

Citizens' Voices for Enhanced and Effective Legislation and Accountability:

A Case Study of Balochistan

By

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Abstract:

Participatory approach is an indicator of sustainable development which a global agenda for almost every country and international development forum around the globe. Participation not only ensure sustenance of development projects but also help adopt for policies, laws and resource use patterns, which is friendly to efforts pertaining to ensure live over mother planet. Jargon, such as citizens' voices refers to similar state of affair where roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders are defined and where value of the vote is citizenry is considered significant in electing legislatures. Ground realities show that there is a big gap between theory and practice, particularly in developing countries including Pakistan. The situation gets worsen where tribal set up exists and belongingness of masses are treated on the basis of their economic, tribal and social status. This research study finds a number of root causes for the prevalence of such an unpromising situation that has already tantalized working mechanisms of people friendly legislation and accountability. It also provides broader guidelines to engulf the gap between voters and elected representatives of masses as present or future legislature / leaders towards good governance.

Keywords: Citizens' voices, good governance, sustainability, accountability, transparency, democracy

Introduction:

The term citizens' voices refer to ensure participation of masses in governance matters. Whilst governance is destined the decisions being made and implemented by a composite mechanism of policy/decision making and enforcement set up, which include both elected people's

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representative's bodies (parliament) and mandated state institutions like judiciary and administration.

Ideally, the power must lie with the parliament, where representatives of masses assemble for deliberations over issues and challenges that a nation state is confronted with in order to find solutions (make decisions) that are helpful to overcome those. These "solutions" are mainly broader guidelines (policies) and specific actions/decisions (legislations). Participation of masses (citizens' voices) helps make best decisions, which are characterized with trickle-down effects and citizen friendly features. At the same time, the in-built transparency and accountability mechanism will improve, which will further help improve performance of the elected representatives and officials of government departments to render services and cater for the needs of the masses as an immediate outcome of democracy.

On practical ground, however, things do not happen the way, they should be. Prevailing situation depicts an ugly and entirely different scenario. The elected representatives seldom bother to consult masses to get adequately sensitized and fine tune with expectations of masses, therefore, issues and concerns, for the most part, remain unaddressed. The gap between actual issues and priorities of elected representatives is vividly evident everywhere, however, its intensity gets further widened in areas where democracy is new or tribal set up is prevalent. Consequently, the level of disappointments, doubts, mistrusts and dislikes from democratic values including its type of government is increasing rapidly. Lots of initiatives from various fronts are needed simultaneously. This research paper is a preliminary effort to explore root causes of this issue that has widespread already and have multifaceted effects on our governance system and society in general.

Literature Review:

Like all other frequently discussed development notions, good governance has also remained a hot topic for intellectual discourse and taken as a missing link of development paradigm among development practitioners and academicians across the country including Balochistan. Prevalence of a functional mechanism of good governance is characterized by active participation of masses through their representative bodies, groups and organizations including actors of civil society provided that they represent concerns of masses and their issues. Undeniably, government is a major stakeholder, to ensure good governance, but not the only player.

Globally, good governance is treated as a human value among civilized democratic nation states. Whereas in Pakistan still lots of efforts are due to promote the very basic idea and significance of citizen's voices among powerful elite at various level and mechanisms of policy and decision making. "Indicators of strong citizen's voices are manifested through its improved access to social services, working apparatus of transparency, accountability and protective shield for rights and interests, which is ensured while citizens' voices are generously paid adequate attention and

is reflected in decisions”. In Pakistan, particularly Balochistan, beside access, the quality of basic services is poor, defective and less than the needs of people. Right of access to information is adversely violated, consequently transparency does not prevail. And legal framework for the protection of rights and interest is faced with issue of proper implementation

