

STRATEGY PAPER FOR 2025-2027

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# Driving clean energy transition & climate justice in public, media and policy discourses



## 1. Our vision and mission

Policy Research Institute for Equitable Development (PRIED) is an independent, public-interest think-tank registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) as a limited liability company. Our vision is that every Pakistani enjoys equal access to renewable, reliable and affordable sources of energy. We aim to integrate the political acumen of policymakers, the scientific rigor of academia, the mission-driven passion of civil society and the fighting spirit of communities affected by energy policies. Our mission is to develop environmentally sustainable, socially equitable, politically pluralistic and economically viable solutions to accelerate Pakistan's transition from fossil fuels, especially coal, and large hydroelectric projects to renewable sources of energy.

These transformative changes cannot happen overnight. They require a sustained research effort, coupled with serious advocacy initiatives, outreach campaigns and social mobilization. We, therefore, carry out evidence-based and actionable research, engage with national and international policymakers, the general public and news media, and mobilize communities affected by energy and climate policies. Our policy recommendations, advocacy, engagement plans and mobilization campaigns are all premised on: scientifically robust methodology, verifiable and empirical data collection and analysis, actionable suggestions and socially, environmentally, economically and politically relevant contextualization.

PRIED aims to accomplish the following goals:

1. Pakistan steadily brings down the share of fossil fuels and electricity produced from large-scale hydropower projects in its energy mix in order to phase them out eventually
2. The share of renewables in the energy mix is increased expeditiously and exponentially
3. Voices of the victims of previous and current energy policies are amplified so that they receive fair, equitable and sustainable remedies to their grievances.

The main stakeholders in the attainment of these goals are:

- People forced to leave their homes, hearths and their traditional sources of livelihood to build large-scale hydropower projects, set up coalmines and coal-based power plants, construct gas terminals and lay gas pipelines and dig oil and gas wells among other such activities.
- Victims of air pollution, water poisoning and other medical hazards caused by energy sector activities.
- Local administrations in areas -- such as Thar desert -- where various energy sector projects are concentrated.
- Provincial and national departments concerned with policymaking and policy implementation in energy, environment and climate change sectors.
- Legislators at provincial and national levels, particularly those associated with energy, environment and climate change sectors.
- Private sector businesses running energy projects.
- Local and foreign banks that lend money to energy sector.
- International financial institutions such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund that affect policymaking in Pakistan both directly and indirectly.
- Foreign governments that invest money in Pakistan's energy sector.
- Local and foreign research institutions, think-tanks and civil society organizations working on energy transition and climate change.

If PRIED is able to achieve its goals, the primary beneficiaries of this achievement will be the people living in areas where energy sector activities are concentrated. The implementation of mitigation, adaptation and compensation measures that PRIED is seeking on their behalf have the potential of helping them rebuild and rehabilitate their lost habitats and livelihood. Other such beneficiaries will include those who reside in the climatically vulnerable areas such as the Indus river's delta region which receives little to no water during most of the year due to the construction of large hydropower projects upstream, inhabitants of the areas where environmental pollution caused by the burning of fossil fuels has become a massive health hazard and the members of marginalized communities living in the vicinity of energy sector projects – particularly religious and ethnic minorities – whose lives and lifestyles have been endangered by the influx of outsiders associated with those projects. The users of energy – at homes, businesses, shops, offices and agricultural farms -- will be the third set of primary beneficiaries as they will be helped to access equitable, reliable and affordable alternatives to their existing costly, uneven and intermittent sources of energy.

The secondary beneficiaries of PRIED's success will be businesses associated with renewables such as manufacturers, sellers and installers of windmills and solar power plants. The banks and financial institutions lending money for renewable energy projects will also benefit if we are able to achieve our goals. So will be foreign governments and aid agencies aiding and bolstering Pakistan's energy transition.

## 2. Our history

### 2.1 Origins

PRIED emerged out of legal necessities.

From 2015 onwards, the government of Pakistan has made many legal and administrative changes in how it regulates non-government organizations (NGOs), requiring them to get no-objection certificates even for routine tasks such as traveling to their project areas and holding meetings. Bank accounts of many NGOs were frozen, disallowing them to use the money they had in those accounts. Several large International NGOs and non-government donor agencies – such as Save the Children, ActionAid and Open Societies Foundation – have been either told to leave the country or their work has been hampered in various ways. The government has also conducted raids on the offices of many local NGOs working on human rights, sometimes arresting their staff and often sealing their premises. Their funding sources, too, have come under increased scrutiny, requiring them to obtain virtually unavailable government permissions before receiving any grant – especially from abroad.





