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Local Government in Sri Lanka and Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis of Decentralization and Governance

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ABSTRACT

This research focused on decentralization and the governing system among the local governments in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, drawing on the comparative analysis methodology. Therefore, the paper assessed how the administrative, political, and historical contexts of decentralization in both nations have shaped the policies and the impact of these policies on the local government systems. Moreover, the current study highlighted some core aspects such as accountability, transparency, and citizen's participation in the structures of municipal governments in both countries. The findings of the study suggested that Sri Lanka has been a more devolution-oriented country as the country has formed directly elected local government institutions and devolved a relatively large amount of power and authority. In contrast, Pakistan has been a more deconcentration-oriented country as local governments remained the central authorities' administrative subordinates. These findings provide insights into the broader implications of decentralization in South Asia and highlight ongoing policy changes and efforts to build better capacities in both central and provincial governments for better decentralization and governance practices in Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Decentralization, local government, governance, accountability, south Asia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.

INTRODUCTION

Decentralization and better governance at the local level are some of the critical elements that promote the democratic process, upgrade service delivery, and accentuate development. Local government has a significant role as a generating institution; decision-making at the local level is far better. Both changes were welcomed by democratization.

Sri Lanka, a small island country, and Pakistan, a large population country, must overcome several issues in dealing with a rich and complex ethnic diversity and implementing sustainable development strategies. Thus, this study seeks to analyse decentralization and governance structures in these countries to define differences and similarities in processes and results and consider factors that define results in the areas of effective governance there.

Consequently, the decentralization process in both countries has been affected by many factors, such as historical, political and administrative factors for and or

against decentralization. In this perspective, Sri Lanka adopted a devolution policy, especially after the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution and attempted to provide more power to the elected local government organizations. In Pakistan, the local governments are, in fact, administrative sub-units of the central government and operate on the principles of the deconcentration type. These divergent initiatives result from the many concerns and objectives facing every country.

Another crucial factor in the effective functioning of municipal authorities is governance, which entails accountability, openness, and public participation. Due to the accountability of local officials through the elected representatives, Sri Lanka's local government system symbolizes a relatively higher level of participation from the community. However, some challenges exist regarding achieving transparency and synergistic cooperation across the various tiers of government. Some recent changes in Pakistan's decentralization policy have

been aimed at enhancing the visibility of the policy and facilitating citizens' participation. However, more should be done to enhance the capacity of Local Governments to deliver services and strengthen accountability mechanisms.

Therefore, this comparative method's nature is to enhance the understanding of the circumstances that precede governors' functioning and decentralization in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Based on the study's contextual, historical, and contemporary aspects, this research provides scholars, practitioners, and policymakers with a better understanding of how to improve local government systems. These findings will contribute to the literature regarding decentralization and governance to enhance the best practice of local governance and sustainable development in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and other areas.

Historical Background

Sri Lanka

In the past, village-level institutions played an essential role in the decentralized structure of the administrative system in Sri Lanka. This is the historical perspective of the country's local government system. The Gram Sabha, a village council, operated a full-fledged participatory structure as the traditional village elders and heads took the judgment together. However, in the Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rule, a hierarchy of administrative systems emerged, reducing local governance.

The development of local government institutions in Sri Lanka occurred during British rule. When Sri Lanka gained its independence in 1948, new efforts were made to reform and enhance the local government institutions. The primary purpose of the Local Government Ordinance of 1946 was to introduce the elective system at the local government's municipal, urban, and rural levels. Later constitutional amendments in 1972 and 1978 further revealed the importance of decentralization and devolution of powers.

The constitutional Amendment of 1987 abolished the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, ultimately bringing the advent of the 13th Amendment in Sri Lanka. This Amendment created the provincial councils and the legal framework for decentralizing powers and responsibilities to elected representatives at the municipal and Provincial legislatures. Pradeshiya Sabhas, Urban Councils, and Municipal Councils, which were established as the

nation's pillars, played a core role in the local management systems.

