Chapter 3

Pakistan's Devolution of Power Plan 2001: A Brief Dawn for Local Democracy?

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Local government is not a new concept in Pakistan. Since the founding of the country in 1947, Pakistan has always had local governments as the lowest-tier political structure. However, grassroots democracy has been eclipsed at different times in the country's history. As we write this chapter, there is no elected local government in Pakistan. The chapter documents the recent history of decentralisation and local government in Pakistan, with special reference to the 'Devolution of Power Plan' (DOPP) introduced by the military government of General Pervez Musharraf in 2001. The author was closely involved with the DOPP at both the policy and implementation levels.

Public administration literature provides an enormous number of studies on decentralisation, but research focused on decentralisation in Pakistan within the context of military rule is limited. Some researchers, mostly belonging to international development agencies, have studied different aspects of the DOPP – sectoral, political etc. – but these do not comprehensively cover the breadth of the local government reforms of 2001. The main thrust of this chapter is that the DOPP was not simply another local government system per se, but rather a major attempt at decentralisation accompanied by a comprehensive package of reforms that had several strands – electoral reform, local government structures and processes, and changes to the police and bureaucracy – all aimed at modernisation and social change.

Pakistan's political history has been characterised by intermittent military rule. Since independence in 1947, there have been four periods of martial law under different dispensations, and three constitutions have been enacted (1956, 1962 and 1973). Cumulatively, military governments have ruled for almost half of Pakistan's existence since 1947. The alternating pattern of political and military governments[1] has not only affected the structure and design of local government systems, but more importantly had significant implications for the development of grassroots democracy. It has at times strengthened and at other times jeopardised the sustainability of local government in the country. In broad terms, local democracy has been nurtured by military governments, whereas during civilian governments it has been replaced by non-participatory, unelected local structures that are run by government-appointed civil servants. Thus, as far as local government is concerned, it may be said that the country has experienced both 'dictatorial democracy' and 'democratic dictatorship'.

According to Briscoe (2008), the formal state structure in any society may have a parallel or 'shadow' set of institutions that hold real power. This is especially true in the case of Pakistan. Every military government in Pakistan has introduced its own brand

of local government. Cheema et al. (2005) have used the term 'non-representative governments' for these military regimes. They have attempted to analyse the Pakistani experience to find answers to the question of why non-representative regimes have been willing proponents of decentralisation to the local level.

In developing countries decentralisation may be either externally driven (e.g. through Structural Adjustment Programmes, donor pressure etc.) or internally motivated (e.g. by governments seeking to strengthen their legitimacy and gain popularity), though the country context is different in each case. In Pakistan's case decentralisation has always been internally driven, and Cheema et al. (2005) conclude that the military's need to legitimise its control appears to be a prime reason behind the recurring attempts at local government reform.

Bhave and Kingston (2010) view the military in Pakistan as a separate actor with its own interests. It can, however, be argued that institutional 'interest' and institutional 'role' are two different things, and that the course taken will vary according to the institution's interpretation of the context in which it has to operate. According to Sivaramakishnan (2000) local government in South Asia often tends to be stronger during eras of authoritarian rule than in times of democratic rule. He suggests that during democratic regimes elected local government is less attractive because it provides an additional platform for citizen participation, and hence may to some degree rival the centre.

The patronage of local governments under military regimes is not unique to Pakistan. In many countries military governments have attempted to create grassroots popularity and support, and to secure their legitimacy and a better external (and internal) image by nurturing local governments. In the Commonwealth, there are at least two more instances, Ghana and The Gambia, where army rulers introduced local government reforms. In Ghana, a major change in the governance system was introduced in 1988 by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, the organiser of the fourth coup in the country, in 1981. Writing about Ghana, Ahwoi (2010) argues that decentralisation of national administration, particularly in unitary states, works best in the presence of a strong central government. Although Pakistan is a federation, Ahwoi's thesis seems to apply.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. The first looks briefly at local government models in Pakistan before 2001 – all creations of military regimes. This is necessary if one is to distinguish the DOPP from previous waves of local government reform. The following sections then explore the DOPP of 2001–09 to examine what was new compared with previous attempts at decentralisation, and analyses some of the social factors evident in the two local government elections (2001 and 2005) which were a hallmark of the DOPP. The final section reviews the experience of the DOPP, looks at the current situation and future prospects, and draws some general conclusions.