At International level various studies were conducted to clarify the foggy situation about governance. Beyond any doubt, the voice and accountability are important dimensions of good governance. Voice refers both to the capacity to express views and interests and to the exercise of this, usually in an attempt to influence government priorities or governance processes. “Accountability exists when those who set and implement the rules (politicians and public officials) are answerable to those whose lives are shaped by those rules and can be sanctioned if their performance is unsatisfactory”. Voice and accountability are therefore important indicators of the nature of the relationship between a state and its citizens”. Despite of the theoretical discourse with regard to significance of citizen participation, it is however evident in practice that in most developing countries including Pakistan citizen voices are still ignored by both legislators and legislatures. The situation gets further deteriorated among masses where tribal set still prevails like Balochistan. The present scenario requires immediate responses and the help and support of media and political push up. The prevailing situation and methods to respond them is not a “wish list” rather human value, which must be believed upon and shown in practices at all levels. Such a humane situation is the essence of true democracy.

In Pakistan, during the past consecutive government of both military and civil establishment, it was proved that none can achieve the prime objectives of welfare state without ensuring people’s participation in its governance approach. “Governance refers to the formal and informal processes through which a society’s rules are established, operate and evolve. The formal institutional framework of the state is important in determining how a society is governed, but governance is about more than this. In reality, governance is messy and context dependent, and entails the interaction between formal and informal rules, processes and relationships”. A governance issue, no doubt, is a policy matter that has its negative impact over all aspects of lives of citizen irrespective of their socio-economic status. Once decisions such as policies and laws are made faulty and anti-people, everything trickled down will have to be questioned. Such a situation has already given birth to the three dimensional aspects of service delivery mechanism across countries including ours. They include public, private and civic sectors. Each sector has its own issues and challenges in order to ensure their survival and sustainability while providing quality goods and services to citizens.

1. Public Sector:

Politically, it is believed that provision of basic social services and safeguarding the rights and interests of citizens, is purely, the prime

responsibility of state, which the state must perform through its public sector organizations. However, in practice, Pakistan seems to have failed to satisfactorily meet such an ever increasing rational demand. Reports by various international and national organizations show that millions of children don't have access to education, millions of poor masses particularly women have no or very little access to health facilities and are prone to serious diseases." Almost half of the population lives miserably in single roomed houses. More than 40% of the entire populace lives below the poverty line. "According to reliable sources the current ratio of birth and death rate is 6.8 in comparison to a figure of 24.6 respectively, whereas literacy rate is almost 55%, unemployment ratio is 24% and the rate of poverty despite variation among provinces is rated to 46% of total populace of potential workforce". Interestingly, despite repeated proclamation as welfare state, Pakistan is faced with mass poverty, unemployment, lack of basic social services and absence of good governance. Moreover, the hues and cries of masses are seldom heard and taken serious by every ruling government. The gap gets further widened due to corruption, loopholes of administrative arrangement and lack of political will. Absence of any mechanism by masses and civil society to hold people representatives responsible and accountable is another major issue to be addressed

2. Private Sector:

It is justified, that in countries where public sector has limitations, in term of financial and human resources to reach every citizen to meet their basic needs, they are ethically bound to seek help and support of private sector and Multi-National Companies MNCs. Keeping in view privatization and seeking help from MNCs must be dealt sagaciously to avoid its negative impacts. Therefore, legislations and regulations become the utmost duties of government. Un-regulated or defective regulation do provide enough space to MNCs and private sector to freely practice their fundamental business objectives of profit maximization while compromising rights, interests and welfare of masses at the cost of their profits. The same is going on in Pakistan, where private sector's conducts remain un-checked and un-monitored. Consequently, people's vulnerability increased many fold. Health and education sectors, for instances, are two sector, where masses get somewhat quality services by private sector through their own resources, however, with dozens of issues that have to be addressed

3. Civic Sector / Civil Society:

Civil society organizations CSOs also called "the conscience of society" is the third powerful sector that has various challenging roles as watchdog and monitoring mechanism over conduct of private sector and lethargic function of public sector. "They are required to proactively take up issues lobby around, advocate with concerned quarters and build pressures to influence policies and decision making apparatus according to the needs and interests of people". Since civil society organizations CSOs are expected multi-dimensional role, they are also faced by huge social pressure combined with challenges of financially sound and

administratively powerful private and public sector organizations, which do not provide level playing field to it to perform.

