



# **PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF CITIZENS IN EDUCATION SERVICE PROVISION AND UN SDG-4 IN PAKISTAN, AN ANALYSIS ON EVIDENCE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION SERVICE DELIVERY**

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## **Abstract**

*Current study investigated the role of citizen-led collaborative governance in Gujrat, Pakistan. The study used qualitative methodology and analyzed semi structured interviews collected from local education authorities. The findings highlighted the significant gaps in formal governance, such as scarcity of infrastructure, lack of trained staff, and unequal access to education in rural areas. In spite of challenges, the interviews discovered a strong commitment from local actors to support local education through collaborative efforts such as adoption of schools by philanthropists, infrastructure developments and resources by NGOs and local businesses. These citizen-driven initiatives highlighted the limited ability of the government in providing equal access to education and addressing inequalities. The study concludes with recommendations for strengthening civic engagement by fostering PPPP, improving accountability in allocation of resources, and ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all. This two-way governance approach is essential for advancing progress toward SDG-4 for quality education and other relevant SDGs that can contribute to sustainable development in Pakistan.*

*Keywords: Local level community engagement, local governance, public management, Philanthropists, United Nations SDG-4, Pakistan*

## INTRODUCTION

International civil organizations such as UNESCO (2021, 2022, 2023), the United Nations (2020, 2022), the World Economic Forum (2021, 2022, 2023), the European Union Commission (2021, 2022, 2023), and other organizations increasingly stresses on the critical role of public involvement in local education governance. This current change reveals a growing recognition that engaging with local communities from evaluation to decision-making to implementation processes of local educational systems is crucial for creating inclusive, justifiable, and practical educational environments. Conventional knowledge and approaches to economic expansion and development seem to be outdated in the modern era of information flow, cooperation, and dependence, where citizens are more aware of their needs than ever before.

Whereas command-driven approaches fail to consider concerns, the economic development and welfare needs of people (UN, 2024) emphasize that citizens are beneficiaries as well as affected groups of policies or developments and suggest that governments should modernize welfare systems to better respond to crises and broader needs such as education and health, which empower citizens to make them active participants in policy development rather than receiving aid.

Therefore, the author argues that neglecting citizens' value as change agents can present major challenges for the impact of local governance on local economic development. The development policies and service delivery of local governments fail due to nonalignment (Asim et al, 2022) with citizens' education and economic and welfare needs, as such approaches exclude local citizens from the evaluation of the implementation of local policies or practices, resulting in local citizens' lack of support and trust in local government institutions and their vision and leading to adverse effects. Advocates (Casey, 2018; Cilliers et al, 2018) of citizen participation believe that the success of citizen engagement is uncertain, as citizens may lack key information about rights, public service goals, and challenges and can face resource constraints or local elite control.

To address and answer this gap (European Commission, 2023; OECD, 2021), which advocated community participation in shaping educational and development policies and stressed the need to reskill efforts for its citizens, in this context, Pakistan is no longer an exception entrapped in complex governing challenges and requires changes in its governance approach to meet its citizens' increasing welfare needs. Therefore, this study aims to explore and contribute empirically to the understanding of how community-led citizen engagement in Pakistan influences local education governance, in alignment with the United Nations SDG 2030 Goal 4.

Allowing citizens to participate brings many benefits, from legitimizing decisions to policy making as well as to the governance framework of addressing community needs in a timely manner. Local engagement can help customize public services to meet community needs, enhance resource allocation, and improve service management and good governance. However, there is a lack of evidence on comprehensive participatory methodologies that promote participation in Pakistan's local governance system; thus, it is imperative for scholars and academics to develop practices and policies that stimulate citizens to actively participate in promoting citizens' engagement in their welfare needs and development. Scholars have suggested that academia and research institutions play crucial roles in highlighting and shaping public policies and research (Garzon et al, 2005; Garcia Ramirez, 2012), suggesting that one approach to creating strategies suited to various contexts involves incorporating consultation and citizen participation processes, with a focus on the specific realities of their communities (Atutxa et al, 2020). Therefore, in this context, our paper contributes to the literature on local governance by studying and analysing current strategies and highlighting the importance of participation in improving public service delivery in Pakistan.

### **Problem Statement**

There is scarcity of research on the role of citizen-led civic initiatives in local education governance in Pakistan. Thus, stressed in (2019) report by UK-AID hence, this qualitative inquiry investigates bureaucratic perception of participatory development in Pakistan.

### **Research Objective**

Study aims to analyse community- led civic engagement and explore how community led participatory developments are perceived by local administration in Pakistan.

