

Building Minimum Consensus on the Architecture of Local Government System in Pakistan

in collaboration with GIZ

The local government system in Pakistan has witnessed a variety of arrangements over the past decades. While the 18th Amendment provides protection to local governments in Article 140A of the Constitution, it leaves modalities to each provincial government. As a result, since 2013 local provincial government systems have differed between the federating units. Obvious differences can be seen in the role and mandate of local governments, local election systems, role of political parties, endowment of local governments with human and financial resources, and arrangements between elected representatives and the administrative branch.

While this is not a matter of concern *per se* as different local government systems reflect the diverse political, social, and economic conditions of the provinces, thus illustrating the purpose and benefits of having a federal state structure, however, a worrisome observation has been the lack of minimum consensus regarding essential elements of local government system. In the debates between various levels of the government, between the political parties, and between key stakeholder groups (such as the administration on the one side, and the elected representatives on the other), it seems that there is little collective agreement regarding the overall purpose of local governments, and how they relate to the provincial political and administrative institutional arrangements.

A normative framework for local government systems in Pakistan needs to take care of issues such as (i) the modalities in which decentralisation is applied; (ii) functions and responsibilities devolved to local governments; (iii) minimum revenue generation in line with the functional load, combined with regular Provincial Finance Commission Award (PFC) awards and reliable transfer of fiscal grants; (iv) safeguards for local autonomy; (v) effective mechanisms for accountability and transparency of local government functionaries; and (vi) legally binding regulations for holding local elections in a regular manner.

The change in political majorities following the 2013 General Elections triggered amendments in the local government acts – often significant and far-reaching. Thus, jeopardising the continued presence of elected representatives at the local levels resulting in disarrayed political accountability mechanisms. These amendments also involve significant institutional changes on the administrative side with impacts on the business processes in delivering public services. Individual and institutional learning and the accumulation of a body of knowledge, skills, and experiences in the local government systems have been hindered by these repeated changes, thus undermining the effectiveness of local governments in fulfilling their roles.

To understand the logic behind the changes and develop a minimum standard framework of a local government system with consensus, this panel aims to systematically review and benefit from the discussions held at the provincial and federal level in early 2021. The session will generate discussion on:

- Key differences among stakeholders about the role, structure and functioning of local governments across Pakistan;
- Key issues, barriers, policy, and regulatory framework that will facilitate and accelerate functioning of the local government system in Pakistan; and,
- Recommendations for a minimum common framework for local government system in the provinces to make local governance strong, accountable, and more effective in the country.

The session will bring together researchers, practitioners, federal, provincial, and local stakeholders, including local government departments, parliamentarians, representatives from political parties, local council associations, and private sector experts.

Panel Organisers

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