



**3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference  
on Public Policy (ICPP3)  
June 28-30, 2017 – Singapore**

**Panel T16P11 Session II**

*P11 Sustainable Development, Public Policy and the Local*

**Title of the paper**

*Challenges for Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals in  
Pakistan*

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**Date of presentation**

*Friday, June 30th 13:45 to 15:45*

## **Challenges for Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan**

### **Abstract**

All the targets of Sustainable Development Goals are directly or indirectly related to the daily work of regional and local governments and they can play a vital role in the achievement of all 2030 agendas. Regional and Local Governments are not mere implementation authorities but are the central to face local challenges and opportunities to be taken to account in the implementation of the agenda in institutional arrangements. The purpose of this article is to explore the extent of association of roadmap for localizing the SDGs at national and provincial levels including local governments and their challenges in localizing SDGs are discussed.

In order to conduct an empirical research, a multi-perspective structured questionnaire covering all the five parts of roadmap drawn up by Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, UNDP and UN Habitat for localizing the SDGs at national, the provincial and local levels. The findings have disclosed the local version of challenges faced by provincial and local government in localizing SDGs in Pakistan.

This research paper contributes an understanding of the variety of existing policy issues at the level of national, provincial and local against the indicators for estimating the success of initiatives for localizing the SDGs. This paper is expected to present several suggestions and practices for national policymakers, international organizations, civil society organizations, academia and anyone involved in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs' parameters to get fully entrenched for localization of all goals.

**Keywords:** localizing SDGs, intuitional arrangement, local government, developing countries

## 1. Introduction and Background

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) goals rolled around economic and social development with that of the environment merger, paved the way forward to conceptualize and launch a universal United Nations 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in January, 2016 being applicable to all countries.<sup>1</sup> Expectations associated with SDGs targets are thus high because of the growing resolution of sustainable development for the entire world. Almost it is recognized that the combination of economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion are the shared focus for academic institutions to develop action points and implementation on sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Fukuda-Parr, 2015; Melamed, 2016).

There are big debates over the implementation of SDGs because each country faces various challenges to implement the SDGs within specific context of that country. For developing countries the most challenging key issues are financing and lack of reliable data for planning and implementing the SDGs. The effectiveness of SDGs attainment tools is highly dependent on the way adopted for the economic, social and environmental goals and targets to be attained including human rights, governance, social justice and equity (Klein, 2014; Koehler, 2016). Sustainable Development Goals are action oriented and needed for the achievement of SDG targets to escort means of implementation trajectories, mapping of all types of resource, measurement tools, and roadmap for localizing the SDGs and these goals need implementation on daily basis to be the sassiness for sustainable development.

The SDGs are closely related to local and regional governments because localization is important to be utilized in local contexts to specific indigenous circumstances. Localization involves implementation and monitoring strategies in awareness-raising, advocacy, implementation, monitoring and way forward for development agenda at subnational level (GTF et al., 2014). A roadmap is drawn up by Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and UN Habitat for localizing SDGs and providing range of strategies that can be adjusted to the specific contexts and needs of different cities and regions.

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<sup>1</sup> Developed, underdeveloped or developing countries in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September, 2015.

## 1.1. Outlook of the Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs

Localization is the recognition of the key role of local and sub-national government in sustainable development and it indicates the local implementation of goals and strategies that can be adapted to the specific contexts of the provinces and cities. To deliver post 2030 agenda, roadmap for localizing the SDGs has been outlined by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, UNDP and UN Habitat to support cities and regions<sup>2</sup>. This roadmap is having five parts containing of awareness-raising, advocacy, implementation, monitoring and way forward<sup>3</sup>.

Local and regional governments are the appropriate level to raise awareness about the importance of the SDGs and their relevance to all sectors of society including academia, community, elected politicians and private sector. Awareness campaigns activities can be undertaken to raise awareness through media, education and local associations. In the advocacy process local and regional governments can have the support on evidence based facts while collaborating with research institutes and universities. In upraising advocacy for SDGs, decentralized local and regional governments can develop local ownership of national strategies through multi-level governance mechanism.

In the process of implementing SDGs, need assessment and cooperative governance is required in shared priorities. In monitoring of SDGs, set of local indicators should be identified and regional and local governments should be involved in national monitoring. This roadmap is just one step to guide for the ownership of local and regional governments in achieving SDGs. The following table indicates a range of strategies that can be adapted to the specific contexts and needs of sub-national governments.

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<sup>2</sup> The Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments co-led a consultation on localization with UN-Habitat and UNDP identified a roadmap on how to implement the new Sustainable Development Goals at local level. Available on [http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/bfe783\\_434174b8f26840149c1ed37d8febba6e.pdf](http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/bfe783_434174b8f26840149c1ed37d8febba6e.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Based on the criteria shared by GTF in <http://www.gtf2016.org/our-work>