Pakistan

The decoupling of Pakistan from Britain in 1947 has played a role in the historical perspective of local governance and decentralization in any country. Pakistan's government arrangement was central to its beginning, and it significantly derived its roots from the country's colonial administrative model.

In Pakistan, the establishment of local government came into power during the 1970s as there was a trend towards decentralizing power and giving authority to regional areas. The Local Government Ordinance, which was passed in 1979, introduced a decentralized structure of local government that comprised the Union Councils at the village level, the Tehsil Councils at the sub-district level, and the District Councils at the district level.

However, after that, more authoritarian rule in Pakistan by subsequent military governments and political crises led to a loss of autonomy and effectiveness for local governmental organizations. However, endeavors to decentralize power and improve the local administration of Pakistan have only been revived in the early 2000s. The devolution plan introduced in 2001 introduced a new structure that elected the district, tehsil, and union councils. Therefore, this plan's goal was twofold: decentralize administrative and financial decision-making to local levels.

Furthermore, Pakistan has undertaken many reforms to strengthen LG institutions, including the Local Government Acts of 2013 and 2019. These legislative measures were intended to strengthen local administration, increase service delivery, and increase the powers of elected representatives at the base.

Examples include the historical background of the local administration of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, which provides progressive measures toward decentralization and governance. For example, Sri Lanka chose the policy of decentralization and provision of powers to local governments, while Pakistan has experienced both centralization and decentralization during its development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study employs a method of comparative analysis as far as the decentralization and governance of the local government systems in Sri Lanka and Pakistan are concerned. The research compares decentralization

in both countries: Institutional framework, administrative approach, and Policy outcomes. The study involves a systematic review of the current literature, the collection of primary data through semi-structured interviews with the identified key informants, and the use of thematic analysis. The secondary data sources include academic articles, policy papers, and research papers on decentralization and governance systems in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

FINDINGS

Local Government Systems in Sri Lanka

Historical Background

Sri Lanka's local government system dates back to the early years of its history when the council of villages managed local affairs. The modern system originated in the British colonial period and marked the centralized, hierarchical structure of the organizations constituted by local government. Sri Lanka has made significant strides toward enhancing local democratic practices, with local governments playing a vital role in the country's democratic governance framework.

Structure and Functions

The structure of local government in Sri Lanka is based on a developed three-tier structure: the central government, provincial council, and local authority in charge of the area's administration. Some examples of local administrations include municipal councils, urban councils, and pradeshiya sabhas, also called divisional councils. To guarantee that local governments are represented optimally, the nation divides administration around the nation and then splits these into representative districts.

The functions of the local authorities in the Sri Lankan context involve service delivery across several sectors of communal well-being, such as health, plumbing, education, road construction, and the development of the area's infrastructure. Further, they also participate in developing and regulating land use, protecting the environment, and enhancing economic activities at the local level.

Administrative Mechanisms

The local government in Sri Lanka consists of elected councils and appointed officials. The government's representatives have the progressive responsibility to administer the government. The elected representatives include the members of the pradeshiya sabhas and the urban and municipal councils and councils. The appointed officials, which include the chief executive

officers and other administrative employees, help the elected representatives implement and execute the operations of local government responsibilities.

Decentralization Policies and Reforms

Sri Lanka has witnessed several decentralization measures and reforms, the underlying purpose of which has been to strengthen the devolved system of governance in Sri Lanka. The Constitution was also amended for the thirteenth time in 1987, legitimizing the local authorities as an institution of self-administration and deputing the Authorities to the provincial council. This Amendment intended to resolve ethnic issues through the sharing of power, in addition to fostering decentralization and granting extra powers to local governments.

In the latter reforms, attention has been shifted to the improvement of the financial management of local governments, greater public participation, and increased capacity. In an endeavor to consolidate and reform the funding base for the local authorities, there have been approaches towards increasing local resources through the distribution of grants, collection of local revenues, and the flow of funds between the tiers of government.

