



From Policy to Action

How to drive successful policy execution in Pakistan

Introduction

Following the 2013 general elections, Government interest across Pakistan in the way policy is translated into on the ground action¹ has significantly increased. This focus has driven healthy competition between the provinces, leading to improved service delivery. With a general election scheduled for 2018, and voters demanding ever better public service delivery from politicians, the ability to successfully translate stated policy into action has never been more important in Pakistan.

A major factor in Pakistan's recent success has been the setting up of specialised *delivery units* in government, responsible for turning policy into tangible results for citizens. Federal and provincial governments have established these units to drive forward policy execution in line with political priorities. The Prime Minister's office established a delivery unit to implement federal priority projects, with a particular focus on CPEC.² The Governments of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa established *delivery units* to drive forward policy execution with a view to improving the quality of services available to their citizens. Despite having similar names, these units have looked very different. At the same time, the Governments of Sindh and Balochistan have both trialled models for improving policy execution that are built within the current system.

The breadth of different approaches provides an exceptional opportunity for each government to learn from its peers, and for Pakistan to share its learning more widely. This briefing note summarises the core findings.

1 For the purpose of this paper this is understood as the core of policy execution.

2 The China Pakistan Economic Corridor.



Six lessons from Pakistan's Delivery Units

Drawing on discussions held over the course of two days,³ this briefing note distils learning from the detailed discussion of the approaches governments across Pakistan have employed to translate policy into action. The workshop focused on the many successes of delivery units and delivery approaches in Pakistan. This experience was compared with learning from the UK and broader global experience. The focus of discussions was on identifying key elements in improved policy execution. In particular, participants discussed the central role of delivery units, when they work and their limitations. This briefing note distils this learning into six lessons that provide a set of key concepts to help governments and bureaucrats think through the choice of policy execution approach – a delivery unit or something else – when tasked with improving service delivery.



Lesson 1:

A Delivery Unit is there to drive policy delivery for political priorities

“Delivery units help to drive prioritisation through the system.”

Across Pakistan, effective policy execution requires strong political support. Ideally this comes from the political executive. This political authority authorises the activities of a delivery unit and ensures that it is aligned with the essential priorities of the Government. In Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Chief Ministers actively hold stocktake meetings and direct further progress. Significant successes in improved service delivery have been achieved in both provinces. The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PDMU) reports to the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister. It has a mandate to follow up progress on specified projects of national significance.

Political backing for an agenda of policy execution, often aligned with the delivery unit, is critical for early success. To succeed in the longer term, political backing must be complemented by a process of embedding within government. A focus on delivery, either through a delivery unit or a special cell, works to drive political priorities through the government system. To ensure sustained success and lasting change, participants noted that the culture of delivery must become part of daily government work, strengthening policy execution processes irrespective of the political executive. In the long term, sustaining success in the implementation of political priorities requires both political ownership and departmental commitment to drive systematic improvements.



Lesson 2:

Recognise that a delivery unit is only part of the solution; it can help deliver government priorities but cannot implement them

“I don't mind if it's a white cat or a black cat, so long as it catches a mouse. The mode of delivery, or how it looks, is less important than what it delivers.”

The importance of starting from a clear, resourced, agreed and understood government plan provides a clear direction of travel. Experience within Pakistan and internationally highlights the importance of agreeing on a limited number of targets, linked to a specific and focused vision. Participants noted that in situations where the objectives of the unit are not clear, and a plan of action is not well articulated, it becomes difficult if not impossible to effect change. The delivery unit or team cannot be a substitute for a good, resourced and prioritised departmental plan. When this is the case, it becomes part of the problem and not part of the solution.

Clarity over a unit's mandate and focus ensures that it can effectively work with government rather than against them. The success of the unit, and consequently of other government departments, depends on how tight the remit of the unit is and how the staff succeeds to sequence the activities to achieve the priorities. Delivery units should not be seen as a quick route to faster delivery. Instead they should be part of the process of improving the performance and capability of the public sector. Where delivery units have been used to drive delivery, at the cost of the due process, this process negatively impacts the capability in the public sector and the accountability of people and departments who are responsible for policy execution. In establishing effective policy execution process, attempts should be made to drive delivery through the existing system to ensure it is strengthened. This must be clear in the mandate of the unit.

³ This briefing note has been prepared following a joint Government of Pakistan and UK Government workshop in Islamabad on 13 and 14 November 2017. The workshop focused on learning from the Pakistani experience, covering three themes: (1) Sharing techniques and approaches of effective publicly funded service delivery within Pakistan; (2) Learning about what works and how to support improved publicly funded service delivery in Pakistan; and, (3) Furthering the global knowledge on driving government performance. This briefing paper refers to the first two.

