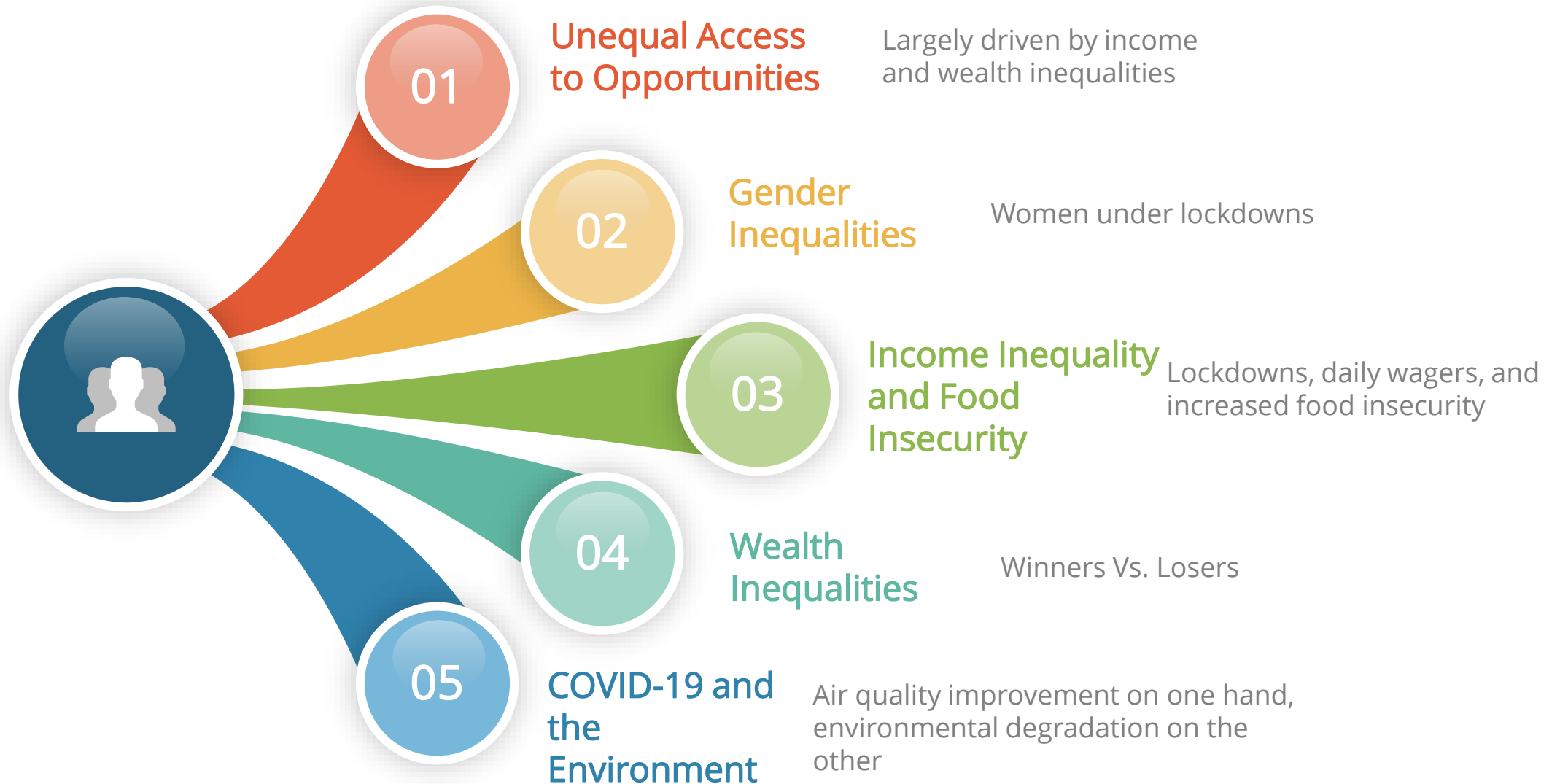


Impact of COVID-19 on Inequalities in Pakistan

Brief Overview



1- Unequal Access to Opportunities

Access to Health Facilities

Mounting Pressures on the Healthcare Sector

Impact on Youth

- Jobless Graduates
- Trainings

Vaccine Distribution and Administration

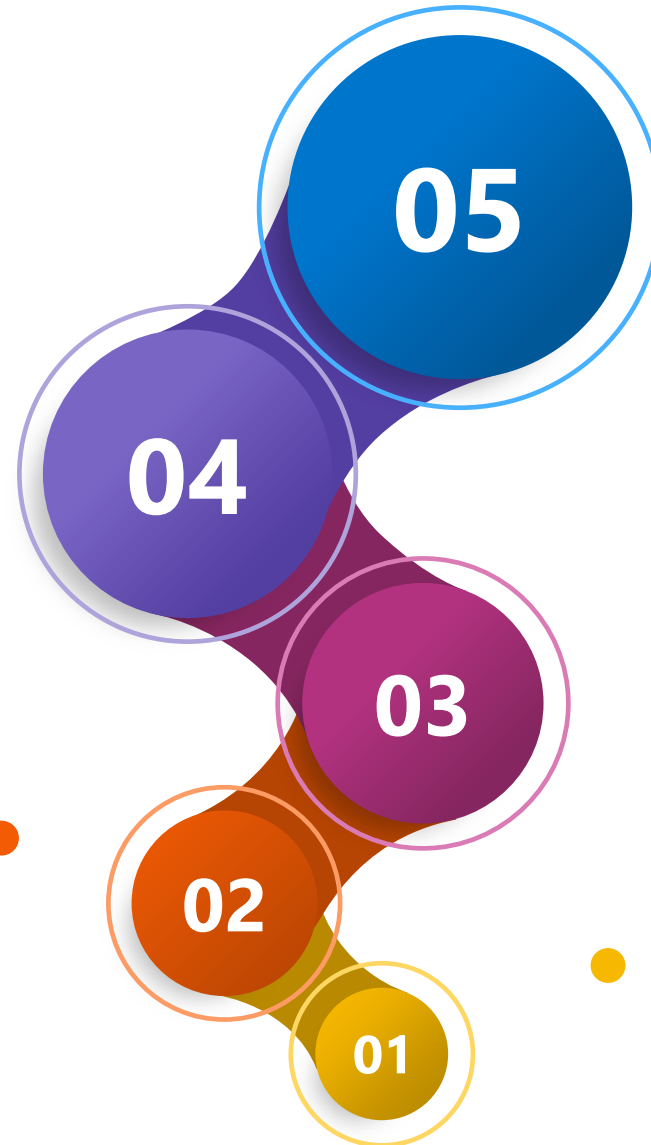
Equitable Distribution?

