



PILDAT Legislative Capability-building Programme
Workshop for Members of the National Assembly of Pakistan

Devolution Plan: Demarcation of Roles

January 29-30, 2003
Hotel Pearl Continental, Bhurban, Murree

WORKSHOP REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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PILDAT owes special thanks to the participant MNAs at the workshop who not only took time out of their busy schedules to attend the workshop, but also enthusiastically engaged in a lively debate and discussion on various aspects of the issue. Indeed, it was the eagerness and enthusiasm of the participants in both learning and interaction which we consider as the real success of the workshop. We are also thankful to participants for their generous feedback as well as their patience in filling out a variety of forms that were put in their folders.

We especially acknowledge the role of the resource persons, which include **Mr. Daniyal Aziz**, Chairman National Reconstruction Bureau; **Mr. Shah Mahmood Qureshi**, MNA and former *Nazim* Multan District; **Ms. Nafisa Shah**, *Nazima* District Khairpur; **Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani**, Chairman Gallup Pakistan and Member PILDAT Board of Advisors and last but not the least, **Mr. Peter Schroeder**, an expert in devolution and decentralisation, who especially flew from Germany for the workshop. It was the insight of these resource persons as well as their grasp on their particular areas which generated and maintained the interest of participants. We also thank resource persons for their invaluable time that was mostly spent in leading key discussions on the issue with participants. We also wish to thank Mr. Tasneem Noorani, Federal Secretary for Interior, though he could not deliver his presentation at the workshop due to an emergency, he had sent his presentation earlier which was a part of the information folder prepared for each participant and is also featured in this report.

As the first of the series of the legislative capability-building workshops PILDAT has planned to enhance the knowledge and skills of legislators, this workshop provided many learning aspects for the PILDAT team as well, which as we so hope, have served to sharpen our understanding. Both the wraths and accolades for the planning, organisation and management of this workshop go to the PILDAT team. We especially acknowledge participants' feedback on PILDAT team's performance.

Disclaimer:

PILDAT has made every effort to ensure accuracy of views, discussion points and presentations in the editing and compilation of this report. PILDAT, however, does not take any responsibility of any omission or an error since it is not deliberate. The views expressed at the conference and presented in these proceedings are those of the resource persons and participants themselves and do not necessarily represent the views of PILDAT and/or the DFID, UK.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development And Transparency – PILDAT held its first Legislative Capability-building Workshop for the Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) on the issue of Devolution Plan: Demarcation of Roles at Bhurban, Murree from 28-30 January 2003. The purpose of the workshop was to enhance the learning and understanding of the MNAs about the local government system, its related issues and develop and delineate a clear demarcation of roles between MNAs and local governments.

The workshop had twenty-nine (29) MNAs as participants belonging to various political parties represented in the parliament as well as five (5) resource persons dealing with different aspects of the subject. The workshop enjoyed intense interaction by participants on various aspects of the subject. There was a unanimous agreement that the Local Bodies System is good for the country and should be allowed to run independently and freely in all districts of the country. However, MNAs disagreed with each other as to whether or not they should have a role in the development and administration in their constituencies alongside district nazims: a majority of MNAs believed they should have a role in their districts, especially on the spending of development funds, postings and transfers, while another group, albeit smaller in number, believed MNAs' involvement in local governments will be tantamount to destroying the local government system.

The participants of the workshop termed the workshop as a comprehensive learning experience which not only presented various perspectives of the issue, enhancing their understanding, but also provided a platform of dialogue across party lines which defused their distinct party positions and enabled them to discuss the issue of crucial importance as one group.

BACKGROUND

PILDAT Legislative Capability-building Programme:

The PILDAT Legislative Capability-building Programme (LCBP) was conceived so as to build the capability of the elected legislators towards an effective and better discharge of their duties as parliamentarians. Parliamentarians, the lead policy makers in a democracy, work unassisted in relative isolation in Pakistan without a proper system of training and capability-building unlike the system provided for executive and the judiciary in the country. The PILDAT LCBP was designed in consultation with veteran legislators after a year-long process of ascertaining their needs and requirements.