3.1 Local government in Pakistan until 2001

In 1947, on the eve of independence, Pakistan inherited the local government system of colonial India. The British Administration had introduced the concept of 'local

self-government' by creating a separate tier to administer civic functions, initially through appointed local administrators and then through elected municipal and district boards for urban and rural areas respectively. This system was first introduced in Bengal and Madras, followed by Bombay, Punjab and other colonial states. Separate laws were enacted in each state for large cities, municipal cities and towns, and rural areas (Alam 1999). During the independence movement in India, national political parties stood for greater representation at central and provincial levels rather than local government. This prompted the British government to grant autonomy at the provincial level (Cheema et al. 2005), and was a major factor in the weak development of local governments in the areas that later became Pakistan (Ali 1980).

The history of local government in Pakistan from 1947 to 2001 can be broadly divided into four periods:

- 1947–1958;
- 1958–1969, the 'Basic Democracy' system of General Ayub Khan;
- 1969–1979;
- 1979–1988, the local government system introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq.

3.1.1 1947–1958

As explained above, at the time of independence the areas that constituted Pakistan had few developed systems of local government, and the local bodies were mostly run by government-appointed administrators. The early years of independence were marked by limited constitutional development and the extreme pressures on limited resources brought about by partition. The partition of India in itself was phenomenal, and perhaps unique in the British Empire, as no other colony was partitioned at the time of granting independence. In Pakistan, migration of millions of Muslims from the Indian states and their settlement was in itself enough for the newly created country to handle with minimal infrastructure and resources, without trying to focus on other developmental issues such as establishing democratic local government.

Around 1956 some progress began to be made towards creating an adult franchise and electing local office bearers, but this was confined mainly to the Bengal (now Bangladesh) and Punjab provinces. In 1957–58 half the municipal councils in West Pakistan (the present Pakistan) were still managed by government-appointed administrators, as in most cases elections had not been held after the expiry of their terms of office. Waseem (1994) points out that, even where elections were held, there was only a limited franchise and massive malpractice.

3.1.2 1958–1969: The 'Basic Democracy' system of General Ayub Khan

This was the first period of martial law in Pakistan, which brought with it a 'first wave' of local government reform. The 'Basic Democracy' (BD) system was the first experimentation with local government in Pakistan under the auspices of a military regime. Field Marshal Ayub Khan introduced a system of 'controlled democracy' at all levels of government. Under this system, local government institutions were created

in rural and urban areas through separate legislation. All urban and rural councils, as well as provincial and national assemblies, were elected indirectly through an electoral college consisting of 40,000 'Basic Democrats' popularly elected in each of East and West Pakistan.

3.1.3 1969–1979

After the imposition of the 'civilian[2] martial law' under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in 1971, all local bodies were dissolved and the functions and powers of local governments were vested in official administrators. This state of affairs continued throughout the reign of Mr Bhutto and the early years of the following period of the martial law regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, which began in 1977. By this time East Pakistan had seceded from Pakistan, and West Pakistan had been divided into four separate provinces: Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and the North-West Frontier. According to the 1973 constitution (still in place), local government is a provincial subject. Thus all four provincial governments enacted their respective local government legislation in 1979.

3.1.4 1979–1988: The local government system of General Zia-ul-Haq

This period marked the 'second wave' of local government reform under a military regime. The system of local government introduced in 1979 by General Zia-ul-Haq was the most representative in nature since independence. For the first time in the history of Pakistan, elections to all local councils in both rural and urban areas were held simultaneously on the basis of adult franchise and under the aegis of independent provincial election authorities.