Access to Education

Widening Knowledge Gap

Access to Technology

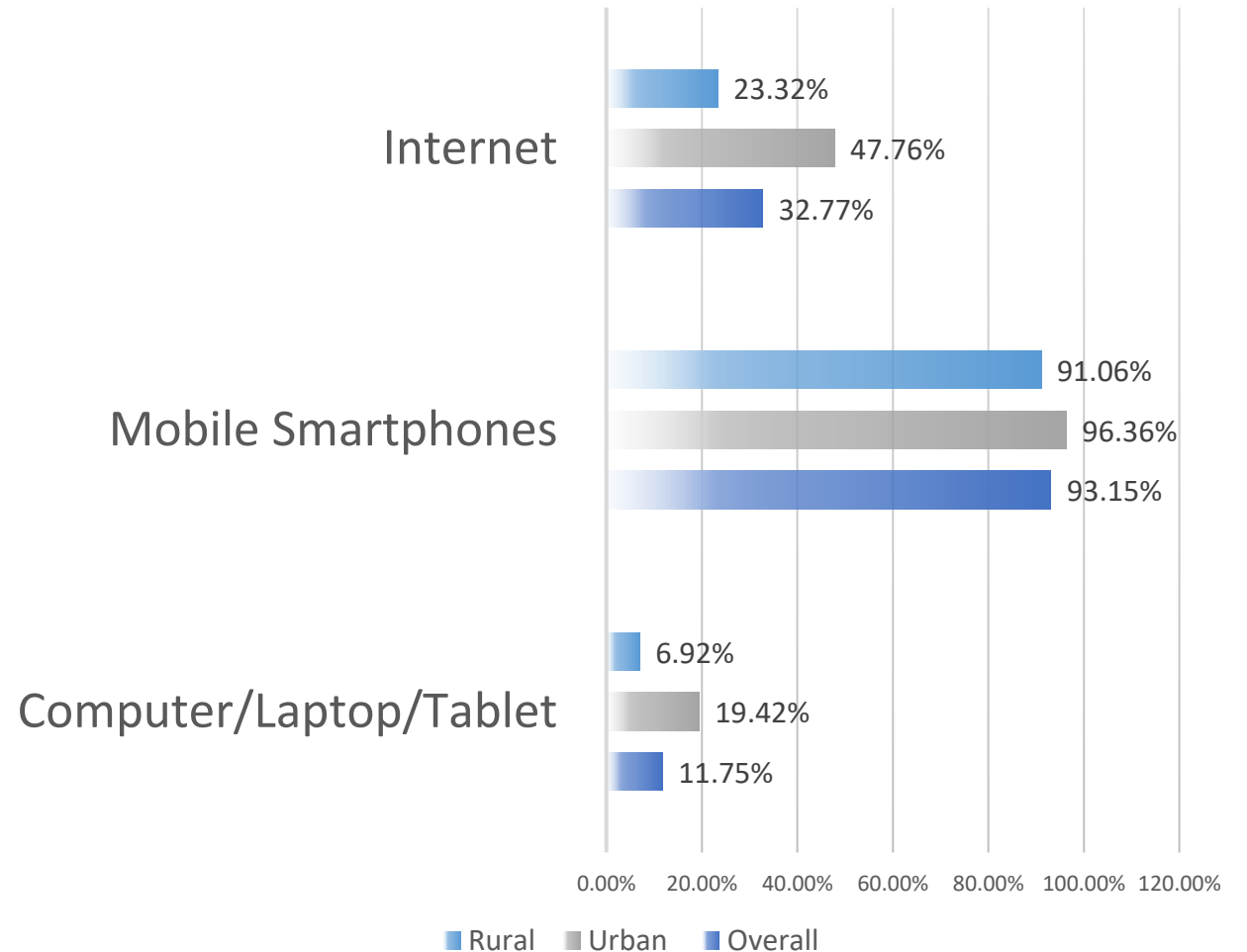
The Great Digital Divide



Access to Technology: The Great Digital Divide

- 76% of internet access is limited to only four major cities
- 35% of Pakistan does not have any digital infrastructure
- The impact is heavily skewed against women who are 8% less likely than men to own cellphones, and 20% less likely to use mobile internet.

PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH COMPUTER/MOBILE/INTERNET



Access to Technology: The Great Digital Divide



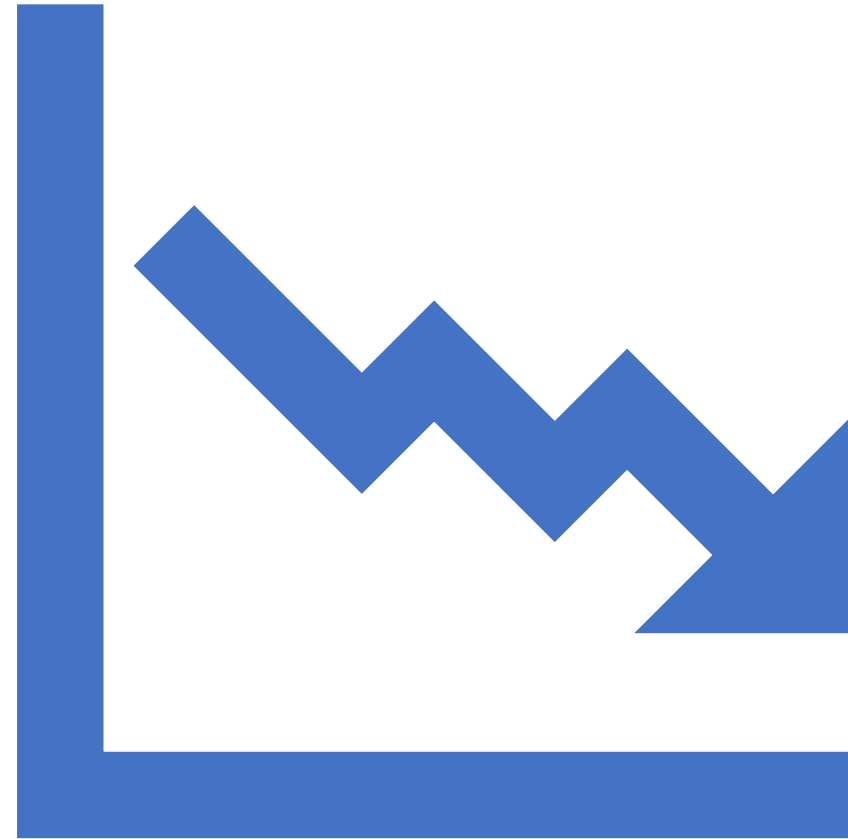
The Great Digital Divide

The diagram consists of two dark blue chevron shapes pointing to the right. The first chevron contains the text 'The Great Digital Divide'. The second chevron contains a paragraph of text explaining the impact of non-access to technology on poor households.

