THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN

Muhammad Ali*

Abstract

In recent years, decentralization initiatives have emerged as an important instrument of local development policy in both developed and developing countries. Various approaches of decentralized governance (some time refer local government) are discussed in the light of previous empirical research. It is an attempt to make efficient, effective, transparent and accountable governance at the grassroots level. Decentralization is not unique to Pakistan, but a global trend. Decentralization mechanisms at local level have been appeared as an essential pre-requisite for sustainable socio-economic developments of any country everywhere particularly in Pakistan. It is hoped that, in Pakistan, the genius devolution of political, administrative, financial and electoral responsibilities and authorities to the democratically elected local government would significantly enhance efficiency, transparency, accountability, fairness and participation in resource allocation and public service delivery. The purpose of this paper is to critically evaluate the conceptual framework of decentralized governance and its significant role in Pakistan. The research problem behind the study is to examine how decentralization affects governance; in particular how it increases political competition, improves public accountability, reduces political instability, and imposes incentive-compatible limits on government power and also threatens fiscal sustainability.

***Keywords*:** Decentralization, Mass Participation, Accountability, Local Government, Good Governance and Civil Society

Introduction

The emergence of grassroots level democratic systems in recent years has changed the context of public decision making and hence it is a need of time to study the process of mass participation at the local level. Decentralization and local governance are recognized as major mechanisms for good governance as providing the enabling environment in which decision-making and service delivery can be brought closer to local population. The significant objective is to make the decentralized governance more responsive to the needs of the local citizens. Most discussions about decentralization accordingly center on attempts to improve the delivery of services. This descriptive study is an attempt to understand the perception that, establishing decentralization measures is an essential pre-requisite for sustainable socio-economic developments of any country everywhere. On the basis of reviewed literature, this theoretical research paper is organized in three sections; first part focuses on the brief but comprehensive

*Muhammad Ali, Ph.D, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science , University of Karachi, Karachi

background of research problem. Moreover it also provides the conceptual framework of decentralized governance .The second part deals with decentralized apparatus which exists at the local level governance in Pakistan. Finally, the paper concludes with some recommendations for practitioners and stakeholders including government, civil society, the private sector and scholars in the field of decentralization.

Significance of the study

In recent years the topic of decentralization has received great attention. The increased interest is not only because of its theoretical appeal, but it is related to the rising number of countries adopting a more decentralized system. Today, throughout the world there is a broad-based movement towards greater decentralization. The widespread economic liberalization along with political change towards openness and democracy is one of the driving forces. The most important theoretical arguments concerning decentralization is that it can improve governance by making government more accountable and responsive to the governed. It is hoped that the expected results of this timely work will not only facilitate the scholars and expert of Political Science as well as local government officials but will also be a massive contribution for the students in this field. Ultimately it will open new avenues for further research to provide relevant information to the civil society and hence will remain a subject of common interest and beneficial to general public. The study is planned as a qualitative method and based on available literature review on the research problem. Keeping in view the nature of research objectives, the efforts are made to collect material from diversified sources. Thus, there is a combination of primary and secondary sources.

Literature review

In contemporary global scenario, the most significant theoretical argument regarding decentralization is that it can improve governance by making government more accountable and responsive to the governed. This section of paper analyzes the decentralization process by linking authority and power relations to the accountability. Although decentralization is one major aspect of local government ,it is essential for several reasons in which strengthening the role of governance, formation of environment that is strongly felt and addressed as national environment by all. These mentioned above are some of vital aspects that have enhanced the attention towards the governance.. Today both developed and developing countries are pursing decentralization policies. According to Manro (1999) most developing countries are embracing decentralization whether in Latin America, Europe or Afro Asian countries . It is a worldwide phenomenon for at least two reasons ‘first need for sustainable political stability, and second need for more effective and efficient social public services.

As Robert Ebel(2001) points out in his overview of decentralization: "The western world sees decentralization as an alternative to provide public services in a more cost-effective way. Developing countries are pursing decentralization reforms to counter economic inefficiencies, macroeconomic instability, and ineffective governance. Post-communist transition countries are embracing decentralization as a natural step in the shift to market economies and democracy. Latin America is decentralizing as a result of

political pressure to democratize. African states view decentralization as a path to national unity. Decentralization has undoubtedly gained popularity within the last two decades; it is not a new concept. The theory of decentralization and accountability go back to Montesquieu [1748], Rousseau [1762] Mill [1895-61] and Tocqueville [1835-40], who debated the optimal size and conformation of 'political units' that served the interests of their citizens. The term of decentralization attracted attention in the 1980s when global agenda emphasized socioeconomic human development and good governance.

