

Decentralization, Citizen Participation, and Local Public Service Delivery: A Study on the Nature and Influence of Citizen Participation on Municipal Service Delivery in Pattoki

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Abstract

Failure of governance systems is one of the major and most typical issues in developing states worldwide. The veracity of such failures and malfunctioning exists at every tier of government. The study conducted in Pattoki, a Tehsil of District Kasur in Punjab Province aims to understand the relationship between local government offices and citizens regarding public participation in service delivery, policy-making and implementation in small towns in Pakistan. The study employed a qualitative research methodology that consisted of 2 focus groups with citizenry including local residents and public representatives and government body comprising of municipal service officials and public executives. In addition, an in- depth review of relevant literature including the frameworks of public participation was conducted. The participants for the focus groups were selected to comprehend the potential contribution of public participation towards promoting joint decision-making to improve service delivery. An extensive literature review with the topology of ladder of public participation complemented the findings from the focus group discussions. The data analysis provided a strong understanding of standpoints, considerations, and interpretations of the factions, citizens, and government officials. Citizens' lack of awareness about the rule of law and policy procedures, low public trust, and low public office accountability and transparency are the genesis of inadequate service delivery.

Keywords: governance systems, District Kasur, local government policy procedures,.

1. Introduction

Enhanced quality of service delivery and good government is a distressed benchmark in developing countries. Inefficient governance and inadequate service delivery have been a relentless phenomenon in developing states because of a lack of public officials' accountability, corruption, abuse of power, and centralized decision-making (Ali, 2022a).

In Pakistan, article 32 of the constitution protects the local government, and article 140-A conditions that "Each province shall, by law, establish a local government system and devolve political, administrative and financial responsibility and authority to the elected representatives

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of the local governments." (*The Constitution of The Islamic Republic of Pakistan National Assembly of Pakistan*, n.d.) These articles emphasize devolution of power and reinforce effective citizen engagement at the local level by ensuring public participation in local governance and decision-making.

There has been a consistent change in regimes remoulding government structures, and several reforms regarding local government and service delivery at grass root level in the history of Pakistan (Rafique et al., 2020). The provincial assembly in every province is required to establish a local government act under the article mentioned above. This study discusses the Punjab Local Government Act – 2019 as it is directed to assess the functioning of local governing bodies and the level of citizen engagement in tehsil Pattoki of district Kasur (THE PLGA 2019, n.d.)

The local government department of Local Government & Community Development (LGCD) under LG Act – 2019 is responsible for public service delivery and municipal services, including water supply, sanitation, and conservancy, disposal of sullage, refuse, garbage, sewer, solid or liquid waste, maintenance, and development.

The government at every tier in Pakistan is notorious for its incompetence and venality. Despite all laws and government offices, officials are found ineffective and bungling for effective decision-making (Arif et al., 2008). There is an elitist culture where a fraction of the governing people has a major say in decision-making. The centralized system leaves no room for local grievances; the public has petite space in policy formulation (Mohmand & Cheema, 2007). Through civic engagements, citizens actively participate in governance processes, not essentially being the passive beneficiaries (Rafique et al., 2016).

The study asserts that the low level of public participation is a consequence of non-collaborative insolence between government offices and the public as a community. Studies have revealed that the government offices responsible for quality service delivery act as regulators and governors having control over resources rather than acting as a facilitator, optimizing the means and allocating sufficient resources for the betterment of society (Rosilawati et al., 2018).

In Pakistan, local government and municipal officials are ill famed for not being able to devolve power and decentralize decision-making processes in rural areas. Power centralization and low public participation have been a hallmark of governance in Pakistan (Ali, 2022b).

Civic engagement is the fixative that holds a society together and is the factor that ensures the development and quality of service delivery (Zaheer Shaikh et al., 2016). This study is directed to dig deep into the level of public participation and understand the dynamics of citizen engagement in Tehsil Pattoki, District Kasur. The study incorporated the perceptions and perspectives of local government informants and citizen bodies to understand the level of public participation and the relationship between local government bodies and the community.

The study is structured and explains the dynamics of public participation and the processes of decision-making at the local level in, highlights the conceptual framework emphasized by Arnstein's *The Ladder of Public Participation* (1969 *Arnstein*, n.d.) in this regard, and discusses how a higher level of public participation can be achieved and how citizen engagement can bring about positive change in the course of public service delivery.

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Failure of governance systems is one of the major and most typical issues in developing states worldwide. The veracity of such failures and malfunctioning exists at every tier of government, i.e., federal, provincial, district, and local levels. District and local levels are more vulnerable as this problem intensifies because of various factors, which include limited resources, political instability, social conflicts, lack of government capacities, and caste, ethnic and sect-based divisions (*Executive Summary*, n.d.).

Besides, centralized governance and administration structures worsen the fragile government

situation. Citizen participation at the local level is argued to be the ingredient that brings about progressive change in the region. However, due to the government's inefficiency in deviating power and the factors mentioned above, it gets hard to ensure public participation (Hyder, 2019).

1.2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aims to understand the relationship between local government offices and citizens regarding public participation in service delivery, policy-making, and implementation in small towns in Pakistan. It tries to determine the state of public participation by examining the region of Tehsil Pattoki in District Kasur of Punjab province, undergoing several inefficiencies in municipal service delivery. The study looks at different levels of public participation in terms of citizen engagement with local government in the decision-making process in the light of Arnstein's ladder of public participation (1969_Arnstein, n.d.). It tries to understand the processes by which citizens engage themselves in participatory activities and how government offices utilize local wisdom for optimum use of resources and efficient decision-making. It studies the causes of low citizen participation and how this phenomenon can be improved for better decision-making and policy-making in such areas.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the nature of citizen participation in local governance in Pattoki?
2. How has citizen participation influenced local service delivery in Pattoki?