The special features of the 1979 local government system can be described as follows:

- local government laws relating to rural and urban areas were unified and harmonised;
- representation was given to peasants, workers, women and minorities in pursuance of principles laid down under the 1973 constitution;
- elections to local councils were held on a non-party basis;
- local governments had elected officer bearers (chairmen, mayors, etc.) and there were no appointed members; and
- local councils had significant autonomy, for example, they could approve their own budgets and taxation proposals.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 summarise some of the key features of the three systems of local government introduced under military rule, and the intervening 'political' (civilian) governments.

3.2 The Devolution of Power Plan: What was new?

Although the coup of 1999 was the precipitating cause of devolution, movement towards local government reforms had begun earlier at the behest of international

Table 3.1 Local government systems under military rule

Period	No. of years	Military leader	Name of system	Distinguishing feature(s)
1958–1969	11	General Ayub Khan	Basic Democracy	National law; local governments comprised both elected and appointed members, and served as an electoral college for the election of the national president
1979–1988	9	General Zia-ul-Haq	No specific name	Elected local governments under provincial laws; no appointed members; 3–4 successful terms completed under this system
1999–2008	9	General Pervez Musharraf	Devolution of Power Plan	Based on the principle of subsidiarity; radical departure from all previous systems; devolution accompanied by taxation, civil service, electoral and police reforms

Table 3.2 Local government under 'political' governments

Period	Political situation	Remarks
1947–1958	No constitution, no elected government in the country	Urban councils and district boards in urban and rural areas respectively, continued according to laws left by the British government
1971–76	First elected national/ provincial governments	Despite promulgation of a local government law, no elections held throughout this period and local councils were managed through official administrators
1988–1999	Several elected national governments held power	All elected local governments dismissed. Local government elections never held though announced and scheduled several times; elections held in certain provinces in 1998, but elected representatives never assumed office

donors and lenders, particularly the World Bank. On the global scene, pressure for decentralisation, especially market-based decentralisation, had already been brought to bear in developing countries as a result of the Structural Adjustment Programme of the International Monetary Fund in the 1980s and 1990s. Based on World Bank reports (1996, 1998), Cheema et al. (2003) argued that, although multilateral pressure for decentralisation in Pakistan had developed since the mid-1990s, no major attempts at decentralisation were initiated in Pakistan before General Musharraf took power in 1999. Therefore it can be said that the coup of 1999 was a turning point for local government reform, and that without the coup the course of decentralisation in Pakistan would have been further delayed.

In Pakistan, like any other developing country, public service delivery was characterised by a concentration of powers in the federal and provincial governments. Most

service delivery was therefore under bureaucratic control, without any contribution from elected politicians at the local level. This meant that provincial and central governments carried out the policy-making and district authorities[3] acted as the implementation agency with little say in decision-making – a system of deconcentrated administration rather than decentralised authority.

To address this situation, General Musharraf established a National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) as a 'think tank' to help transform an over-centralised and ineffective service delivery system into a decentralised and responsive one. After an extensive process of consultation, his government introduced its programme of devolution of power and authority under the aegis of the NRB in 2001. This began the 'third wave' of decentralisation in the country. The Devolution of Power Plan (DOPP) of 2001 was a radical departure as it was based on the concept of subsidiarity, involving transfer of power from provinces to districts and other lower levels. Before the DOPP, subsidiarity was not a commonly used term in developmental discussions and in the corridors of power in Pakistan.

The DOPP had two main elements: decentralisation and electoral reforms. Devolution was also accompanied by reforms to the civil service and police. Features introduced for the first time in the history of Pakistan are summarised in Table 3.3.

The following sections provide further detail on some of the key features of the DOPP reforms.

3.2.1 Application of subsidiarity

As noted previously, the 2001 system sought to apply the principle of subsidiarity.[4] Even though this was not fully implemented and many details were not resolved, especially in relation to financial decentralisation and relationships between provincial and local governments, the DOPP can be said to have brought about some of the most fundamental changes in governance and local governance in Pakistan since independence in 1947.

