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**The Dynamics of Public Service Delivery at the Local Government Level in Pakistan****Sabira Iqbal**

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**Abstract**

*Local governments in Pakistan play a critical role in delivering public services, yet they face significant challenges that hinder their effectiveness. This study examines the historical, legal, and operational frameworks of local governance in Pakistan, focusing on the decentralization of power and the devolution of responsibilities to local bodies. Despite constitutional provisions and various reforms, local governments struggle with financial constraints, political interference, and inadequate capacity building, which limit their ability to provide essential services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The paper highlights the disparities between urban and rural service delivery, emphasizing the need for greater financial autonomy, enhanced training programs, and reduced political influence to improve governance at the grassroots level. Case studies from provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab illustrate both successes and ongoing challenges in local governance. The study concludes with recommendations for strengthening local governments, including increasing revenue generation, fostering public-private partnerships, and leveraging technology to enhance service delivery. By addressing these issues, Pakistan can achieve more equitable and efficient public service provision, ultimately contributing to socio-economic development and improved quality of life for its citizens.*

**Keywords:** *Local Governments, Pakistan, Public Service Delivery, Decentralization, Financial Constraints, Political Interference, Capacity Building, Urban-Rural Disparities, Governance Reforms, Technology in Governance.*

**Introduction**

The rapid increase in developing countries' urban population has mounted unnecessary pressure on local governments in reference to public service delivery. As a result of the decentralization of the country's educational authority to the local governments, it has taken the status of a service providing institution from a financier. It is also tasked with providing non-formal and formal primary education aimed at children up to fifteen years of age and designed for individuals who could not attend school as children (Afrin, 2023). As public opinion becomes increasingly concerned about the availability of public services in government, there is a parallel growth in emphasis on the management of service delivery systems. This pattern of accountability for the functioning of public services in general, and the role of local services in particular, generates an increasing interest in evaluating patterns of service delivery.

Local Governments are billed with being proactive managers in the government's efforts to expand coverage and improve performance systems. In the context of this essay, the importance of local governance will be established with reference to the relationship that public services have with social, political, and economic

objectives. It will then outline the objectives of an evaluation of the ongoing nature and effectiveness of government services management by local governance in general and local government in particular (Sheehan et al.2023). This is followed by an analysis of the operational definitions of the local government and its responsibilities in order to establish partnerships with other actors, especially private actors, in districts receiving support from the Local Management Systems Promotion Unit. In conclusion, the essay draws attention to a number of difficulties faced by government officials. An incipient interest in public services and in evaluating their outputs is partly a reflection of growing demand for coverage and greater sophistication in the supply of public services, partly a response to perceived deficiencies in existing delivery systems and partly new opportunities to develop technology.

### **Historical Background of Local Governance in Pakistan**

The history of local governance systems in Pakistan is as old as the land itself. Even prior to the establishment of known empires by the Aryans, local governance was in practice. In ancient of Pothohar land, there were powerful clan's system even before the arrival of Islam (Haq KANDHRO & AKBER, 2015). The rules of the Moghal as well as the British also carried out the local governance system at union council levels.

With a tradition of the local authority system and well-established precedent of the presence of local bodies in the subcontinent, the maintenance of local bodies and continual consolidation of this level at village, tehsil, and district was ensured in the governmental setup after independence. With some modifications, there were well-recognized revenue, police and administrative system at the local level, under articulation through martial & non-martial laws (Iqbal & Ashraf, 2022). Once transferred to civil bureaucracy, however, power also inflated personal manipulations & extensions. The conformity and compliance of administrative instructions had added sinful flavor to the taste of existing traditional system. In the name of modernization, the existing harmonized local system was uprooted in the late 1959s and local traditional governance systems having strong and effective participatory structures were replaced by the District Management System. Though public services delivery was dislocated, the local governance system was unable to address community needs.

The so-called developmental dictator was lately replaced by other dictators but the system remained unchanged until finally, in the late 1996s, an ordinance was promulgated and local bodies were reinstituted. Clearly articulated powers and functions were conferred upon these new councils to functioning as a third tier of governance. The Promulgation was introduced at tehsil level, at district level and DCO system was ended with an order to restart Nazim's system. The first general election under the local body's law was conducted on December 31st, 2000, and afterward, financial and administrative powers were decent with them so that they function as a sustainable and accountable system. Treasurer in each local government was appointed.

