

The Structural Redundancy of Local Government in Social Sector Delivery: A Critical Analysis of the Punjab Local Government Act 2025.

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Abstract

Problem Statement: This research study is based on one of local government Act 2025 of Punjab. This problem is also affecting health, education and social welfare services in Punjab, this Act largely deals with a problem termed as structural redundancy, the study states. A three tier system was revived with the enactment of the Punjab Local Government Act 2025. There are various levels of local government (Metropolitan and Municipal Corporations, District Councils, Union Councils and Town Councils). This was a law to decentralise and empower local communities provide basic services. And it was also intended to make local leaders accountable. The law is, however, flawed in one important aspect. Several circles of government are given the same responsibility. This is referred to as structural redundancy. The lack of competence of two or more offices doing the same work and functions not clearly defined. The method that was used in this analysis was content analysis. Read PLGA 2025 word by & sentence by sentence I have used secondary data as wells based on reports of UNDP, World Bank and stats from Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. There were three major issues from the study, the researchers said. The city can have road repair and planning with district council and province, as it could with the council and the province. When this happens, if a problem occurs, no one is responsible for it. Secondly, local governments don't have their own money. They have to rely on Punjab government for funds which delayed. Thirdly, local government officials are under the control of the National government. They have been dispatched from the province, to ensure that they do not attend to the local council either. These problems lead to lax accountability and the delivery of health and education services is adversely affected. Only health, education and social welfare are covered in the study. There is no experience with the Act, since it is still a relatively new one. To achieve this, the scope of powers at each level must be clear – decentralization can work in Punjab – Conclusion. Local government bodies also should be empowered with financial strength and staff management. Without rectifying these issues, the 2025 Act will have the same problems as before.

Keywords: Punjab local bodies, PLGA 2025, Confusion over role of local bodies, Schools and hospitals

Introduction

Decentralization is often seen as a solution to improving public services in developing countries. Essentially, the argument states that if power is decentralized to local levels then this brings decisions closer home and provision of services will become better. This is the approach that many Asian,

African and Latin American countries have taken for 30 years. It has, moreover, been pushed strongly by international organizations, such as the World Bank and UNDP. 1[3] It's not new to Pakistan. Since 1947 we have gone over and under the devolution process and centralization. This local system was later adopted in 1979 with the military rule. Musharraf later came up with the 2001 Devolution Plan. Provinces have passed laws on local government since the current constitution was passed in Pakistan in 2013, because of an aversion against unitarism and the strong criticisms that were levelled at the constitution, as well as the aftermath. Every time the concept was to shift the responsibility for health, education, water and sanitation to the local governments. And in some districts progress was achieved but the disease continued; the local elites were extremely strong; budgets were more or less effective but unclear who was responsible for what at both governmental levels. 4[6] The dramatic change took place with the passing of 18th Amendment in 2010. It transferred 17 federal ministries to the provinces, including health and education. It was expected that provinces would now devolve these sectors down to local governments. Punjab was the true proving ground due to its population - more than 110 million. For this purpose, the province of Punjab passed the Punjab Local Government Act 2013. In practice, it was not until the year of its implementation that the system was actually used and was offline for long periods. Meanwhile, the majority of services were directly managed by the provinces in that interim. Devolution was written into the papers but in practice, it was the province who had the control. [7] It is an effort that was recently imposed in Pakistan via the Punjab Local Government Act 2025. It reinstates the three tiered system : Metropolitan and Municipal Corporations at the top, District Councils in the middle and Tehsil and Town Councils at the bottom. The Act also gives local governments new responsibilities - operating primary and secondary health facilities, basic schools, local roads, sanitation and social protection programs. There is a goal to improve the engagement of citizens, improve the service delivery and ensure that citizens hold representatives accountable. [8] Sounds like a good idea of decentralization on paper. There is an evil issue in the engine, though: structural redundancy. In layman's language: There are no rules of who does what at multiple institutions doing the same thing. However, in Punjab provinces departments divisional commissioner the district administration and the new local councils can claim to be in charge of the same facility. For instance, a Basic Health Unit can report to the Provincial Health Department, the District Health Authority and Tehsil Council. [9] This intersection poses three major challenges. Firstly, no one takes care of it. When services do not go well in a structure where everyone is in control no one is blamed. Third, it's a waste of money since you have double offices and staff. Last but not least, it leads to budget battles, hiring and facilities conflicts. This isn't the first time we've witnessed this. Previous to devolution in 2001, the fear of similar misunderstandings spiraling into bureaucratic paralysis and a lack of services led to a reversal of empowerment – instead of empowerment, assembly was turned upside down [10] [6]. A key difference in the 2025 act is that local governments aren't granted more autonomy to generate revenue; instead they have a variety of new duties and obligations, but with no dedicated provincial funding. They must await the return of late provincial grants, which have conditions attached. Even the best law is mightily helpless without money. In decentralization, particularly in those regions where local tax bases are fragile, this disconnect between the need for spending by local governments and revenue capacity is a common challenge. 8[3] And this is felt most by citizens in health and education. Levels of indicators in Punjab lag behind their regional averages and are very different between urban and rural areas. Completion of primary school and maternal health in rural Punjab is worse than even comparable areas in India and Bangladesh. Poor coordination between province and local levels is one of the reasons why primary health and schools are not working well. In the event that the 2025 Act is designed on the same principle of overlapping power that the current act exhibits, it is possible that such gaps might be exacerbated. 5 Surprising is that to date no academic study critically examines the design of the 2025 Act itself. Most of the papers deal with the earlier reforms, or merely describe new law as it