**Table1. Roadmap for localizing the SDGs<sup>4</sup>**

1	2	3	4	5
Awareness-Raising	Advocacy	Implementation	Monitoring	Where do we go From here?
Getting to know SDGs at sub-national level through awareness campaigns including;	Including a subnational perspective in national SDG strategies via;	The SDGs go local!;	Evaluating and learning from experiences via;	Localize the SDGs;
existing and new platforms	participating in the definition of national SDG	prioritizing plans in local contexts, needs and resources	collect, monitor and analyze data at subnational level	international community, national governments and civil society
traditional and social media	reflecting the needs and concerns of local and regional governments	links with national SDG strategies	develop a set of localized indicators	avoid confusion, overlaps, or gaps in action on the ground
harness the power of local culture	evidence based support	links within local or regional administration	participate in the monitoring and evaluation	
gender perspective	decentralization and good governance	resources needed to implement priority areas of the SDGs	information gathered at local level is used in national SDG	
power of education	multi-level and multi-stakeholder partnerships			
nominating SDG ambassadors from local level		local institutional arrangements and governance frameworks developing capacity building programs involve as many actors as possible		
<b>I. Raise awareness and advocate for the active role of local actors in the localization of the SDGs</b>		<b>II. Support them to make decisions that contribute towards the achievement of the SDGs.</b>		
<b><i>The toolbox provides concrete tools, and practices to support local and regional governments and their associations to implement and monitor the SDGs and to influence national policy-making with a view to creating an enabling environment for action at local and regional level.</i></b>				

<sup>4</sup> Based on the criteria shared by GTF in <http://www.gtf2016.org/our-work>

## **1.2. Relevance of Localizing SDGs for Pakistan**

All the SDGs in one way or other are related to local and regional governments but every country can take sustainable development in a pragmatic way which fit into their capacity based on their resources and try to achieve them. The key messages this roadmap carries are creating broad-based ownership, commitment and accountability with integrated multilevel approach. The inclusion of localization of SDGs is imperative, for sub-national governments play crucial roles in utilization of local knowledge and at front line of development.

A slowdown in emerging market economies, rising inequalities in income and migration within urban and rural populations, fragile conditions and society extending from vulnerability to terrorism have led Pakistan to social exclusion and generated much vagueness. Pakistan failed to meet most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) due to various socio-political and economic flouts and internal and external security concerns (PIPS, 2014). One of the imperfections in implementing MDGs in Pakistan was the delay in localization as in 2004 MDGs were officially recognized but the localization was started in 2010 (UNDP Pakistan, 2013).

Based on lesson learnt from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the state has also realized the importance of SDGs and linked it with its Vision 2025 agenda<sup>5</sup> to achieve economic progress and provide welfare to the people by building upon national strategies and international development goals. Pakistan has shown timely and pro-active reaction in aligning economic policies and development structure to SDGs framework. Pakistan is facing fracture socio economic structure and flaws in planning and implementation strategy which needs result-oriented strategy to be adopted to achieve SDGs<sup>6</sup>. This move upholds a longstanding demand by Pakistan to emphasize inter-governmental coordination and linkages with various government departments.

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<sup>5</sup> Pakistan Vision 2025 is developed by the Ministry of Planning, Development with extensive input and deliberations of all stakeholders seven pillars; developing human & social capital, sustained, Indigenous & inclusive growth, democratic governance, institutional reform & modernization of the public sector, water, energy & food security, private sector & entrepreneurship led growth, developing a competitive knowledge economy through value addition and modernizing transportation infrastructure & greater regional connectivity and all these pillars are aligned with SDGs.

<sup>6</sup> Federal Minister Planning, Development and Reform Pakistan, Ahsan Iqbal stated at workshop on "Sustainable Development Goals- the way forward" organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) Islamabad Pakistan on Monday 5th October, 2015.

The rising income inequalities, regional disparities and gender inequalities vindicate a longstanding demand by Pakistan to localize 2030 agenda into national and subnational planning budget.

In accordance with current governance structure in Pakistan, the federal government has established national SDG Unit in the planning commission to develop and strengthen coordination with the four provincial governments' SDGs units. In the current decentralized governance SDGs related to social sectors fall under the preview of sub-national capacities and provinces are empowered to plan and executive- implementation of SDGs. This demands to overcome serious coordination issues for localization and ownership of SDGs at the lowest administrative tier as key to SDGs achievement.

### **1.3. Objectives**

To localize SDGs in Pakistan is a demanding task and lack of implementation is the very serious challenge. There are serious coordination issues, compliance, supervision and inter & intra-departmental missing linkages. There is very grave challenge of coordination within the four provincial governments in the monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Local governments have limited control over the implementation of developmental programs and federal unit of SDGs lacks the enforcement power to make all stakeholders comply with policies. Therefore, it is essential to unravel the critical role and status of national and provincial units in fostering advocacy and identifying crucial development priorities within the context of local specific needs and resources. The objectives of this study are:

- To find out the existing initiatives taken for SDGs and extent to which national and provincial, local governments are associated for localizing the SDGs.
- To highlight local version of challenges faced by national and sub-national government in localizing SDGs.

The remainder of this paper is constructed as follows. The following section identifies gaps in existing literature and outlines how this study adds to the existing body of knowledge. The next section provides methodology based on survey and key informant interviews followed by a section elaborating detailed results. The last section concludes with specific recommendations for localizing SDGs for inter-governmental integration.

## 2. Gaps in Literature

The literature on sustainable development and context-specific is growing in local literature of developing countries. Localization in sustainable development has been promoted to guide the planning agenda in environmental or social dimension (Jepson 2004). The literature on substantial progress in MDGs in South Asia depicts achievements and remaining breaks in education, poverty and health goals. The emerging literature in South Asia related to SDGs is more towards issues in food, water, energy security and social inclusion to strengthen coordination among various sectors such as Ahmed et al. 2013; Rasul & Sharma, 2015; Rasul, 2016 etc. The findings of Ernst & Young (2015); Park, C.Y. & R.V. Mercado, Jr. (2015) Ram, R. (2015) and ESCAP, (2016) on key policy priorities and implementation challenges of sustainability are for cognizance of operationalizing integrated SDG achievement in South Asian context.