The Devolution Plan:

After the introduction of the devolution plan in 2000, the provincial governments promulgated the local government system through provincial ordinances and held elections to set up district governments in place in the absence of national and provincial assemblies and legislators. After the October 2002 election of MNAs and MPAs and allocation of development funds for them for their individual constituencies, new issues emerged as to how the parliamentarians would view the new demarcation of roles between themselves and local *nazims*. PILDAT chose to address this issue of crucial importance in the shape of its first legislative capability-building workshop by bringing together newly-elected legislators, the brains behind Pakistani devolution plan, the *nazims*, ex-*nazims* and experts to address all aspects of the issue in detail.

COMPONENTS OF THE WORKSHOP

The PILDAT workshop 'Devolution Plan: Demarcation of Roles' was a three-day event organised at Hotel Pearl Continental, Bhurban, Murree from January 28-30, 2003.

The workshop started with an informal introductory dinner on January 28, 2003. Apart from that, it had six (6) sessions which dealt with the evolution of devolution in Pakistan; international experiences and conceptual basis of devolution and why it is needed in societies; details and *raison d'être* of the devolution plan 2000 and the issues of Pakistani local government system as faced by implementers, while the remaining sessions comprised working session for developing recommendations by MNAs, presentations of Group recommendations, synthesis and personal learning and future avenues.

Twenty-Nine (29) MNAs belonging to various political parties participated in the workshop. Special Information Packs/Workshop Folders were prepared by PILDAT which included copies of the presentations of the resource persons; background information and reading material on the concept and plan of devolution; copies of the updated provincial local government ordinances; list of helpful resource material and national and international websites on devolution, apart from a variety of feedback and data collection forms and other introductory information such as detailed programme bulletin, prayer timings at Bhurban and introductory brochure of PILDAT and PILDAT Legislative Capability-building Programme brochure for the details of the programme. Each participant was given a folder, a workshop participation identification card and a name card upon check in at the hotel.

The participants, resource person and organisers of the workshop had a group photo during the workshop. Certificates of participation were also given to participants, with special thanks from PILDAT for their active participation, which were distributed by the resource persons.

Introductory Dinner:

The workshop began with an informal introductory dinner on January 28, 2003. The purpose of the dinner before the start of the sessions was to provide the participants with an opportunity to introduce themselves to each other in an informal setting. Most of the participants attended the dinner while a few were held by bad weather on way to Bhurban.

All participants were given an opportunity to briefly introduce themselves while also state their expectation from the workshop which was to start the next morning, i.e., January 29, 2003. The participants not only used the occasion to introduced themselves but the informal dinner became a semi-session where all participants also gave vent to their specific feelings on the issue of devolution, elaborated upon their respective stances and ideas relating to the issue. This exercise greatly helped participants understand each other's viewpoints and also highlighted the main themes and sub-themes that appeared during the workshop ahead.

Entertainment:

A dinner was arranged for the participants at the end. The famous comedian of Pakistan Mr. Omar Sharif was invited to entertain the participants after a long and busy day of work.

The evening was tremendously enjoyed by participants while it also helped relax and bring together people socially as one group.

RESOURCE PERSONS' VIEWS

Welcome Remarks:

In his welcome remarks at the start of the workshop, Mr. Ahmed Bilal Mehboob, Executive Director PILDAT, highlighted the importance of the issue and the need for MNAs' understanding of the system. He emphasised that PILDAT, as an organisation, has no specific view on the issue of local bodies system and MNAs' involvement into it; however, the purpose behind the workshop is to provide a platform of informed interaction and debate on the issue so as to crystallise a consensus.

Evolution of Devolution in Pakistan:

Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani's presentation traced the evolution of the need for a local bodies system in Pakistan and highlighted that since 1947, various commissions of the government have reported that decentralisation can be a logical key step towards dealing with a magnitude of management and administrative problems of the country.

Dr. Gilani presented his analysis that the military governments in Pakistan have been using the system of decentralisation as a substitute to democracy in the country and hence, despite a great need for decentralisation in Pakistan, the system gave rise to extreme political scepticism in the people and their political leaders. His research showed that the use of local government as a substitute for transfer of political power to popular representation is the key source of that political scepticism that surrounds even the present devolution effort. He also traced the history of this political scepticism to Indian Political Act of 1936 where the British first used this system as a substitute to independence.

Despite this political scepticism, he said, local government could have freed upper tiers of government to concentrate on their true mandate. He believed that the new dispensation of local government must address this issue of political scepticism focusing on making devolution a tool for good governance and administrative efficiency. His complete presentation is attached as Appendix C.