1.4. COPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Several pieces of research have been done to study the complex dynamics of local decision-making and to explore the role of citizen participation in development at the local level in Pakistan. Most of the research has been directed to explore the influence of major interest groups in shaping local policy-making, and many try to unfold the role of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in ensuring public participation (Anasti et al., n.d.). This study will try to understand the form of public participation in Tehsil Pattoki in District Kasur and its overall impact on policy-making and development. The research is significant for policymakers, administrators, and community-based organizations. The way citizens and government officials interact in small city settings and their relationship and level of participation influence development are of significant interest to policymakers and public administrators (Masiya & Davids, 2019).

At the local level of government, citizen-centered policy-making, as well as the implementation of such policies for the sake of quality service delivery, is based on the decentralization of government and the nature of the interaction between governing bodies and citizens. It determines how efficient the municipal service delivery will be (Rahim & Saleem, 2021). So, understanding the level of public participation and citizen involvement in decision-making is of great importance to making effective policies in such areas.

The study is also significant for international organizations like WorldBank, UNDP, community-based organizations (CBOs), and government bodies, which initiate development projects and emphasize enhancing citizen engagement for better service delivery. The study's results will help policymakers and such organizations understand the gap between citizen bodies and local governing bodies and how citizen participation can be ensured in that particular region and other pertinent areas.

The study will also investigate how different decision groups are responsible for non-development in the area. It will also seek to highlight how both entities can bridge the gap and reach a consensus that endorses a better quality of service delivery. It will also demonstrate the despotism of local government offices and the centralized decision-making process, which are the major hallmark of Pakistan and a prodigious impediment to a truly democratic society.

1.5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There is a wide range of studies on the public participation framework at the local level in developing states such as Pakistan. The term public participation entails that there should be opportunities conferred to individuals through delegation of powers and public engagements so that they can influence municipal decisions. In democratic decision-making at local levels, public participation has been theorized as a constituent that accelerates service delivery. The phenomenon emboldens public opinion, incites public-oriented service delivery, and recuperates the credibility of notorious municipal among citizen bodies (Masiya & Davids, 2019) (*US EPA*, n.d.) argues that when done in a meaningful manner, public participation results in better outcomes and good governance and improves the quality of decisions made at the local level by municipal authorities regarding policies and development initiatives.

(Pandeya, 2015) states that public participation is a phenomenon that empowers the underprivileged to exercise their rights and their voice through mobilization and can affect policy-making. The public participation process positively influences municipal service delivery and acts as a stimulus that increases public office accountability and impedes perversion. This is ensured by improved citizen awareness and ease of accessibility of information about the policies formulated and actions taken by municipal offices. Hence, local communities and citizen bodies are supposed to be the stakeholders, and municipalities should provide them with the opportunity to express their opinions and actively engage in the processes before, through, and after policy-making.

Researchers have conceptualized and tried to evaluate the forms of public participation through several standpoints and different perspectives. Some of these researchers include (*Kiewit and Kuwait (1981)*, n.d.) who stresses that there are four (4) forms of citizen participation. These forms are:

1. Participation in elections and appeals
2. Participation through unions
3. Contact between the citizenry and local government (referendum, conference)
4. Public participation through delegation (actual citizen participation)

According to (Pozzoni & Kumar, n.d.), public participation at the local tier of government and local decision-making includes four (4) levels of participation:

1. Information Sharing
2. Consultation
3. Collaboration
4. Empowerment

(Dr. Charles Stangor; Dr. Rajiv Jhangiani; and Dr. Hammond Tarry, 2002) proposes that there are public participation is a process that incorporates the following procedures and stages in local governance:

1. Sharing
2. Following the thoughts
3. Joining the conversation
4. Planning together
5. Deciding together
6. Arranging together

1.6. Arnstein ladder of Public Participation

Sherry Arnstein proposed a model of public participation that was close to ideal. Arnstein uses a model where she puts the levels of public participation between citizenry and municipalities perceived through a 'ladder.' The 'Ladder of Public Participation' model can be employed to observe and understand the power-sharing during the policy-making process and through participation in the municipal decisions made for public service delivery (1969_Arnstein, n.d.) Arnstein conceptualized a ladder as a metaphor for her model. She developed a continuum of power in terms of participation that scales from non-participation to degrees of tokenism and citizen participation. She used an ascending order in the forms of levels of participation termed 'rungs.'

The levels in the typology of conceptualized participation process divided into eight are:

Manipulation – Participation at this level is illusory as there is no actual occurrence. Rather municipalities, public officials, or administrative heads manipulate the decision-making process and deceive the public into believing that the power is being delegated to them. Power holders manipulate citizens at this bottom rung of the participation ladder and manoeuvre by engineering citizens' support to the resolution they have already decided.

Therapy – As described by Arnstein, participation in terms of therapy states that public officials create pseudo-participatory programs and simulate that the state of powerlessness is synonymous with cognitive disorder. At this level, government officials trick the public by convincing them that they are the problem, not the institutions. The operation is to educate or cure the participants, not allow them to participate in policy-making.

