

ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF RAHIM YAR KHAN (2001-19)

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Abstract

This paper describes the role of local government in the rural development of Rahim Yar Khan during the period of 2001-2019. Qualitative approach is used by researcher for collection and analyzing of both the primary and secondary data. The underlying themes and sub-themes were identified and analyzed by the thematic analysis. Qualitative data was collected by interviews with the local officials, community leaders, local citizens, government reports and other literature. Findings indicate that local governance plays a dominant role in promoting rural development by influencing socioeconomic conditions and fulfill local needs by means of the community engagement and resource allocation. Themes that revolve around good governance, community participation, infrastructure development, socio economic development, and challenges faced by the local governments. Results obtained from the study highlight the relevance of local governance in facilitating the sustainable rural development and provide policy recommendations for improving the effectiveness of governance in other cases of similarly selected areas.

Keywords: Local government, rural development, Rahim Yar Khan, governance, community engagement, infrastructure, socioeconomic development, qualitative analysis.

Introduction

The role of local government in agrarian socioeconomic transformation is important particularly in developing countries where a large proportion of population lives in rural areas (Khan, 2018; Khan & Qureshi, 2020). The urgent need for effective rural development strategies is sharpened in Pakistan for the sake of poverty, unemployment and lack of basic infrastructure (Ali et al., 2019). Rural development is mostly seen to be driven by local government, considering local units of the government are closer to the community and can play a vital role to address the local needs of the people. (Raza, & Ali, 2017). The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of local government in rural development of a district situated in the Punjab province of Pakistan Rahim Yar Khan between the years 2001 and 2019 (Mansoor, 2020). This period coincides with a number of phases of local governance reforms to improve the capacity of local institutions and promote participatory governance in Pakistan. In implementing these reforms, it is against the backdrop of various radical and challenging changes of political and social nature, including natural disasters and economic instability (Khan, 2016). The ability of decentralized governance to deal effectively with rural issues is understood in terms of understanding the interaction between local governance structures and rural development initiatives in Rahim Yar Khan.

Rahim Yar Khan is a considerable district of Punjab which is mainly agrarian and agriculture is the fountain of its economy. Almost 64% of the population depends on agriculture for its livelihood. (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Rahim Yar Khan has a great agricultural potential but it suffers hindrances in its development due to lack of infrastructure, water resource management, proper access to markets and energy crisis. (World Bank, 2017). The history of evolution of local government in Pakistan has gone through various phases. Local government system was meant to give power to the local representatives, make them

accountable and to make them participate in development. (Cheema & Mohmand, 2011). Nevertheless, there has been debate about the way these reforms far as concerned have been effective in achieving real outcomes in rural development. Scholars have noted that while the theoretical framework for the provision of local governance is sound however, attempts to initiate local government's role in the affairs of development have nevertheless been catalyzed by such practical problems as bureaucratic inertia, political interference and lack of resources (Mahmood, 2014).

This article about shaping the rural development policies and the local governance in Rahim Yar Khan was a socio political dynamic between 2001 and 2019. It is a matter of military led government (and also introducing local governance reforms) followed by a civilian regimes adopting participatory development methodology (Raza, 2019). According to literature, there is potential for local government structures to fill such a gap and to bridge the gap between policymakers and rural communities in the implementation development programs that meet local needs (Danish, 2018). Nevertheless, success of these structures depends mostly on local politicians' commitment, citizen participation, and availability of financial resources. (Khan & Najam, 2016).

This research attempts to critically assess the extent to which local government institutions in Rahim Yar Khan played in these outcomes of rural development between 2001 and 2019. Through the evaluation of the results of these institutions in their capacity to enhance Rural welfare, access to services and valuable livelihood opportunities in Pakistan, the study has been able to contribute to the larger discourse of decentralized governance and rural development in Pakistan. This study traces to the understanding of scope on local governance, which has contributed substantially in the rural development of this particular district in Pakistan over a two decades. This has a great importance as it reveals the effectiveness of local government structure on the implementation of development policies, increasing of living standards and the community efforts enforcement in rural areas. The research objectives involve analyzing the local government policies, analyzing implications on rural infrastructure and on rural education, health care and agricultural development, identifying challenges and successes during the evaluated period. The justification for this study is due to the relevance in illuminating the governance mechanisms that have historically determined rural development outcomes in Rahim Yar Khan so as to offer the lessons for future strategies and plug existing gaps for the sustainable development of rural areas in Rahim Yar Khan.

