

## Devolution: A Case of Federalization in Pakistan

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### Abstract:

*Pakistan is a developing nation of third world yet struggling to launch a local level system that ensures targeting of developmental problems at grass roots and striving to make the communities empowered in the sense that they plan and prioritize their problems and decide the solutions at local levels. The purpose of the paper is to study the new approach of Devolution of Power in its procedural perspective. The paper also aims to highlight the procedural loopholes in the concept of devolution of power in Pakistan due to which the real essence of participation, local level planning, and empowerment did not reach the targeted communities. The paper critically comments on the gaps that were not addressed in the policy due to which the idea of devolution came under severe attacks by the social scientists.*

**Key words:** Devolution, Decentralization, Local Government, Biradari, Panchayat

## **Introduction**

On March 23, 2000, the Federal Government announced a bold Devolution Plan with elected district governments serving as the focal point for local governance and development (Asian Development Bank:2004). A more detailed devolution proposal was presented in May, 2000 for public comments and debate. Finally, the government on August 14, 2000 approved Local Government Plan 2000 (Government of Pakistan: 2000). The Devolution Plan aimed at decentralizing the government structure and service management, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of key public services by bringing their management closer to the people, creating potential for much greater beneficiary participation and monitoring, and better responsiveness to needs and stronger accountability to the public (World Bank: 2004).

Empowerment of the people through the introduction of district governments commonly referred to as devolution of power has undoubtedly been the most significant and sensitive initiative of the present regime. Significant in the sense that it brought about the biggest restructuring of the public sector organizations in Pakistan through a paradigm shift in favor of the directly elected local government institutions. It is sensitive, as this initiative has perhaps triggered more controversies than any other policy of Musharraf government. Indeed, the Local Government plan presents a great opportunity for decentralizing the Government structure and service management by enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of key public services.

In the devolution plan, following justifications have been given as the basis for the Local Government structure:

1. Non-use, misuse, and abuse of political and administrative system which led to institutional crisis

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- resulting in collapse of political and administrative systems;
2. Corruption in political and administrative system;
  3. Political system has been hijacked by political families, as it has not functioned under the political parties;
  4. Administrative set-up was control-oriented rather than service-oriented.

The government this time around has indeed changed Pakistan's decades' old colonial system of running political and administrative affairs based on a colonial ethos of control rather than service by devolving powers at the local level. Pakistan did witness local bodies' elections in the past but each time, unstable national political system amongst other factors led to its collapse. Under the devolution plan, Local Government elections were held in five phases covering all districts of the four Provinces from December 2000 to June 2001. All the elected representatives at the *Zila* (District), *Tehsil/Taluka* (sub District), Town Councils and Union level were sworn in on August 14, 2001.

### **Fundamentals of Local Government Plan**

Local Government plan has following five fundamental objectives:

1. Devolution of political power.
2. Decentralization of authority.
3. De-concentration of management functions.
4. Diffusion of the power-authority nexus.
5. Distribution of resources.

Essentially, the new system is aimed at creating an enabling environment in which not only the people participate in the community welfare but also own their decisions and become the masters of their own destiny. This system as a matter of fact,

functions within the provincial framework and without any interference from the centre.

Following are the salient features of the devolution plan:

### **Empowerment of People**

1. For the first time the elected *Nazim* (Head of District, Tehsil or Union Council) has been made the head of a district administration. Under the earlier system elected functionaries headed municipal administration only.
2. District Police Officer (DPO) made responsible to district *Nazim* for law and order.
3. District *Nazims* have been empowered to initiate/countersign the Annual Confidential Rs of district officers. In the earlier systems government functionaries used to be the controlling authority of the local councils.

### **Devolution of Authority**

Twelve departments called group of offices by LGO 2001, devolved to the district government are as follows:

1. District coordination: Coordination, human resource management and civil defense
2. Agriculture: Extension, livestock, farm/water management, soil conservation, soil fertility and forests.
3. Community Development: Community organization, labor, social welfare, sports, culture, cooperative and registration.
4. Education: Primary and secondary schools, colleges, technical education and special education.
5. Finance and planning: Finance and budget, planning and development, accounts, enterprise and investment promotion.
6. Health: Public health, basic and rural health, child and women health, population welfare, district and tehsil hospitals.

