



Decentralising Local Government to Improve Service Delivery and Reduce Poverty

Policy Brief

Thursday, 7th October, 2021



Introduction

This policy brief is based on the medium-term findings of a longitudinal research study titled, “Dynamics of Household Poverty and Inclusive Development in Balochistan with Focus on Women’s Empowerment”. The longitudinal study has been commissioned by the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) and undertaken by the Momentum Ventures (MV), an Islamabad-based research firm. This research exercise has been funded by the European Union Delegation to Pakistan under the Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment (BRACE) Programme. The participatory study has been conducted across 13 villages from three districts namely, Kech, Khuzdar, and Loralai.

Poverty reduction and ensuring participatory development have always been challenging for policymakers particularly in communities like that of Balochistan, where there are multiple challenges across facets of socio-economic infrastructure. Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon which needs to be handled through holistic and integrated approaches. Some of the poverty imperatives are tangible while others are intangible. Within the intangible poverty factors people’s potential, their beliefs, their social organisation, and mutual integration for socio-economic challenges of their areas play key roles.

This policy brief provides workable policy insights for improving local governance and the state of public service delivery by the government departments. It also entails how improved public services and inclusive governance can lead to reduction in poverty as well as ensure socio-economic development.

The paper is based on the findings of a longitudinal research study titled as “Participatory Action Research on Dynamics of Household Poverty and Inclusive Development

in Balochistan with a Focus on Women’s Empowerment” conducted under European Union (EU) Funded, BRACE Programme.

Before we analyse the policy options, let us have an overview of the core findings of the research in the domain of governance and its role in inclusive development.

Inclusive development is defined as a “process that occurs when social and material benefits are equitably distributed across divides in society” (Hikey, 2015). Some experts focus on the “voice and power to the concerns and aspirations of otherwise excluded groups” as a determinant of inclusive development (Johnson and Anderson 2012). Overall, inclusive development is an important determinant of effective governance. Generally, respondents during the wave II of the study have termed policies in place and the model of governance in Balochistan as non-inclusive. Respondents believed that influence of the political and tribal elite along with that of bureaucracy on the public policy design and implementation is one of the key reasons for non-inclusive policies.

Lack of capacity in the human resource to handle governance according to the principles of inclusive development is yet another reason for non-inclusive policy design. Poor coordination between the policy design experts and overlapping functions in different government departments further complicates policy formulation and their effective implementation. . Lack of coordination results in duplication of efforts and waste of resources during the process of policy implementation. Inclusive development promisingly eradicates extreme poverty and reduces social and economic inequality and exclusion. However, inclusive development requires a well-structured policy and supportive governance structure to realize its benefits. One such structures is local government bodies and institutions, which are by and large non-functional in the province.

Policy Options

Keeping in view the essentiality of the inclusive development and role of local governance in integrating the inclusive development-based initiatives at the grass root level, decentralised policy approach is pre-requisite. Decentralised governance and bottom-up approach must be introduced as a fundamental policy orientation for reap the benefits of inclusive development to the province.

The longitudinal study at hand confirms an existing correlation between inclusion and empowerment of women in district Kech and the participatory decision-making at the local administrative levels. It also identifies socio-cultural patterns that allow increased mobility and visibility for women in district Kech, which can serve as a role model for the rest of rural districts in Balochistan. Bottom-up planning structure should be introduced for policy design and its implementation oversight. The proposed structure should be defined in terms of its composition, coherence, performance indicators pertaining to planning and governance as well as budgetary planning support and utilisation oversight. All the departments should have an equitable representation to such a structure for promoting coherence and nullifying the impact of undue politico-bureaucratic influences.

All the administration levels, i.e., provincial, district and tehsil should prepare and present their development programmes under the bottom-up approach while abiding by the processes of the core structure concentrated at provincial level.

The model of joint development committee (JDCs) should be introduced at tehsil, district and provincial level. These committees should work within their ToRs for overseeing, coordinating, reporting, course correction and overall decentralised management of development programmes.

Enhanced capacity of local governance system and government officials at tehsil, district and provincial levels are crucial to smooth functioning of such a decentralised model of inclusive governance. Capacity development programmes should be introduced in the areas of planning, budgeting, local governance, public services management (education, health, skill development, social development, rural development, value chain development, water, sanitation, agriculture livestock, etc.), monitoring, supervision and controlling, etc. Such capacity-building programmes can be undertaken after carefully reviewing the existing trainings conducted by various institutions such as the Balochistan Rural Development Academy (BRDA) and the Local Government and Rural Development Departments (LGRD Department). Joint working approach should be followed towards this end. Balochistan Rural Development Academy, National Institute of Management, College of Agriculture Education, engineering faculties of the universities, etc., should jointly work to devise and deliver such training package to inculcate the desired level of capacity amongst the government servants at all levels. Furthermore, participation of citizenry should be encouraged to include in the policymaking and development processes people from diverse genders and age groups, physical (dis)abilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and lower financial strata.

Based on the structural changes proposed and the overall bottom-up approach to planning and decentralised governance, strengthened by quality human resource in civil service, the province can experience the dawn of a new era of inclusive development. ***“Poverty resides at the household level”***, legendary pioneer of community development in Pakistan, Mr Shoaib Sultan Khan once commented. He continued, ***“It is only through their organisation and participation that poverty can be removed”***.

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