

Role of Local Government in Community Empowerment and Participation: A Case Study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2001-2018)

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Abstract

Local government being closer to the people is appropriate tier for community empowerment and people participation. Objectives of this research are to analyze the role of local government system (2001-2018) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in empowering local community, to determine the challenges of community empowerment and empowerment in KP. Using social constructivist paradigm, this is qualitative study based on both secondary data and primary data of purposively selected participants. The study concludes that though powers are devolved to elected local government officials, there are still systematic gaps and challenges for community empowerment and participation. The present local government model and development framework is not supportive for community empowerment. It is suggested that keeping in view the international best practices, systematic changes need to be incorporated in acts ad rules and practical steps need to be taken for meaningful participation and empowerment of local community.

Keywords: local governance, human development, community empowerment, inclusion and participation.

Introduction

Democracy with all its ingredients like free and fair election, participation, political liberty and public debate are both intrinsically and instrumentally essential. Democracy is helpful for inclusion of marginalized group in decision making process and making them part of development process, (Sen, 2010). Though democracy it every tier is essential, but it is the democracy at local level which ensure empowerment and participation of local people. Development is the capability to function, capability to freedom of choice, capability to agency role and capability to self esteem. The example of being are being literate, being well fed, being healthy, being able to take part in community in life, (Sen, 1999).

In new local governance model, along with elected official, civil society, community organizations and local market are integrated into one framework (UNDP, 2016). Participation of local people in local governance is very beneficial both community and local institutions, (Bird, 1995). There are four mechanism for meaningful empowerment:

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access to information, role in accountability, inclusion and participation and capacity building of local organization, (Narayan, 2002). Localization of development and governance is one of the important components of sustainable development goals (SDGs) regime/framework where local governance, community empowerment and community involvement was made an integral part, (UNDP 2014).

The aim and scope of this study is to analyze the governance and development from the perspective of people centric approach, community empowerment and people participation. To start with Pakistan inherited strong civil-military bureaucratic structure and weak representative institutions. Unlike India which brought meaningful democratic reforms in initial years, Pakistan has remained same Talbot (2009). Moreover, though a federation, governance structure has remained under strong central government system. Among many other subjects, local government related laws were framed by federal government and hence, throughout Pakistan including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, uniform system of local government was introduced with different interval. First local government system was introduced by general Ayub Khan in 1959 known as Basic Democracies. It has dual role to act as electoral college for president and acts as local government at local level. This system came into an end with down fall of Ayub Khan. LG again established during Zia regime in 1979, election was held for local government. Two tier systems were established in rural areas and four tiers consisting of ward, union committee, Municipal committee and Municipal corporation in cities. This system was abolished by the democratic government in 1990s without introducing new system (Khan, 2009). After assuming powers in 1999, General Pervaiz Musharaf again introduced local government system known as devolution plan. (National Reconstruction Bureau: 2001). With 18th constitutional amendment in 2010, most of the service delivery departments and huge financial resources were devolved to province. Local government became exclusive domain of provinces. KP introduced its own local government system in 2013, election was held 2015 and strong local government institution were established through province. Due over centralized model of governance and development, KP has remained neglected in term of development for a longer time. At present total population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is 35.5 million with area of 101,741 square KM. Most of the population, almost 84% of population is residing in rural areas (Pakistan bureau of statistics, 2017). Its economy is services driven as services sector contribute 60 percent of provincial GDP, agriculture share is 17 percent. Rate of unemployment, 7.1 percent is

highest in Pakistan. Remittances contribute 20 percent, (Pasha, 2017). As per report of 2017 census, KP growth rate of 2.9 percent is highest in Pakistan. According to multi dimensional poverty index (MPI) 49.2 percent of people are living in multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2016). As per UNDP, 2019, human development indicators (HDI) is 0.527.

Research Question

- How did local government in KP empower community and local people?
- How did local community participation influence development and service delivery in KP?
- What were challenges/issues in empowerment and participation in local government system of KP?