7. Information technology: Development, promotion and database.
8. Law: Legal advice and drafting.
9. Literacy: Literacy campaigns, continuing education and vocational education.
10. Executive magistracy.
11. Revenue: Land revenue and estate and excise and taxation.
12. Work and services: Spatial planning and development, districts roads, and building, energy and transport.

## **Historical Background**

Before the advent of the British rule in India, there was no advanced tradition of local self-government in the modern sense. However, a rudimentary local government system did exist in the rural areas. This was the system of village *panchayats* (literally council of five) which performed administrative, judicial and sometimes developmental functions (Majumdar 1960, Basham 1954, Chaudhry 2009).

In the areas that presently comprise Pakistan, local governments were introduced by the British not by building on the village *panchayats*, but instead from scratch, following the annexation of Sindh in 1843 and of Punjab in 1849 (Tinker 1968, Venkatarangaiya and Pattabhram 1969, Chaudhry & Chaudhry 2012).

Another important feature of the British system of local government was the creation of a rural-urban divide. Urban local councils were established by the British to provide essential municipal services in urban areas where they resided. It appears that rural councils were explicitly used to co-opt the local elite by giving them limited representation and as a result their capacity to provide essential municipal services became even more circumscribed than the capacity found in urban areas (Siddiqui 1992, Chaudhry & Chaudhry 2013).

Local government institutions of some kind always existed in the socio-political fabric of Pakistan. But the municipal committee and corporations were the creation of the British Rule. The East India Company precursor of the British rule established rudimentary Local Government institutions. The system in the right earnest, however, was brought about towards the end of the last century when political consciousness grew and there were strings of an anti-colonial struggle. Starting in 1882, it had undergone various changes and improvements (Government of Pakistan: 2002). The system of Local Government inherited from colonial times continued in Pakistan even after the independence. "However, no attempt was made to release it from strangulating bureaucratic trammels or to convert it into a system responsive to the aspirations and needs of the people. Elections to the local bodies were not held at regular intervals starving these bodies of fresh talent and denying the general people an experience of working of self government institutions (Government of Pakistan: 2004a).

In the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, the term local government was originally used to denote the provincial governments, which were the local agents of the Government of India. Before the introduction of provincial autonomy, there was only one government for the Sub-Continent i.e. Government of India and the government under Governors were merely local governments.

The 1962 constitution introduced a term 'Basic Democracies' to denote institutions of representative local government (Government of Pakistan, 1962). While Basic Democracies system also served as Electoral College for the election of President of Pakistan and members of the legislatures. It centered around the concept that Pakistan's sovereignty and unity as a nation can be guaranteed only by a strong centre. That centre should give autonomy to provinces without allowing centrifugal forces to re-assert themselves.

Notwithstanding the merits of Basic Democracies, its role as an electoral college for the high tiers of government was one of the causes of its pre-mature demise in 1971. After the short life span of Basic Democracies in the sixties, the elected civilian government in early seventies failed to establish Local Government system despite Peoples Local Government Ordinance-1975 (Government of Pakistan, 1979).

The structure and characteristics of Basic Democracies system was such that local bodies were a mix of elected and officially nominated representatives headed by the district bureaucracy. There was a strong concept of controlling authority in the system. In Pakistan, it was the first military government, which introduced Basic Democracies through Local Government Ordinance 1979. The ordinance introduced three-tier structure of local bodies i.e. Unions Council, District Council and Tehsil Council. Following were the main features of the system:

1. Provinces and Federally administered areas framed the local government laws.
2. Rural and urban local government laws were unified to avoid duplication.
3. Representation was given to peasants, workers, women and minorities.
4. For the first time local council were headed by elected chairman.
5. No nominations were made on local councils.
6. Autonomy given to local government to approve their budgets and taxation proposals.
7. Elections to local councils were to be held on non-party basis.
8. Controlling authority under Basic Democracies was done away with.
9. A five year term was fixed.
10. An independent election authority headed by a judge of the High Court was set up.

11. It was mandatory to hold election on expiry of the term with no extension.
12. Elections on the basis of adult franchise.

General, Zia-ul-Haq, promulgated Local Government Ordinance in 1979 and elections for Local Councils were held on a non-party basis in 1979, 1983, 1987 and in 1991. It is ironical indeed to observe that in Pakistan when civilian governments were in power either there was no local government or it was not encouraged. However, each military government i.e. 1958-1969, 1977-88 attached high importance to the development of local government (Government of Pakistan, 2004b).