1. Literature Review

Economic and social fabric of developing countries depends on rural development. Local government in Pakistan has a key role in the implementation of rural development policies, community engagement and resource allocation. Therefore, this literature review focuses on investigating the role of local governance structures in rural development of Rahim Yar Khan from 2001 to 2019 employing previous studies and the evidence.

1.1 Local Government Structure in Pakistan

Since the introduction of devolution plan in 2000, Pakistan's local government system has been changed several times. According to Khan (2006), with the Local Government Ordinance, there was a marked shift toward decentralization, giving local authorities the power to resolve the problems pertaining to the specific needs of the communities respectively. The local government system in Rahim Yar Khan is at different levels including union councils and tehsil councils and associated with rural development projects (Awan, 2017).

1.2 Historical Context of Rural Development in Rahim Yar Khan

Historically, poverty, education and infrastructure remain challenges for Rahim Yar Khan, which is located in southern Punjab region (Bashir et al., 2015). The studies such as Hussain (2013) brought to an attention that rural communities in Rahim Yar Khan frequently depend upon local governance structures to initiate developmental steps in areas of living standards, so the efficacy of these bodies is most critical in improving the quality of living standards.

1.3 Role of Local Government in Rural Development

Role of the local governments in Rahim Yar Khan in the development of rural areas includes:

Infrastructure Development:

Local government has been done a great in setting up and maintaining of the infrastructure like roads, irrigation systems, and education facilities. According to Rashid & Shafique (2018), local councils have put home-making while balancing transportation that is meant to facilitate trade and markets for the farmers'.

Community Participation:

For the programs of development, it is important to involve the local communities in the process of decision making. As reported by Ali & Gulzar (2019), participatory development programs have been organized by local governments of Rahim Yar Khan, that empower its inhabitants to express their grievances and requirements, luring the projects to cope with the community vision.

Resource Allocation:

For rural development, local governments have the ability to properly allocate resources. As per Qureshi (2014), Rahim Yar Khan has local authorities that lack in resource mobilization and this has led to an unsustainability of many projects. Success stories, however, show that local governments have the potential to put these funds to use in developing health and education.

1.4 Challenges Faced by Local Government

Although local governments play a crucial role, they are hampered by a lot of hurdles, such as:

Political Interference:

Often, developmental agenda of local governments becomes superseded that of political level. Batool (2016) talks about how bureaucratic, political pressures can deprive locally generated initiatives of community relevance.

Capacity Issues:

There is no doubt that the lack of capacity and training among the local government officials is a key barrier to good rural development. As stated by Khan and Fatin (2018), many of the local representatives in power are lacking the required skills and fund of knowledge for the diverse programs to be utilized in addressing the rural problems.

Financial Constraints:

Local governments are severely limited by finances in their ability to reach and to effect. Dawood et al. (2017) argue that lack of funding compels local initiatives of Rahim Yar Khan to falter in addressing already existing problems of socioeconomic status.

The review of the literature shows the role of the locality in their own area in rural development of Rahim Yar Khan from 2001 to 2019. Local governance structures have certainly improved in terms of infrastructure development, as well as their participation in the community but are still far from being effective. Focal points are to provide for political interference, capacity and financial constraints to allow local government to bring its full potential to bear on sustainable rural development. Efforts should be made out into the future

to develop strategies to strengthen local governance and its potential impact on rural communities.

An analysis of the "Role of Local Government in Rural Development of Rahim Yar Khan (2001-2019)" envisages a need to determine the appropriate research questions pertaining to the efficacy, issues, and impact of local government efforts done in the said period. Key questions may include:

The influence of local government policies on relevant socioeconomic indicators for the rural areas of Rahim Yar Khan.

Local communities perceive what are the perceptions of the effectiveness of these governance structures in terms of their response to local development needs?

To what has local government faced in terms of barriers when implementing development programs?