Media and political party's despite of their mandate to represent masses and strive for promotion and protection of citizen rights seemed to be either indifferent or incompetent. They, indeed, do require smart inputs and moral support to broaden their interventions, approaches and strategies to become empowered. Media, both print and electronic, have not yet properly raised citizen voices according to its true letter and spirit; the discontents of masses have never been channelized by media, rather they seem to be inclined towards private sector's misleading information dissemination through advertisements of goods and services. They also seem to be lacking the courage in taking stand (stance) against government, elected representatives and organs of executive pillars due to many fears by state and non state actors. Political parties already lost their credibility to protect interests of masses due to their dubious role while performing as ruling government or playing the role of opposition.

Philosophy of Citizen Participation:

The social philosophy of ensuring citizen / community participation for sustenance of development efforts had been realized by the development practitioners during the last quarter of the past century. Lots of modules and approaches have been introduced to ensure active participation. However, all such efforts were primarily focused around creating sense of ownership among masses with regard to project implementation and maintenance of physical infrastructure. In other words, these efforts were limited to practice level, not at policy and governance levels.

Ensuring citizen participation at policy and governance level can be termed as successful strategy, useful to address root cause of illness, not treating the disease itself. Lack of citizen participation in policy and decision making mechanism have proved to be failing in meeting basic social needs anywhere across provinces. According to the findings of a field survey report conducted by Water and Sanitation Program WSP "A citizen's ability to decide what and how much is required for basic survival is a precursor to practicing citizen power. Citizens have the right to demand quality services and hold service providers accountable for any lack. The World Bank's World Development Report-2004 points out that successful service require relationships in which clients can monitor and discipline providers (client power) and citizens can have a strong voice in policymaking (voice). However, in many developing countries, the inability to provide services, let alone quality services, has left a major gap in both service delivery and citizen participation. No doubt, citizen participation is not confine to sustainable development efforts only, but as main source towards promotion of democracy through associational life, creation of public sphere and seeking to achieve objectives of good society as major pillars of civil society. It is believed that by ensuring citizen participation issues such as transparency and accountability will be addressed indirectly by the masses through their organized forum and media. According to an official report of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

“Establishing a Civil Society Forum (CSF) for providing regular policy advice to the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on issues related to social accountability, strengthening of grievance-redressed mechanisms, improving and streamlining of M&E processes and overall developmental planning and implementation. This forum should consist entirely of CSOs with broad-based membership to ensure representation of different types of CSOs. The Chair would rotate amongst members, with a fixed tenure”. This and similar other confessions further justify the need and significance of incorporating voices of citizen at policy level interventions in the country. The confessions also promote human values such as accountability and transparency as part of good governance.

Why Citizens Voices?

Since any policy /law making, institutional reform and efforts of sensitization of masses and relevant stakeholder is part and parcel of good governance therefore, there are utmost need of adding citizen voices at all level in order to ensure transparency, accountability, participation, rule of law and efficiency/effectiveness. Dr. Dragan Golubovic argues that citizen participation will make sure the following beneficial functions such as

- It provides an opportunity and creates conditions necessary for citizens to engage in political life regularly and not only during elections.
- It creates a framework for citizens to advocate for their legitimate interests and thus contributes to the development of a vibrant democratic society
- It makes the work of public authorities more transparent and closer to their constituencies
- It contributes to the quality of adopted public policy and its smooth implementation: if all stakeholders participate in the process, their legitimate interests will presumably be protected and costs of implementation of such a policy will be reduced
- It facilitates civil society Organizations watchdog role in the implementation of adopted policies”

Indeed, citizen’s voice and active participation will pave the way for transparent and accountable mechanisms that would ultimately result in achievement of desired goal of good-governance where the policies and legislations reflect the need and desire of their people.

