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**THE EXPERIENCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BALOCHISTAN:  
CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study analysis political and financial challenges faced by local governments in Pakistan's largest province Balochistan with a focus on suggesting practicable solutions for improved governance and development purposes. This paper is an attempt to address the central question: How come meaningful change be brought about by addressing the basic hurdles confronted by local governance in the province? In order to trace back the evolution of local governance from colonial times to present day, qualitative assessments, policy evaluation and historical analysis are utilized as methodology for this study. All this is done keeping in view the significant constitutional milestones achieved so far such as Local Government Ordinance 2001 followed by Balochistan Local Government Act 2013. Meanwhile this paper also highlights missing gaps between policy intent and field implementation by adopting a solution-based approach.*

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**Keywords:** Local Government, Balochistan, Governance Challenges, Political Barriers, Financial Constraints, Policy Implementation, Reforms, Development

**INTRODUCTION**

Local government is considered as the backbone of governance by highlighting day to day issues which needs to be fixed on regular intervals. It's a system that empowers people to bring about solution to their community needs through elected leaders. LG plays the role of a bridge between the state and its citizens. It is also regarded as the self-government of its citizens. The citizens of a locality solve their local problems through LG (Naseem, 2021). At its core, the system is about giving people a voice in decisions making so that resources are utilized

wisely by creating a government that prefers the well-being of its citizens. It's governance that's personal, practical, and rooted in the lives of the people it serves.

According to (Tindal, 1977) local government is not only to provide fundamental services to its citizens, but also to represent the will of the people in the best possible way. In (Aijaz, 2007) words local government is part of national government that deals mainly with issues and problems related to a particular segment of population. To (Hasluck, 1948) (WHO, 2023) local government is the sphere of government where local authorities are allowed to issue orders and make decisions, by law, in order to adjust the governance. At the same time, (Sidgwick, 2005) in his book entitles, "Elements of Politics" states that local government as a government has some special powers to issue regulations and rules within the area of their control.

In Pakistan, local governments are vital in tackling the social and economic challenges that people face, especially in rural and less-developed areas. They act as a crucial link between the government and the people, making sure that policies and initiatives reach the grassroots level and make a real difference. The introduction and establishment of the local governments at each district, tehsil, municipality, union council, and neighborhood levels offered a better chance for autonomy and self-governance in Pakistan (Hashmat Ullah Khan, 2022). By giving communities, a stronger voice and encouraging active participation, local governments help strengthen democracy, reduce poverty, and promote sustainable growth (Mahmood A. , 2012). They are the backbone of efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

Balochistan, is the largest province, territory-wise as it consists of almost 44% of overall Pakistan, yet it is the most overlooked province where hope and despair exist side by side. However, the residents live in utmost poverty and despair. Although it is home to one of the richest cultures on earth, yet political unrest coupled with administrative inefficiency and financial woes tell the entire story. Under this background lies fundamental question regarding overall governance of the province.

At the heart of Balochistan's governance crisis rises a critical question: What are the main challenges confronted by local governments in Balochistan, and how can they be properly addressed

to improve governance and development in the region? The paper is a solution oriented one with a simple but powerful argument that without empowering local governments administratively, politically and financially the province will not thrive and remain under-developed for decades to come.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research is qualitative in nature employing historical analysis and policy evaluation in order to identify key challenges in local government, focusing mainly on Quetta, the capital territory of the province, by proposing actionable solution. Data is mainly collected through secondary sources such as colonial era governance records, post-independence local government policies (Local Government Ordinance 2001 and Balochistan Local Government Act 2013) and historical reports on administrative structure of Balochistan. In addition to this, the study also benefited from relevant research papers, books, and periodical opinions by analyzing data through content analysis.

