

## Center-Periphery Relations and Governance Gap – The Role of Local Government in Post-Conflict North-Western Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

In the post conflict situation there is a wide governance gap between the central government and the periphery of North-western Pakistan. Rebuilding governance is a vital and important step toward reconstruction, stabilization and to the socio-economic recovery in the post-conflict situations. Generally, it is the responsibility of the central government to provide and fulfill the governance functions: provision of security, basic public goods & services, and political legitimacy in territories under its jurisdiction. This paper explores the center-periphery relations and the role of local governance (decentralization) in filling the governance gap in post-conflict North-western Pakistan. Additionally, the paper implore that the local government may play a better role for a state to perform its governance functions in a better way. The paper argues that there is a strong correlations among fragile (conflict) situation, decentralization and governance. Further, a state with effective governance is one if the state has negotiating and mediating ability among the different interests of its population. Moreover, for a strong state-society relations such kind of governance arrangements are needed that can produce public goods, such as conducive environment for socio-economic development, guarantee of national security and other such things which could solve the common problems faced by all their citizens irrespective of any discrimination based on ethnicity, religion or region. The paper finds that in North-western region of Pakistan the central government have low presence of its political and institutional infrastructure that promote strong state-society relations necessary for stable and equitable social relations and contracts. Further, the paper finds that in larger centralized administrative system the provision of public goods by state creates pressures for the State as compared to decentralized, smaller, and more autonomous units. Thus the paper concludes that decentralization provides opportunities for better governance, equity and improved efficiency by handling diversity and distinctiveness. Moreover, decentralization moves the authority and responsibility from the center to the local level, thus leading to expansion in roles and functions of central government agencies to multiple jurisdiction and agencies at local level.

**KEYWORDS:** Governance, Center-Periphery, Local Government, Post-Conflict, public goods, legitimacy, North-western Pakistan.

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the role of center-periphery relations and local governance (decentralization) in filling of governance gap (rebuilding of governance) in the post-conflict North-western Pakistan. The paper examines the governance in terms of state-society relations. Within this context of governance, the paper overviews the relationship between governance and decentralization in fragile/weak post-conflict situations. Filling the governance void is a vital and important step toward reconstruction, stabilization, growth and socio-economic recovery in the post-conflict states (Jones et al. 2008). In post-conflict situations, the three tasks: restoration of governance, stability and reconstruction are knotted together for the smooth functioning of administration and political stability. Among these tasks the most important is restoration of governance. The core governance tasks include delivery of basic public goods and services, political legitimacy and security (Khan 2015).

Thus, the decentralization literature is blind about the role of local governments in building political legitimacy in post-conflict setting. This literature only focuses on administrative issues. That's why the center-periphery relations is very important in the context of post-conflict situation for achieving stability because it affects the societal contracts and conflict resolution. As mentioned, a state with effective governance is the one which can mediate and negotiate among different interests and needs of its people.