The analysis of Local Bodies of later years reveals that the Local Government system was never granted legitimacy as a formal organ of the State. The Provincial Governments made the rules and procedures relating to its functioning thus exercising control not only over the management but also finances of the local government. Some of the district Councilors became provincial level leaders and carried their district politics and influenced the decision making in the provincial government with their limited interest. The elections on non-party basis also created a division in the community on religion, ethnic and caste basis. Its adverse ramification distorted the entire political culture till to date (National Centre for Rural Development, 1996).

### **Play of Devolution**

The Devolution plan was aimed to bring new and radical changes in the local level administrative system in Pakistan. The document of Local Government Ordinance 2000 promised to change the previously held malpractices in the local administration. The promise could not come true. World Bank (2004) commented that "To ordinary Pakistanis, however, devolution is a promise being kept, a promise still far from

fulfilled, but one that is already bringing change in some schools, courts and clinics and, most visibly, in the political life of the countryside and the cities and towns'. International Crisis Group (2004) stated that 'Four years after a national devolution plan was implemented,1 local governments still have only nominal political, administrative and financial autonomy'.

### **No Fiscal Decentralization**

While the scope of local governments in terms of the services they are responsible for and how they allocate district level expenditures across services increased substantially post-devolution, the extent of financial decentralization is limited both because (i) districts governments continue to have the same limited revenue collection abilities (no new taxes have been devolved to the district and tehsil levels) and still rely primarily on provincial and ultimately federal funds, through the provincial finance commission awards (although the latter has been made rule-based) and (ii) a significant majority of district expenditures are establishment charges which, while incurred by the district, cannot be altered by the district; these expenditures include salaries of administrative personnel who continue to be provincial employees and as such the district cannot fire them or adjust their wages. Keefer et al (2003) state that discussion of administrative and fiscal decentralization below demonstrates that devolution is incomplete in Pakistan. Centrally appointed administrative officers prepare the first draft of district budgets, and funds for local government come almost entirely from upper level governments with strings attached. A key characteristic of local government is nevertheless the allocation of decision-making authority among local government officials in the formation of local budgets. The existing ordinances governing Pakistani devolution suggest that the district councils may have little influence over budget

preparation or implementation and that the district *nazims* will exercise significant influence over district government.

### **Fears of Provincially Weak Control Structure**

It was held that provincial government would become weaker since much of its power would be given to district governments. Devolution of power means transfer of powers from Centre to provinces and further to lower tiers, but depriving the provinces of whatever they have runs against the existing federal system. Or, is it that we are moving towards a unitary form of government? If it is so, the government should do it openly and initiate a debate on this crucial issue.

### **Devolution excluding Political Parties**

It was noted that party-based political system and elections provide the best order of checks and balances. Non-party system, on the contrary, creates divisions along tribal, ethnic and linguistic lines. A viable system of checks and balances cannot be evolved through bureaucratic machinations or game of numbers. The formation of about 20 monitoring committees may complicate a problem rather than solve it as they would be at loggerheads with each other. Cheema et al (2004) in their work cited Wilder (1999) who says:

‘the non-party basis of local government elections has invariably ended up weakening political linkages between elected provincial governments, which have tended to be party based, and local governments. Political parties, when in government at the provincial level, have tended to view local governments as a competing tier of ‘patronage’ (Wilder 1999).

Caste is a strong bond in Pakistani rural society that plays a vital role during the decision making for the vote cast. Caste indulgence means the personalization of the affairs associated with the honor and prestige of a certain group of people. Many bloodiest feuds were observed during the pre-election and post-election periods. The political parties though also use this

triumph card for success in the election but the same time the ideological association of the voters also matter. In rural society of Pakistan, people are divided on the basis of caste due to which the elections become the matter of one's respect for which according the rural view point 'death can also be embraced'. This argument is further reinforced by ICG's (2005) report while commenting 'The elections were marred by serious violence, which may well become worse in future polls as ethnic, religious and regional rivalries are stirred up. President Pervez Musharraf's efforts to maintain military control over politics are likely to limit the state's mechanisms for dealing democratically and peacefully with its many internal conflicts (2005).

### **Women Participation**

While there is a dire need for women's emancipation and protection of their rights, the proposal for 50% women's representation at the Union level certainly lacks touch with ground realities. The question, then, is why women's representation is 20% at the district level? And what would be their representation at the provincial and federal levels?