#### **Literature Review: Historical Background of Local Government in Balochistan**

##### ***Pre-Independence Era***

Before the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the region now known as Balochistan was governed under a tribal system, with local chieftains (Sardars) and tribal leaders exercising significant control over their respective areas. In order to maintain strict control and smooth facilitation of revenue collection, the British colonial administration introduced limited forms of local governance as these systems were, for the most part, informal and did not prioritize community development or participatory governance.

During the British era, Balochistan was divided into British Balochistan (directly administered by the British) and the princely states of Kalat, Las Bela, Kharan, and Makran. The British introduced a rudimentary form of local administration in the directly governed areas, focusing on maintaining law and order and collecting taxes. Tribal leaders were co-opted into the system to ensure stability, but this approach marginalized the majority of the population and stifled the development of formal local governance structures.

1907 was the year when, “Decentralization Commission” was put in place by the British administration under strict official (Reforma, 1993). However, with 1919 Act, a new area started with local government becoming a provincial chapter. This system prevailed till 1935 with provinces solely in charge of local governments.

Although there used to be scarce resources with limited autonomy under the British rule in colonial times, yet it was central which had the upper hand in controlling local government affairs. Since central government exercised full control using bureaucratic machinery to their advantage, therefore, grassroots governance remained largely neglected as there existed a huge gap between the ruling and the administrative bodies. The true power rested in the hands of the District Officer (DO), who held significant control over decision-making. Local authorities were rarely entrusted with the responsibility of rural development, except in a few cases where individual British officers took personal initiative to drive isolated efforts for rural progress. These scattered attempts, however, were not enough to bring about meaningful or widespread change.

#### ***Post-Independence Era (1947–2000)***

The United India was divided into two separate and independent states namely, India and Pakistan. In fact, it was the British administration that had populated Pakistan prior to its inception in 1947. As a matter of fact, Pakistan remained a centralized state where local government used to be a matter of time before another military coup. The Civilian government couldn't be able to hold firm ground and initiate ground-breaking reforms at the grossroot level. In his book, *Pakistan: Political Roots and Development*, Safdar Mahmood (Mahmood, 2003) argued that both military and civilian governments failed to improve and implement local government all these years they were in power.

Pakistan inherited a very poor local government structure (Ahmed, 1984). After gaining independence, Pakistan struggled to build a strong local government system, and unfortunately, little progress was made over time. The original idea behind local government was to bring rural landlords into the administrative fold, partly to address the growing democratic aspirations of the educated

middle class in cities and partly to maintain the governance structure left behind by British rulers (Tinker, 1968).

History is evident to the fact that both socio-ethnic and political tensions were the result of colonial legacy that ultimately translated into Pakistan’s domestic challenges (Ashraf, 2022). Although local authorities saw their comeback during military rule post inception of Pakistan, yet there remained structural flaws from colonial past. In fact, at community level civilians had pretty little say in local affairs in early 1950s. However, General Ayub’s Basic Democracies was a positive attempt in this regard which lasted for a very brief period of time (Kochane, 1997).

The decision to merge the entire western part of Pakistan into a single unit which was to be administered from capital city (Karachi then) got things further deteriorated. Overnight, whatever voice Balochistan had was drowned out. Resentment grew as people watched their local institutions fade into irrelevance. By the time One Unit was scrapped in 1970 and Balochistan became a province again, hopes were high, but reality didn’t change much.