Non-access to internet and/or digital devices reduced the ability of poor HHs to adapt to evolving circumstances, rendering them completely isolated from online work and educational opportunities.

Impact on Youth

- Lockdowns, slow growth, and business closures reduced job opportunities for the youth.
- Marked increase in the number of “jobless graduates” between 2019 and 2021.



Access to Education

Widening of the knowledge gap between the rich and the poor due to:


1. Unequal access to technology: online classes conducted by a handful of private schools
2. Poor parental education of the lower classes
3. Increase in drop out rates





Access to Health Facilities

- Pakistan faced severe deficiency of quarantine centres, testing kits, diagnostic facilities, and drugs and equipment needed for treatment.
- While the rich were able to afford access to private health care, medication, vaccines, and health insurance, the poor had to struggle over securing spots in the designated healthcare centres, making COVID-19 up to 10 times more deadly for the poor.
- Loss of incomes and/or jobs during lockdowns exacerbated the situation.

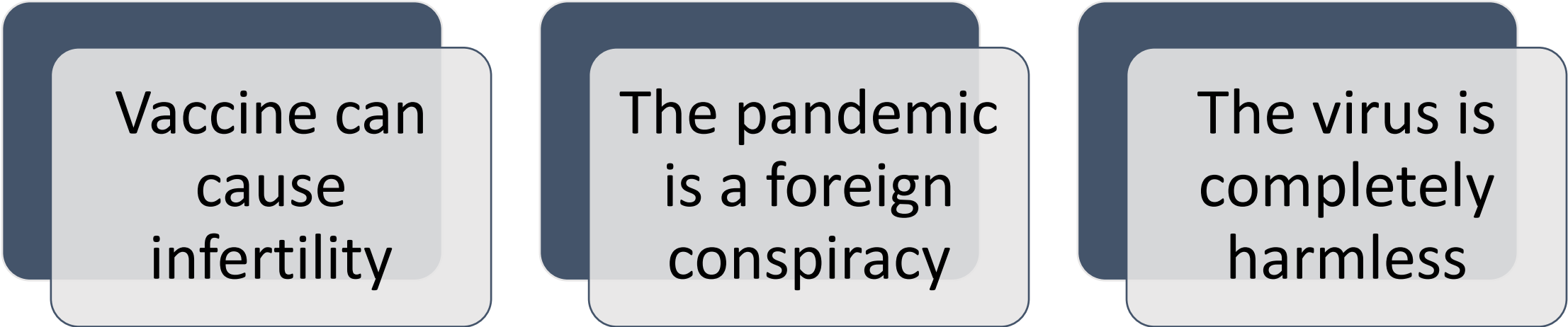


Vaccine Distribution and Administration

- Pakistan has fared well in terms of equitable distribution of vaccine with effective national outreach.
- By August 2021, Pakistan was able to develop and sustain an efficient immunization program by securing thirty million doses of COVID-19 vaccines from China, and more than 8 million doses via COVEX.
- To reduce foreign dependency, Pakistan started producing and bottling its own single-dose COVID-19 vaccine, the Chinese CanSinoBio by June 2021

Vaccine Distribution and Administration

The main challenge was vaccine hesitancy stemming from misperceptions such as:



Vaccine can
cause
infertility

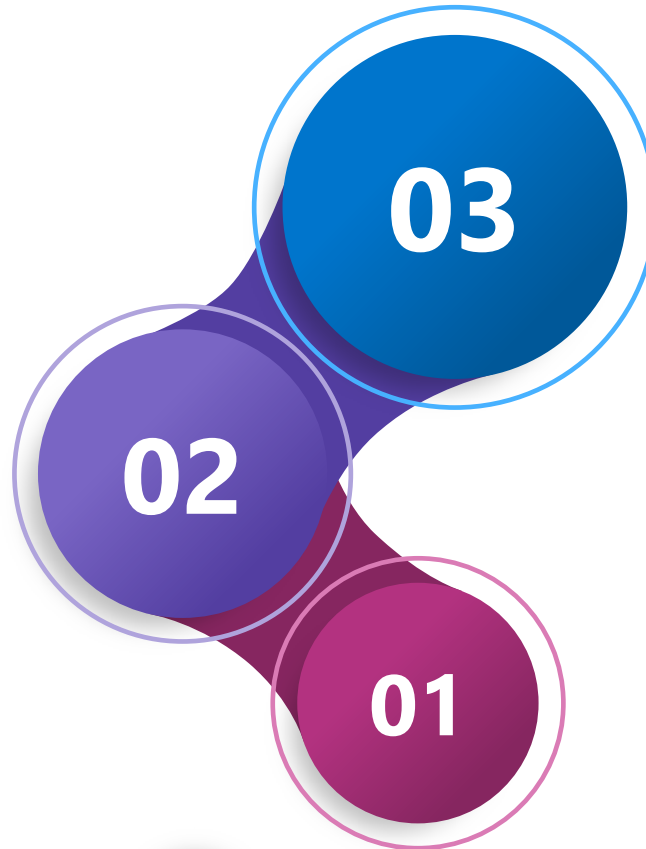
The pandemic
is a foreign
conspiracy

The virus is
completely
harmless

2- Gender Inequalities

Economic Participation

Online work and informal workers



Education

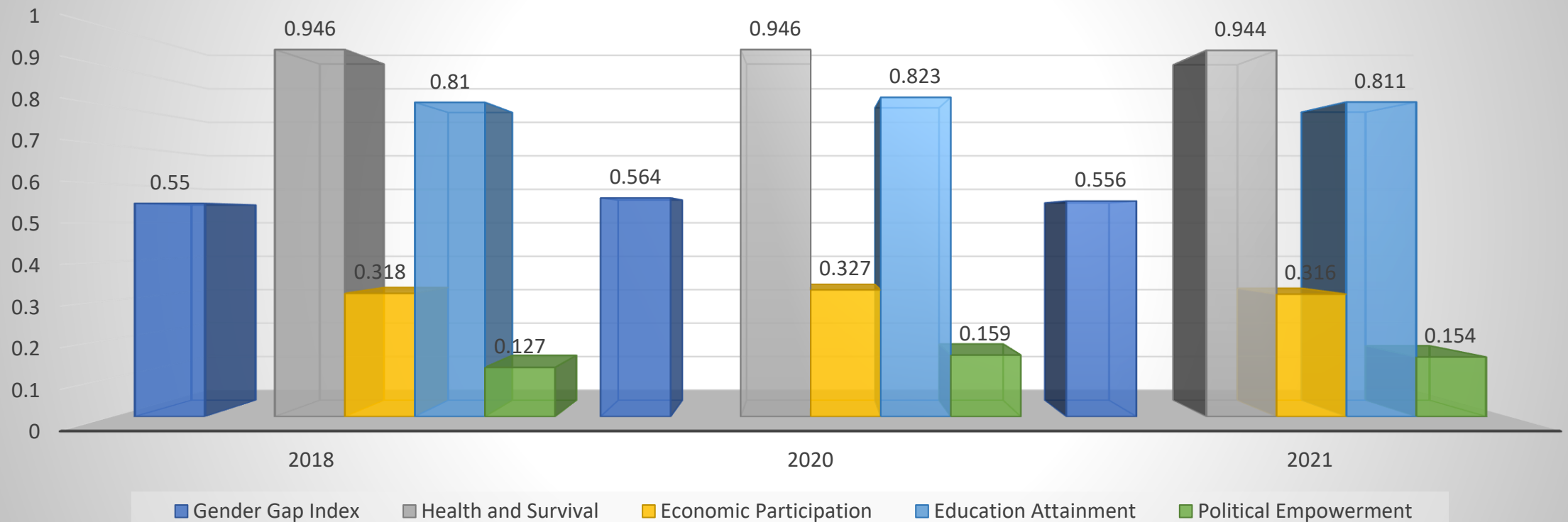
Equitable distribution?

Health and Survival

Physical and Psychological Health

Gender Inequalities

Gender Gap Index



Health and Survival

- Reproductive, antenatal, and other health services particular to women were heavily compromised under mounting pressure of the pandemic.
- Midwives, vaccinators, and family health workers were unable to provide outreach services in compliance with social distancing protocols.
- As a result, around 17 million children under 5 missed out on routine immunisations.
- Pakistan witnessed a 30% decrease in family planning services, 19% reduction in skilled attendance at birth, 10% decrease in new born care, and 26% decrease in vaccination coverage.

Health and Survival: Mental Health

- Confinement of men in houses along with reduction in household incomes increased the likelihood of women being subject to gender-based violence.
- While there was a significant surge in reported cases of domestic violence, the unreported cases are expected to be much higher.

Economic Participation

- School closures, social distancing, and lockdowns all increased the demand for unpaid care work
- In Pakistan, 80.5% of economically inactive women were out of the workforce due to unpaid care responsibilities
- Females remain majorly over-represented in the informal sector with 94% of all employed women engaged in the informal sector with little to no job security.
- These workers were severely affected in the form of reduced incomes during lockdowns

Education

The pandemic has impacted the education sector disproportionately, leading to widespread unemployment of teachers.