Informing – Potentially, the first step conceded by Arnstein towards legitimate citizen partnership is to inform the public about their rights and create a flow of information sharing. She emphasizes that this level is essentially oriented towards the one-way (from officials to citizens) flow of information. There is no significant mechanism of feedback and opinion.

Consultation – This level is also acknowledged as a step towards legitimate participation as it incorporates public opinions in decision-making through attitude surveys, public hearings, and meetings. Actual participation is not assured even at this level as from the participation from the public's perception is just their appearance and from government officials' point of view is the evidence that they have carried out a process of citizen involvement.

Placation – Public participation as placation occurs when citizens get a tiny part of influence and a limited share in power. This participation process level is largely tokenistic in nature as power holders merely devolve power to give the impression that citizens are involved but can be outvoted quite easily.

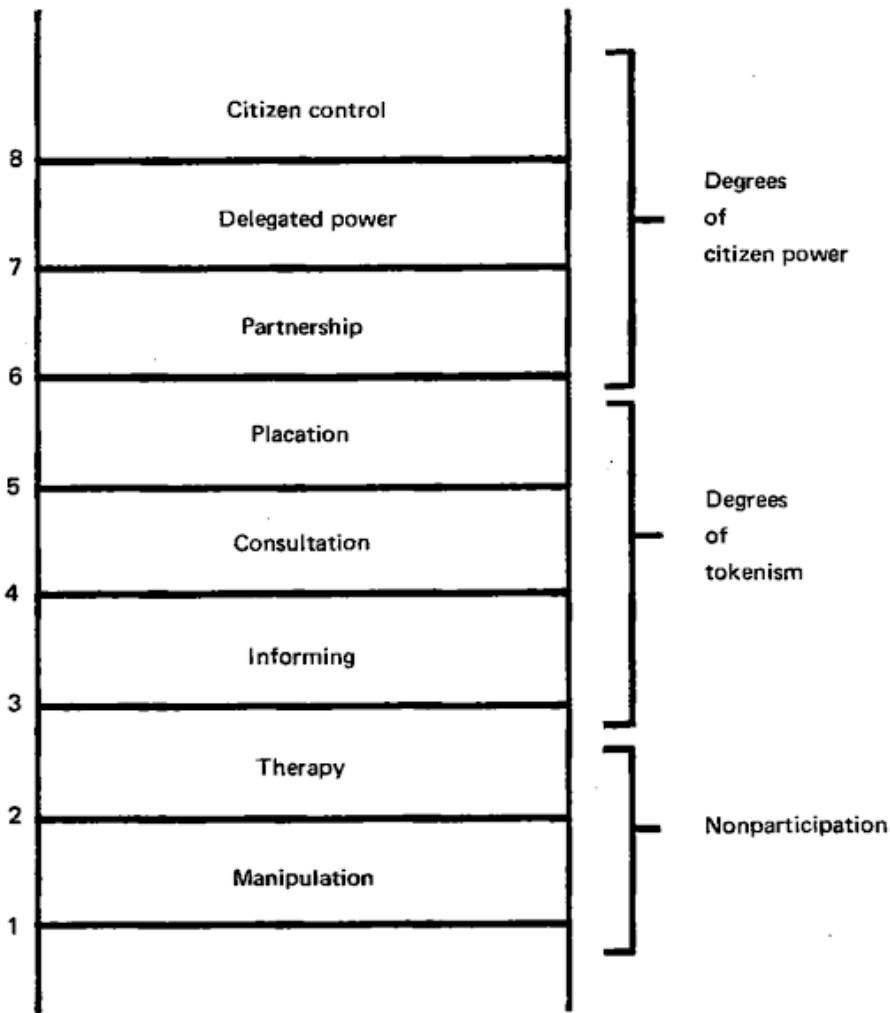


Figure 1. Sherry Arnstein Ladder of Public Participation

Partnership –

Participation is ensured through decentralization and redistribution of powers through negotiations between the citizenry and governing bodies. Joint committees could be formed to share in the formulation and implementation of service delivery policy. As stressed by Arnstein, every situation not essentially devolves or shares powers through actual partnerships. Rather citizens, through protests, strikes, and campaigns, get a share in power.

Delegated power – This participation node ensures a degree of control where officials give the authority of decision-making, administration, and management and control. Citizen boards not only participate in programs but also manage such programs. At this stage, citizens not only hold power to influence the decision-making process and implementation but also assure public accountability of programs.

Citizen control – Arnstein describes that the control stage in participation occurs when citizens become fully in charge of the policy, can influence the process and negotiate conditions, and can modify the policy. Under such settings, fiscal flow and funding would go directly to community-based organizations with complete command and control over the allocation practice.

Arnstein discussed three distinguished tiers from these eight rungs of the participation ladder model. The bottom tier, namely, non-participation, occurs under conditions where the participation is in its poorest condition and highly centralized decision-making. The middle tier entails the circumstances when there is partial participation where the information is disseminated, and citizens are consulted, but there are no significant assurances of their input being considered in policy formulation and implementation. The third tier, acknowledged as the ideal one, settles sensible participation and actual involvement of citizens in the policy design framework. This tier ensures partnership between citizens and government officials so that citizen can directly engineer their involvement.

1.7. Historical Perspective of Citizen Participation in Pakistan

In Pakistan, several governments have made several efforts to engage residents in development in local areas since 1960. During the military regimes of General Ayub Khan, General Zia-ul-Haq, and General Pervez Musharraf, significant moves were made toward devolution of power and a system of decentralized decision-making.