## **LITERATURE**

### **Governance and Citizen Participation in Local Education Service Delivery**

Civic engagement has been a focus of research, and scholars are extensively analysing citizen participation processes that impact governance outcomes, as a wide consensus is reached in the literature on citizens' engagement (Correia et al, 2023; Brazeau-Beliveau et al, 2021; Trencher, 2019; Sadoway et al, 2018) in public affairs matters. Citizen participation offers several benefits: it helps policymakers address real community needs while also legitimizing decisions by ensuring that those affected have a voice in the governing processes. The concept of public engagement is generally viewed as involving policy making with the aim of influencing decisions (Arnstein, 1969). Despite some structural developments and participatory frameworks,

public officials and policy makers often struggle to encourage public participation. Therefore, it is argued that citizen engagement is crucial for successful transitions from the change of powers to the empowerment of local communities, thus providing multi-fold solutions to complex governance structures, helping address local conflicts, and creating a sense of responsibility in relation to this, there is little information about citizens' engagement tools, strategies, and mechanisms for public service delivery in Pakistan's local education governance structure, which enhances the participation of citizens and promotes local community trust in government institutions, as scholars emphasize the need to develop practices that create awareness and remind local citizens about their citizenship roles (Carreira et al, 2016).

Researchers (Han et al, 2024; Przeybilovicz et al, 2022; Schmitter, 2015) have reported that citizens' disengagement from public affairs is harmful to civic society, as governments often face crisis representations. In recent years, researchers and scholars have extensively explored various mechanisms of citizen participation in local governance, highlighting the potential to enhance transparency, accountability, and community empowerment. The key mechanisms are participatory budgeting, public consultation, and digital platforms. Cabannes (2015) contended that participatory budgeting nurtures democratic and transparent governance by shifting decision-making power to citizens. Enhanced local civic engagement can serve as a critical catalyst for empowering the local marginalized communities. By facilitating participation in local decision-making processes ensures public resources are allocated in a manner that effectively addresses their specific needs. Therefore, leads to improvements in local infrastructure development and provision of public services that are tailored to their unique circumstances. Hence, strengthens communities trust in government institutions, and promote a more equitable and inclusive society.

Wampler et al. (2018) emphasized that participatory budgeting enable citizens to take an active interest in improving the relation among communities and their leaders, leading to better public services governance outcomes and lowers the level of corruption (Gilman, 2016; Avritzer, 2017).

Proponent of civic engagement (Baiocchi et al, 2015) claimed that community consultation plays a critical role in improving transparency, fostering deliberation, and ensure that local government remains accountable to its constituents. However, their research also highlights the limitations of these mechanisms often attract more privileged and politically active citizens which can result in unequal representation neglecting the voices of marginalised communities. Likewise, Fung (2015) stressed on the need for inclusive consultation and strategies that enable involvement of marginalized communities predominantly in lower-income

regions with this inclusive approach more democratic decision-making can be ensured effectively.

Conversely traditional modes of public engagement have long been discussed in academia however, introduction of digital tools and platforms has added a new dimension to participation in local governance. Modern digital tools have changed the civic participation modes of interaction hence, provide new ways for citizen to interact with their local government. According to (Peixoto and Fox, 2016) information and communication technologies (ICTs) extends opportunities for community participation and enable citizens to engage using tools like open-data portals and mobile applications. These platforms enable public to report problems, propose solutions, observe government actions, and improve responsiveness and transparency.

Medaglia et al. (2022) highlights the success of digital engagement, particularly (AI) artificial intelligence reduce cost, enhance effectiveness, and improve public service provision, moreover empower citizens to monitor progress of public projects and reduce barriers relating to distance and time consumption. Peixoto and Fox (2016) point out the risk of excluding individuals with no internet access i.e. elderly or low-income groups. To address this, some cities have implemented hybrid models integrating traditional in- person meetings with digital tools, ensuring broader inclusion in civic participation.

On the contrary, community-led initiatives have emerged as a powerful mechanism for boosting civic engagement, often referred to as new public governance (Igalla et al, 2020). These initiatives involve citizens working on specific issues i.e. urban planning, education reforms and environment related policies. Escobar and Elstub (2017) defined this approach as deliberative democracy, where participating members make informed decisions after expert-led discussions. Community initiatives demonstrate active citizenship by promoting collective efforts among government agencies and civic organization/s to address complex societal issues. These frameworks, as described by Vinokur-Kaplan (2017), comprise a diverse range of stakeholders, including non-profit civic organizations, private businesses and organisations, and community members, with a focus on achieving efficiency and quality in their endeavours.

In this paper, the researcher argues that in Pakistan's politically conflicting environment, community initiatives address gaps left by inefficient and under resourced government institutions. They mobilize local resources and foster collaboration among non-profits, businesses, and individuals to address service delivery issues such as healthcare, education, and disaster relief, thereby promoting grassroots empowerment and sustainable development amidst political instability. Hence, there is a gap in the literature in that no research has examined 'citizen participation' as a strategic tool to address communal needs in Pakistan's fragile context, as per (Ahrne et al, 2019) community participation in the form of networks,

institutions enhance service quality and financial efficiency by providing essential public services. Thus, this study addresses this gap by exploring citizen participation as a strategy. In doing so, this study contributes to the literature by examining how community participation through networks and institutions can enhance the quality and financial efficacy of public services at the local government level.