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Almost all the developing states lack/are missing political and institutional infrastructure/setup that promote strong state-society relations which is necessary for stable and equitable social relations and contracts. For strong state-society relations such kind of governance arrangements are needed that can produce public goods, such as conducive environment for socio-economic development, guarantee of national security and other such things which could solve all the common problems faced by all their citizens irrespective of any regional, ethnic, and/ or religious groups biasedness. In a centralized, integrated and larger administrative units the provision of these public goods creates problems and pressures, while in decentralized, smaller and autonomous units handling diversity and heterogeneity is easy. That's why in many developing states of the world, the political leaders give preference to centralized command and control as compared to decentralized one. And thus they rule through their patronage networks and repression of opposition to get political support. Thus in large centralized state often fail to provide just and equitable public goods and services leads to state fragility, weakness and conflict. This lead to the assumption that though weak or fragile states have functional governments, but these governments are incapable in providing basic services, economic opportunities, security to their citizens and thus lack the ability to develop legitimacy in the eyes of citizen leading to mistrust and lack of confidence of citizens on it. The weak/fragile states having histories of grievances distrust and violent conflicts and their citizens are polarized citizens in class-based groups, ethnic and religious factions. These states lack the capacity to fill these gaps, address the grievances, to cooperate and to develop the trust of its people. Having these capacities deficit leads these states to conflict, crisis, collapse and failure. The only way forward and cure which provide remedy to all ills of fragile or weak states is decentralization. Decentralization is desired due to various political, financial and technical reasons. The political benefit of decentralization is that it leads to local autonomy by increasing local participation, it reduces regional and ethnic differences by redistributing power and addressing distributional inequities. On financial side it gives greater control to local units over revenue and resources thus resulting honing accountability and by increasing cost efficiency. On technical side it improves service delivery and thus results in administrative effectiveness (Smoke 2003). Thus in overall it leads to equity, poverty reduction, increased efficiency, and better governance. For political, administrative and fiscal system between center and periphery, the decentralization also devises the allocation of responsibility, authority and power. It moves the responsibility and authority along roles and functions from central agencies, organizations to multiple agencies and organizations at the local level jurisdictions and organizations at different physical locations across the country (Khan 2015).

The state is required to deliver core governance functions of security, legitimacy and provision of services. Thus according to the performance of their governance system states vary to fulfill these functions (Grindle 2007b and Brinkerhoff 2007). For restoration of governance in the post-conflict situations, the state must have monopoly on the use of force along sufficient authority. Monopoly on the use of force is one of the key tests for the state sovereignty (both internal and external sovereignty) (Krasner 1999). The lack of or weak sovereignty constrains the state actors' capacity to exercise governance because it creates legitimacy problems for a state in the eyes of its citizens as well other states.

### **Research Questions, Hypothesis and Approach**

The paper investigates the governance gap in the center-periphery relations and the role of local government in filling this gap in the North-West Pakistan. In the post-conflict situations, the fragility and weakness of the state in the North-western Pakistan implores the questions: why?

1. Why there is weak relationship between central government and North-western Pakistan leading to governance gap?
2. How this governance gap has led to state fragility and weakness? And;
3. What role the local government can play in filling this governance gap?

These questions have been investigated through qualitative approach by reviewing only the secondary data. For this purpose the secondary data obtained from various published materials are reviewed.

The main hypothesis of this paper is that the balanced governance between center and the periphery lead to better governance than centralized governance. The sub-hypothesis is that in post-conflict situations governance gap can be filled/addressed through decentralization at the sub-national (peripheral) level. However, it is a fact that broad generalizations of the restoration of governance issue at post-conflict setting oversimplify the issue because it is evident from the literature that both the local governments and fragile states contain signification amount of variation.

### **Theoretical Framework – Center-Periphery Relations and Local Governance**

This section consists of two parts. Literature has been reviewed regard the strength and weaknesses, and pros and cons of central government (with centralization of power) and local governance (with decentralization) has been discussed in detail. The first part discusses and identifies various problems related to central government in the context of weak or conflict affected fragile state. The second part identifies and discusses various benefits of the decentralized local government, which is mostly dependent on the governance facilitating conditions. These facilitating conditions are necessary for the effectiveness of the local government which contributes to the restoration of governance in the post conflict affected states.

In the post-conflict fragile/weak states, for restoration of governance, reconstruction and stabilization, it is natural tendency to stress on strengthening the central government. At central level, the aggregation of

authority is required not only for implementation of large scale infrastructural programmes, but also for having monopoly on the use of force with sufficient authority – which is the prerequisite for the central government to exert its sovereignty. It is equally important for the central government to exercise the economic regulatory functions as well as the fiscal and monetary policy requirements. However, other governance issues at sub-national level can be addressed through decentralization (Picard et al. 2006), which is the main argument of this paper.