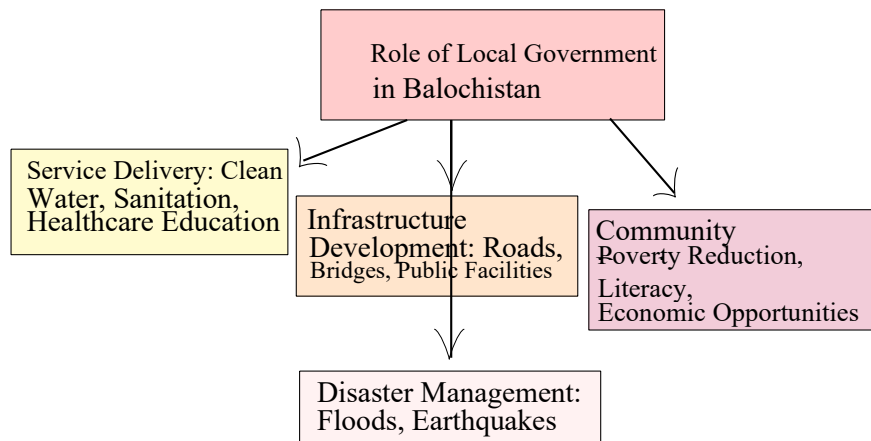
***Local Government Reforms in 2001***

The introduction of Local Government Ordinance (LGO) in 2001 was one of the most appreciated milestones achieved by the then military general, General Pervez in the evolution of local government in Balochistan. Reforms were brought about to decentralize power and empower local governments so that community needs are properly addressed. Below is a comprehensive table to illustrate these changes.

Aspect	Details
<b>Introduction</b>	A major step forward in Balochistan’s local governance came in 2001 with the Local Government Ordinance (LGO), introduced by General Pervez Musharraf’s military government. The goal was to decentralize power and empower local governments to better serve communities.
<b>Key Features</b>	
<b>Three-Tier System</b>	Establishment of District Governments, Tehsil Municipal Administrations (TMAs), and Union Councils to bring governance closer to the people.

<b>Devolution Power</b>	Administrative and financial powers were transferred to local governments, giving them more control over decision-making and resource allocation.
<b>Elected Representatives</b>	Local leaders were elected to ensure that governance was participatory and reflective of community needs.
<b>Service Delivery</b>	Focused on improving essential services like education, healthcare, and infrastructure to enhance the quality of life for residents.
<b>Impact</b>	
<b>Progress</b>	The reforms brought some positive changes, especially in urban areas, where local governance became more responsive and effective.
<b>Challenges Balochistan</b>	Implementation in Balochistan faced hurdles due to the province's complex socio-political environment, including tribal conflicts, security concerns, and a lack of trained local officials.

**TABLE-1  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS IN 2001**



***Local Government Reforms in 2013***

During 2013 the newly elected civilian government made a huge decision in strengthening the grassroots governance system by introducing the new local government system named as the Balochistan Local Government Act (BLGA). This reform was meant to highlight the shortcomings in previous system, 2001.

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	In 2013, the Government of Pakistan introduced the Balochistan Local Government Act (BLGA) to address the flaws of the 2001 system and strengthen local governance in Balochistan.
<b>Key Features</b>	
<b>Three-Tier System</b>	Establishment of District Councils, Municipal Corporations, and Village Councils to ensure governance reached every level of society.
<b>Focus on Rural Development</b>	Greater emphasis on improving rural areas and encouraging community participation in decision-making.
<b>Fiscal Decentralization</b>	Enhanced financial powers for local governments to improve resource allocation and service delivery.
<b>Transparency and Accountability</b>	Introduction of mechanisms to ensure that local governance was transparent, accountable, and free from corruption.
<b>Impact</b>	
<b>Progress</b>	The reforms marked a step forward in empowering local governments, particularly in rural areas, and improving community participation.
<b>Challenges</b>	Persistent issues such as political interference, inadequate funding, and security concerns limited the effectiveness of the reforms.