The education sector is the largest employer of women in Pakistan, with nearly 54% of teachers at secondary level and 72.19% of teachers at lower secondary level being female.

Education

Around 26 million students dropped out of school in March 2020, i.e., at the start of the lockdown. 50% of these children did not return to school once they reopened after the lockdown, 60% of which are female.

Learning losses are expected to be higher for female children as they are less likely to have access to digital devices, rendering them unable to study online.

3- Income Inequality and Food Insecurity

Income Inequality and Food Insecurity

Income inequalities were widened during the lockdowns as businesses faced closure, rendering its employees jobless.

During 2020, poverty in Pakistan has increased from 4.4 per cent to 5.4 per cent as 2 million people fell below poverty line of \$1.9 per day

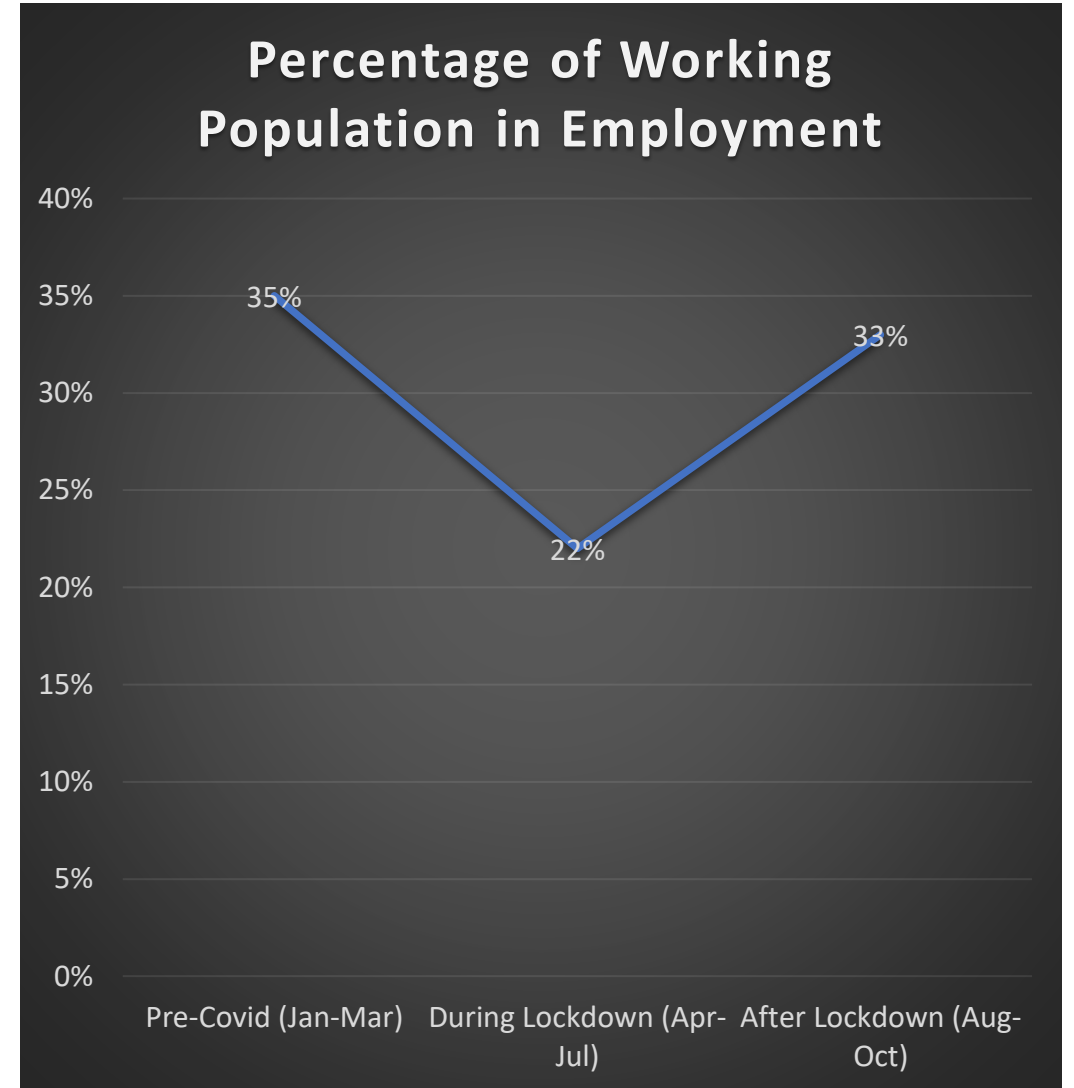
An estimated 126 million are likely to be pushed into multidimensional poverty due to the pandemic

Income Inequality and Food Insecurity

- During lockdowns, working population in Pakistan deteriorated from 35% to 22%.
- Approximately 50% of the working population had to suffer from either job loss, or a reduction in income, 74% of which belonged to the informal sector.
- 27.35% did not get any income during the period.