Conceptual Basis of Devolution and International Experiences:

Mr. Peter Schroeder, expert consultant on devolution and decentralisation from Germany, presented international examples of devolution and decentralisation from Germany, South Korea, Indonesia, Russia, Argentina, and Former Yugoslavia to underscore the crucial need for devolution in each system. He pointed out that reason behind sharing international models with Pakistani audience was to bring home the point that almost every country in the world is trying to approach an outlook based upon devolution and decentralisation to run its affairs.

Referring to devolution as the concept of the new public management in which Lean State plays the most crucial role, he emphasised that separation of strategic from operational level, introduction of a product approach, customer orientation and service mentality and a new model of control were extremely necessary for operationalisation of the model of new public management. Explaining the concepts of Lean State, he mentioned Task Criticism, Decentralisation/Devolution/ Subsidiarity, Privatisation and Deregulation as the major steps towards achieving the model of Lean State. Speaking of Germany in detail, Mr. Schroeder explained how after World War II and destruction of all state structures, the state was built from bottom to top which speaks of today's Germany.

Mr. Schroeder emphasised that devolution is needed for better governance and that each tier of the state governance should have clearly demarcated roles with no interference from one another.

He explained that the *raison d'être* behind decentralisation is that it benefits the common citizens. His complete presentation is attached as Appendix D.

The Pakistani Devolution Plan:

Mr. Daniyal Aziz, MNA and Chairman National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB), highlighted that the existing system before the conception and implementation of local government system, dealt unfairly between rural and urban areas. Focussing his talk on the issue of taxation alone and using it as an example, he elaborated that decentralisation was the only solution to the system which hampered growth and that there are cogent administrative and financial reasons behind the introduction of the recent local government system.

Since the reasons behind promulgation of this system are myriad and manifold, he appealed to the MNAs that an enlightened and factual analysis of the devolution system was necessary before it should be attacked for personal political reasons. He emphasised that the system was necessary, as the state was not delivering what it should have to its citizens. He said that development funds would not ensure votes for MNAs but it is the creation of an efficient system at the grassroots, which will ensure their place in peoples' hearts and minds. He strongly believed that development fund to the MNAs is a curse and would further destroy the system. He said that if the MNAs are unhappy with devolution system, then the assembly should come up with a more comprehensive system that should deliver to the grassroots.

He emphasised that the devolution and local government system, like any other system, will continue to grow and need continuous input and adjustments. A summary of his speech is attached as Appendix E.

Implementers' Issues: Perspective of a Former *Nazim*:

Mr. Shah Mahmood Qureshi, MNA and former *Nazim* of Multan District believed that the system of devolution on paper is brilliant and workable but the authors of the plan themselves set to destroy it once it was put in place. Mr. Qureshi blamed the Musharraf regime for sabotaging the system by using it to gain favour in the presidential referendum of April 2002. He also referred to the role of bureaucracy in creating hurdles in the system.

Mr. Qureshi believed that the ground realities as existed before the devolution made people receive the new system enthusiastically. The elections at the councillor and union council level were generally free and fair but *tehsil nazim* and district *nazims* were carefully chosen by the regime to keep the 'undesirables' out of the system. Soon after the dangers of politicisation were apparent as despite promises, the system was used for presidential referendum and administrative and financial structures of local government were used for that.

Speaking of the technical issues, Mr. Qureshi highlighted that the concept of parallelism, as opposed to the hierarchical approach, is introduced in local government which is causing confusion and is compromising the writ of the government. Financial resources available to local governments are not in conformity with their responsibilities either. On the law and order side, while the district nazim is responsible for maintaining law and order, his/her relationship to the District Police Officer (DPO) is vague; *nazim* can issue orders but has no mechanism to ensure implementation. He pointed out that the district public safety commissions are also still non-existent which are crucial in this area.

Among other issues, Mr. Qureshi pointed towards the frustration of councillors who are feeling redundant and ineffective without any specific assignment of role for them. He highlighted that postings and transfers are another cause of concern for a nazim as provincial governments take it upon themselves to deal with the issue, thus stepping over *nazims'* authority. His complete presentation is attached as Appendix F.

