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**CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY
AND GOVERNANCE**

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DIALOGUE REPORT

Building Cultural Vibrancy Through Performing Arts

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The Centre for public policy and Governance (CPPG), in collaboration with the Punjab Council of the Arts (PUCAR), organized a policy dialogue on “*Building Cultural Vibrancy through Performing Arts*” on June 8, 2023. The objective of the policy dialogue was to assess the facilitation provided by the Government of Punjab (GoP) to the theatre and music communities. The dialogue aimed to generate practical and actionable recommendations to make Punjab's culture more vibrant and sustainable. It sought to address the immediate needs of artists by generating ideas to attract private investment. The purpose of this discussion was to develop a multi-year plan to raise the level of performing arts in the province. Additionally, strategies to promote local theatre art and music internationally were discussed, and the need for better monitoring and evaluation was recognized. The discussion resulted in improved awareness of theatre and music and provided a networking opportunity to the participants.

Introduction

For building cultural vibrancy through performing arts, it is imperative to pay attention to inclusivity, accessibility, and the promotion of voices. For fostering sustainable and vibrant arts to enrich the cultural stream of society, it is important to develop collaboration between cultural organizations, artists' community, educational institutions, and community members.

Unfortunately, any meaningful discussion and deliberation on cultural policy in Pakistan has yet to take place. A robust and consensus-driven culture policy can play a key role in protecting and promoting a nation's tangible and intangible cultural heritages. It helps identify, protect, preserve, and showcase cultural assets and properties; for instance, language,

traditions, art forms, historical sites, and intangible cultural practices.¹

For Pakistan, a culture policy is a desirable goal for several reasons. First, it helps to shape an understanding and recognition of diverse cultural identities within a nation (we know that Pakistan is a multicultural and multiethnic country with various regional, linguistic, and religious communities; this deserves recognition and acceptance). Second, it provides space for artistic expression and creative freedom in the context of regulatory and censorship practices and also the support mechanisms for artists and cultural practitioners. Third, it promotes understanding of cultural products, nurtures citizens' sense of belonging, cultivates their personal connection to their cultural roots, and contributes to national identity formation.² Fourth, it can contribute to the economic and social development of a nation by assessing any past strategies used to leverage culture for economic growth, tourism, job creation, and community development. Finally, a vigorous, deliberative, and dynamic culture policy could help build a national narrative on celebrating cultural diversity, preserving crumbling heritage sites, promoting artistic expression, fostering social cohesion, driving economic development, and engaging in global cultural diplomacy.^{3, 4}

Several attempts were made to draft a cultural policy in Pakistan, starting from 1968 when the Standing Committee of Art & Culture took the initiative. However, these efforts remained inconclusive. Famous national poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz was inducted into Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto cabinet as minister of Culture (1972-74) and played a key role in highlighting the cultural heritage, folk literature, and arts and crafts of Pakistan. He was instrumental in drafting a culture policy for the country in 1975. Under General Zia-ul Haq's regime (1977-88), the emphasis on Islamization made any discussion on cultural policy irrelevant. During Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's tenure (1988-90), Fakhar Zaman presented a culture policy that also remained a draft. Subsequently, in 1995 and 2008, efforts were made to formulate institutional frameworks for culture. In 2016, the Lok Virsa - Heritage Library of Pakistan drafted yet another version of the cultural policy, but it remained non-functional. Thus, at the national level, any meaningful progress on the culture policy has remained elusive. Following the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), culture became a provincial subject. Since then, the provincial governments have shown interest in showcasing their cultural heritage, arts, and literature.

¹ Bleibleh, Sahera, and Jihad Awad. "Preserving cultural heritage: Shifting paradigms in the face of war, occupation, and identity." *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 44 (2020): 196-203.

² Tariq Mahmud, "Do We Have a Cultural Policy?" *The Express Tribune*, *The Express Tribune*, March 7, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1061257/do-we-have-a-cultural-policy>, also see Saeed

Shafqat, *Pakistani National Identity: Muslim, multilingual and multicultural?* Research & News Quarterly, CPPG, no 5&6 July, 2009: 2-5.

³ Hesmondhalgh, David, and Andy C. Pratt. "Cultural industries and cultural policy." *International journal of cultural policy* 11, no. 1 (2005): 1-13.

⁴ Bell, David, and Kate Oakley. *Cultural policy*. Routledge, 2014.

