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The prospects of new local government system: An empirical study of the local government in District Dera Ismail Khan (DIK)

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The objective of this paper is to study the ground-realities of the system by gathering empirical facts and figures from the real actors of the local government work. Empirical results show that there is a lack of understanding of the system itself by all the users, which is making the system-performance-evaluation more ambiguous, complicated and thus, subject to a variety of interpretations. The regression analysis exposes other variables to determine the system prospects; however, the dominant beta-score of 'popular participation' and 'government intervention' convey a different message. That is, efforts should be made to increase participation but more importantly, a visible mechanism must be put in place to stop government intervention. It is however, worth mentioning that the public is optimistic about the new system and they are enthusiastic about the future of the system provided all the publicly noticed weaknesses and problems of the new system are taken up instantly and uprooted in time.

Key words: Local government, devolution, citizen's participation, transparency, accountability, good governance.

INTRIDUCTION

Devolution of power is one of the most important reforms introduced in Pakistan in recent years. It has brought about a radical transformation in the political and administrative landscape of the country. By taking power and decision-making to the grass roots and promoting community (especially women's) participation in government, devolution can make a significant contribution to good governance and improves service delivery. It is claimed by the policy makers that this system will promote better local representation and leads in the long-term to poverty alleviation.

A number of studies have already evaluated the impact of devolution in Pakistan with mixed results. Some of them positively linked devolution and improved service delivery (World Bank report, 2004) while others showed their

reservation about the positive role of the new local government system (Khan, 2004; Alam, 2004). Surpris-ingly, no research, especially quantitative/ empirical in nature, exists to measure the prospects of the new local government system. The historical perspectives of local government in Pakistan justify the idea, as Pakistan has a poor track record of democracy with long military rule. Military always created the local governments, first in 1959, then in 1979 and now the current devolution plan 2000. In Pakistan, a limited local democracy had always been introduced in order to convey some kind of democratic legitimacy to an authoritarian regime.

The present devolution plan is also a brainchild of military government, which no doubt, brought about a wholesale transformation in Pakistan's system of government, especially at local level. The new local government system reorients administrative system to allow public participation in decision-making. The essence of participation, accountability and better public service this

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system is that these local governments are accountable to their citizens for all their decisions. It enables proactive elements of the society to participate in community work and development related activities (LGO, 2001). It is argued in this paper that, as the basic aim of the devolution exercise was to establish “good governance” at grass roots level, so it depends on the proper implementation of promised principles of the system as envisaged in LGO (2001), such as, 1) community participation 2) accountability and 3) better service delivery. Higher the ratio of popular participation, degree of accountability and transparency, and better service delivery, higher the chances of maintaining good governance at grass roots level. How meaningful is the community participation? How far is the governing body accountable and transparent? What is the level of service delivery? And what is the nature of governance? These are the questions of interest to understand the prospects of the system at grass roots level. Likewise, it is the satisfaction/ dissatisfaction of the masses, which defines the degree of success or failure of the system in qualifying the aforementioned objectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before the popularity of globalization, the world was dominated by strong national governments, and regional governments tended to be either weak or non-existent (Pose and Gill, 2002). At the beginning of the 21st century, this situation changed radically and the globalization was accompanied by a global tendency towards devolution of authority and resources from nation-states to regions and localities that could take on various forms depending upon ‘who was driving the decentralization efforts (Pose and Gill, 2003).’ Consequently, concern of strengthening local government has got momentum in countries of both the developed and developing world (Geddes, 2006). However, the performance of local governments varies considerably due to different demographics (Pose and Gill, 2003). Despite different decentralization initiative of different countries of the world, the decentralization of power to local level is recognized as a process to improve the quality of governance (Rondinelli et al., 1989). Decentralization, according to the UNDP, “is the logical application of the core characteristics of good governance at the sub-national or local levels (Blair, 2000)”. Good governance in turn is one that “ensures accountability; transparency; easy access to information; popular participation in decision making and implementation; responsiveness; efficient delivery of services and goods; rule of law; legitimacy and voice; direction; performance; and fairness (Kaufmann et al., 1999).” Given this, it is argued that the success of the local government depends on the proper implementation of the critical factors of governance, that is, citizen’s delivery.