The growing local literature in context to Pakistan is ranging from strengthening capacities to challenges in implication of SDGs. Pakistan consultation report (2014)<sup>7</sup> on Post 2015 Development agenda depicts key areas and focuses only on means of implementation. The combine work<sup>8</sup> of Dr. Khalida Ghaus from Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC), Karachi with researchers from Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad (2016) has acknowledged current depressing position of governance for implementing SDGs in Pakistan. The work of Institute of Strategic Studies (2015) sheds some light on the need of

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<sup>7</sup> For the new set of the development agenda to replace MDGs after 2015, the UN launched global consultative process on post 2015. Pakistan was selected one of the 100 countries for the national consultations, starting in December 2012, the second round of Post 2015 consultations focuses on the 'means of implementation' (Mol) critical for the achievement of the post 2015 development agenda and takes into account: ownership, participation, capacities, partnership, monitoring and accountability. (Executive summary of Pakistan Consultation Report (Draft) December 2014).

<sup>8</sup> This country paper on Pakistan titled Implications of Implementing SDGs at the National Level: A Case of Pakistan is the third of the eleven country studies to be published under the Southern Voice Occasional Paper Series. The paper identifies the challenges of implementing SDGs in the country in terms of governance related to inter-sectoral coordination, accountability and transparency, as well as financial constraints in developing a realistic plan of action. It also puts forward the suggestion of improving or reforming the bureaucracy for better performances in delivering basic services. The leadership of the federal government and controlling the inter-provincial political-rivalry receive importance in successful implementation of SDGs in the country. (Debapriya Bhattacharya, PhD Chair, Southern Voice, Dhaka, Bangladesh July 2016).



people centered inclusive growth for Pakistan to attain SDGs. SDPI<sup>9</sup> provides recommendations to Government of Pakistan (GoP) on issues of food, energy, climate change and social sector to attain sustainability in accordance with vision 2025 and SDGs.

The work of UNDP (2017)<sup>10</sup> has given snapshot of incapacity of local government for implementation of SDGs. Abbas and Ahmed (2016) points out fragmented government priorities of programs by federal and provincial governments from social accountability mechanism perspective. The Poverty Alleviation & SDG Section in Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform Pakistan has prepared a presentation (2016)<sup>11</sup>, base line work in localizing 2030 agenda into national and sub-national planning and budgeting which is indicating critical challenge of data gaps for social indicators at local level.

Although these all above mentioned studies are correlated with localizing of SDGs interventions in various challenges, Pakistan still lack literature where association and challenges to attain roadmap for localizing the SDGs at the lowest administrative tier by national and provincial units is arbitrated. There is a lack of literature on the subject at hand as it is a relatively new field of study in Pakistan. This study will be a useful addition to the ongoing discussion on localizing of SDGs and this study drives afar from the existing literature by:

- Looking into the quantitative and qualitative perception of the local public institutions and national & provincial units, public, private experts and civil society organizations on the association with SDGs. The purpose here is to;
  - (i) inquire from the support units for early institutionalization of agenda 2030 and association with the roadmap for localizing SDGs.

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<sup>9</sup> Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) is independent non-profit organization to serve as a source of expertise for policy analysis and development, policy intervention, and policy and program advisory services. The think tank is based in Islamabad Pakistan. Institute's activities are designed to provide Policy advice to government.

<sup>10</sup> UNDP Pakistan along with Local Government Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (one province in north of Pakistan) is working on assessment of Implementation of SDGs in Pakistan and preliminary finding- SDGs & Local needs that will be integrated in local plans and budgets to localize SDGs.

<sup>11</sup> Presentation on Localizing SDGs in Pakistan is prepared by the Poverty Alleviation & SDG Section in Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform Pakistan for National Initiative on Agenda 2030 provide the need of reposition Local Government as the SDGs focal tier to meet challenge of data gaps for social indicators.

(ii) inquire from the supporting units and inline departments, think tanks at the national, provincial and local level, the local version of challenges they are facing and how these challenges may be alleviated in the future.

- Categorize the challenges in accordance with roadmap for localizing SDGs with in specific context of the country.

### **3. Methodology**

Methodology of the study consists of the combination of both qualitative and quantitative approach to get to know the closer local version of the association and challenges for localizing SDGs in Pakistan. Semi-structures interviews were conducted with national, provincial functionaries in SDGs and with various levels of local governments and discussion was made with key informants from public, private experts and civil society organizations (CSOs) working within the domain of the development sector. The respondents for informal interviews and key informants for discussion were identified on the basis of purposive, their expertise and involvement in sustainability agenda units and developmental sector.

The semi-structured interviews and discussion were prepared around the five parts of roadmap for localizing the SDGs<sup>12</sup>. The interpretation of the roadmap involved local versions of approaches and understanding articulated in national documents. For informal interviews purposes, 3 persons from national level, 2 key persons from each provincial level and 20 persons from key local governments of major cities in Pakistan. For discussion, 10 key informants were identified from national, subnational and local level. The following table 1 displays the sampling frame. The interviews and discussions data was gathered first at the federal level and then in all four provinces and at last at local level.