### **Legal Framework for Local Governments in Pakistan**

The status of local government as a third tier of government is constitutionally guaranteed in Pakistan. Articles 32 and 140 to 140A of the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan enacted by Parliament have provided the formal

guidance and the basis for a particular authoritative structure to operating local governments and delivering public services. By Emersonian standards, provincial autonomy and local autonomy are closely related concepts within a federal environment. However, local autonomy in Pakistan is conceptually distinguished from provincial autonomy and, notwithstanding the 2001 regulations of the Military ruler, the relationship between provinces and local governments appears to remain one of dependency and patronage (Haq KANDHRO & AKBAR, 2015). In the past, the powers and functions of local governments were enshrined in separate ordinances called LGOs, but at present, the provincial assemblies have been deciding the powers and functions of the local governments by introducing amendments to the LGOs.

Legal framework within which local governments operated was prescribed by the respective provincial assemblies. Decisions under the legal framework at the provincial level determined the nature and scope of local government structures including the number and area of districts, towns, and union councils, and the appropriateness of mechanisms such as the presence and objectives of the district council as the top tier of the system (Akbar, 2019). This implies that local governments were never constitutionally autonomous democratically elected bodies and therefore openness of the legal environment to wider political forces was intended to ensure, or at least maximize possibilities for, effective oversight of local government by the provincial government. The removal of local councils in 1959 was fueled by dissatisfaction from local and provincial governments. Provincial legislative assemblies were not in favor of the functioning of local governments as autonomous bodies. The ruination of local councils in West Pakistan in 1959 was the onset of the deprivation of the right to democracy at the local level.

### **Decentralization and Devolution of Power**

Since Pakistan's inception, decentralization has remained part of the broader discourse of efforts to improve governance, augment democratic fields, and bridge gaps between resources and liabilities. Over the years, various commission reports have worked to suggest recommendations to improve the efficacy and efficiency of local governance. Likewise, the 8th schedule of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan contains the list of mandated subjects of local governments, based on which all provinces have enacted local government ordinances. Two segments of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) manifestos stand out in this literature base, explicitly making the organization of local government a prior commitment within three months of assuming office (Haq KANDHRO & AKBAR, 2015). However, the promises have yet to be delivered, as no mandate lasted long enough for any consecutive government to fully implement either the existing local government ordinances or formulate something newer.

Mention of the devolution of power occurred in various commission reports and party manifestos, but these have never been actualized satisfactorily. The only major reprieve occurred under General Musharraf's regime, in the shape of the Local Government Ordinance 2001, under which district government systems were established in the late August 2001, requiring district-level governments consisting of elected district nazims and naib nazims. Later LG ordinances were enforced in provinces during 2001-2007, seemingly altering power structures. Moreover,

efforts of the newly-elected political governments, from 2008 to 2012, saw older district setups restored, or district Nazim or mayors divested of the devolved departments. A district-level devolution of power plan was enacted through the 18th Amendment.

### **Challenges Faced by Local Governments in Pakistan**

Local governments are the governing institutions charged with the responsibility to deliver public services at the grassroots level. In many countries, the services delivered by these institutions are contingent upon the devolved mandates and resources. The government of Pakistan, recognizing the importance of local governments in delivering services, enacted the act in 2010 as an amendment to Part VII of the constitution of Pakistan, for establishing the local government system. This system intends to strengthen the local governments in their ability to deliver public services through legitimizing the municipalities, local councils, and other administrative institutions. Simultaneously, devolution of power plan was initiated aiming to return political, administrative, and financial powers to these local governments. Government institutions at the peripheral level could not deliver the public services effectively mainly due to various challenges they encounter. One of the critical challenges in this respect is the framework of financial constraints. Since local governments are the institutions located at the peripheral level, largely depending on the devolved mandate and resources. (Ali, 2022) If any lacuna in the constitutional guarantees or commitment to the fiscal rights for such the local governments, they would lose their capacity to deliver effective services. This is the prevailing scenario of the local governments of Pakistan especially regarding the fiscal rights.

Various financial constraints jeopardize local governments in their ability to deliver the public services. Most of them are deprived of their legal fiscal rights or revenues. Consequently, they depend on the grants frequently sanctioned by the central government or the provincial government under the guise of political patronage. As such, the resource and fiscal autonomy of the local governments have been largely eroded. Simultaneously, the revenue generation mechanisms have been complex and unable to materialize for which most of the decided revenues could not be collected. Moreover, the development expenditures have largely been siphoned to the Favorite Nazim's areas under the political motivation. The investments were mostly contingent upon the political influence rather than the need-based priorities. Oftenly, the bifurcation of funds was concentrated in preferable sectors. Thus local governments had continuously been failed to enhance the public welfare services effectively.

