



Sindh Union Council and Community Economic
Strengthening Support Programme
SUCCESS is funded by the European Union



POLICY BRIEF

Challenges to Citizen-Driven Local Governance: Findings of the Study on Joint Development Committees in Sindh

CONTEXT

The achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) hinges upon the functioning of local governments that are responsive to the needs of the citizens. Local governments, closest to their communities, are meant to translate aspirations of their locale into development by providing opportunities for decent employment, promoting entrepreneurship and an enabling environment where everyone can achieve according to his/her potential. However, the disconnect between what people want and what governments provide remains a key factor responsible for poor economic development with the lack of access to basic services for the communities, particularly in rural areas. Exclusive development priorities and allocation of scarce resources show a mismatch of what is needed and what is provided for rural development.

The European Union-funded 'Sindh Union Council and Economic Strengthening Support' (SUCCESS) programme (2015-2021) that aims to improve the living conditions of the rural populations by building local social capital for better access to basic social and economic services providing means for income-generating and diversification activities. The programme was rolled out in October 2015 by the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) and its three-member Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) in Sindh, namely, Sindh Rural Support Organisation, Thardeep Rural Development Programme, and National Rural Support Programme. It spans over eight out of the 24 districts of the Sindh province for a period of six years with an overall budget of EUR 82.13 million.

SUCCESS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

To achieve inclusive and citizen-driven local development objectives, there is a deliberate effort under the SUCCESS Programme to increase the voice of the neglected groups to the ears of the local government, line departments and related entities. This is proposed to be achieved by establishing Joint Development Committees (JDCs). The aim of a JDC is to create synergies between the Community Institutions formed under SUCCESS, local administration/departments and externally supported development investment in the programme districts. The ultimate objective of the JDCs is to incorporate the development plans developed by the community institutions in government annual development plans and for the government line departments to channel their existing development services and supplies to the rural poor through community institutions. JDCs for both local authorities and community representatives are institutionalised at district and Taluka level and regularly convened, in order to serve as a forum to plan, implement and monitor the local development plans.



THE STUDY

The study was primarily designed to offer a critical perspective on the potential of JDCs in promoting citizen-driven economic development, improving inclusion and access to public services through a qualitative study.

FINDINGS

Symbolic empowerment

This new initiatives of JDC in rural Sindh under the SUCCESS programme has infused a breath of fresh air. For the communities, the JDCs have been appreciated by the representatives of LSOs as a forum that elevates them as equal and powerful to hold those in power. Some LSO leaders observed, “it was unbelievable for us to sit alongside high officials such as Deputy and Assistant Commissioners. This made us realise that we have gained power.” The key challenge for the women representatives of LSOs, who are mostly not literate and from the poor households, is to assert the communities’ needs and demands in the powerful male dominated committees.

Better connection and coordination

For the RSPs, the JDC meetings have led to recognition and trust building of RSPs and community institutions with the government line departments and support in the implementation of SUCCESS and other projects. It has also helped in notifying the community institutions, which helped in opening their bank accounts and access the SUCCESS resources. However, the key challenge for the RSPs remains continuous orientation of the frequently changing government officials about the concept of JDCs and need of community participation in the development process.

Structural issues hindering effectiveness of JDCs

A structural issue is that the district and taluka heads of line departments that are responsible for service delivery do not report to these administrative officials: they work according to their departmental rules rather than ad hoc instructions from the civil administration. The departments work with RSPs and community institutions after signing district- or taluka-level Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with respective RSPs for undertaking specific activities in collaboration with the RSPs, rather than relying on JDCs. They take up one-off activities selectively, based on departmental priorities and resources rather than the plans prepared by the Community Institutions.

Loss of institutional memory hinders the JDCs to deliver due to frequent transfers of the Assistant and Deputy Commissioners. The programme manager SUCCESS TRDP said “the district or taluka heads are key to the performance of the JDCs and it takes time before they fully comprehend the RSPs work and its importance for the poor people. In some



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cases, we have to arrange field visits to Deputy Commissioners and Assistant Commissioner. In other cases, some officers have visited the rural sites of the programme on their own before they okayed to support the JDCs. Often, after huge time investment of the officers and the RSPs, these district and taluka heads have short tenures and we lose the momentum and support needed to make the line departments deliver and cooperate with our local support organisations”.

When asked from different line departments about their experience of being part of the JDCs, mostly found it but redundant – a project-driven temporary arrangement. The Additional Commissioner Tando Allahyar who had been part of the JDC meeting remarked “JDC is a useful governance mechanism as one gets to know what is happening in the district and who is doing what. But it is limited to the life of the SUCCESS project. It has not been mandated by the provincial government”. The key challenge on the part of government is how to include community needs in the annual development planning process of the government. The existing rules and procedures of government departments do not cater to the participation of community institutions in development planning and implementation processes. The second issue is the ownership of community institutions as an official partner in development. The third issue is limited human and financial capacity of line departments to engage with community institutions.

Sustainability beyond programme life

JDCs provide the platforms for such interactions and to follow up on meeting those needs and demands for the policy makers and public servants to be more proactive in addressing the citizens’ concerns and sustaining such platforms for more citizen-driven governance mechanisms. The challenge remains if these committees are sustained after the SUCCESS funding dries up and whether the govt. fulfils its commitment to strengthen the CDLD policy in the province. It’s only the govt. who will have to bell this cat, take ownership of the JDCs and the development process, ensure inclusion by empowering marginalised through the citizen-driven development and supporting community organisations.

UPDATE AS OF APRIL 2019

On the whole and until April 30, 2019, 66% (27) JDCs could hold only one meeting, 19% (8) held two meetings, 5% (2) JDCs had three meetings and 10% (4) of the JDCs could not hold any meeting.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To make the JDCs more effective changes are required on the demand side as well as on the supply side. On the demand side, which is represented by community institutions and the RSPs, following steps can be taken in the short run, perhaps within the remaining duration of SUCCESS.



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Firstly, the RSPs could identify more line departments for entering into district-level MOUs and, over time, start discussing sector plans with them that are based on the community institutions' village and union council plans. Secondly, the RSPs could arrange regular orientation, training and exposure visits for JDC members to enhance their understanding of CDLD and its potential. Thirdly, the RSPs need a programme for building the capacity of VOs and LSOs for advocating and articulating their plans and priorities at JDCs and with individual line departments. Lastly, the RSPs should develop a mechanism for digitalising the village and union council development plans and updating them annually.

On the supply side which is represented by the provincial and district government, the roadmap for the operationalisation of Sindh's Poverty Reduction Strategy needs to consider selection of sectors, departments and activities deemed appropriate for partnership with community institutions and RSPs. It should identify activities eligible for the proposed modality (or activities excluded from it). Needed amendments in the Rules of Business and/or departmental policies and procedures should be made to provide supplies and services of line departments through the community institutions. Similarly, amendments in the district budget making rules and processes are required to include needs identified by community institutions through Village Development Plans and Union Council Development Plans. To reduce the inequality in the urban and rural areas, adequate (and possibly enhanced) pro poor resource allocation for priority sectors, departments and activities should be made. On a longer term basis, provision should be made in for hiring and maintenance of minimum RSP field staff needed in each district for facilitating linkages with government departments, building the capacity of community institutions and government departments, and monitoring community institutions after the closure of SUCCESS.