**TABLE-2**  
**LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS IN 2013**

### **Structure and Functions of Local Government in Balochistan**

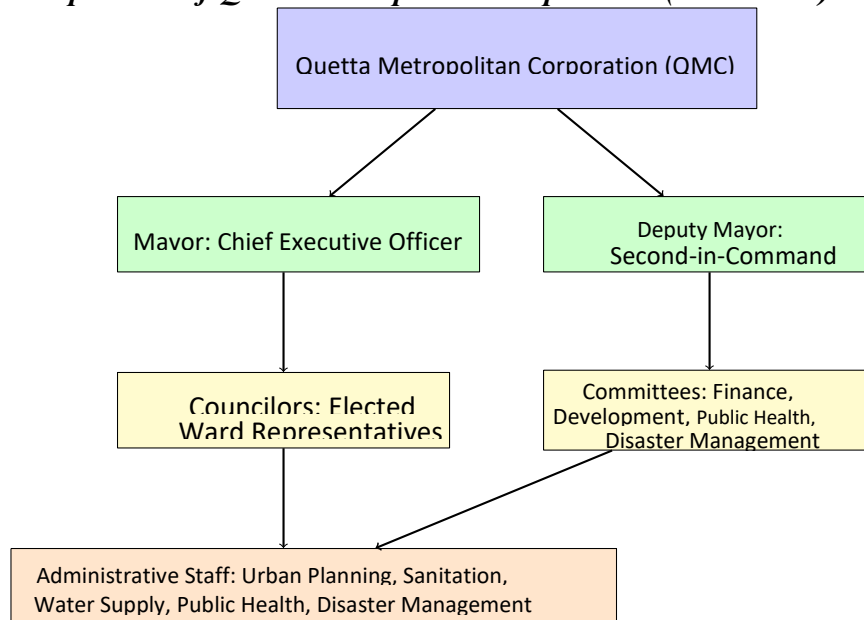
The local government system in Balochistan is designed in such a way to decentralize governance and bring about the administration closer to the locals. In fact, the existing structure, established under the Balochistan Local Government Act (BLGA) 2010 with further modifications in the 2013, introduces multiple tiers of local governments where each tier has a particular role and responsibility aimed at improving service delivery, development planning, and resource management to name a few.

**Current Structure of Local Governments in Balochistan**

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>District Councils</b>	Highest tier of local government in rural areas. Oversees local governance across the district. Composed of elected representatives from Union Councils, led by Chairmen. Focuses on district-wide development and resource management.
<b>Municipal Committees/Corporations</b>	Govern urban areas, including towns and cities. Municipal Committees: For smaller urban centers (population 15,000–100,000). Municipal Corporations: For larger cities like Quetta (population 100,000–500,000). Responsible for urban infrastructure, sanitation, and municipal services.
<b>Union Councils</b>	Lowest tier of local government, representing small rural or urban communities. Population range: 7,000–15,000. Composed of elected members, including Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and reserved seats for women, peasants, and workers. Acts as a bridge between the community and higher tiers of local government.

**TABLE-4**  
**CURRENT STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN BALOCHISTAN**

**Composition of Quetta Metropolitan Corporation (2013–2018)**



**Comparison with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s 2013 LG Reforms**

Unlike Balochistan, where local governments remain heavily dependent on provincial authorities, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s (KP) 2013 local government reforms introduced a more empowered and autonomous system. Bureaucratic handling was largely reduced with empowering local mayors relatively more edge in both administrative and financial matters under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa model (Cheema A. K., 2006). Unlike in Balochistan where mismanagement is in abundance due to vulnerable accountability mechanism, KP’s has its own local government commission that keeps strong oversight. This is not yet, there exist fixed allocation of budget to the local councils from provincial revenue which ensures that development projects be carried out independently (Zaidi, 2005).

**Contrast with India’s Panchayati Raj System**

There exists massive contrast with respect to Indian Panchayat system as India’s Panchayati Raj system (mandated by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment) is by and large a decentralized system consisting of village councils called Gram Panchayats which

administer not only education but healthcare as well (Palanithurai, 2000). Most interesting thing about this system is that women have reserve quota along with the marginalized segments of society acceding to over 1.4 million elected women representatives something that one cannot imagine in Balochistan (UNDP, 2018). Unlike in Balochistan where funds are received in cash, Panchayats in India, on one hand, impose taxes at local level while on the other receive funding from state governments.

### **Key Challenges Facing Local Government in Balochistan**

Administering grassroots governance system in a province like Balochistan is a Hercules task. However, this time around an effort has been made to collect data from live experiences of the local councilors elected from Quetta Metropolitan Corporation from 2015 to 2019 including that of the Deputy Mayor. Following are the details.

