



RESEARCH PAPER

Strategies to Enhance Municipal Services in Sindh: A Research Study

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ABSTRACT

This research paper intends to provide pragmatic suggestions to improve deteriorated municipal services. Secondary data and available literature intimate that the municipal services in Sindh have deteriorated. To understand this severity and to collect firsthand information, to improve municipal services, the primary data was collected from four hundred different random selected citizens, who are end users of respective municipal services. The multistage random sampling method was used to collect qualitative data through open ended questions from different municipalities. The approach of qualitative thematic analysis is used to interpret the results in relevant groups of the key service deliveries. These results are further presented in the form of practical suggestions for implementers and policy makers. The paper recommends undertaking necessary measures to improve compulsory municipal services. The structural changes in overall governance of local councils and introduction of e-governance practices are required for long-term sustainable improvement and improved service delivery.

KEYWORDS Efficiency of Local Government, Municipal Services, Sindh

Introduction

Municipal services in Sindh face constant challenges in terms of both quality of service and operational scale. There is a persistent deterioration of these services including water supply, sanitation, public health, hygiene, refuse collection and other related municipal services (Chandio et al., 2021; Cooper, 2018 Ahmad et. al. 2015 & Mahmood et al., 2023).

There are multifaceted factors which affect this service delivery. It is proposed that the local government in Sindh to be decentralized and empowered for better service deliveries and improved operational scale (Dino et al., 2021). Similarly, Farooqi, (2013) found a relationship between decentralization and performance of local governments system in Pakistan (Refique et. al. 2023a). The administrative changes in local government system during 2001 incited a new feudalism in Sindh by crippling overall performance of local municipalities (Refique et. al. 2023, Shaikh & Jatoy, 2021). The quality of municipal services is categorized as poor in various studies. The water supply, which is a very basic and essential public service, is consistently poor across the province. Unjustified and ineffective billing charges to citizens for water supply service is a major gap in governance and effective service delivery. In addition to water billing, there are also various drawbacks in designed water supply schemes (Ahmed et al., 2021).

The sanitation services in Pakistan are also not up to mark. The situation even in major cities including Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad is poor. There is no infrastructure for wastewater treatment. The sewerage network is also old, outdated, and damaged in major cities. The available drainage network is insufficient and incapable of meeting drainage requirements in cities and towns (Maqbool et al., 2023). The services provided in the water, sanitation and hygiene sectors are very fragile (Ikhtlaq et al., 2018).

For efficient management of cities, the municipal services are crucial. Therefore, such these services are required to be improved and upscaled. This improvement involves identifying the gap between services provided and service demand of local citizens. The efficiency of municipal service delivery improves if the services rendered are compatible. This decreases both cost and time and increases scale of municipal services (Rusek et al., 2016).

There is literature available to recommend how deteriorated local government systems may be improved. Rind and Murtaza, (2019) in a research article regarding the current local structure in Sindh narrated that local municipalities should be empowered fully to deliver required services. Within the province, both inter and intra district(s) coordination is essential to pool resources from abundance to spend in the areas having dearth of resources. This also further requires decentralization in letter and spirit of what is endowed under The Sindh Local Government Act, 2013.

The improvement of local municipal services is directly related to citizens satisfaction. The more the people satisfied the better are considered municipal services (RIDIC et al., 2021). There is a need to undergo an immediate structural change, in addition to other changes. These structural changes mean inclusive executives among municipalities to run day to day operations. Political parties which are not governing should also be part of executive management in local municipalities. This inclusive is essential to bring more transparency, enhanced accountability, and improved service delivery (Visser, 2018).

The research paper summarizes the pragmatic suggestions based on the practical opinions of end users of municipal services and to devise plans to implement these suggestions to improve the deteriorated municipal services. These suggestions are intended to simultaneously upscale municipal operations and to improve overall quality of services.

Literature Review

Javeed, (2020) unavailability of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities affects every walk of citizens in each society. The study conducted with an aim to find out how these missing services affect school going children and educational status reveal that those schools having no to low water supply and sanitation facilities are facing considerable decline in both existing students and new enrollment.

Memon et al., (2016) contamination in surface water affects the overall quality of water supply schemes. The study conducted to test surface water of Indus River found that its contamination affects overall water supply. The unavailability of proper water filtration plants aggravates this situation further. The government in general and local government in particular are required to take measures to ensure safe water.

Hasting et al., (2017) found in a research study that lower spending on municipal services and adoption of budget cuts have negative impact on service delivery. Such these cuts on municipal expenditures affect the disadvantaged and poor users who already are underprivileged to receive municipal services. This research paper has used mixed method case studies and found that austerity in urban areas impact municipal services for those who already are marginalized.