### **Financial Constraints**

The financial constraints regarding the local government system for the delivery of public service are a major constraint in Pakistan. Insufficient funding is identified as a major issue with regard to the failure of local governments for effective service delivery at the local level (Haq KANDHRO & AKBER, 2015). In addition to this, sources of revenue for the local governments are linked with their limitations and unpredictability. The imposition of budget constraints is responsible for the failure of the local government in the implementation of development projects and initiation of viable initiatives. This failure leads to an increasing demand from the community for the enhancement of the quality of services. Due to the financial

constraints, the deteriorating quality of these services is not provided. This automatically leads to a loss of public trust, and its consequences further influence the demands for the delivery of services at the local level.

In revenue sharing, local governments are at a disadvantaged and vulnerable position rather than having a secure, full-fledged source of revenue. Grant-dependent local governments have to bear the undesired domination of the funding government regarding the planning and project selection, while grants, on the other, are uncertain in amount. Local governments are often forced to incur heavy debts for pledging future incomes. This hinders the autonomy and financial stability of the borrowing local governments (Ajam et al.2021). The local government must make available the obligatory resources and assistance, fiscal or otherwise, to empower local bodies to discharge their functions effectively. Eco-urban development complexities and financial resources guess a direct relationship. The generation of revenue too is radically linked with local autonomy. With regard to revenue generation, unwise fiscal policies, and an irrational local authority tax system will adversely impact on the financial growth of the local bodies.

### **Capacity Building and Training**

Introduction of Local Government Act 2013 in Pakistan made it apparent that local bodies would have to cope with the mammoth task to deliver public services to the citizens of their jurisdiction if they could utilise their legal, political, and financial responsibilities. Local governments in Pakistan, however, have been institutionally very weak due to their financial and administrative dependence on provinces (Akbar, 2019). This weak system emanated from colonial times and continued after independence creating a vast intergovernmental network of central, state, and local governments and introducing complexities and ambiguities in their tasks. A double government context, existing in other former British colonies, means that local bodies are not only subordinate to higher-level governments but also require compliance for the enactment of any competence on the part of those authorities entailing the wish that service delivery at lower levels is based on higher-level authority decisions. That system, normally characterized as one of weak urban governments, is seen elsewhere.

The role of local government in the Public Service Delivery System (PSDS) in Pakistan is less significant and weak due to the lack of resources, infrastructure, staff and poor governance. Public service delivery is facing many challenges at the local level in terms of capacity building, funding, sustainability and implementation of standardized and admissible policies to ensure services are being delivered effectively and efficiently. In Pakistan, Local government institutions are the discredited segments as compared to provincial and federal tiers. The popularity and functionality of local bodies have declined silently over the decades due to the barriers faced by the local bodies in delivering efficient services. The insufficient allocation of funds and resources is the longstanding issue of the local government considered as a multidimensional obstacle in effective service delivery. In across the country, different departments are operated in local governments, but, the positive performance is still awaited (Ali, 2022). The water and sanitation department is the most significant sector. Due to the lack of resources and funds,

waterborne diseases are spreading rapidly in the residents, and waste segregation is another inherited tradition seen in the country.

This paper studies the impediments due to financial issues faced by the local government in delivering services at the local level by utilizing the structured interviews from different segments of the city. The result shows that the local bodies are not trying to put their energies in service delivery but facilitating themselves. The disbursement of money is not disbursed by the provinces on time. The staff is of the view that due to unfair increments in the salaries, the standard of work is not according to the dreams of individuals. The resources like machinery and equipment are not properly purchased. A government that is based on federal concepts, there is a dire need of fiscal federalism among provinces, districts and tehsils should be constructed for the effective delivery of services. Minimum possible infrastructure at the local level should be planned thought out the country. Financial and resource allocations should be made promptly (Qamar et al.2022).

### **Political Interference**

Political interference is one of the most important constraints that have emerged in the local government system in Pakistan over the past three decades. The key objective of the local government system is the decentralization of power to ensure its implementation to the grassroots level. But, in Pakistan local governments have played the role of the branches of powerful provincial capitals. The local governments were led, rather controlled by powerful provincial leaders belong with the former administrative bureaucracy. The decisions at the local government level were taken as per the interest and personal liking of provincial leaders. The political clash, far from lowering in the local councils, would enough mobilize additional fights, therefore degenerating into a successful instrument in the handing out of power and the state of affairs (Baker et al.2025) .