**Lesson 3:****Build a trusting relationship with the sectoral departments**

“We need to move from command and control into coordinate and collaborate.”

The relationship with sector departments is crucial for sustained improvements in how policy is executed. Delivery units in Pakistan identified departmental support as a central criterion for sustained improvements in the way policy is executed. Recognising this challenge, a unit needs to balance the monitoring of progress with the more hands-on approach to solving the challenges to achieving the progress. International good practice demonstrates that units succeeded in generating buy-in from the bureaucracy support to departments to improve their day-to-day work for better results.

The central activity of successful delivery units is an iteration between implementation and monitoring. Within Pakistan, the most successful delivery processes have been characterised by a process that is collaborative and engaged with the sector departments and the key secretariat functions. These processes maintain the monitoring focus of the unit, measuring progress on a regular basis and using different tools to identify and understand the bottlenecks. Stocktake meetings hold the departments to account. In these successful cases, the unit also has a strong interaction with the department to resolve issues early, brainstorm solutions, and help identify effective ways forward. **The partnership between the central delivery team and the department is critical to successful policy execution.**

**Lesson 4:****Keep focus on what matters; avoid mission creep**

“Policy execution is really focusing on problems and solving them.”

Beyond choosing clear priorities is making sure that what is being measured addresses these problems. The focus must be on addressing the real problems that need to be solved not just the problems that are easy to solve to prove results. Across the discussions, participants stressed how at times the unit failed to address the core issues of the government. Or, that by delivering a set of targets, the government’s attention was diverted away from the deeper public sector challenges to reform.

The participants to the workshop agreed that it is often difficult to maintain a tight remit for the unit, especially if the unit proves to be successful. In some cases, being asked to do more is considered a positive sign of ‘trust in the unit’s capacity to deliver’. A focused remit was easier to maintain when and if there was a clear plan that the delivery unit or team was aligned with. Keeping focused on managing priorities relies on the relationship with the political sponsor, managing his or

her expectations, and ensuring that there is a clear strategy for delivery across government. **An effective, routinely revisited, and realistic diagnostic that deconstructs the policy execution challenges within a delivery unit’s priority sectors is essential to ensure that in hitting the target, the core delivery challenge is addressed.**

**Lesson 5:****Use adequate tools, data, and routines**

“Sometimes, you’re hitting the target but you’re missing the point.”

The methodology, approach, and routines used to understanding a problem and interrogating data are extremely important. To avoid being an organisation without substance, a delivery unit needs to have a strong set of tools that it can use to enable other departments to deliver effectively. Part of this is the collection, management, and use of data for improving policy execution. Participants’ main concerns referred to the availability and credibility of data, as well as to the capacity to analyse the data within the government departments. It was noted that the type of data available and targets set are extremely important in enabling good decision making. Targets that are not aligned with the plan, or partial data, can undermine the decision-making process.

Poor data and weak routines lead to policy making on the fly. This can undermine departmental functioning and lead to poor policy decisions. There was agreement that data needs to play a role in performance management tasks across government, but that this should be done with departments. Building government capability to analyse the data and prepare it in an accessible format for the political executives has been an important function of delivery units. Participants recognised that this skill set must be complemented by an understanding of the government systems and processes, and the constraints to policy execution, to ensure that departments are brought along and robust policymaking is enabled. **The system and routine of data analysis, and how the wider government is involved, are as important as the data itself. Robust data, collaborative interactions, and a focus on solving problems prevents policy making on the fly and builds sustained government capacity.**



Lesson 6: Build the right team

“Everyone wants to deliver something. No matter if it is a football team or a government department. In time, you come up with your own delivery team, your trusted people with skills, resources, and the right attitude.”

Having the right team in place is critical to the success of the unit. This includes the availability of a team of professionals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to support change. Diverse professional backgrounds can be essential to bring new thinking into a unit. The team does not have to comprise the leading experts in all the sectoral areas, as this expertise should continue to be embedded in the sectoral departments. Instead, a delivery team should have problem-solving capability and the required change management skills. The sectoral expertise should reside at sectoral level departments, but the unit should only provide structures, methods, and tools to assist in the activities to improve performance on their priorities. For example, the unit needs to be able to provide a challenge function and to be adept at a collaborative exploration of solutions for solving persistent challenges.