#### ***Voices from the Ground: Views from Local Leaders***

Muhammad Younis Baloch, Deputy Mayor from Ward 26 was not highly critical of the provincial government and stated that, “Despite of being democratically elected representatives we were supposed to serve people, yet decision making was not in our hands as provincial governments had upper hand in exercising authority. Ward 39 representative, Councilor Rehmatullah Achekezai highlighted financial mismanagement challenges confronted by them saying that, “More than third part of funds used to get disappeared in what was known as the processing fee and that too waiting for funds to be released for months. Moreover, councilor Abbas Ali Hazara Ward 10 shows dark reality about one of the basic rights of citizens that, “Our locality strives for pure and clean water in an atmosphere where tanker mafia sell water with clean chit from authorities”. These are some of the firsthand accounts that expose the bitter reality when it comes to governance structure in Balochistan. Bureaucratic control, financial mismanagement, tribalism and nepotism, and absence of accountability hinder the very foundation of grassroots governance.

#### **POLITICAL CHALLENGES**

##### **Centralized Control by the Provincial Government**

Pakistan’s 1973 constitution in its Article 140(A) clearly states that Local Government elections should be conducted on regular basis.

However, when it comes to ground reality, the provincial governments do not prioritize to empower third tier of governance simply because they do not want to share power at grassroots. Doing so would ultimately strengthen local government which would demand their due right in governance related affairs. Decentralization is key to democratic culture but the contemporary state of affairs is contrary to the this.

### ***Political Interference in Local Affairs***

Political interference constitutes another major barrier to effective local governance in Pakistan. The literature consistently points to the patron-client relationships between local representatives and provincial elites, which undermine accountability and responsiveness (Ali, 2022). The persistent influence of provincial political dynamics results in ineffective provision of public services, depriving communities of the chance to engage and benefit from local governance initiatives (Kharel, 2020). Moreover, political instability due to frequent military interference has further deteriorated local governance.

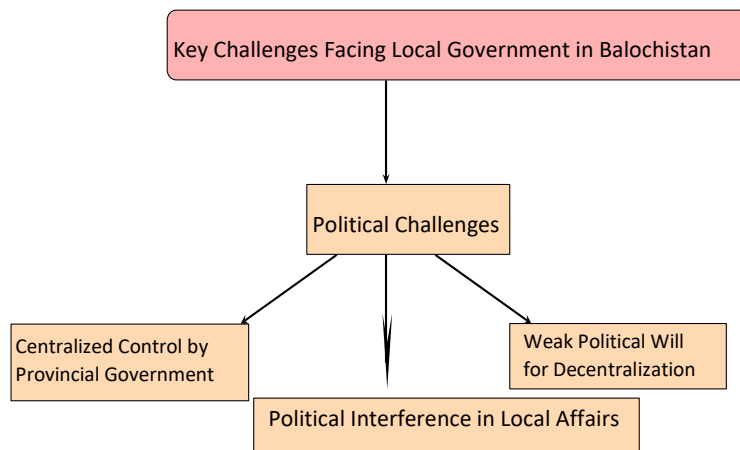
Third world countries including Pakistan has been going through transformation phases where democratic institutions are yet to grow in full swing. Political interference has been deeply rooted phenomenon that halts day to day business of the state. Although local governments are meant to serve their people directly by addressing citizens' issues at door step, political meddling from either provinces or federation divert local funds for political gains through their installed administrators (Mookherjee, 2006). This system let local communities to depend on the whims of top-management as local leaders do not function independently (Shah, 2012). To make situation further complicated, reshuffling and reposting of local authorities becomes usual practice as new parties coming into power claim that doing so is done for improved efficiency but the reality is opposite (Siddiqui, 2019).