Schoeneborn et al. (2019) discussed new forms of community structure, such as social movements, networks and coalitions that should be included in traditional governing frameworks. Alliances with NGOs and community organisations often become primary and alternative choices for local governments because of limited resources or because of state governance failure. Some scholars have strongly emphasized that NGOs and civil society organisations emerge as consequences of the state's fragile governance (OECD, 2011). Therefore, civic engagement is found in many forms, i.e., regional or local initiatives, citizen/community participation, citizen-led projects at the grassroots level, community-driven actions, community-wide programmes and strategies driven and controlled by local citizens for their local needs (UNDP, 2016a; Verkoren et al, 2014; Lewis, 2010). Hence, in this study, civic engagement is not limited to any specific form of collaboration among government or nongovernment functionaries. Labonne et al. (2009) reported that local leaders' authority often dictates resource allocation, ignoring citizens' preferences and urgent needs. Community-level engagement strategies provide solutions to urgent social needs, and this method is viewed as more organized, transparent, and goal-oriented locally (Torjman et al, 2004). Conversely, evidence shows that capacity building is crucial for empowerment and sustainable development (Wahid et al., 2017).

## **LOCAL EDUCATION GOVERNANCE AND APPROACHES TO COLLABORATIVE PARTICIPATION**

Community participation enhances accountability and improves the quality of education and service delivery, which are responsible for overseeing educational activities, school management, and school finances; thus, community engagement helps improve learning outcomes (Pritchett, 2015; Fox, 2015; Mansoor et al, 2004) and is growing with the passage of time in education (Mansuri et al, 2013).

Scholars have found and reported various approaches to involve communities in public education services through school management committees, decentralized initiatives, and local campaigns (Sawada et al, 2022; Westhorp et al, 2014); similarly, (Bruns et al, 2011; Banarjee et al, 2010; 2007) their empirical research shows varied outcomes of these approaches in which community collaborative participation strengthens school activities (Fox, 2015; Banarjee et al,

2010; Kremer et al, 2009), with other findings on elite capture and a lack of resources (Mansuri et al, 2013; Platteau et al, 2003). In contrast, researchers (Celik et al, 2024, Sianturi, 2023; 2022; Islam, 2019) have identified parent–teacher involvement as one of the critical success factors in enhancing community participation in local education governance programs.

Local bureaucratic administrative processes strongly emphasize needs; capacity building; and the provision of facilities, educational activities, and management but rarely highlight learning outcomes. Previous studies have analysed devolution programs and interventions. However, this study contributes to the literature on civic engagement/participation and builds on local strategic planning for the local governance of local community bodies in Gujrat, Pakistan.

Table 1: Existing Work

| # | Author                 | Findings  | Conclusion   |
|---|------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Banerjee et al, (2009) | Information campaigns to boost school management participation had mixed results on school performance.   | Limited improvements in teacher attendance, minor increase in community participation with limited impact on student learning.                 |
| 2 | Banerjee et al, (2010) | Low participation rates in community meetings and engagement with the schools. Institutional failures, lack of incentives, and limited knowledge were barriers    | No significant improvement in student learning outcomes or school quality, suggesting that simply increasing participation is not enough       |
| 3 | Pradhan et al. (2014)  | Community involvement improved teacher behavior and school inputs, but learning gains were small and inconsistent. Context-specific factors heavily influenced.   | Some improvement in teacher attendance and classroom practices, but the impact on student test scores was minimal and not sustained over time. |
| 4 | Fox (2015)             | Success depends on context, such as political and social environments. Mixed evidence on the direct effectiveness of social accountability programs in education. | Effective when combined with broader institutional reforms and better government accountability, but weak when implemented in isolation.       |

|   |                             |  |   |
|---|-----------------------------|--|---|
| 5 | Chirambo and Riddell (2016) | Positive correlation between active community involvement in school management and improved student achievement, especially when led by strong local leadership. | Community- driven school management improved student attendance and achievement, but results were dependent on the quality of local leadership and resources. |
| 6 | Rao and Mohanan (2022)      | Schools with democratic management showed increased social capital and cooperation among stakeholders, but impacts on educational outcomes were limited          | Social capital and participation improved, but there were minimal changes in student performance without additional institutional and resource support        |
| 7 | York and Loeb (2018)        | Behavioural interventions increased parent engagement, particularly when parents were provided with reminders and simple nudges to increase their participation. | Improved parental involvement in school readiness programs led to better cognitive and behavioural development outcomes for children.                         |

## CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: PAKISTAN-PUNJAB-GUJRAT

In recent years, the world has seen the governance structure of the public sector evolve from sole creation to cocreation, referring to a collaborative approach in which multiple stakeholders, including users and partner organizations, actively engage in enhancing services, making policies, and creating solutions. Thus, Pakistan was no exception to this swaying wave of structural change in governance. The country is the world's 5th most populous republic and provides complex and multifaceted cases for examining education service delivery at the local level. It has a combination of public and private sector institutions, regional disparities and various socioeconomic challenges. With over 225 million people, approximately 35% are under the age of 15.

The Pakistan education system has faced dramatic transitions in the most recent past from reforms to terrorism and is considered the victim most affected by a decline in educational development. In response to evolving needs the Punjab provincial government announced education reforms aiming to increase access to quality education and equity to its school education system through comprehensive policy initiatives curriculum development and provision of infrastructure to empower students and train educators, however, Pakistan's educational system faces numerous unanswered challenges.