already exists without elaborating on the changes. it will work on the ground. Only theoretical praise of devolution is being emphasized and policies count the technicality of overlapping mandates. This paper tries to fill that void by reviewing the division of responsibilities outlined within the Act and the implications that this division of responsibilities has for delivery in the social sector [7][8].

Objective of this Study:

1. Who Does What for Health, Education and Social Welfare Under the 2025 Act (Map Out Who Does What)
2. Identify places where structures are overlapping and consolidating
3. Evaluate the effect of the issues on accountability, efficiency and service delivery
4. Give guidance on role- clarification and prevention of duplication

Although decentralization has a good chance of functioning in Punjab, the Act of 2025, as it is, contains structural redundancy, this paper suggests. If there are not clear boundaries between roles and there aren't true local authority financial powers the same risks will be faced as with previous reforms. The findings are relevant for the province of Punjab, but equally relevant for any province and country implementing similar reforms.

Literature Review

Decentralization has been viewed for decades as a means to more effective provision of public services in the developing world. It's not a complicated bit of logic. Push power down and you will receive services that cater to what people need. As Oates once said - a local government has a better knowledge of its community than a government in the capital. Especially for schools and health centers: each village has different problems. Other researchers said that elected officials can also be questioned more readily at a later date, as the voters directly approach them. [13] [14] [15].

Examples are Bolivia or certain African countries. Where the local councils were strong and financing was made on time, it was better. Where they were not strong, decentralization has failed to work out. There was a rise in corruption and local elites took control of power. It was discovered in villages of India where the rich appropriated money for themselves, as Bardhan and Mookherjee discovered. The thing is, you can't stop it by passing a law. It's all about politics and money and whether or not institutions can do the job in the end [16][17][18][19].

Pakistan shows the same story. After the 2001 Devolution Plan, some districts did see more kids in school and more clinics working. But in many places it was chaos. Nobody knew who was supposed to handle what. Provincial officers kept giving orders. And after 2005, local councils lost power again. Cheema and his team argue that devolution was never finished here. Provinces kept the money and staff. Local governments got the responsibility but not the tools to do the job. This mismatch shows up in almost every Pakistani study [20] [21] [22] [23].

It is the same story in Pakistan. The 2001 Devolution Plan did result in increased children in school and increased clinics that dispensed care in some districts. But there was chaos everywhere. Nobody had any clue of who was responsible for what. The provincial officials continued issuing instructions. Power among local councils was lost again after 2005. Cheema and his team contend devolution was never completed in the first place here. Money and staff were still available with provinces. Local governments now are given the task without the tools to do the task. In reality, though, this disconnect manifests itself in almost all Pakistani studies that we have conducted.