Aims and Objectives

- To know the role of local government in community empowerment and participation in KP.
- To know the impacts of community participation on development process and service delivery
- To know the challenges in community empowerment and participation.

Research Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research methodology covering the phenomenon of empowerment and participation of local community under local government system of KP with timeframe from 2001 till 2018. Aim of the study is to investigate as how LG system has empowered local people and ensured their participation in process of development and local governance. This is a complex study and can't be reduced to variable and needs holistic account. Qualitative study is more suitable for such interpretive kind of study where participants are linked with social phenomena under investigation, (Creswell, 2013). Within qualitative research, case study approach is adopted in this study. According to Yin (1994), case study is "an empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". KP is case study with further unit of analysis is Abbotabad and Dir Upper. Participants are purposively selected from range from local elected officials, reps of civil society and heads of service delivery departments.

Literature Review

According to United Nation Human Development Report (NHDR, 1993), people are the agent of their own change, they have the choice to choose what is best for them and should be an active agent in process of development. Development is an inclusive process, woven around people. Human development is development of the people for the people by the people. Rondinelli and Cheema (1983) are of the opinion that local governance is essential for democratization at local level, empowerment of communities, and involvement of different political, religious, ethnic, and tribal groups in the decision-making process. According to Manor (1999) local governance being closer to the people, is more accessible, effective in poverty reduction, service delivery and is accountable, transparent and ensures public participation and community development. According to Jutting et al. (2004), strong civil society, access to important information, community participation has positive impacts on poverty reduction.

Easterly (2003) in his article, “political economy of growth without development: A case study of Pakistan” has criticized that development and growth model of Pakistan on the grounds that though, Pakistan achieved economic growth but same could not be translated into social and human development. Zaidi (2014) argue that Pakistan growth pattern is faulty as middle class is less integrated LG system discontinued, civil society is disorganized. Cheema and Momand (2003) argue LG system after 2001 has improved target service delivery like sanitation while no visible changes in universal service delivery like health and education. There were issues of elite capture, lack of accountability, faulty distribution of resources and services in different tiers and lack of participation of people as CCBs were dysfunctional. Keefer *et al* (2003) while studying local government system after 2001, are of the view that politician is driven by clientelist consideration and want to favour their own voters, are more interested in building infrastructure, creating jobs, benefits from construction works, posting transfers.

(Pasha, 2018) argue that economy of KP is services driven, as services sector contribute 60 percent of provincial GDP, agriculture share is 17 percent. Remittances contribute 20 percent. (Barth, 1975) is of the opinion that besides speaking the Pashto language, a Pashtun must also —do Pakhto, i.e., live up to a set of honor-based practices known as Pakhtunwali. According to Barth (1981) there are three basic institutions

of code of Pakhtunwali, one is hospitality known as melmasthia, second is council of elders for managing and resolution of dispute known as Jirga and third is Purdah where women are confined to home and marginalized from public life. According to Jamal, (2015), Pakhtun society is often criticized for treatment of women. Right from birth, women are controlled by men and deciding for her the major questions like education marriage etc.

Analysis

Local government system of 1959 and 1979 were not truly empowered system as most of the resources and service delivery department were either I control of provincial or federal government. After assuming powers in 1999, General Pervaiz Musharraf introduced his seven-point agenda. One of the agendas was devolution of powers and for the purpose National Reconstruction Bureau was established for revamping the administrative system of Pakistan. According to NRB, aims were decentralization and restructuring of administrative system, creating space for public participation, creating space for civil society and creating an integrated system system for service delivery Govt of Pakistan (National Reconstruction Bureau: 2001).