There were two main purposes for interviews and discussion;

- There are some existing institutional arrangements of SDGs and this exercise was done to know extent of association with roadmap for localizing SDGs.

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<sup>12</sup> To deliver post 2030 agenda, roadmap for localizing the SDGs has been outlined by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, UNDP and UN Habitat to support cities and regions. This roadmap is having five parts containing of awareness-raising, advocacy, implementation, monitoring and way forward

- The purpose was to know the initiatives taken so far at national & sub-national levels for localizing SDGs.
- There are various challenges in mainstreaming SDGs and purpose was to know what type of local version of challenges are there in accordance with roadmap for localizing SDGs.

Table. 2: Sampling Frame

<i>Government functionaries</i>		<i>Key Informants</i>		
<b>Level</b>	<b>No of Persons</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>No of Persons</b>	
<b>National</b>	3	<b>National</b>	2	Key informants from public, private experts and civil society organizations (CSOs) working within the domain of the development sector.
<b>Provincial</b> (2 from Punjab, 2 from Sindh, 2 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa & 2 from Baluchistan)	8	<b>Provincial</b>	4	
<b>Local</b> (8 persons from four major cities of Punjab; 6 persons from three major cities of Sindh; 4 persons from two major cities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa & 2 persons from one major city of Baluchistan)	20	<b>Local</b>	4	

## 4. Results

The data is analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively with both approaches. The quantitative data provides the snapshot of institutional arrangements and key milestones achieved so far at national and sub-national levels. The association with roadmap for localizing SDGs is also analyzed quantitatively. The local versions of challenges are categorized qualitatively in line with the roadmap for localization. The results are validated in the light of existing literature.

### 4.1. Quantitative Analysis

#### **Institutional Arrangements**

The government has institutionalized SDG unit in Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms embedded with 7 pillars of vision 2025 and into national and sub-national planning and budgeting. There exists, the federal SDG unit, Punjab planning and development department

SDG unit, SDG Unit in Planning department Sindh and KP has taken initiative of the SDG Unit while Baluchistan is in the process of establishing similar unit.

There is emphasis and strong commitment by central development authority on coordination and linkages in inter-governmental departments (Nation, 2015). The regular meetings by the central planning commission are to be held with provincial planning & development departments on SDGs to align planning agendas and SDGs (SDG section, planning commission, 2017). At the national level, UNDP champion is nominated to promote SDGs at the national and subnational level and to coordinate with provincial units for SDGs implementation, coordination and monitoring. In Pakistan parliament SDG secretariat is established to adopt sustainability with the national agenda 2030.

### ***Preview of Sub-nationals Initiatives***

Ministry of planning, development and reform and the provincial planning and development departments has taken initiative partnered with UNDP to support and establish SDG units in each province under 5 years project. For this purpose, federal and provincial governments have financed US\$ 16 million to lay foundation for SDGs implementation (Poverty Alleviation & SDG section, 2017). Ministry of planning, finance department and statistical institutions are working collectively to strengthen SDG planning, budgeting and implementation. In the Federal Budget 2017-18, the government announced 30 billion Pakistani rupees for Prime Minister's Global SDGs Achievement Programme (MoF, 2017) which is complained by experts to be insufficient to create any impact on SDGs achievements.

### ***Beyond the sub-national level***

The major issues relating to governmental structures in Pakistan are monopolized fiefdoms at federal and provincial levels in empowering the third tier of government (Express Tribune, 2017). Local government is not positioned as focal tier for implementation and to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. A study by UNDP Pakistan (2016) on SDG local government assessment points out that the districts are lacking in capacities to localize SDGs beyond the sub-national level.

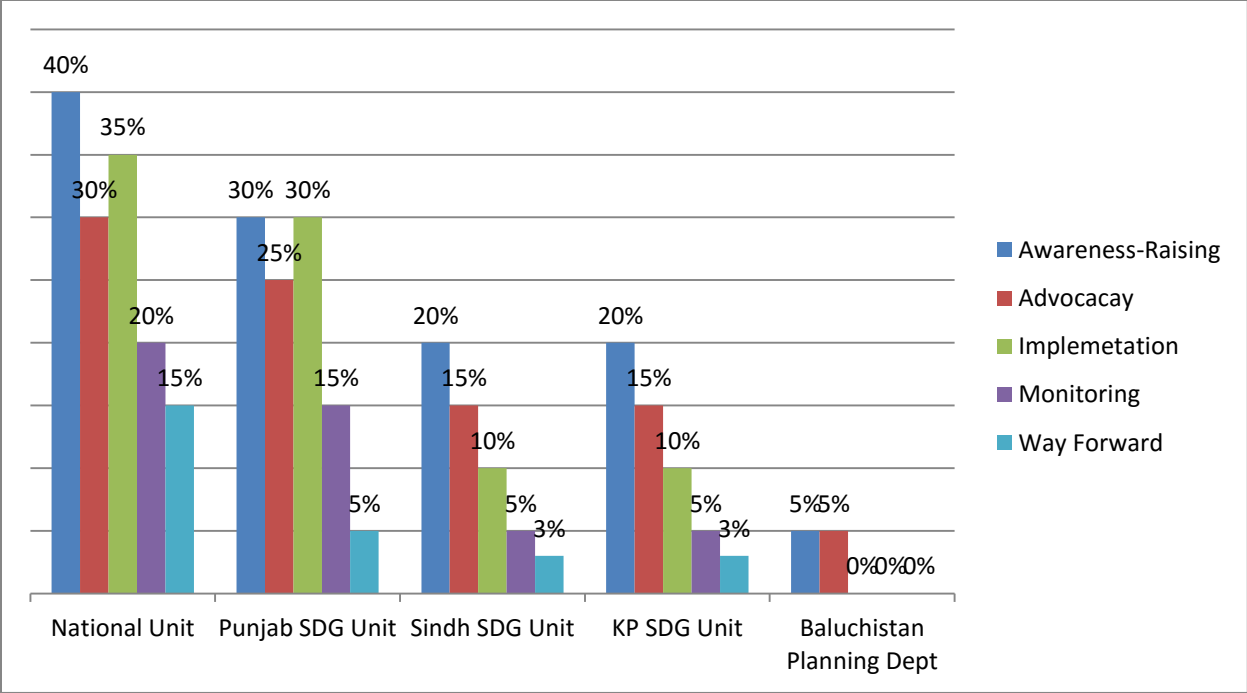
The already weak institutional capacity of provincial governments is not compatible to localize SDGs beyond the sub-national level (MoF, 2017).

