

Challenges to citizen-driven local governance: Lessons from Pakistan

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Abstract

The achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), among others, hinges upon the functioning of citizen-driven local governance. The study offers a critical perspective on the working of Joint Development Committees (JDCs), set up as a citizen-driven local governance mechanism at the local government levels, in promoting economic development through improving inclusion and access to public services in the eight districts of the Sindh province of Pakistan. The eight districts are part of the European Union-funded ‘Sindh Union Council and Economic Strengthening Support’ (SUCCESS) programme (2015-2021). This programme 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. This new initiative of JDC in rural Sindh under the SUCCESS programme has infused a breath of fresh air by providing to women a new sense empowerment enabling them to sit at the same level as of the district bureaucracy. The implementing rural support programmes have also gained increased visibility and recognition due to a formal platform to engage with the local government officials. This increased engagement has led to some improvement in access to services for the rural communities, though on transactional basis. Despite generic reception and acknowledgement of this new governance mechanism by different stakeholders, JDCs offer a lacklustre performance due to lack of literacy among leaders of community organisations, structural flaws in devolution and lack of power, capacity and capacity with the local governments.

This, however, has not been an easy job since it required extensive efforts for mutual respect, recognition and trust building between the citizens, practitioners, researchers, politicians and civil servants. Yet, there are signs of positive developments as detailed in this paper. Among encouraging aspects were signs of confidence and empowerment among rural citizens and community representatives.

Keywords: Poverty; Citizens-driven local governance; economic development; Pakistan

Introduction and background

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.

The RSPs social mobilisation process involves building capacities of people, focusing on poor men and women to organise, manage their own organisations, and link these into government services, to increase the outreach and accountability of government to the people. The RSPs provide social guidance as well as technical and financial assistance to the rural poor through a three-tiered institution-building approach. The first tier is fostering Community Organisations (COs) at neighbourhood or muhalla level. At the next level, COs are federated into Village Organisations (VOs) at the village level. Finally, VOs are federated into a Local Support Organisations (LSOs) at the Union Council (UC) level, as shown in Figure 1.

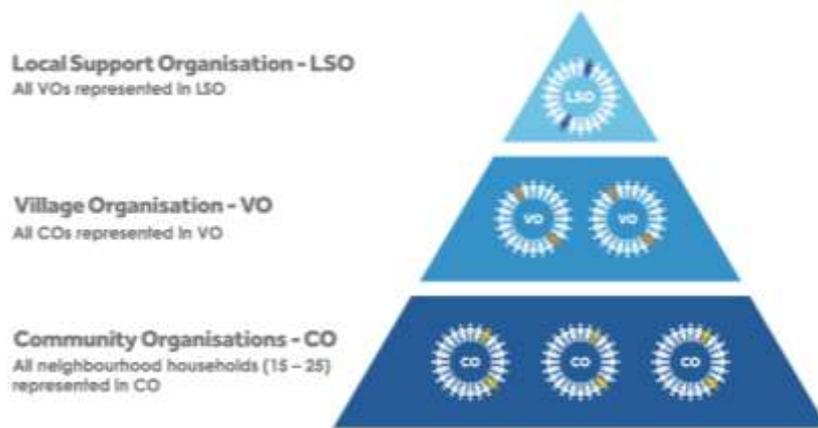


Figure 1: RSPs three-tiered social mobilisation structure

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.

Each committee comprises of three representatives of Local Support Organisations (LSOs) set up under SUCCESS, representatives of Government Line Departments, representatives of local Elected Bodies, and representative of the Rural Support Programmes working in respective districts and taluka (sub-district). The JDCs at the district level are headed by the Deputy Commissioners and at Taluka Level by the Assistant Commissioners.

All implementing RSPs partner teams for SUCCESS worked for a year and a half since 2016 with their relevant district governments to lay a foundation for the establishment of these committees. At the level of the district JDC, each RSP partner will share the overall

SUCCESS programme interventions plan and progress, the LSOs will share the Village Development Plans and Union Council Development Plans, and the government will share the district development plans, budget and processes. Similarly, at the level of the taluka, the JDC will serve a similar purpose and functioning but at the taluka level. This mutual sharing of information and collaboration is supposed to reduce any and all duplication of efforts leaving both human and financial resources to be spent in the most efficient way.