Punjab Culture Policy 2021

As noted above, culture and cultural heritage have remained an inadequately studied subject in Punjab as well as Pakistan. The 18th constitutional amendment has prompted the provinces to consider culture to promote tourism and boost pride in cultural heritage. The Information and Culture Department, Government of Punjab, with the help of relevant stakeholders, drafted the Punjab Culture Policy, which has been duly approved by the provincial cabinet in 2021. The policy identifies the following five key objectives:

- Governance for Culture
- Peaceful Coexistence
- Protection and Promotion of Culture
- Social Cohesion
- Economic development

The policy is overarching and wide-ranging. It envisions “*a peaceful, progressive, and culturally vibrant Punjab.*” It frames culture underscoring tolerance, societal regeneration, social cohesion, and economic growth. The policy outlines sectoral strategies to achieve these goals. Sectors included in the policy are:

- Literature, Libraries, and Books;
- Performing Arts (Music, Theatre, Dance, And Puppetry);
- Visual and Digital arts (Art, Film, And Digital Media);
- Tangible Heritage, Intangible Heritage;
- Design (Fashion, Architecture, Advertising), Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship;

- Culture, and Education; and
- Media and Culture.

The policy has also listed eleven strategies under the performing arts (Music, Theatre, Dance, and Puppetry) category, including promotion through public and private education and greater awareness among the public, setting up a performing arts academy, organizing workshops and platforms for artists, the creation of a cultural calendar, documentation of artists, and an artist support fund.⁵

Policy Dialogue: Theater and Music

The policy dialogue focused on the two components –theater and music, exploring the role of performing arts in promoting cultural vibrancy and facilitating socio-economic development in light of the Punjab culture policy. Punjab’s Culture Policy 2021 is broad and wide-ranging and includes a variety of cultural aspects. Experts in the fields focused on evaluating the extent to which the Government of Punjab has facilitated the theatre and music communities.

The panelists included Shahid Mahmood Nadeem, Director of Ajoka Theater; Dr. Ghazala Irfan, Professor & Chairperson of the Philosophy Department at FCCU; Mehboob Alam, Director-General of the Punjab Council of the Arts; and Professor M. Jawad, Head of the Philosophy Department at Punjab University. All the panelists were vigorous in proposing ideas on improving the opportunities for the artists, devising better schemes for their livelihood, and promoting respect and dignity for the artisans and

⁵ Information and Culture Department, Government of Punjab, “Culture Policy Punjab”, 2021,

musicians. Some of the experts called for inviting the private sector to invest in arts and develop a business plan.

There was a broad consensus among the panelists and participants that in order to facilitate culture and promote performing arts in the province, sensitizing the public and youth in particular, to consume, produce, and appreciate art is important. It is equally important to curb rising censorship practices, improve execution, provide better training, foster a conducive environment through societal, governmental, and artist community support, organize tours and festivals, and establish public-private partnerships for sponsorship.

Recommendations:

The panelists, discussants, and participants of the policy dialogue made the following recommendations to build cultural vibrancy through performing arts:

Nurturing Performing Arts Ecosystem

- Creating a thriving performing arts ecosystem in Punjab requires nurturing and preserving the region's cultural heritage. This can be achieved by introducing and promoting Punjabi and other regional languages and literature in schools across Punjab. By incorporating these cultural elements into the curriculum, students can develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for their roots, fostering active participation in the performing arts and ensuring the preservation of Punjab's cultural heritage.

- Recognizing the significance of performance arts-- integrate subjects like music and theater into the core curriculum of education. This inclusion allows students to explore their artistic talents, fostering creativity, self-expression, and critical thinking skills. By incorporating performance arts (music and arts), students gain exposure to diverse art forms, cultural traditions, and the value of artistic expression. It can contribute to students' overall development, nurturing an enduring appreciation for the performing arts and potentially cultivating future artists and performers.
- Encouraging businesses to prioritize corporate social responsibility (CSR) and support the creative arts through funding is crucial for fostering cultural vibrancy and supporting artists' livelihoods. By allocating a portion of their CSR budgets to the arts, businesses demonstrate their commitment to the local cultural community. This funding can be used to organize art exhibitions, theater performances, music festivals, and other cultural events, providing platforms for artists to showcase their talent and engage with the public.
- Encouraging public-private partnerships through corporate sponsorship is crucial to foster a robust and sustainable performing arts ecosystem in Punjab. Corporate sponsorship not only provides financial backing but also brings in expertise, networks, and managerial

support. These collaborations facilitate the establishment of performance venues, high-quality productions, and educational programs for artists. By engaging in public-private partnerships, Punjab can create a sustainable ecosystem where artistic endeavors thrive, cultural heritage is celebrated, and the performing arts benefit the entire community.