The core members of the PRIED staff during this turbulent period were a part of the Rural Development Policy Institute (RDPI), a non-government advocacy group based in Islamabad and working on disaster risk reduction, disaster-related communication and participatory rural development. In 2018-19, it also started working on energy transition and climate justice. But, as a result of the restrictions mentioned above, its bank accounts were coming under heightened scrutiny and receiving every new tranche of funds from abroad was subjected to a larger and longer paperwork. Consequently, it lost its main researcher to an international research institution and the two junior researchers it engaged afterward both left for greener pastures. These obstacles made its executive director and project lead realize that they could no longer carry out any meaningful activities under RDPI's banner. So, they set up PRIED in July 2021 as a limited liability company duly registered with SECP, Pakistan's national business register.

The initial staff of the organization comprised five members: Chief Executive Officer, Project Lead, Research Associate, Media and Communications Coordinator and Finance Manager. In the first nine months of its operations, it neither had its own office space nor its website. PRIED also did not, initially, have technological/technical support staff and a well-resourced research team since it could not employ qualified research personnel with the limited financial resources it had. It was only in early 2022 that it could rent an office, buy furniture and other necessary fixtures and hire qualified human resources – that is, after RDPI was disbanded and its assets were sold, giving PRIED the money it needed for these two purposes.

Our independence is guaranteed by the fact that we carry no one's brief. We work independently of political influences, business interests, and state-driven national, regional and global agendas. To ensure this independence, we strive for a diversified funding portfolio, drawn mostly from philanthropic foundations which are willing to finance our activities without political, commercial and strategic strings attached.

## 2.2 The Great Leap Forward

Pakistan's public discourse around climate change was limited to its technical and scientific aspects till a few years ago. So, policy discussions would take place only in terms of its macro-level impacts on the environment, economy and agriculture. There was next to no conversation about its socio-cultural consequences, about the human displacement and suffering it was causing and about its causal connections with government policies in general and developments in the energy sector in specific. PRIED was one of the earliest institutions to open a window of discourse for these communities and talk about all this – and then some more. Along with its founding partners in the Alliance for Climate Justice and Clean Energy (ACJCE), it pioneered a conversation about climate justice in 2019-20, not just in a global context but also within Pakistan. To do so, it initiated evidence-based and actionable research on energy transition and climate justice in Thar region where coal mining and coal-based power generation had started in the mid-2010s. It also started flagging energy policies – specifically, those concerning coal mining and coal-based power generation and the construction of large dams – that contribute to environmental degradation and negative climatic changes which, in turn, are causing climate migration, soil deterioration in deltaic regions, increased rate of glacier melting in the mountains and the poisoning of subsoil water reserves. Today, PRIED is a well-known name in public, policy and parliamentary circles and its research staff -- comprising eight people and expanding -- is both reputed and respected for having produced high-quality, verifiable, evidence-based and actionable research. The organization's areas of operations have also expanded and include:

- I. Producing high-quality research to partake in and promote a global discourse on the transition to renewable sources of energy;
- II. Institutionalizing interaction between all energy sector stakeholders in Pakistan, including legislators, policymakers, private businesses, social activists, non-government organizations, academia, and think tanks;
- III. Providing regulatory input, policy critique, and research support to the parliament, government departments, Pakistan's bilateral and multilateral development partners and international financial institutions;
- IV. Organizing events and engaging with news media for networking and information-sharing;
- V. Mobilizing public opinion and affected communities against the use of fossil fuels, in favor of an energy transition to the renewables and for ensuring and promoting climate justice during this transition.

## 3. Scope of our work

### 3.1 Context

Climate change is one of the biggest 21<sup>st</sup>-century threats to human civilization. If we do not curb global greenhouse gas emissions within the next few years, the average global temperature will very likely rise more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level. This rise will make Pakistan extremely vulnerable to devastating climatic changes such as floods, erratic rains, severe droughts and recurring heatwaves. It is already among the top 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change. In its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted to the United Nations (UN) in 2021, the Pakistani government set a cumulative target of 50 percent reduction of its projected emissions by 2030. To achieve this target, it has promised to shift to 60 percent renewable energy and 30 percent electric vehicles by 2030. It has also imposed a moratorium on new energy projects based on imported coal and seeks to expand nature-based solutions. While these appear to be promising developments, the government continues to grapple with the technical, economic, social and political complexities of a just energy transition. These complexities involve, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- What innovations or strategies can be implemented to scale up renewable energy?
- What policies and frameworks can ensure equitable outcomes for vulnerable communities during the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy?
- How to allocate, manage and invest funds required for energy transition in a manner that ensures equity and justice?

