

# Global Development by Public Participation: An Approach to Achieve SDGs

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## Abstract

Research on public participation in the policy process often focuses on the localization and participation activities, and pay less attention to the empowerment of civil societies and their meaningful participation; what kind of institutional setups are required and what types of reforms are needed. To address these major gaps, this research theoretically illustrates that the presence of institutional setups that help to empower civil societies not only ensure meaningful involvement of civil societies in their development but also help to develop pressure on the governments to fulfill their commitments towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goal of this study is to analyze in-depth the relationship between institutionalization of Participatory Development (PD) and SDGs. This study will help not only to understand the logic behind the emphasis on PD in the UN agenda 2030 but also to find out socio-political institutions that are required to make the relationship between PD and SDGs successful. To evaluate this relationship, I used comparative case study method. I developed theoretical framework to analyze the practical implications of incremental reforms in the socio-political setup of both case studies. After careful analysis, this research finds out the institutional setups that help to empower and strengthen civil society, are useful not only to institutionalize PD but also to achieve SDGs.

**Keywords:** Participatory Development, Sustainable Development Goals, Devolution, Incremental Reforms, Political Stability

## 1. Introduction

The 2030 agenda for sustainable development was launched by United Nations (UN) in September 2015 as a new framework to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and guide development efforts across the globe for the next 15 years. The agenda 2030 explicitly recognizes the importance of inclusive decision making and gives huge emphasize on the inclusion of civil societies in the decision making process. Target 16.7 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 says to ‘ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels’ (UNGA 70/1, 2015:25). Civil societies and non-governmental organizations have played vital role not only in the formulation of international agreements, national policies and laws but also in their implementations. For instance, in June 2015, Dutch court held a Dutch government responsible for alleged inaction on climate change in the litigation filed by the environmental NGO, Urgenda, against the Dutch government (Kharas et al, 2018). Now, the biggest challenge for the decision makers is how to institutionalize Participatory Development (PD) or engage communities and civil societies more effectively at all level of policy process to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

First, this paper aims to highlight the relationship between PD and SDGs. Institutionalization of PD is a setup when the both civil society and government work together to achieve SDGs. A detailed and comprehensive research on the existing literature helped me to find out that institutionalization of PD helps to build a multi-layer governance model in which civil society and government both work together to make the development policies or practices sustainable (SGI, 2018). Second, this paper applied the idea of PD to real world examples. I used comparative case study method and chose two countries which are situated in different continent for instance, one is in South Asia (Pakistan) and other is in Eastern Europe (Latvia) but similar enough to be compared to support my research. Both countries are democratic states. Moreover, in both countries PD was initiated by the foreign donors and both countries made changes in their local laws to ensure community participation in development projects. None of them is a developed country but Latvia made a visible progress on SDGs during last decades; its strong civil society played significant role in this process. It made Latvia a suitable case study to compare with Pakistan to find out answer of my research question.

In-depth analyses of both case studies helped to identify that the existence of institutional setups that empower and strengthen civil society are necessary to institutionalize the PD. Moreover, the difference in the Sustainability score of both case studies guided me to measure progress of both countries on SDGs. Devolution, political institution, and source of funding available for civil society organizations were studied in detail to comprehend the factors that would help to achieve SDGs in the given timeframe. To examine the relationship in-depth and to understand the social structure and political setup that directly affect this relationship; a theoretical model e.g. Incrementalism was also applied (explained in the below section).

## 2. Theoretical Underpinning

In 1970’s PD was introduced as a theoretical approach to development. It was emphasized

to see the world from the perspective of those who were affected most from the modern development (Freire, 1982). In 1980's and in 1990's the project undertaken in the developing countries by the World Bank and other international donors saw the reasonable advantage of including the communities in the development projects. World Bank replicated this idea into numerous developing countries with the involvement of various donors and private sectors (Hossain, 1988). Development was begun to be measured in term of empowerment, environmental protection and human development. However, researchers highlighted that there are many factors that impede the effective participation of civil societies. For example, politicization of the PD is a big challenge in the way of ensuring meaningful participation. Aid receiving governments pay only lip services towards PD; and they are doing so because it has become a discourse of western donors to make aid conditional with the involvement of local communities in the development projects (Mohan, 2000). In the local decision making process only pre-shortlisted NGOs and community members were invited who had the common vision with the local elites or protect their interests. Localization of PD actually empowered the powerful local elites who manipulated the development policies at the first place (Pottier, and Orone, 1995). Various cases were highlighted where the chief purposefully failed to invite the very poor and the decisions made generally favor only the elites of village (Richards, 2003).