Under the 2001 system, district governments (the upper tier) were given responsibilities in agriculture, health, education, community development, information technology, finance and planning, together with revenue previously held by the provinces, and became financially competent through transferred funds and local taxes. Town/*taluka* governments (the middle tier) were assigned most of the functions of the former municipal authorities as the main providers of essential services (e.g. water, sanitation, roads and waste disposal). The union councils (the lowest/third tier) were envisaged as providing monitoring and oversight of service delivery, as well as undertaking small developmental projects. Union councils received funds directly from the district and collected some local taxes.

3.2.2 Abolition of the rural–urban divide

One of the important distinguishing features of the DOPP was that it abolished the previous rural–urban divide in local government. Under the British system of administration, urban local councils were established to provide essential municipal

Table 3.3 Innovative features of the DOPP

Electoral	• Voting age reduced from 21 to 18 years to bring youth into mainstream politics • Minimum educational qualification prescribed for candidates for *nazims* (mayors) • Manifesto mandatory for candidates for district and town/*taluka nazims* (mayors) • Elections conducted by (central) Election Commission of Pakistan instead of provincial election authorities • Local government elections held in phases for better management and co-ordination
Gender	• Reserved seats for women increased to 33% in all tiers of local government
General	• Divisional tier (between districts and provincial government) abolished • Office of the Deputy Commissioner (a colonial legacy of deconcentrated administration) abolished and replaced by senior district co-ordination officer (DCO) reporting to *nazim* (mayor); interaction of DCO with provincial government through mayor • Magistracy abolished; in Pakistan's context this was important, as provincial governments extended their reach through district officers who also had judicial powers that could be exploited through the district bureaucracy • Mayor made chief executive of the respective local government, with wide-ranging administrative and financial powers • Elaborate mechanism for internal and external recall of elected representatives prescribed under law; similarly, officials enabled to seek recourse against motivated or illegal orders of *nazims* (mayors)
Finance	• Provincial Finance Commission constituted for allocation of resources from provinces to districts, based on population, fiscal capacity, fiscal effort and specific needs etc. of districts
Police	• *Police Act 1861* replaced after nearly 150 years; law and order became the responsibility of *zila nazim* (district mayor), but the district police chief was responsible to their own professional hierarchy in matters of crime prevention, investigation and personnel management of force. This was intended to check patronage by political leadership and high-handedness on the part of police, while facilitating dispensation of justice • District Public Safety Commissions constituted, comprising elected and appointed members, to act as a safety valve providing recourse for both police chief and district mayor in cases of conflict • Police Complaint Authority introduced to deal with serious complaints against police
Community development	• A new grassroots institution developed – Citizen Community Boards – to engage local people in service delivery

services. By contrast, the capacity of rural councils in service delivery was far less (Siddiqui 1992), and they provided only limited representation, often strengthening the local elite.

3.2.3 Reform of bureaucracy

The DOPP was a bold attempt to transform an over-centralised bureaucracy, especially in terms of the established elite. The district co-ordination officer (DCO) of the district government, equivalent to a chief executive officer, was placed under the authority of the elected mayor. Likewise, the superintendent of police of the district reported to the mayor on the overall maintenance of law and order.

3.2.4 Developmental planning

Before the DOPP, the planning system was centralised and development funds were distributed to provincial departments through a top-down mechanism. The identification, appraisal and approval of development projects had no relationship to local priorities. The element of community participation was missing from the process, which was non-transparent and inequitable. Politicians, mainly parliamentarians of national and provincial assemblies, were provided with development funds to be spent according to their wishes.

The DOPP provided for Citizen Community Boards (CCBs) to mobilise the community in the development and improvement of service delivery through voluntary and self-help initiatives. CCBs played a major role in the transformation of development planning by creating a sense of ownership. They were given the legal right to enable citizens to actively participate in development activities, plus an earmarked budget that could be carried over from year to year. This also introduced transparency and accountability to the development process, as communities became active participants in projects instead of being passive beneficiaries.