These questions can be addressed through a rapid yet orderly shift from fossil fuels to renewable ener-

gy – a transition that is both comprehensive and socially, environmentally and economically just. This transition also needs to be accompanied by a power shift from the highly centralized energy systems of today to producing, transmitting and distributing electricity through a decentralized and distributed system. While the potential for a transition to Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE) is admittedly high in Pakistan, its share in the energy sector remains negligible. DRE has been held back by massive policy gaps and flawed regulatory regimes. The main hindrance has been the absence of clear policymaking and limited coordination both within the relevant government institutions and between the government and other relevant key stakeholders such as financial institutions, private sector, donor agencies and civil society organizations. Coupled with the absence of a conducive commercial and financial environment, these problems have massively hindered the growth of DRE in Pakistan.

While these problems remain unaddressed, Pakistan's energy landscape is undergoing changes that run counter to its NDCs. For one, the share of coal in its energy mix has substantially increased over the last decade or so, contributing to a growing environmental crisis. Hundreds of thousands of people have also been displaced from their ancestral lands by energy projects such as hydroelectricity schemes in the north of the country and coal mining and coal-based power generation plants in the south. All this while, its electricity generation system has been reeling under the heavy financial burden of untenable power purchase agreements and vast swathes of its territory have remained un-electrified, especially in the poorer and politically marginalized south. Even in electrified areas, poor management and crumbling grid infrastructure are causing large-scale power outages daily. Rural areas in Sindh and Balochistan, particularly receive electricity only for 4-6 hours a day. Even in industrialized and urbanized central regions – as well as in the country's biggest metropolis, Karachi -- power is not available to the poorer sections of the society for more than 12 hours a day. Electricity prices, meanwhile, have risen astronomically over the last couple of years – from 20 rupees per kilowatt hour in December 2023 to 35.5 rupees per kilowatt hour in June 2024 for residential consumers alone. Similarly, energy-induced environmental pollution in big cities and carbon emissions from the energy sector are both escalating rapidly, increasing Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change.

### 3.2 The mismatch between evidence and policymaking

Research and policymaking seldom go hand in hand in Pakistan. This situation was amply highlighted by the heads and members of a dozen or so other government-funded think tanks at a seminar held in Islamabad on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The common concern expressed by many of these think tanks was that their research is never reflected in the government's policies even though they regularly send out policy briefs and policy advice to the relevant departments.

The faculty and students of academic institutes, on the other hand, are more likely to squander research opportunities than to capitalize on them. In September 2020, Pakistan's Higher Education Commission told a parliamentary committee that it had provided funds to different universities for policy-related research projects but 106 of those projects “were still incomplete” 14 years after receiving the funding. Similarly, an investigation report in 2022 revealed that a research center at a public sector university was funneling funds allocated for research “into buying real estate”. The non-academic research institutions that do get public funding often produce narrowly focused technical and academic output in such areas as education, water, agriculture, public health, regional and global relations and national security. This research often ignores cultural, political and other intersectional aspects of these subjects and lacks objectivity, academic rigor and relevance because their researchers cannot afford to challenge, let alone antagonize, the bureaucratic hierarchies they operate in and the state structures that govern them.

The scientific, technical and academic research on policy issues, therefore, either remains scarce or it gets cloistered within academic and research institutions, never reaching people in general and policymakers in particular. This explains why there is an almost total absence of public discourse on such important issues as energy transition and climate justice. A newspaper report published in 2020 explains this situation by stating that there is a total absence of coordination and collaboration between research institutions and their funding agencies. The research and policy discourse being produced in the country, thus, remains fragmented, sporadic and ineffective.

Research being produced by non-government institutions also remains poorly disseminated, particularly to policymakers and parliamentarians, because most research organizations have failed to develop dependable and durable mechanisms for the purpose. Consequently, the dissemination of research and knowledge products entirely depends upon individual contacts and connections their producers might have with policymakers and parliamentarians.

Another major hurdle in the way of disseminating research and knowledge products is the poor coordination and collaboration between research institutions and mass media. The quantity and quality of news coverage of any research activity, therefore, leave a lot to be desired. This is mainly because researchers often fail to articulate their findings in a way that can be accessible and comprehensible for journalists – and by extension, the public. Its other major reason is the structural weakness of Pakistani news media which is reeling under a serious editorial and financial crisis created by state censorship and technological disruption. While, on the one hand, avenues for independent reporting are vanishing because of the government's clampdown on the freedom of the press, on the other hand, technological changes have not just diverted the news media's audiences to social media platforms. It has also destroyed the news media's business model based on advertisement revenue received mainly from the government and the corporate sector. Consequently, Pakistani news media can neither invest in the latest technologies and skilled human resources for news gathering and news presentation nor does it have the financial capacity to employ and retain skilled editorial and reporting staff. The combined effect of these factors is that the news media's output on such complex fields as energy transition and climate justice remains inconsistent, superficial and jargon-laden.