Keefer, et al (2003) describes that 'the new plan reserves a third of the seats in the districts councils and other tiers of local governments for women, addressing a longstanding demand of human rights and women's rights groups. In a major departure from past practice, the plan would, at least in theory, make the district administration answerable to the elected chief executive of the district rather than provincial or central government authorities. Although there have been prior attempts at decentralization in Pakistan, these never involved, even in principle, such delegation to locally elected officials'.

### **Increased Federal Influence**

Devolution in Pakistan replaced at the district level the former Deputy Commissioner (DC) who was appointed by the Federal

Public Service Commission. Former DC's role was evident in almost all spheres of district life. He was the executive head of public offices at the district level. In addition, DC was also supposed to look into two other matters that included financial matters of the district and the legal power of district magistrate. This was an issue often attacked by the critics of nominating same person for administration and judicial matter which under any circumstances put questions on the transparency of the district deals. Keefer et al (2003) pointed out that the administrative structure under devolution leaves substantial authority in the hands of centrally appointed civil servants. Devolution created the post of District Coordinating Officer (DCO), replacing the former Deputy Commissioner. The DCO lacks many of the legal powers of the Deputy Commissioner, but still has significant executive and managerial responsibilities. Not the least of these is the authority to prepare the first draft of the district budget and control over district personnel. The key change under devolution is that the DCO reports to the district *nazim*. The *nazim's* authority over the DCO is limited, however. He can request the transfer of the DCO and initiate the DCO's performance evaluation, but the transfer goes through only if the provincial government concurs and the *nazim's* performance evaluation is valid only if countersigned by the chief secretary and chief minister of the provincial government. Similarly, the ten to twelve executive district officers, responsible for sectors such as education, who formerly reported to the parent line departments in the provincial government, now report to both the DCO and the *nazim*. Once again, though, the *nazim* can only request that the provincial government transfer these officials and provincial governments retain sole authority to appoint them.

### **Limited Constitutional Support**

Despite the new local government structure Pakistan is constitutionally still a two-level federal state i.e. the local governments are not recognized as the third tier of government by the 1973 Constitution. The 17th Constitutional Amendment provides limited protection to the local governments for a period of only six years during which provinces can make changes to the local government legislation with the concurrence of the President. Keefer at el (2003) also commented 'there is no constitutional guarantee for the new structure. Although local government is a provincial subject under the 1973 Constitution, empowering provinces to create administrative units through decree and local governments through ordinances, such bodies have no constitutional status or protection from the parent province at any time. It remains constitutionally permissible for local governments to be disbanded by the parent province at any time'. In theory, the new Local Government System promised to provide the decision making powers to the local level. This promise could not be fulfilled as under the rules the Provincial Chief Minister can suspend the resolutions of District, Tehsil and Union Council, if any contradictions with law or interests of the people are reported. This power was mainly used for the sake of benefiting the provincial government's candidates.

### **No Local Level Empowerment**

The national picture also worsens with the efforts made by the governments in their respective tenures and later on high jacked by the influential in the office or the influential rural supporters to whom Alavi (1976) calls "*Rasagirs*". Working on these lines Chonchol (1976) focuses on the role of pressure groups and influential people in adoption of innovation especially through any project. He says that pressure groups or influential get their share on priority basis because they can afford to take risks and exploit others, because they know that

while doing this no body would stop then and their links in government and bureaucracy would protect them. Roth (1976) in agreement with Chonchol also says that people who are neither big land lords nor politically influential, an easily be suppressed by influential people due to the lack of class solidarity among the poor. Hussain (1999) visualizes that the traditional view of Pakistani politics, feudal landlords, by virtue of their strong control over rural voters and the significant overrepresentation of rural voters in the national and provincial legislatures, exercised disproportionate influence in national level policy making. Their influence over decision making and the generally client list nature of decision making meant that targeted spending and government actions were far preferred by politicians to the provision of broad public goods. Certainly, the deepest and most pervasive poverty in Pakistan is rural, and it is worst in areas that have been traditionally considered as feudal, such as rural Sind. A strong association between landlessness and poverty supports this link (Chaudhry & Chaudhry 2011).

Among the 70 percent of the population that do not own any land in Pakistan, the poverty rate is 35 percent, while it is only 13 percent among the 6 percent who owned at least 4 hectares of land. Rural elites have always had exceptional influence in Pakistan. In some cases, in particular in the poorest parts of rural Pakistan, elected politicians were large semi-feudal landowners, who would have had the weakest incentives to advocate for better government on behalf of their constituents.