Challenges and Opportunities

Several local government systems in Sri Lanka face several challenges and obstacles. Another major challenge is low funding, which is unavailable for local authorities to deliver quality and accessible services and carry out developmental activities. In addition, some issues result from the failure of elected leaders and bureaucratic workers to perform their assigned tasks, and some issues result from political interference and corrupt practices. However, there is also a point of improvement in this aspect. People's participation and their ability to make decisions locally are enhanced by the decentralized decision-making apparatus involving the provincial council and the municipal authorities. Measures that are taken towards increasing the financial soundness of the local governments and enhancing the cooperation between the different tiers of government can, therefore, help lead to much-enhanced service provision and local development. The local government system in Sri Lanka has evolved, and it is possible to discuss primary challenges that need to be solved, as well as opportunities to foster decentralization, upgrade governance, and improve people's existence locally.

Local Government Systems in Pakistan

Historical Background

Several changes have occurred in the structure of the local government in Pakistan during its history. It becomes easy to track the history of local governance in Pakistan back to British colonialism when local associations were established mainly to manage regional affairs. Pakistan followed the centralized governance structure when the state was created; nonetheless, people have tried to decentralize authority and foster local government over the years.

Structure and Functions:

There are three levels of governance in Pakistan's local government system: the federal, provincial, and local governments. Local governments can then be divided into two major categories: the rural local governments and the urban local governments. The local governments include the village council, the neighborhood council and the union council around the villages. All these are urban local governments or municipal committees such as Municipal Corporations, Municipal Committees, and Town Committees. The duties and tasks of all the tiers vary from province to province, where each tier has different tasks and responsibilities.

Provincial and local governments in Pakistan perform several functions, including providing basic amenities such as water supply, sanitation, health and educational facilities, disposal of solid wastes, and physical infrastructure development. Further, they are involved in matters concerning the allocation of land, conservation and development of the environment, and boosting the region's economy.

Administrative Mechanisms

Directly elected representatives and civil servants control Pakistan's local governments, which the central government selects. As a result of level elections for grassroots representatives, elections for local governments are widespread. These elected officials are also charged with forming local government organizations, facilitating decision-making and policy implementation. The appointed people are administrators and technical specialists and are expected to support the elected representatives.

Decentralization Policies and Reforms

Pakistan has adopted several Reforms and decentralization policies to build an efficient Local Government System. The first significant process of devolving authority and responsibilities to other tiers of government, especially the local governments, was made

with the enactment of the Local Government Ordinance of 2001. The passing of this ordinance was made in order to provide autonomy to local governments, involve more people in decision-making processes, and improve the quality of service delivery. Regarding the changes, their application has been uneven across provinces, and some provinces have sometimes experienced specific problems and delays.

Moreover, attempts have been made to strengthen the local authorities' fiscal decentralization process through financing, money provision, and facilitating share revenue mechanisms and intergovernmental relationships. However, one significant hurdle still goes to financially and operationally dependent on the governments of the provinces and the federal government while exercising local administration.

Challenges and Opportunities

The local government system in Pakistan faces several challenges. Such as, constraints such as insufficient funds, lack of competence and capacity among the elected politicians and bureaucrats, interference by the Political parties, and energy of the bureaucratic system. Furthermore, issues relating to corruption, the absence of accountability structures, and the imbalance in the distribution of resources are potential challenges that hinder local governance. However, it is also possible to note certain aspects which still have potential for further improvement. The decentralization changes have helped to bring more people into participation, decision-making at the local level, and accountability. Improve service provision and local development can be realised through increased financial viability of local governments, using measures such as training and professional development of local authorities in autonomic and accountable processes. While Pakistan's local government system faces significant challenges, there are clear pathways for reform. By addressing financial constraints, enhancing administrative capacities, reducing political interference, and promoting transparency and accountability, local governments can play a transformative role in improving service delivery, fostering local development, and ensuring more equitable governance across the country.

Structural Frameworks: Similarities and Differences

Sri Lanka and Pakistan are also similar regarding the longevity of their local governments and their structural frameworks. Both have a three-tier local government structure, including the central government, provincial governments, and local authorities. However, some

variations can be distinguished regarding local authorities' actual types and tasks in the given states.