The performance information of municipal services is important. However, there is no evidence that only this availability of information improves performance. It

requires usage of this information. Even then this performance information alone cannot be considered as an influencing factor to improve municipal service delivery (Markoski, 2019).

Karachi, being the biggest city in the country, faces solid waste management crisis despite being a major economic hub. However, the city witnesses an abundant quantity of solid waste on roads and streets. Such massive and attended refuse in the urbanized city affects the health of its inhabitants and overall city well-being. However, this municipal solid waste has potential to economic generation if it used as energy source after conversion through recycling (Mukherji, 2018).

Malik et al., (2006) has found that the introduced decentralization in local governments system in Pakistan after 2001 has a positive relationship with municipal service delivery. This decentralization has empowered local municipalities to generate their own resources which impacts both on immediate municipal service delivery and on long term economic growth.

Material and Methods

The diversified geographical locations and huge population number is a challenge in selecting appropriate research methodology for reliable results. To address such large and multi gradient surveys the studies use stratified multi-stage random sampling method (Aubry, 2023 and BMJ, 2015).

Hence, this research methodology involved multistage stratified random sampling. At first stage the sampling between different geographical locations of municipalities was done including selection of divisions and districts. Two separate administrative divisions, namely Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas, were selected for this study purpose. At the second stage different municipal entities varying in both scale and structure were selected including two municipal corporations, one municipal committee and one town committee. Sixty percent of respondents were selected from both municipal corporations including Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas. Whereas forty percent of respondents were selected from Qasimabad Municipal Committee and Digri Town Committee.

The participant's selection was also done through stratified random sampling method. To validate this primary data survey designed were designed and used. The data from Key Informant Interviews was collected from each selected municipality. Likewise, Focus Groups Discussions were also conducted in respective municipalities. The key informants were traders, notables of the areas, technical experts, people from local associations and technical experts. While focus groups discussions invited varied mixed groups of participants from all walks of life to give a neutral view of municipal services and suggestions on their improvement.

The approach of constructionist epistemology was adopted to know the status of what is and what would be in the opinion of respondents (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The data is analyzed using the procedures and steps necessary for thematic analysis. This qualitative thematic analysis is very useful for qualitative data to identify the data, to organize in, applying data coding, segregate in relevant theme. (Byrne, 2021; Braun and Clarke, 2008).

The analysis is done through statistical tools including percentage and frequencies of responses and usage of descriptive statistics techniques. The qualitative

data was organized in groups and appropriate coding was assigned to produce reliable results. The qualitative data is analyzed by organizing it in relevant themes, applying statistical techniques, interpreting the results and presenting them in form of report (Ezzy, 2013; Trullols, 2004).

The open-ended questions regarding all compulsory municipal services, mandated under The Sindh Local Government Act 2013, were asked and respondents were given ample opportunity to express their experiences and suggestions for improvement. All the recorded answers were grouped based on their frequency of responses and descriptive statistics techniques were applied through SPSS to analyses and interpret the results. Key findings of the data collected through primary data collection were cross verified through survey guide findings including qualitative data from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The major data outliers are addressed and rectified and key results are presented in below section of results and discussions.

Sampling Techniques

For selection of municipalities the multi-stage stratified random sampling technique was used. Four municipalities were selected for this data collection. However, 400 respondents were interviewed, including 200 household owners and 200 shopkeepers, for this primary data collection. All the responding citizens are direct users / beneficiaries of municipal services. In the second stage the data was also collected through survey guides including 10 KIIs and 4 FGDs to double check and cross verify primary data. The average number of participants in FGDs varies in between the range of 10-12 participants per FGD.

The participants of surveyed guides were also selected randomly with following basic minimum criteria for participation including relevance of participants and diversity in both experience and expertise with relation to municipal services. The sampling size of primary data slightly varies, keeping in view the size of municipality and its area coverage. The municipal corporations are having more responding participants for this survey compared to municipality and town committee.

The questionnaire for data collection included open-ended questions by providing an ample opportunity to each respondent to share his experience and to suggest pragmatic measures to improve deteriorated municipal services.

Table 1
Sampling Size of Survey Participants

Name of Municipality	HHs	Shops	KIIs	FGDs
Hyderabad Municipal Corporation	60	60	10	1
Mirpurkhas Municipal Corporation	60	60	10	1
Qasimabad Municipal Committee	40	40	10	1
Digri Town Committee	40	40	10	1
Total	200	200	40	4

Results and Discussions

Thematic analysis is very useful for qualitative analysis. The common themes are identified, examined, coded, and interpreted to present reliable results. This approach is very useful for the qualitative data collected through interviews (Caulfield, 2023). Thus, the qualitative data collected through interviews from 400 different respondents was

analyzed using thematic analysis approach. The results are presented below in respective sections of municipal services.