Political patronage undermines both accountability and effectiveness. A key problem is the implication of party politics, which intrudes on the local government but weakens good governance. Political affiliations interfere in the decision-making process. The impact of this interference could be felt in a form of a corruption extent. The context procuring decisions is fundamentally tarnish. Often the sensation of politic interference, as well as corruption and favoritism, is strong. Furthermore, political influence not only detached people from government but also obstruct individuals' support services, which are being imagined as act of passivity to the political figures, and maintained in the sense of obtaining back all benefits and gains (Raffler, 2022).

Political pressure is a large obstacle to the adequacy of local democracy. Political influence can add to unequal practice as it alters the political risk of alternative leaders of dispute. Critics are implying acts of sabotage at the local level, political intrusion, or stopping progressive profit or program in anti-patronage zones. In such a situation the likelihood of the fulfillment of the political figure for the people employed gains is highly degraded. The maneuvering of political interest, the absence of plausible expression and involvement, digs a rich ground for nurturing mistrust in political institutions, uneasiness, doffing passes, and communal remoteness (Tajbakhsh, 2022).

### **Case Studies of Successful Local Government Initiatives**

People of Pakistan have had the fortune of experiencing two substantially different forms of local governments in the past few decades. The first and the better known form is local governments elected under the Devolution of Power Plan of 2001. Despite the bad press and the controversy, it has its successes to show. However, local governments made and operated by the provincial governments under the renewed Local Government Ordinance of 2001 have been an altogether different story. Those local governments were simply not there for the voter. The local governments elected in 2001 were handpicked, ornamental, and an undemocratic tool of provincial government. The result was that those local governments remained busy in political one-upmanship with the provincial government. The local governments of 2001-05 got enough bad press for all the successive local governments, even those that actually deserved some accolades (Fombad2023).

The first story comes from the Union Council of Ranigat in Malakand, though in a slightly different setting. One initiative in Ranigat deserves immediate mention. While the rest of the country was waiting for the Malakand division to come back to the country, some elected from the area went on to do something extraordinary. They got together and worked out a code among themselves with a promise not to participate in the 'attractive' but divisive schemes. One year into the plan, by their claim, situation is magical. The representatives say their union is more caring, responsible and accountable. The ranigati's think their council had been really good in realizing rights of the people in local decision making (Eriksen & Katsaitis, 2023).

### **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government System**

In order to understand the local government system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, it is fruitful to provide a slight insight of the background of the local governance model introduced in 2001, and its efficacy in addressing the socio-economic and developmental needs of the population. This background is determinant in grasping the unique features of the governance model introduced in 2013 by the same political party presently in power in the province. Moreover, the 2013 local government reforms sought to bring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's local government laws and structures in harmony with the national legal framework and established a more homogeneous set of governance structures for Local Governments across the provinces of the country (Paul2024).

Each Local Government under the 2001 model in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa consisted of local councils and nazims, affairs of government and governance were devolved to the Local Governments and all organs of the state in the district were under their control and supervision. The Provincial Government retained control over police services while the rest of departments had to function under the Local Governments. Crucially, Local Governments had complete authority to plan all the development schemes, and spent their development funds. The system brought innovations such as mandatory community participation in budgeting process, mandatory publication of all government contracts for transparency, mandatory publication of audited budget statement for accountability. The system is evaluated by understanding the reforms, assessing the innovations and examining the critical evaluations of post reform studies. Kindergarten of lessons are derived

for the readers from the experiences of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regarding its endeavor to improve local governance.

### **Punjab Local Government Act 2019**

The Eighteenth Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution aimed to enhance governance through the devolution of functions to districts. Eight years later, Punjab's Provincial Assembly introduced the Local Government Act 2019, reviewed within a conceptual framework that highlights decentralization as complex and multifaceted. The extent of authority does not necessarily indicate effective devolution or increased public participation. Under the three-tier system (Union Council—Tehsil/Town—District), local governments had limited functions, largely due to the provincial government's retraction of powers after Musharraf's 2000 reforms, resulting in significant negative effects on public welfare, service delivery, and participation. Five local council associations, including those from Lahore and major cities, represent Punjab's local councils. The Provincial Association proposed further devolution to the Chief Minister, identifying the local level as optimal for governance improvements (Ali, 2022). Historical roles, such as that of the Lamardar and native councils, are crucial for strengthening ties between government and community, echoing the village republic concept rooted in Pakistan's history. The Lamardar, established during the Muslim era, protected village functions, including water supply, revenue distribution, and crop security.