In all programme districts, 41 JDCs were notified at district and taluka levels between May 2017 and January 2018. Under instructions from the provincial government, the government of the Sindh province, the JDCs are notified by the respective Assistant and Deputy Commissioners at taluka and district levels, respectively. Under the SUCCESS programme, each committee is mandated to meet two times in a year although special meetings can be called when needed. This paper shares a critical perspective on the potential of the JDCs in promoting citizen-driven economic development, improving inclusion and access to public services through a qualitative study of the working of the JDCs.

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 by assessing this initiative introduced under SUCCESS programme in the Sindh province of Pakistan. The paper illuminates the opportunities, challenges and offers recommendations for strengthening the role and voice of communities through JDCs.

This paper is organised in five major sections. The next section draws on some of the literature on local governance before discussing local governance experiences of Pakistan to provide a background to the utility of the idea of local governance. It also shows the commitment of the govt. of Sindh to strengthening local governance. The research methods employed in this paper are discussed in the next section. Later, the details of the findings gathered and analysed through fieldwork are presented in the following section. In the next section, the results of this paper are discussed in relation to the research about the effectiveness of the JDCs. The conclusion is presented in the end.

What is local governance?

Local governance refers to the collective planning, decision making and implementation of social and economic policies in collaboration with businesses, civil society, development agencies and the government institutions to improve socio-economic wellbeing (Mayhew, 2015). The focus here is more on hierarchical and network forms of governance with horizontal networks, comprising of local social, economic and non-profit agencies influence policies and practices to address basic local needs. In a broader context, local governance is also defined as “the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level. Thus, it encompasses the direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies, as well as the roles of informal norms, networks, community organizations, and neighbourhood associations in pursuing collective action by defining the framework for citizen-citizen and citizen-state interactions, collective decision making, and delivery of local public services” (Shah & Shah, 2006).

In the developing countries, increasing decentralisation, privatisation, deregulation and devolution of economic and political decision making to the local governments have provided both opportunities and challenges (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006). On one hand, it allows for a reduction in central authority, giving more power to local institutions and citizens, whereas on the other hand, it raises the question of capacity building for people and local institutions to reap benefits from such transformations in governance mechanisms. Within South Asia, the Report of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (1992) was seen as a call for a paradigm shift for poverty reduction (Maqsood & Sirivardana, 1996). The report emphasised the strategy for social mobilisation and greater decentralisation to address the challenge of poverty, participatory democracy and good governance.

Local governance in Pakistan

Local governance in Pakistan has a turbulent history with the alternating civil and military regimes. Interestingly, local governance institutions were strengthened during military rules whereas civil governments were largely inclined towards maintaining centralised control. However, the roots of effective local governance are deeply embedded in the ancient history of Indus Valley civilisation with the cities such as Mohenjo Daro and Harappa as regional commercial and political centres (Wajidi, 1990). As a relatively

young nation born out of a bitter divide from British India and a colonial empire that used feudal aristocracy as a controlling mechanism especially to subdue rural masses by granting large extents of land to fewer elites, the rural population of Pakistan is still recovering from the institutional inertia (Tinker, 1967). The process is complex and gradual and needs extensive support by the businesses (local employment, work opportunities), civil society (capacity building, social relations) and government agencies (regulation and engagement of political and civic bodies).

In Pakistan, local governance has been largely subjected to the provincial legislation. This meant that the governance frameworks and power structures revolved around individuals, political interests, and relationships between key decision makers creating frequent and irregular changes in the legislation. At the same time, international funding agencies have been demanding the implementation of their own definitions of ‘good governance’ (Shah and Shah 2006). The Commission’s report supported the establishment of independent, non-government and national level support mechanisms to catalyse the formation of the institutions of the poor to enable them to participate directly in the decisions that affect their lives (Khan, 2016).

18th CONSTITUTIONAL Amendment and RSPs

RSPs primary interface centres upon interaction with the local governments. However, post-18th amendment to the constitutions of Pakistan, several procedural and institutional hiccups impede the way to any substantial interaction between the RSPs and the local governments.