Water Supply Services

The suggestions regarding improving water supply services are categorized into six major categories. The first and foremost suggestion is to provide new water supply connections. It was indicated that the existing water supply lines are damaged and incapable of meeting water supply needs. These old water supply lanes also contribute negatively to water contamination. The second major suggestion is about maintenance of the existing supply system. Since there are areas where existing water supply system is leaking, causing seepage problem during water provision. Then comes the need to improve supply frequency. A considerable majority of respondents asserted that water supply timing and frequency are not sufficient to meet water needs. They shared that water provided in their areas in very limited quantity with sporadic water supply frequency. It was also suggested to provide safe and clean drinking water. As the available water (both ground and surface water) supplied through water supply schemes to citizens is badly contaminated carrying various biological and chemical contamination (Daud et., 2017 and Kumar et al., 2023). The respondents also suggested curbing the corruption in collection of water bills and material procurement. This will enhance water supply service.

Sanitation Services

The first major suggestion to improve sanitation services is to provide a new sewerage system as the responding citizens believe that existing drainage network is not capable to cater sewerage needs. It is for this reason that there are frequent complaints about chock drains and inundation of streets with sewerage water. (Ahmed and Ali, 2022; Khulud et al., 2022). Followed by the suggestion of new sewerage system provision, the responding citizens suggested maintaining and improving the existing drainage network. In most areas the drains and sewerage pipes are damaged, which are required to be maintained. This group of respondents also suggested ensuring timely desilting of existing drainage pipes and open nalas. The other groups of respondents suggested that local municipalities are required to increase sanitation staff and to provide sanitation material for smooth service delivery.

Refuse Collection Services

The suggestions regarding improving refuse collection services are categorized into six major groups. The first group of respondents highlighted the need of regular cleaning of streets and local areas. The second one stressed that the waste bins are mandatory to throw in litter and other waste articles. Both these groups intimated that inefficient solid waste management creates various health and environmental problems in major towns and cities of Sindh province (Soho et al., 2022).

The third group of responding citizens suggested the need to increase cleaning staff. The fourth, fifth and sixth groups suggested repairing damage streets, to improve maintenance of cleaning system and to provide cleaning material respectively.

Streets Safety and Street Lighting Services

The results suggest that to improve street lighting and safety measures the respondents of this survey have suggested installing additional streetlights. The second

major suggestion is to install new streetlights. Both these suggesting groups assume that either the existing streetlights are not sufficient to meet lighting requirements, or their streets don't have streetlights at all. The other suggestions are to increase staff to look after their lights and to ensure continuous maintenance of streetlights.

Table 2
Suggestions Regarding Key Municipal Services Improvement

Water Supply Services		Sanitation including Sewerage Services		Refuse Collection Services		Streets Safety and Street Lights Services	
Suggestions	%	Suggestions	%	Suggestions	%	Suggestions	%
New Connections	47	New sewerage system	39	Regular cleaning of streets & areas	45	Need Additional Lights	45
Maintenance of existing system	37	Maintenance of existing system	27	Putting Litters into bins	28	Provide New Lights	27
Improve Supply Frequency	10	Increase sanitation staff	18	Need to increase staff	14	Need Extra Staff	12
Provide clean drinking water	4	Need Sanitation Material	10	Repair of damaged streets	8	Maintenance of Existing Lights	9
Curbing corrupt practices	2	Desilting of Drains	6	Provide cleaning material	5	Depute Safety Teams	7

Suggestions to Revamp Market Committee

The role of market committees is important in towns and cities. These committees regulate overall price mechanisms and the competitive environment in the local markets (Rana, 2018). These committees play a significant role in managing trade union issues and facilitate traders in executing day to day entrepreneurship. On the question of what should be done to improve the market committees to make them more effective and functional, it was suggested by 40% of the respondents that dormant market committees are required to be activated. As the respondents assume that present market committees are inactive to play their legitimate role in bringing about overall price stability in the local market. 26% of respondents suggested that the market committees are required to be formed democratically and on pure merit basis as they assume that existing market committees are not formed transparently, and on meritocracy. Whereas 14% respondents believe that such these market committees are required to play their effective role in managing price control mechanisms within respective markets. These respondents believe that the basic function of market committees is to regulate and ensure price control mechanisms to discourage monopoly and price hike. However, in response to this question of how market committees may be improved, 10% of responding citizens also suggested that the members of the market committees to be trained and capacitated to perform their mandated tasks. This group of respondents think that the members of prevailing market committees are not capacitated and trained to perform their role. Finally, 11% of respondents expressed their ignorance in responding to this question of improving the market committees. They explicitly admitted that they don't know what local municipalities need to do to revamp prevailing market committees.