### **Relevant Findings from Key Informants**

In figure 1, findings from key informants are exhibited related to roadmap for localizing SDGs at national and sub-national levels. The results reveal that key informants clearly highlighted that in planning documents and at national level, the awareness & advocacy are created through organizing workshops, meetings and seminars with stakeholders. At national level, the respondents indicated that 40% awareness and 30% advocacy initiatives are taken. For implementation of SDGs, the feral government has shown commitment and only implementation plans are 30% envisaged into monitoring criteria.

The relevance of this this data related to SDGs localization initiatives at provincial level shows the low commitment to SDGs other than Punjab. This is a serious constraint by the different political affiliations in each provincial government. The Punjab provincial government is showing willingness to own the SDGs national vision because of the same party as that of federal government. Being the separate and two leading opposition parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh, there is lack of political consensus with federal government which is overshadowing the SDGs commitment. Baluchistan needs more hard and soft infrastructure development being the most under developed province and having coalition government which needs to be coordinated in national development agenda.

The data revealed that there is need of mechanism to prioritize the SDGs among all provinces and to minimize the intra-provincial rivalries (Khlida Ghaus et al. 2016).

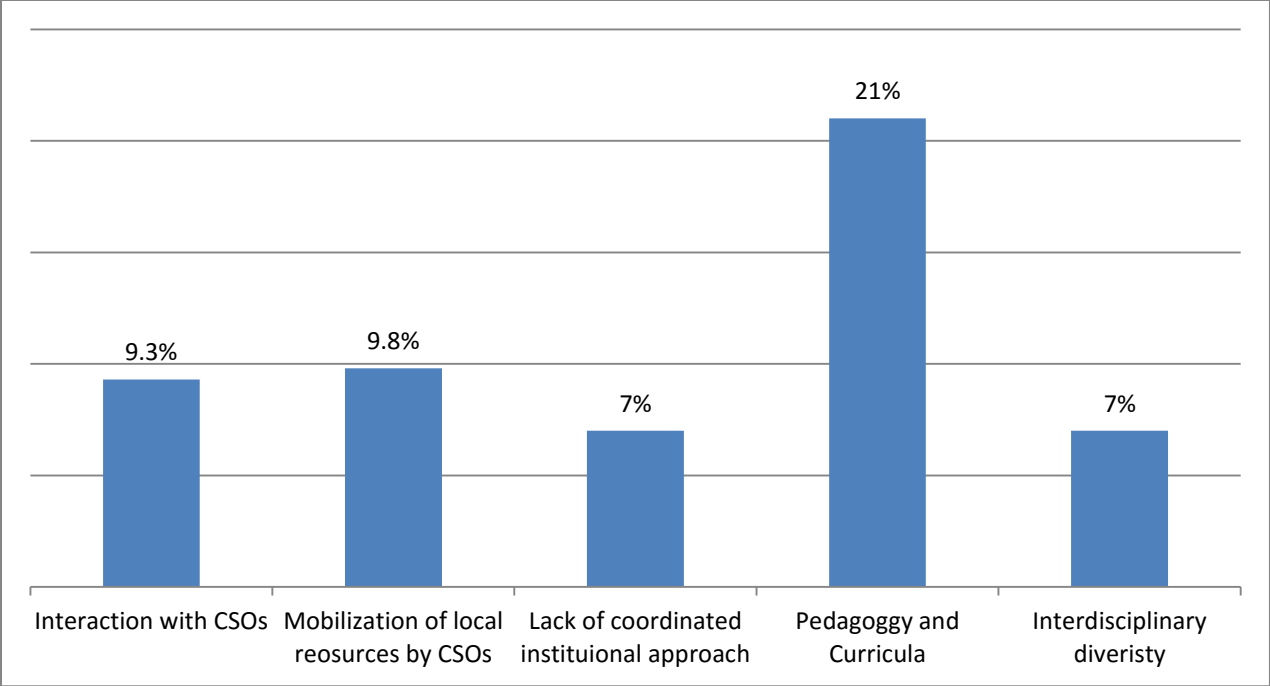


**Figure 1.** Association with roadmap for localizing SDGs

*Academia, civil society Organizations and SDGs*

In Pakistan, the role of academia and civil society is meager in localization and to create awareness and advocacy for SDGs. Figure 2 elaborates where the academia and civil society role could be useful in localizing SDGs in Pakistan. 9.3percent informants believed that interaction with CSOs could be helpful in localizing SDGs, 9.8 percent felt that local resources mobilization could improve awareness and advocacy of SDGs, 7 percent believed that interdisciplinary diversity in research could benefit the government in policy issues and twenty one percent favored that incorporation of SDGs in pedagogy and curricula in formal and informal academia would be visualized in the educational set up for upcoming generations.