According to the Article 7 of the Constitution of Pakistan the State means the Federal Government, Parliament, a Provincial Government, a Provincial Assembly, and such local or other authorities in Pakistan as are by law empowered to impose any tax or cess.¹ Three tiers of the Government of Pakistan include Legislative, Executive and Judicial branch. Legislation is the sole responsibility of the elected representatives and its execution lies on the shoulders of Executive branch which mainly constitute bureaucracy or Civil Services in Pakistan. After passing of the 18th Amendment in 2010, number of

¹ Government of Pakistan, *The Constitution of Pakistan* <http://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1333523681_951.pdf>.

responsibilities and due rights including education, health, local government and rural development were devolved to provinces for which provinces have been struggling to respond to.

Though advances in provincial autonomy were welcomed by the provincial governments, governance mechanism and procedures were not properly worked out to mitigate the transition time between the transfer of power from the federation to provinces. This amendment where enhanced the role and functions of provincial governments also needed a significant shift on the part of federation. However, the bureaucratic inertia and centrist mind-set at the Federal government hampered the process of this transition. On one hand side, the federation was less supportive in terms of the provision of requisite resources, advisory and capacity to the provinces to enable them to effectively fulfil their duties. On the other hand, the provinces have displayed a similar power-centric tendency once the provinces were to devolve the powers to the local and district governments. In some ways, the devolution of power from centre to provinces has been streamlined, the devolution of power from provinces to districts remains a challenge with several overlaps and lack of clarity in the roles of different departments. The true essence of 18th amendment could only be harnessed if the authority would have gone to grassroots levels but the decentralisation struggles at the intermediate level - provincial governments have been unable to move closer to the people. RSPs work has been adversely affected due to this dysfunctional role of local governments.

The 18th amendment could really change the trajectory of governance structure in Pakistan creating more space for the citizens and the civil society organisations such as RSPs but in most areas of Sindh decentralisation is either rolled back or largely postponed. Discrepancy persists among elected local government and their authority over the executive in their areas. Bureaucracy is dominant, controlling and directing. The office of the Chief Secretary holds control of the financial resources and disburses the money through old procedures, as the new procedures are still worked out, to avoid auditors' checks. Chief Minister's office is less supportive of the idea of the local governments as it would have to deal with more people and administrative demands for

which it is not yet fully ready. In short the internalization of the intent of amendment is missing at the centre and as well as in provinces.²

The Article 32 of Principles of Policy asks the State to encourage local Government institutions composed of elected representatives of the areas concerned and give special representation to peasants, workers and women in such institutions. Sindh adopted local Government laws in 2013 which rationalized and reorganized the local government system in the Province of Sindh.³

Towards a citizen-driven local governance

Under the auspices of the SUCCESS programme, through the development work carried out in rural Sindh, a form of ‘citizen-driven local governance’ is expected to take roots that is proactive and potentially sustainable and addresses basic social and economic needs of citizens in accordance with the objectives set forth by the SDGs. A ‘citizens-driven’ approach allows for more decentralised, participatory and inclusive governance mechanism that is defined by the responsiveness, accountability and relevance of the government institutions through active citizenship, especially in local public-service delivery (Walker, 2009).

The Government of Sindh approved its Poverty Reduction Strategy with a focus on Community Driven Local Development (CDLD) on March 16, 2018 (Daily Times, 2018; SUCCESS, 2018). The strategy was prepared with the technical assistance provided under the SUCCESS programme. This Poverty Reduction Strategy was the culmination of a fifteen months’ collaborative effort of the Government of Sindh and SUCCESS Technical Assistance Team. The consultation during 2016-17 included a number of workshops on poverty and the research work included an assessment of experience in poverty reduction to date, consideration of macro and micro issues and development of proposals aimed to address the context and particular dynamics of Sindh. Through

² Malik, Javed Ahmed, TedXIslamkot. *How Grassroots Democracy can end Rural Poverty at a Rapid Pace* (Jan 2019). IS IT A BOOK OR WEBSITE ?

³ Government of Sindh, *The Sindh Local Government Act, 2013*.
<<http://www.pas.gov.pk/uploads/acts/Sindh%20Act%20No.XLII%20of%202013.pdf>>.

approval of the strategy, the government has agreed to further budget a part of its local development through allocations for community-driven development initiatives.