Beyond expert skills, the Pakistan experience has highlighted the importance of a diversity of professional experience. The mixing of skills from bureaucrats, the private sector, and academics improves the quality of problem-solving. Participants agreed that bureaucrats will be able to understand best the political and administrative environment as well as the main challenges in implementation. The private sector will be able to bring different tools and approaches to problem-solving. Frontline professionals will know most about interaction with citizens during service delivery. Academics will know how to ask the right questions and gather data to answer them. In Pakistan, the Strategic Support Unit in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa employs a mix of public sector staff and private sector consultants. The Prime Minister Delivery Unit and the Special Monitoring Unit use predominantly private sector consultants. Having access to people with expertise and experience at different stages of the policy execution is useful to understand the type of problem one needs to solve.

It is not easy to put together the right team. Participants mentioned how challenging it is to find the people with the right set of skills for a variety of reasons, from the technicality of some of the tasks to the incentives in place. **At the same time, an important consideration was the mix of skills used, and focus on building individual capacity within the government instead of relying on short-term staff or consultants.**

Contribution to the global debate

Pakistan's experience complements and reinforces the ongoing global debate about how to enable effective policy execution. Delivery units are clearly part of that solution, but as the UK's experience of delivery units and implementation units has demonstrated, what works needs to evolve over time. From this perspective, as Pakistan continues to build its own public administration, a key lesson emerged from the workshop focusing on the importance of building a system and culture of policy execution. Delivery units are part of this process, but may not be a solution to weak policy execution in government.

“If we don't link the learnings from the unit with the overall traditional bureaucracy which stood the test of time already, we are creating islands and delivery silos.”

Over the course of the workshop, participants discussed the importance of enhancing the learning about government performance from the experience of the units. If delivery units are successful organisational responses to improve policy execution, it is important to know what the underlying factors to successful change are (the staff and skills mix, clear accountability lines, better remuneration, better processes, a specific organisational culture etc.). There was strong focus on identifying how these systems can be replicated in other government departments. In part this is achieved when units work closely with sectoral department, but the process needs to be more robust. Building this expectation into delivery units at the outset, and holding events such as this workshop to identify critical delivery processes, is essential to sharing learning and culture of effective policy execution.

Feeding back the learning into the public administration system should be a declared objective from the beginning, just as much as the action should be evaluated not just regarding the targets it has achieved, but especially the change it has brought in the public administration. This, combined with the focus and authority of the political authority, is critical to delivery unit success.

As food for thought, relevant not just for Pakistan but globally, the participants asked three questions referring to the sustainability and relevance of delivery units:

- How do you ensure that the entire system benefits from the learning about translating policy into action, and how to best feedback the learning into the system through good practice and methodological support?
- Is it possible that the delivery units shift the focus away from more strategic issues and decision making to more visible and second-best results?
- How can delivery units be sustained between political governments? Are the functions and processes more important than the physical unit?

Next steps

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' model to improve policy execution. The lessons learned in Pakistan reinforce the international debates about the conditions for successful delivery units and the challenges to improving policy execution. The participants agreed to continue the conversation and to build on this knowledge sharing opportunity.

Practical next steps will be undertaken to follow up on this workshop as follows:

- This policy note and the longer report will be shared with the National School of Public Policy and a further discussion will be held to identify opportunities to incorporate these concepts into the National Public Service curriculum.
- A longer learning report will be prepared to share Pakistan's experience more broadly as a contribution to the global debate on effective policy execution.
- These findings will be shared and discussed with the federal and provincial governments to validate the lessons learned and to encourage a debate on what drives effective public sector delivery.