At the micro level, local elites or politicians controlled the whole process. Even the staff of the NGOs encouraged local elites to form community organizations to fulfill the documentation's requirements and other formalities set out by the international donor agencies (Ali, 2005). The underlying reason for this situation was the struggle of staff to meet donor's targets within the prescribed timeframe (Zaidi, 2000). Secondly, many projects under Rural Development Programs were initiated on the demands of local elites without bothering whether consent is obtained from all stakeholders or not. Donors wanted the local communities to follow their directions that undermined the real spirit of PD. In this scenario, members of civil society organizations focused on attaining the goal or target set out by the donors without paying much regards to the needs of communities. However, this paper will identify the underlying factors that helped some countries to overcome the forces of status quo and achieve measurable progress on SDGs whereas other countries could not achieve meaningful results and the change is confined to the policies only

To understand the relationship between PD and SDGs in a comprehensive and broader way I drew theoretical framework from the work of Charles E. Lindblom and Douglass C. North. Lindblom introduced a key model of decision making through his article titled as 'Still Muddling, Not Yet Through' that is called incrementalism. He said that 'A fast-moving sequence of small changes can more speedily accomplish a drastic alteration of the status quo than can an only infrequent major policy change' (North, 1991). Douglass C. North emphasized that the durable and meaningful institutional change happened incrementally because it is required to bring changes in the formal rules and informal constrains (Clever, 1999). My theoretical framework helped me to understand the role of institutions (Local government system and political stability) in the institutionalization of PD that affect the progress of sustainable development goals in the long run.

The recent literature has overlooked the very important aspect of the PD. Literature that has been published on PD looks its role in the achievement of sustainable development in a normative ideal sense. Paradigm of sustainable development has derived the focus away from the contextual objectivity towards localization. It is not about to dismiss the importance of participation, but to open up the possibility of reforms to achieve the goals of sustainable development. However, literature does not talk about the factors that hamper the process of institutionalization of PD in various countries and risk the pace of the achievement of goals set out by the UN agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development. Incremental model helps us to understand that it is a slow process where small steps in the reform process help to achieve a meaningful results than a one big leap.

After the implementation of SDGs, governments of developing countries pledged to implement SDGs in their homeland. Many developing countries endorsed their commitments through parliamentary resolutions, however the quantitative data indicates the performance of developing countries on SDGs is not very courageous and going with same pace the achievement of SDGs will remain a distant dream (Garoza, 2007). To address this major challenge, this study shows change in policy that is not incremental is very hard to achieve. Thus, this study investigates the role of institutional reforms in historical and sociological context that influence the process of the institutionalization of PD and help to achieve SDGs. To achieve this goal, reforms in the local government institutions, political stability and policy process in both counties have been studied in detail and the role of pressure groups in tilting reforms in their own favor was also analyzed.

### **3. Research Methodology and Design**

The comparative case study method has been applied in this study. This design helps evaluators and researchers to evaluate progress qualitatively and quantitatively. Case study method is a systemic way of collecting information and measure the progress. This method helped me to understand the process of meaningful institutionalization of the PD and challenges to its effective implementation that ultimately lead to slow progress on SDGs. The population size of this study consists of civil servants, legislatures, civil society organizations of Pakistan and Latvia.

This study is mainly qualitative; however, it has been supported with the quantitative data. In order to understand the effective institutionalization of PD, this study employed in-depth interviews, questionnaires, discussions and online available material to collect data about the progress of both countries in SDGs. Detailed interviews were conducted from 25 civil servants of Pakistan working in the Ministry of Climate Change and Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms. Apart from this, 15 interviews were conducted from the representatives of civil society organizations of Pakistan. 10 interviews were conducted from the members of the civil society organizations of Latvia via Skype to comprehend the challenges and opportunities in effective implementation of participatory development.