The absence of a robust research culture and the lack of a clear and effective interface between research institutions and the news media/general public/policymakers mean that people do not get to know about various policy options including the one that might work best for them. This absence of public participation in policy discourses explains why policy flaws and policy failures are not just rampant in Pakistan, they also often lead to disastrous social, economic and political consequences. This situation is particularly bad in the energy sector where policymaking has been virtually outsourced to international financial institutions and where the negative social, economic and climatic impacts of bad policies are becoming increasingly apparent. In Thar region, specifically, the government's policy of utilizing local coal for power generation is depriving people of their ancestral lands and their traditional sources of livelihood besides poisoning their underground water resources and polluting the air they breathe.

Pakistani research institutes generally address these problems by (a) unveiling research publications in big- ticket events where powerful politicians and influential parliamentarians are invited to attract the attention of the news media and policymakers; (b) engaging journalists to develop news reports about their research output; (c) writing op-eds and (d) holding consultative meetings with policymakers. Criticizing these methods strongly, the head of the Pakistan Institute for Development Economics (a government-run think tank) recently stated that the most obvious evidence of their failure is the fact that Pakistan has become a policy wasteland where “no policy seems to be working”. According to him,

the “policymakers are completely ignoring the policy advice being offered to them or such policy advice itself is useless”.

We, at PRIED, believe that the failure pointed out by him is essentially the result of an institutional inability to create a seamless continuum between research and policy discourses and policy changes. This continuum cannot be ensured without developing organic and institutionalized links between researchers and their primary audience (policymakers and other relevant stakeholders) – with the news media and parliamentarians acting as bridges between the two sides.

Overall, our strategy integrates evidence-building, narrative framing, stakeholder dialogue, policy critique and policy advice into a cohesive impact chain. This structured approach ensures that every action contributes to the development and implementation of effective, fair and actionable policies, driving the systemic change needed for a just energy transition and a climatically sustainable future. Given below are the building blocks of our current and future strategy:

## Research

Over the last four years, PRIED has conducted research and produced knowledge products under three categories: projects and policy briefs, media and energy monitors and research studies. The major thematic areas of its research work include: transition to renewable energy, coal phase-out and the negative social, environmental, economic and financial impacts of coal mining and coal-based power generation, introduction and promotion of innovative and sustainable energy technologies and review and critique of energy policies, plans and projects.

Between 2025 and 2027, we plan to upscale both the capabilities and the strength of our research team, focusing strongly on training it in research methodology, research operations, research writing and research communication.

## Engagement

PRIED focuses strongly on engaging with the elected representatives of people, who are accountable to their electorates, rather than interacting exclusively with bureaucrats who are answerable to only their own superiors. So, besides holding regular meetings with government officials at the national, provincial and local levels, PRIED has successfully set up a cross-party parliamentary forum on energy and economy, having engaged its members in several activities such as webinars, seminars, consultative sessions and multi-stakeholder dialogues on various issues and problems that connect the energy sector with economy at large.

We have charted out a detailed plan to both broaden and deepen our engagement with the forum in 2025-27 by working as its administrative and logistical secretariat and, more importantly, by providing it regularly with knowledge products, policy critiques and policy briefs on the nexus between energy and economy.

We also engage regularly with Pakistan’s bilateral development partners – such as China, the United Kingdom and Germany – and its multilateral development partners such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank through letter campaigns and consultations, particularly on the negative social, environmental, economic and political consequences of their policies, grants and loans related to Pakistan’s energy sector.

To institutionalize these engagements during the next three years, we have devised a clear roadmap to engage with these bilateral and multilateral development partners under an arrangement that ensures a formal exchange of ideas and information and strong formal and sustained interactions on issues and problems related to a just energy transition.



## Outreach

PRIED is conducting its outreach activities through a two-pronged strategy:

1. By engaging with communities that are on the receiving end of flawed and failing energy policies. This is mainly being done in Thar desert where PRIED is supporting local communities in organizing people's tribunals on the negative impacts of coal mining and coal-based power generation. By translating evidence-based research into such actions as awareness-raising events, social mobilization and submission of letters and petitions to the authorities and agencies concerned, PRIED has successfully developed a core constituency among the residents of Thar and has developed effective mechanisms for amplifying their voices against coal development so that they can be heard in the power corridors.