### ***Central Government***

Mostly, in the conflict affected states the central state remains weak because it has weak roots and presence in society and as a result have low legitimacy and efficacy in the eyes of its citizens, which is very much important for a viable governance. Thus states having weak roots at the peripheral regions fails to integrate their all areas especially the hinterlands and minorities into central politics. Such states have only concentration of resources, authority and power in their capital cities. In these states the peripheries and hinterlands are controlled through traditional chiefs, who govern these areas through their informal rules. These underrepresented, disenfranchised and disaffected communities at the hinterlands provide support and conducive environment for non-state actors, and other activities that oppose the central state in these areas (Jackson 2007).

Also, in these conflict affected fragile states the central government does not perform inclusive resource allocation and the distribution of services remains poor which affect state legitimacy in the hinterlands. As mentioned, mostly in these states the central government has strong reliance on local chiefs and strongmen (patronage and clientelism). The over reliance of the central government on the local chiefs and leaders in the peripheral society results in socio-economic stagnation creating discrimination and ethnic tensions (Hegarty et al. 2004). In these conflict affected fragile states the central government lack an integrated power, sovereignty and authority across geographical jurisdiction and lack an integrated sense of national identity. This weak capability of the state to govern its territories results in the emergence of strongmen religions, tribal, and ethnic groups, which operate autonomously and thus resist the central government (Migdal 1988).

### ***Local Government***

In the conflict and post-conflict situations when the central government is weak especially in peripheral areas, the local government can help to fill the governance gap resulted due to the weakness and bad governance of the central government. The importance of the local government can be stressed through these arguments: Generally, in developing states, the central government institutions due to low presence have weak efficiency, and thus cannot properly address the needs of provision of security and other basic public goods. This results in the grievances of the peripheral people. The local government addresses the local people needs and priorities and provides them speedy delivery of services. Thus in the post-conflict conflict-damaged infrastructure base and dilapidated situations, the local government provides speedy provision of basic public service delivery to the most underserved and ignored population within peripheral areas of the state. This timely delivery of services to unserved population builds trust on the state and help in restoring governance of the state instead of large scale new infrastructure projects, which take years in initiating and delivering their impact on society at large. Thus addressing the basic and urgent needs and services of the population at large, especially in peripheral areas results in the enhancement of legitimacy of the state in these areas (Khan 2015).

The local governments provides power, authority and sufficient resources for addressing inequities and imbalances. Though, there is general fear that the decentralization can further worsen the existing territorial and ethnic inequities, however it can be avoided if it is accompanied by equalization measures (Crook 2003). The effective implementation of decentralization measures lessen and discourages the forces of territorial, ethnic, socio-political and economic fragmentation (Sukma 2003).

The benefit of the decentralization is that both the decision-making authority as well as the distribution of resources are devolved which creates institutional grounds for local government. This leads to participatory local government which provide opportunity to the common people how to get awareness & exercise their rights, voting on local issues of education, street lights, garbage collections; making budgets and tax choices, encourages dialogue, problem solving, learn democratic and leadership skills and conflict resolution of common community issues (Brinkerhoff with Azfar 2006). Local government also provides multiple arenas of influence and power contestation at local level. It allows opportunity to opposition leaders to have a check on and challenge central government by remaining in government at the local level. This multiplication of arenas of political power helps in political stability in post-conflict societies and avoids the winner-take-all, the zero-sum in the center (Bland 2007).

In the post-conflict situations the local leaders (traditional, religious and tribal) can play greater role in the restoration of governance. In this regard the local government increases the chances of identifying and working with local emergent leaders, who have strong links with their local areas and are perceived by the local population as more legitimate (Wunsch 2005).

## **Application of the Theoretical Framework – The Role of Local Government in Filling Governance Gap**

The North-western Pakistan, which remained a conflict affected area since 2003, presents a typical example of all the issue and shortcomings of the central government as discussed in above literature review section. The central government and North-western Pakistan relations is a classic example to narrate the shortcomings of the center-periphery relations as discussed above. In the context of post-conflict North-western Pakistan, the role of local government is discussed here for restoration of governance or filling the governance void. In North-western Pakistan, in the conflict situations, not only the federal (central) government has lost its control and support in the local population but the provincial government has also been criticized for its lack of capacity and inefficiency of providing local administrative and other social services in North-western region. Because most of the areas during the conflict were occupied by the militants and the government was totally disappeared and absent.