General Ayub Khan introduced a system of Basic Democracies in 1959. This system contained a structure where the lowest tier was Union Council (UC) having locally elected members, but concurrently the system had extra political purposes where bureaucrats and elite at upper tiers had substantial controls (Cheema et al., 2005), n.d.).

General Zia-ul-Haq introduced another system of public participation in 1979. Unlike General Ayub Khan's Basic Democracies system, this system also empowered the local representatives elected as members of Union Councils. The more authority and control in UCs member's hands resulted in the reduced influence of bureaucrats and higher authorities (LG_1979, n.d.).

A new system of government, namely the 'Local Government Plan,' also known as the 'Devolution Plan,' was introduced in 2000. This plan introduced a framework through which bureaucracies and local governments were integrated, ensuring improved accountability of higher authorities to local representatives. In the devolution plan, the unit considered for public participation was village and union councils as the entity responsible for service delivery.

This structure of devolution introduced a framework of the community as a civil society that ensured citizens' role and participation in decision-making and policy implementation and formulated Community Citizen Boards (CCBs) (RULES, 2003, n.d.). CCBs were the means through which community participation, efficient decision-making, optimal utilization of resources, and quality service delivery were ensured.

In the light of the Devolution Plan, Community Citizen Board has the following major elements:

- Improved public service delivery.
- Development and management of new facilities.
- The welfare of the vulnerable and underprivileged in society.
- Optimized utilization of resources and improved municipal services.
- Community involvement through the formation of distinct associations.
- Strengthening of the monitoring committee.

1.8. Challenges to community participation:

There are several challenges to public participation, as discussed by many researchers and a wide range of literature on it.

The citizen body's literacy level and the level of consciousness and public awareness in the sphere of politics significantly impact public participation (Talò et al., 2014). Research by (Wei et al., 2017) on the challenges to public participation mentions that citizen participation is notably influenced by domestic economies, the literacy rate of citizens, and the nature of their occupation.

The culture of power abuse and elitist governance model significantly influences the process of public participation at the grass-root level of governance (Mahmood et al., 2014).

Citizenship is one of the important factors that influence the level of public participation. Several types of research comply with the notion that the low level of public awareness and lack of understanding of citizenship significantly affects citizen participation (Turner et al., 1994). Citizenship in the margins of public participation does not essentially mean the legal recognition of citizenship rights but the awareness and recognition of citizens' obligations and rights and the consciousness of citizens' capacity in the practice of democracy. The development of a community and improved public participation requires a level of citizenship among the citizens.

1.9. METHODOLOGY

This study uses the qualitative method of research. Two groups of participants were selected as participants. Government officials and key informants (Group 1) responsible for municipal service delivery and policy-making and citizens from different areas and distinctive social groups (Group 2) who actively participate were selected as participants for the interviews. Participants from different schools of thought were approached to crosscheck or validate their participants' responses. The data were recorded with the consent of the participants. Interviews were conducted in different locations through an appointment in a peaceful environment. One interview guide was designed to conduct interviews. Open-ended questions were asked from the participants through a semi-structured interview method. The duration of each interview was 15-25 minutes. Same questions were asked from all participants.

1.10. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

1.10.1. Governance

The implication of a top-down approach to decision-making leaves a narrow room for power sharing (Sabatier, 1986). The following discussion with a policy's stakeholders enlightened their standpoint of the current system of policy-making in tehsil Pattoki.

Nazim specified that:

"The policy-making is centralized and does not cater to the needs of people at the grass root level. Citizens do not have policy input; they do not even know they can complain about certain issues. People do not have the government offices' awareness here, the Assistant Commissioner of Pattoki does not have a media cell, and AC is not even active on social media such as Twitter. There is no scheduled time for public meetings and hearings."

In the context of governance and decision-making, the President of the Press Club explained that:

"No, governing bodies do not weigh up local wisdom in policy-making. There is no mechanism of connecting people; the decisions are made on bias basis, and there is zero flexibility in the

decisions made."

Nazim Further elucidated that:

"The decision-making is biased and centralized. Public opinion is the least catered thing; influential persons get their interests secure before everyone. Due to recent access to rain and inadequate sanitation system, the rainwater could not drain properly from our streets in Mohalla Ahmed Nagar, we complained and called for water tanks, but there was no response. On the other end, there is this area named Bhedian where there are more influential persons who got their water cleared within hours."

The above discussion on centralization and closed decision-making system tells that public participation is minimal as significant policy-making is confined to public offices. The citizen body essentially stressed the stance that government officials take all kinds of policy decisions themselves.

A citizen rationalized the process of policy-making as centralized. The respondent from the local community described that:

"There is no mechanism of public opinion being articulated. There are a few filter plants in the whole of Pattoki. Groundwater is salty, and the government has installed few filters. Those filters need maintenance; they do not even listen to the complaints of our filter plants. How are they going to make us part of policy making."

The respondent further explained that:

"There are focal persons who are meant to deliver the needs and issues of the public; even in the minorities, there are such focal persons, but they abuse their position. Not understanding that they are public should be helping them and being their voice. There is no power-sharing at the grass-root level."

Public participation demands a bottom-up approach to decision-making where residents, decision groups, and policy stakeholders are involved in formulating and implementing policy. According to the seventh (Delegated Power) and eighth (citizen control) rung of Arnstein's Ladder of Public Participation (1969_Arnstein, n.d.), public participation is ensured when there is actual power sharing in decision-making and citizens are in charge of policy.

