

Background Note

All Parties Conference (APC)

**on
Transparency and Accountability in the Local Government System
in Punjab: Challenges and Opportunities**

Background Note

1. Introduction

During the last couple of decades, the spread of local governments and decentralized economic systems have unleashed debate and tremendous efforts towards advancing public participation in governance in the developing countries. As a result central governments started to allocate more of the national budget to local authorities besides facilitating a greater role for civil society and the private sector in governance and service delivery.

Pakistan has experimented with various forms of devolution and decentralization since its inception. However, in 2001 a new Local Government system was introduced in which historical ‘top-down’ approach of local government was combined with the notions of ‘bottom-up’ approach. According to Local Government Ordinance (LGO), 2001 the aim of devolved system was to promote local participation and accountability, thereby leading to improved service delivery and poverty reduction.

In 2008, after the restoration of the democratic process, key constraints of LGO 2001 emerged which hampered the efficacy of the system. As a result almost all provinces came up with amended or new versions of the LG enactment and system. In August 2013, the Punjab Local Government Act, 2013 was passed by the Punjab assembly. The Punjab government is committed to hold the local government elections but for various reasons the schedule of elections could not be finalized yet. It is important to note that for the past three years local governments in Punjab are being run in a bureaucratic manner. There exist no forums for the citizens to voice their concerns and give feedback on the service delivery and on the local government system itself.

Keeping the above in view, I-SAPS initiated its efforts to engage all stakeholders for strengthening Local Government System in Punjab and to highlight the need for early local government elections. Our advocacy is based on the evidence gathered from throughout Punjab that informs about citizens’ perception regarding local government system and demand for early elections. The research and advocacy efforts are being supported by the Citizens’ Voice Project of USAID. In this regard, we are conducting an All Parties Conference (APC) on the Need for a Transparent and Accountable Local Government System in Punjab. The APC is envisaged to engage the political parties and relevant stakeholders to contribute towards improvement in and strengthening system through effective implementation of the LG Act, 2013.

2. Aim and Objectives

The broad aim of this stakeholders’ consultation is to facilitate an informed discourse on need for an effective local government system in Punjab from the standpoint of improving transparency and accountability. Specific objectives of consultation are as follows:

- i. Provide the much needed interface between government officials, public representatives and civil society to highlight need for local government system in Punjab;
- ii. Share recommendations for improving opportunities for transparency, accountability and citizens' participation;
- iii. Advocate and articulate demand for early LG elections.

3. Topics to be Covered by Speakers

The speakers and discussants at the APC will include members of political parties, members of provincial assembly Punjab and experts in the areas of governance, devolution and political economy. The topics to be covered in the APC are briefly described below:

- a. Public Perception of LG System: Early Elections a Citizens' Agenda
- b. Accountability, Right to Information and Citizen's Participation: Opportunities and Challenges in LG Act, 2013

4. Participants

The participants of APC will comprise the key stakeholders i.e. parliamentarians, members of political parties in Punjab, representatives of relevant government departments, selected civil society organizations (CSOs), and media.