Research Methods

The paper offers 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. Though the paper is informed by the several years of observation, formal and informal interaction with the government bureaucracy and working in these programme districts in rural Sindh, the customised fieldwork for this study was conducted in the first two weeks of September 2018 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Details of the fieldwork data collection

Interviews	Type of stakeholder	Places of interviews/FGDs
1. District Manager	RSP	Jamshoro
2. Programme Manager	RSP	Jamshoro
3. Communication Officer	RSP	Jamshoro
4. District Programme Manager	RSP	Tando Allahyar
5. Deputy Director Livestock	District Govt.	Tando Allahyar
6. Additional Deputy Commissioner	Govt.	Tando Allahyar
7. District Education Officer	Govt.	Tando Allahyar
8. Assistant Director Social Welfare	Govt.	Tando Allahyar
9. Team Leader SUCCESS TA Component	Ernst and Young	Karachi
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)		
1. Taluka LSO	Representatives of LSO	Jamshoro
2. Tualaka LSO	Representatives of LSO	Tando Allahyar
3. Taluka and Line Departments representatives from Agriculture, Livestock and Social welfare and a Union Council Chairman	Representatives of LSO and Govt.	Taluka, Sehwan, Dist Jamshoro

In the first stage, the related record of the notifications and minutes of the meeting of the JDCs was collected from the concerned RSPs and perused to make a list of the participants of these meetings and their profiles. At the second stage, and after identifying three stakeholders namely RSPs, representatives of the local support organisations (LSOs), government officials and Ernst and Young (EY), the scope of the paper was defined to include two of the closely located RSPs for convenience sampling. The concerned RSPs namely NRSP and TRDP were informed about the aim of the study and

nine interviews and three focus group discussions were held at three locations as shown in the table. Interviews and FGDs were held with those who had at least attended one JDC meeting either at taluka or district level.

Key Findings and discussion

JDCs have been notified and began to function, albeit with challenges and lacklustre performance. JDCs were notified between May 2017 and January 2018 (only 8, 20%) in all eight districts and all 33 talukas of the programme area. Until September 30, 2018, the cut-off date for this study, 80% of the JDCs had almost completed one year and should have conducted at least the two mandatory meetings. However, 70%, 29 of the 41, JDCs have held one meeting each and only one JDC had two meetings. While 30 percent (12 out of 41) of the JDCs could not hold their first meetings in the first year, the JDCs platform remains hugely underutilised.

The membership of the JDCs includes 260 officials of government departments, 118 LSO members, 46 elected representatives and 87 representatives of RSPs and civil society organisations. RSPs have trained LSO members in 35 JDCs to participate in these committees.

This section presents the key findings of this paper. It also shares critical perspectives reflecting on the performance of these JDCs in terms of their current and future performance.

Setting up of JDCs – a symbolic empowerment to rural communities

Setting of JDCs is no less an achievement in itself. Though mainly misunderstood or not understood properly, JDCs have been appreciated by the representatives of the local support organisations (LSOs) as a forum that elevates them as equal and powerful to hold those in power. The participants of all the three FGDs echoed “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”. LSO members have presented Village Development Plans in 28 JDCs and Union Council Development Plans in 24 JDCs.

In all cases less one, there has been only one introductory meeting of JDCs and in no case, no second meeting has been held so far. First meetings have been introductory although in a few cases, a couple of issues were raised by community institutions' representatives.

The JDC meetings have led to recognition and trust building of RSPs and community institutions with the govt. line departments. In a couple of cases, the LSO participants of JDCs meetings had followed up with the concerned representatives of the line department whom they had met in the JDC. In one case, it led to facilitation in accessing some of the civic services such as CNICs and domiciles. At the JDC meeting of Taluka Sehwan, Assistant Commissioner Mr Fazel-e-Rabi Cheema was quoted as saying, "rural women leading from the front is actually what women empowerment is." He said that his office will extend every possible support to community institutions. Based on the issues raised by the women representatives in JDC meetings, Assistant Commissioner Sehwan established a special cell in his office for registration of domicile and Permanent Residence Certificate to ease the process for the rural poor who face difficulties due to a lack of awareness and knowledge about the process. This was a huge relief and facilitation as men and women would have several visits to the government offices finding out the pre-requisites and many would end up paying bribes to the middle men who would exploit their illiteracy and lack of awareness about the government procedures. Also, a message was passed across the functionaries of these government offices that LSO women to be taken seriously as they have access to the commissioner's office. If not treated well, they will have a recourse to the Commissioners' office. In another case, the JDC meeting led to getting a teacher posted in a school where the seat was vacant for long time that was lying vacant as new teacher was not posted once the existing one retired. Furthermore, the JDs also led to the plantation of thousands of trees in Taluka's of district Tando Allahyar and Jamshoro.