Figure 1: Geographical Context

Ref: Survey of Pakistan

The following table illustrates annual education reforms in Punjab, Pakistan.

Table 2: List of Punjab Government Education Reforms; Pakistan

| Year | Reform Area                                    | Description  | Initiatives   | References                             |
|------|--|--|---|--|
| 2002 | National Education Policy                      | Improve access and quality of education  | Implementation of the National Education Policy 2002 to enhance education access and quality.   | National Education Policy, 2002.       |
| 2013 | Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP) | Improve infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum development, and student enrolment. | Focus on enhancing the quality of education and increasing enrolment rates, particularly among marginalized communities.                | Punjab Education Sector Reform Program |
| 2014 | Punjab School Reform Roadmap                   | Increase student attendance and reduce dropout rates.                                    | Improvement in learning outcomes through teacher training programs, curriculum reforms, and provision of missing facilities in schools. | Punjab School Reforms Roadmap          |

|             |   |   |   |   |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|
| <b>2016</b> | Punjab Education Sector Plan (2013-2017)              | Enhance governance, teacher training, curriculum development, and assessment systems. | Aimed at making education more inclusive and responsive, including for learners with disabilities.  | Punjab Education Sector Plan                  |
| <b>2018</b> | Punjab Education Policy                               | Integrate technology, promote critical thinking, and expand vocational training.      | Focus on integrating technology in education, improving teacher recruitment, and expanding vocational and technical training opportunities. | Punjab Education Policy 2018                  |
| <b>2020</b> | Covid – 19 Response and Distance Learning Initiatives | Ensure continuity of education during the pandemic.                                   | Introduction of online learning platforms, distribution of educational materials, and teacher training for remote teaching.                 | Covid – 19 Education Response                 |
| <b>2020</b> | Curriculum Development                                | Updating and Standardizing curriculum   | Implementation of the National Curriculum Framework 2020.   | National Curriculum Council                   |
| <b>2021</b> | Teacher Training                                      | Professional development for teachers.  | Launch of teacher training workshops and programs.  | Punjab Education Foundation                   |
| <b>2021</b> | Digital Education                                     | Incorporation of digital tools.   | Introduction of digital classrooms and e-learning tools.  | Punjab Information Technology Board           |
| <b>2021</b> | Quality Assurance                                     | Establishment of monitoring systems.  | Development of the Punjab Education Assessment System (PEAS).   | Punjab Education Assessment System (PEAS)     |
| <b>2022</b> | Student Enrolment                                     | Increasing enrolment rates.   | Enrolment drives and campaigns to include out-of- school children.  | Education Department, Punjab; Enrolment Drive |
| <b>2022</b> | Scholarships and Financial Aid                        | Financial support for students.   | Expansion of scholarships and financial aid for underprivileged students.   | Punjab Educational Endowment Fund             |
| <b>2022</b> | Textbook Distribution                                 | Ensuring availability of textbooks.   | Distribution of free textbooks to government school students.   | Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board          |

|             |                      |   |  |   |
|-------------|----------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>2023</b> | School Management    | Improvement in school governance.           | New management systems and training for school leaders.                        | School Management Committees (SMCs)- Guidelines |
| <b>2023</b> | Community Engagement | Increased community involvement in schools. | Formation of School Management Committees (SMCs) and local community programs. | Community Participation in Education            |

Over the years Punjab Pakistan has undergone a series of education reforms setting the foundation for a comprehensive approach to improve the education sector. The NEP 2002 cemented the way for greater access to education. The (PESRP) 2013 focused on improving the infrastructure provide teacher training develop curriculum to increase enrolment particularly for marginalized communities. Moreover, the PSR Roadmap 2014 was designed to reduce dropout rates and enhance the learning outcomes through targeted reforms. These reforms have been instrumental in establishing a stronger education system in Punjab.

The Punjab Education Sector Plan (2013-2017) employed in 2016 focused on the improvement of school governance curriculum and establishing of assessment systems to create a more inclusive learning environment. Moreover, Punjab Education Policy of 2018 integrated technology into education, expanded vocational training opportunities, and aimed to improve teacher recruitment and local school infrastructure. And in 2020, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic comprised distance learning initiatives that ensured educational continuity through digital platforms and remote teaching.

Subsequently, in 2020 initiative aimed at curriculum development and modernize the educational content. In 2021, significant emphasis was given on enhancing the teacher development and upskilling thus, introduced digital education tools. The reforms in 2022 focused on increasing student enrolment, increasing scholarship opportunities, and guaranteeing the distribution of textbooks. Finally, the 2023 initiative was aimed to improve school management and fostering civic engagement through the establishment of school management committees. These reforms were designed to enhance quality, access to education, and inclusion in education service delivery in Punjab.



Figure 2: Map of Punjab–Pakistan  
Ref: Government of Punjab

**Case Study of District Gujrat**

Strategically situated on the banks of the Chenab River in Punjab, Pakistan, presents a compelling case study of regional development and cultural evolution.



