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Factors Affecting Service Delivery System at Local Level: An Analysis of KP Local Government System

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ABSTRACT

Local government system, being closer to the people, is best suited for local development, better public management and service delivery. Efficient and functional service delivery system is contingent upon many factors like conducive environment, political will, social activism, voter awareness, community empowerment, proactive role of civil society and training of local government members. However, due to frequent disruptions and experimentations, local government institutions have not evolved in KP specifically and Pakistan generally. In 2001, uniform Local government system was established in Pakistan with high dreams and goals. The existing structure of governance and administration was shaken and reformed. Service delivery departments were devolved, powers and finances shifted to district level. Despite this transformation, quality of service delivery and management of health and education facilities are still far from satisfactory. This manuscript finds that clientelism, narrow local interest, voting behavior, elite capture, lack of empowerment; public accountability and marginal role of CSOs have influenced service delivery. The study is qualitative in nature where secondary and primary sources have been used and interpreted for the case in hand. Participants are purposively selected from range from local elected officials, reps of civil society and heads of service delivery departments. Thematic analysis is used for data analysis.



Introduction

Local government is a kind of self-government where local interests are best articulated, people trust is maintained, and state to people contact is developed (Osborn and Gablier, 1992). It is flexible, innovative, gives better representation to different segments and tribes, minorities, and provides greater opportunities for political participation (Rondinelli & Cheema, 1983).

According to UNDP (1993), development is not an isolated process rather it is about people, woven around people and not the other way round. Development is sustainable when people have a voice in decision-making process and are not mere bystander. Manor (1999) argues that decentralization is effective in poverty-reduction and human development as it is closer to people, is more accessible, service delivery system is better managed and implemented, it is accountable, transparent and ensures public participation and community development. LG is more accountable and responsive, helps in innovation, improves public services delivery, and ensures equitable budget.

First local government system was introduced by General Ayub Khan in 1959 known as Basic Democracies and was reflective of Ayub Khan philosophy of democracy. It acted as local government and Electoral College at same time. LG system was again introduced by General Zia in 1979 and remained functional till 1989. Two tier system was established and role of bureaucracy was minimized as councils were to be headed by elected chairpersons, (Khan, 2009).

LGO 2001 was unique in the sense that along with political reforms, whole bureaucratic and service delivery departments were shaken, reformed and established on new lines. Three tier system was established where political leaderships was made executive for the first time at local level. Elected officials were empowered vis-à-vis the bureaucracy, women and marginalized communities were empowered and hence service delivery system was brought closer to the people (Cheema and Mohmand, 2003).

In 2001 uniform local government systems were established in Pakistan for the third time. 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, Naibazim, general councilors, kisan, women and minority council. Marginalized groups like peasants, workers, minorities and women were given representation. Provisions were made for community participation in shape of CCBOs and CSOs, School Management Committees, Public Safety Commissions, Informal system of justice like family and reconciliation courts, Insaaf Committees and Alternative Dispute Resolution Committees. 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.

In general election 2013, Pakistan Tehrik Insaf established its own government. As per its manifesto, the government passed another act in 2013, elections were held on 30th May 2015. This new system was almost a replica of the old 2001 system. As per provision of constitution and spirit of devolution, necessary financial, legal and administrative powers were devolved to the district government.

Despite these local government reforms, service delivery at the door steps still remained ineffective. This article addresses the question: how did nature of local politics influence service delivery system under local governance in KP?

Literature Review

A considerable body of literature is available regarding the role of local government in human development. Some scholars argue that it creates a positive impacts while other link it with certain conditions and argue that, in absence of conducive environment, it may be less effective and wastage of resources. Without certain conditions and conducive environment, devolution is not helpful for service delivery and local development. Faguet (2003), in his study regarding impacts of decentralization in developing countries, has concluded that as compared to the central government, local government is more responsive to the needs of the poor. Jutting et al (2004) are of the opinion that factors like sufficient resources, strong civil society, access to important information, and community participation have positive impacts on poverty reduction. On other hand elite capture, low participation, lack of political will have negative impacts.

According to Bardhan and Mookherjee (1999), decentralization is a complex process and may not be beneficial at every state. The political distortion that affects central government may also be more visible at local level. It is not essential that mere proximity of citizen and election of more representatives at local level may improve service delivery and public accountability. Elite capture or clientelistic politics may be more dominant at local level if proper care is not taken. Platteau and Gaspart (2004) argue that local government is very susceptible to elite capture as political parties are less organized at grass roots level, common people are less integrated and lack awareness and motivation for political participation and civic engagement.