Popular participation

One of the arguments in favour of local government is that it induces broader participation in democratic governance (Jutting et al., 2004) and enables local level services to be tailored according to local preferences (Gustafsson and Stephen, 2005). A vast body of knowledge exists regarding citizen’s participation at grass roots level. Some studies showed that local government considerably enhanced citizen’s participation in governance (Manor, 1995; Tulchin and Andrew, 2004; Santos, 1998). Other studies conclude lesser popular participation at local level and also highlight factors responsible for it. D’Art and Thomas (2007) argues that a review of every national election in 18 democratic industrialized countries since the 1950s clearly shows that levels of voter turnout have fallen from their immediate postwar levels. For this set of countries, turnout is currently down approximately 10% points from what it was in the early 1950s. In their wide-ranging survey, Rondinelli et al. (1989) stated that decentralization has seldom, if ever, met the expectations. Many decentralization experiments did not live up to expectations. Sometimes non-political factors like poverty and insufficient resources were made responsible for these failures.

Accountability and transparency

Decentralization is also argued to promote accountability and reduce corruption in the government (Nupia, 2006; Ostrom et al., 1993). Decentralized bodies “in comparison to national governments, is more accessible, more sympathetic and quicker to respond to local needs (Faguet and Sanchez, 2006)”. However, the practical experiences of decentralized societies shows mixed results regarding the level of accountability and transparency at local level. Manor (1996) concludes considerable increase in information flows between governments and citizens, enhancing accountability and transparency (Faguet and Sanchez, 2006). Similarly, Blair (2000) argues that democratic decentralization by building popular participation and accountability into local governance; government at the local level is becoming more responsive to citizen desires and more effective in service delivery. Besley et al. (2004a) found that South Indian villages with higher literacy rates were more likely to hold village meetings that discussed resource allocation issues within the village and the actions of local governments. Villages that held meetings targeted public benefits more closely in favor of landless and illiterate individuals by an order of 8 to 10% points. Whereas, other authors, such as Nygren (2005), Anderson (2004) and Larson (2002) are more cautious, arguing broadly that decentralization is more complex and problematic phenomenon.