In 2025-27, we plan to develop similar community engagements in other areas where coal-based power generation is being done in Pakistan.

2. By collaborating proactively with the news media. This is mainly being done by
  - Engaging individual journalists and news media outlets to cover energy transition and climate justice better than they already do. Consequently, between the start of November 2022 and the end of December 2024, we have been able to publish/broadcast approximately 150 news media pieces through different news media outlets. These include press statements, news features, investigative reports, op-eds and audio-visual news packages.
  - Conducting summer schools for journalists. In August 2022 and August 2024, we conducted two such schools in which 35 journalists from across Pakistan participated and received editorial training as well as a basic understanding of energy transition and climate justice. Some of them now regularly generate content on these topics.
  - Launching a journalism fellowship program – with its first iteration having started in February 2022 and the latest one having been completed in October 2024.
  - Collaborating formally with mainstream news media organizations. We have signed two memorandums of understanding so far – one with a news organization (that runs a newspaper as well as a television channel) based in Karachi and the other with a radio channel based in Islamabad.

We have devised detailed plans under our ongoing projects to both expand and strengthen these activities between 2025 and 2027.

## Collaboration

Partnerships are essential to the successful implementation of our strategy. As a founding member of

the **Alliance for Climate Justice and Clean Energy (ACJCE)**, we bring together several organizations working on coal phase-out. We have also founded the **Pakistan Renewable Energy Coalition (PREC)**, along with many like-minded organizations, to promote renewable sources of energy in the country. PRIED also collaborates actively with research institutions outside these two networks. For instance, it has joined hands with the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), an Islamabad-based higher education institution, to conduct two research studies – one on the gasification of Thar coal and the other on the de-carbonization of cement industry. PRIED is also collaborating with Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) on energy modeling. Similarly, it is actively engaged with foreign think tanks such as the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), Agora Energiewende and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) and regional and global civil society organizations such as Recourse and the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD).

Since the start of 2025, we have also joined the Global Clean Energy Network (GCEN) and are in the process of developing a formal collaboration with the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) to facilitate and expedite the early retirement of coal-based power plants in Pakistan.

## 4. Our initiatives

At PRIED, we are not just focused on building our internal capacity to do our work efficiently and effectively, we also emphasize a lot on empowering communities, raising public awareness and strengthening the capabilities of key stakeholders, including the news media, to address challenges posed by flawed energy policies and to advocate for climate justice. Internally, PRIED's staff has been participating in various training programs, both inside and outside Pakistan, and, externally, we have been organizing training workshops for the affected communities, journalists and civil society activists.

### 4.1. Community Empowerment

We prioritize working directly with communities affected by the negative impacts of energy policies, such as those living in Thar desert. These communities face serious social, environmental and economic problems -- including water depletion, air pollution, health hazards, and displacement -- due to coal mining and coal-based power generation. Our approach to support them includes:

- **Organizing people's tribunals:** PRIED supports the formation of community-based platforms like **Rajounri** (people's tribunals) which help the affected communities to come together and discuss the challenges they face, strategize about solutions and take public actions for change.
- **Translating research into action:** PRIED translates its evidence-based research into practical initiatives such as awareness-raising events, social mobilization activities and advocacy campaigns carried out through the writing of letters and submission of petitions to relevant stakeholders.

- **Capacity building through advocacy:** By equipping communities with data analysis and evidence-based insights, we enable them to become active participants in advocating for policies that prioritize sustainable energy transition and climate justice.

We have devised clear and detailed plans under our ongoing projects to continue, strengthen and expand all these activities – both thematically and geographically – in 2025-27.

## 4.2. Media Engagement

Recognizing the critical role of news media in shaping public discourse and influencing policy, PRIED has taken a proactive approach to collaborate with journalists and news media outlets to improve coverage of energy transition and climate justice. Through informal collaborations, formal networking events, partnerships and training programs, we have developed a strong cohort of journalists who regularly report, write and publish content about these subjects. Over the last three years, we have trained around 100 journalists extensively and intensively to enable them to produce authentic, verifiable and evidence-based news content. Their output has been highly instrumental in shifting public discourse in the favor of energy transition and climate justice. This situation is in sharp contrast with what we faced three years ago when critiquing the use of fossil fuels, particularly local coal, and large-scale hydroelectric projects was considered synonymous with anti-state activities.

We, therefore, seek to continue, strengthen and expand our media engagements activities in 2025-27.

