, confined public participation, weak implementation has constrained accountability and institutional transparency (United Nations, 2024).

Overall, the government of Pakistan introduced Institutional and peace reforms but failed to provide speedy justice and reduce corruption. The global indicators explained that the progress of SDG 16 remained blocked and uneven due to implementation barriers (World Bank, 2023: UNDP, 2023).

Interaction between Political, Administrative, Judicial and Administrative Accountability in Shaping SDG 16 Outcomes

The judiciary of Pakistan ensures rule of law and constitutionalism meanwhile political institutions draw policy directions. The anti-corruption institutions are contingent on courts for implementation of cases of corruption, forming a close relation. Moreover, the delayed justice, political interference and poor investigation mechanism revoke effective cooperation and coordination. In result, constitutionalism and efforts to reduce corruption has confined the progress of sustainable development goal 16 (World Justice Project, 2023).

Political institutions are heavily dependent on administrative system for the implementation and laid down of different policies. But bureaucratic inefficiency weaken political institutions weaken democratic continuity. Accountability mechanism supervises the bureaucracy efficiency and performance but overlapping mandates and weak institutional coordination reduce effective policy implementation. Overall, all these governance institutions operate interdependently but in a separate way, leading towards weak transparency, low institutional coordination and weak governance which adversely blocks progress of SDG 16 in Pakistan. The fragmented institutional framework is considered as one of the major barrier that hinders development of sustainable goals (United Nations, 2024).

Empirical Evidence of Provincial Disparities in Implementation of SDG 16 in Pakistan

Table 1: Empirical Evidence of Provincial Disparities

Dimension	Punjab	Sindh	Blochistan	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Empirical Evidence
Rule of Law and Justice	Better court infrastructure but backlog exists	Intense urban and rural divide, and weak	Weak court infrastructure, Confined and poor access to justice	Limited access to judiciary, dependency on informal justice	Uneven justice and national backlog highlight inequality in access to justice

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		legal aid in rural areas			across the provinces
Violence and Security	Lower violent conflict, improved policy reforms	Urban crimes and weak rural policy	High insecurity and policy gaps	Conflict affected zones, security-driven governance	Vulnerable global peace index ranking reflects uneven security results.
Corruption and Accountability	Inefficient bureaucracy and normal accountability enforcement	High corruption perception in police	Severe governance Vulnerability to insecurity and high corruption perception	Reforms exists but weak infrastructure and mixed performance	Transparency studies show corruption perception more in Sindh and Balochistan
Citizen Participation **Feedback**	Highest use of digital complaint system	Moderate participation	Very low participation due to digital divide	Selected responsiveness in certain districts	CFMP data showed high volume of complaints but only 30% understand institutional responsiveness nationally.
Institutional Capacity and Governance Quality	Strong bureaucracy and administrative structure	Fragmented governance and weak law enforcement	Weak institutional penetration and fragile governance	Reform oriented but inconsistent enforcement	Uneven administrative capacity across provinces and federal provincial divide

Effectiveness of Citizen's Participation and Institutional Accountability Mechanism in Ameliorating Governance Outcomes

Public Participation and accountability pave way for better governance by improving transparency and oversight of citizens through different tools including right to information law, citizens feedback system and addressing problems of public on various platforms. But, the governance effectiveness remained poor due to low institutional capacity, poor public consciousness and arbitrary enforcement which constraint SDG 16 outcomes(UNDP,2023;World Bank,2023).The different anti-corruption and accountability institutions including NAB,FIA and audit bodies expose governance challenges but their effectiveness is hindered and restrained by political interference, weak law Implementation and delayed justice. Both public participation and accountability institutions are partially efficient, promoting public consciousness but generated confined structure changes in political and governance outcomes (World Justice Project, 2023).

Future Governance Pathways and Institutional Preparedness for attaining SDG 16 Targets by 2030

The key future governance directions concentrate on the introducing digital governance,

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Volume 4 • Issue 7 • November 2026

accountability mechanisms, efficient transparency, constitutionalism, decentralization of power, public participation meanwhile the institutional preparedness emphasizes on the legal and institutional frameworks, administrative abilities, institutional coordination are strengthen enough to enforce these reforms in Pakistan effectively. The effective progress of SDG 16 was not hindered only due to policy challenges but also because of low institutional capacity, and fragmented structure of governance and limited monitoring system (United Nations, 2023; UNDP, 2022).

Governance future pathways and preparedness of institutions emphasized a key gap in implementation SDG 16, while defining international and national ambitions of governance, there has been low concentration to whether the institutional bodies of Pakistan are efficient enough to procure effective outcomes by 2030.The gap is necessary to fulfil that could improve progress towards SDG 16 in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The evaluation of effective consideration of country's endeavour in ensuring justice, strong institutions and peace is inevitable for assessing development of SDG 16.Attaining the sustainable development goals requires effective coordination among institutions, efficient transparency, institutional accountability and participation f citizens. Moreover, solving provincial disparities and consolidation of institutional capacity is important for sustainable development. Furthermore, a vast evaluation of governance outcomes and institutional preparedness can pave way to the progress of key policy measures and promote Pakistan's progress to attain SDG16 by 2030.

Recommendations

Establish Governance Coordination Framework

The national and subnational government should establish a strong coordination mechanism among various judicial, administrative and political institutions to ensure implementation of SDG 16. The persistent and regular coordination can reduce institutional fragmentation and overlapping mandates (United Nation, 2024).

Strengthen Administrative Reforms and Institutional Capacity

The political and public institutions should be strengthened by introducing various administrative reforms, recruitment on merit-based and professional training. Development of institutional capacity is important for ameliorating policy enforcement, rendering services and institutional performances across governance levels.

Ensure Judicial and Administrative Accountability's Independence

Judiciary and accountability institutions should be independent from any political intervention in order to perform their obligations effectively. Legal, institutional, and constitutional measures should be pursued to preserve their dignity, non-political intervention, and to enhance efficient transparency, public trust and institutional accountability (International Monetary Fund, 2024).

Reduce Provincial Governance Disparities

Ensure equitable resource allocation and introduce various targeted development programs to resolve the issue of differences in provincial governance outcomes and performance, peculiarly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Strengthening grassroots institutions and ameliorating easy access to fairness and justice can encourage efficient enforcement of SDG 16 all across the provinces of Pakistan (United Nations Pakistan, 2024).

Improve Access to Rule of Law and Justice

Judicial reforms should be concentrated on consolidating dispute resolution mechanisms, preventing case backlogs, reducing delayed proceedings, and strengthening easy reach to justice for poor population and marginalized

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Volume 4 • Issue 7 • November 2026

communities. Effectiveness of accessible judicial systems are necessary for attaining SDG 16(World Justice Project, 2023).

Enhance Inclusive Public Participation

The government should promote public participation through grassroots institutions, digital feedback systems, and public consultation. The focus should be shifted towards youth, and ensuring participation of marginalized communities, women and minorities in political decision making processes (World Bank, 2023).

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