Implementers' Issues: Perspective of a serving *Nazim*:

Ms. Nafisa Shah, *Nazima* district Khairpur, strongly believed that the system was not allowed to function by its very creators in many districts including her own. Dismayed by the state's handling of her district's affairs, she said there was a crisis of governance in the district as it was a direct territorial field of the power centre in the province and the District Police Officer and District Coordination Officers etc., work as agents of provincial government in opposition to the district Nazim.

Terming her speech as a comment on the 'politics of devolution, Ms. Shah believed that development challenges, the rhetoric of good governance, military government's quest for political legitimacy and the demonstration of a reform agenda, all make the context that leads to the current devolution system. Highlighting the challenges faced by the system, she identified political vacuum, lack of democratization, legal vacuum and federalism as the major issues. Ms. Shah believed that the devolution system has suffered three (3) major shocks since its inception that include 9/11, which shifted focus of the military regime away from devolution, referendum and general elections in a legal vacuum.

Commenting upon the major issues she faces as a *nazima*, amongst many others, she highlighted problematic structural relationship with the provincial government, conflict-ridden relationship between *nazim*, *naib nazim* and councilors, and the unsettled problem of town committees. She also spoke of the administrative issues including the law and order and the police, which remains a major one, as well as the financial side of things which hampers progress on many counts. Her detailed presentation is attached as Appendix G.

DISCUSSION

Discussion:

The workshop enjoyed an intense interaction and debate on the concept and application of the Local Government System and the possible role of MNAs in them. Many aspects of the system came under discussion and various themes and sub-themes also emerged during this course. The major points of discussion are detailed below:

Consensus on the Need of Local Government System:

Almost from the very start, most MNAs, with the exception of a few who had complaints against individual *nazims*, believed that since the local government system addressed the needs and requirements of ordinary citizens, it must continue. During the course of the discussion, many issues were identified as hampering the progress of the system, which all MNAs felt, should be done away with for an effective and smooth running of the system.

MNAs' Role as Elected Peoples' Representatives versus Indirectly-elected *Nazims*:

Despite agreement on the conceptual need for a local government system, MNAs felt that the authority vested in the role of *nazim*, who is an indirectly elected head of the district, is unfair compared to the role of an MNA who is a directly elected representative of the people. A large number of MNAs felt that they needed to have a role in the local development and administration with district *nazims* as the voters considered MNAs as their leaders who would solve their problems.

MNAs felt that by being directly elected representatives of the people, the onus was also on them to deliver to the people.

Powers of Nazim versus MNA in Districts:

Carrying the earlier point further, a large number of MNAs were uncomfortable with the fact that with the change of the system, local *nazims* enjoyed all powers on the issue of postings, transfers and development. MNAs vehemently complained that their role is not merely to legislate in the national assembly; especially when policy making has never been a forte of MNAs in Pakistan. But, they argued, that as peoples' representatives, they were obliged to deliver on these counts to people. With all such powers resting with *nazims* now, how are MNAs supposed to deliver to the people in their constituency? Many MNAs felt that although sitting in Islamabad and only legislating without getting into the hassles of their constituency needs and issues makes their lives easier, their voters look up to them for solving their issues and, if MNAs cannot deliver to their voters today, their voters will not vote for them in next elections, thus terming the whole issue as a crisis of survival for themselves.

Education of Voters:

Voters needed to be aware of the change in the roles of MNAs with the advent of Local Government System. This was especially considered necessary now so that people are aware of what they should expect from their MNA as well as district nazim. Most MNAs were sceptical whether people would be happy with MNAs merely legislating and making policies and not tending to their constituency problems. MNAs felt that it is only after gradual education of voters and their understanding that MNAs can let district *nazims* deal with every aspect of development. At the moment, without voters' understanding of these roles, it is suicidal for the future politics of MNAs to confine themselves to their role as legislators.

Uniform Application of Rules and Laws:

Ms. Nafisa Shah and Mr. Shah Mahmood Qureshi, as well as other MNAs who were aware of the problems of their district governments complained against central and provincial governments' whimsical and unfair application of rules and laws of Local Government System. Ms. Nafisa Shah complained that, as a rule, district nazim were to be consulted before any postings and transfers within the district, but as she was perceived to have political leanings with the PPP, an opposition party, she was never consulted on key postings and transfers in her district which resulted in major administrative crisis in her district. Similarly, many such instances were pointed out where a uniform application of rules and laws was not carried out across all districts, singling out those that refused to play ball for political interests of central and provincial governments. All MNAs strongly felt that it was necessary that a uniform and unbiased application of rules and laws be made at all districts of the country regardless of political affiliations. They emphasised that for an effective running of the system it was necessary.