Things became even more complicated following the 18th Amendment, 2010. It sprinkled over provinces, and it blessed them with health and education. And that those would then put those on to local governments. But it wasn't that at all. These sectors were kept by Provincial departments in majority of provinces including Punjab. In the provision of services, the local governments affected by the 2013 Act played a small role. In their study, Khan and Niazi report that people continue to

come to the provincial government with health and education problems. A change in the locally elected local bodies did not bring about any difference. It is a devolution which cannot be effected by passing a law [24] [25] [26] [27].

A very frequent problem would be overlapping roles. This is an Academic equivalent which is known as structural redundancy. But, Oates cautioned, if anybody doesn't know what to do, there is duplication, meaning no one's responsible for things. Smoke also covers the failure of most reforms since the old institutions stay and new ones are added on. This puts you in a situation where you're competing with parallel systems in the same budget. It is seen in Pakistan since 2001. Schools and BHUs were owned by both District and Provincial departments and line agencies. In the case of everyone being in charge, no one is accountable [28] [29] [30].

The Table 1: The overlapping mandate of delivery of social services in Punjab.

Sector	Provincial Department	District/local Govt	Problem identified in literature
Health	Department of health, Punjab	Local council under 2013/2025 Act	BHUs Managed by both.no clear accountability
Education	School education department	District Education Authority	Teacher hiring and monitoring duplicated
Social welfare	Social welfare department	Local government	Funds and programs overlap, leading to duplication

Money is the other big issue. The studies, however, broadly agree that giving local governments the responsibility without ensuring there is a revenue stream to support the responsibility involves issues. In the case of local bodies, there is no other source of funding apart from provincial grants, except that of the state. As Ahmad and Brosio note, these grants come with limitations and often are late. Local Councils have no income source. The study also reveals that fiscal autonomy is key to the positive impact of decentralization on services, Faguet found. This is bad enough in Punjab; property tax amongst other local taxes are still collected by the province.[31][32][33]

Table 2: fiscal autonomy of local governments in Punjab

Revenue source	Controlling Authority	Impact on service delivery
Provincial transfer	Provincial finance department	Delay and earmarked, limits planning
Property Tax	Provincial excise department	Weak local tax base
Own source Revenue	Very limited	Cannot respond to local needs

The impact of all this is visible in the social sector. What this does to the social sector is obvious. Little progress in education and health indicators have been improved, whereas the gap between urban and rural areas is huge, as per Punjab's too Data compiled by PBS and UNICEF. The 18th Amendment rendered health governance less centralised, and more fragmented, Ali & Haq says. There are too many agencies and they don't coordinate each other. Lack of monitoring in education and absenteeism of teachers are examples of aspects. For both research, it is an unclear situation regarding the provincial/district boundary. New laws will be little assistance to the common people if there is no clarity of roles. [34][35][36][37]

Figure 1: study of structural Redundancy service and delivery



The truth is that we haven't done so much work really on the Punjab Local Government Act 2025. The majority of the researchers are writing for the year 2001 or 2013. While it's good to hear that devolution is being commended, government reports are not composed of detail on legislation. Nobody is asking the question: "Does this Act create more confusion - by putting the same position in too many offices? This paper aims to do just that. It analyses the allocation of functions in the 2025 Act and the potential negative impact of overlapping functions on health, education and social care provision.[38][39]

Methodology

In this study, we intend a qualitative research design to explore the possible effect of structural redundancy in Punjab Local Government Act 2025 on delivery of health, education and social welfare services. The qualitative approach was chosen because the objective of the research is to look into the division of roles and responsibilities in law as it is not easy to understand. The numbers tell us too little to understand why accountability is not that great, so we need to look to the legislative text as well as existing scholarship addressing similar issues.[40][41]

Research design

Uses descriptive and analytical study design. Secondly, the functions and powers of each of the three tier governments under the Punjab Local Government Act 2025 was explained. Second, a step was taken to check these assignments which ride on more office do the same assignment. This is called

Data Sources

The study's data sources are all secondary data sources. The sources you are trained on were of three types.