Figure 3: District Gujrat  
Ref: survey of Pakistan

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research on community-led civic engagement in Pakistan’s local education health sector has been lacking. On the basis of exploratory and investigative approaches, qualitative methodology is chosen and highly suitable for investigating how various governmental and nongovernmental individuals and groups perceive citizen participatory processes in Gujrat, and

research has focused particularly on districts' managerial aspects of the service delivery of the local education sector of Gujrat, Pakistan (Creswell, 2014; Eisenhardt, 2021).

The current research uses a single case study design (Yin, 2003) because this study approach can answer how and why types of questions about a phenomenon are under investigation (Yin, 2003). This case study is viewed as the preferred method because it uses an interpretive methodology, as it helps in discovering a theory that can illuminate the core phenomena within this research to obtain in-depth details about the processes of engagement in the health sector in the urban setting of Gujrat city district.

Therefore, this qualitative study helps guide the analysis of current processes and strategies for involving local citizens in the governing of public organizations and fills the gap associated with civic engagement in Pakistan, Gujrat's local education sector.

### Data collection

The researcher used purposive sampling to interview 10 key district-level participants, including government officials and private sector representatives, to gather in-depth qualitative data. Contact was made via email and phone, and interviews were scheduled on the basis of the participants' availability. The sample size was determined by data saturation and practical constraints.

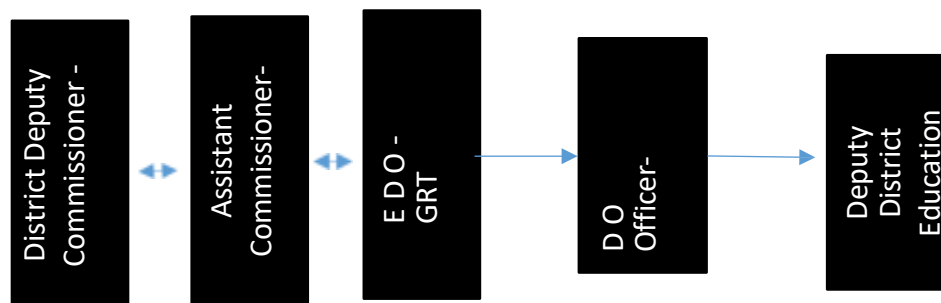


Figure 4: Hierarchy of the district Gujrat health department

Ref: Government of Punjab, 2022

### Semi-structured Interviews

The author, Sulman Naeem, conducted interviews after providing informed consent, following strict ethical guidelines (Albusaidi, 2008). Using a qualitative method, the interviews were presented conversationally to encourage natural responses. A semi structured guide was used to explore engagement processes and policy challenges. The interviews were conducted

in Urdu and translated into English, lasted approximately 50 minutes to 1 hour, were recorded with permission, and were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then shared with participants for validation to ensure accuracy.

### Thematic analysis

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic approach, with manual coding due to time and resource constraints, rather than using software. The participants' identities were anonymized, and the interviews were coded on the basis of key themes aligned with the study's objectives. Cross-case analysis compared and contrasted transcripts from 10 participants. The methodology adhered to Yin's (2003) case study research guidelines.

### FINDINGS

This section addresses the core objectives of the current study by examining the perspectives of top and middle management within the education department of the local government in Gujrat, Pakistan. The participants offered detailed insights, contributing valuable information that supports the conclusions of this research. The following themes were derived from the data.

Table 3: Themes and Sub themes

| Key themes                                | Sub themes   |
|---|--|
| 1: Citizen – led collaborative governance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Civic organizations in Partnership</li> <li>- People led initiatives</li> <li>- Local Philanthropists</li> <li>- NGO's &amp; INGO's collaboration</li> <li>- Community participation</li> </ul> |
| 2: Governance challenges                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political &amp; Non – political interference</li> <li>- Lack of resources and funds</li> </ul>  |

#### Citizen-led collaborative governance

R1: *“Local people are well aware of basic needs for their children’s education and come to us, since we are also aiming to engage and collaborate with local businesses, investors, national and international NGO’s as well as philanthropists having common interest and establish mutual working partnership and turn it into long lasting working relationship”.*

R2: *“With the help of local communities, we are working to provide necessary facilities into our local government schools in the form of furniture, books, renovating schools, the local body is proactively working to create awareness and attract local communities of interest”.*

R3: *“One of the local NGOs approached us and now works in partnership with the local department for the construction of an extra block in school, which will increase capacity and provide additional multipurpose space”.*

R4: *“A generous local alone bearing the full financial expenditure and adopting a local school in which they are responsible for all the managerial affairs of the school and provide missing facilities to the children”.*

R5: *“private organization is serving local school and providing free-of-cost food to the children in our primary school”.*

R6: *“Our local community is very vibrant and shares concerns regarding their needs; we hold Open meetings and address and resolve citizen-related matters immediately adhering to legitimate processes of the governing body”.*