Nadeem (2013) also emphasized the need of academia and civil society organizations could join hands with the government in planning and implementation of MDGs which would lead to better good governance in the country.



**Figure 2.** Where Academia and Civil Society Organizations can stand

**4.2. Qualitative Results**

**Planning & Budgeting**

All of the key informants were of the view that Pakistan is facing structural impediments confronted due to political and bureaucratic hierarchies to be the main reasons for the challenges in planning & budgeting (for detailed challenges, see Figure 3). The Budgeting at national and provincial level does not care to discuss much about the future policies that how government plans to bring changes in livelihood of people (Rizvi, 2017). In past few years there is no certain change in budget allocation in climate, education, health, social protection and energy sectors and the government has announced Rupees 30 billion for Prime Minister’s Global SDGs Achievement Programme which would not create sufficient impact towards achieving SDGs (TRIBUNE, 2017).

The main purpose of local and national governments in creating awareness is to increase citizens and all stakeholders understanding and ownership of the SDGs in bringing together all sectors of society for implementation of SDGs (GTF, 2016). All the informants indicated that awareness

raising campaigns are not included in the national and provincial plans to build the commitment of educational institutes and other stakeholders to localize SDGs in Pakistan. Formally the traditional and existing platforms of media are not used to raise the advocacy of SDGs and local bodies are not enjoying self-government to take advantage of the international commitment to localize the 2030 agenda in Pakistan (interviews and discussions with key informants, 2017).

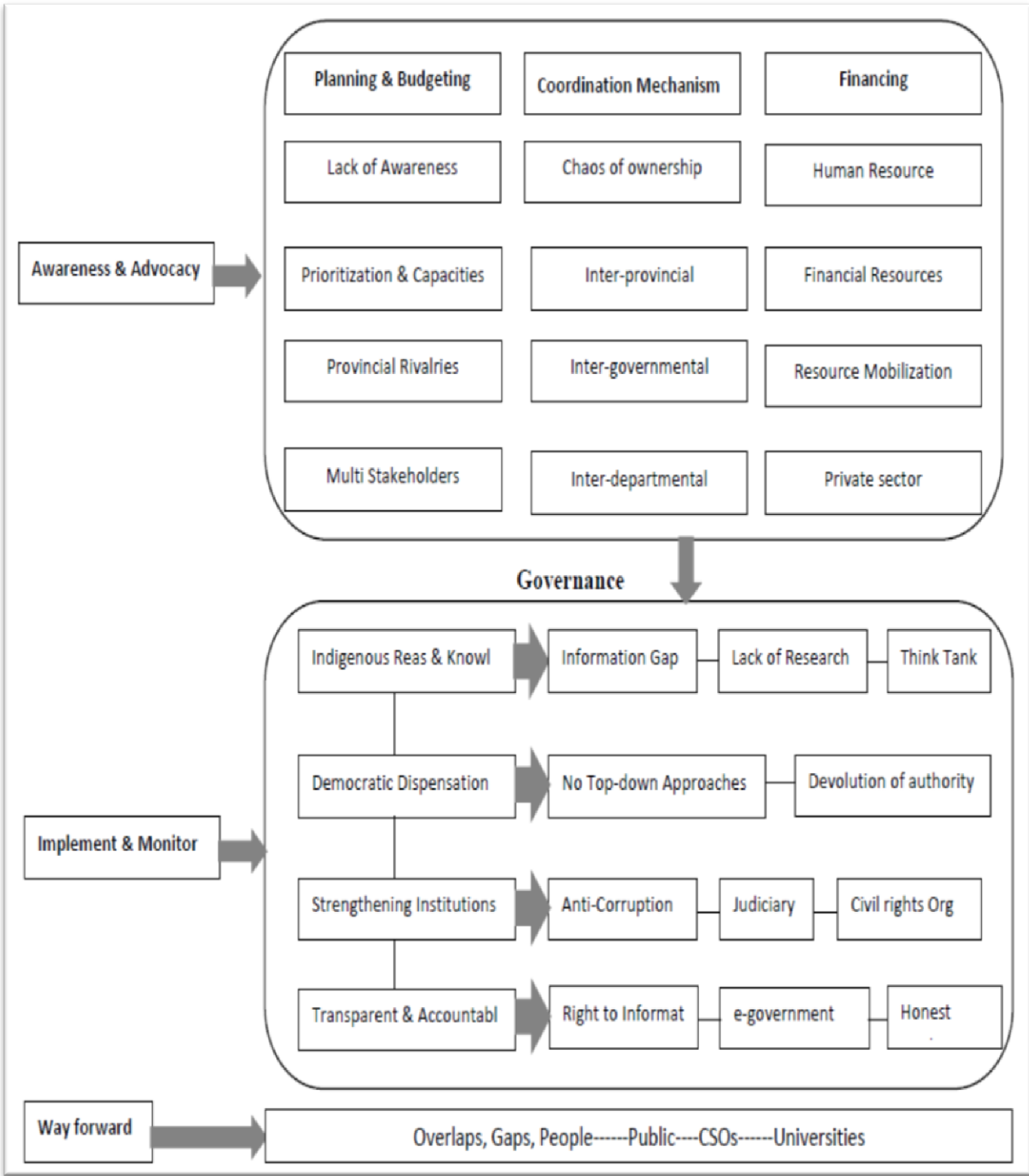
The all informants indicted that most national and provincial policies and action plans are developed without strong political will and the current institutional capacity needs massive institutional reforms to amplify their capacity for effective implementation of the SDGs (Khlaida Ghaus, et al. 2016). Pakistan needs to transform the current institutions capacity through cross sector partnerships for the benefits of people (Dawn, 2016). In the first phase of prioritizing SDGs and targets, Pakistan has to pick half or even one third keeping in mind the resource capacity of the country (LEAD, 2016). Institutions in Pakistan providing services are politicized and involved in corruption, nepotism and red tape.