3.3 Organised local government – a new phenomenon in Pakistan

Before and during the greater part of the DOPP period, local government associations (in the commonly understood sense) did not exist in Pakistan. However, under the DOPP there was a growing awareness and empowerment of local government that promoted a greater sense of unity and common purpose among its elected representatives. The first initiative came from Punjab province with the creation of the Local Councils Association of the Punjab (LCAP) in 2007. Since its inception, LCAP has become a leading national organisation, not only in its lobbying of provincial and national governments, but also in paving the way for a louder voice for local democracy across the whole country. Following LCAP, new local government associations were created in the other three provinces in Pakistan: Sindh, Balochistan and the North-West Frontier (Khyber-Pakhtunkhawa). Later, in November 2009, a national local government association was launched.

In the immediate post-Musharraf period, the local government associations established under the DOPP sought to mobilise public support from across civil society, business

and the political spectrum to call for the protection of local democracy in Pakistan and for further local government elections. The international community expressed concern about the future of local democracy in Pakistan, while the associations' efforts were supported by local government leaders, including the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (Local Government Alliance 2009) – but at this point to no avail.

3.3.1 Social dimensions

One of the significant features of the DOPP was the attempt to make social change part of the reforms. According to Randall and Hermann (1981) 'social changes' are those that mark the transition from one stage or phase of a construed cycle of development to another. They designate as 'significant' those changes that evolutionary theorists associate with the movement of social forms or a whole society from a 'less advanced' state towards a durable 'advanced' state, or from one level or epoch to another. The definition of 'significant' will depend on the aspect of society or the segment of social reality that is seen to be of strategic importance. For example, reforms in local government institutions may be significant both as a process of strengthening local democracy and as a way of providing better and more efficient services for economic, social and cultural development. Montiel (1988) argued that the institutional development of local government is politically and culturally bounded, therefore its context and process need to be considered accordingly.

Against that background, this section examines some of the social factors and trends exhibited in the two local government elections – 2001 and 2005 – held under the DOPP. For this purpose reliance has been placed on secondary data and published sources. Pattan Development Organisation (Pattan) carried out substantial work in collecting data from the two elections, and here we rely on their data (Pattan 2006) plus other sources where available (see also Bari 2001).

As shown in Table 3.3, the DOPP incorporated significant electoral reforms. First and foremost, the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18 years in order to increase the involvement of young people.

Second, minimum educational qualifications were established, including having reached matriculation in order to take the position of district mayor (*nazim*). Pattan's analysis shows that, in the 2005 elections, most of the candidates indicated they had first or higher degrees. Approximately 46 per cent claimed to be graduates, while 30 per cent said that they had higher or professional degrees. About 15 per cent had completed their FA/FSc – equivalent to 12 years of schooling – while only 10 per cent were educated below that level (see Table 3.4).

Alam (unpublished) provides supplementary data from a study of 16 district and 102 town/*taluka* mayors elected in Sindh province in 2001. District mayors were more likely to be highly educated than their town/*taluka* counterparts (see Table 3.5).

Alam's study (unpublished) also indicated that a younger leadership came through in the 2001 elections. In 2001, among town/*taluka nazims* the largest number were 46–50 years of age (about 25 per cent), followed by those aged 41–45 years (19 per cent).

Table 3.4 Education of district and *tehsil nazims*

Education	Number	Percentage
Less than FA	48	9.7
FA/FSc	72	14.6
BA/BSc	225	45.5
Higher than BA/BSc	150	30.5
Total	495	100.0

Table 3.5 Qualifications of mayors elected in Sindh province in 2001

Qualification	District mayors (*N* = 16)		Town/*taluka* mayors (*N* = 102)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Matriculation	3	18.8	24	23.5
Intermediate	2	12.5	10	9.8
Graduate	5	31.3	33	32.4
Masters	3	18.8	10	9.8
MBBS (medical)	1	6.35	5	4.9
LLB (law)	1	6.3	7	6.9
BBA	1	6.3	2	–
Diploma	–	–	3	2.9
B.Engineering	–	–	3	2.9
MSc	–	–	3	2.9
MBA	–	–	2	2.0

Source: Alam (2001)

The numbers aged 56–60, 66–70 and 71–75 years were low – less than 5 per cent combined. Pattan data shows a similar picture for 2005. Nationwide approximately 15 per cent of the successful district and town/*taluka* candidates were in the age group 25–30 years, while 35 per cent were 31–40 years. Some 30 per cent of candidates were aged 41–50 years and approximately 20 per cent were older than 50 years.