### ***Weak Political Will for Decentralization***

Weak political will constitutes another pervasive hurdle to real local governance. Decentralization brings common citizens and government closer to each other. As a matter of fact, genuine and

meaningful decentralization requires stable and long-term government policies with political backing so that local communities exercise real authority with allocated financial and administrative powers. Unfortunately, our leaders at both local and national level are highly skeptical of transforming power to the lowest tier of administration as doing so would weaken their position on decision making and service delivery. This is a clear indication of their pessimistic view of decentralization. Balochistan presents even more fragile situation with persistent law and order and security dynamics and that too under minimum political will at provincial level. Hence local government is reduced to paper only. In order to restore true democratic order and responsible local government powers must be decentralized to grassroots level (Rondinelli, 2007).

Research scholarship on decentralization emphasis not only on passing resolutions and laws from legislatures but on building effective structure ensuring all remedies and resources required for meaningful governance at citizens' doorstep. This also includes political will with long term governance reforms (Smoke, 2015).



#### FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

##### ***Insufficient Budget and Revenue Generation Issues***

One of the major issues facing Pakistan's local governance system is the limited financial autonomy given to local bodies. Because they do not have enough independent sources of revenue, local governments struggle to function effectively. Studies show that

most local councils depend heavily on funds released by provincial governments, creating a persistent dependency that weakens their authority and restricts their ability to make timely decisions for community needs (Rasheed, 2022). In fact, Balochistan's Local government presents even darker picture as both the upper tiers, provincial and federal administrations, keep tight control by often interfering in its area of influence.

Balochistan being the largest province territory-wise often confront with dire problems in far-flung areas where service delivery becomes even worse as revenue generation is usually affected due to poor mismanagement. Local governments, despite of over-crowded staff lack basic criterion of skills and qualification that are pivotal for revenue collection.

On the other hand, in smaller towns, corruption makes things even worse as public funds often disappear owing to dishonest bureaucratic practices, and the absence of formalized digital tracking mechanism where accountability system is hardly seen. Even in cases where charging fees for basic services (like water and sanitation) could help generate steady income, local authorities avoid doing so simply because they do not want public to turn against them by generating political pressure. This leaves municipalities strongly trapped in a vicious cycle by putting heavy dependence on external funding. As a result, they are powerless and inefficient to improve their economic situation.

### ***Heavy Dependence on Provincial/Federal Transfers***

One of the biggest structural weaknesses in Balochistan's local governance is the way the federal and provincial governments have put them under their control through their overreliance in terms of financial matters despite of the fact that the constitutional clearly states that local governments have exclusive rights in their revenue generation. Although there exist clauses that mentions financial decentralization for local councils, yet they wait for months for funds that may never arrive in full.

### ***Mismanagement and Corruption in Funds Allocation***

One of the most painful realities in local governance is how funds are often mishandled or diverted long before they reach the people

who actually need them. Instead of being used for schools, clean water, roads, or community welfare, money frequently gets stuck in bureaucratic layers or disappears due to favoritism and corruption. For ordinary citizens, this means broken promises, half-completed projects, and years of waiting for even the most basic facilities. The lack of transparency not only weakens service delivery but also erodes public trust, leaving people feeling frustrated and unheard. In the end, the real cost of mismanagement is paid by the communities whose lives could have been improved but never were.

A few elites within our tribal structure holds financial power that makes way for corruption in the province. These are powerful people such as local and tribal chiefs called Sardars and Nawabs, and influential politicians. Because they control and manage most of the resources, they can easily manipulate decisions in their favor through the power of their purse.

#### **WAY FORWARD: SOLUTION-BASED AND WORKABLE**

##### ***A Pragmatic Path Forward: Blending Tradition with Reform***

Moving forward requires solutions that are not only ideal on paper but also realistic in Balochistan's local context. Any meaningful reform must recognize the importance of local traditions, community structures, and existing power dynamics, while still pushing for modern, accountable, and people-centered governance. A balanced approach that respects cultural realities but encourages transparency, participation, and stronger institutions can help bridge the gap between old practices and new development needs.