I conducted extensive research on data available online. Moreover, I consulted annual reports of UN, World Bank (WB) and other international organizations published on the progress of SDGs particularly to collect the quantitative evidence about the progress of both case studies

on the SDGs. Data available on the official sources (websites of ministries, official reports, laws, constitutions and national programs) and private sources (NGOs, publications, newspapers and etc.) was also consulted in detail. My selected case studies helped me to understand what kind of reforms can be helpful in strengthening the civil society to ensure meaningful and effective community participation so that SDGs can be achieved within a stipulated time frame and to further investigate the underlying reasons that are responsible for slow progress of developing countries on SDGs despite the introduction of policy reforms.

#### **4. Results**

To understand direct link between participatory development and SDGs, it is imperative to understand the factors that ensure meaningful participation of local communities in their own development; it was observed at two levels in the case studies e.g. empowerment of local communities through devolution (top down), political stability and availability of fund to ensure a meaningful participation of local communities at all level of policy process (bottom up).

##### *4.1 Reforms in Local Governments*

Since inception Latvian municipal elections have been held continuously. Latvian Supreme Council enacted laws in 1991 to promote community participation. New local government reforms were introduced in Latvia through the 1994 laws. The underlying principle of those reforms was that local problems are resolved at best on the local level. The law 1994 was amended many times to empower local communities and ensure decentralization in the next 6 years. Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government Affairs was looking after this process. In Latvia, from 2000 and onwards local government began to play a diverse role. Local governments were free from the ministerial regulations and were subject to laws only (Council of Europe, 2018). The turnout of local election has also been increased. In last local election of Latvia 2017 turnout was 50.39 percent. In the last local government election 2017, Pro-Russian party (Harmony) along with its allies won the majority of seats of the capital city Riga (Cheema et al, 2005).

Major Local Body reforms were introduced in Pakistan in 1960, 1979 and 2001. Ironically all these reforms were introduced by the dictatorial regimes. My interviewee informed me that decentralization of power in Pakistan through the local government reforms implemented by the dictatorial regimes was nothing more than an illusion. For instance, Ayub Khan introduced local government in the form of Basic Democrats. This system was criticized by the opposition as a 'Representative Dictatorship' because it was controlling the development process at local level through bureaucrats, for instance, Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners instead of elected representatives (Jalal, 1995).

During the period of 1979 to 1985, under the Zia regime, local government reforms were introduced. His reforms reduced the control of bureaucrats over elected members by declaring elected houses as the controlling authority, however, the election was held on non-party basis and it created a new and competing class of 'collaborative' local-level politicians (Zaidi, 2000). In 1985, national and provincial assemblies were revived.

Provincial members began to use development budget to enhance their own chances of being re-elected. This competition between local representatives and MPAs/MNAs had real consequences as Chief Ministers (CM) and Prime Minister (PM) allowed MPAs/MNAs to take control of the functions that were being previously performed by the local-elected representatives (Khan, 2013). The conflict over the control of resources between local and provincial representatives led to no local body elections at all during 1990's. In short, due to the lack of continuous local body elections and local government system, decentralization or devolution of power remained a distant dream.

In Pakistan under Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001, introduced by General Musharraf, Citizen Community Boards (CCB) was established that ensured the availability of fund to finance the initiative taken by local communities for their own development. For those projects 80% of the fund would be provided by the local governments and 20% would be generated by CCB through gift, endowment and etc (Local Government Ordinance, 2001). It was a unique step taken under local government reforms. From 2003-2010, 49643 CCB were registered in Pakistan and they completed 19391 projects at district level (Arif et al, 2010). However, none of the financial or administrative power of Federal Government was devolved through LGO 2001, for example, even the few taxation powers that were devolved to local government were previously provincial taxes (Khan, 2013).

After the Musharraf regime, democratic government emerged in Pakistan in 2008 but it failed to hold any local body election or introduce local reforms. In 2015, a local body election was held in different provinces of Pakistan that was too under the direction of Supreme Court of Pakistan. In 2015, the first time in the history of Pakistan democratic government was able to introduce local government act or reforms; before this, all three local government acts were introduced under the military regimes (Elahi et al. 2015). In 2010, through 18th constitutional amendment federal powers were devolved to the provincial level. However, provincial governments did not devolve the power to local level so far (Qadeer, 1997).