### **Impact of Local Government Performance on Public Service Delivery**

Role of local governments is crucial for the effective and efficient delivery of public services. In contexts like Pakistan, local governments are the most vital level of government and play a significant role in the country's scenario. It is argued that local government performance plays a significant role in the delivery and accessibility of public services. Furthermore, focus is on service delivery only; to what extent do local government performance and governance efficiency directly affect the access and delivery of public services? This has gained considerable attention in recent years, with implications for governance, accessibility, and quality of services.

Services are categorized as either physical or social services, both in rural and urban areas. In rural settings, due to the larger number of consumers, the quality of roads, basic health facilities, and the existence of separate amounts of clean drinking water were used. On the other hand, in urban areas, the number of electricity connections, streetlights, and public transport facilities, among others, were the service delivery indicators used. Ongoing public service delivery is a vital concern, and its improvement is an urgent task for developing countries like Pakistan. Since the inception of the structure of the local government system in Pakistan in 1863, there have been various efforts to enhance public services (Haider and Khan2024). Dedicated studies focusing on the assessment of local governments' present efforts on the delivery of public services, and the direct relation between the quality of services and the effective realization of governance, are rare. On the whole, the effectiveness of local governments directly affects the quality and accessibility of services. A variety of service delivery models are being tested, and different sectors are being devolved to local governments to assess the accountability of the government and transparency. There are some public service delivery case studies identified that confirm the



fluctuating degrees of service delivery effectiveness in different localities. Several characteristics are identified that contribute to successful local government performance and, consequently, public service accessibility. Among the potential impediments, ongoing challenges persist in regard to the measurement and evaluation of outcomes. It is urged that citizens' engagement is crucial to the assessment and, in turn, the improvement of service delivery. A comprehensive approach is called for to enhance local governance accountability and public services effectiveness.

### **Role of Technology in Enhancing Local Government Services**

In the context of Pakistan, the potential of technology as a tool for the efficient delivery of services needs to be underlined. The digital transformation of services is increasingly seen as an alternative with a strong transformative potential. Digital tools have the capability of drastically augmenting the efficacy and reach of service delivery mechanisms in the local governments (Atique et al., 2024).

First, they have a great potential in the completion of numerous routine administrative services in an efficient manner. Financial transaction, payroll system, pension disbursement, tax collection, lease of municipal properties, all of these services can be efficiently streamlined by the introduction of digital tools. With a few clicks, the monotonous and time-consuming process of transactions has the capability to end up in a few seconds only. Such a swift process is thus freeing up the considerable time and resources which were previously spent on the tedious manual process. These, now can be devoted to the more strategic and beneficial activities of the governmental institutions. The faster utilities can thus add to the growing list of completed tasks and eventually facilitate on how the basis of efficiency and precocity in the individual departments.

Second, digital tools hold a vast potential in enhancing the engagement of citizens with services and in the fostering a feedback mechanism in between them and the respective government institutions. Computer applications, telephone feedback mechanism, digital citizen centers in which services are provided to the citizens, have the capability of considerably stimulating the citizen engagement with the local governments and create avenues for perusing a vast network of feedback between them, and thus allowing the adaptation of services as per the needs and feedback of citizens. Digital platforms are enhancing the linkage between citizens and governments as well (Mansoor). Open government data portals, digital complaint registrations, e request registration, public private partnerships in service delivery, have the capability of transforming the traditional service delivery system to a much refined soothed and citizen-friendly model. In the contemporary planning and governance paradigms, the positive role of the technology in the service delivery model should not be downplayed or exaggerated, instead, the strategic use of technology is needed to foster innovations in the concerned domain. Efforts should be launched to embrace and capacitate the juncture of technology and local governance systems.

Despite the wide-ranging possible advantages brought by the integration of technology in the local government service delivery, it's pertinent to underscore the fact that technology's integration is not without stumbling blocks and facial impediments. For the developing, or under developing countries in which infrastructure development is not up to the mark, many of the mentioned digital

tools, platforms, applications, cannot be implemented efficiently. In Pakistan, for example, which are pre requisite for online services, are lagging far behind. In the backward areas of the country, the lack of internet connectivity, the vigorous use of technological gadgets, the absence of reliable electricity, the unavailability of digital platforms, and the lack of digital literacy are the barriers which prelude an immediate integration of technology in the service delivery measures of local governments.