### ***Shortcomings of Central Government***

North-western Pakistan, being a periphery is mostly a hilly area with a rough topography. This province was created in 1901 by the British Colonial power with two clear administrative division of areas i.e. administratively controlled (Qalang society) and uncontrolled (Nang society) (Ahmed 2013, 117). Most of the territories of the North-western Pakistan mostly remained outside the direct state control of the British Monarch and then of the Pakistani state control. The most nitrous among these was the princely state of Swat, which was governed under a monarch till 1969, when it was included in Pakistan by the consent of its princely king by signing various agreements and contracts with the Pakistani state. These include the exemption of provincially and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (PATA and FATA) from the Tax and the provision of other such immunities and privileges to the residents of these areas (Ahmed 2013, 9). Being a hinterland, neither the provincial government nor the central government, through its development works, did not fully integrate the area and also the central government did not deeply rooted itself in the society of North-western. That's why more recently, these gaps in the central state governance emerged in a full fledge movement and revolt in most of the areas of North-western Pakistan against the central government in the shape of various demands in the shape of revolts. These demands include speedy justice, provision of services, security and other such public goods (Khokhar *et al.* 2014, 23 - 30). With the literature and theoretical framework discussed above, the problems of the central state government in the context of North-western Pakistan have been analyzed as below:

### **1. Weak Presence of Federal Government Institutions**

The problem that troubles the federal government of Pakistan in North-western Pakistan is rooted in the very chemistry of its governance structure i.e. the nature of political interaction and style among the major actors, the bases of political parties, the provincial government, the federal government, the administration and its structure. The major political parties are the roots of the central government. These major political parties are mostly based and having either Punjabi or Sindhi domination. Unlike, the rest of Pakistan, the administrative structure of North-western Pakistan is not of one nature, but is consists of a mix of settled, Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Over the years, since independence, coupled with other factors these attributes of the different administrative system and political differences in North-western region did not lead to a vision of a strong Pakistani state. Since independence, mostly on provincial level no clear majority for a single political party and the government mostly remained a coalition government remained always a complicated one. Also on the national level, the majority government, as mentioned above, was always dominated by one ethnic group i.e. either the Punjabi ethnic group or other regional party (Visweswaran 2011, 193). In Pakistan, since independence, the country political stage was confused and dominated by three major problems: the place of religion in the national politics, the center-province relations and the military role in politics (Visweswaran 2011, 194).

### **2). Parochialism**

The Constitution of Pakistan also remained not a federal in spirit and most of the time the provinces have had differences of opinions and sense of depravedness. This sense of deprivation lead to parochialism in various parts of the country including the North-western region. There remained also a permanent tension for power among the national parties, parties with parochial sentiments and the religious parties, claiming for making Pakistan a Sharia State rather focusing on regional and national inequities and thus highlighting themselves as representative of whole nation (Alagappa 2004, 362).

Moreover, many of the national leaders are not indigenously groomed and educated locally in Pakistan rather from west. That's why these leaders are not true representative and are thus not perceived as having roots in the local land and strong links with the local people in Pakistan (Bohlken 2016, 234-240). The central government control the country through federal civil servants. The provision of most of the public goods and services is the responsibility of the federal government. However, the administrative centralization of Pakistani state is not extended deep into political ties of all the parts. Most of the people in the hinterlands/peripheries, especially in North-western Pakistan, having the general perception that the central government and the leaders are busy in gaining their vested interests and most of the time they spent in their destructive power game and planning against each other for power and they are least bother

about improving the services delivery, security and are uninterested in the welfare of the common citizens of Pakistan (Anderson 1991).