### **Feudal Structure remains Intact**

The startling thing in devolution plan was that it increased the influence of the power holders to a considerable extent. Before that the federal government introduced the minimum educational qualifications (i.e. graduation) for the candidates who were contesting the national assembly elections. The

conviction for doing the same was that these old politicians are corrupt and looted the assets of the country therefore they should be some yardstick which could help in debarring them to join the new assembly. The candidates who were disqualified in the new criteria made their minds to indulge in the newly district government system in which the power and authorities were more than that of the Member of National Assembly (MNA) or Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) while making their sons and nephews ready for the new “graduate assembly”. These two reasons made the elders of the families going after the district or Tehsil elections and their younger for the national or the provincial assemblies. One can easily understand that had the power of these politicians decreased or increased. The rural life is a composite chain of cultural complexities in Pakistan as cited by Burky (1976) who says that: “Land lords in the pre-Ayub era were able to control at least twenty Punjab villages. It is a reference to the exceptional case, rather than the rule few villages were (or are) owned by a single family. In the typical of about 12, 000 Acres, these are usually a few land lords (some of whom may own more land is adjoining *Mauza* (village) plus a large number of Peasant proprietors as well as members of other classes. Given such a composition of the rural population, it would be simplistic to explain political power in the rural society merely be references to exceptional political power in the vast majority of villages in Political power in such missed villages is typically, organized by the *Kath* or the *Dharras* (Factions). The *Dharra leader* who is typically a big land owner organizes support by a variety of means like they rely on a core of supporters namely their economic dependents, their share croppers, who have little option but to follow their master also their close relative, who might also be the big land lords. The faction leaders enter into alliance with fellow land lords, who too bring with them economic dependents into the faction with the power of this core. The faction leader set out to recruit following from among

other section of the rural community principally, the independent small peasant proprietors. The later are weak individually but often they are organized under the authority of their “*Biraderi Panchayat*” (Linkage Council) (Ahmed et al. 2012, Chaudhry et al. 2014).

### **Missed Local Level Participation**

Devolution did not bring real empowerment to the people at the grass roots rather only those who were already enjoying power in the society were benefited. In this regard the work of Martinussen (1997-205) also depicts that:

‘The Pakistani bourgeoisie favored a regime form that concentrated as much power and decision making as possible in the executive branches of the state, the main reason being that this class was weak in political terms for at least three decades after independence’ (Martinussen: 1997).

The idea introduced by new devolution plan was Citizen Community Boards (CCB) as an organization run by the local people at the grass root levels to identify their developmental needs and launch new innovations to change their lives by rooting out the existing problems. The CCBs failed to get their project sponsored unless their projects were supported by the influential occupying the public offices. This thing is ignored or under rated by the policy makers at the federal level. Failure on the part of the planners and policy makers has rightly been highlighted by Thiesenhusen, Esman, Du Bois Cora and Frans Doorman(1991). Thiesenhusen says “reaching to the poor has turned out to be a much more complex task than was earlier visualized” (Thiesenhusen: 1978). Esman discusses that planners and administrators here are on an unfamiliar ground. There is no previous experience to guide them in their operations (Esman: 1980). Often, they are therefore unable both to anticipate socio-cultural hurdles, which arise during the plan implementation phase, and to try to overcome them. Cora highlights the human factors in development process as:

“Since human factors in the rural development process have not traditionally been accorded the due importance, knowledge in these matters has not developed to the required degree” (Du Bois Cora: 1959).

The policy weakness raised the conflict element in the rural life after the elections. Khanna (1991) describes the rural development scenario in his work by stating that ‘there is no unanimity among the distinguished thinkers and experienced planners and policymakers in regard to the purpose of development in universal terms. This is not altogether surprising in view of the fact that create perceptions, demands and aspiration of the countries and various classes of people within these differ on account of varying national heritages, needs, resources and existing socio-political systems’.