Taj and Baker (2018) argue that local government under devolution plan of 2001 was part of comprehensive reorganization on part of military regime of general Musharraf. These reforms could not produce the desired result as local government system was introduced in haste, institutional set up changed abruptly and Local Government members lacked the training and capacities. There was lack of harmony between federal, provincial and district level government.

Easterly (2003) in his article, “political economy of growth with-out 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. Keefer et al (2003) while studying local government system after 2001, are of the view that politician are 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.

Liaqat et al. (2019) identified the voting behavior of preference of voter in Punjab during local government election of 2015. In their detailed study and findings, they have come to the conclusion that voter prefer those candidates who are more connected with local bureaucracy, MPAs/MNAs and provincial party leadership. This connection means more and more access to power corridor for them. Candidates having local connection may help them in provision of goods and services, may help them out in court, thana/kacheri etc.

Factors Impacting Service Delivery

Clientelesim

In societies divided on tribal, biradari and ethnic lines, votes are casted on basis of these loyalties. In such societies and state, public representatives are least interested in service delivery. Voting pattern in KP is quite different in many respects. Voters of KP are mostly independent which is evident from the fact that mostly they have voted for different political parties in different elections. Clientelesim is prevalent in provision of services and goods and political bosses at national and provincial level are allocating funds as per political needs and expediencies. Local government system is not immune from it.

Compare to national and provincial level election, Clientelesim in term of public resources is not very effective in determining the election results in local government system. This is not due to the fact that LG members are allocating resources as per merit; rather they have very limited resources available at their disposal. One of the UC Nazims from Dir Upper told that during Mushraf era, he was given from two to four lac development funds per annum while people had many expectations like street pavement, drinking water supply, roads and improvement in schools and BHUs. It was impossible to keep so many people happy with this meager amount. Similarly, Ex District Nazim Dir Upper opined that LGO 2001 was created with great hope and expectation. During initial year, a lot of developmental fund was provided but later on when provincial government was elected, funds were diverted back to provincial government. It was difficult to fulfill the need of whole district with this reduced amount.

However most of the developmental fund were spend on street pavement, roads, drinking water supply schemes. Very limited fund from their discretion was spent on health and education services. Under 2013 LGA, 55% developmental funds were put on the discretion of LG members and most the amount were spent on infrastructure developments other than health and education services.

From interview with LG members and developmental experts, it was found that LG members were to be judged on traditional parameters like social net-working, role in jirga, how they can help their voters in Thana and Tehsil, and can stand with them in adversity and other ceremonial occasion. In KP, the society is either tribal rural, or divided on tribal, biradari and familial lines. While going through primary data it was evident that votes are gained on the basis of typical kind of biradari and tribal politics. However, it was evident that vote purchasing is not practiced. No evidence was found in this respect.

They vote in individual capacities for a particular candidate having some specific qualities. These qualities include that LG members are well connected and may help them in difficult times. They vote for individuals who are powerful enough who can protect them against police, can provide help in, revenue administration, Thana kachari. Ex District Nazim Charsada was of the opinion that:

“Social networking abilities of members are very essentials. The ones who are better connected with police, local administration, MPAs, MNAs, are more popular in their villages and local wards and may have better chances for election and reelection. Mostly people of a village, or family biradari join hand to vote for a particular candidate. The demand list mostly includes developmental works of many kinds like construction of schools, hospitals, roads, drinking water schemes, street pavement and sanitation services”.

Biradari or family plays a very dominant role in election process. Most of the district Nazimeens belong to well established political families. Political parties do have a role, but they have to operate within dynamics of family and biradari system. No party can ignore this role. Due to predominant role of family and Biradari, few families dominate political parties.

While going through literature review and primary data, it is evident that subject of human development is very rare in our political discourse. Local government elections are not fought on agenda of human development nor votes casted on same basis. While asking from different social activist, LG members, and government officials, they were of the opinion that LG members were least interested in improving service delivery system particularly health and education. LG members were mostly pursuing narrow interest.

On a query from one of UC Nazim and district members in Dir Upper, he told that

“Most of our time is spent in Jirgas, Thana kachari, ghammi/shaadi. We woke up in the morning only to see our hujra filled with guests who are asking for our help in different land, family feuds, thana khachari. As we to get votes from the people and hence we must have to fulfill their demands. As people are not demanding any such thing related to human development and they don't cast vote on these criteria so we are least interested”.

Asking the input of one of the District Officers Education Abbotabad, he told clearly that LG members were less interested in real service delivery challenges like allocating funds, improving the infrastructure, building new schools or improving the quality of education or ensuring teacher attendance. They were mostly interested in transfer posting of the teachers. Same was the opinion of District Officer Health Abbotabad.