R7: *“Although it’s a work of government to whom we choose by voting, but unfortunately, political structure has become fragile, and despite all this, we in the local chamber are proactive and aim to pursue all those welfare-based objectives that at least fulfil the needs of citizens, we hold monthly meetings with the local administration and offer them solutions to problems, and they also welcome this”.*

R8: *“With the help of our local community contributions, our district and city ranked 10th in Pakistan, and our results and achievements have been phenomenal, and this all happened with the help and contribution of citizens of Gujrat donations and contributions of philanthropists, donors, and local NGOs”.*

R9: *“Involving and working with local departments is essential in all the work we do, and if we want to achieve our set goals in providing access to education, then partnerships with local education departments are instrumental, and collectively, we are transforming access to education for local residents”.*

R10: *“Philanthropists and the local business community come with proposals and donations”.*

The above responses from the semi structured interviews illustrate a powerful narrative of **citizen-led collaborative education governance**, where local communities take an active role in addressing their own needs, particularly in the realm of education. This theme emerges as a recurrent motif, showing how grassroots efforts, combined with partnerships from various sectors, shape local governance and fill gaps often left by fragile political structures.

The participants’ statements outline a strategy for engaging with the local community where the key to successful collaboration lies in shared interests and the ability to deliver

tangible improvements in public services. It underscores the need for alignment with like-minded partners who can collectively solve community challenges and enhance development. The local education department plays proactive role in assessing and maintaining these partnerships to guarantee alignment with its mission to serve the local community effectively.

In many of the responses, the local community is depicted as civically responsible and capable of organising resources and partnerships to meet those needs. For example, in Response 1, local people/guardians are described as aware of their children's educational needs and are active in seeking help from local authorities. Moreover, highlights are that collaboration at local level and with international entities is not only encouraged but also pursued to create enduring relationships that can sustain the development efforts. The involvement of diverse actors and community, e.g., businesses to NGOs, validates a willingness to transcend traditional governmental roles and create a more people focused participatory form of governance at local level. Similarly, example of collaboration is echoed in Response 2, where community plays a direct role in providing crucial resources to schools. Both local body and community works collaboratively to address needs based educational challenges by providing furniture, text books, and renovation facilities. What stands out is the proactive approach of the local body, which is not waiting for any external involvement but is instead actively creating awareness and bringing local communities together to solve common problems. This dynamic collaboration among community and local governance entities demonstrates the core idea of citizen-led collaborative governance, where both parties are equally involved in the decision-making and implementation processes for service users.

Additional illustrations of collaboration is seen in Responses 3 and 4, where NGOs and individual citizens collectively contribute to educational infrastructure. Response 3 explained how a local NGO approached local government to provide help in constructing an extra school block, increasing the school's capacity. This action reflected the deep-rooted tradition and values of partnership, where residents and organizations outside the formal government structure step up to propose tangible solution/s. In a similar vein, Response 4 described an individual philanthropist providing full financial support and responsibility for a local school's expenditures managing operations and ensuring provision of missing facilities. This illustrates localized nature of governance, where individuals directly influence public services, suggesting that governance is not limited to formal institutions but is progressively shaped by the citizens' initiatives themselves.

Response 5 adds another layer to this narrative by showcasing how local private organizations stepped in to meet essential needs, such as provision of free meals to school-children. This form of participation by private organisation reflects a growing trend where private sector is not only profit driven but also deeply embedded in social fabric of the community,



contributing to welfare of local citizens. And this partnership between private sector and the community promotes the flexible and evolving nature of school governance in the district Gujrat, which increasingly includes non-governmental actors playing essential roles in addressing social issues.

The **vibrancy of local public** is evident in Response 6, where “Open-Hearings” serve as a mechanism for residents to voice their concerns and address them immediately. This practice establishes a direct form of local participatory school governance where citizens actively stimulate decision-making processes based on communal needs. By organising ‘Open – Hearings’ the local governing body established a direct communication line with the local community ensuring school governance is responsive to people's needs thus not cubically confined. This technique reinforce legitimacy of local school governance and makes even more transparent and focused.

According to Respondent 7 despite functioning under fragile political structure the local chamber of commerce continues to participate with the government body to fulfil the needs of citizens. The chamber holds scheduled meetings with local education administration that aim to provide solutions. This response illustrate how even in the face of political upheaval local governance can flourish to function effectively through the collaborative and participatory efforts of local businesses, citizens and local administration highlights the resilience of citizen-led governance structures.

Respondent 8 highlighted the success of collaborative efforts pointing to the outstanding achievement of local community due to which it has arisen to 10th in ranking in whole of Pakistan due to collective contributions from diverse pool of community and individuals. This achievement serves as a testament to potential of citizen-led governance when local contributions lead to measurable and sustainable developments. The community's ability to assemble and accomplish such a high ranking demonstrates that civic participation can lead to significant large-scale accomplishments.

Lastly; respondents 9 and 10 stresses the critical role of partnerships play in transforming access to education. Respondents discuss how collaboration with local education department is vital for achieving sustainable goal in education. Furthermore, it suggests that local governance is deeply intertwined with collaborative efforts of creating networks of support from various segments. The partnerships with the local education department are portrayed as influential in ensuring that local service users and residents have access to quality education.