Devolution should be Along the Entire System:

MNAs strongly felt that provincial autonomy has been seriously compromised by the local government system which has further snatched away provinces' powers making them weaker, while the federation continues to hold on to the powers that should be with the provinces in a federal state system as enshrined in the 1973 constitution of the country. It was important, they strongly believed, that the process of devolution should start from the top: from federation to the provincial and from provincial to the local instead of only devolving from the provincial to the local level.

A Policy of Non-interference:

Speaking against the centre, provincial and bureaucratic interference into the working of local governments, all MNAs unanimously agreed that there should be a policy of non-interference in the working of local governments so that effective and smooth operation of the system is ensured. MNAs believed that governments should not use the system for political coercion but allow it to function freely so that it could deliver to the masses.

MNAs' Role in Local Governments:

Despite forceful recommendation to the central and provincial governments to adopt a policy of non-interference in local governments, a large group of MNAs felt that they should have a role in the development, postings and transfer related powers, etc., vested in the district heads. These MNAs believed that if they do not have a role, it would be destructive for the system, as a tussle between two sides will start which will destroy the system.

Instead, they proposed, district boards should be created which should be headed, by rotation by MNAs belonging to various constituencies in a district, while the DCOs should be the secretary to the board. District *nazims* should be members of such boards and the boards should decide development and posting/transfer related issues of the district. Some participants felt that the decision of the MNAs should be binding. The proponents of this idea believed that for an initial period of 5-10 years, it is necessary that MNAs play a role in these matters in the districts, while gradually, with voters education, this role should be phased out and district heads alone should be the masters of the fate of their districts.

Commitment of the architects:

It was repeatedly pointed out in the discussion that the commitment of the architects and implementers of the devolution system, i.e., the Musharraf regime, itself has wavered on the concept of keeping the system above politics which has affected the system. Some crucial aspects of the system such as setting up of the district safety commissions, district ombudsman, and district consultative committees etc have been ignored so far which have resulted in weak and poor performance of the system.

Financial Issues

One of the key areas identified as affecting the performance of the system was the lack of financial resources. MNAs, alongside their resource persons, argued that without the availability of sufficient financial resources required to run local governments, it was not possible for local governments to fully deliver. Participants at the workshop urged the government and the architects of the system to look into this crucial issue and make adequate financial resources available at the local level.

It was also pointed out that the taxes collected at the district level should also be spent within those districts.

Independent Working of Local Governments:

A smaller group of MNAs compared to the proponents of the above idea, as well as the resource persons including Mr. Peter Schroeder, Mr. Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Ms. Nafisa Shah, believed that MNAs should not have any role in the workings of the local governments, and difficult as it may seem, should only devote themselves for policy making and legislation.

- a. Upon the position taken by proponents of MNAs involvement that legislation and policy formulation has never been a forte of legislators in Pakistan, Mr. Daniyal Aziz felt that power is never handed over to the other, but it always has to be sought. Similarly, if MNAs were to focus themselves towards legislation and policy making, then they would have to flex their muscles as legislators to take that power in their hands. Mr. Ahmed

Bilal Mehboob, although not a party to any position, also lamented the fact that many MNAs seemed resigned to the idea of policy making and legislation outside their role traditionally, and said that the basic motive behind this workshop organised by PILDAT was to enhance the skills of legislators so that they could take legislation and policy making into their own hands. The constitution, he said, empowered MNAs to legislate and give policies to the country to follow, and PILDAT, as a partner with MNAs in this endeavour, would help them achieve it.