### **Authoritative Policy Process: Traditional Top down Approach**

Pakistan has seen various phases in her agricultural development cycle with incessant and perpetual shifts in policy further bringing the upshots of not achieving the level of sustainability. Failures in heavily invested programs and projects, fragmentation of rural population, rise of rural rifts, etc were the aftermaths after a lot has been done by previous political and military set ups to bring revolution in agricultural sector. Unfortunately, the most ignored chapter was the strengthening of research traditions to benefit the masses of the rural farmers willing to adopt newly evolved varieties and practices matching the developmental needs of motherland. Appropriately deemed investments in the domain was severely lacked and resultantly lagged the farming community to arrogate the winning board. Most of the new experiments done in the agricultural research institutes and departments of the country were either restricted to the laboratories, or were a matter of disagreements among the planners at the national and provincial levels. Few of the new innovations made by the

scientists were not cost effective. The said problems perplexed the scenario for the rural farmers and really pushed them to the walls merely thinking of ensuring their own survival. This phenomenon also raised the dependency on the agricultural imports that put even added fuel on unluckiest fate of the country. This argument is further strengthened by Duncan (2007) as:

‘Who examined how indigenous ethnic minorities in Indonesia were affected by the implementation of decentralization and regional autonomy policies. New legislation transferred responsibility and authority over various issues, including resource extraction and local governance, from the central government to regional authorities at the district level. Members of the growing indigenous rights movement hoped that this decentralization process would allow ethnic minority communities to retain or regain control over natural resources through local-level politics. Furthermore, some ethnic minorities saw the implementation of decentralization as an opportunity to return to local forms of land tenure and resource management that had been disparaged by the national government for most of the twentieth century. However, these new laws also encourage district level governments to generate income through natural resource exploitation, as they will receive a certain percentage of these revenues. Minority communities could be adversely affected as local governments disregard their land rights in efforts to raise income to cover their new expenses, essentially continuing the practices of previous governments. This article examines the new opportunities, as well as the new threats, posed by decentralization to ethnic minorities throughout Indonesia’.

### **Power Brokers in Rural Pakistan**

Burky says that the local power structure is inevitable in rural life because “Individuals and political parties with ambitions in district, provincial or national politics seek alliances with the local faction leaders that secure for them support at the grass root level” (Burky 1976).

Having said the above, it is contended that how is this notion of participatory development be launched in a society with evidence of comprehensive conflict prevailing. The idea of citizen community boards (CCBs) in LGO 2001 is another mean of benefiting the like minded people who have opted to become vehicles of those who are after the whims of extension of their hold over country. Similar argument is made by Alavi (1976) who gives example of Pakistan. He says politically influential land lords manipulate the project into their favor, due to the power structure in Pakistan, which allows them to exploit, and they get share of small potential beneficiaries. The startling thing in devolution plan was that it increased the influence of the power holders to a considerable extent. Before that the federal government introduced the minimum educational qualifications (i.e. graduation) for the candidates who were contesting the national assembly elections. The conviction for doing the same was that these old politicians are corrupt and looted the assets of the country therefore there should be some yardstick which could help in debarring them to join the new assembly. The candidates who were disqualified in the new criteria made their minds to indulge in the newly district government system in which the power and authorities were more than that of the MNAs or MPAs while making their sons and nephews ready for the new graduate assembly. These two reasons made the elders of the families going after the district or Tehsil elections and their younger for the national or the provincial assemblies. One can easily understand that had the power of these politicians decreased or increased.

An example is worthy quoting from the one Tehsil in Gujarat district that was represented by the opponents group to the one sitting and occupying the district assembly presents a gloomy picture of no work done in the Tehsil because of the opponents. Construction of one road was witnessed that is a classical picture of the conflict between the opponents' parties. The said road was under the jurisdiction of Tehsil Kharian of

Gujrat district. There was matter of road construction under the consideration of Tehsil administration who expressed their helplessness as having no developmental budgets. The district assembly wanted the people of the Tehsil learn from it and to refrain from voting their opponents party in the next elections. In all this mess, the rural masses were facing a lot of problems.

In district Sheikhpura, conflict is deeply rooted in the cultural life of the people. Link road from *Sacha Soda* to *Phularwaan* (a town at a distance of 15 kilometres) was also a bone of contention between the power groups of the village. The road was not maintained after it was once constructed. The local transport people and general public were really concerned about the road as it became notorious for the looting even in the day times. Due to badly damaged road it was impossible for the busses and other local transport to move swiftly due to which it was so easy for the local bandits and other wanted criminals to loot and plunder there. The evidences led to loss of many lives, rape of the passenger women, kidnapping of young girls who travelled from there, etc. The road was not in the mainstream of the road as it was merely a link road that provided a shortcut link to Farooqabad city to Sangla Hills (another town at a distance of 28 Kilometres). The presence of main Sargodha Lahore road and the railway track from Faisalabad to Sheikhpura really made the road unimportant as the town of Sangla Hills was covered by the train and the said road became a mere link road connecting the villages to the agricultural market of Farooqabad city. The transport load was also lessened therefore the road was even desolated and deserted in day times. There was only one Police check post in Sacha Soda village where the police was supposed to search the criminals. From the stated Police check post up to Sangla Hills there was no single check post or Police station therefore the area served as a paradise of the bandits where there was no concept of law, only the local *Deraydars* along with their bandits ruled the area and made decisions that suited them and their groups.