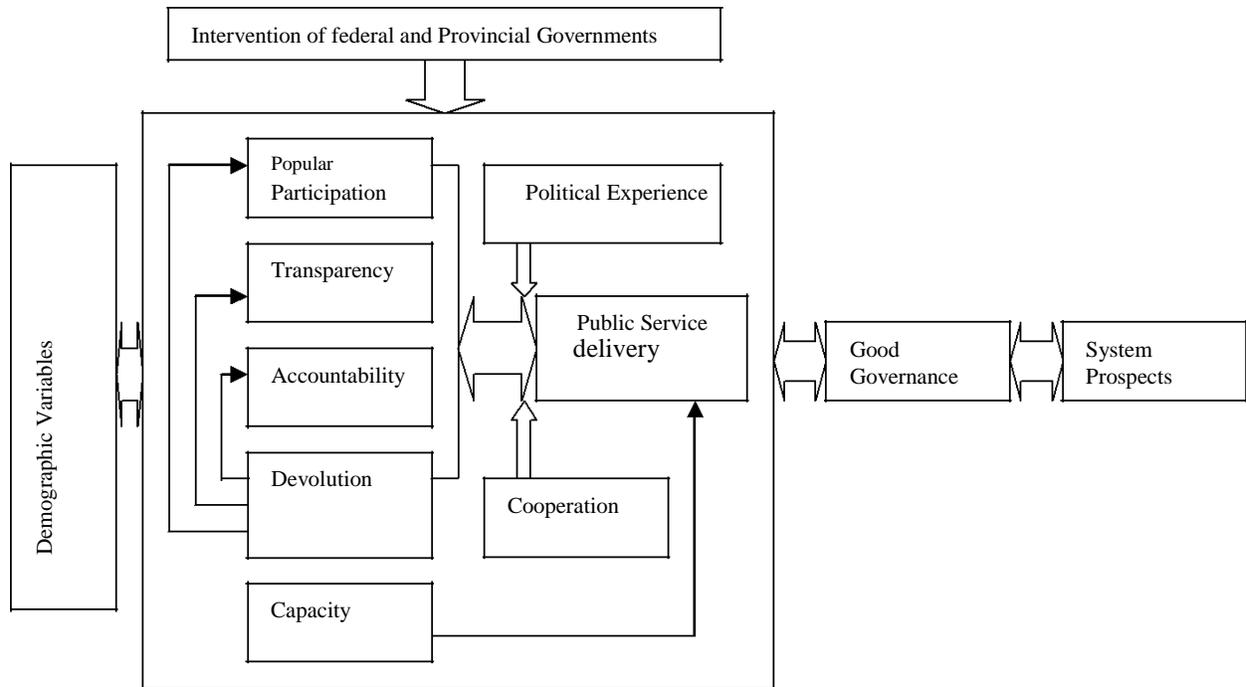


Figure 1. A conceptual model on prospect of new local government system.

Public service delivery

A leading rationale for decentralization is that it can generate financial efficiency and quality gains by devolving resources and decision-making powers to local governments for the delivery of services (World Bank Report, 2004; Kwon, 2003). Being closer to the people, it is assumed that local authorities can more easily identify people's needs, and thus supply the appropriate form and level of public services (Faguet and Sanchez, 2006; Rondinelli et al., 1989). However, the practical experiences of decentralized societies round the world shows mixed results about the extent of public service delivery at local level. The world development report 1994 on infrastructure cited several cases of quality improvement and cost savings in infrastructure projects after local communities were given part of the responsibility in management.

Similarly, Azfar et al. (1999) find positive correlation between decentralization and quality of public service delivery in the field of health and education in some areas of Philippine, whereas, Bird et al. (1995) conclude that public service delivery deteriorated after decentralization in Eastern and Central Europe. Similarly, Wunsch and Olowu (2001) also attribute the failure of decentralization to problems such as the over-centralization of resources, limited transfers to sub-national governments, a weak local revenue base, lack of local planning capacity, limited changes in legislation and regulations, and the absence of meaningful local political process.

A conceptual model

This paper presents a conceptual model of factors affecting the future prospects of the system. As shown in Figure 1, prospects of the system depends to a certain degree on the popular participation, accountability, transparency, public service delivery, capacity, cooperation, political experience and limited intervention in local affairs of the higher tiers.

HYPOTHESES

This study proposes the following hypotheses:

H¹: The independent variables (ten) significantly explain the variance in system's prospects.

H²: Demographic imbalances and power relations determine system's prospects

H³: Citizens, politicians and government officials have different views about the prospects of the system.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study made use of survey method to collect the primary data. The survey was conducted in district Dera Ismail Khan of North West Frontier Province, Pakistan. The target population of the study included the registered voters, local representatives and the local government officers of District Dera Ismail Khan. The technical distribution of the total population is given in Table 1. The table

Table 1. Population distributions.

S/N	Strata	N	Percent
1	General public	4, 20,002	99.74
2	Representatives	656	0.16
3	Government servants	450	0.10
Total		4,21,108	100.00

Table 2. Sample size for three groups of population.

Group	PSn	SD	SE	N	Sampling procedure	n
General public	45	0.65	0.097	4, 20,002		170
Representatives	35	0.80	0.137	656		110
Government servants	20	0.74	0.185	450	$[\sigma^2/((E^2/Z^2)+(\sigma^2/N))]$	56
Total (n) of pilot study	100	Total (N) =		4,21,108	Total (n) =	336

shows the total number of each population category (N) along with its percentage in the total population.

Sample and sampling procedure

A pilot study was conducted to get the required statistics for applying random sampling procedures in sample selection. The formula for finite population was used to compute the sample-size for each population category. Population was made of 4, 20,002 general public, 656 local representatives and 450 government servants. The difference between different groups of the population is too big, therefore; the formula for stratified sampling is not applicable because the smaller groups are then not represented properly. Given this, the formula for selecting a sample from 'finite population' was applied on all the populations individually, which gave the advisable size of the sample. In social sciences, 95% confidence level is usable, which equals 1.96 z-values. Table 2 details the whole sampling procedural applications and results.