## 5. Our contributions

In the last four years, PRIED has made a significant contribution to public, media and policy discourses on energy transition and climate justice. Its major successes during this short duration of time are described below:

1. The government of Pakistan revised its Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IG-CEP) for 2022-32 after strong advocacy by PRIED and its partner organizations to raise the share of variable renewable energy in the country's prospective energy mix from 13 percent to 30 percent;
2. PRIED conducted a comprehensive study on green loans, focusing on accessible financing for Electric Vehicles (EVs) and Distributed Solar Photovoltaics (DSPVs). Excerpts from this study were added to a charter that was presented at COP 29 by the National Institute of Banking and Finance (NIBAF), Pakistan.
3. PRIED's study on the transition of gas appliances to electric alternatives played a key role in the revision of winter tariffs for electricity. We successfully pushed for a reduced tariff so that people are incentivized to use more electricity in winter thereby addressing the seasonal surplus capacity issues.
4. The provincial government of Sindh announced that it will not set up any additional coal-based power plant – other than those already operational and committed-- in Thar after vociferous campaigning by PRIED and its local allies, emphasizing that coal-based power generation was

eating up and polluting Thar's scarce water resources.

5. After a strong social mobilization campaign, initiated and supported by PRIED, the government has agreed to pay due financial compensation to villagers displaced by coal-mining and coal-based power generation projects in Thar's coalfields.
6. PRIED and its allies also successfully campaigned against the imposition of prohibitive import duties on solar panels and other associated gadgets and equipment in the 2022-23 federal budget.
7. PRIED's expertise in energy policy was recognized when Sindh government officials requested collaboration with us to devise the Sindh Electric Power Regulatory Authority (SEPRA) regulations which is now a deliverable of one of our projects.
8. PRIED facilitated the establishment of a cross-party Parliamentary Forum on Energy and Economy, aimed at mobilizing and building the capacity of parliamentarians to advance renewable energy adoption and initiate discourse around contemporary energy sector issues. This platform has been instrumental in catalyzing informed legislative discussions on the nexus between energy and economy.
9. A PRIED study exploring the correlation between coal mining activities in Thar and the increased incidents of lightning strikes has started a strong debate among academia, policymakers, politicians, experts, and civil society organizations and activists.

## 6. Our challenges and opportunities

### 6.1 Challenges

These initiatives have won PRIED an early recognition but they have also exposed it to several new challenges – as is described below:

- The most important challenge we face is the unresponsiveness both by the government and Pakistan's development partners to any voices speaking on policy issues from a public interest perspective. As has been explained above, their policies are made behind closed doors and are aimed at addressing macro-level problems, often disregarding their micro-level impacts;
- The second biggest problem facing PRIED is to develop and expand so that it can increase both the scope and scale of its work to cater to the increasing needs and demands of those it works with. This required money which is not easily available in Pakistan. No international philanthropic foundations operate within the country. It also has no local foundations/donors who are willing to fund research and civic action on such subjects as energy transition and climate justice. The government of Pakistan, too, is so cash-strapped that it deems investing in research a luxury it cannot afford. The only possible venues available for such funding are foreign em-



bassies and aid agencies linked either to rich Western countries or to the United Nations. They, though, always have very strict pre-conditions attached to the funding they provide. Consequently, PRIED have very little opportunities to diversify and scale up its sources of funding;

- The third most important challenge has been to find and hire qualified personnel who can carry out high-quality research and effective communications. This has been a particularly tough challenge in the beginning because PRIED was unable to pay market-based salaries and, being a new organization, did not have enough brand power to attract the required talent.

Some of the challenges mentioned above have been addressed thanks to a two-year grant that PRIED has secured from Tara Climate Foundation. For instance, the number of people working for PRIED has increased substantially, mainly because it can offer market-competitive salaries now. Its ability to pay its employees well has increased its capacity to retain them as well. More money at its disposal has also allowed it to both widen and deepen its research work and it has employed three social mobilizers who are regularly engaged with communities suffering the negative consequences of climate injustices.

In 2025-27, we are highly focused on diversifying our sources of funding so that we can attain financial stability in the medium term and organizational sustainability in the long run. By overcoming this challenge, we aim to achieve our objective of becoming Pakistan's most trusted and most prized originator, disseminator and promoter of evidence-based and actionable research on energy transition and climate justice.

## 6.2 Opportunities

Being one of the pioneering think tanks/civil society organizations working in the twin fields of energy transition and climate justice, PRIED enjoys many advantages over others which open a whole set of opportunities for it to explore and exploit. Firstly, the almost total lack of policy review and policy critique in the energy and climate sectors makes any voices informed by evidence from the ground hard to ignore. With a strong presence in Thar, the ground zero of both Pakistan's most important energy-related developments and the climatic dystopia associated with such developments, PRIED is uniquely positioned to keep its ears to the ground and serve as a mouthpiece of Thar's local communities in front of policymakers and implementers.