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 visibility for RSPs

At the district level, the JDC meetings have been instrumental in getting a better visibility for the RSPs as the district administration began to have a better idea about the outreach of the concerned RSP. 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.

One district manager remarked, “after a few JDC meetings held in my district and talukas, I am called by the DC office every other day for involvement in several other development activities in my district beyond the scope of SUCCESS because the district administration has a better idea about our outreach”.

Though all the stakeholders; communities, RSPs and the government find JDCs as an innovative and useful governance arrangement of having all the development stakeholders around one table, a number of barriers constrain opportunities to meaningful development outcomes and synergies to flow from these meetings. At the moment, each stakeholder is tightly locked into its own sphere by choice or by compulsion or due to both reasons and JDCs are but mere meetings.

Hardly govt. line departments have clear work plans backed by careful resource allocation to be readily shared during the JDCs meetings. So far, LSOs have been sharing their work plans and projects and govt. line departments have been quiet observers. Where govt. line departments had clear work plans and targets, they pro-actively approached LSOs. The example here is of the forest departments in dist. Tando Allahyar and Jamshoro. In both the districts, the district forest department officials approached the respective RSPs and their LSOs to plant trees in their areas. This endeavour led to the plantation of thousands of new trees. This was a win-win scenario as forest departments are keen to partner with communities though it's not always achievable. Through LSOs, the forest departments find willing and motivated households to undertake plantation in their areas. Given the hot and dry climatic conditions of the Sind province, plantation serves multiple purposes such as shade for humans and livestock and in the times of adversity, a source of income.

The JDCs face a number of challenges that restrict them to perform and to achieve their goal of better services delivery and resource allocation. 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.

Chasing target - winning battles to lose war

For the district and taluka officers of the RSPs, holding a meeting fulfils the implementation target they have to meet and accountable for. Though the senior management of RSPs understand that holding a meeting is not sufficient to achieve the aim of JDCs arrangement, they practically ignore it and thus remain busy in winning battles and losing war. So far, 41 JDCs have been notified at the district and taluka levels. However, owing to factors such as availability of the concerned administrative head and political climate in the country, only 26 meetings could be held so far with the first ever JDC meeting held at taluka Jati of district Sujawal on October 10, 2017. Mostly, the RSPs district and programme managers identified two main reasons for the delay in the holding of JDCs meeting. One, the Assistant and Deputy Commissioners are frequently transferred, sometimes one officer stays for less than a month. Once the RSPs approach these officers and win them over to hold the meeting, they get transferred. The second main reason was the national and provincial elections in July 2018. The district administration was too busy with the arrangements for the elections that it could not spare time for the JDC meeting.

On the condition of anonymity, one of the senior staff of the RSPs administration admitted “we don’t have staff and resources to follow up with the decisions taken in a JDC meeting. We are too busy to report on the SUCCESS programme intervention to be able to back up LSOs and government line departments. In some cases, we have signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with some of the line departments clarifying our roles of the both; the govt. and the RSP. However, we are yet to make use of any of the JDCs or the MoU signed after that but one with Election Commission of Pakistan.

In this case, LSOs mobilised and assisted women to get their computerised national identity cards, get registered for voting before the national elections. This collaboration really worked well with high women voting turn out and TRDP received an appreciation

letter from the Election Commission Office”. This collaboration led to getting hundreds of men and women their CNICs and registration in the voting list. In future, inclusion of these rural men and women into voter registration list may give them a better political mileage to have their demands fulfilled by the elected representatives.

The objective of JDCs, as stated in the Financing Agreement, is “to advocate for access to essential public services and for planning, implementation and monitoring of local development plans”. The JDCs, on their own, have been able to make little progress in this direction. The chairpersons, however, have been instrumental in motivating some of the line departments, which have entered into MOUs with RSPs. So far, various government departments have signed 23 MOUs for collaboration with RSPs and community institutions. Implementation of 21 activities across the eight districts has started as a result of these MOUs. Most of these are one-off activities for specific purposes and have not engaged community institutions as expected in the stated objective.