Pakistan statistical departments do not have the capacity to measure the indicators at national and sub-national levels and it needs to be strengthened with training and capacity building in resources. At local level, the data gaps for social indicators are increased and few indicators are available at provincial level. The baseline data needs extensive resources to be collected and will need extensive exercise that will require substantial financial and human resources (interviews with provincial SDG Units, 2017). There is need to address limitations related to authority and responsibility of District Government and to empower the local government as the SDGs focal tier (Discussion with experts from developmental sector, 2017).

### ***Provincial Rivalries and Multi-stakeholders***

It was found in discussion with informants that Pakistan has always face difficulty to balance the distribution of resources among provinces and there is always lopsidedness in resource allocation which leads to inter provincial rivalries (Fakiha, 2017). The KI (key informants) also said that these rivalries are the alarming challenge Pakistan is facing to take on board all the provinces at same step. To achieve real implementation of 2030 agenda in Pakistan, the unrestricted role of the federal government state must be invoked which create mechanism for provinces seriously to work on building their capacity to develop consensus on SDGs implementation.





**Figure 3.** Local versions of challenges for localizing SDGs

**Source:** Author’s own compilation from key informants

For localizing SDGs, engagement of multi-stakeholders is very essential element to ensure the participation of inclusive cross-section of the population to bring egalitarian society at one place. The discussion and interviews with informants brought the use of multi-stakeholder engagement process for implementation mechanism at national and provincial level including local governments with defined responsibilities of each stakeholder.

### **Lack of Coordination Mechanism**

There are certain challenges to coordination mechanism that is contingent to place SDGs at the center of national, regional and local development: these are chaos of ownership, interprovincial rivalries, and lack of coordination in inter-governmental and inter-departmental. Key informants who were working in developmental sector talked about chaos of ownership and complete lack of understanding to realize the SDGs vision to be shared collectively. The SDGs are ambitious targets which require a serious and committed federal government to promote inter-provincial and federal-provincial communication and co-ordination to work together to advance the sustainable development agenda. The ongoing tussle between the federal and provincial departments has worrisome scenario to promote national agenda.

In Pakistan, the SDGs have received mixed reviews from inter-provincial institutes realizing the indicators of SDGs as not realistic for current weak situation of provincial institutes capacity ones and financial constraints confronted by these institutes are the main hindrance to achieve them. The federal-provincial grievances and disparities among provinces have weakened the localization of national agenda in provincial plans. The macro-policies and political interests undermine the provincial plans and further pitfalls for the SDGs is the difficulty of coordinating and integrating targets into already existing developmental plans.

It was found in interviews and discussions with key informants that within the provinces and federal ministries, there are serious coordination issues in intra-departmental and inter-departmental level and in localizing SDGs, the issues of compliance, reporting, management and supervision will hinder the coordination among various departments. To archive SDGs effectively, federal government plans depends on the co-operation of sub-national governments with clear roles and responsibilities delineated for each department in concerned provincial set up.

The informants were of the view that lack of coordination in inter-provincial institutes and governments are serious impediments in advancing the SDGs. All the key informants stressed on the need of effective coordination mechanism among all inter-provincial governments to resolve the conflicting issues to localize the SDGs properly engraved with local bodies ownership.

### **Financing Issues**

Most national and provincial policies and action plans are not backed by sufficient financial resources and the presence of too top down decision making hampered the sub-national prioritization (interviews with provincial & local key informants, 2017). The federal government should support provinces in specific SDGs and the process of localizing needs to revisit the way the government approaches. The actions and plans of government needs to be revisited in budget allocation in social sectors and the state is stop doing the blatantly, cruelly, obvious wrong plans that deepen poverty, extend degradation of ecosystems and expand inequality (key informants from development sector, 2017).

The key challenge in advocacy of SDGs in Pakistan is the availability of adequate human resources and institutional resource gap. The inadequate financial resources cannot meet the targets of SDGs in provincial governments in Pakistan and through international donor programs and resource mobilization; the financial capacity can be increased at federal and provincial level. The federal budget 2017-18 is lacking in redistributive fiscal policies and budget is not having short and long term goals which may to lead to social mobility and address to all economic classes for SDGs attainments (informants from academia sector, 2017).