Table 3
Suggestions to Revamp Market Committee

#	Proposed Suggestion	No	%
1	Dormant committees to be active	160	40%
2	Committees to be formed transparently	102	26%
3	Committees to play Price Control Role	55	14%
4	Committees to be trained	38	10%
5	Don't Know	45	11%

Suggestions to Improve Overall Service Delivery

After garnering suggestions regarding individual municipal services, this qualitative research also analyzed the overall suggestions to improve municipal services. The responding citizens shared five pragmatic suggestions upon asking the question that how overall municipal service delivery may be improved. The first group of 41% respondents suggested improving the quality of municipal services, the second group of 22% respondents intimated to improve overall monitoring system. After then, 16% respondents suggested that local municipalities are required to ensure that assigned tasks are performed timely. Finally, the last two groups comprised of 12% and 10% respondents suggested increasing taxes through revenue and increasing municipal staff, respectively.

Reasons for Poor Revenue Generations

One of the major challenges which local municipalities face is funds shortage. Data suggested that local councils rely badly on provincial grants as their own revenue generation is not sufficient to meet financial needs. This qualitative research attempted to explore the reasons why local municipalities are unable to collect and/or generate their own revenue. 34% of respondents intimated that due to poor service delivery local municipalities are unable to generate their revenue. It is believed that both the quality of municipal services and satisfaction of citizens are major contributing factors to municipal revenue generation (Hirani et al., 2024). 16% blamed the political interference as a major reason for poor revenue generation in local municipalities. Whereas 21% accused the rising inflation which cripples people's purchasing power. Besides, 17% believe that tax evasion and defaults by municipal users to pay local taxes and council bills and 12% think that present revenue collection staff is not sufficient to collect local taxes and bills.

Table 4
Reasons for Poor Revenue Generation

#	Proposed Suggestion	No	%
1	Due to Poor Services	135	34%
2	Political Interferences	65	16%
3	Due to Inflation	85	21%
4	Tax Avoidance by users	66	17%
5	Staff shortage of revenue collection	49	12%

Measures to Additional Revenue Generation

Upon inquiring the reasons for poor revenue generations, the respondents were asked to suggest what measures local municipalities are required to take to generate additional revenue. The major suggestion by 38% of the respondents was to collect property taxes. The second group comprised of 26% respondents suggested collecting local commercial taxes including trade fees. While the third group consisting of 18% of responding citizens suggested that local municipalities are required to improve overall services. The fourth one endorsed by 11% of respondents suggested the need for structural change in the prevailing local government system. The last group comprised of 7% respondents suggested improving transparency and accountability in local municipalities of Sindh.

The findings concluded from respondents' feedback indicate that there is a significant gap between actual staff required to render mandated services and staff available on ground. This gap is due to two major reasons. Firstly, the vacancies created

by retired staff are not filled in a timely manner with new recruits. Secondly, staff numbers are not increased with the induction of additional staff despite increased population and enhanced operational size of local municipalities.

More importantly, the gist of overall feedback proposed to make structural changes in the local government system. The respondents intimated that political interference in some way or other coerces the local management of municipalities to favor some citizens with municipal services at the cost of overlooking others. Ironically, this political shelter is wrongly used by tax evaders and defaulters. Thus, the responding citizens suggested making necessary changes in overall structure and governance of local municipalities to eliminate political interference.

Conclusion

The results and discussion presented in the above section conclude that local municipalities are responsible to provide basic municipal services including safe drinking water, sanitation services, solid waste management, refuse collection, market management and other crucial services. The available literature however indicates that these municipal services in Sindh are being deteriorated. There are multifaceted reasons for degradation of each municipal service. To explore the concrete remedial measures against each municipal service, the users of these municipal services were categorically asked to share suggestions based on their experience of municipal services and accordingly to be of their best of knowledge. Key findings of this primary data in consolation with survey guides including KIIs and FGDs conclude that local municipalities at the first stage are required to provide good quality of basic services which are mandated under local laws. As effective service delivery motivates the benefiting citizens to pay back bills and local taxes. In addition to that, local municipalities are required to explore local revenue generation options including revenue from property taxes and timely recovery of all applicable local taxes and fees. In this connection it is suggested to take stringent measures to ensure recovery from all evaders and defaulters.

The suggestions narrated for key municipal services are required to be implemented in later and spirit to improve the overall status of deteriorated municipal services. Besides, it is suggested that local municipalities should increase their staff and pay timely salaries and remuneration to municipal staff to address the issues of staff shortage and delayed services.

Finally, it is suggested to improve accountability and to curb the menace of corruption which is pervasive in most of the municipal operations. This further also demands structural reforms in municipalities to make local councils more empowering and efficient to deliver mandated municipal services.

Recommendation

This research study recommends to implement the proposed suggestions suggested under each key municipal service. This will bring immediate relief to common citizens and ensure improvements in deteriorated municipal services. However, for long term and sustainable remedial measures it is recommended to make proposed structural changes in the current formation of municipalities to make them more empowered and self-reliant.

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