1. The Punjab Local Government Act 2025: A Policy Brief by Government of Punjab is the first fully-fledged legal document. One line was read at a time for all functions that concern health, education and social welfare.
2. A literature search of relevant papers pertaining to decentralization in Pakistan was conducted. It has distinguished publications on the 2001 Devolution Plan and the 18th Amendment. These sources will help to put the 2025 Act into context with previous experiences.
3. This research further scoured the existing data available from documents and reports of councils or by government and international organisations to assess the services delivery status in Punjab. The sources were Pakistan Bureau Statistics and UNICEF. The UNDP and the World Bank also provided reports on fiscal and challenge of administration. 3420 The research was secondary data which meant that no primary data (interviews, surveys) were included as the Act has not yet been fully implemented. So, it's about what the law states will transpire and what literature suggests. [44]

Analytical study

The theory that the analysis is based on is Oates and Smoke's theory of structural redundancy and fiscal federalism. Structural redundancy is the case where institutions are assigned the same function and do not have gaps between them. This overlap will, according to the thesly, result in duplication, fault-shifting and low accountability. [28][29]

Adopting this framework, each of the functions in the 2025 Act was tested against two questions: Which level of government has this function?

1. Has another level or department been given the same function?
2. If so, it was said it was an overlap in mandate.

These findings were then compared with the findings of previous studies conducted in Pakistan and related to service delivery [30][32].

Table 3 A structural Redundancy detection analytical approach

Step	Question asked	Data sources	Outcome
1	Which tier is assigned the function?	Punjab local act 2025	List of functions by tier
2	Is same function assigned to another tier?	Act 2025 + Acedamic literature	Identify overlapping mandate
3	What is impact of on accountability?	Oates& smoke theory	Link to service delivery gap

Limitation of Study

This study has two limitations. At first, due to the Punjab Local Government Act 2025 being

Now, for the first time, there is no more field data to examine to determine if those issues were to happen as predicted. This analysis covers the substance of the law in light of experience. [38] [44] Second, it will only deal with three sectors – health education and social welfare does not include other sectors such as water and sanitation. Future studies with a larger sample size will be able to expand on this after the law comes into effect and data is available. [45]

Key points of Punjab local Government law 2025

In 2025, Punjab decided to bring in a law for local bodies. The older setup had failed. People at village and city level were not getting help on time because local councils had no real power. So the provincial setup thought it was better to push power downwards. The whole point of this new law is to let local people decide local issues, improve basic facilities, and make sure that the people we elect locally have to answer to us.[46][47]

This law divides Punjab's local setup into three parts. The cities will move by Metropolitan and Municipal Corporations. Think Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi. Then each district will have its own District Council. And at the bottom, in villages and small towns, we will have Union Councils and Town Committees. The law gives a job list to each part. But the problem is many jobs are given to two places at once. That is why staff get confused about who should do what. [48][49]

The biggest change is that now we will vote directly for Mayor and Chairman. Earlier this was not the case. If people choose them directly, they can also question them directly. The Act also says that village and neighborhood councils should be involved so common people can speak in planning meetings.[50][51]

About services, the law says health, schools and welfare will be handled jointly. That means both the provincial department and the local council will work together. For example a BHU or primary school will need both sides to cooperate. Money will come from the province plus a little from local taxes like property tax. But local bodies will still be short on funds.[48][52] The main flaw is that no one clearly knows who is in charge of what.

The plan and check are the same for both province and local bodies. As a result, everyone is unwilling to assume responsibility for their actions. Local governments will also continue to rely on provincial funds if they do not have their own funds, it is reported. [49][53]

Overall, this Act 2025 aims to reform local government in Punjab. The idea is good. If duties are clear and local bodies have real powers and sufficient resources to serve people then it will work. [46] [54]