Devolution Plan, 2001, Public Participation and People Empowerment in KP

Consequent upon report of NRB, local government system was established in KP through an ordinance known as local government ordinance of NWFP or (LGO 2001). This was different from rest of the LG system of 1959 and 1979. This was not mere political devolution at local level, but along with political devolution, financial resources and administrative powers were also devolved to local level. Districts were made powerful; 17 departments were devolved along with financial and administration. Tehsil tier headed by elected Tehsil Nazim was mandated with municipal services. Union Council was the lowest tier consisting of Nazim, Naib azim, general councilors, kissan, women and minority council. This act as electoral college for District Nazim, Naib Nazim, Tehsil Nazim and Naib Nazim. Other marginalized groups like peasants, workers, minorities and women were also given representation. Provisions were made for community participation like CCBos and CSO, School Management Committees, Public Safety Commissions, Informal system of justice like family and reconciliation courts, Insaaf Committees and

Musalihat Anjuman (Alternative Dispute Resolution Committees). Main aim was to ensure community and people participation, governance and development should be bottom up and increasing citizens say and voice in decision making process. (NRB 2000). 2013 KP local government system was almost replica of 2001 devolution plan as same service delivery departments along with resources were devolved at local level.

Community Participation and Empowerment under LG system of KP

Participation of local people in local governance is very beneficial both community and local institutions. Empowerment range from access to information, role in accountability, inclusion and participation and capacity building of local organization, (Narayan, 2002). According to Bardhan and Mookherjee (1999) if proper care is not taken, decentralisation and more representatives at local level may not be beneficial, may result in elite capture or clientelist politics. Platteau and Gaspart, (2004) are of the opinion that LG is prone to elite capture where political parties are less organized at grass roots level, people are less integrated and there is lack of motivation for political participation and civic engagement.

Devolution plan and consequent elections were good step political empowerment, participation and better service delivery. Powers were devolved at local level to the elected officials, however, empowering local elected officials is one step, next level is how to empower the local community as ultimate aim of development is to devolve governance and development related powers to the local level. There are many mechanisms like participation in developmental activities, access to information, strengthening community organization etc. People participation and community involvement was lacking. People were not involved in development process, service delivery and decision making. This is evident both at policy level and in practice. People are not part of governance but rather mere bystanders. Though CCBO was there but was not materialized and facilitated and LGA 2013 completely ignored it. Participatory budgeting and community consultation in formulation of budgeting is another important step in this respect. There is no such arrangement either in law nor in practice.

Community involvement in execution of development project is very essential. There are many instances where community involvement has produced good results. One such is community driven local development (CDLD) which is implemented through European Union. Quality of work is excellent, rates are low, and satisfactory level of

community is very high when compared to the rates of projects implemented by the government department through contract system. One of District Naib Nazim Dir Upper opined that:

“We have a say in identification of project but don’t have any role in its executions. Work executed is of low quality, there are complaints of kickbacks. On other hand project tune to the same amounts being executed by community driven local development (CDLD) are completed timely with good quality and short time as these projects are executed by the community themselves. Similarly, on farm water management and soil conservation departments are performing well in execution of project as community involvement is an integral part of it and hence, we have allocated maximum amount for this department”.

District Education officer female Abbottabad was also optimistic about results of community involvement. She was of the opinion that since introduction of Parent Teacher Council (PTC) model, school management basic infrastructure like boundary walls, play grounds, provision of drinking water, construction of additional class rooms has witnessed improvement. We can construct a room with cost of eight lac while cost of same room is 30 lacs as per contract system. We have the liberty to purchase equipments with low costs in short time. Similarly, with proactive engagement of community, students and teacher attendance has improved.

All LG members were of the opinion that that work executed through PTC and CDLD are of good quality compared to the works executed by the civil works department. Ex District Nazim Abbotabad that community is lacking here and most the projects are not as per need nor properly executed. He was of the opinion that projects with less than 30 lacs should be executed through community and even for bigger projects, community must have a role in identification and monitoring.