This pattern of voting behavior and clientelistic nature of politics relationship is against norms of functional democracy, parameters of good governance and against the notion of equality of citizens and fair distribution of resources. While it is a prevalent phenomenon in both national and local politics, its adverse impacts are very common in local politics. Local government is more prone to it as at district, Tehsil and village level, politics become more and more localized. Party politics, party manifesto, and ideological lines are blurred. Family bonds, tribal loyalties, and local identities and likes and dislikes are more pervasive at local level. Moreover, resources are less, needs are many and LG members have to cater for the needs of many people with little resources.

Elite Capture

The phenomena of elite capture are very common in developing world and is observed at both national and local level. Elite capture can be in terms of seat capture, resources capture or services capture.

The phenomenon of elite capture in terms seat capture was more common in KP. Almost all of the District Nazimeen in three district under study were from local influential families having long history in politics. Union Councils Naziemeen were also from local influential families. However, members of UCs and VCs/NCs were from lower and marginalized classes.

The amount and degree of resources captured by the elite in local government is minimum. One of the reasons is that local government has been disrupted time and again and hence elite have not strengthen their grip. Resource allocation to the local government by the federal or provincial government has been minimum over the years. Most the funds are allocated or spend either at federal or provincial level. Moreover, local governments have not generated their own resources. Barring few metropolitan cities like Karachi, Lahore or Peshawar, most the districts don't have

their own resources and mostly depend on funds transferred from either federal or provincial government. Local governments are either not empowered to collect taxes or they have no capacities for effective tax collection. Tax regime in Pakistan is hugely tilted in favour of federal government as custom, federal excise, income tax and sales tax are collected by federal government through Federal Board of Revenue. In absence of resources, powers to impose taxes, or regulated taxes, local governments have very little available for manipulation by elite capture.

Elite capture in respect of service delivery on part of elected representatives is also minimum. Most of the service delivery departments are regulated by the provincial government, funds are allocated at provincial level and even infrastructure like Schools and Health facilities are built by provincial government. Politicians at national and provincial level are diverting resources at their own will to few districts or even to few constituencies within districts. Planning commission or planning department are subservient to political bosses and distribute resources at their sweet will. In this whole process, local government institutions or LG members have very little say in resource allocation, planning and utilization of funds. Though budget-making of devolved departments is the responsibility of local council, but its guidelines and regulation are determined by the provincial government. Local councils have less number of resources and room or space to manipulate these resources as they are bounded by strict regulation. One District Naib Nazim complained that:

“Provincial governments have tied their hands by too much regulation; we have no discretion and hence cannot spend fund as per local needs. There are chances of misuse if allowed freely, but with so much regulation, we are deprived of any initiatives at local level. If we have free hands, we will utilize it for public good as ultimately, we are responsible to the public”.

Similarly, appointment and posting transfer of service delivery departments are regulated at provincial level. Earlier, appointments were made on political basis but now appointments above Class IV are made by either Public Service Commission or through recruiting agencies like National Testing Service and ETEA etc. Though there are chances of misuse or corrupt practices, mostly there is merit. Local governments have no powers in this respect and hence cannot be blamed for any misuse.

Community Participation and Empowerment

Without community participation and empowerment, local government system is incomplete. Narayan, 2002 argues that inclusion, participation, role in accountability and access to information are essential ingredients of empowerment.

Ample provision were provided for community empowerment and participation in devolution plan of 2000 like CCBOs and CSOs, School Management Committees, Public Safety Commissions, Informal system of justice like family and reconciliation courts, Insaaf Committees and Musalihat Anjuman (Alternative Dispute Resolution Committees).

Community involvement and participation in developmental projects have produced good results in KP. Community driven local development (CDLD) project implemented in few districts of KP, has produced very encouraging results as quality of works is good, cost of execution cost is low and public satisfaction level is high compared with similar projected executed through contract system. One of District Naib Nazim Dir Upper opined that civil works executed by government department through contract system is of low quality and major share spent on kickbacks while similar projects executed through community through CDLD are more durable transparent, with low cost and high public satisfaction. District Education officer female Abbotabad appreciated the role of community participation in school management committees, Parent Teacher Council (PTC)

as with this model school management has improved and basic infrastructure like construction of additional class rooms, playground, drinking water supply, play grounds and boundary walls have been completed with low cost and good quality.

Community empowerment, role of civil societies and community organizations are completely missing in practice. Though provisions were made, however these were never materialized, as people were not empowered, community engagement and participation was lacking on ground.