This study also recognizes a huge research gap in the combination of the local government's responsibility in inciting community participation and attain sustainable advancement results in the distinctive socio economic atmosphere of Rahim Yar Khan. Much scholarly attention has been paid to grassroots development initiatives in this region, primarily in the evaluation of the long term impact of local governance on rural livelihoods, infrastructure and access to services, but little scholarly treatment has been provided regarding the simultaneous impact of local governance and grassroots development initiatives. This research attempts to fill this lacuna in the understanding of local government dynamics and their fundamental function in the making of rural development trajectories in Rahim Yar Khan by addressing the questions put forth.

1.5 Methodology

This paper engaged in the qualitative research methodology to investigate the role of local government in rural development of Rahim Yar Khan from 2001 to 2019. To better achieve rich and context specific richness into the effectivity and challenges of local governance on promoting rural development initiatives, the research was based from their use of case study approach supplemented with in depth interviews with the key stakeholders, such as local government official, community leaders, and residents. Major themes including governance and institutional framework, community participation and engagement, infrastructure development, socioeconomic development and challenges and limitations were done by using thematic analysis. Also, participants were observed to gain insight in socio-political dynamics. The validity and reliability of the findings were ensured by triangulating data sources, and this helped ascertain how local government interventions affected rural development in the region. In general, the qualitative methodology gave a total framework for the examination of sociopolitical issues to get more profound apprehension of the development between local managerial administration and rural development designs in Rahim Yar Khan.

1.6 Analysis

The predominantly rural population depends on agriculture, and Rahim Yar Khan is located in it. The district has had problems dealing with poverty, difficulties for people to get an education and access to health care, as well as a lack of infrastructure. To assess the impact of governance structure on rural development, it is necessary to understand the role played by local government between 2001 and 2019. The subjects of qualitative research includes semi structured interviews with local officials, community leaders and residents; secondary data sources are used in the form of project reports, policy documents and existing literature.

Extraction of themes and sub-themes representative of the impact of local governance on rural development was carried out by coding the data.

Table 1.6.1 Thematic Analysis

| Major Themes | Sub-Themes | Initial Codes |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Governance and Institutional Framework | | |
| | Structure of Local Government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Administrative hierarchy ✓ elected representatives ✓ decentralization ✓ local council structure ✓ governance policies. |
| | Policy Formulation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strategic planning ✓ rural policies ✓ stakeholder involvement ✓ needs assessment ✓ policy implementation. |
| Community Participation and Engagement | | |
| | Citizen Involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Community meetings ✓ feedback mechanisms ✓ participatory budgeting ✓ public forums ✓ consultation processes. |
| | Empowerment of Local Leaders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Training programs ✓ leadership roles ✓ capacity building ✓ local advocacy ✓ skill development. |
| Infrastructure Development | | |
| | Transportation and Connectivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Road construction ✓ public transport ✓ access to markets ✓ rural roads ✓ connectivity projects. |
| | Basic Utilities and Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Water supply ✓ sanitation, ✓ electricity access ✓ infrastructure projects ✓ utility coverage. |
| Socio-Economic Development | | |
| | Agricultural Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Extension services ✓ credit access ✓ technology transfer ✓ farming training ✓ crop diversification. |
| | Education and Health Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ School enrollment ✓ healthcare accessibility ✓ community health initiatives |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ health education programs ✓ literacy campaigns. |
| Challenges and Limitations | | |
| | Financial Constraints | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Budget limitations ✓ funding gaps ✓ reliance on external aid ✓ financial mismanagement ✓ taxation issues. |
| | Bureaucratic Inefficiencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Corruption ✓ lack of transparency ✓ delayed implementation ✓ administrative delays ✓ regulatory hindrances. |