In the context of decentralization, open-door policies, and citizen engagement, Assistant Commissioner (AC) explained that:

"If we look at the history of local governance, the system was close. The governance system that was once closed is open now. You can call the system of governance open in many ways. Firstly it is an open system because there is a proper local governance system now. People vote and then elect a person who comes into the offices of municipal services first thing; secondly, if there is no election and there is an interim period, then in that interim period, all the officers, including our Assistant Commissioner, Chief Officer our Municipal Officers everybody is on an open-door policy. Any citizen can come to the offices at any time. The third and more important thing is social media. Any citizen can call us anytime, talk to us, tell us anything, ask and inquire us anything. So the syndrome understood and shared among citizens that the system is close is nothing but a false fallacy. There is nothing like that; the system is open to inquiry and suggestions, and since the system is open, the governance is getting far better."

Assistant Commissioner (AC) further said that:

"See the mechanism of giving input through the website and writing a letter to us; that era is over now... If I open my Whatsapp right now, I am sure I would have texts from ten (10) people saying sir, this is our issue, that things are our problem. Municipal Officer Infrastructure (MOI) is here in Pattoki before me; he would have 20 such texts, and Chief Officer (CO) will also have 10 – 15. So the point is that everybody has access; that is the one thing. Other than that, the media is so strong nowadays that there are so many journalists, people tell their issues to

journalists, and we get to receive the information through journalists. Secondly, there are social media pages our assistant commissioner has such page; the municipal committee has pages through which people are continuously giving their suggestions, and making inquires, tell their issues."

From the above discussion and analysis, it is observed that the standpoints of citizen-body and public office are distinctive. Citizens are found complaining about the system being centralized, and there is no little or room for the intervention of the public in policy decisions. The officials argue that there are mechanisms and procedures for engaging the public in decision-making and that public offices are always open to citizens. There is a connectivity gap between both bodies because of the contrasting standpoints.

In the context of connectivity and an efficient governance framework for quality service delivery, the Assistant Commissioner of Pattoki stated that:

"Definitely, there is a mechanism to articulate the opinions of marginalized groups. There is a minority quota; we have separate seats and a quota for minorities in our country. Not only the seats are savailable, but we have services; in every service, they are provincial, federal, or local, and minorities are given opportunities and places in decision-making. Other than that, I have observed that their sympathies are mostly with marginalized communities whenever our officers visit any place. Today (26th July 2022), we were on a visit, and we raised a point that I cannot share here was on a marginalized community, and we decided to cater to their needs particularly."

In the same context, Municipal Officer Infrastructure said that:

"I am stating this in the context of local government, that in our local government policy-making bench, we have five (5) elected members, one (1) selected member, and that selected one is from minorities. In the same way, one (1) women member and one (1) is from the general public. So we have three (3) members of the public, and we involve them in policy-making. Those persons are not elected, they are selected, and we have them on board for public representation and participation so that we get to hear their problems and issues and collect other related information. Plus, in the peripheral areas of the villages, we have the labor. There is also a representative of laborers. The person who has slight influence over the area, who understands the mechanisms and local needs and dynamics, gets nominated as the focal person of that group." The officials of Municipal Committee Pattoki and the Assistant Commissioner of Pattoki stressed the mechanisms of incorporating the opinions of the public and their representation on the bench of the policymakers. From the citizens' perspective, the decision-making and the policy implementation integrate the least of their involvement, and the system of governance is essentially centralized. In the background of reasoning over so-called local representation and ignorant public officials, a citizen stated that:

"The open door policy is just so-called. If you have some issue and you want to go to the AC office, you have to get an appointment, and for that appointment, you can go to their office. Furthermore, when we go to their office, the guard tells us to go and come some other time, as AC is busy now. I think he is never going to be free. The open door policies and public participation is nothing but a hallucination, and ground realities are different." Understanding the importance of local representation and focal persons, Municipal Officer Infrastructure Pattoki stated that:

"In the parliamentary system and local government, we have public representatives. The public representative is responsible for his or her constituency. The public representatives are the focal persons of their groups.

There are focal persons and influential persons at the time of elections, and they speak on behalf of their group plus, stay in contact with us, give their input, and participate in decision-making.

Those focal persons better understand the dynamics of their relevant local area and can help us accordingly. These focal persons give their inputs and suggestions and come to us with their problems."

Emphatically, there is a gap between the citizen body and governing body. Civil societies and focal persons are generally conceptualized as integrating bodies to bridge that gap. Reckoning the connectivity and inclusiveness gap, the General Secretary of Pattoki Bar Association conceptualized focal persons as bridges and stated that:

"I believe there should be some mechanism of identification and nomination of focal persons. Some such persons act on behalf of some groups but are notorious for securing their interests and not catering to the needs of people with low incomes and awareness. Groups should select a person who has some awareness of public offices and is a representative of the public at a grass-root level. A focal person should integrate government offices and citizens in engaging them to make policy."

From the above discussion on the system of governance, connectivity, inclusiveness, policy-making, and decision-making, it can be observed that government offices claim to have a mechanism that articulates opinions, including representation in policy-making bench and open-door policies. Nevertheless, there is a flip side, where the citizen body is complaining about the policy-making process being more central.