With vaguely implemented decentralization in Sindh, multiple problems are often faced by RSPs. Before a meaningful contact can be made with any of the department, multiple Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) have to be signed with every line department separately instead of one broad agreement with the district government. Though JDCs are headed by the Assistant and Deputy Commissioners at sub-district and district levels and it brings together all the line departments at one forum, it does not create a one window to operate with each of the department represented at the JDC level. Instead, as experience by RSPs, separate MoUs have to be signed with each of the department before RSPs can formally undertake a joint activity.

To share an example, if a Basic Health Units (BHUs) has to be upgraded, a MoU will have to be signed with the district health department that will seek its approval from the provincial health department. Such practices increase the cost and time needed for undertaking any development. The offices of Assistant and Deputy Commissioners serve no good but to call for a meeting.

What is needed from the provincial governments is their adjustment with new realities and revised Rules of Business to empower local governments with more resources and authority to undertake decisions at the local level.

In only one case where a second JDC meeting has been held (dist. Sujawal, taluka Jati), it was mere reporting of the work of the RSPs carried out and that too, mainly community infrastructure projects. The meeting did not lead to any collaborative working among the line departments where the line departments could have exchanged their work plan with the RSPs and LSOs.

Lack of accountability mechanism and loss of institutional memory

To avoid the duplication of efforts, the JDCs approach has been appreciated by all line departments. However, the work plan of activities is only shared by concerned RSP in meetings. The govt. line departments' commitment has been less than expected and myopic. They need to understand, as observed by the Chief Minister, Mr Murad Ali Shah, "it should especially be noted that community development is not politically attractive as its positive effects manifest only after a long period" (Daily Times, 2018).

Loss of institutional memory also 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 cases, we have to arrange field visits to DCs and ACs. In other cases, some officers have visited the rural sites of the programme on their own before they okayed to support the JDCs. Unfortunately, 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". Despite the fact that JDCs are now part of the provincial government's Poverty reduction strategy and Community-

driven Development policy. The government officials at district level were not aware of the Poverty Reduction Strategy with a focus on Community-Driven Local Development approved by the provincial Chief Minister and it needs to be communicated and operationalised.

The government officials expected to be approached and demanded than to be pro-active and accessible to the people. The Taluka Education Officer Tando Allahyar said: “we are willing to help whatever we can but nobody has approached us so far before or after the JDC meeting”. The Deputy Director Livestock Tando Allahyar remarked “we can advise people about the best breeds of animals and vaccinate their livestock. However, none of the LSO representatives has ever come to me, before or after the JDC meeting”.

In addition to the lack of a pro-active approach from the RSPs and the govt., the Assistant Director Social Welfare Jamshoro (taluka Sehwan) pointed out another area of institutional disconnect. He said “the LSOs are not registered with the Social Welfare Department at the moment. In a strange way, these bodies have been notified by the respective Deputy Commissioners, bypassing the normal procedure. I do welcome the LSO representatives and help them to connect with different line departments in my personal capacity but from an institutional point of view, the Social Welfare Department is only responsible for looking after those civil society organisations duly registered with it”. He further said that meeting minutes have not been shared with his department despite the lapse of six months.

The LSOs representative, all women, mostly not literate and mostly mobility dependent - transported by the RSPs vehicles to and from the meeting venue are ill-poised to follow up with the line departments for seeking much-needed service.

The line departments representatives usually complained about the lack of resources, both, human and financial, to perform their roles. However, they welcomed to offer their technical advice where needed.

Team Leader SUCCESS TA Component shared, “the concept of JDC’s is making headway with community engagement and I am very hopeful for these [SUCCESS] eight

districts will pick this idea. However, the challenges remain at the government level that requires a refined strategy to work in a sustainable manner.”

The JDCs have led to improved visibility and recognition of the work of RSPs. Also, some social empowerment of the attending members of the LSOs is also apparent. However, the JDCs innovative governance mechanism is far from being used as an instrument to foster efficiency and citizen-driven community development. So far, it is seen as a project-driven temporary governance arrangement that will vanish once the project funding dries up.

Largely, JDCs first meetings have been dominated by the RSPs where LSOs development plans have been discussed. However, as per the spirit of the JDCs, these forums have to serve as a coordination and collaboration hub for all the development activities including those carried out by other civil society organisations. The upcoming meetings not held, were to be inclusive of discussion of other externally funded programmes in the respective districts to achieve synergies, efficiency and avoid duplication. 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 the community institutions.