In interpreting the data, it is clear that **citizen-led collaborative education governance** is a dynamic and participatory model that is deeply entrenched in the local situation. The public takes ownership of its needs, enthusiastically cooperates with a wide range of partners, and

plays a direct role in shaping governance processes. The importance is on **communal responsibilities**, where local bodies, citizens, businesses, NGOs, and philanthropists collaboratively work to provide essential services, particularly in local education system. This communal effort, despite political challenges, showcase the potential for community-driven governance to achieve sustainable and impactful outcomes.

### **Governance challenges**

R1: *“Despite collaborative efforts, public schools lack basic infrastructure, such as classrooms, clean drinking water, and sanitation facilities and directly affect student’s health and learning outcomes”.*

R2: *“One of the main challenges in Gujrat is lack of trained and motivated teachers and need improve in teacher’s professional development”.*

R3: *“Due to a lack of facilities, our students fail to meet the requirements of modern education and international competitiveness”.*

R4: *“While progress has been made to some extent, children in rural parts of Gujrat still face difficulties in accessing education due to lack of funds, predominantly at the secondary level, Cultural and economic barriers often prevent their enrolment”.*

R5: *“Because of increasing divide between private and public schools in Gujrat, where private establishments offer better quality infrastructure and education but remain unaffordable for many families”.*

R6: *“High dropout rates, particularly in middle and high schools, are a persistent problem in Gujrat’s rural areas due to economic pressures often force children to leave school and support their families”.*

R7: *“Disable and Special needs children in Gujrat face exclusion from mainstream education due to lack of specialized schools, teachers and facilities”.*

R8: *“In Gujrat many parents do not want their children’s to go to school due to some safety reasons”.*

R9: *“In modern technology-driven world, digital literacy is essential, yet many schools in Gujrat lack access to digital tools and internet infrastructure”.*

R10: *“The provincial department has implemented several education reforms for local government but promises and accountability remains an issue as mismanagement of funds and lack of monitoring have hinders our progress”.*

The qualitative interviews discovered several governance challenges that hinder the effective functioning of the local educational system in Gujrat. A common thread running through these answers is lack of school and education based infrastructure, which has

appeared as a major issue in public schools. The respondents pointed to absence of basic facilities such as classrooms, clean drinking water, and proper sanitation facilities. This infrastructure gap has direct and serious consequences on students' health and learning outcomes, reflecting to a core failure in delivery of essential services that are foundational to an effective education system.

Another repeated theme is lack of trained and motivated staff, as mentioned in the response highlighted a gap in professional development for school staff and teachers, which impacts the quality of education. As without adequate training, local school teachers are not capable to effectively deliver modern and globally competitive education, which worsens the struggles that students face in acquiring the skills needed for future workforce and this lack of investment in human capital coupled with lack of motivation for teachers add further damage to systemic failures in region's education sector.

Issue of access to schools and education is also highlighted, particularly in rural areas. Indicating that children in these regions face major barriers related to economic and cultural factors preventing them from accessing secondary education. Despite some improvement lack of institutional funding and cultural expectations severely limit educational opportunities further hinder enrolment particularly for residents of rural areas hence, highlights intersection of governance failure and sociocultural dynamics that collectively shape educational access. Growing inequality between private and public schools in Gujrat adds more to the educational and governance issues as private schools offer better-quality education but remain high-priced for a large portion of the population. This widens the division in education between wealthy and poor creating two-tiered system where students from public schools are less prepared to compete professionally as well as academically.

The increase in dropout rate in middle and high schools is also another challenge to school governance. Economic pressures is noted in interviews compelling children to leave school early and provide support their families. This reveals a weaker policies to retain children in school in financially challenging conditions and without addressing the root causes of poverty and creating stronger support systems drop-out rates will remain high.

The exclusion of special needs children from mainstream education is another serious issue due to a lack of specialized teachers and facilities. The absence of inclusivity in the educational system is a form of local governance reforms and failure as it denies a significant portion of population access to educational resources they require. This exclusion perpetuates social inequity and hinders development of an inclusive society.

Parental participation is found to be another concern particularly in rural areas further complicates the local education landscape. Many parents in rural Gujrat are uninformed of the

importance of education thus, limits engagement in children's academic development. Stemming from both educational and socioeconomic factors lack of awareness and need for comprehensive governance structure are required to involve communities more actively in supporting education at the local level.

Digital illiteracy is another pressing challenge the inability to provide access to digital platforms public educational institutes in Gujrat is a setback. Digital literacy has become a critical component of contemporary education and failure to integrate technology into the learning environment widens gap between Gujrat and more technologically advanced regions resulting to leaving students at a competitive disadvantage.

At last the local government efforts to implement education reforms are acknowledged in interviews however, significant issues are found in accountability and mismanagement in the government body. Poor oversight and misallocation of funds are cited as major weakness to progress. These governance issues undermine potential effectiveness of reforms and slow the pace of development in local education sector and without stronger system for accountability and with proper monitoring cell even well-intended reforms can fail to produce positive outcomes.