##### ***Practical Solutions for Balochistan's Local Governance***

Local governments in Balochistan stand at a critical juncture as they lack ability to serve their people simply because the overall structure is at the verge of collapse. In fact, political interference and financial constraints have limited the officials to govern and administer their communities in an efficient way. However, societies go through troubled past and they advance with bringing positive reforms into their existing setup by implementing long-term and visionary programs that are community-centric and realistically practical in order to transform grassroots system with strong local

government initiatives. In this backdrop, some workable suggestions are share and discussed in the following lines.

***Political Reforms: Restoring Trust***

First and far most thing is to look back at the existing local government framework in the province which limited the local councils, for the most part, as an inefficient body by reducing them to just administrative. The existing governance framework in Balochistan has rendered local councils largely ineffective, reducing them to administrative functions and that too of the provincial authorities, taking back their autonomous power of taking decisions independently. Resultantly, more and more power is centralized by the upper tiers of the government leaving the local government toothless to come up to the expectations of the people who in response distrust in overall local government institutions.

**ECONOMIC SOLUTIONS**

***Breaking Free from Financial Dependence***

For local governments to truly serve their communities, they must be able to manage their own finances instead of constantly waiting for funds from the provincial level. Giving local bodies the authority to raise and use their own revenue can help them plan better, respond faster, and work more independently for the people they represent.

***Modernizing Revenue Collection***

The province loses millions annually to inefficient tax systems. A 2023 study of Quetta's municipal finances found that 60 percent of potential property taxes go uncollected due to outdated paper records and corruption (Khan, 2023). Digital solutions could transform this: GIS-based property mapping to identify untaxed buildings (as successfully implemented in Punjab's 2021 urban reform program) Mobile payment systems for business licenses and utility bills, reducing cash handling. Block chain-tracked transactions to prevent revenue leakage.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Local Government in Balochistan can be become a beacon of hope through long-term and visionary steps taken in the greater good

of all. Here are some recommendations after studying the phenomenon of grassroots politics within the province.

The Provincial government should clearly define the concept of Local government by making its councils powerful. Moreover, they should limit their meaningless interference in local affairs such as education, healthcare, infrastructure and other municipal services. This was achieved by third world countries like Indonesia and South Africa by strengthening their third tier through constitutional amendments.

Another important recommendation in this regard is the direct election of the local representatives by the people. Nominated members within the setup make it more complicated as they are hardly made accountable to the voters. Both India and Turkiye have successfully achieved this milestone.

The establishment of an independent and powerful Local Government Audit commission is pivotal for the system to be more responsive and effective as corruption and mismanagement in funds often disappear. The anti-corruption bodies in Philippines and Columbia have proved vital in limiting embezzlements.

Similarly, digitalization of tax collection is the need of the hour as the system is massively outdated. The traditional setup has benefited only the elites who escape taxes. In fact, Urban Reform Program (2021) in Punjab is one of the positive steps in digitalization.

Since Balochistan is a region with rich resources, share in natural resources for the relevant districts in revenue collection would empower the local governments to initiate development programs by having minimum reliance on provincial government. Oil sharing Revenue Modal in Nigeria is a perfect example in this regard.

Finally, residents within Balochistan feel marginalized and excluded in political decision making. They should be given voice through citizen participation initiatives. Allocating separate seats for youth, women and other deprived segments of the society would, definitely, boost their moral and trust in local governments.

#### **CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION**

These solutions are not just theoretical rather they are achievable, practical steps that could reshape governance in Balochistan. Overall local governance system faces deep challenges that keep communities from receiving the services they most desperately deserve. Yet, these

problems are not overwhelming. Strengthening financial autonomy, promoting transparency, and encouraging accountable leadership can create a system that truly works for the people. The time to act is now: reforming local governance is not just about policies on paper, but about improving everyday life, empowering citizens, and building a more inclusive and resilient society.

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