Access to Information and Accountability under LG system of KP

Public or community accountability is more appropriate at community level as local government institutions are closer to the people and hence more accessible for people. Civil societies are given roles and integrated with local government system. People are organized through community organization and ample space is provided for participation.

Ex Tehsil Nazim Abbotabad pointed out that we lack this culture of accountability. Representative institutions are weak, people lack motivation for civic and political activism. There is no formal provision

for community involvement in Local government institutions. They don't have any say in budget making, policy making or policy implementations.

In absence of formal mechanism, there is an informal system in our society. Society in KP is very integrated and there are strong social bonds. LG members are supposed to participate in marriages, jirga, funerals, and other social gatherings where people have easy access to them. Deputy Commissioner Abbotabad opined that society in KP is more integrated socially. There is string of informal mechanism which govern the relation between elites and non-elites. People have easy access to parliamentarian, LG members and even government officials. Though society is more integrated, LG members are more accessible to people, but LG members are hold accountable as per preference of local people. Local people are more interested that LG members should attend in funerals, marriages jirgas and should help them out in thana, kachari etc. Improving service delivery is not a priority per se.

In absence of formal accountability or community participation mechanism, election and voting process is the alone such big tool to have check on LG institutions. For this to be effective it is essential that voters are free from many social and biradari bond, are more active, have civic sense and spirit of political activism. For improved governance, voters must have the ability to vote above petty lines and should have more interest in service delivery, transparency. While going through primary and secondary data it was found that voting pattern and behaviour is also determined by thana kachari, civil works and gham shadi. Our cultural norms and social structure have deep imprints on voting behaviour and majority of both LG members and voters operate within same mechanism. The performance of members is judged with same parameter. Ex District Nazim Dir Upper was of the opinion that it is the social networking ability of the candidates which is essential for winning election. As people expect that public representative should listen to them should, help them out in court kachari. And vote for the one who is better connected with people on the one hand and better connected with politicians, parliamentarians, party heads, police, lawyers and bureaucracy at district and higher level.

One of the development practitioner Ms Rashida opined that people have not raised above petty issues and still tradition and locked up in close culture. There is lack political awareness and sense of social and political activism. Consistent election at local level could have produced real representative leaders but LG election have not been held regularly. On a question from District Nazim Abbotabad, he told that most of our time is consumed in attending to day to issues like thana kachari, jirga and

gham and shadi. We have very little time left for policy making. Service delivery is one of our last priority.

People accessibility varies from tier to tier. District tier is more empowered for service delivery but at same it not that much accessible. District and Tehsil Nazim, Naib Nazim have more areas to administered and more issues to attend to and hence less available for common people. On other hand Union councils and VCs/NCs are closer to the people and hence more accessible and more accountable. LGA 2013 has further narrowed down the geographical areas of UC to village level and hence more representation for peoples. Ms Rashida opined that in the 2013 KP LG, the basic tier of village & neighborhood was more accessible than other tiers. Most elected councilors were known to people, and their proximity also increased access. However, village council as such were not empowered to deal with health and education. These subjects were devolved in both LG system these were domain of district tiers. UC or VC/NC were not empowered to dealt with budget making or personnel management. They were not given even any monetary role in this respect.

Women empowerment and participation in public, social and political life is one of the important challenges in Pakistan and KP and therefore it was one of the integral parts of LGO 2001 and LGA 2013 where 33 percent of share in each tiers of government was reserved for women. Women were directly elected at UC, VC and NC level while rest of them were nominated for Tehsil and district tier. This was good development and a larger number of women were elected in different tiers of government. However, in practice its impact has been minimum. One of the participants, who happened to be members of district council, pointed out that most of that it was very limited and role was constrained by local culture. Even they were ignored in the district councils. Most of the women candidates were not attending meeting of councils and were least interested in debate.