All the research participants including the experienced govt. officials including Additional Commissioner Tando Allahyar and the programme and district heads of the RSPs agreed that JDCs was a unique arrangement to have all the stakeholders around one table. Previously, project committees have been set up to coordinate with the govt. around a specific intervention such as education and health.

What JDCs have achieved so far? Except one, all JDCs had but one meeting. Given the short and varied history of the local governance in Pakistan; the performance, results and the kind of challenges are not surprising. The SUCCESS programme annual key performance indicators report clearly indicated that women representatives from rural backgrounds would require capacity building to make their presence more than a show (Nasir, 2018). More so, the report points out another important need to work with those on the giving end – the members of the government line departments. The other members of the JDCs

need to be sensitised about the significance of working through communities and perhaps, taken on exposure visits where this approach has made a difference to the lives of the people. To make a difference in view of the continuing elite hold of the land resources since colonial period (Tinker, 1967), JDCs has provided a unique and socially innovative mechanism to allow inclusion by allowing marginalised rural women citizenry to share the same table as of those holding control of resources, the district bureaucracy and political elite.

JDCs, but exist in a challenging power-sharing environment. At the national level, devolution of power to local governments remains a challenge where locally elected representatives remain toothless. “There is an absolute consensus among the District Chairmen and Mayors of Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan; that there are no authorities and resources given to the local governments” was the consensus of the March 9, 2017 summit on SDGs or the District Governments’ Elected Representatives of all four provinces that was conducted by Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms (Jaswal, 2017). While provincial governments have been keen on having their shares from the National Finance Commission Award on yearly basis, they have been reluctant to hold Provincial Finance Commission Awards to give resources to the districts. In a number of cases, district governments have been given administrative control without financial resources.

Conclusion

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. In this respect, a new initiative of JDC in rural Sindh under the SUCCESS programme has infused a breath of fresh air. This, however, has not been an easy job since it required extensive efforts for mutual respect, recognition and trust building between the citizens, practitioners, researchers, politicians and civil servants. Yet, there are signs of positive developments. More encouraging aspects of the research and development exercise discussed in this paper were signs of confidence and empowerment among rural citizens and community representatives (particularly the impoverished villagers and rural women) to express and discuss their needs with the government officials (the Assistant or Deputy Commissioners) sitting on the same tables.

A large grey area demonstrating the disconnect among the RSPs, govt. and communities is apparent even after introducing the innovative mechanism of JDCs. For the development outcomes set out in the SUCCESS programme to be achieved and the SDGs calling for equitable and inclusive development to be materialised, each stakeholder and especially the RSPs and the govt. will have to move out of their strict spheres of action. The RSPs need to understand the strategic importance of JDCs in addition to meeting with the immediate target under the SUCCESS programme. Alongside, the govt. line departments need sensitisation, motivation and resources to build useful linkages with the community organisations and leverage this linkage during the rollout and implementation of its development programmes.

On the demand side, long-term and sustained investments are essential to building the capacity of the representatives of LSOs to enable them to move out independently from their homes partake in the local development.

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.

Effective and institutionalised approaches for building linkages between government and community institutions can be contemplated going forward. It is essential for the Government to make it mandatory for relevant departments to plan, implement and monitor local development activities through broad-based community institutions of the rural poor.

What could be done to improve the working of the JDC? Changes such as these that depend on government initiative may take time to be effected. There are other steps, however, that can be taken on the demand side, which is represented by community

institutions and the RSPs, so as to elicit a minimum set of services from selected government departments. These steps, listed below, can be taken in the short run, perhaps within the remaining duration of SUCCESS.

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.

The roadmap for the operationalisation of the Sindh Poverty Reduction Strategy should consider selection of sectors and departments 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.

Update as of April 2019

An update on the JDCs meeting was obtained until April 30, 2019. The data shows that since the first meeting of any JDC and until April 30, 2019, only 20% (12 out of 57) of the meetings happened. This excludes four talukas namely Matiari (district Matiari),

Chamber (district Tando Allahyar), Dadu (district Dadu) and Johi (district Dadu) where no meeting has happened since the notification of the respective JDCs in the second half of 2017. In this way, the JDCs meeting rate has declined up to 50% when compared with the notification and the first meeting; and between first meeting and the second meeting. On the whole and until April 30, 2019, 66% (27) JDCs had one meeting, 19% (8) had two meetings, 10% (4) could not hold any meeting and only 5% (2) JDCs had two meetings.

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