Local Governments and Challenges of Social Inclusiveness

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Ratification of the 18th Amendment in 2010 authorised establishment of local governments in Pakistan to promote a functioning democracy. After a decade, however, complete implementation of a fully functioning local governance system remains a concern. Strengthening the Local Government (LG) system is part of democratisation it leads to the development of transparent and accountable procedures to support administrative reforms; engaging citizens in determining and addressing local needs and ensuring their participation (especially of marginalised and minority groups) in decision-making at the grassroots level. Although since the independence of Pakistan, there have been different waves of power decentralisation to give more autonomy to local governments, a lot remains to be done. Transition of power in a democracy is not just about devolution of power from federal and provincial to local level, but also about opening the political landscape to share LG positions among women and minority groups.

Debating the representation of women, and minority groups and their participation in decision-making should be at the centre of the democratisation debate. The session will discuss this issue. Elected women and minority parliamentarians, law makers, officials, experts, as well as academics who have worked on representation of women and minorities in the LG systems will share their knowledge and initiate debate. The following guiding questions will be used for a focused discussion:

- What are the main challenges to inclusiveness of women and minority members for meaningful representation in local governments in Pakistan?
- When we talk about challenges, do the challenges differ for, especially women, when it comes to geographical location? Are some provinces doing better than others in terms of inclusion?
- What are the best suited strategies that can be adopted to tackle these challenges?
- What kind of reforms are required in the LG system to make women and minorities’ roles more meaningful?
- Which actors need to be involved to bring in necessary reforms and where are opportunities for partnerships?
- What perceived role can women and minority members play in the new normal amid COVID-19 to improve their participation and representation in local governments?

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