#### *4.2 Political Stability*

In case of Pakistan, since the inception of this country, political institution has been in turmoil. Ultimately, the general election of 2013 brought the first ever democratic handover in the country's history. In 1958, General Ayub Khan imposed martial law. In 1970's general election were held and populist government under the leadership of Zulfikar Ali Butto emerged in Pakistan. This government implemented the socialist policies and nationalized all major industries and banking sector (Memon et al, 2010). In 1977, General Zia-ul-haq imposed martial law and banned all political activities and began to Islamized the society. During 1990's democratic governments brought different plans, for instance, Social Action Program and privatization but reforms could not be implemented successfully because none of the government was able to complete its political term. Thus, Pakistan has witnessed in its short history; reforms of Basic Democrats, Socialism, Islamization and liberal democracy. None of these reforms could be implemented successfully because every time new government refused to carry on the reforms of previous government and introduced a completely different set of reforms. Political reforms implemented under different political

regimes were completely different from the reforms implemented by their predecessors. Ultimately, these reforms further weaken the civil society of Pakistan (Council of Europe, 2018).

In 2012, Federal Government of Pakistan (Ministry of Climate Change) prepared a proposed draft of first-ever sustainable development strategy of Pakistan with the involvement of Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and other CSOs. No open public consultation meetings were held in this process like Latvia. Thus, provincial governments refused to give concurrence to that policy. Weak civil society and failure of state in mobilizing its citizens to play role in the process of formulation of National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), is keeping its progress slow on the SDGs. Despite the fact that Pakistan was one of the first countries who not only endorsed SDGs globally in 2015 but also its parliament unanimously approved SDGs as its national development agenda in February, 2016.

Latvia got independence from Soviet Union in 1991. The Latvian parliament is called Saeima. It has 100 members and who are elected for a four-year term by proportional representation. Elections of the 5th Saeima were held in 1993. After that parliamentary elections have constantly been held without any interruption. The last parliamentary election was held in 2018 of the 13th Saeima. Following table indicates the years and parliamentary elections held since independence of Latvia from the Soviet Union.

Table 1. Parliamentary elections held since independence of Latvia from the Soviet Union

<b>Year</b>	<b>Election</b>
1993	The 5th Saeima
1995	6th Saeima
1998	7th Saeima
2002	8th Saeima
2006	9th Saeima
2010	10th Saeima
2011	11th Saeima
2014	12th Saeima
2018	13th Saeima

Source: <https://www.saeima.lv/en/about-saeima/archives>

After its independence the government of Latvia introduced various reforms to promote democratic norms and practices in the country (Karnitis & Kucinskis, 2009). To achieve this goal, Latvian government began to focus on establishing the strong civil society (Secretariat of the Minister for Special Assignments for Society Integration Affairs, 2019). During the period of 1994-2001, there was a significant rise in the awareness in Latvian society about the civil society organizations, for instance, within the first year of its independence, 89 civil society organizations were founded in Latvia (European Commission Staff Working Document, 2018). Existence of democratic system helped Latvia not only to strengthen its civil society but also to ensure maximum participation of its citizens in the process of its development (Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation, 2018).

Existence of democracy and efforts of Latvian government to strengthen its civil society according to the principles described in European Charter of self-governments made it able to get full benefit out of this situation whereas Pakistan depicts an opposite scenario. In 2004 Latvia successfully joined EU and its government took new steps to make masses able to have active role in the decision making process. For instance, in 2005, the Framework of the Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the cabinet of ministers and non-governmental organizations (Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation, 2018). In 2006, Latvia began a participatory planning process in which citizens were invited or encouraged to give their input to develop the sustainable development strategy of Latvia. This process culminated in 2010 with the approval of sustainable development strategy of Latvia 2030 (Latvia vision 2030) by the Latvian parliament (Saeima). Because of the large scale participation of civil society in the process of the formulation of SDS, this strategy is also referred as social contract (Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, 2018)

#### 4. Sustainability Score

Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network present every year, since 2016, a report that indicates the sustainable development score of each country in all seventeen goals. All 17 goals are weighted equally in the index. These reports provide the quantitative evidence that can help to trace the progress of both selected case studies on the SDGs. Latvia's score is showing an upward trend since 2016. In 2019, Latvia was included among the top 25 countries with the score of 77.1 (see table below) that is reasonably higher from the score of 2018 that was 74.2. However, in 2016 Latvia score was 72.5. Sustainable development score of Pakistan was 55.6 in 2019. Pakistan was ranked at 130th position out of 162 countries. Unlike Latvia, performance of Pakistan is very slow. The last three years score of Pakistan are 55.6 for 2017, 54.9 for 2018 and 55.6 for 2019. Report further indicates that out of 17 SDGs, Pakistan performance on 6 goals is stagnant and in one goal (e.g.15) it is, unfortunately, showing a downward trend (Sachs et al. 2019, 2018 & 2017).