Additionally, the over-reliance on the technology needs to be undermined, as it is widely misconstrued with the policy tools, institutional settings, and broader holistic strategies in the governments. Most often technology is seen as an easy, inexpensive, and quick fix that can be integrated into the local government systems overnight. Such a prejudicial attitude deprives us from perusing and incorporating the aforementioned discussion of the transformative potential of the technology in the service delivery of governmental institutions. Adequate development policies, strategic planning, and a long term durable vision are needed on how to embellish and incorporate technology in the service delivery mechanism of governmental institutions. Lastly, the government sector and tech sector should endeavor to carve out avenues for a powerful pairing dichotomy on how to deliver public services in a much more effective and efficient manner. Substantial amount of papers have been devoted to the synergistic approach and possible avenues as to how the mutual integration is possible and beneficial for the contemporaneously governing models.

#### **Comparative Analysis with Other Countries**

There is no one size fit, model of local governments in the democracies of the world one because of the various geo-political, socio-economic, ethno-cultural and historical contexts, and second because of the different governance philosophies and models that prevail elsewhere. Local governments in Pakistan function under various models. From 2001-6, Pakistan introduced the devolution policy. Governments do not maintain separate institutions for service delivery mechanisms, rather the services to the citizens are delivered through the cooperation of different departments. By and large service delivery was handed over to the provincial local government departments but it was allowed to operate in the local jurisdictions through the District Governments (Haq KANDHRO & AKBER, 2015). Alternative path is to provide services to the local population through the private sector in return to some fees or charges. Keeping in view the growing demand of funds and the trend of fiscal imbalances throughout the world, industrialized world has no other choice except to operate the services in partnership arrangement with the private sector. Public-Private Partnership (PPP) is a procurement tool between a public and private sector for the delivery of a capital asset or infrastructure. So under the mixed model of service delivery such functions are privatized which are under-performing and rest are kept under the public sector.

Local governments are viewed as obstructing “the capacity of markets to allocate goods efficiently” and opening up the political space for the “poor and uneducated masses for capturing the local states and then disturbing the national political and economic stability”. However, another paradigm of decentralized governance stresses the very same local politics, and supports local governance mechanisms to

further economic development through “place-specific factors” which benefit free exchange of information and innovation. “There are strong arguments (too) in favor of decentralization in the context of economic development”. Decentralization of economic functions can discipline and improve the effectiveness of public management through limits on state intervention and promotion of market mechanisms, which is the most commonly advocated strategy since the early 1990s. However, localization of governance does not always go in line with the economic growth (Altamimi et al.2023). Performance and interpretation of the local governance concepts and approaches have been viewed differently due to the centrality of the nature of political, economic and social interactions. Some declared local governments as the epicenter from where local economic growth can be launched provided the local governments are powerful while others showed skepticism on such arguments. Since the local governments are elected and can be a direct reflection of local political sentiment, it is important to have “institutional arrangements” in place. In the presence of such “arrangements”, the “profit-making” firms in the locality are more likely to invest in “livability” in the urban contexts. Conversely, in the absence of such mechanisms, “local governments are likely deeply captured or captured by local power-mongers”. In such a situation, local governments are forced to play in the hands of these entities who can manipulate the different functions of local governments for their own interests, often conflicting with the local development.

### **Recommendations for Strengthening Local Governments in Pakistan**

Following is presented a vivid picture of local governance in Pakistan, with a particular focus on the role of local government in delivering public services in the selected KP province, and makes recommendations for its further improvement. Local governments in Pakistan are progressively playing a recognized role in governance system through the provision of services and development initiatives since the enforcement of local government legislation in 2001. In general, all basic services such as water supply, education, health, and infrastructure development that are considered fundamental human rights and crucial for socio-economic development were legally devolved to local governments. There are four types of urban councils of varying sizes classified on population criteria. Union councils (UCs) that come under the administrative control of district governments are the most decentralized tier. Due to high expectations of public services delivery particularly at UC level, it has been selected as a case study in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan. From the perspective of local governments, public services and their delivery systems in KP have been studied.