Islamabad 2018

	 Special Monitoring Unit Government of Punjab	 Strategic Support Unit Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
Ownership by the political leadership; how frequently does the Head of the Unit meet the CM? To what extent does the unit receive support from the CM?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Head meets with the CM on a regular basis, a few times a week at least. The support from the CM is a key driver for SMU and the latter enjoys this to a significant extent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Head of the Unit meets the CM at least once a week exclusively to discuss prioritised sectors. The unit receives full support from the CM in terms of time, importance, and attention.
Is the unit located in the office of the CM? If not, how far is it from the CM office?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The unit is located in the CM office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The unit is located in the office of the CM.
Does the unit monitor progress by the departments, or provide support towards achieving targets and removing bottlenecks? How does the unit balance monitoring with support for departments?	The unit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitors and develops an independent perspective on roadblocks which the SMU then supports to resolve. Co-identifies roadblocks to help maintain the balance between support and monitoring. 	The unit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitors progress by departments on regular basis to track progress and to highlight and tackle challenges to delivery. Provides advisory and technical support to help realise targets and remove bottlenecks, particularly inter-departmental.
How frequently does the unit coordinate with departments between stocktakes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With most departments, the SMU has set up a weekly routine with their leadership, including the Secretary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination is an ongoing function of the Unit between stock takes.
What methodologies does the unit use when helping to solve problems – e.g. deep dives; client mapping; etc.?	SMU staff have multiple tools, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> General project management tools. Rapid appraisals (from field visits). Creating delivery chains. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hands-on technical and advisory support. Regular monitoring and review to tackle issues of timelines and delays. The Head of SSU engages directly with the Chief Secretary and Additional Chief Secretary or solicits the intervention of the CM to solve inter-departmental coordination issues.
How many sectors does the unit deal with?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education; health; solid waste management; and water sectors. The SMU has also worked with culture & information, youth and sports departments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elementary and secondary education; higher education; health; local government; energy and power (two sub-sectors including hydropower and oil & gas); and the CM's Special Initiatives (Currently 11).
How many priority areas per sector, on average, does the unit pursue? How were these priorities chosen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are on average 4-5 priority areas per roadmap – for some there are 4-5 each for a rural/urban split (e.g. SWM and water). Priority areas are defined by the CM and the interventions that have been designed by the department to meet the aspirations. Expert opinions are also sought. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On average, 5 priority areas in each of 6 sectors, and 3 selected initiatives under each priority area. Priority areas are identified in close consultation with implementing departments; and considering political priorities. They are then agreed by the departments and the political leadership.
How does the unit collect data for baseline and progress measurement; use of data, frequency and nature of stocktakes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SMU collects data through independent sources as well as monthly data collected through PITB. The use of data ranges from using the analysis for our weekly meetings with the departments, to the quarterly stocktakes with the CM. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departmental data to assess progress against targets is used for the baseline/preliminary stocktake. Further information from external sources and field visits is taken where necessary. Stocktake meetings are held with the CM and include Ministers, Heads of department and senior officials. The unit conducts a minimum of two rounds of stocktakes in a year.

	 Special Monitoring Unit Government of Punjab	 Strategic Support Unit Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
Is progress always tracked against the agreed initial baseline?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress is always measured against the initially set baseline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress is measured against the initially agreed baseline but where there is justification, the baseline is adjusted to reflect that.
What is the skills mix in the unit team? Public sector/private sector background?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SMU team members are largely from the private sector but have experience in both public and private sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In terms of numbers, approximately 50% have public sector background while the other 50% private sector.
Does the unit focus on change management and problem-solving skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective problem-solving with the departments which helps train the lower management staff, which contributes to change management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress chasing and improving coordination - unblocking obstacles and resolving the problems. They have specific focus on terms of overcoming problems in inter-departmental coordination.
Does the unit have an external communication function? Who are the target audiences and what is the mode and frequency of communication?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The external target audience includes the public, as well as influencers of public discourse such as academics, etc. SMU uses social and print media to further the agenda of social reform in Punjab and the frequency of communication is daily. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The unit does not currently have an external communication function.
Are resources allocated to the unit sufficient and what is the source of funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The source of funding is a development project of the Government of Punjab. It is expected that the unit will be sustained either through a successor project or made part of regular government spend in due course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SSU is supported jointly by Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Department for International Development (DFID) UK. DFID funding will finish in June 2018, when the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is expected to internalise the unit. Allocated resources are sufficient to fulfil current mandate of the unit. However, some activities, e.g. impact assessments, are not currently covered.
Does the unit collaborate with other external partners to help ensure delivery? What type of support is received?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SMU actively collaborates with technical assistance teams as well as foreign donor agencies like DFID, the WB, etc. to constantly seek feedback on the reform efforts of GoPb. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The unit coordinates with those development partners who provide TA to prioritised sectors. The unit also coordinates with international firms/organisations as a special assignment given by the CM. They provide their time, access to information, and projects' sites.
How is the performance of the unit evaluated? How is learning captured and internalised from the work of the unit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-house performance management routines for all staff members, undertaken quarterly. All work of the unit is stored in a central repository, which they have started to make available through their website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings are held both internally and with the CM and Principal Secretary to elicit feedback and to discuss lessons learned. DFID conducts annual assessments of the unit's performance against annual work plans and indicators. The unit also maintains an archive of all documentation including stocktake presentations, working papers, minutes etc.