In light of the data; it illustrates a multi-layered governance crisis in Gujrat's education sector, surrounding issue of infrastructural deficits, human resource development challenges, socioeconomic barriers, and institutional accountability. These challenges are interconnected and with their cumulative impact it further creates a deeply unequal and incompetent education system that struggles to meet requirements of local population. In order to move forward, governance must become more open, accountable, inclusive, and responsive to both immediate needs of local schools.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data revealed a dynamic model of citizen-led collaborative governance (Sawada et al, 2022; Westhorp et al, 2014; Bruns et al, 2011; Banarjee et al, 2010; 2007) in Gujrat, where local community is active in addressing local challenges especially in local education service provision. This approach of local civic engagement (UNDP, 2016a; Verkoren et al, 2014; Lewis, 2010) model softens traditional boundaries between government and non-government entities (Sianturi, 2023; 2022), as local peoples, businesses, philanthropists, and NGOs working together to meet urgent needs. The emphasis on community-driven solutions highlights the shared responsibility between formal governance and the people they serve. A key finding is the empowerment of local communities to take ownership of their developmental goals. The respondents consistently described the proactive

role citizens play in raising concerns, contributing resources, and forming partnerships with various sectors. Rather than relying solely on the state, the community engages directly in the governance process, initiating collaborations that enhance service delivery and infrastructure development (Pritchett, 2015; Fox, 2015; World Development Report, 2004).

Collaborations between the education department and external partners, i.e., parent-teachers (Sianturi, 2023; 2022; Celik, 2024), are crucial in this model. Local businesses, NGOs, and philanthropists provide financial resources, expertise, and solutions, such as adopting schools or building school blocks. These partnerships are described as long-lasting, showing a commitment to sustainability and community development. Additionally, local actors demonstrate flexibility in addressing gaps in public services (Fox, 2015; Banarjee et al, 2010; Kremer et al, 2009). Communities and private organizations often provide schools with essentials such as furniture, books, food, and renovated facilities. This involvement in resource allocation allows communities to meet immediate needs more efficiently than the state does, ensuring that services are provided even when government support is lacking.

The success of these citizen-driven civic engagement (UNDP, 2016a) efforts is particularly evident in local education sector. One respondent cited the district's ranking as 10th in Pakistan, attributing this achievement to collective contributions from residents, philanthropists, and NGOs. This exemplifies the potential of grassroots governance to drive considerable long-term developments when effectively coordinated, showing the transformative power of local engagement in governance.

Despite successes at local level challenges remain that needs attention. The interviews mention the fragility of political structure (Mansuri et al, 2013; Platteau et al, 2003) and highlighted a weakened formal governance system. However; local community and organization/s remain active offering practical solutions and engage with local authorities. This change toward a more robust adaptive governance model highlights that how citizen group/s and local businesses can compensate for political inefficiencies.

The interviews also highlighted significant challenges within district's education sector revealing the inadequacies of formal governance structures. Many schools lack basic infrastructure such as classrooms sanitary facilities and access to clean drinking water. Additionally absence of trained motivated staff and professional development programs hampers educational quality and leaving communities to fill these gaps.

The divide between private and public schools also worsens educational equality, with private institutions offering higher quality but are unaffordable (UK-AID, 2019). High dropout rates, particularly in economically deprived areas, reflect broader governance failures, as students are forced to leave school early to support their families. Furthermore, special needs

children face exclusion from accessing education due to a lack of specialized amenities and trained teachers demonstrates a failure to ensure inclusive education.

Regardless of challenges; citizen-led collaborative governance has arisen as a powerful model in Gujrat. Where local diverse communities' steps in where the government falls short by mobilizing resources and address gaps in services ultimately contributing to educational reform. On the contrary these efforts are praiseworthy but it also highlight limited capacity of government in fulfilling promise of quality education to its citizens.

Thus, community led governance can provide short-term relief but cannot fully replace the need for systemic reforms and investments from the state.

## **CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Tensions among citizen-led initiatives and formal governance failures is evident. However, for collaborative governance to be more sustainable and impactful, it must be better combined into public policies and should be supported by long-term government initiatives that address the root causes of educational inequalities. Moreover, it is clear that community participation plays a critical role in addressing educational challenges and meaningfully contribute to achieving UN SDG 2030 goal 4.

To maximize this potential, a comprehensive strategy should focus on establishing collaboration between local communities, businesses, NGOs, and the government at the very local level. The important steps include improving transparency and accountability in resource allocation, modern infrastructure development to smaller districts, establish and invest in teacher training and their upskilling, and ensuring equal access to education, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, should foster digital literacy and inclusive education for marginalized groups in out of reach locations as well as for special needs children should also be prioritized. By formalizing and scaling up citizen-driven efforts within a legitimate and supportive policy framework, communities can be empowered to drive sustainable progress toward achieving SDG 4 (quality education) and other appropriate goals.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1: Explore similar phenomenon in other regional context/s of Pakistan or out of Pakistan.
- 2: Assess the impact of parent-teacher involvement in local school governance in Pakistan.
- 3: Explore how parent-student participation can enhance local education service delivery.

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