### **3. Weak National Unity and Integration**

Mostly the national debate and politics in Pakistan remains on provincial and parochial deprivation and differences blaming some ethnic groups exploiting the other ethnic groups. This resulted in a weak sense of national integration and nation building. As mentioned, the general public believe that the political leaders at the federal government of Pakistan are busy in their dirty politics of pulling each other down and are least bothering about the poor citizens. These leaders are not sincerely working for the development and the provision of basic services to the poor citizens. Nor these leaders have any vision to explore the unexploited natural resources of the country for the larger benefit of the poor nation. The conflict, poverty and the resulting since of deprivation has lead parochial tendencies in the citizens where the people has started sub-national movements against the state demanding their rights on the basis of regional and ethnic discrimination, which is another impediment to the national unity of Pakistan. This since of deprivation has resulted in tendency where the people look to their ethnic affiliations and regional links for their issues and problems instead of national government (Migdal 1988).

### **4. Unjust and Poor Distribution of Services and Resources**

As mentioned due to lack of representative political parties at national level and coalition government at provincial level, the Pakistani central government did not gain its full control and representation especially at peripheral parts/hinterlands. The region and provinces always blamed for their deprivation and sense of biasedness and unequal distribution of resources and provision of services on equal basis. And due to lack of clear-cut majority of any political party, in Pakistan, there is always disagreement on major policy issues not only at national but also at provincial and regional level. With regard to distribution of resources, there has always been disagreement on the revenue sharing formula at national level (Ahmad and Brosio 2006, 277-289). The provinces always have feeling of inequality and argue for a greater share for itself based on various resources they have and believe that their region was exploited by the federal government, in the past and even today. Moreover, the provinces claim that they are not given their due share in benefits and services. The political discrimination in the shape of control of ministry by a particular faction or party is considered another reason of favoritism and over development consideration given to a particular geographic areas by the given minister or party, which creates sense of deprivation in other regions (Nazir 2008).

### ***Local Government as a Solution to Filling Governance Gap***

In the post conflict situation in North-western region of Pakistan, the only solution which can fill the state governance gap is the introduction of local government. The local government implementation offers the following benefits.

#### **1. Speedy Provision and Delivery of Services**

North-western region remained one of the underdeveloped hinterlands of Pakistan, only with few developed areas, like settled districts of Mardan, Charsadda, Peshawar, Nowshera and Swabi, having urban infrastructure-base and services. The conflict in North-western region of Pakistan has deteriorated the existing services infrastructure. In the post-conflict situation, now most of the infrastructure plans are focused on immediate assistance through local government in order to identify problems that could be addressed in short time. These immediate remedies to the local problems have greater impact on the local reconstruction and services in the early days of post-conflict situation, thus resulting in increased support and approval of the people for the state. It also resulted in building the capacity of the local delivery of services for the future. In post-conflict situation in KP, the newly elected local government helped the citizens in getting social services and other public goods at their door steps. The people are getting now health, education and other services with the help of their locally elected representatives and addressing their grievances (Eris and Roberta 2016, 513-520).

#### **2. Trust Development and Ensuring Legitimacy**

Due to the long ignorance by the central government, mostly, the peripheral areas especially in the North-western region lost their confidence and trust on central government, which resulted in loss of legitimacy of the central government and its institutions in these areas. That's why people rose in revolt against government and provided support to the militants. In post conflict situation, the introduction of local government can provide an opportunity to build the people trust in the central government and to develop the legitimacy of the central government in the eyes of local people by providing them the power at local level through their local representatives at the door step (Eris and Roberta 2016, 520-530).

### **3. Addressing Ethnic and Regional Inequities**

Inside the underdeveloped and ignored North-western Pakistan at national level, there were areas which were more deprived and ignored at the provincial government. At provincial level, as most of the development projects were only centered in the settled districts of Mardan, Peshawar, Nowshera, Swabi and Charsada, the other regions remained very much deprived and ignored. In the post-conflict period, after the introduction of local government, the deprived districts of North-western Pakistan were given more attention as the federal government as well the provincial government implemented a more equitable distribution. In this way, the external foreign donor reconstruction efforts as well the federal government struggled to ensure the services to the people in these areas. This also helped in addressing the previous inequities resulted due to ignorance of the previous governments due to ignorance of the North-western areas.