Local government is entrusted with the responsibility for executing functions that are very closest to the citizens (Akbar, 2019). Theoretically, workers such as garbage cleaners and small scale water supply infrastructures, community health workers, and village-based primary schools teachers who look natural responsibilities fall in the jurisdiction of local authorities. However, all these functions are never delegated to local governments in most developing countries. There is wide variation, which is generally based upon the historical evolution of local governance, economic development and cultural background. Therefore, an important strategy would be to enhance the financial autonomy of LGs, either by increasing their resources or delegating more revenue generating responsibilities.

Apart from that, there is also a need for exploration of practical service delivery partnership arrangements between LGs and other organizations including the private sector, NGOs, and CBOs. Moreover, the need for sufficient capacity building by the LGs has also been emphasized by the donor community as a pre-condition for enhancing the governance capacity or for effectiveness, efficiency, and to bring transparency in service delivery. There is further wide consensus that good governance is compromised in contexts where political considerations influence the distribution of resources and the operation of institutions. Rushing the process to third-party private sector management or other forms of privatization without first supporting LGs is likely to be counterproductive. This may require comprehensive mechanisms including the constitutional protection of LGs from inconsistent central government interference. Such mechanisms should be politically embedded and offer enforceable guarantees to promote confidence. Governance reforms should be seen as an iterative process and should be continuously monitored, evaluated and if necessary revised or replaced. In addition, there is a need to develop good practices in order to facilitate the replication of successful reforms. Regarding KP/AJK, progress has been much more limited. Successful LG reforms are best conducted in an atmosphere conducive to change with solid long-term commitment. To ensure a successful LG and service delivery package, a dialogue strategy capable of increasing the political will of national and local governments and fostering a conducive and supportive environment is required. Lastly, the capstone reaps the lessons of implementation, presents guidelines to help improve the long-term sustainability of the project and suggests some critical areas where national and international support can provide valuable assistance.

### **Improving Financial Autonomy**

Greater financial control in the hands of local governments is key to providing essential public services such as safe drinking water, sanitation, health, and education. Local governments in Pakistan do not have direct control over a major part of the revenues that account for the total public spending on basic services or development. On the current parameters, there is very limited scope for local governments to enhance their ability to deliver services. The local governments have fewer opportunities to generate revenues by themselves, as the major potential revenue generating authorities, such as the agriculture income tax or the urban unit tax, are also owned by the provinces. Realizing the importance of financial autonomy for effective service delivery at the local level, it is necessary for the government to examine the revenue raising sources and funding structures that local governments can access (Tunio & Nabi, 2021).

There are various systems for local government financing in developed countries, but in Pakistan little elaboration is there. The Punjab LGAs Ordinance, 2001, specifies the distribution of approximately 20 tax bases, with two or three provinces sharing the proceeds of many of the taxes. Until now, local governments generating revenues themselves have been limited to charging local user fees for services and levying taxes on property and advertising, and under doubtful legal status. The government can generate more money for local governments in Surplus-Provincial land to urbanize and liberalize altered and exempted livelihood, and it is recommended that provincial and federal units revise their fiscal policy

allocation for sustainable funds from local governments. Direct from the center or province, the government transfers funds to the local governments. The overall mechanism for transferring funds from the central to the local and provincial units is called credit and is divided into two categories: vertical credit, and horizontal credit (ur-Rehman et al., 2014).

### **Enhancing Capacity Building Efforts**

From service delivery challenges to dealing with unforeseen issues, local councilors in Pakistan face significant hurdles. Improved service provision requires elected officials to develop a range of skills and knowledge. Efforts should be made to develop programs that grow these skills and knowledge and, most importantly, respond to the shifting governance issues they confront. Develop and deliver capacity building programs that increase the capacity of local government officials to address difficult governance challenges, with a focus on local councilors. Capacity development programs should ideally take the form of practical skills development where local councilors have the opportunity to learn practical skills that can improve their governance. In addition, a strong emphasis should be placed on building a culture of continual learning (Khan, 2021). This involves local governments, local government associations, and other relevant stakeholders, including educational institutions and NGOs, regularly organizing practical and needs-based training programs. Local councils that have effectively trained councilors should be showcased as models. Training programs should also focus on building knowledge. Local governments in Pakistan should develop and deliver tailored contained programs that enhance the knowledge councilors have about the services local government should provide (Akbar, 2019). The piloting of TALD should also include a component on service delivery capacity building. New training technologies should be explored to increase training accessibility. In IG, and all of Pakistan, training often involves councilors travelling across Pakistan to central training hubs at considerable cost. Online platforms can be explored to deliver cost-effective and comprehensive training.