1.10.2. Public Awareness

Citizen consciousness of fundamental rights strengthens frameworks of good governance. This requires going beyond the ratification of merely making frameworks, integrating the citizen's rights in policy-making and legislation, ascertaining inclusiveness and connectivity, and understanding that the involvement level of citizens is essential for good governance and quality service delivery.

A low literacy rate is considered one of the major factors influencing the relationship between government offices and citizens. The most common definition considered for literacy is the skill of reading and writing.

When asked about the mechanism of involving the public and taking their input in policy-making, Assistant Commissioner detailed that:

"You are a bit fast on it; see, in our Tehsil Pattoki, the literacy rate is very low; the formula of checking literacy is that people know how to read and write it is not a bachelor's degree in public administration or engineering, its not that such criteria. Our criterion is just that a person can read and write. You can leave this room and ask someone that we are making policy. People might find time, but they do not have enough literacy and intellect to give any input that this policy should be implemented in that way or that project should be done in that way. The public participation that we have is essentially through civil societies and the officers we have. The kind of participation you are asking in the strict sense that we go out and boys are playing, and we ask those boys that we are making a water supply system here; what is your opinion on that? They will not have the sense to give any input, and the only reason they will not have sense is that they are not well educated. However, if there is some student among them who has the exposure can tell us something or give input. Ultimately, the policy decisions are made with civil society's involvement. Our political government means the representatives of society are represented. The population of this city is 934,000 (nine lac thirty-four thousand). We cannot take opinions from Nine lac thirty-four thousand (934,000)."

According to the above statements, the public offices in Pattoki are open for citizens' input in policy-making, but they are illiterate and have little awareness of their rights, responsibilities,

and governance frameworks.

In the margins of illiteracy, the General Secretary of Pattoki Bar Association mentioned that:

"The office of Assistant Commissioner or Municipal Committee might be open for citizens, and they might welcome the public suggestions, but people have no idea about the process of policy-making, people have no awareness of their rights. Their public representative's task is to deliver information on such processes. It is the task of governing bodies and decision groups to make a mechanism that articulates citizen opinions. Such a mechanism can be ensured when a focal person from the local community acts as a bridge between public offices (Municipal Committee Offices and Assistant Commissioner office) and residents or stakeholders of policy. The level of citizen engagement is quite low, and there is a gap between residents and policymakers making policy for the local area."

Nazim also explained the impact of illiteracy in the following words:

"There is a communication gap between citizens at the grass root level and the public offices, including the Assistant Commissioner office, Municipal office, NADRA, Tehsildar Office, and illiteracy. People are unaware of the fact that they have the ultimate power. Nobody knows where to go, where to complain about a certain issue. People here do not understand government offices and their helpline numbers so they can complain. If the government makes a dumpsite or landfill, nobody follows the SOPs of that."

Nazim Further described that:

"The governing body has 10% interest in the public out of 100. There are few basic issues of Pattoki, namely water and sanitation, waste management and healthcare."

"People do not have the understanding of governance mechanisms. If you ask 10 random people about the complaints and government offices, 8 would have zero ideas about such procedures."

The tehsil of Pattoki does not have its jurisdiction confined only to the city but also to the villages' peripheral areas. Those areas suffer the most. Even if there is policy-making, it will only cater to the city's needs, not the villages. The residents have zero ideas about policy-making and public participation. The subdivisions suffer the most as their needs are not considered in the policy-making even though they are the sub-division of tehsil Pattoki. Citizens have zero ideas about making policy, so the input in policy is an unknown terminology for such people. If an influential person supports a policy, then the public must accept it as it is."

From the above discussion, it can be observed that one of the main reasons for deceitful governance and low quality of service delivery is the stumpy level of citizens' understanding of procedure and illiteracy. There are surroundings where people are sentient about their rights and responsive to government mechanisms. Citizens believe that government should formulate such a mechanism where a person from the grass-root level is designated as their focal person and cater to the needs of the citizen through such channels.

An informant from Union Council stressed the system of power-sharing and stated that:

"Well, the decisions are made with the consensus of residents, public representatives, and municipal officials, so there is no question on flexibility as they are the ones approving the decision for them at the end of the day. Officials cannot ask every citizen about their opinion; the participation is ensured through channels and public representatives."

In the margins of service delivery and public awareness, Municipal Officer Infrastructure stated the following words:

"If you ask about the platforms of connectivity, then any citizen can get contacts of public

officials from municipal committee office, get guides on a specific issue and lodge their issues or complaints as well. From the end of public offices, everything is fine. It is just the citizen who does not know enough about the procedures."

From the end of government, officials provide claim to provide a platform for citizens to engage and participate through their locally nominated and elected focal person. However, the General Secretary of Pattoki Bar Association and other citizens expounded that the focal persons are local representatives who only secure their interests and do not serve the needs of residents. They explained that even if there are local representatives, government officials do not amend their decision when the public opposes a policy.

In the context of flexibility in decision-making, Assistant Commissioner stated that:

"See, when there is human intervention in something, let us say the decision-making, the decisions are subjective one cannot call a decision 100% objective, but the subjective decision will have rational, logic and reasoning behind it. A human is not a robot with a 0,1 (binary number) in front of a person, and that person performs in a programming language. Humans are emotional animals; when we make decisions, there is an element of subjectivity in them. I cannot say that the decisions that are made are purely objective. The MOI here knows better about the sanitation system here than I (AC) if I make a decision purely objectively that the water and sanitation system should start from this point, end at this point, and should this flow, but the MOI knows that there are poor households in the route of the project, the poor people who have encroached the area, their houses and settlements will be destroyed. So the perfection in the decision may not be 100%, but the decisions taken are taken subjectively and with the rationale of doing the correct and best suitable thing. Going mathematically or objectively in the decision is not right."

