

Institutionalization and Sustainability of Local Government System through Civic Education and Citizens' Engagement

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Editorial

Sustainability and institutionalization of Local Government System is essential for ensuring true spirit of decentralization and citizens' involvement for policy change. Citizens' voices must be heard through institutionalized and sustainable LGS in Pakistan.

Historically, Local Government system was introduced and established under the Local Government Act 2001 in EX-Chief of Army Staff and ex-president of Pakistan General Pervaiz Musharraf. After, 2008 elections in the government of ruling party PPP the LG system was demolished. Simultaneously, Local Government Act 2013 was formulated later on after amendments LG Act 2015 is now adopted. Currently, Local Government elections are completed in Punjab and KP provinces. The sole purpose of Local Government Ordinance 2015 which gives indications regarding implementation of Local Government System. The sole purpose of Local Government system is to institutionalize citizens' participation through institutionalized local governance system apart of this, to devolve administrative, political and financial responsibility and authority to the local governments. Now, there is question again either Local Government system will be able to institutionalized and sustainable or may be demolished by the next ruling government. Certain questions emerged regarding the sustainability and institutionalization of local government, devolution of financial and legislation decision making powers and authorities to local governments, actual participation of citizens from the grass root level, accountability and transparency in functioning of devolved legislative and financial powers.

Rationally, local government system provides foundations for, government by the people and for the people through citizenry approach. Local Government provides means and ways for providing and improving government services according to the needs of citizens. Devolved governance system solve the issues of non-accessibility to services and decision makers. This is the system through which citizens are convey their voices and demands and this the system through which their needs and demands may be fulfill by the authorities. Thereby, institutionalization and sustainability of local government system matters for pro-poor, vulnerable and marginalized who don't have access to government services and resources. Local government system provides corridor of opportunity for citizens' inclusion through participating in policy level decision making according to the needs and demands of citizens.

Brief review of LGO, 2015 (amended 2013) is explained below;

It is clearly elaborated in the Local Government Ordinance 2015 that, the local governments established under this Act will function within the Provincial framework and shall faithfully observe the Federal and Provincial laws. In the performance of their functions, the

local governments shall not impede the exercise of the executive authority of the Government who is Governor and Chief Minister. Working under the provincial framework indicates the supremacy of provinces in decision making and legislating with lesser devolution of local governments. This means that local governments are dependent on provinces in financial, administrative and legislative matters which mean no devolution of local governments.

Subject to the local government Ordinance (amended 2013) 2015, the composition of local government consist of union council and district council. Union council will constitute of chairman and vice chairman and with members while district council will constitute of chairman, vice chairman, the Chief Officer and with members. Subjects to the Local Government Ordinance 2015; the Election Commission shall delimit and notify the Union Councils and wards on the basis of the principles laid down in sections 9 and 10 and, as nearly as possible, under the Delimitation of Constituencies Act, 1974 (XXXIV of 1974) or any other Act of the Majlis-e-shoora (Parliament). Subject to the local government act 2013 the Chairman of a District Council is the executive head of the District Council and the Vice Chairman shall perform the functions of the Chairman when the Chairman is unable to perform his functions on account of absence or for any other reason, The Chief Officer shall coordinate and facilitate the performance of functions assigned to the District Council under supervision of the Chairman.

Subject to the local government ordinance (amended 2013) 2015, devolution of education authority and health authority will occur at the local governments' level. For that, chairman, vice chairman and chief executive officer will be appointed. The district education authority may solve issues but not limited to finances and administrative governance related with education at the district level. It will ensure free and compulsory education for children of the age from five to sixteen years as required under Article 25-A of the Constitution. Poor management of schools, lack of infrastructure facilities, lack of budget for education institutions, absence of teachers, lack of school management are the issues facing by the vulnerable and marginalized class citizen which may be solved by the district education authority. Likewise, district health authority may solve the issues but not limited to poor management and governance of health institutions, lack of budget for the health institutions, poor infrastructure facilities of health institutions and absence of health management and staff. Furthermore, if the district health and education authority established then it may be accessible and approachable for common citizens and particularly for vulnerable and marginalized class of citizens for the solution of issues. District education authority will help to promote accountability and transparency in the provision of services to the citizens furthermore, it may give help in redress of grievances of

citizens related with health and education institutions and health and education services providers at the district level.