The State of Citizen’s Voice in Balochistan:

While analyzing state of citizen voices in matters of policy and decision making mechanism and legislative processes, it depicts very gloomy situation. Masses are seldom consulted by both legislators and legislatures. There are certain reasons behind it. Lack of awareness combined with semi tribal set up that further aggravates the situation is one obvious reason. There are other contributing factors such as socio-political status

quo, absence of mechanism of transparency and accountability with regard to governance issues. Political and tribal affiliations combined with relatively weak civil society allow prevailing situation to continue. The situation gets further complex in rural areas of the province, where literacy and education ratio are minimal, tribal influence is dominant and physical infrastructures are least to meet the needs of masses. Masses seem fragmented on the basis of socio-economic status, political and tribal affiliation and vested interests. Democracy is yet to establish and harmonize gender equity and equality, ethnic differences and economic status. Female is still treated as commodity to barter in relationships and denied their most basic rights. Minorities are forced to adopt majority's tribal laws at the cost of their beliefs and ethnic identity.

Methodology:

The following step by step methodology was implied while accomplishing this research paper. Initially, relevant literatures including web pages were reviewed to attain adequate grip over all dimensions of policy making, legislators and legislatures' role and responsibility, oversight's role of citizens in legislation. Based upon review of relevant literature, multiple sessions of focus group discussion were conducted, which helped prepare detailed questionnaire to be used for survey. Besides, key informants were additionally interviewed to incorporate their view as well. The information and data collected were analyzed for conclusion and recommendations to be made as an immediate outcome of the paper.

Result and Discussion:

Respondents' Level of Knowledge about Constitution of Pakistan:

As illustrated in below two tables 44% of the respondents did not know about constitution of Pakistan while another 40% knows about it to some extent. Those who feel that their level of

knowledge about constitution of Pakistan is "to some extent", it means that they either have heard about it by any secondary sources or they have just read about constitution of Pakistan in any newspaper, book, magazine or any other write up. In fact, they don't know any other details about it. Through data, it was found that very few of the sampled population (16%) believed that they knew about constitution of Pakistan.

Through this analysis it is found that the situation is worse pertaining to level of knowledge about constitution of Pakistan although ratio of education is very high among population selected for this baseline (82% respondents' qualifications are over intermediate level). The situation is assumed to be worst and more alarming if same analysis is conducted among general and uneducated masses. Based on question, if respondents know about constitution of Pakistan, another question was inquired of those respondents who answered previous question in "Yes" or "To some extent". These respondents were asked if the constitution of Pakistan is comprehensive enough to determine the role and responsibility of every

individual in the country. In response to that 58% said “Yes”, 34% replied “To some extent” while only 8% said “No”.

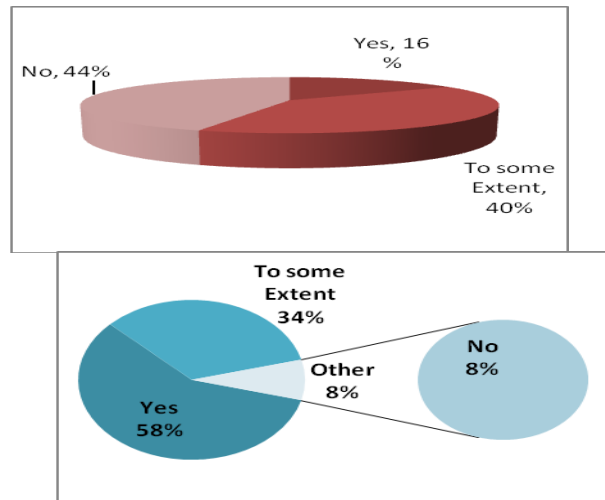
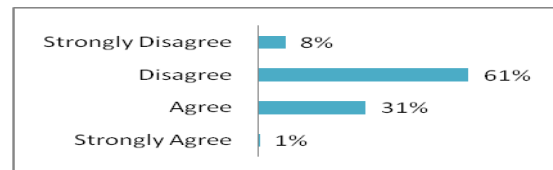


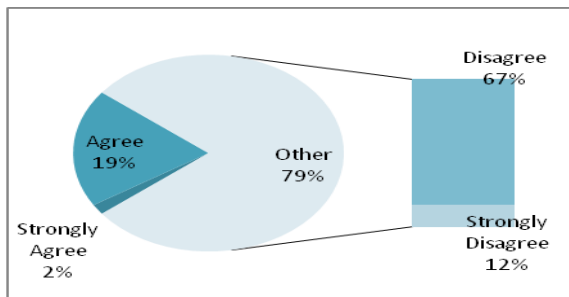
Table Showing the Gap Between Actual Performance and Masses Expectations:

A good proportion of respondents 69% disagreed. These participants claim that the elected representatives seldom or never address the issues and concerns of local masses at decision making forums. On other hand, 31% respondents agree with the above stated statement.