Accountability

Being closer and more accessible to the people, Local government is more appropriate for public accountability. It has two aspects. On one hand, LG members are empowered to hold the service delivery department accountable and, other hand, people are supposed to hold the LG intuitions including them as accountable as well. Though people in individual capacity may play roe in accountability, but usually community organizations and civil societies are given due role for this purpose. For the purpose of accountability both system of LGO 2001 and LGA 2013 were sufficiently empowered to exercise this right through different mechanisms with council in and through different committees. Most of the tools for oversight and accountability were available with LG institutions and LG members. Ex District Nazim Dir Upper was all praise for devolution plan. He told being chief executive of the district he provided leadership to the whole District, implemented government policies and programmes with success and efficiency. He was optimistic that devolution plan was for better than the previous system where district Nazim and LG were empowered and they performed to their capacities.

Ex District Nazim Abbotabad opined that though District council had sufficient powers to regulate the departments we could not accomplish this task in true spirit. Members of the councils were not trained enough, were not aware of their powers and responsibilities. They were unable to handle the seasoned officers of the departments who were well versed with rules and regulations. District Naib Nazim Dir Upper under 2013 system was less optimistic as, according to his opinion, district council was more effective during budget session, but for rest of the sessions, district councils members were least interested to participate. Most of the debates revolved around constituency issues, and service delivery related issues were seldom discussed. He also lamented the negative attitudes of the head of departments as they were not cooperative enough and mostly concealed the facts, misled the members. Assistant Director local government Dir Upper who was also secretary district council under 2013 system told that hardly any meeting of standing committees has been held. Most of the committees were non- functional.

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. One of the development practitioner MsRashida 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

NazimAbbotabad, he told that most of our time is consumed in attending to day to issues like thanakachari, jirga and gham and shaadi. We have very little time left for policy making. Service delivery is one of our last priority.

Way Forward

(UNDP, 2016) has developed integrated development at local level where all stakeholders local government, decentralized sectors, community based organizations, civil society and private sector are involved for local development.

This framework provide 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 decentralized departments, sectors, local government institutions and community organizations. Core elements of this framework are empowerment of local people through local governance.

Though LGO 2001 was effective system but it was introduced all of a service delivery system was constrained by many factors and foremost was clientelistic culture. This culture is very dominant. There is lack of awareness on part of voters. They vote on particular line keeping in view the traditional performance of LG members.

Frequent disruption, different models, and experimentations have badly influenced evolution of LG institutions. Local government system need continuity. Sufficient powers and resources should be placed at the disposal of local governance. Continuity in local governance system and democracy within political culture should be ensured and this can minimize the phenomena of elite capture.

The performance of LG system is directly linked with performance of LG members. They need proper orientations and trainings. The local councils should be strengthened. The committee system should be made more regulars and its constitution and regulars meeting should be made binding. Similarly minimum time should be fixed for council meetings.

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 each village and muhalla level should be organized into community organizations like CCBOs and these CCBOs should be mad integral part of local governance system. Civil society organizations are integral part of modern governance system. These 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.

LG members need proper training and orientation as they are the one who run the system. with quality training and exposure, they can be sensitized in this respect.

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.

Each public facility should be managed by management committees and LG members should be its essential members.

Women participation should be more meaningful and this only possible when women at local level are organized. One women members would not have any impact. There should be an assembly of women.

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 be registered at village council. Instead of contract system, developmental projects need to be executed through community organizations.

Conclusion

Local government system is essential for service delivery. However, mere empowerment and closeness to local community is not enough for functional system. It would have little impacts, if there is lack of popular participation, social activism, voters awareness, functional accountability mechanism and lack of training of LG members. Similarly, more spread of population, less transfer of resources/devolution of powers, lack of political ownership, and will from above may have negative consequences. Nature of politics, local preferences, role of local elites is also crucial.

In Pakistan, Local government institutions have not evolved to fulfill service delivery in a befitting manner. Earlier systems were not comprehensive enough and were not empowered for service delivery. Devolution plan was more comprehensive, detailed and tailored to the need of efficient service delivery. Given the powers, resources and restructuring, this system has not lived upto the expectation, though marginal improvement has been observed. While conducting research, it was observed that nature of politics has influenced the function of local government system in many ways. The local preferences revolve around petty politics, like participation in gham, shadi, funeral and marriages, helping out voters in thana kachari,. Same pattern is observed in voting behavior as well. LG members lack training and motivation. Their role in leading the service delivery department is limited. Their participation level at district councils, Committee system is also minimum. Though elite capture in term of resources is minimum however, in terms of seat capture, especially at higher level, is more dominant.

To minimize the influence of clientelistic politics, prevailing voting behavior and elite capture, certain interventions are needed in local government system. Development is development of local people and service delivery would be more effective if local people are made active participants of this system. local people need to be organized into local community organizations and these organizations be given proper role in service delivery system and developmental initiatives. Similarly, accountability mechanism of local government institutions be strengthened and it is only possible if civil societies, community organizations and local media are integrated and given appropriate role.

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