

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN PAKISTAN: LEARNING FROM THE PAST

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan inherited the local government system from the British. Pakistan must have learned to customize it with local demands but it did not happen because it has a poor track record of democracy with long military rule. Military always erected the local governments, first in 1959, then in 1979 and now the current devolution plan 2000. Under the previous local government systems, the provinces administered the districts & tehsils through the bureaucracy, with absence of democracy and accountability at local level. However, scenario has changed with the current system due to several global changes and demands emanating from them. The new system brought mega changes showing high levels of learning. The powers has been devolved at local level where elected bodies now ensure the planning and development in accordance with the local needs; monitor the functioning of local administrations thereby making them accountable to the representatives and general public. Despite the fact that the present government has taken mega steps in improving the administrative structure, especially at local level, however, there are uncertainties about the expectations from the new System, as it is once again introduced by the Military regime. In such scenario, there are reservations about the successful implementation of the system in the long term.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are the learning entities (Hicks and Gullett, 1976) so are the local government organizations because updating is the pre-requisite for the competitive survival of any organizational unit. Learning process in the Pakistan's local government system is 46 years old stretching from the first system of 1959 to the present LG 2001. Research, however, indicates low levels of learning among different stakeholders in the local government system (see for example, Khan, 2004; Zaman, 2002). Having said that, LG 2001 is a bold effort to kick-start high levels of learning by introducing mega-changes both in the structure and functioning of the system. Almost all the stakeholders in the local government system (govt officers, representatives and citizens) have to learn the delicacies of the new system so that a different organizational behavior could be observed. Changed organizational behavior requires organizational learning. (Luthans, 2002) notes "learning is a relatively permanent change in behavior." Burns (1995) defines 'behavioral change' as including both observable and internal processes such as 'thinking, attitudes and emotions.' Hicks and Gullett (1976) extend "learning process profoundly affects one's

personality including habits, knowledge and personal and cultural values."

Although, every next local government system was intended to address the weaknesses of the predecessor, the learning process always remained 'single-loop learning.' This learning is "associated with routine learning ... and organization learns without significant change in basic assumptions (Luthans, 2002)." LG 2001 however, came with broader visions of bringing change at local level by giving power at the grass roots to decide and implement change with authority.

This paper attempts to analyze the vicissitudes of local government system in Pakistan with focus on how did learning take place? What was learned, what were the barriers? And finally how learning should be value-added?

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS IN PAKISTAN

The Local governments have existed in the Indian subcontinent for many centuries, with the first municipal corporation set-up in Madras in 1688 by the East India Company, through the Conservancy Act 1842, followed by the Municipal Act 1867, Lord Ripon's Resolution on local self-government 1882, Decentralization