Decentralization is defined and interpreted in several ways. Sometimes it is considered a term, sometimes a concept, a process, a theory, a methodology, or a policy, even a trend. One of the most common definitions of decentralized governance/local governance is that it is a process through which authority, resources and responsibility for public functions is transferred from the federal and provincial level to local level. According to Paracha (2003), decentralization or decentralizing Governance, refer to the restructuring or reorganization of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institution of governances at central,regional and local level. According to Manor (1999) decentralized systems must have sufficient powers to exercise substantial influence within the political system and over significant development activities, sufficient financial resources to accomplish important tasks, adequate administrative capacity to accomplish those task, and reliable accountability mechanismsto ensure both the accountability of elected politicians to citizen and the accountability of bureaucrats to elected official.

Decentralization is described as three broad types: political, administrative and, fiscal and five main modals of decentralization such as, delegation, de-concentration devolution and co-responsibility. (Robertson 2002). Political decentralization usually refers to situations where political power and authority have been transferred to sub-national levels of government. The most obvious manifestations of this type of decentralization are elected and empowered sub-national forms of government ranging from village councils to state level bodies. Political decentralization requires a constitutional, legal and regulatory framework to ensure accountability and transparency. It also necessitates the restructuring of institutions and developing linkages with civil society and the private sector. Administrative decentralization aims at transferring decision-making authority, resources and responsibilities for the delivery of select number of public services from the central government to other levels of government, agencies and field offices of central government line agencies. Administrative decentralization is often simultaneous with civil service reform**.** Fiscal decentralization is the most comprehensive and possibly noticeable degree of decentralization since it is directly linked to budgetary practices. Fiscal decentralization refers to the resource reallocation to sub-national levels of government. Arrangements for resource allocation are often negotiated between the central and local authorities based on several factors including interregional equity, availability of resources at all levels of government and local fiscal management capacity. It is a generic term which covers a number of models such as, "transfer of authority and responsibility from one level of the central government to another while maintaining the same hierarchical level of accountability from the local units to the central government ministry or agency,

which has been decentralized", "delegation which is the transfer of responsibilities from central government to semi-autonomous bodies that is directly accountable to the central government", "devolution which is the process of transferring decision-making and implementation powers, functions, responsibilities and resources to legally constituted, and popularly elected local governments. Devolution is considered a form of political decentralization"; and "co-administration describes the authorization of a specific task by the central government to be done by the district or the village governments". There are numerous political and economic reasons that why governments adopt decentralization policies.

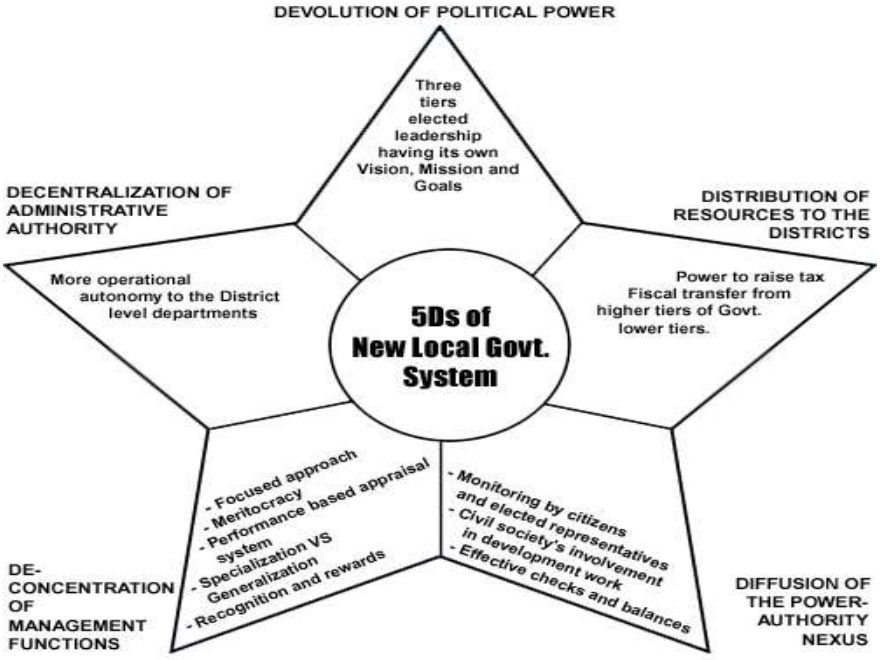
Decentralized Governance models in Pakistan