Before listing other opportunities, it is important to highlight how and why PRIED is well-placed to explore and exploit them. Given below is a short description of its unique features and characteristics:

- I. We are an amphibious organization: PRIED operates as a research institution and a social mobilization organization simultaneously;
- II. We are a truly diverse organization: PRIED's leadership includes people with vast experiences in such disparate fields as journalism, social activism, academia and energy systems and energy finance. Our staff also comes from highly diverse social backgrounds. Most of them are under the age of 35; almost half of them are women; many PRIED staffers come from rural, marginalized and peripheral parts of the country and at least two of them belong to a religious minority;

- III. We conduct research as if people matter: PRIED's research studies are always driven by public interest – that is, they must highlight and promote the losses and gains accruing to people on the ground from ongoing and future policies in the energy sector. This focus has helped PRIED build a high level of trust with the communities it works for and with;
- IV. We are also known as a news media development organization: Over the last three years, PRIED has developed a strong reputation for conducting extensive and intensive training for journalists. We have also established strong relationships with news media outlets, often providing them with logistical and financial support and on-job capacity building and mentoring for reporting on energy transition and climate justice.

These unique features and characteristics have helped PRIED create many serious opportunities for itself. Some of these are given below:

- I. Its amphibious nature allows PRIED to intervene in the policy sphere through evidence-based and actionable research; it also enables PRIED to use the same research for mobilizing communities affected by energy policies to press for policy changes. The verifiability and practicability of this research are helping us to gain the confidence of both policymakers and the affected communities, opening vast possibilities for policy advocacy and social mobilization for us;
- II. PRIED's diversity not only helps it connect smoothly and strongly with communities it works with in their languages, it also informs PRIED's research and advocacy efforts which are always planned, prepared and implemented through a participatory process in which every voice and every point of view matters equally. This process, in turn, helps PRIED to avoid narrow parochial interests and instead serve genuine public interest;
- III. The public interest focus has helped PRIED see and describe the situation without any fear or favor, allowing us to take bold stances and actions on behalf of the affected communities;
- IV. Engagement with journalists and news media is helping PRIED understand how to bridge the gap between academic research and its dissemination to and reception by people on the ground. This understanding is enabling us to ensure that our research output is easily accessible to all kinds of audiences.

## 7. Our projects

Keeping in view PRIED's theory of change mentioned above, all our past, present, and future projects are focused on achieving three main goals:

1. **Coal phaseout**
2. **Renewable energy expansion**
3. **Climate justice.**

These long-term goals are the bedrock of PRIED's medium-term (2025-27) objectives. These objectives are briefly described below.

1. **Coal phase-out**  
Accelerating coal phase-out through clear timelines and under comprehensive just transition frameworks, ensuring complete support for the affected workers and communities.
2. **Massive expansion of renewable energy**  
Driving a large-scale deployment of renewable energy, particularly wind and solar, to meet growing energy needs sustainably by fostering innovation, enhancing grid readiness and creating an enabling environment for investment in distributed renewable energy.
3. **Equitable access to energy**  
Promoting decentralized renewable energy systems to bring affordable, reliable and clean energy to underserved and off-grid communities.
4. **Climate justice**  
Placing equity and justice at the center of the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewables, focusing on solutions that align with the social, environmental, economic and political needs and rights of the marginalized communities.
5. **Energy efficiency and demand-side management (by consumers)**  
Reducing energy consumption and energy wastage by promoting energy efficiency across industrial, residential and commercial sectors. This includes empowering consumers to take demand-side management initiatives, contributing to both cost savings and emission reductions.

To achieve these objective, we are working on two projects, briefly described below:

### Project 1 (2024-27)

Under this project, PRIED aims to carry out a coal-phase-out campaign to limit the scale of coal mining within Thar Coalfield Block-I and Block-II through the creation and dissemination of policy and project briefs on the following subjects:

- The social and environmental impacts of coal-based power generation and mapping out occupational hazards associated with coal mining activities
- Delay Thar coal railway track project and stop the conversion of power plants running on imported coal, gas, or oil to Thar's lignite coal through a people's Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA).
- Evaluate the comparative cost and benefit analysis of converting a power plant based on imported fossil fuel and its replacement with VRE Projects.
- Create position papers for the retirement plans for power plants running on fossil fuels, especially those whose licenses are expiring by 2027-28; and (ii) prepare early retirement plans for coal-based power plants

The second part of this project focuses on renewable energy financing and integration in Pakistan through the following activities:

- A research study on energy transition finance and a brief on green financing, which would feed into a reform agenda for mobilizing financial tools and mechanisms to drive energy transition in Pakistan at utility scale
- Evaluate the feasibility and suitability of building swarm grids through effective planning for rural electrification in Tharparkar, Sindh, which would feed into an energy transition agenda.
- Evaluate the cost impacts of the implementation of CTBCM and advocate for the establishment of social safety nets in tandem with its implementation in Pakistan.

