



PBS's Strategic Communication Strategy, Success, Challenges, Learning



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<https://datafest.gov.pk/Home/EventGallery>



Context

- We all know that process of communication starts with clarity of objectives which in turn requires us to know the recipient of message.
- NSOs often deal with diverse stakeholders including public sector, private sector, academia, development partners but it is not very often that NSO is all the time dealing with diverse entities in short time.
- PBS committed itself to increasing data literacy, data use, and data sharing culture by holding data festivals in Pakistan. First was held in end 2024 and second was held on 11th and 12th November this year.
- At this stage it is important to discuss context of Pakistan. Pakistan's GDP is around 407 billion US\$ with share of 24%, 58%, and 18% for agriculture, services, and industry respectively. Documentation is lowest in agriculture, followed by services, and then industry.
- Despite low direct contribution in GDP, agriculture still provides around 45% of employment.

Context

- Land distribution is highly skewed, around 78% of farmers are holding farms of 5 acres or less. Situation is similar in industry sector where 80% of sector's value addition comes from organized. Around 80% of the value addition in industrial sector comes from large firms in organized sector.
- In both, agriculture and industry access to input and output markets is low and there is huge output gap, especially in agriculture & livestock sector.
- Country lacks a digital framework which may guide for investors for investment opportunity on one side and to financial sector for risk assessment on other side.
- On social side, there are huge gaps, especially in areas of need identification, governance, and fiscal comparison in modes of service delivery.
- On fiscal side, low fiscal base, especially, in agriculture and services is a serious and persistent issue which has been a cause of budget deficit.

Structure of Data Fest

- As NSO, PBS was of the view that it has the data which is capable of providing base map which may be overlaid from survey data of PBS or from other data producers to develop contours of solutions and opportunities, problem was to start this communication, which will be the substance for remaining talk.
- With these broad ideas, PBS started engagements with developed partners, mainly UNFPA, UNICEF, FAO, ILO, World Bank to develop contours and structure of data guided communications, i.e. data fest.
- The fest had two strands, first was the thematic discussions in social, economic, climate, and DRM sectors in which diverse stakeholders were to discuss the issues and opportunities while focusing on data collaborations.
- Second strand was the market area in which these stakeholders could show case their data products and services.

Its is smooth now but it had frictions

- PBS had clarity on social and economic landscape and problems of country and shared it with development partners.
- Development partners have their own priorities and ethos which may or may not overlap completely with that of PBS's, so challenge was to find convergence so that data fest plans could offtake.
- This was done after series of discussions and accepting changes.
- Although PBS, along with development partners, started working on data fest, but the fact remains that biggest stakeholders are public and private sectors and it were these two stakeholders without whose ownership fest would not have realized.

Engaging stakeholders

- Talking about public sector. We focused on secretaries of concerned ministry and or provincial departments to lead the discussions. It was done deliberately as this leadership will increase chances of increasing data use in policy, planning and decisions.
- Working with public sector is not easy for various reasons. First their appetite of data use has uncertainties, it may be low or high and it may vary. So it is important to know the transparency threshold else public sector representative may review their involvement.
- Second is their low realization for fundamental principles of national statistics, which are not hardwired in politicians/public servants unlike these principles are in NSOs. Soon after start of conversation, first thing they ask is geo-tag of house or individual's id.

Engaging stakeholders

- Next major stakeholder is private sector.
- Private sector has serious trust issues with public sector, so engagement with private sectors, like telco, fmcg, commodity businesses, and financial sector was not easy.
- PBS offerings of mutually beneficial data/information exchanges was not taken at face value in first data fest. In second data fest, their involvement was relatively better but it has yet to go long way before NSO's engagement with private sector may take roots.
- Moreover, sectors like telco, fintech, etc. are in data monetization. When any NSO engage with private sector for collaboration they want to keep it exclusive whereas NSO is in business of public good, no exclusivity.

Logical behind digital visualizations

- The core idea was to place the digital picture of social and economic landscape for discussion and collaboration.
- Such a visual and story guided discussion was likely to improve efficiency in need identification, governance, and social service delivery by public sector.
- Make economies of scale obvious to attract private sector and improve chances of related investment becoming bankable thus improving their sustainability.
- Show the possibilities of fiscal broadening clearer in UIPT, retail, and agriculture sectors which are not contributing their part currently.
- This visualization would help fiscal authorities in improving planning and transparency in fiscal efforts.
- In all, six thematic discussions were done each having 5 to 6 discussants. This required two to three physical and online sessions between participants in very short time, it was not easy.

Country context is a helpful example

- Now, this is context of Pakistan.
- Large number of small farmers and SMEs, low input and output access, huge output and productivity gaps, policy discontinuity, low fiscal base, and low social outcomes.
- Data fest was an endeavor to find entry points for breaking this vicious spiral.
- This may be true for Pakistan or country with similar background but it may not be true for another country with more documented economy, continuity of tax policy, and progressive & inclusive taxation.
- Therefore private sector of other country may not find this sequence of logic very appealing.
- This is why I detailed Pakistan's context so that it becomes clear that data/statistics sharing is for a purpose which is derived from present status and desirable state and these two states may vary significantly for two countries.

Preparations

- For all of above sessions, the participants, majorly PBS, created the heat maps, dynamic graphs, and data stories in social and economic sectors.
- But this happened only after 20+ officials acquired sounds skills in R, Python, GIS/Spreadsheets working, AI, LLM etc. to develop needed material for making these discussions more meaningful and impactful.
- Finally, this was a fest which means thousands of visitors. It cannot be expected from dry policy discussions and data products to get the crowd.
- In order to do that, we set up data analytics competitions, poster competition, paper presentations, workstations, and data/statistics quiz competition for national universities.
- To attract students and faculty form universities, officers from regional offices and headquarters visited universities in their respective cities and gathered students from economics, business, social sciences, computing/IT etc. to inform them with program and e sure their participation.

- Thank You!