Table 4 Three Tiers under Punjab local Government law 2025

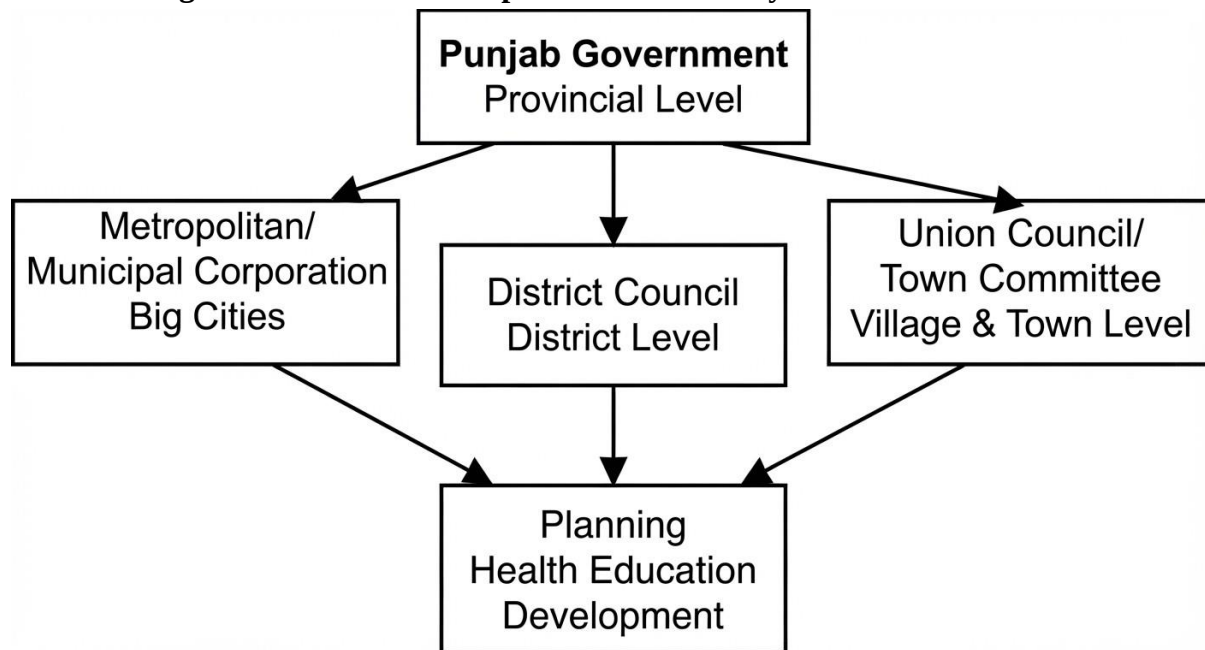
Level	Where it's work	Example
Metropolitan/municipal corporation	Big cities	Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi
District council	Whole district	Every district of Punjab
Union council/town committee	Town and village level	Small towns and rural area

Critical analysis of structural Redundancy in PLGA 2025

On paper, this is a good law, but there is structural redundancy here which is the Punjab Local Government Act 2025. That is, it means has been bestowed on different levels at the same time. The more the people who are in control, the less there are people who are accountable. [55] [56]

In law, Metropolitan Corporations, District Councils and even provincial departments have all the legal powers for planning, development and monitoring. When for example a city road needs repair, the city government claims that this is their responsibility, the district begins to take responsibility for it and the province shows up. Ultimately the file just continues to circulate and no one is better off. [57] [58]

Figure 2 structural overlaps in service delivery under PLGA 2025



We see this overlap primarily in the provision of essential services. While certain areas have been designated as "common functions" — in particular health and education. This means that decisions must be made in a hurry and local and provincial officers must approve – subject to the verification work may be postponed for months. Local representatives are unable to deliver due to the lack of control over staff and budget. [61] [62]

The greatest concern is money. You are instructed to render services but the bulk of your revenues continue to flow from the province. A Mayor or Chairman cannot plan anything on his own due to a lack of own revenue. He has to wait for the province to need to release cash and approval. [63] [64]

Both sides believe this was done on purpose so as to keep power in the hands of the province. However for the average person, it simply means poor service. So when you ask to complain, each and every office will say, "It is not our department." 63 So the 2025 Act made three tiers, but did not differentiate their work. The outcome will be continued local government weakness — as long as each level of government has not clearly defined responsibilities, budgets of their own and direct accountability. [55] [65]