President of Aman Press Club Pattoki explained that decision-making is not flexible. Rather, the policy is formulated and implemented through centralized channels. In this regard, President said that:

"No, there is no flexibility; government thinks that people cannot decide for themselves. You see the roads and sanitation system here, and you see the local communities, roads, infrastructure, and water and sanitation system in the western countries where the government articulates the voices of residents."

Concerning flexibility in decisions over policy, an Official from Municipal Committee explained that:

"There are so many factors in flexibility in decision-making; there are some decisions taken in which there is maximum room for flexibility, and there are certain instances where there is minimal room for the flexibility. Flexibility varies from decision to decision, but essentially, we try to make the decision that best suits the public and has public opinion. There is no such formula of flexibility that fits every situation."

The effectiveness of democracy and the credibility of public participatory mechanisms demand the effectiveness of the citizens' response to political, social, and economic policies. The establishment of political will and awareness among citizens helps the process of citizen engagement.

The respondents have explained the existing public participation processes and have divergent views on local representatives or focal persons. The citizens' mistrust of government officials and elected persons demonstrates that even if there is a public representation, it is in the second stage of 'Degree of Tokenism' according to Arnstein's Ladder of Public Participation.

1.10.3. Public Participation

Connectivity is the key element that ensures citizen engagement. The acknowledgment of citizen rights and the level of awareness about the procedures of policy-making play a crucial role in citizen involvement in decision-making.

The countries with democratic systems and weak governance are widely concerned about losing public trust in local representatives and authorities. Due to inadequate service delivery, the connection between citizens and local governments has enfeebled. Public participation is considered a phenomenon that answers to the malfunctions of governance and inadequacy of public service delivery and ensures effective service delivery, legitimacy, social justice, and improves public trust.

In the margins of holding public officials accountable, the President of the Press Club stated that:

"There is no mechanism of holding public offices accountable. Local persons do not even have access to the municipal or assistant commissioner offices; holding them accountable is a far-fetched concept. The reasons, effects, causes, or anything behind, before, or after the policy is unknown to people. A citizen cannot inquire anything about the policy. Look at our streets, buildings, and this road. we got tough tiles here after decades of complaining and requesting."

In the verges of accountability and transparency, members of the Union Council vindicated that:

"Pattoki has its operating offices in a single area. The offices of DSP, Assistant Commissioner, Tehsildar Office, and Municipal Office are all in one area and are close to each other. Everybody living in Pattoki knows which office is where and what time it opens. If a citizen has any kind of issue or problem, whether regarding a policy or needing any kind of information or documents, I believe that offices will be ready to help anytime. So the information is accessible, and citizens can inquire about any information."

A contradiction can be found in the arguments of the President of the Press Club (Citizen body) and an official from the Union Council (Authorities). The President of the Press Club talks about one extreme of the system being consolidated and far from public reach, while an official from Union Council argues otherwise.

Public participation is effective when there is a mechanism of getting public opinion and modifying the policy over their input. According to citizens, including residents, the President of the Press Club, and Nazim, the quality of service delivery is scant. Public trust is absent, as authorities are notorious for their *modus operandi*.

A citizen explains the culture of personal bias in decision-making in the following words:

"There is 100 percent influence of biased decision-making. Personal interests are prior and foremost. For instance, there will be some development, such as a road. Whoever, the decision maker, is, she/he will give that project to someone close, some friend or relative where they can maneuver a chunk of money into their pockets and do corruption. They will just secure their interests and not think about the public. There is a culture of ethnic biasedness. If there is some Meo(caste) person in the office, he will favor the Meo community in the development project, and the same goes for other castes."

Respondent further explained that:

"There are focal persons present, but a culture of mistrust exists. People do not trust their representatives, as there has been such history. There is a trade union in Pattoki by the name of Anjuman Tajiraan. So the head of Anjuman tajiraan (Trade Union), during the decision or policy-making, will not bother the small traders having small shops. The head will take their vote at the time of the election, and after getting the desired seat, he will be doing every decision-making according to his interest, or even if there is some mechanism of public opinion, the head is just going to listen to the influential group of people, those who are dominant and financially well off."

Talking about the level of public participation and quality of service delivery, the President of the Press Club elucidated that:

"Look, you see this road; there are pipes of Sui gas, water, and sewerage underneath it. If the government approves the construction of this road, they will not demolish the previous road present here. They will level it and build another one on it without asking us anything or taking any kind of our input on policy. The issue here is that if they build a new road on an old road, the level of our houses will go down than the level of roads and streets and when there is rain, our houses will get filled with water because there is no proper sanitation system as well. Similarly, there are other policy decision-makings where the opinion of residents is not considered. There is no platform provided where the citizen can involve them in policy-making."