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan lies at the crossroads of South Asia, Southwest Asia and Central Asia. On its west lies Iran, on the north and northwest Afghanistan, on the northeast is China, on the east and southeast Pakistan shares borders with India, and on the south lies the Arabian Sea. The land area of Pakistan is 796,095 sq km (307,374 sq mi). This excludes the area of Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) and the Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA). Jammu and Kashmir is a disputed territory since 1949 situated between Pakistan and India .Pakistan controls a portion of the territory named Azad Kashmir. Azad Kashmir and the FANA's territory are *de facto* dependencies of Pakistan. India controls a major part of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan has a population of about 180.5 million; making it the second largest Islamic state after Indonesia and ranking 6th in the world as far as population scale is concerned (2014 est.) .The country's population has been increasing at a rate of 1.55% a year, According to UN projections, at the present rate of growth it is expected to cross the 295 millionand become the fourth most populous country by the year 2050.

Local government institutions, known as "local bodies" in Pakistan, are essential grassroots organizations that perform necessary administrative functions at the municipal level, devolving power and authority to the district, sub-district and community level. Pakistan is a Federal, Parliamentary and Islamic Democratic republic. According to article 7 of the Constitution of Pakistan, the affairs of the Federation of Pakistan divide among three tiers of the Government – Federal, Provincial and Local. Article 32 of principle of policy asks the state to encourage local government institutions composed of elected representatives of the areas concerned. After 18th Amendment (2010) insert the article 141- in the constitution, which stated that "each Province would, by law, establish a local government system and devolve political, administrative and financial responsibility and authority to the elected representatives of the local governments. Election commission is responsible for to hold the local election. When read together all these articles, the constitution clearly conveys that without local government the state will remain incomplete.

Decentralization initiatives have been emerged as an important instrument of local development policy in Pakistan since 1960s. It was an attempt to make efficient, effective, transparent and accountable governance at the grassroots. Pakistan has experienced three major models of local government systems – 1962, 1979 and 2001, all under the auspices of military regimes .The history of Local Government elections inside Pakistan was started from the regime of General Ayub Khan (1959-1969). He introduced the

system of "basic democracies" in 1960. It consisted of a multilevel pyramidal hierarchal network of local self-governing bodies to provide a link between the government and the people. Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988), reviewed the system of Local Government and established this system on strong footings, which progressed step by step.Obviously, in both systems there was no strong accountability mechanism but it also circumscribed the real role of local self-government, where it steadily came under the control of the bureaucrats. Most Recent Local Government, Devolution Power Plan was introduced by Pervez Musharraf in 2001. It was a plan to transfer the "Devolution of Power and Responsibility" to the gross roots level. Devolution in Pakistan has significantly changed the provincial and sub-provincial government structure, with the main responsibility for the delivery of education, health, water and sanitation, roads and transport, and agriculture services devolved to local governments. The Plan introduced a model described as 5Ds, which is explained by following diagram:



Source:Anjum. Z.H (2001), New Local Government System: A Step towards Community Empowerment**?** *The Pakistan Development Review*40: 4 Part II (Winter 2001) pp. 845–867

According to plan "the system was designed to ensure that the genuine interests of the people were served their right safeguarded through an enabling environment, people's participation, clear administrative responsibilities without political interference and making it accountable and answerable to elected head of the district. At the same time it

promised check and balance to safeguard against abuse of authority.(NRB 2001). New political structures for local governments had been created, new arrangements for inter-governmental sharing of resources had been established, large numbers of staff had been transferred from provincial to local governments, and an entire new administrative system had been set up at the local level. (Anjum 2001)The new Local Government System advocated an enabling environment for significant citizen empowerment, participation, and representation, making government increasingly responsive.

It is an unfortunate fact that after the national elections in 2008, the Plan was hastily and sharply abandoned without any proper assessment of its merits and demerits. No serious effort was made to modify or remove its weaknesses to retain and build on its strengths.Unnecessary controversies have been initiated on points that have nothing to do with devolution itself. The responsibility for local government was moved to the Provinces in January 2009 in line with the Constitution, and councils were dissolved. (Hussain 2011).Despite there is a constitutional requirement to hold local government elections, not all provincial governments have done so. Due to the delay in local government elections, the administration of each district is currently headed by an appointed district administrator. A question therefore arises: What is the justification for a strong local government system in Pakistan? There are numerous political and economic reasons as to why governments should adopt decentralization policies. First, decentralization of power at the grass roots level leads to better provision of social and civil services, restoration of the real democracy in the country and a more active and beneficial interaction and participation of the masses in all tiers of governance. They must have the power to levy and collect revenues. Second, empirical evidence shows that raising taxes or charging user fees for services at local level is relatively easier. The tax payers can see the visible benefits of such payments. At the local level the citizens get in contact with governmental structures every day of their life. In local democracy, necessary information is more readily available, and local authorities are obviously more knowledgeable about a local situation than authorities who are far away from realities at the grassroots level. It is also easier at the local level to hold officials and elected office-bearers accountable.(Qaiser;2012). Local Governments form an integral part of democratic governance framework that allows greater participation by the citizens in the management and control of their day to day affairs. (Hussain, 2011).