- Providing financial support to artists and ensuring accessible funding is critical for a thriving arts community. Establishing grants tailored to support artists, institutions, and cultural groups serves as a vital source of funding.
- Transparent and streamlined application processes could create equitable opportunities for artists from diverse backgrounds. Adequate resource allocation to these grants addresses financial burdens, encourages innovative performances, and fosters an inclusive artistic community in Punjab. This financial support empowers artists to pursue their creative projects, develop skills, and contribute to Punjab's cultural landscape.

Social Protection and Collective Bargaining

- Establishing social protection measures is essential to honor the contributions and legacy of veteran artists. Dedicated programs and initiatives should provide financial support, healthcare benefits, and recognition for their lifelong commitment to the arts. These

measures ensure that veteran artists receive the respect and care they deserve, allowing them to continue their artistic pursuits with dignity.

- Pension schemes, healthcare coverage, and tailored assistance should be implemented to address their specific needs in later years. Recognizing and endearing the contributions of veteran artists not only preserves cultural heritage but also inspires future generations.
- Establishing fair and transparent contractual agreements is crucial to create a thriving environment for artists in Punjab. These agreements should address concerns such as delayed payments, deferred payments, and breaches of contracts. Standardized templates and guidelines ensure clarity and understanding of rights, responsibilities, and financial arrangements for both artists and organizations. Transparency protects artists from unfair practices and ensures timely and fair compensation for their work.
- Mechanisms for dispute resolution should also be implemented to address conflicts that may arise during the contractual relationship. By promoting fair practices, Punjab supports artists' rights, fosters their professional growth, and ensures their sustainability in the industry.
- Ensuring fairness and protecting artists' rights requires implementing minimum wage standards, improving working conditions, and establishing regulations in the arts industry. Regulations addressing working hours, contracts, and

occupational health and safety create a supportive environment prioritizing artists' well-being and rights.

- Enhancing transparency in financial transactions promotes fairness. Punjab can cultivate a sustainable and equitable arts ecosystem that empowers artists to thrive in their creative pursuits by prioritizing fair compensation and better working conditions.
- Empowering artists and promoting their collective interests necessitates the formation of associations that serve their needs. These artist-focused organizations foster community engagement, mobilization, and representation. By unifying artists, associations provide support networks, networking opportunities, and resources for professional development.
- By amplifying artists' voices, these organizations contribute to favorable policies, fair compensation, and improved working conditions in the arts industry. Through collective efforts, artist associations create solidarity, foster collaboration, and empower artists to thrive in their artistic pursuits.

Technology and social media: New Tools of Empowerment

- To empower artists and expand their reach, it is crucial to make them technology-savvy and provide training on utilizing social media platforms. By equipping artists with the necessary skills and knowledge,

they can tap into international markets and promote Pakistani art globally.

- Training programs can focus on leveraging platforms like Spotify and Netflix to showcase and distribute their artistic creations to a wider audience. These platforms provide opportunities for artists to gain international recognition and generate income through their work.
- Social media platforms offer a cost-effective way for artists to reach a broader audience, connect with fans, and network with other artists. Provide training to the artists to effectively use social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, which can enable them to engage with their audience, and build a strong online presence. By embracing technology and social media, artists in Punjab can enhance their autonomy, expand their artistic horizons, and contribute to the global promotion of Pakistani art.

Conclusion

The dialogue emphasized the need to integrate performing arts into the education system, promote corporate social responsibility for arts funding, encourage public-private partnerships, and establish support mechanisms for artists. It underscored the need for fair contractual agreements, associations for artists' representation, and the implementation of minimum wage standards within the arts industry. Importantly, the dialogue recognized the transformative power of technology and social media in empowering artists, expanding their reach, and promoting Pakistani art globally. By

implementing these recommendations, Punjab can cultivate a vibrant and inclusive performing arts ecosystem that not only preserves cultural heritage but also nurtures the growth of artists, fosters community engagement, and contributes to socio-economic development. Through such a collaborative and holistic approach, Punjab can unlock the full potential of its performing arts sector, celebrating cultural diversity and positioning itself as a thriving hub of artistic expression.

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