Speaking about the service delivery, Nazim detailed the following assertions:

"The system of fire control is worse. Pattoki faced a big fire scene in 2018 in a wood warehouse. The flames of that fire were higher than a 10 floors high building. The service here could not control that fire, so they called fire brigades from nearby cities, namely Renala, Okara, and Phoolnagar. The fire started at 7 PM, and they controlled it at 3 AM. After that, because of public pressure, Pattoki managed to get one (1) fire brigade. Then a shop in the market caught fire due to a short circuit in 2020. They could not take over the fire because the fire brigade could not get into the market's narrow streets; people had to fight the fire on their own. AC was standing there arguing that he could not do anything. Still, no fire fighting department or trained capacity can do that job. Since that event, there has not been some major incident, but if something like that happens again, there is no capacity to fight unless the fire is in some open place where fire brigade can go."

Stressing over the mechanisms of power sharing, policy-making, service delivery, and public participation, Municipal officer Infrastructure said the following words:

"A survey is done. There is a proper mechanism for surveying the area before the policy. When we launch a new project, we first carry out 3 4 kinds of technical surveys. We do one physical survey and one public survey. These surveys are done properly. After the survey, we impose our technical reasoning in the area of policy like there is salty water, so what is water quality? What is the depth of water? What is the quantity of water? The local persons only tell us about their local knowledge, but we carry out surveys, and the survey outputs are based on shreds of evidence."

Municipal officer Infrastructure further explained that:

"In the same way, for instance, are about to install a sewerage system, and we decide the area then we conduct all kinds of relevant surveys whether it is physical or technical in the area, and we project the future of that project. We focus on the maintenance and sustainability of the project as well."

Over the question of articulating public opinions and involving citizens in decision-making, Municipal Officer Infrastructure explained that:

"Likewise, we have the mechanism of meetings here. Like the Moharram is starting soon, so the Assistant Commissioner called everybody. Public representatives and ethnic group representatives from every sect were also called to the meeting to guide us in policy-making, get feedback from them, and help us identify the problems. Today, a person told us that some guy entered the jiloes riding a motorcycle. We did not have that information before but got it through their input. So there are notable persons in society, and it is not essentially necessary that they are political."

When public opinion is involved, the question is about the credibility of decisions and policies in reflecting the citizens' opinions, and there is a 'Degree of Tokenism' as discussed by Arnstein (1969_Arnstein, n.d.), or the actual and effective public participation. In explaining the phenomenon of making the decision that pronounces public opinion, Assistant Commissioner affirmed that:

"The decision will always be subjective, when there are conditions and situations when there is crossing the lines of Islam in some cases, then the decision making is strict and no room for flexibility otherwise there will be public participation and tractability in decision-making. It does not mean that the decision has room for modifications on someone's (influential person) personal interest. It is just about catering to the needs of the general public and ensuring the phenomenon of public participation."

The quality of service delivery and public satisfaction depends on the nature of public participation. Accountability and transparency mechanisms, public trust, inclusiveness and connectivity among informal and formal government institutions, and effective public participation ensure good governance and better service delivery.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to develop an affirmative connection and reinforce the relationship between the government officials of Tehsil Pattoki and local communities that include civil society and communes. In the expressions of Arnstein's Ladder of Public Participation, local communities have to be reinvigorated to participate in a certain way to ascend the ladder.

Furthermore, in Pattoki, the quality of service delivery, water and sanitation, waste management, and safe drinking water need development and improvement. The officials need to trigger the delivery process and disseminate information to aware residents incorporating to the third tier of Arnstein's ladder of public participation.

The framework of good governance and quality of service delivery can be promoted by working with civil society and residents at the grass-root level to promote an open, transparent, and liable approach of two-way communication; collective effort, and cooperative endeavour helps pronounce the concerns, needs, and values of citizens and can be integrated into municipal decision-making.

The municipal committee needs to involve citizens in the decision-making by taking the consent of residents and stakeholders over service delivery and policy implementation. Municipal officials should take a bottom-up approach to policy-making and avoid manipulation and therapy by sidestepping the foisting of decisions on communities.

3. CONCLUSION

The study explained the nature, processes, and dynamics of public participation concerning Arnstein's Ladder of Public Participation (1969_Arnstein, n.d.) and analysed how impactful public participation can be in improving municipal service delivery. The article detailed the mechanisms of public participation and service delivery by gathering information from focus groups involving government and citizen bodies. The data analysis provided a strong understanding of standpoints, considerations, and interpretations of the factions, citizens, and government officials.

The quality of service delivery largely depends on the level of citizen engagement. Citizen participation is a fixative that holds a community together and holds great importance as it structures the means of governance and service delivery. The effectiveness of public participation is ensured when residents are part of the decision-making in a true sense. The quality of municipal service depends on the relationship between municipal officials, residents, and stakeholders of the implemented policy. Having an open-door policy in government offices and presenting devolution plans that are not practiced meticulously does not help articulate the voices, needs, and concerns of citizens.

The main issue of tehsil Pattoki is the lack of awareness that impetus communication and connectivity gap. Citizens' lack of awareness about the rule of law and policy procedures, low public trust, and low public office accountability and transparency are the genesis of inadequate service delivery.

Public representatives and local focal persons are required to act as an integrating body as an insistence of efforts to develop and sustain a healthy citizen-official relationship that enables public participation. Officials' openness and citizens' awareness provide a healthy platform for effective communication channels.

According to the understanding of Arnstein's ladder of public participation and analysis of focus group interviews, it is demonstrated that tehsil Pattoki undergoes Manipulation (1st rung) and Therapy (2nd rung) in the margins of citizen engagement. However, it can ascend to Informing (3rd rung) and Consultation (4th rung) by creating a liaison body at the local level and bridging the gap (1969_Arnstein, n.d.).

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