Discussion and Policy Implication

The concept behind PLGA 2025, was in essence to give back power to local people. The very law was enacted in that local issues can be solved through the same local means only. However, as we read the law and observe it in practice, there are many issues. The primary problem has to do with roles. The same task is performed at multiple levels in this law. For example, it's work from road repair, street lights and planning. Metropolitan Corporation can do it! The District Council can, too. And province can, too. Therefore, in case of any problem, nobody assumes responsibility. The

common man becomes confused, not knowing what to do. To whom will he turn for his next audience - Mayor, DC or MPA? This is the reason people are upset. They begin to lose trust in the local government progressively. Other big issues are economic. Local governments have numerous responsibilities. They have to maintain health, education, sanitation and other services. However, they don't have enough money to do this. They did not take proper tax on them. Major component of these funds comes from the Punjab government in Lahore. No matter how small the project, it needs approval at the provincial level. So, without curb a Mayor or Chairman cannot work. It paints pictures of an ineffectual local government. This means local bodies have to accord financial power. In short, they should have the authority to levy property taxes and other local taxes. This will enable them to be self-reliant. The local authorities, who are employed in the local offices, do not fall under the jurisdiction of the local government. These are sent over from the province. As a result they ignore the local council. The staff may not abide by a decision made by the council. Until October 2023, council must have their own servant: if local government is to work, councils must be masters of their own servants. They need to be able to employ and move staff. Another one that they use is that province doesn't want to give any real powers. This is why the law has been drafted in an uncomfy manner. But, after all, the whole purpose of local government is getting things done quickly. It has to be decided in Lahore, even if a little decision has to be made, there will be no benefit of local bodies.

Policy implication

There are three major changes that need to happen in order to be successful with PLGA 2025. A differentiation of tasks at each level does provide room for sensible decision making, but if its goal can only be reached when the tasks specific to each level are clearly defined in law. This should NOT overlap. Local bodies need a cash inflow, such as, for example. Their primary funding should not be based entirely on provincial grants. Last but not least, they said the staff should be under the control of local government. In the end, therefore, we wish PLGA 2025 the best of luck in achieving its good aims. The concept is for power to be brought nearer the people. Right now, though, it's a matter of power, and that's in the hands of the province. These changes would enable local government to be able to work with the people it serves to provide improved health and education, as well as other services.

Conclusion

Punjab Local Government Act 2025: The Punjab local government act was manifested to formally devolve power to the community level. This law was meant for a purpose. Do locals solve local problems? The system was planned to be faster and improved for the common man. However, going through the Act and studying its operation we can say that the working of law are still not at par. This leaves plenty of room to fill-in. We covered also three main issues of PLGA 2025 in this paper. The Metropolitan Corporation, the District Council and the Secretary of State are responsible for the same duties in the Act regarding the first role ambiguity. province. This is one of the reasons there is no accountability. A common man gets confused that where he has to approach for help? Consequently, the system becomes slow and everybody loses faith in the system. The second is a question of funding. There are many activities local government needs to struggle for, among them health, education and sanitation. The catch is they don't have any money of their own. They are funded by the provincial government. Local politicians can't initiate any new projects in their area without money. They have been awaiting green light from Lahore. This makes them appear weak. We need to ensure that local government is effective, and that can be done only by giving them financial independence. They should be able to charge for their services. The third one is staff. The officers in the local offices are not employed by local government. They're dispatched from the province, They

do not listen the local council for that reason. Having staff (not implementing a staff decision) Local government should be in control of the staff for a healthy system. Political causes are also a factor for these issues. It is alleged the province does not wish to devolve fully. That is the reason for making the law somewhat vague. However, this is not good for democracy. True to the nature of local government, it is about giving people power. The one asset that my tour guide could not help me with, was understanding that there were three pillars which will make PLGA 2025 a success. The work for the first 3 levels should be legible. Then, local bodies need to be given financial independence. Third, staff to work under local government. To sum up, the good intent of PLGA 2025 is But this is not enough. The legislation should be amended and implemented correctly. Local government will only be successful when control of money, work and staff is firmly in the hands of local people. Then only can it be said that power is truly with the people.

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