The foundation and formation of local government is affirmed and advocated because it is a fundamental source to train the masses about mobilization and political education. Tocqueville (1935: 631) states that, “meetings of town are linked with freedom as the science is closely linked with the primary schools.” Government is brought among people’s reach as it assist men to using and enjoying the facilities. According to Holm (1971), local government is seen as an another bureaucratic government organization when masses directly participate in local politics and councillors of local government work in political consciousness by executing and aiming to intensify public towards local politics. The basic foundation for political leadership is served in shape of training provided by local government, particularly for those individuals who intent to further prosper their career innational politics.

Good governance is of crucial importance for effective governance at all levels – central, regional, and local. Governance, according toLandell-Mills and Serageldin(1999), is how people are ruled, how the affairs of the state are administered and regulated as well as a nation's system of politics and how this functions in relation to public administration and law. Decentralization's major contribution to good governance is thought to be positive impact on service delivery. This is achieved through broader citizen participation on local level or their elected representatives in planning and decision-making processes, which should improve capacity to deliver services to all (local) units. In developing countries and particularly Pakistan the concept of decentralized governance often is using as an instrument for democratization and poverty reduction. Decentralization can also reduce political instability. In institutionally underdeveloped democracies, elites fearing the unchecked power of unfriendly governments may resort to violence to protect themselves and their interests.

Challenges of the decentralized system

Despite the massive merits of the system was not free from disadvantage. There were some drawbacks of the devolution power plan that needed to be rectified or removed. First, the District Nazims were elected indirectly by the Union Nazims and were thus beholden to them and served at their pleasure. Most of the time the budgetary allocations were made not on the basis of the priorities of the district as such but the priorities of the Union Nazims. Thus, a large number of small development projects proliferated and the large projects which covered or linked the entire district were neglected. The economies of scale and scope were ignored in project selection and execution.Second, there was lack of administrative connection in each tier of government. Each tier was supposed to work independent of each other and consequently the lack of coordination among various agencies led to inefficient outcomes. Conflict resolution and coordination mechanisms were thus conspicuous by their absence in the new law. Third, there was no clarity about the role of responsibilities of all three level-Union, Tehsil and District government. These functions can best be performed by competent, neutral and non-political civil servants, who are trusted equally by all the citizens across the political spectrum. Fourth, the accountability of the local governments assigned to the Local Government Commissions proved to be perfunctory and almost non-existent.(Hussian 2011).

Discussion / Recommendations

Pakistan has faced continual administrative reforms to enhance its accountability at local governance. The issues of decentralized governance have frequently been addressed by politicians and public via electronic and written media. However, the improvement is still unsatisfactory. Keeping in view of above discussion, there are several administrative and political policy recommendations/reforms for making more effective and accountable local governance in Pakistan. These include:

Administrative Reforms

Accountability can be promoted through the establishment of particular institutions and mechanisms to control governments' abuses and increase their responsibility (one of the possible ways is trough application of their sanctions).In improving the accountability in Pakistan, both the model of horizontal accountability and vertical accountability should be introduced and implemented.The demarcation and clarification of responsibilities accountability mechanisms between the Provincial and District Governments should be drawn more clearly and explicitly.Regular meeting between elected representative and government official need to be convened for better mechanism and state institutions that monitor and control abuses by other public agencies must be strengthened, by fostering their autonomous position vis-à-vis the State and their links to other public institutions.

Political Reforms

The District Nazims should be elected directly by the voters rather than indirectly by the Union Nazims for increasing accountability.There needs to promote good governance and e-governance for social services delivery at grass root level, effective media campaign for voters' education need to be made, and electoral reform for free and fair election need to be ensured. There needs to disseminate information to all stake holders to ensure that what decisions were taken and why?There needs to provide opportunities to local people to have a check on how money is spent locally.There requires to provide well publicized routes for citizens to make their voices heard.There needs to provide opportunities for 'scrutiny' of proposals (which can be informal) within the decision making process.

Social Reforms

Community empowerment is one of the important challenges to Pakistan. The civil society organizations (CSO), including NGO's and independent media and the private sector, which compose the main structure of the vertical model, should be more articulated. The efficiency of these accountability models largely depends on the capacities of civil society organizations and watchdog institutions to strengthen accountability mechanisms.