The elected representatives are well equipped with required knowledge, skills and attitude to address any particular issue of local constituencies:

To address the issues of local constituencies at various forums require dynamic personalities with proper knowledge, skills and attitude particularly at legislation levels. Whether the elected representatives of selected district possess the required knowledge, skills and attitude, a majority of the selected sample (67%) disagreed and 12% strongly disagreed. On other hand, only 19% agreed with the view and 2% strongly agreed.



Conclusion:

Based upon the findings of primary data analysis, focus groups discussions, individual interviews and observations, the following conclusion is drawn for this research paper/study. There are various socio-economic and political factors that contribute towards prevalence of such a gloomy situation.

Few of conclusions are general, which deals with prevailing socio-economic conditions and geo-political environment while others are doable actions to be taken by the relevant stakeholders. It is vividly observant, that the decade's long trend of supremacy of powerful elite have made citizens to believe that having no voice in policy and decision making is part and parcel of their fate, not a manmade political phenomenon. Brining about positive changes to such unpromising situation and mindset of people is very challenging in its entirety. The following are few of the concluding points

- There is lack of awareness among masses about the concept of equity and equality as universal principles, which is entrusted by constitutional guarantee. Also evident is that almost everybody does not know about international conventions such Universal Declaration of Human Rights UDHR, Convention to End all kinds of Discriminations Against Women CEDAW and Convention on Rights of Children CRC to which Pakistan is a signatory or ratifying country with certain moral obligations. Almost nobody could ever have time to either read them or understand them by someone else to grab over its crux of the message
- Tribal or semi tribal belongingness has already replaced political activism, which hinders to negotiate with potential candidates of election on prevailing issues. Almost everybody seemed inclined towards sub cast system and its traditional approaches as their best choices of candidates. Political affiliation without reasoning does prevail, which might get further intense during the process of campaigning and advocating issues with concerned quarters
- Another major potential hindrance vibrantly evident is low literacy and education. New ideas and notions such as citizen's voices for enhanced and effective legislation and accountability might be compromised by illiterate and semi literate masses with their

immediate needs fulfillment. Masses, believes more on their traditional thoughts than needed approaches to address their issues and concerns

- Due to extreme mass poverty, the concept of “citizens’ voices are treated as luxury, which will definitely hinder any effort of change. The sense of indifference as a result of repeated failure to improve lives during consecutive government is another major ground reality that is vividly evident.
- The prevailing situation depicts that masses do not even believe on the value of their vote, elected representatives are treated as super natural and local administration are traditionally treated as emperor, not as government servant obligated to provide goods and services to masses as per their needs.

Suggestions/Recommendations:

Keeping in view the main findings and conclusion of this research paper the following pragmatic policy recommendations are suggested.

Since general masses are intentionally kept out of policy and decision making mechanisms, therefore, masses in general need to be sensitized with regard to value of their vote. This is, indeed, the voter who elects members of assemblies to legislate and make policies, which should be friendly to them and their interests. This mindset has to be changed altogether in order to incorporate citizens’ voices in decision making mechanisms. Also needed is to sensitize actors of civil society about the issue, its repercussions over society and their role in it. Apart from NGOs, media, political parties and religious institutions also needs additional inputs get their approaches aligned with the need of the situation. Furthermore, everybody needs to be educated about their human and citizen rights with regard to get access to quality basic social services particularly health and education, which is a prerequisite to any paradigm shift including this issue and such a gloomy situation.

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