Local authorities in Sri Lanka include the municipal council, urban council, and pradeshiya sabha. These bodies are partial to some geographic areas and are thus involved in service delivery and providing the necessary infrastructure. On the other hand, the Local government of Pakistan has rural local governments such as village councils, neighbourhood councils, union councils, urban local governments, municipal corporations, municipal committees, and town committees. Sometimes, the pattern and number designation of local bodies differ even with the provinces in Pakistan.

Administrative Mechanisms: Strengths and Weaknesses

In fact, local government institutions in Sri Lanka and Pakistan operate through elective and appointive authorities. This institution's members are responsible for making decisions, formulating policies, and representing the people of the locality. Appointees of national or regional government offer administrative support and technical assistance.

Some advantages of administrative mechanisms include the possibility of people's involvement, decentralized decision-making, and responsibility. Local councils act as intermediaries between the government and the residents, helping assess needs and prioritize. Fighters are agents of change, possessing the technical competence to make a difference and guarantee policy/program delivery. However, flaws can also be detected in both systems. The political candidates and appointed officials also have limited capacity, which leads to ineffective governance and service delivery. Political interferences, corruption, and bureaucracy rightfully remain as many issues that should be solved to support administrative measures in both countries.

Policy Implications of Decentralization

The scanty nature of reforms, such as decentralization revealed by the Sri Lankan and Pakistani experience, has significant policy implications. Decentralization is the process that aims at giving out power to the local entities, people involvement, and efficient delivery of services. Critical policy implications include:

Financial Autonomy: Making sure that local authorities are provided with sufficient finance funds and means to raise these funds to enable them to perform their tasks properly.

Capacity Building: Facilitating the development of formal

and informal capacity-building programmes to build the professional competency of elected representatives and appointed officials for improved governance and management.

Participatory Decision-Making: Fostering processes that enable citizens to get involved and participate in local decision-making processes efficiently and effectively that meet local needs.

Intergovernmental Cooperation: Managing relations between central and provincial as well as between central and local governments to prevent duplicities in activities and coordinate their work to respond to challenges.

Legal and Institutional Frameworks: Adoption and implementation of legal frameworks that outline decentralization and other legal frameworks which equip institutions with powers and duties of local institutions.

Governance Outcomes

The consequences of decentralization in governance can be positive or negative in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. This paper has revealed that good governance decentralization can enhance the government's capacity to deliver services, stimulate the local economy, and meet the populace's needs. It can also promote accountability and responsiveness in the local governance processes.

That being said, there are some obstacles to achieving those objectives. Some challenges that reduce the desired governance outcomes in the two countries include weak institutional capacity, corruption, lack of political will interference, and resource constraints. Therefore, prominent monitoring, evaluation, and feedback processes are needed to enhance governance results in the local context.

Comparative Assessment of Local Government Systems

Comparing the administrative structures of the LGs in the two countries of Sri Lanka and Pakistan makes it possible to conclude certain similarities and differences. Both countries are federated with three levels of government: federal, provincial, and local. Nevertheless, specific kinds of local authorities, as well as their roles, are straightforward. Sri Lanka has municipal councils, the same as the urban councils and pradeshiya sabhas. In Pakistan, they have village councils, such as neighborhood councils, union councils, municipal corporations, municipal committees, and town committees.

Regarding the administrative structures, both countries employ the systems of the elected people's

representatives with the bureaucratic apparatus of civil servants. This makes it possible to have adequate political appointments and proper professional civil service running. However, the disadvantages or barriers associated with the two systems include capacity constraints, political interferences, corruption, and bureaucracy; these must be considered or tackled to improve governance.

Factors Influencing Decentralization and Governance

Several factors determine decentralization and governance in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Influence drawn from historical, political, and cultural factors is regularly evident when understanding local government systems. Both countries' historical interactions with colonialism, post-colonial political leadership, and ethno-political structures have shaped the decentralization process in theory and practice.