Table 2. SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

Years	Latvia	Pakistan
2019	77.1	55.6



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2018	74.2	54.9
2017	74	55.6
2016	72.5	54.2

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*Source:* Sachs et al (2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019).

## 5. Discussion

Application of theoretical framework helps to analyze the potential pitfalls of institutional reforms in both case studies. Douglass C. North said that formal rules are only one part of the institutional matrix; they must be complemented by informal constraints that are self-imposed and regulate the action of individuals or everyday process of making transactions. For instance, In Pakistan, inconsistent local body reforms and political instability further strengthened the control of local elites instead of promoting participation of civil society organizations. It happened because reforms implemented overnight could only bring changes in the formal rules while keeping the de facto power structure intact. Ultimately, this de-facto power structure helped the local elites to maintain the status quo in the long run. For instance, CCB was established to ensure community participation in the development process but the role of district governments in the registration process of CCB as well as in the approval of these projects initiated by local communities helped the local elites to maintain their control over these projects. It indicates how the de facto power structure in society helps to resist reforms and successfully maintain status quo in the long run while change is confined to only the de jure power structure (North, 1992).

Institutions are developed incrementally. However, the above results indicate that in case of Pakistan not only local government reforms have been victim of rapid policy shifts but also every government introduced new local body laws instead of making some amendments in the previous laws like Latvia. The Abrupt radical Shifts in local body reforms in Pakistan, kept its local government institutions weak and civil society organizations never been empowered enough to resist the local elites. Because overnight change in the formal rules (local body laws) could not be coupled with the change in the informal constraints (weakening the influence of local elites). An external or internal impetus to change in formal rules or de jure institutions may still leave the sources of de facto power intact, ultimately a group that has lost its de jure power may use its de facto power in order to maintain status quo (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2010). It helped to understand that despite the reforms in local body system, local elites or politicians kept their strong hold over development process intact and civil society could not be empowered in Pakistan. Ministry of climate change invites CSOs to attend its meetings to promote inclusive decision making. My interviewee told me that the officials of the Ministry feel that there is a need to work to build the capacity of civil society organizations

Gradual reforms in society help to build institutions or strong civil societies that promote sustainable development and pressurize governments to fulfill their international commitment

to achieve SDGs. Due to the political instability and military coups, Pakistani civil society could not be strengthened, institutions remained weak. Ultimately, the participation of civil society in the development process of the country remains very low despite the policy change. After the implementation of SDGs, developing countries has brought policy change to ensure maximum participation of local communities but due to centralization of power, political instability and weak civil society no practical change has been witnessed. My interviewee informed me that recently during the process of formulation of National Forest Policy; Ministry of Climate Change uploaded the draft of policy on its website to share it with all stakeholders and invited civil society organizations to add their comments. However, there was no input from any sector of society.

Moreover, the reason why specific reforms can be ineffective is that there are many different institutions that affect the process of development or successful implementations of reforms. For instance, making reforms in one institution without altering the basic power structure can simply lead to the replacement of one institution or instrument to another. Case study of Pakistan tells us that in the absence of decentralization of power, local body reforms failed to strengthen its civil society. Local elites and politicians were able to tilt new reforms in their own favor. Thus, changing only de jure power, while leaving the sources of de facto power intact, may have little impact in the long run. Various Institutions of society working together help to achieve sustainable development.