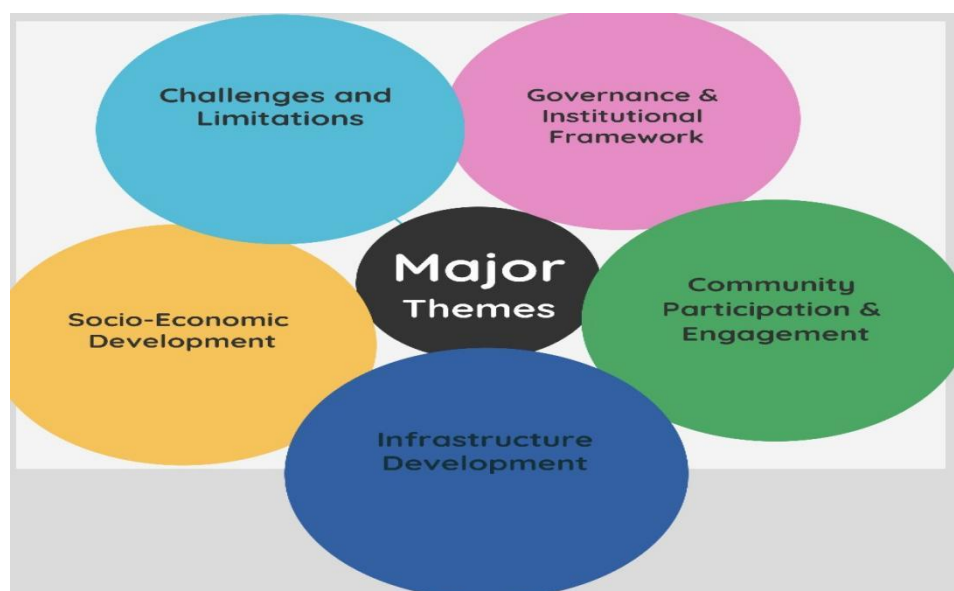


Figure 1.6.2 depicts the major themes extracted from thematic analysis

The thematic analysis of local government's role in rural development in Rahim Yar Khan from 2001 to 2019 reveals a complex interplay of governance structures, community engagement, and socio-economic initiatives. However, there is a long way to go before the full potential of rural development in the region is realized in the light of the fact that although some progress has been made in infrastructure and service delivery, there is still much to do in the areas of financial limitations and bureaucratic inefficiencies. These insights should be read to inform policymakers and local government officials as they make decisions about the course of sustainable rural development. Despite this progress within infrastructure and service delivery, the complementary issues of financial constraint and bureaucratic inefficiency have to be resolved if the potential of rural development within the region is to be realized fully. This analysis has yielded many important insights which are useful for policymakers and local government officials when developing strategies for the sustainable development of rural areas.

1.7 Discussion

The analysis of theme presented above shows the crucial role of the local government in the development of rural areas in Rahim Yar Khan spanning from 2001 up to 2019 (18 years). The findings support the existing literature that highlights the significance to rural needs and development initiative in the hands of the local governance structures. Sequencing of the themes identified in relation to relevant studies which present the evidence for local government's role in rural context is found in this discussion.

Theme 1: Governance and Institutional Framework

Government structures and institutional framework were key elements of effective local government operation that was analyzed. The fact, as noted by Shah (2006), is that decentralized governance is often associated with greater service delivery. In Rahim Yar Khan, the elected representatives and administrative hierarchy together were in the arms to stand for the needs of the community in the formulation of the policies. An important idea is that of introducing stakeholders into policy formulation because it has been claimed that this practice contributes to legitimacy and responsiveness in governance (Agarwal, 2014).

Theme 2: Community Participation and Engagement

Community participation can play a vital role to enhance the rural development. Thus, community engagement in a development work improves local ownership of projects and guarantees a shared understanding from the same community as well as the suitable use of development initiatives that are in line with community's priorities. Participatory budgeting was used by local governments in Rahim Yar Khan and other mechanisms were established to enable citizens to get involved in governance processes. This empowerment of local leaders through training programs further provided them with the capability to effectively voice community voices when they participate in various decision making platforms (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). It is implied that there is a direct and positive relation between participation and successful outcomes with stronger engagement evidenced to lead to higher development effectiveness (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006).

Theme 3: Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure development has become a focal point; of local government to improve transportation and basic utilities. Market access through rural roads and transportation improvements facilitates rural economy quite highly (Fan et al., 2004). Furthermore, investments in basic utilities like water supply and sanitation affect health outcome and have a vital influence over the quality of life (Bhandari, 2014). Specifically, these broader trends also characterized Rahim Yar Khan's local government initiatives in terms of officially defining infrastructure as the main driver of rural development.

