

**ONE-DAY NATIONAL CONFERENCE**  
on  
**Devolution of Power to Local  
Governments: Challenges and Reforms**

Organized by



**Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI)**

**Date:  
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**Venue:  
Islamabad Hotel, Islamabad**



## *The Institute*

Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) is an autonomous think tank. It is dedicated to undertaking research, analyses and evaluations of important national and international politico-strategic issues and developments affecting Pakistan and the region. One of the prominent areas of activity of the institute is organizing national and international seminars/conferences. To know more about IPRI, you may visit our website, [www.ipripak.org](http://www.ipripak.org)

## *Concept Outline*

Local government is the basic building block for democracy. The 'Local Government System' aims to empower the people at the grassroot level, allows public participation in decision-making and ensures the provision of speedy justice. The Local Government enables the proactive elements of society to participate in community work, development related activities and bridge the rural-urban divide. The structure of governance in Pakistan is primarily two-tier: the Federal and Provincial. The third tier of governance 'the Local Governments' have not been able to make significant impact in the political realm of the country. The political history of Pakistan reveals that the first attempt to introduce local body system was made during General Ayub Khan's era. Ayub's 'Basic Democracy' had some semblance with a third tier of governance. Sequel to this, in 1979, General Zia-ul-Haq introduced a 'Local Body System'. These moves could not establish a real third tier of governance at the local level, but they did contribute towards devolving power to grassroots.

In 2000, the 'Local Government Plan' was introduced. The 'Devolution Agenda' under the plan comprised of District Government, the Tehsil Government and the Union Government. All the services that people needed were provided at the local level. Masses easy access to Nazims made the system conducive. Afterwards, the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment (2010) was introduced. The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the devolution of power that it embodied aimed at decentralizing political power and authority to lower tiers. As enunciated in Article 140A "Every province shall establish a local government system. This local government will have elected officials through elections held by the Election Commission of Pakistan. Political, administrative and financial responsibility and authority will then be devolved by the provinces to local government officials". Article 140A gives constitutional protection to local governments. The setting up of local governments is a constitutional requirement. Local body elections have already been conducted in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while Punjab and Sindh are still to hold local body elections.

Constitutionally, the provincial assemblies are free to enact their own local governance



systems. But the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment does not describe the type of local government that needs to be set up; that is left to the provinces. There is, therefore, a likelihood of four different systems of local government emerging in Pakistan.

A major challenge in a three-tiered governance is the division of responsibility and authority between different tiers. To make the three-tiered governance fully functional, the “principle of subsidiary function” with a genuine decentralization of power, whereby political and financial powers are distributed among different tiers based on their capacity to deliver is required. The devolution of power should be from lower to upper tier or vice versa. According to the Devolution Plan of 2000, the power distribution was from bottom to top. Under the 2001 local government system, local bodies were autonomous even in terms of revenue collection/generation and expenditure. The local governments were equipped first for service delivery, whatever they could not deliver became the purview of the provincial government, and then provincial government's inability to handle a task was left for the federal government. For example, local government in semi-developed urban areas is important for maintaining law and order. But, it is not possible for local government to manage a road system that runs through five districts. Such a subject is for the provincial government. Meanwhile, the province cannot defend the country's territory, nor can it run foreign and economic affairs. Therefore, these matters fall within the purview of the federal government.

Another question that needs to be addressed, is the local government's ability to adjust itself into the system of political representation and its interaction with the higher tiers? Central to this, is the equation between political representation at the local level and the representation through political parties at the provincial level. At the provincial and federal levels in Pakistan, it is the political parties which determine as to how the political representation is organized. The challenge we face is the organization of political representation at the local level. Letting local councils at each level elect their own executive mayor or nazim would give effective responsibility for local governance to a broadly representative group of local leaders, which would be consistent with the system of parliamentary responsibility that is already constitutionally mandated in governments at the provincial and national levels in Pakistan.

The importance of local government institutions cannot be under-estimated for a developing country like Pakistan. The local bodies are essential grassroot organizations that perform the necessary administrative functions at the municipal level, devolving power and authority to the district, sub-district and community level. Besides, for a successful democracy, there has to be a balance of power between democratic politics at the local and national levels. In other words, the

local government system must engage the mainstream political parties and give them a stake in supporting local democracy.

To discuss the importance of local government system in Pakistan and their likely role in empowering the masses, the socio-economic development, and effective law and order at lower tiers, IPRI plans to organize a one day National Conference on the subject “Devolution of Power to Local Governments: Challenges and Reforms”. The conference will also discuss the challenges in establishing of the local government system, the lack of coordination between the local governments and the provincial governments and what measures/reforms are required to strengthen the foundations of democracy in Pakistan. Eminent scholars and policy makers will be invited in the conference to share their perspective on the subject.

### *Conference Themes*

- Democracy at the Grassroot Level
- Fiscal Empowerment of Local Governments
- Balancing the Responsibilities of National, Provincial and Local Governments

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