

Local Governance System - The Missing Link in Pakistan's Governance Structure

OUTLINE :

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- Thesis Statement

2 - Causes

- Inleak/fractured Constitutional base
- Lack of Political Will
- Absence of National ~~and~~ Consensus

3 - Impacts

- Ineffective Decentralization
- Hampered Participatory Governance
- No Mechanism to Institutionalize local Development Agenda

4 - Solutions

- Introduce a Constitutional Amendment
- Promote Participatory Governance
- Establish a National Political Consensus

5- Global Inspiration & Its local Implementation

- Case study of Rwanda
- How similar steps can bring a change in the case of Pakistan.
- What can be achieved by efficiently bridging the gap in the system.

6- Conclusion :

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Since its independence, Pakistan has remained unable to adopt an effective local governance system. It took the country 10 years to bring its first constitution in place. While India only took 2 years to introduce its first constitution. Perhaps, the subsequent constitutional framework have failed to address the issue of local governance in an absolute manner. Therefore, local governance system has remained a missing link in Pakistan's governance structure due to weak constitutional base and lack of political ^{will} due to absence of national consensus. This has widened the gap between the "rulers" and "the ruled" ultimately hampering the development agenda.

Pakistan underwent a serious constitutional struggle due to the political instability in the initial decades of its creation. The country was able to adopt the constitution of 1973 after years of consistent efforts by the then responsible political leadership. However, it still did not address the issue of decentralization of authority at the local level. The constitutional of 1973 vaguely

talks about this third tier of governance due to which the country failed to develop any operational governance system at this level.

In Pakistan, local governance institutions were segmentedly developed by the military rulers during the times of martial law. The real purpose was to gain the validation from the people because they lacked validation from other political instruments. Therefore, from Ayub Khan's basic democracies to Musharraf's Local Government Act introduced in 2002 all were different faces of the same coin. Because ultimately they were short lived and vanished along with that said rulers.

The 18th Amendment in the constitution has somehow tried to address this problem by entirely delegating the authority to manage the local governance systems to the provinces. Although it has its own demerits, but somehow the country has seen some sort of development in this domain other than the military era's. Still, the efforts are insufficient unless there is a national consensus on this issue. And all the political parties collectively decide to

address it. Because even after 18th Amendment, provinces have adopted their individual acts and elections were conducted but it was just a one time practice rather than a concerted political process.

The lack of an effective local governance has led to an flawed decentralization of authority in Pakistan. It has resulted in the concentration of power in the highest echelons of government. And subsequently the people are unable to exercise their voice in the key matters that concern them. Even though members of national and provincial assemblies are also elected from within them but there is a huge disconnect between these tiers of governance. The absence of a local governance system has left people voiceless and they have lost the tradition of participatory governance was therefore largely declined.

The lack of an effective and operational governance structure has also left the implementation of developmental agenda at the local level unattended. Although big projects are designed

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at the national level with allocation of massive budget but not even a fraction of it would be spent on a small scale project. Someone living in Islamabad would verify my point that alot of mega infrastructure projects are inaugurated every now and then but you travel more outwards to the suburbs, the condition is no different from a remote rural locality. The situation would have greatly been improved in the presence of an local governance setup.

The real solution to amend the existing gap is to introduce a constitutional amendment. There needs to be a national consensus on this issue of grave importance and all the political parties should jointly develop a mechanism to constitutionalise this third tier of governance. This is the only way to develop a consistent and operational institutions at the local level. Also, this will hold the leaders accountable in front of the court of law in case of violations. It is not only a path to develop a constitutional process but it will also give people

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the power and the authority to speak up in issues which directly concern them.

In this regard, there are a lot of key examples where countries have eradicated a lot of problems by just setting the course in this one direction. Case in point is Rwanda, after decades of political instability and suffering from a genocide, the country has implemented one of the most successful decentralization frameworks in 2000. Although the difference might not have felt in big issues but it was largely streamlined the governance structure in the country. And it has also encouraged people to take initiatives on their own for their betterment. There are a lot of community initiatives in place in Kigali which largely exhibit the trends of participatory governance.

Pakistan can also benefit from something of the similar sort. By introducing a constitutional amendment, we can not only deal with a serious political issue but can also localize and effectively improve the implementation of the development agenda.