This paper has established that financial autonomy is one of the critical variables that can determine the implementation of the decentralization process. Financial strength and the right to charge the appropriate rates are essential to enabling local authorities to perform their mandates. Other measures that must be included in increasing governance outcomes include improving the capacity of elected officials and appointed personnel. Another factor that comprises decentralization and governance is citizen engagement, access to information, responsive authorities, and coordination between intergovernmental units.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

The comparative study of the LG systems of Sri Lanka and Pakistan holds many lessons learnt and good practices. It emphasizes self-reliance in finance, strengthening organizational capacities by building capacities, and the central theme of participation in decision-making as critical elements of good governance. Other prerequisites are that legal and institutional requirements must be defined unambiguously, and intergovernmental collaboration must be encouraged.

Positive experiences in both countries can be taken from the equation. For instance, the Sri Lankan example of excusing power to provincial councils has encouraged public participation and decentralized provisions. Some of the decentralization reforms in Pakistan have offered prospects regarding accountability and responsibility at the country level.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the comparative analysis, several policy recommendations can be made to improve decentralization and governance in both Sri Lanka and Pakistan: Based on the comparative analysis, several policy recommendations can be made to improve decentralization and governance in both Sri Lanka and Pakistan:

Strengthen Financial Autonomy: Local authorities are adequately funded and have the necessary tools to generate the requisite revenue to do their job.

Enhance Capacity Building: Holistic training and support programmes for the officially elected representatives and the appointed official to enhance governance and management competency.

Promote Citizen Participation: Promoting effective accountability for citizens, the framework should incorporate ways of ensuring their participation in decisions affecting their communities and localities.

Improve Intergovernmental Cooperation: Co-opt central, provincial, and local governments so that they work in unison to handle issues that often involve cross-overs in terms of roles and responsibilities and have similar objectives.

Enhance Transparency and Accountability: Establish ways to assess and review local authorities' performance to enhance governance accountability.

Address Corruption and Political Interference: To do this, one can take necessary actions to check corruption and reduce political influences on local government activities.

Ensure Effective Service Delivery: Ensure the effectiveness of services provided for them in a decentralized order, such as healthcare, education, construction of the necessary facilities, and provision of high-quality sanitation.

Promote Research and Knowledge Sharing: Promote scholarships and dissemination of information on decentralization reforms and governance to facilitate policy decisions grounded in research findings and best practices in the domain.

By championing these policy recommendations, it will be possible to deepen the decentralization reforms in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, improve governance results on the ground, advance the populations' access to the services they need and realize their development aspirations.

CONCLUSION

This research paper compared and contrasted the local government systems of Sri Lanka and Pakistan regarding

decentralization and governance. Through the comparison, it has been revealed how the structural settings, different forms of administration, policy issues and problem-solving perspectives, and governance characteristics of the two countries interplay. The decentralization of decision-making is also apparent in the following ways. Despite some similarities in the structure and organization of the three-tier local government systems of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, there are differences in the nature and functions of the local authorities. Challenges From development experience, it is clear that challenges such as poor capacity, political interferences, corruption, and financial setbacks reduce effective governance at the local level.

Decentralization and governance determinants can be distinguished into historical, political, cultural, financial, capacity, people, transparency and accountability, and intergovernmental levels. Among the positive practices and experiences are financial independence, staff development, decision-making involving all layers of government, and intergovernmental cooperation. Accordingly, policy implications were suggested to enhance decentralization and governance in Sri Lanka and Pakistan so that they could learn from their differences. Some of these recommendations include increasing financial independence, capacity development, people's involvement, cooperation among different tiers of government, financial transparency and accountability, and service provision.

With these policy recommendations, Sri Lanka and Pakistan can tackle the problems they encountered and improve Local Governance, citizen Empowerment, and Sustainable development at the grassroots level. This research offers a case study of decentralization and governance in two nations and suggestions to policymakers and practitioners wishing to enhance local government systems.

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