## **No Social Empowerment**

Devolution was an innovative idea that promised people of providing opportunities to develop and grow according to the wishes and developmental needs. The oppressive nature of the local government structure debarred people to avail the chances of meeting the needs. Local power holders were very much concerned about supporting their candidates to come in the scenes as the elected candidates later on add strength and indispensability in the village life. According to the view of the general public that the local level elections are always very violent and bloody as the public overtly support and oppose their candidates and this support and opposition is very much articulated in their daily life which can not be concealed for many reasons like in the local body elections, one has to clearly distinguish the *Dharra* (group/ faction) with which one is going to attach otherwise to fix the daily problems are in question. Local level elections are also point of contention because one can see divisions even in the *biradari* (brethren) and extended families. The local level power holders very artistically use the mutual misunderstanding of the village community for their purposes. It is essential for the villagers that whatever *Dera* they are affiliated decides the supported candidate in the oncoming elections. These local power holders win a position during the national and provincial elections which they provide the voters' support to these politicians and in return from these politicians, the power holders receive support for the own candidates contesting the local level elections. A similar comment has been made by Lentz (2006) who worked on Decentralization projects, such as that initiated by the Rawlings government in Ghana at the end of the 1980s, create a political space in which the relations between local political communities and the state are re-negotiated. In many cases, the devolution of power intensifies special-interest politics and political mobilization aiming at securing a 'larger share of the national cake', that is, more state funds, infrastructure and posts for the locality.

Situation in Pakistan regarding Decentralization is creating a social frustration in which rural communities have to participate with no hope left to get the issues resolved at the grass roots which was the main assurance of devolution plan.

### **Devolution on Ground**

In the early days the devolution plan convinced so many people but later on since the plan was implemented the failures were sky high according to one of my respondents in Akhter Hamid Khan Centre of Rural Development and Municipal Administration, in Islamabad. The Director Research of the centre was of the view that “one can only try to develop plan close to reality and true picture but the loopholes are always pointed out when the specific plan or program is implemented and the required feed back is received”.

My conviction here is to emphasize the true spirit of devolution described in the lines above in which I believe that the true sentiments and results of any development plan, project or program could only be reflected by the intentions and action of actors and intended audience of the program. Firstly, the reason given for the devolution plan is articulated in the terms that in previous local governments the district bureaucracy was made accountable to the non-elected members in the district councils. Whereas the statement is not factual as the reality on ground speaks of a different story that shows that the members of previous local government were also elected through a complete electoral process and the members of previous local governments were also somehow contributing to the infra-structural development of the country. Secondly, with the advent of the new devolution plan the slogan raised by the innovators and policy makers that centuries old system of bureaucracy has been abolished while giving the decision making power into the hands of true public representative elected in the election under the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). My conviction is that most of the political

parties and majority of the public in Pakistan rejected the results of the new system as the major ruling party was blamed of rigging the election results before the elections held. The government failed to appoint a permanent election commission to hold the free and fair elections as a temporary chairman of the ECP was appointed to conduct and oversee the task. There were talks on the media about the controversial status of the temporary person being responsible for holding national level activity without having access to a neutral and objective environment. There were claims before the elections about the clean sweep of the ruling party which came to be true to almost cent percent.

Thirdly, the breaking up of old bureaucracy was not a blessing because of the fact the previous district commission was not only the administrative head of all district offices as well as the district magistrate whereas the new system was silent in the magistracy whose proof is the recent decision of government to appoint the price magistrates at the district level because of the high level of black marketing and sky high prices without any proper check and balance in effect.

Fourthly, the lay men in all local government system were not reflected anywhere. There has been a tradition that the lay men tried to find some nearest people or the spokesmen of the politicians to fix their problems. The situation now is even worse because the local level politics especially in the villages which is already full of inter class conflicts; the elected members only benefit the people from their own group while ignoring the others. To do the same is also the constraints of the elected members because of the fear of losing the support of their people and thus losing the next elections.