Pattan data also suggests that the DOPP reforms encouraged new entrants to local government. In 2001, 57 per cent of candidates for *nazims* and 75 per cent for *naib nazims* (deputy mayor) contested elections for the first time. In 2005 similar trends continued: approximately 70 per cent of those elected as union councillors were new faces, and few of these had previously been members of town/*taluka* or district councils.

Alam's study (2004) of the 2001 elections in Sindh province again provides supporting evidence. Out of 16 district mayors elected in Sindh province, none had any past experience in local government, but 12 out of 16 had been a member of a provincial or the national parliament. This in itself may be seen as a reflection of empowerment at the local government level, attracting national/provincial or mainstream politicians to contest local government elections. In the category of town/*taluka* mayors, only 3 per cent had previous experience in local government, while one mayor had been a senator. Overall only 14 out of 102 town/*taluka* mayors (13.7 per cent) had previous

political experience. This suggests the emergence of a new leadership, as envisioned in the devolution plan.

In Pakistan, women have been contesting elections for national and provincial assemblies, as well as local governments, since independence. However, their representation remained low because of socio-religious factors. In order to bring women into politics, the DOPP increased the number of reserved seats to 33 per cent at all levels. Previously only 5 per cent of seats were reserved for women in local councils. Thus the DOPP created about 24,000 seats for women in local governments across the country. In some parts of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan, women were not allowed to take part in the elections as a result of social conservatism. However, such cases were few. Election figures showed that on the whole the provision of reserved seats had encouraged women to participate in the political affairs of the country, with nearly 22,000 women elected (including those returned unopposed) (Pattan 2006).

Between 2001 and 2005 there was a 100 per cent increase in women candidates elected as *nazims* and *naib nazims*, from 16 to 32. Similarly, in Sindh province in 2005 four women became district *nazims* as compared with only two in 2001. It should be noted, however, that Sindh's literacy rate and educational standards are better than those in less advanced provinces like Balochistan and NWFP. Nationally, the candidature for district and town/*taluka nazims* was almost totally a male affair, with only 1.4 per cent women candidates (Pattan 2006).

Determining whether or not social change actually occurred as a result of the DOPP is a complex matter. It requires study not only of the institutions of local government, but also of diverse aspects of Pakistani society including trends in the economy, demography, culture, history, law, politics, education and religion. Two terms of local governments under DOPP, cumulatively eight years, are not sufficient to gauge any definite trends in the political milieu of the country. However, based on the limited data presented above it is possible to identify some early signs of change and to suggest that the direction of the reforms did indeed have the potential to initiate modernisation of the political and administrative system in Pakistan, as envisaged by the military government.

3.4 Recent developments, prospects and conclusions

In a study of five fragile countries Anten et al. (2012) conclude that Pakistan offers the most detailed example of a process of decentralisation that has only partially achieved its objectives. This chapter echoes their concern that decentralisation cannot proceed effectively in a governance system that suffers from a number of dysfunctional factors.

A central characteristic of the polity of Pakistan has been alternating civilian and military rule, with each period of military rule patronising and introducing its own brand of grassroots democracy. Within that context, the Devolution of Power Plan introduced by General Musharraf in 2001 was a radical departure, as it comprised a package of changes to the public sector including decentralisation, electoral, public service and police reforms. In effect, it was an attempt to change the governance

paradigm. Although the data is patchy, available evidence suggests that over the period 2001–09 substantial progress was made towards effective decentralisation, in particular a sound system of democratic local government.