The Community Citizens Boards (CCB)s) are a useful innovation to promote an all-inclusive partnership between public, private sector and NGOs. Given the poor access and quality of education and health in the rural areas of Pakistan, the CCBs can supplement the efforts of the government departments in the planning, execution, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of development projects at the level – below the Union Councils.

Improved flow of information about local needs and preferences is one of the theoretical advantages of decentralization.In theory more transparency in local governance should mean less scope for corruption, in that dishonest behavior would become more easily detectable, punished and discouraged in future.

Public trust is an indicator for the successful development of local government reforms. In many countries, including Pakistan, it is a newly established mechanism. Public

opinion surveys in these countries during the past decade suggest that local governments seem to be more trust worthy organizations, than the most powerful political institutions (including the parliament or the president of the country).

Conclusion

Decentralization governance is essential and a cornerstone of the government's approach to improving public services to ensure that public goods are delivered according to people priorities and that those who govern provide adequate account for their performance to the citizens and their representatives. In Pakistan, it is an opportune time to highlight importance of the grass-roots democracy and seek commitment of the political parties for the revival of the elected local governments immediately after the formation of new democratically elected government. Bureaucratic institutions, political parties and security intelligence establishment still have put the emphasis on strengthening the centralized model and this centralized mindset is reluctant in transferring most powers to the local level and still trying to retain all important powers at the central level. Civil society groups are demanding restoration of the local governments across the country. They are raising awareness that local democracy and union level administration can be more accessible to the average person and thus more democratic and pro-people than a very distant and mighty central administration. Well-functioning accountability mechanisms are believed to provide incentives to governments for working in the best interests of citizens. When it comes to the more concrete dimension of service delivery, the critical role of accountability is still a matter for debate. It is to be hoped that the local mechanisms of accountability discussed above will in tandem with greater probity at the national level improve the degree of honesty at all levels, but at best this will take time.

Reference

Anjum, Z. H. (2001). New Local Government System: A Step Towards Community Empowerment? *The Pakistan Development Review* 40: 4 Part II (Winter 2001) pp. 845–867.

Britannica (2014) Local Government in Pakistan. http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/438805/Pakistan/23705/Constitutional-framework. Accesses on 12-11-2014.

DimceN (2006) Decentralization and decentralized governance for enhancing delivery of services in transition conditions ,St. petersburg unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan025134.pdf Accesses on Accesses on 12-12-2014.

Ebrahim, A. (2003). *Making Sense of Accountability: Conceptual Perspectives* Nonprofit Management & Leadership, Emerald Group Publication Limited http://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/ Accesses on 12-11-2014.

Holm, J.D. (1971). *Dimension of mass politics.* Boulder: Westview Press. pp - 60-62

Husain. I (2010) Models of Local Democracy Within A Federal System the Experience of Pakistan: keynote address at the commonwealth local government forum seminar on July 6, 2011 at Karachi

Landell-Mills &Serageldin, I. (1999). "Governance and the External Factor" *World Bank Annual Conference on Development Economics,*Washington, www ds.worldbank.org/external/default/.../1999/10/.../multi_page.pdfAccesses on 12-10-2014

Local Government Plan (2000). National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB), Government Of Pakistan http://www.nab.gov.pk/ Accesses on 12-10-2014.

Manor .J(1999). *The political economy of democratic Decentralization*, World Bank 1999,pp 4-6

Nauman A (2013) Pakistan with and without Local Government http://spearheadresearch.org/SR_CMS/index.php/researchopinions/pakistan-with-and-without-local-government

Paracha.S. A(2003). Devolution Plan in Pakistan Context, Implementation And Issue. Paper Presented at Foundation Open Society Institute, Hungry. www.saadparacha.com/.../IPF%20Final%20research%20paper.pdf Accesses on 22-09-2014

Qaiser J (2012), Pakistan "Main Challenges And Constrains In Local Government., Paper Presented at International seminar on local government and civil society at GummerGermany.Https://Lubpak.Com/Archives/279693Accesses on 22-12-2014

Ramakant. R, (2008) Good Governance Modern Global and Regional Perspective, MG. Kaniska publisher distributors, New Delhi, pp- 6-7

Ron K, (2010). *Mechanisms of Accountability in Local Government: An Exploratory Study* International Journal of Business and Management Vol. 5, No. 7, pp- 46-48

Tocqueville, A. de (1955). The old regime and the French revolution (S. Gilbert, Trans.). Garden City, NY: Doubleday. pp- 46-47

UNDP,(1998) "*Governance for Sustainable Development*," UNDP Policy Paper Series,http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan025134.pdf Accesses on 12-11-2014.