### **4. Inclusive and Participatory Planning**

In the post conflict situation in Pakistan, the government and international community overall focus was to setup local government system in order to encourage participatory governance at local level and to avoid the centralization of power in order to redress the grievances of the aggrieved party/groups. Though ignored by the central government institutions, it is now argued that with the introduction of local government there is a significant and apparent improvement in the delivery of basic services to the people of North-western Pakistan. Thus adopting and applying inclusive participatory planning processes at local level addresses the concerns of minority oppositions without harming the majority outcomes. In 2008, the concluding session of the first tenure local government system, its chairman concluded that the outcome of system in two points: that it provided decision making and addressed the grievance of the community at the local level. Moreover, the participatory process of the local government helped in reducing the conflict over resources allocation at provincial level by providing win-win situation.

### **5. Democratic Capacity Development**

In the post conflict the central government even with the help of the national and international development organizations started to introduce local government system throughout Pakistan, with power devolved at local level including the North-western region of Pakistan. In North-western region initially the military started some local level efforts to get acquaintance with the local population and to get the community support in case of information sharing and further restricting the people from joining and supporting the militants. Also for local development the military involved the local representatives in various joint projects. One of the basic purpose of the introduction and implementation of the local government system was the introduction of democratic governance at the local level through the local councils across the country. Local government election were conducted soon after the conflict in 2013, which was announced as party-less election but actually the representatives do have affiliation with one or other political parties. Yet, these local governments with their local representatives have been able to bridge the differences and grievances of the local community of North-western Pakistan and having their own local level decision making, local level distribution of resources and utilization of funds and delivery of services.

### **6. Decentralization as a Core Element**

The introduction and formation of the local governments at each provincial district, tehsils, union council, neighborhood and municipality levels provided greater opportunity for autonomous and self-governance at the local level in Pakistan especially in the post-conflict North-western Pakistan. In the North-western Pakistan, the local government served a balance in catering the strong demands of the subnational autonomy of the local people in their decision making and delivery of services at their local level. The division of responsibilities, power and authority at the provinces and center level and further at the province and local level resulted in a very fruitful outcome at the governance structure of Pakistan. This move formalized the decentralization as a core element of the national governance as a result of the introduction of local government in Pakistan.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of above discussion for further improving and restoring governance and filling the governance gap in the post-conflict North-western Pakistan, the introduction of local government presents positive contributions in reconstituting and restoring governance. The decentralization by local government in the post-conflict North-Western Pakistan is among the best features of good governance. The following thoughts presenting for further improving the governance in post-conflict North-western Pakistan through local government and decentralization.

- 1). For an improved decentralization, the importance of effective communication, stakeholder participation, political will and the role of an active civil society is pertinent.
- 2). The local government alone does not ensure democratic or citizen-responsive choices as it may lead to excessive power grabbing by local elites. In this way, the center-local relations, particularly in the context of power relationship between center and local elites, can play an important role to question and check whether decentralization achieves democratic outcomes and service delivery.
- 3). In post-conflict situations, especially the fragile and weak states lack the skills to implement decentralization. In the de-concentrated units, the concerned sectoral ministries are also

administratively and technically weak due to lack of skills. There is need of the supervision by the central government to provide these skills to the local units.

4). Further, the success of local government is depended on its capacity to implement at national and local level. Further, it needs administrative and technical skills for the local priority setting, having capacity to engage its citizens, planning, needs assessment and the implementation of program at local level.

5). In the post-conflict situations, besides immediate intervention of reconstruction and rehabilitation, the citizens are mostly concerned with their security and access to basic services followed by political power distribution. This is done through political decentralization, including the election of the local leaders through an electoral process. This is an important feature of the good governance.

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