The third part of the project concerns engagement with relevant stakeholders including:

- The cross-party parliamentary forum on energy and economy
- Government officials both at the federal and provincial levels
- Civil society organizations and grassroots-level activists
- World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

## Project 2 (2024-25)

In this project, PRIED intends to create a bankable investment framework for renewable energy for Chinese investors under the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This is being accomplished by fostering high-level collaboration between Chinese and Pakistani government representatives.



## 8. Risks and mitigation

Risks	Mitigations
<b>Government restrictions</b>	<p>Since the government considers coal mining and coal-based power generation in Thar as an integral part of its strategy to achieve energy security, it might put restrictions on PRIED's social mobilization and research work in that region. We will offset this risk by developing strong connections with local communities, local civil society, local politicians and local parliamentarians. Their combined clout, on the one hand, might help us fight off the restrictions, on the other hand, it will allow us to continue our activities by proxy and through remote/online work mechanisms.</p>
<b>Single donor dependence</b>	<p>All PRIED's operations are solely dependent on the receipt of funds from Tara Climate Foundation. So, if and when Tara Climate Foundation is unable to send us money – due to its own reasons or due to any restrictions imposed by the government of Pakistan – our continued existence might be jeopardized. This, however, is a low risk since Tara Climate Foundation is already approving funding for us that will be enough to run our existing operations till the end of 2027. PRIED, however, is simultaneously developing its three-year organizational development strategy which includes a strategy to diversify its donor-base.</p>
<b>Staff recruitment and turnover</b>	<p>In the first two years after its inception, PRIED could not offer salaries compatible with private sector and foreign think-tanks and always ran the risk of losing its best research staff to its competitors. Its financial constraints also restricted it from attracting the best research talent as its future staff members. PRIED has largely overcome this challenge now, thanks to the ongoing two-year grant by Tara. By offering market-competitive salaries, it has reduced its turnout rate to very low. Another factor, however, still remains to be addressed: The pool of talent that we can draw from to recruit is rather small in Islamabad where we are based compared to Lahore and Karachi where most of the higher education institutions and energy/technology are located. We are trying to overcome this problem by devising a hybrid work environment that can allow people living outside Islamabad to work remotely but in close coordination and collaboration with their colleagues in Islamabad.</p>

<b>Political and social unrest</b>	<p>Pakistan has been in the grip of an unmitigated political uncertainty and instability since the start of 2022 and this is only getting worse by the day. Even though it changed four governments in the last 30 months and new legislative forums have come into existence at the national and provincial levels since February 2024, stability and certainty still elude the country. The animosity among political parties remains strong and their conflicts with the military establishment remain unresolved. Judiciary, too, has become a major player in inter-institutional conflicts and clashes. All this political strife has a strong potential to disrupt many activities planned by PRIED in the coming weeks, months and years. We, however, encountered – and survived -- similar disruptions during Covid-19 (2020-21) and then during a highly turbulent period between 2022 and 2023 when public protests and breakdown of law and order were a matter of routine. Having learnt from the previous experiences and thanks to advances in information and communication technologies, we have devised a robust system to run our operations in a hybrid mode – a combination of visual and physical – if and when the ongoing political crisis spills onto the streets and threatens to disrupt our work.</p>
<b>Epidemics/natural disasters</b>	<p>In 2022, one-third of Pakistan remained under flood waters for several weeks during the monsoon season. This natural disaster restricted mobility in flood-hit areas. Such flooding – and/or other natural disasters – can happen again. Similarly, the outbreak of a national and/or global epidemic like Covid-19 cannot be ruled out entirely. Their ability to hurt or halt PRIED's activities will remain limited because, as noted above, they have devised a strong mechanism to work in a hybrid mode that allows us to carry on our work without major disruptions.</p>
<b>Changes in organizational structure</b>	<p>As PRIED expands and its organizational hierarchies and internal division of work become more strongly delineated than they are now, it runs the risk of losing its horizontal, consultative culture. We plan to counter it by institutionalizing internal reviews and/or monitoring and evaluation. This will be done by a committee -- comprising three staff members other than the management – which regularly monitors and evaluates all the organizational operations in order to spot misuse of authority and wastage of resources. It will also hold quarterly meetings to review and critique financial expenditures, staff hiring and procurements.</p>