68.6% of the respondents were male and 31.4% female; 60.7% were dwellers and 39.3% were councilors; 26.2% belongs to urban area, 19.9% belongs to urban-cum-rural area and 53.9% belongs to deep rural area; 14.3% were rich people and 85.7% were poor people. 46.8% were elites and 53.2% were non-elites; 21.1% were highly educated, 36.1% were educated and 42.9% were uneducated people.

Data collection methods

Based on the literature survey, a structured questionnaire comprising 5-point scale was constructed to collect primary data from the sample. The decision to use questionnaire was mainly a replication of Flowers et al. (1975), Ali et al. (1995), Zaman (2002), and Khan (2004, 2006), and thus it seemed appropriate for reasons of consistency to use the same method of inquiry employed by them. Three different questionnaires were used for general public, local representatives and government officers separately. They were first tested in the pilot study.

Data analysis tools

Given the social nature of the research project, both qualitative and

quantitative methods were required to analyze the data. Both literature and field surveys came up with a body of facts and figures, which were analyzed both descriptively as well as in inferential manners. Using SPSS 12.0, empirical data was placed into a well-structured database comprising research variables and their attributes thereby getting a data matrix for statistical manipulation. All the descriptive tables were created from the same matrix. The results were obtained using different statistical tools particularly 'multiple regression analysis'.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

H₁ was tested with multiple regression analysis, the result of which is presented in Table 3. The result identifies six significant predictors of system's prospects, not all of which had the largest simple bivariate correlations. Popular participation contributed most to the system's prospects, followed by accountability, transparency, public service delivery and understanding of the stake-holders. Government intervention was negatively related to system's prospects. The positive beta weights indicate that for maximizing the system's prospects, greater participation, increased accountability with higher transparency level of the system and improved public service delivery is imperative. The highest number in the negative beta is -0.42 for government intervention, which is significant at the 0.024 levels. The negative beta weight indicates that if the system's prospects are to be increased, the intervention of upper tiers in local affairs must be reduced.

H₂ was tested with the t-test and ANOVA, the results of which are shown in Tables 4 and 5. The results confirm the impacts of demographic imbalances on system's prospects. The results indicate that profession has the maximum F-score of 13.257, and is highly significant with p-value of 0.000 levels. The impact of education and class has also been found. Similarly, the elite are more optimistic than the non-elites. The people living in deep

Table 3. Multiple regression.

Dependent variable	Independent variables	R	R ²	df	Beta score	Significance	Result
System's prospects	Participation	0.602	0.363	325	0.371	0.001	Accepted
	Accountability				0.205	0.013	
	Transparency				0.281	0.001	
	Service delivery				0.175	0.019	
	Good governance				0.003	0.975	
	Political experience				-0.0171	0.523	
	Government intervention				-0.420	0.001	
	Capacity				0.234	0.024	
	Understanding				-0.097	0.517	
	Cooperation				0.275	0.070	

Table 4. T-tests (to compare mean on system's prospects).

Categorical variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Table value	p-value	Results
Gender	Male	240	3.22	0.50	334	2.396	1.960	0.017	Null is rejected
	Female	96	3.07	0.50					
Class	Elites	165	3.23	0.55	334	2.072	1.960	0.039	Null is rejected
	Non-elites	171	3.12	0.47					

Table 5. ANOVA applications (to compare mean on system's prospects).

