

# **Empowering LGs for better public service delivery**

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Muhammad Aqib Zardad | 21<sup>th</sup> Jan 2025



**Local government, as the name suggests, refers to a set-up established locally to cater to the needs of the public falling within its jurisdiction with the word 'government' reflecting the representative nature of such a set-up.**

An objective and critical analysis of local government may indicate towards the set-up being repugnant with the authoritative supremacy of the federal/ central or provincial government for that matter.

However, the same provides for strengthening of these government structures in that the local government works more closely with the public and, therefore, can enforce law and regulations more effectively.

As we attempt to conceptualize the phenomenon of welfare state, local governance system appears to be a very crucial element since in such states the prime objective of the government is the well-being of the general public. That said, a local government being the closest to the beneficiaries is in a much better position to make sense and ensure effective redressal of public issues.\*\*

Unfortunately, Pakistani system of governance is unique in the sense that it is an amalgamation of various governance systems out there. Picking and choosing aspects of such systems, given the biases and inclinations of people in power, thus, presents a challenging situation.

Consequently, we do not currently possess a system which may ensure efficient public service delivery and management by a representative governmental set-up whether at national level or at local level. That is the reason, perhaps, for the political instability and economic uncertainty we have been confronting for as long as one can remember and even before that.

All hail to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and its co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari under whose stewardship the 18th Constitutional Amendment was railroaded through the Parliament in 2010.

Even though the amendment has long been subject to severe criticism, however, one cannot deny its role in granting significant autonomy to the federating units. That is when the center lost most of its powers, or

let's just say significant powers, were delegated to the provinces with Islamabad holding onto portfolios dealing with matters of national nature or character.

However, what was never the priority of any Pakistani political party is a well-rounded public policy formulation aiming at commendable public service delivery on all levels. And this certainly warrants delegating powers even further down to local bodies or say local government.

The reason for this refusal of handing over sufficient powers to local bodies is none other than the fear of losing not just massive constitutional powers but also electoral support since no party in a provincial assembly directly requires local bodies to make it to the assembly or form government as such.

Hence, such delegation will only empower local/ district governments and will definitely pay dividends for timely and fruitful management of local level public affairs yet without any electoral benefit to the people perching on power-making echelons in the provincial power-heads.

As we look at the matter under discussion more rationally, we see that handing over the taxation and other related powers to local governments would for sure minimize the influence of provincial government over the former as now the local government would be financially independent as well. Rather than looking at it as a win-win situation, political figures and parties for that matter in Pakistan view it as losing it all.

As far as the need to constitute local governments, yes, every state with an underlying aim of benefitting its public in a plethora of spheres does establish such bodies and does not see it as losing powers but as an element contributing towards national progress on a bigger level. Hence, we also need to have such set-ups.

And, why not? How someone sitting in a provincial capital can be aware of the problems and worries of people inhabiting a remote locality several hundred kilometers away? Also, to engage in infrastructural development, sanitation and waste disposal, provision of reasonable education and healthcare facilities and other such local level matters is something that explicitly falls within the ambit of local government.

That is because the provincial governments are mainly responsible for and constitutionally entitled to exercise law-making authority and implementation of policies. Why still we do not have fully functional local government structures is because of the conflicting interests and nothing else.

***To conclude, in the context of Pakistan, to ascertain efficient public service delivery and management of public affairs in a more reasonable and of course representative manner, Pakistan needs to institute local bodies and not just this but also empower them with significant law-enforcement, taxation and financial independence as well as service delivery related powers. This is the only way forward and way out of the political stress and economic crunch that Pakistan is facing today and since always.***

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