- b. Upon another point raised by the proponents that MNAs' involvement into district affairs should gradually be phased out, Mr. Shah Mahmood Qureshi said that MNAs are taking a similar position as that taken by bureaucracy when the system of devolution was introduced in 2000. The bureaucracy, too, did not want its stronghold on administration broken so it wanted to buy time; similarly MNAs are working on the same idea that the powers they enjoyed should not be outside their hands now.
- c. Both Ms. Nafisa Shah and Mr. Shah Mahmood Qureshi believed, alongside others who felt against the involvement of MNAs into the district government, that MNAs involvement into district affairs will be tantamount to destroying the whole system of local bodies. They believed that MNAs involvement into districts is against the very concept of devolution and decentralisation. They also showed scepticism as to whether MNAs only want a minimalist role for only a certain period of time, and felt that MNAs would be like the proverbial camel inside the tent, with no space left inside for the original inhabitants of the tent after their entry.
- d. Some MNAs also felt that those who want to have a role in local development should opt for contesting elections as district *nazims*. It is not MNAs' role, they categorically stated, to get involved in local developmental work, but to create policies for the country and make legislation.
- e. Mr. Chaudhry Omar-uz-Zaman Kaira, MNA, believed that MNAs' worry over getting elected for their next term on the basis of the development work in their constituencies is baseless. He said that 1988 onwards history of elections proves otherwise. Being a PPP MNA, he said that in 1988, all of us worked in our constituencies with development funds, but 1990 elections brought Pakistan Muslim League into power; from 1990-93, PPP MNAs were sidelined for sitting on opposition benches and hence, no development work, yet 1993 brought PPP into power; yet again, despite development work into constituencies, PPP again lost to PML in 1997. Hence, development work does not necessarily ensure seats for next elections.
- f. On the issue of development funds, it was suggested that MNAs could use federal government agencies such as the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) or the Pakistan Telecommunications Corporation Limited (PTCL), etc., to carry out development-related work in their particular constituencies through development funds allocated to them. This would solve the issue of involving or interfering into *Nazims'* area of work as only federal agencies could carry out work falling into their domain.
- g. Many MNAs speaking against their involvement in district affairs felt that MNAs should not concentrate only upon winning next elections. If all MNAs feel local government system is good for the people, let it continue. MNAs should only focus upon serving the people in whatever capacity they have and not destroy a good system which has the potential of delivering to the people.

- h. Mr. Peter Schroeder felt that Pakistan needs to learn from the examples of other such countries' system where legislators are directly elected while there are also effective local governments in place without the interference of legislators. He said the system of transition is never smooth but MNAs should not intervene or interfere into local government system if they sincerely want it to prosper. He said that as a consultant, he often asks himself who will be the losers and winners in the case of an established and effective local government system, and the answer is that only people will be winners if there is an established and effective local government system in place; all others including politicians and legislators and government will be losers. And, as he said, people are weak; who would struggle for their rights, to make them winners and be losers themselves?

GROUP WORK

As mentioned earlier in the report, after the resource persons' presentations, and ensuing discussions, followed the working session in which the participants were divided in two (2) groups. Participants belonging to different parties were equally divided in two groups so that each group had a diversity of views necessary to discuss all pros and cons of the issue. Both groups were given the task of preparing their separate recommendations for the improvement in the local government system based upon their perspectives on the issue of devolution.

Both groups, called Group 1 and Group 2, were required to choose their own group leaders while two resource persons were assigned to each group to act as facilitators from the sidelines. Group 1 chose Dr. Fehmida Mirza, MNA from the PPPP as the group leader, while the Group 2 chose Mr. Asadullah Bhutto, MNA from the MMA as its leader.

The groups were initially assigned the time of one (1) hour to discuss and formulate their recommendations, which were to be presented in the workshop in the subsequent session, but following the elaborated discussion in each group, more time was allocated to continue the session so as to facilitate the process of dialogue culminating in recommendations.

Both groups prepared their recommendations which were presented in the session right after by their respective group leaders. Each recommendation of both groups was thoroughly discussed in the session in the form of question and answers, critiques, comments and additional suggestions. Through the discussion on each clause, recommendations similar in nature by two groups were clubbed into one, while those recommendations on which the groups differed from each other were to be carried forward to the session of Synthesis the following day. The main points of groups' recommendations appear in the section of discussion.

SYNTHESIS

The Synthesis session both summarised the main themes discussed at the workshop while it also carried forward the discussion on the deferring points of the two groups' recommendations drawn during the working session.

The workshop had not set out to necessarily achieve any consensus but the objective was to enhance the learning and understanding of the participant MNAs on the crucial issue of devolution which was taking the shape of a controversy in the country between elected legislators, both national and provincial, and the local governments. As the synthesis session experienced, the participants did not have a consensus on the issue of a possible role of MNAs in the development and administration of their constituencies at the local level: a majority argued, as captured in the section of discussion, that MNAs should have a role, while another group, albeit smaller in size, vehemently debated against that.

FEEDBACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

The concluding session of the workshop dealt with the feedback of participants on every aspect of the workshop: from content of sessions to the variety of resource persons and their grasp on their presentations to housekeeping details relating to the organisation of the workshop.

Earlier, the participants were requested to fill out a host of forms provided to them in their workshop folders which dealt with detailed feedback as well as other issues and areas of legislative interests of the participants. The feedback session, however, brought to fore many such aspects which were not captured in forms. Participants generously praised the format of the workshop as well as its contents and resource persons, which, put together, had made it a comprehensive learning experience for them, they commented.

The most laudable aspect of the workshop, expressed participants, was that it had diffused and submerged their distinct political ideologies and had converted them into one group of national legislators who only had a single objective to earnestly debate and discuss a national issue for its possible solution.

Similarly, it was expressed, that the workshop had added to the understanding of all participants while it had a profound effect on many who acknowledged that their views about the whole concept had changed for better and they saw devolution as a good step necessary for the good of the people. It must be noted that the feeling that devolution was a good concept and must continue was shared passionately by all; the only difference of opinion existed on the possible role of MNAs in the system of local government which a majority favoured and a minority argued against.

The resource persons also got individual praise for their role as resource persons as well as for sharing their distinct perspectives on the issue at the platform.

On the organisational side, PILDAT was both lauded for its effective management and complained to for the marathon sessions; most participants felt they deserved longer breaks during the routine of sessions and a lighter schedule of the day while the duration of the workshop, i.e., one and a half day of sessions, should have been longer.

The participants strongly felt that the choice of venue for the workshop helped them concentrate on the workshop, as being up in the mountains and away from their daily routine work and constant contact with their constituencies related affairs made them a 'captive audience' which helped the learning aspects. They also felt that it helped participants to grow closer due to the opportunity of social interaction during their three-day stay away at Bhurban. They expressed that a workshop at any of the cities such as Islamabad, Lahore or Karachi etc., would not have been as successful due to the constant demands on their time and hence decreased attention. Participants strongly recommended that PILDAT should hold future workshops at the same venue, but for a longer duration.

The participants also strongly expressed their desire to be part of capability-building workshops and urged PILDAT to hold future workshops on different issues. The participants also filled out their personal preferences for attending workshops on specific topics and also highlighted many topics for future workshops that they would be interested to attend.

CONCLUSION

The basic objective behind holding the workshop was to provide MNAs, belonging to different political parties, with a forum of interaction and learning after participating in which they should be able to make better-informed policy decisions. The PILDAT workshop has been successful in providing just that forum to the participating MNAs where they could actively engage in a knowledgeable discussion on the pros and cons of the issue.

The workshop did not reach a consensus: a majority believed MNAs need to have a role in district affairs, while a significant number believed MNAs should not interfere into workings of the local government. But the workshop had not set out to achieve any consensus either. What it did achieve, and had set out to achieve, was an intense and informed interaction on a policy issue across party lines and positions. All participating MNAs felt towards the end of the workshop that although they had all come to attend the workshop with clear and strong party identities, but during the workshop their identities submerged into only being Pakistani legislators who were discussing an important issue together to resolve that. They felt that this was the success of the forum.

Another objective of the workshop was to enhance learning of the MNAs on the issue. A majority of MNAs expressed both verbally, and through specifically designed forms to gauge the level of learning and change of position in before and after the workshop, that two days of learning and interaction made them change their position on the issue of devolution.

The workshop managed to keep the interest of the participants alive, despite 'gruelling' (as put so lovingly by many MNAs) time table and programme keeping MNAs occupied from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm. Despite such a schedule, upon demand of the participants to continue discussion, many tea breaks were shortened and meals delayed.

It was also pointed out that the implementers themselves abandoned their ideology of keeping the system above politics which affected the system. Some crucial aspects such as the setting up of safety commission, district ombudsman, and district consultative committees, etc., are also required for the working of the system.

The participants of the workshop identified many disturbing holes and discrepancies in both the concept and the application of the local government system. The chairman of the NRB, Mr. Daniyal Aziz, explained to some extent that some issues would smooth out with time as the new system would catch up after a few initial hiccups; but he also believed that it is now up to the elected legislators of the country to take up these issues in the parliament and opt for amending them into a better system.