Furthermore, Punjab local government commission at the provincial level may provide necessary hand on support in ensuring accountability of transparency of services of local governments at the district level. The Punjab local government commission may be as an icon for smoothing functioning and coordination between department of government and local governments at the district level and facilitation in the performance of Provincial departmental functions of the decentralized offices, relating to policy analysis, oversight, checks and balances, capacity building and coordination through the Commission. Along with this, the local government board shall make appointments, order transfers, take disciplinary action and deal with other service matters in respect of the members of the prescribed local government service cadre.

Subject to the local government ordinance (amended 2013) 2015, the Punjab Finance Commission shall make recommendations to the Government on a formula for resource distribution including-distribution between the Government and the local governments out of the proceeds of the Provincial Consolidated Fund into a Provincial. Retained Amount and a Provincial Allocable Amount to be called Punjab Finance Commission Award.

Citizens' engagement and participation in decision making, planning and implementation always remained a critical gap. However, this may be through the establishment and sustainable institutionalization of local government system which may ensure citizens' participation in decision making, planning and implementation at the local governments. Citizens' voices may be heard and citizens' rights may be protected through the institutionalized and sustainable local government system. The local government system is window of opportunity for citizens to raise their voices for improving good governance and ensuring accountability in the provision of services. The local government system is as an icon of light in ensuring civic engagement through citizens' participation at the policy making and implementation level.

Capacity and performance issues are always remained critical gap in the exercise of functions by the entities of local government at the policy making and implementation level. It may be the prime responsibility of provincial and national government to build the capacity of union council and district council management for the smooth functioning of their services. Although, it is not mentioned in the local government act 2015 for the capacity building of chairman and vice chairman for the appropriate functioning of their services particularly in policy making and implementation. There must have concrete plan for the capacity building of elected LG representative in order to assuming their offices. Elected representatives must be trained on budgeting planning and execution, triggering local issues and reporting of issues at various levels of local government.

Citizens' engagement through civic education is critical gap in the local government ordinance 2015. Although, there is representation

from women, youth, minority and disables community but there is need to define mechanisms for involvement of rest of community members through civic education. Communities must have knowledge and information regarding functioning of local government, role and responsibilities of elected representatives, grievances redress mechanism or complaint registration system and feedback process. This may be possible through conduction of awareness raising seminars, capacity building workshops, and orientation sessions by the elected representatives in respective constituencies. There is urgent need of public awareness raising through the elected representatives and media regarding the role and responsibilities of elected local government representatives at the union council and district level.

It is not elaborated in the local government act (amended 2013) 2015 with respect to redress and handling of grievances or complaints by the local government at the district level as no "mechanisms or organized system" are explained solely for the redress of grievances with appropriate feedback process. It is universal phenomena that systematic gaps may be improve through appropriate citizens' or consumers' feedback. It is necessary that services must be check through the consumers or the services users those who are utilizing services. It is understood that citizens can give appropriate feedback regarding the effectiveness or the true implementation of policy actions. Therefore, it is mandatory to establish "grievances redress mechanisms" at the union council and district council level with appropriate feedback process. When we talk about establishment of health and education authorities then automatically make sense to establish grievance redress mechanisms for the citizens particularly those who don't have access to high level decision makers.

Rationally, sustainability and institutionalization of Local Government System is essential for ensuring true spirit of decentralization and citizens' involvement for policy change. Citizens' voices must be hear through institutionalize and sustainable LGS in Pakistan. Capacity building of elected LG representatives is demand of transparency and accountability for the successful implementation of LGS in Pakistan. Therefore, health, education authorities must be institutionalize and sustainable at the local level. There must have minimum involvement of bureaucracy for the transparent establishment of these authorities' which matters for citizens, is the solution for improved good governance. But, unfortunately, public policies are made, governed and implemented by the bureaucratic system of Pakistan as our political system is not technically expert in policies making. We urge to the national and provincial authorities to closely monitor the implementation of local government ordinance (amended 2013) 2015 through immediate devolution of health and education authorities at the local level. All citizens must be equally involved in the functioning of local government without political parties' affiliation and constituencies division of opposite political parties. Local government system must be implemented across Pakistan.