Theme 4: Socio-Economic Development

Local government play a multifaceted role in socio-economic development. The analysis indicates the promotion of agricultural productivity through extension services, credit access and technology transfer at the local level. The analyses with other studies show that support of agriculture by local governments can bring great improvements to the livelihoods of people in rural areas (Johnston & Mellor, 1961). Additionally, the investment in education and healthcare services are in line with funding from the World Bank (2006). Human development, economic growth, and poverty reduction correlates with it. These sectors laid out the moves in Rahim Yar Khan that can be a proof of the transformative power of local governance in the uplifting of rural living standards.

Theme 5: Challenges and Limitations

The analysis identified some persistent problems faced by local governments, namely, financial issues and bureaucratic disillusion. According to research, insufficiency of funding

can hinder the ability of local governments to execute the effective implementation of rural development plans (Bardhan 2002). In addition, there were issues of corruption and lack of transparency that can undermine public faith and restrict development (Lazaro, 2020). These are all challenges with which other studies have argued that robust governance mechanisms are necessary to counteract the constraints of its local administrations (Ribot, 2002).

1.8 Recommendations

On the basis of the results of this thematic analysis, some recommendations are made to improve the efficiency of local government for promoting rural development in Rahim Yar Khan.

Fund raising by local governments should be made easier, and reduced from dependency outside aid. Instead, budgetary sources can be reallocated and tax collection mechanism can be improved at the local level.

Provide training programs to local government officials to increase their efficiency and understanding of the needs within the community. Also, the capacity building initiatives should focus on the best practices of governance, project management and community engagement.

Local governments should develop stronger mechanisms of participatory actions. Regular community meetings, feedback system and the inclusion of the community in making decisions will engender citizen involvement and will help to design initiative in line with the community's needs.

Invest in protecting public health and provision of basic services like roads, sanitation, and irrigation systems for better living and facilitating economic activity. Supplementation of funding for infrastructure projects can be achieved with the help of partnerships with NGOs and private sectors.

Reduce bureaucracy and improve transparency as well as accountability. It can involve the introduction of e governance solutions, which have greater capability of better communication, faster response time and reduced corruption.

It will help to promote the focus on sustainable practices of agriculture development, training programmes on modern farming techniques as well as technology transfers for ensuring an environmental friendly approach towards the economic growth.

1.9 Conclusion

This paper presents the thematic analysis of the works done by local government in the rural development of Rahim Yar Khan from 2001 to 2019. The second point is the fact that governance structures, community participation and infrastructure development shape socio economic outcomes in this region. Although advances have been made, including in infrastructure, provision of community services, the difficulties persist, and in particular, pertaining to the financial constraints and bureaucratic inefficiency. Clearly, common path forward needs to manifest as integrated approach considering and building upon the strengths of local governance models and enhancing the current issues. More impacts could be leveraged by local governments if it focuses on the empowerment and inclusivity, and therefore working towards a sustainable rural development and better living standards for people in Rahim Yar Khan.

1.10 Limitations of Study

This thematic analysis partially explains the role of a local government in the rural development, but it is not devoid of its limits. Some limitations include: The analysis is based on qualitative data collected from interviews. Valid and reliable findings would be considered if a larger sample size was included and other sources of data were utilized; however, a more complete study would require a more comprehensive sample size. This neglects the focus for

a period from 2001 to 2019 may overlook some significant changes or developments that has occurred before that timeline, Although the interview participant responses could be biased and cannot represent the views of all community members, especially marginalized groups, they are nevertheless compelling. This study does not compare findings between Rahim Yar Khan and other districts of Pakistan and other similar contexts, to identify additional effective governance practices and challenges.

1.11 Future Implications

This thematic analysis makes the insights gained very useful in informing the policymakers and local government officials. Future research can explore:

Longitudinal studies of how rural development evolves over time may be able to determine causal relationships, and long term effects of local governance strategies.

To find out what worked and what didn't, and why, a comparison of different areas in Pakistan might provide us with insights into what has been done well and in which cases it worked, and what turned out less well and in what circumstances it fell.

Investigating new ways of local governance through community centred approach can uncover valuable lessons on how the government can reach out to citizens and fulfill their needs more efficiently.

More future studies could bring an interdisciplinary approach to such studies, so that its perspectives will range from sociology, economics to the environmental science for more holistic understanding of the dynamics of rural development.

In this sense, overall understanding of multifaceted role of local government in rural contexts in Rahim yar khan remains an essential area for further research and application to practice for the purposes of promoting effective rural development in Pakistan and beyond.

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