Categorical variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	F-value	Table value	P-Value	Results
Education	Highly educated	115	3.12	0.54	2	6.913	3.00	0.001	Null is rejected
	Educated	101	3.34	0.47	333				
	Un-educated	120	3.10	0.49	333				
Income	1000 to 10000	184	3.23	46	3	3.344	2.60	0.019	Null is rejected
	10001 to 20000	58	3.22	60	332				
	200001 to 30000	47	3.12	50	332				
	300001 and above	47	2.98	53	332				
Location	Urban	88	3.06	0.57	2	3.133	3.00	0.045	Null is rejected
	Urban-cum rural	67	3.20	0.50	333				
	Rural	181	3.22	0.48	333				
Profession	Ulemas/ pir groups	53	3.35	0.51	4	13.257	2.37	0.000	Null is rejected
	Servants	49	3.12	0.46	332				
	Businessmen	60	3.29	0.50	332				
	Formers/workers	57	3.25	0.49	332				
	Landlords	61	3.24	0.55	332				

rural and urban-cum-rural areas perceive the prospects positively than the voters in urban location. The impacts of gender and class are again significant with reference to the prospects of the system.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test H₃ to see the effect of category of respondents (general

public, local representatives and government official) on prospects of the system. The category of respondents affected responses. ANOVA, which compared the responses given by general public, local representatives and government servants, indicated that the local representatives and general public gave more positive

Table 6. ANOVA applications (to compare Mean on system's prospects).

Categorical variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	F-value	Table value	P-Value	Results
Category	General public	170	3.23	0.46	2	18.117	3.00	0.000	Hypothesis is accepted
	Local representatives	110	3.28	0.59	333				
	Government servants	56	2.82	0.37					

responses than the government servants (Table 6). Local representatives and general public with respective means of 3.28 and 3.24 had significantly ($P < 0.000$) higher scores in response to "the prospects of the system" than the government servants, with mean of 2.82.

DISCUSSION

If we see the prospects of the system in the historical perspective of Pakistan, several questions arise, as the country has poor track record of democracy during the last fifty-nine years after independence; it has mostly been ruled by the military (about 30 years plus). There has always been a limited local democracy in order to convey some kind of democratic legitimacy to an authoritarian regime. Sivaramakishnan (2000) notes "local government did much better during eras of authoritarian rule than in times of democratic rule. During democratic regimes, the local level often lost the attractiveness because it was no longer the only platform available for people participation". However, the scenario is changing as the new system introduced third tier (the district government) under the provisions of new ordinance 2001, empowering (politically, financially and administratively) the district government at grass root levels. Furthermore, the commitment and determination of central government reflects brighter prospects of the system, however, it needs political support, which is still missing.

As for as the critical success factors of good governance are concerned, the new system was designed to increase popular participation, ensure transparency and accountability to enable the people to see what is happening around them and not only to improve the public service delivery but also to provide it at their doorstep. The findings of the study show that there is a relationship between popular participation and the prospects of the system. It is proved that if the people's participation is greater, then there is greater prospect of the system and vice versa (Table 4). Unfortunately, there is still limited popular participation, but with the passage of time it will change as reflected from the increased number of contestant, increased voting rate in the election 2005 as compared to the election of 2001, and the increased participation of the people in the developmental and non-developmental schemes. Such changing trends indicate that the new system have brighter prospects.

The most accountable and transparent systems can gain rapid popularity and can work for longer period of time (Paracha, 2003). It is also substantiated by this study that if the system is transparent, it has brighter prospects to survive and vice versa (Table 4); whereas, the transparency level of the district government under study is not encouraging one. However, the increasing pressure of the donor agencies as well as the general public will compel the district government to work transparently to enable the people to see what is happening around them and to evaluate the performance and make future decisions. As far as the accountability of the politicians and government officials are concerned the people demonstrated their right to vote in the local bodies' election 2005, when they neglected the unpopular, corrupt and inefficient local politicians. While the accountability of the government official has not been exercised as it is reported by the politicians that the government officials seldom appear in the sessions of councils, if yes, they do not meet the demands of the politicians. There is no clear accountability system to keep check over their performance.

The success and failure of the system depends on the quality of public service delivery, but unfortunately, the district government under study has not yet succeeded to improve the quality of public service delivery. One can observe the cleanliness of the streets, bazaars¹ and Mohallas² and can find the pile of scattered waste, the damage water pipelines, the drainage system, etc. However, with the passage of the time and by increasing awareness among the people, the scenario is now changing as the TMAs are now working for the improvement of public service delivery through monitoring committees and citizens community boards (CCBs), as reported by the World Bank Report 2004 "that the decentralized local governments are contributing well to improve the public service delivery", but not yet succeeded to meet the standard.