Income Inequality and Food Insecurity

- However, this economic downturn was short lived as Pakistan demonstrated a V-shaped recovery, with working population standing at 33% post lockdowns in August the same year.
- Unemployment rate stood at 6.9% in 2018–19, and at 6.3% in 2020–21, hinting toward a swift recovery.



Income Inequality and Food Insecurity

During lockdowns, mounting food prices in conjunction with loss of income raised alarm for rising food insecurity in Pakistan.

50% of Pakistani households had to switch to lower quality or quantity of food during COVID lockdowns.

60% households were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food.

Severe food insecurity increased from 3% in 2019 to 10% during lockdowns, meanwhile moderate food insecurity increased from 13% to 30%.

4- Wealth Inequality

Authoritarian Regime, Corruption, and Crony Capitalism

Sectoral Analysis

Impact on Household Wealth

Authoritarian Regime, Corruption, and Crony Capitalism

- Authoritarian regime in conjunction with rising income inequalities resulted in increasing corruption as the rich and powerful engaged in unethical practices to try to maintain their status.
- Increased incidence of sellers charging exorbitant prices for essential food items and health supplies, taking advantage of panic buying at the start of the pandemic.
- Allegations of rewarding cronies, offering contracts without tenders, and overpricing of medicine.
- Subsidy for utility stores
- Incentive package for construction industry.

Sectoral Analysis

Services industry suffered the lion's share of losses, followed by manufacturing and agriculture.

Within the service industry, entertainment, hospitality, and tourism industries crumbled in the face of lockdowns as the industry experienced 50-70% reduction in revenues.


In the manufacturing sector, 90% firms reported falling revenues due to the lockdowns. Worst impacted were the automobile industry and the export sector.

The agriculture sector remained least affected as it witnessed a mere 10–15% loss in revenues during lockdowns, much of which was recovered as food prices rose during 2020–21.

Wheat and sugar remained heavily subsidized compared to other industries.

Impact on Household Wealth


47% households used their savings or sold property during lockdowns to deal with reduced incomes.



One-third households were forced to borrow money from friends and relatives



12% households had to delay repayments of loans they had procured before the pandemic.



Many of the poorest households were forced to sell their productive assets (e.g., livestock) for survival