Miss Rashida pointed out that most of them were elected as faceless. In most of the cases even name of women candidates was not mentioned and were reflected as wife, mother and daughter of such and such person. Ex district Nazim of Dir Upper was of the opinion that this is another unfortunate part of our culture. Most of the women nominated were just for the number games. The LG system has not produced real or true women leaders. Those who were elected were did not participate in sessions and debates. This is fact that without other enabling environment, mere quota for women at each tier of government can't produce the desired results.

Way Forward

(UNDP, 2016) has developed integrated development at local level where all stakeholder's local government, decentralized sectors, community-based organizations, civil society and private sector are involved for local development. This framework provides an integrated mechanism with network for accountability, inclusive decision making which result in improved service delivery and resilient state society relationship. World bank (2005) has framed a framework for local development and better service delivery. It has integrated the decentralised departments, sectors, local government institutions and community organizations. Core elements of this framework are empowerment of local people through local governance. In Bangladesh, ample efforts are made to ensure people participation and specifically the lowers tier UP Union Parishad is more inclusive in this respect where multiple avenues are available as such for both direct and indirect participation. For direct participation, there assemblies of people at each ward level known as Ward Sheva. People participate in open budget sessions and standing committees. Similarly, Assemblies of Women are organized at each ward level. Budget are participatory where citizens are engaged in meaningful debate for expenditure on priority basis, two sessions are organized each year (Uddin, 2019).

Going through primary and secondary data, it was found that people participation and empowerment was lacking in every tier of local government. Though provisions were made for in devolution plan 2000 but it was never made functional. LGA 2013 is completely absent about his very important component. People are neither organized into community organizations nor are community organizations given any role. Similarly, civil society is completely detached from local governance and development process. First people at at each village and mulla level should be organized into community organizations like CCBOs and these CCBOs should be mad integral part of local governance system. Civil society organizations should be encouraged and should be provided proper role in LG system. Community organization at each village and mahalla village should be registered and they should be given the role in execution of developmental schemes.

Budget should be more open and before its finalization, at least two open should be made mandatory. This will help in generation of revenues at local level and would help in effective utilization of und. Accountability mechanism of service delivery department is less effective. Though there are committees at council level but most of them are

dysfunctional. These committees should be made more proactive and should have representation of from community and civil society. Similarly, at facility level, members of civil society should be made an integral part of management committees.

VCs and NCs are closer to the people and provide an ideal place for community participation. Most of the development budget should be diverted to this tier and its members be empowered to look after each service delivery department at NC/VC level. This is the ideal place for community engagement and direct participation and hence community organization should register at village council. Instead of contract system, developmental projects need to be executed through community organizations.

Election of women members at each tier, though a good step, has not produced the required results. Our strong patriarchal system and our culture is till creating hurdles. This evident from the fact in most areas' women participation has been nominal. Therefore, in addition to women members, dedicated women organizations are needed at each tiers. There should be assembly of women at each NC/VC level with availability of funds and other responsibilities. These women organizations should be provided required facilities and fund to play effective role for rights and awareness of women.

Conclusion

Local governance is the appropriate tier for meaningful participation and empowerment of local community. Successful models have been developed to ensure participation of people in local governance and local development. People empowerment and participation at local level is helpful in building strong state society relationship, efficient and equitable distribution of resources and effective service delivery. LGO 2001 and LGA 2013 we were instrumental in devolving powers and resources to the local government in effective manner. However, community participation and empowerment were the missing links. Though provisions were made for different stakeholders in 2001 but they were not materialized in true spirit. This aspect was completely ignored in LGA 2013. There is need for meaningful participation and empowerment of local people in Local governance system and for this purpose necessary amendments are needed in LGA 2013, rules of business framed under it. Developmental schemes need to be executed on pattern of CDLD and PTC. Mere election of women is not enough in a patriarchal society like ours and must be supported by other steps like Assembly of women at each

VC/NC level. People at each village, Muhalla level need to be organized through different community originations and these organization should be empowered for identification, execution of funds, should involve in accountability of service delivery departments.

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