Making Local Governments In-charge of Social Services Delivery

Improvement in the service delivery through increased citizen participation and community accountability is essentially the stimulus behind the ‘KP Local Government Act, 2019.’ It follows the classical argument that with the transfer of responsibilities to the lower tiers of the government, and proximity of local policymakers to citizens, increases the chances of prioritising local needs and enables citizens to monitor local development processes and makes their representatives answerable for their actions. To get re-elected, elected representatives, thus, respond to citizens’ needs and pay full attention to improving service delivery.

Since the 2001 devolution of power, the local government system in Pakistan has undergone several political and administrative changes to create responsive subnational governments which are better positioned to serve citizens in their respective constituencies. Empirical evidence suggests that decentralisation in Pakistan has positive results on service delivery (Aslam and Yilmaz 2011). However, studies also indicate that while decentralisation has increased access to services, the distribution of these services remains influenced by political considerations (Cheema and Mohmand 2008). Studies also reveal that cultural norms and prevailing political structure, does not prioritise minorities (ethnic, religious) and marginalised groups’ (women, youth) needs, neither ensure their access to services and nor participation in local level decision-making (Stojkova 2008). Similarly, due to greater visibility, easy implementation and credit tracking, infrastructure projects (roads, pavement of streets etc.) are preferred over others such as education and health services.

To understand how social services delivery, especially in health and education sectors, can be prioritised and improved through the involvement of local government representatives, this panel will systematically review the issues with as well as provisions within the LGA 2019.¹ The existing capacities of local representatives as well as need for capacity building will also be discussed to improve local development planning and need for institutionalising citizen-led monitoring of development plans at the local level. Experts will also identify the avenues for enhanced citizen engagement and what incentives it would create for the local representatives.

References


¹ Right to Public Service Act 2014 will help to set the tone and direction of the discussion.
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