5- COVID-19 and the Environment

COVID-19 and the Environment

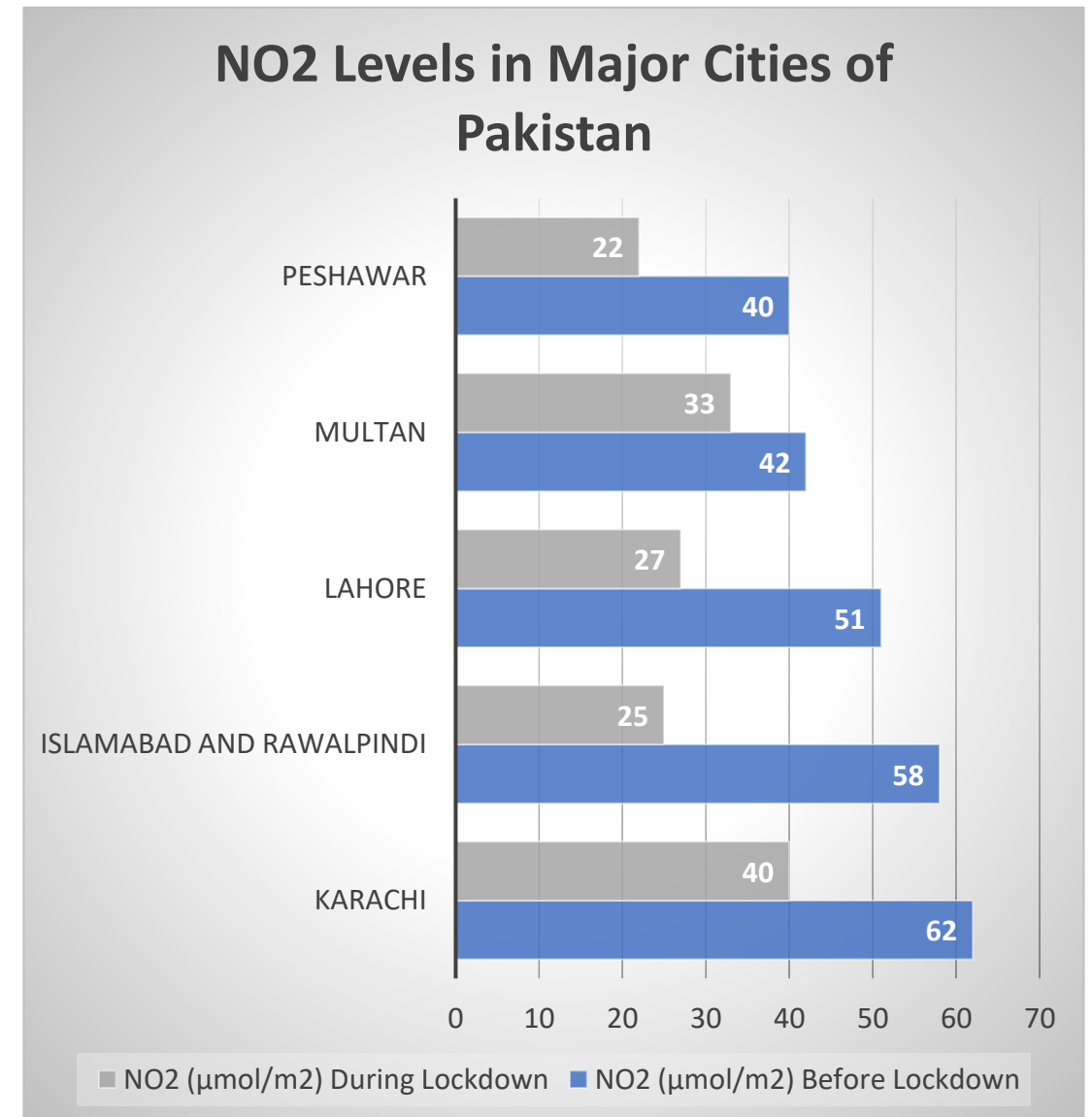
- In recent times, Pakistan has faced an unprecedented increase in the number of natural calamities and disasters owing to climate change.
- Rising temperatures, water scarcity, and rising sea levels have resulted in floods, drought, earthquakes, and landslides, displacing civilian populations, and causing massive damage to property, crops, and infrastructure.
- The increased incidence of these events greatly inhibited access to healthcare facilities, especially for poorer segments of the nation, making them more vulnerable to the pandemic.
- Locust attacks during 2019-20 exacerbated food insecurity during the pandemic.

COVID-19 and the Environment

- The pandemic also created the need for disposable paraphernalia such as gloves, facemasks, hand sanitizers, etc., thereby increasing the use of plastics.
- A shift in priorities of the government from tackling climate change toward handling the pandemic.

However...

- During lockdowns, Pakistan witnessed a marked improvement in its air quality.
- As economic activity came to a near halt, there was 45–62% reduction in use of public transportation.
- Lockdowns and closure of offices and businesses reduced the levels of energy consumption, leading to a fall in levels of pollution created by burning of fossil fuels



The background is a dark blue-grey color with a fine, grainy texture. Scattered across the background are several light blue-grey arrows of varying sizes, all pointing towards the right. Some arrows are sharp and clear, while others are faded and semi-transparent, creating a sense of depth and movement.

The Way Forward...

$$F = G \frac{m_1 m_2}{d^2}$$

$$\phi(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi\sigma}} e^{-\frac{(x-\mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}}$$

$$i\hbar \frac{\partial}{\partial t} \psi = \hat{H} \psi$$

$$E + V = 2$$

$$E = mc^2$$

$$ds \geq 0$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial t^2} = c^2 \frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial x^2}$$

$$\frac{df}{dt} =$$

The Way Forward

Teleschool

- Efficacy remains questionable due to lack of monitoring and assessment.
- Language barrier: Need more inclusive solutions.

Trainings

- Low enrolment rates
- Stereotyping

The Way Forward..

- Cash Transfers: regular vs. one-off
- Inheritance tax
- Progressive Taxation Policies
- Formalisation of the undocumented economy to ensure job security
- Redirecting non-development expenditure toward development projects.
- Incentivising WFH
- Capitalise on the significant Youth Bulge by providing opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. New SME policy is a step in the right direction.
- Providing indiscriminate digital infrastructure.