Fifthly, it is said that the elected government and the provincial administration have been integrated at the district and Tehsil levels while abolishing the division and the local level provincial administration has been made accountable to elected officials at the local level. The fact on ground is

revealing a different story that now the previously the district offices that were supervised at the provincial level are now in a state of confusion as the provincial government expect the officials to look after the provincial priorities in the light of National policies whereas the district government asks for accommodating its own vested and political interests. I met EDO education in his office where he was compiling the lists of the teachers to be appointed on contract as desired by the provincial government. He reported that he is under so much mental tensions as he is having many alternate lists from the district assembly, Tehsil council, MPAs and MNAs. He was expressing that he is totally confused what to do because the names of the people with recommendations form all these offices were more as compared to the available seats. He was also concerned that if he appoints all of these people on contract then what is the point is calling application form the candidates who have no intercession letters attached with the application forms. He also expressed that the politicians will be forgotten but later on if some discrepancy is found only he will be held responsible for that.

Sixthly, it was claimed regarding the fiscal decentralization that no new tax has been imposed. The situation on ground is different because the districts and Tehsil still rely primarily on the provincial and federal funds for the budgetary issues. The industrialization phase is already facing so many problems in the tax field due to which the affairs of the new system usually fall their back upon the provinces and federal government. In some places it was observed that the district governments imposed the road taxes on the heavy vehicles for rooming in the city due to which the local transport system is badly affect. It is because of the heavy reliance of all city districts on the provinces and federal government that the new system has gone into a conflicting situation with the provinces and federal governments as the two also influence their internal affairs.

Seventhly, the clash over the command and authority between the new system and the provinces still remain and pose unsolvable riddle before the innovators and advocates of the devolution plan. As the report under reference itself criticizes over the less or no heed towards the smooth integration of city governments with the provincial and federal governments.

Finally, the devolution must not be assumed as complete devolution of power, decision making from the federal and provincial levels to the district level rather a distinction has been made in the devolved items. While regarding the previous provincial issues to still provincial issues include police and irrigation departments' (examples have just been quoted for reference in the lines above). Few other relevant examples are the education at the university level, administration of teaching hospitals (Health department), agricultural research and development (Agriculture department), supervision of foreign funded projects (Planning and Development department) and regulation of medical standards (Health department) have remained at the provincial level despite the devolution of other activities in these departments. In addition to this, the most important example is salary and allowance expenditures of all department employees. Since most employees in the administrative departments remain provincial employees, the district cannot create or reduce posts or adjust their salary structure and therefore, a large fraction of the district budget is fixed.

## **Conclusions**

The villagers report that no considerable developmental work was carried out in the last local governments. They are of the view that we have accepted that no body after election fulfils the promises often made during the elections under many excuses. The community views that it is always the influential

land owners who demand support from the lay men in the village as recognition of their services during the daily life. The question that why the villagers usually cast their votes after their influential local power holders is simply because, the villagers easily approach them during their problems and thus use their influence in fixing their issues. The power holders on the other hand, act as middlemen between the candidate during the elections and the voter community to cash their vested interests. World Bank in a way summarized that “Devolution’s impact, if any, on the delivery of social services education, health care, water, sanitation, law enforcement cannot yet be reliably assessed. It will be sometime before agreed-upon data that could make or break the case for local control could be collected and analyzed. By one simple measure, though devolution has already begun to bring fresh political blood into local government” (World Bank, 2004). Devolution in its infancy in Pakistan was reported and perceived by Pakistani nation as something will help them overcome their local issues at local level. By having the problems fixed at a local level meant that people precious time and monetary resources will be saved. Local inhabitants were of the thinking that they will be empowered to take decisions at their local Union Council Level regarding their day to day issues in agriculture, road communications, and health and education domains. The devolution plan let people aspire for developing their participative approaches in the socio-cultural life but the dreamt was not fulfilled because the already influential people managed to manipulate the new devolution of power plan in their favors at the Union Council level. The tehsil council and district council were not effectively working on the real issues where as the controversies on several issues were raised between the province and newly set in district governments. This issue was more heard and visible in areas especially where the elected district governments were from opposition parties. Development budgets and minimal fiscal decentralization led

problems within the local government system. The agencies involved in the facilitation and interpretation of devolution plan did not perform the duty up to the mark. Decentralization and finally devolution of power in Pakistan is still a dream for the people of Pakistan.

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