### **Reducing Political Interference**

Political influence on local governance processes is prevalent in many contexts. There is clear evidence that political influence hampers local governance credible decision-making and has negative effects on local service delivery in terms of coverage and efficiency. A free and fair environment is essential for bringing new ideas and policies in local provincial assemblies, but they are not valued in instances in which politics dominate. There is a need to have clear regulations and guidelines to protect local governments so that they may operate with autonomy and take decisions that are in the interest of the community at large. Interest-driven partisan local governments are not popular anywhere and create resentment in the general populace. To mitigate such undue pressures, it is important to establish a transparent and accountable system within local governance (Haq KANDHRO & AKBAR, 2015).

Public service delivery at the local level suffers due to several reasons which are important to understand for considering improvements: (1) Political influence, and the involvement of the bureaucracy and political influential persons at the local level. Infrastructure and jobs and services contracts are approved for a few entrepreneurs contributing to cost escalation and low-quality construction of

infrastructures. Political interference and personal interests are catered to at the expense of the community at large; (2) Lack of ownership of local people in local priorities and projects inhibit full community participation, trust building and transparency in the decision making; and (3) Decentralization by virtue has many advantages such as quick responses, accountability and transparency. These advantages are not used for the welfare of people and economic uplift at the local level, instead tariff and fee rates are escalated on services fixed as part of conditions on structural adjustments. There are approved development funds by the federal and provincial levels, but the interests of influential persons are always catered to and on the one hand conflict occurs in the local Nazim/District Coordination Officers (DCO) and the counsellors and the sponsored projects get approvals.

The choice of policy instruments will be shaped by the wider political culture and will necessarily reflect the ethos, comfort and expectations of the policy makers. There is also a need to invest in changes to the wider political culture to encourage the adoption of effective governance models themselves will shape and structure values, behaviors and norms consistent with fostering genuine local governance without threat or fear of political overreach. The following proposals are drawn from changes in the wider political culture: (1) Severe punitive measures would be introduced that breach guidelines and regulations; (2) Guidelines and regulations would be continually fostered as well as the necessity of obeying the law among the local bodies; (3) A computerized management information system would be developed in each district to make the decision making process transparent and ensure that selected individuals are unable to pressure undue political influence; and (4) Guidelines could be drawn to encourage the participation of citizens and other stakeholders in the decision making process. This would make scapegoating local bodies for unpopular policies more difficult, but it would also foster genuine local governance models.

### **Conclusion**

The local governance reform in Pakistan was introduced in the year 2001 in pursuance of the devolution plan. The Constitution of 1973 provided for a national commission for a local government and instructed the government to promulgate the system of local government. The basic objectives were to establish the separate level of governance as the third pillar of the state, adequate representation in socio-economic transformation and to move democracy at the grassroots level, and to involve elected representatives in monitoring and efficient channelization of resources. The system of local government still cannot be established in the real sense in the country due to political elites, fear of the local government's strength, resources, cronyism, the urge of feudal and tribal system, and mimic democracy. Every government tried to establish its system as per his/their own desire. In democratic governments, the process of evolving such system started in 1985, an election of party basis for a duration of 4 years but disturbed in 1988, then tried to democratize the system through legal framework orders. The one has significant role in 1996, conceived many of the opportunities but policy, cost higher concentration of cabinet and parliamentary system, and LGs could not discharge duty and ultimately became as a white elephant of the province. Each province tried to tailor LG's system in their way of liking pattern. Afterward, the

former Prime Minister, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, trying to enforce future provincial because of his political interest, ended with a new imposition of martial law.

After coming into power of Pervaz Musharaf, embracing local governance reform, and tried to evolve new LG laws. Same was cuprite by politically elected governments. Due to this situation in Punjab, the first major province was not able to formulate LG law, the remaining three provinces announced LG ordinances in the latter part of August 2001. After the announcement of the LG ordinances election was held on December 2001 but there was a lack of preparation due to political issues, pre-occupation in drafting rules of business which leads to rampant corruption, political influence/affiliations across the board at the grass-root level. Actually, the elected members of local government of Punjab and urban Sindh had no political and administrative background knowledge and experience. That is why the rules of business have blocked to discharge their duty function under the nice and suitable understanding of service delivery system. However, the ruling class has committed to holding the general and local government elections in the month of October.

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