Domestic and local resource mobilization and resource generation are the key components of financing the post-2015 agenda. Resources could be collected in a systematic mechanism and resources could be generated by providing different sort of services. To attain SDGs goals, the new models of public-private partnership need to be tested and private sector should be engaged proactively (LEAD, 2017). Large public sector programs are only considered and prompted on the basis of elections and more focus is on rapid unplanned infrastructure and very little attention human resources (interviews with CSOs, 2017).

## **Governance Issues**

The key informants were of the view that in localizing SDGs, implementation and monitoring is impediment in presence of ineffective governance, poor performance and undermining ownership – centrally planned agendas, too top-down approaches and interest driven plans. Federal and provincial governments have to determine governance structures and accountability mechanisms the essential requirement for SDGs at national and local levels (LEAD, 2017). The KIs also suggested that there is no indigenous research and development which is very necessary for sustainable development goals with the specific context of Pakistan. Universities play a valuable role in economic development and scholars, academics, research universities, think tanks and civil society organizations need to be brought to the table to understand the SDGs (TRIBUNE, 2017).

It was asserted by informants that institutional and capacity development for rule-of-law institutions is important in liaising with judiciary, police, local government, prosecution, bar associations, and civil society organizations to support SDGs maintaining accountable justice. It was found that mismanagement of resources and lack of accountability has been creating tension for check and balance in SDGs implementation and monitoring. Transparency and accountability are essential elements of good governance and both are in short supply in Pakistan political culture (Dawn, 2015). Weak institutes and too top down decision making processes have politicized the bureaucracy and plans are prepared by civilian institutions to serve the interest of the ruling party. It seems impediment in implementation and monitoring SDGs if transparency and the process of accountability are not improved. The findings also brought to light that right to information and governance are interlinked for effective implementation of SDGs.

## **Way Forward**

Social indicators remained poor over the last five decades and localizing SDGs in Pakistan is at infancy stage, still in mode of evolution and sub-national governments are in the phase of understanding the SDGs goals and targets from the perspective of their own planning vision. The literacy rate in Pakistan is 58% prevailing strong inequality in different regions, 22.3% of Pakistani population was living below poverty line in 2015, 58% population is food insecure and inequality in health indicators in different regions of the country are alarming (Official Statistics,

2015). Pakistan has been ranked the second worst country in the world for gender equality (WEF, 2016) although SDGs endorse women empowerment and gender equality.

For localizing SDGs, the authorized and responsible national, sub-national and local governments are required and decentralization of governance functions needs to be strong at grassroots level as the SDGs focal tier. The study also showed that it is unfortunate that place of local government is not well recognized in Pakistan and looking into present situation of local government, different institutional arrangements at the local level are required to implement SDGs.

Given that Pakistan continues to be run without clear long term directions, consequently Pakistan continuous to roll along without putting in place the distinct roadmap for localizing SDGs for a promising future. Planning and development departments at national and subnational level need to formulate the reformations for governance, indicator settings, coordination and implementation mechanism and allocating financial and human resources for successful localizing SDGs in Pakistan.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study essentially aimed to find out existing initiatives and challenges faced by national and sub-national governments in localizing SDGs that could be used for an understanding of the challenges of Pakistan in the implementation of SDGs. This study also inquired from experts in development sector in Pakistan, the current and future challenges facing for localizing SDGs at the national and sub-national level. This paper used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to know various challenges in mainstreaming SDGs and type of local version of challenges in accordance with roadmap for localizing SDGs in Pakistan, and these results were validated through a comprehensive literature review.

Pakistan has created an untrustworthily weak reputation in social sector projects' implementation and monitoring which resulted into globally dismal and embarrassingly poor indicators. This situation was further exacerbated by presence of ineffective governance, poor performance and undermining ownership – centrally planned agendas; too top-down approaches and interest driven plans. The study findings suggested that institutional and capacity development for rule-of-law institutions is important in liaising with judiciary, police, local government, prosecution,

bar associations, and civil society organizations to support SDGs maintaining accountable justice.

The major challenge to localizing SDGs was the disparities among provinces and lopsidedness in resource allocation which led to inter-provincial and federal-provincial rivalries which, in turn, threatened sustainability of existing initiatives of SDGs. The local government departments interviewed for this paper were found to be ignorant about the SDGs national agenda which is the key actors to be considered in local challenges and opportunities to be taken to account in the implementation of the agenda that is essential to achieve success at integrating SDGs into national thinking.

Weakness in the implementation of SDGs by provincial governments was base line data gaps and poor capacities of statistical departments. It was felt that statistical departments need to be strengthened with training and capacity building. The current institutional capacities are required massive reforms for effective implementation of SDGs. The services institutions are politicized and involved in corruption, nepotism and red tape in the current narrative. It was found in this paper that chaos of ownership and lack of coordination mechanism were the result of short term interest based plans of governments while the long term sustainable plans were ignored. On the basis of elections, development was considered on short term basis while multiple issues were bypassed.

Sub-national governments are at early stage of designing their implementation mechanism, for this time academia, scholars, civil society and think tanks need to be brought in the table. With evolution of SDGs, there is an unequivocal opportunity for public-private partnership. The SDG goals demand greater attention from the governments and national agenda will be strengthened by promoting inter-provincial and federal-provincial coordination. Partnership between governments, the private sector, civil society and the international donors is required for effective cross-sectional coordination.

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