However, since 2009 the decentralisation agenda has faltered, at least as far as local government is concerned. After the general elections of 2008, a new civilian government came into power and General Pervez Musharraf stepped down. Based on past experience in Pakistan, there was apprehension that the civilian government would not maintain local government institutions, especially the DOPP system. This is exactly what happened, and at the time of writing the local government elections originally due in 2009 had yet to be held and local governments were being managed by non-elected administrators. It appears that the DOPP, although home-grown, had the tag of a military regime and therefore suffered from negative perceptions, even though decentralisation is still seen as a necessary part of broader governance and public sector reform.

The DOPP had also included a component of devolution from federal to provincial governments, named 'Higher-Level Restructuring'. Despite pressure from the provinces, this did not take place under the Musharraf government, but in 2010 it was implemented through the 18th constitutional amendment. As a result, *inter alia*, the Ministry of Local Government at the federal level has been abolished. Also, at around the same time, the federal government disbanded the National Reconstruction Bureau and replaced it with a Policy Analysis Unit (PAU) headed by an adviser to the president. The PAU operated for only a brief period until it was in turn abolished. Thus from 2008, when a civilian ('political') government returned to power, most of the features of DOPP have been steadily eroded.

Achieving complete devolution of power in Pakistan is clearly a huge undertaking. Such institutional reforms are complex, time-consuming and inevitably opposed by those interest groups that benefit from the existing system. For example, the effective diffusion of economic power is an essential prerequisite of meaningful devolution, and one that has perhaps received insufficient attention. Economic power, notably that derived from ownership of land, gets parlayed into political power which, in collusion with other entrenched interest groups such as the bureaucracy, restricts the empowerment of citizens.

Decentralisation is inherently neither good nor bad. It is a means to an end. Successful decentralisation can improve the efficiency and responsiveness of the public sector, and also contribute to significant social change, which cannot occur without supportive institutional development. At the local level, the DOPP brought about substantially enhanced participation of women in government, involvement of a broader cross-section of society in political life, and more educated, responsive and democratic leadership.

According to Anten et al. (2012), institutional reforms that do not align with the interests and incentives of power-holders are unlikely to lead to robust new arrangements. They argue that the World Bank's recent emphasis on an 'experimental best-fit' route to reform of the state is a sensible acknowledgement of these difficulties.

Political factors are therefore crucial in determining the possibilities for reform and development, especially in a fragile state environment. Strong political will and leadership are needed to create and maintain conducive conditions for a steady process of institutional change and development. In the case of DOPP, once the main architect of reform had departed the scene, progress came to a grinding halt. Meanwhile the current political environment remains uncertain.

We conclude that decentralisation cannot be approached as a stand-alone activity, but must draw on and form part of a country's broader democratic and political culture. Parallel institutional development needs to be ongoing, and for this to occur supportive elements have to be designed and introduced in the constitutional framework and political system. Specifically, local government should be regarded not just as the lowest tier of the government, but as a distinct sphere that is closest to the citizens, with sufficient administrative and financial autonomy to serve its constituents. Unless these elements are institutionalised, the sustainability of decentralisation programmes remains at risk. In Pakistan, it would seem that for various reasons military governments have been more willing to accept this challenge: if civilian governments are shy of nurturing grassroots democracy, it raises significant questions about their democratic values and commitment to empowering citizens. Given the experience of the last five years of 'political' government, the prospects for local government in Pakistan are not encouraging.

Notes

1 The terms 'elected' and 'non-elected' are not used here, as military regimes also installed elected governments, albeit of a relatively controlled nature. Within the military, the army typically dominates.
2 'Civilian' martial law, because it was imposed by an elected 'political' government.
3 District authorities are extensions of provincial governments.
4 The concept of subsidiarity is based on the premise that lower levels of government are closer to citizens, and can therefore make more 'intelligent' decisions about 'who does what'; that is, it is less about politics and more about principles. The Aberdeen Agenda on local democracy, adopted by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, provides that local government should have appropriate powers in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

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