It is well documented that the level of governance determine the future of the system if there is a good governance then there are brighter prospects of the system and vice versa, which is also substantiated by this study, but unfortunately, the district government under study has not yet succeeded to maintain good governance as proved by the deteriorating law and order situation, prevalence of high commodity rates, absence of

¹ Shopping place

² Urban residential distribution

coordination between District Coordinating Officer (DCO) and Zilla Nazim, the existence of political rift between Zilla Nazim and Tehsil Nazims, increasing rate of corruption of the local politician as reported by the local news papers, horse trading in the local bodies election 2005 and the present attempt of vote of no confidence against the Zilla Nazim, in which sufficient amount of money were offered to the councilors for vote.

However, despite all these observation, it is still hoped that the system is too good to be retained, especially for the well being of the general public. If given a fair chance and sufficient time to show its potentials, the system will certainly meet the expectations of the people and will play an important role in the development at grass root levels. Furthermore, the present study found varying views of the three main stakeholders about the future of the system. The results indicate that the local representatives and general public are more confident about the prospects of the system than the government servants (Table 6). The passive attitude of the government servant is due to their rivalry towards the new system as it deprived them of their overbearing powers.

Conclusions

The new system of local government overhauled the entire machinery to customize it with the new requirements for the critical success factors of good governance (LGO, 2001). The condition of these indicators helps to determine the future of the new system. This study develops and tests a set of empirical measures of the future prospects of the new system to analyze the impacts of devolution plan at the grass root levels. It concludes that greater the popular participation, understanding and lesser the intervention of central/provincial government, greater the future prospects of the system.

The present local government system, as compared to previous systems, increased the participation level as substantial number of local representatives got elected at union, Tehsil and district level (Alam, 2004). However, popular participation, both directly and indirectly is still limited. It is due to the institutional absence, unawareness, illiteracy and income inequality; professional difference; elites dominance. Illiteracy (especially in rural areas) is the most dominant factor in reducing participation. Gender and income inequality also restricted popular participation. Given this, it is concluded that there is a gap between theory and practice as reality is far behind from the provisions of LGO (2001). If such practices remain continued in similar fashion, then the survival of the system will be very hard.

The new system provides a comprehensive mechanism for access to information and accountability. Furthermore, the new system placed elected political heads as compared to bureaucrats at district, Tehsil and union levels. These political heads are easily accessible and

accountable to the people, as people can contact them freely for inquiry. However, despite all such provisions, the study found limited transparency due to poor access to information and accountability failure of the government officials. Poor access to information is also due to the structural weaknesses. For example, it is difficult for each and every person to visit the offices to get information. Likewise, interested people have to pay for the information they intend to get from the office thereby posing a restriction to transparency. Similarly, lack of accountability of the government officials is due to institutional absence of Zila Mutasib and the passive attitude of the government officials to comply with decisions of the Zilla council. It is now imperative to overcome these problems as early as possible, otherwise, history may repeat itself.

Public service delivery depends upon the availability of resources and the implementation of the system. As for as the resources are concerned the new system made formula based fiscal transfer to the three levels and empowered them to generate local funds through local taxes. However, despite all such measures, the study found limited public service delivery. Obviously, it is not due to financial constraints but because of poor implementation strategy of the government. The study highlighted many reasons of it, as such, lack of transparency, poor monitoring and corruption are the critical ones. Furthermore, political interference and elite capture are other reasons for poor public service delivery. Proper attention to these issues is indispensable to ensure the survival of the system in the long run.

Given this, it can be concluded that there is a big gap between theory and practice, as the ground realities are far from the contents of the devolution plan. If the gap will not be filled as early as possible, the new system will face the same destiny as faced by the previous local government systems. However, despite such observed limitations, there is some improvement and it is hoped that the system may be retained for a longer period of time. If it is given fair time to show its potentials, definitely, it will further improve and meet the expectations of the people and will play an important role in the development at grass roots level.

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