While in case of Latvia incremental reforms helped to strengthen and empower its civil society gradually over the course of time. However, my interviewee told me that during this period of transition Latvian government had to face resistance from different section of society especially the extreme Latvian nationalists and soviet loyalist. Political stability, decentralization of power through local body reform, promotion of democratic norms, strengthening civil society by including them not only to the forum of decision making but also providing them funds paved way over the course of time for meaningful involvement of civil societies in their own development. My interviewee informed me that CSOs played effective role in this process, for instance, Union of Local and Regional Governments of Latvia (LPS), a functional NGO, serving local governments since 1991 to promote autonomy of municipalities as per the principles described in European Charter of self-governments. LPS provided training to the workers of municipalities and formed association with other municipal, national and international organizations. Over the passage of time, LPS became an influential institution and it was recognized as the budget negotiator for the local governments. It also helps municipalities to influence the decision making of central government to promote sustainable development in municipalities.

In Latvia, in 2012, the Cross Sectorial Coordination Centre (CSSC) was established under the direct authority of the Prime Minister of Latvia to ensure policy coherence and implementation of sustainable development strategy in Latvia. Since 2016, the same CSSC is responsible for the implementation of SDGs in Latvia (Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, 2010). It shows that Latvia formulated its sustainable development strategy well before the adaptation of SDGs by United Nations (UN). And the official body that was looking after the sustainable development in Latvia was also entrusted with the task of implementation of the

SDGs 2030 formulated by UN. However, in Pakistan National Planning Commission of Pakistan (NPC) was entrusted with the task of implementation of SDGs in 2016; whereas, Ministry of Climate Change has been working on the formulation of Sustainable Development Strategy in Pakistan since 2010 (Ministry of Planning Development & Reform, 2017). Ultimately, in Pakistan inconsistent reforms kept institutions weak and PD could not be institutionalized whereas Latvia was able to institutionalize PD in its development process successfully.

Government of Latvia took different steps to ensure participation of citizens in the policy process, for instance, e-petition tool. It says if a petition is signed by the group of 10,000 or more citizens it would be placed in the agenda of parliament as agenda item. My interviewee informed me that to promote the participation of NGOs in the development project, Latvian government established Fund out of total annual budget allocation to make CSOs able to overcome their financial constraints and to encourage their participation (King et al, 2004). National NGO fund has been established in Latvia and every year budget is allocated for this purpose. In 2017, only 77 thousand EUR were allocated for this purpose. Series of these reforms helped to bring change in the informal constraints over the course of time especially after accession of Latvia with the EU. Ultimately, institutions were ready to accept the new reforms/ change. Existence of strong and innovative civil society helped Latvia to overcome resistance in its society and promote sustainable development. The strong civil society in Latvia helped government to formulate sustainable development strategy. LAPAS (Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation), a CSO, was established in 2004. LAPAS promoted the participation of NGOs in the development process of Latvia and helped to get access to the relevant information. LAPAS said that the planning process in Latvia is inclusive, with elected representatives focusing on evidence-based decision making to ensure transparency, policy coherence and participation. In developing countries, civil society remained weak due to political instability and inconsistent reforms; consequently, it slows down the pace of sustainable development in developing countries.

In case of developing countries, to achieve the SDGs major policy shift is required. However, North said that ‘yesterday's institutional framework provides the opportunity set for today's organizations’ (North, 1992). SDGs’ scores of countries indicate that high income countries are at the upper end because the series of incremental reforms that began in 2002 among developed countries well before the formulation of SDGs by UN prepared new institutions to opt the path of sustainable development whereas in case of developing countries existing social and political setup is a big hurdle in the way of introducing any big policy shift that is prerequisite to achieve SDGs. Involvement of local communities and civil societies in the development process can be helpful to overcome the forces of status quo and build pressure on governments to introduce policy shifts that will help to improve the performance of developing countries on SDGs. In Pakistan, the civil society organizations are weak and have limited access to financial resources. Government of Pakistan was not providing any fund to civil society organizations to take any initiatives by themselves. My interviewee told me that lack of access to financial resources is a big hurdle in the way of civil society organizations to take initiatives to ensure sustainable development in Pakistan.

Consequently, all the steps that have been taken to achieve SDGs are confined to the policies only.

## **6. Conclusion**

This Paper has argued that in the presence of institutions, for instance, strong civil society and decentralization of power; PD helped to achieve SDGs. The concept of sustainable development was introduced in Brundtland Report in 1987. EU formulated its Sustainable Development Strategy in 2006. It indicates many developed countries set SDGs for themselves well before the formulation of SDGs by UN (agenda 2030). High income countries through the incremental changes in their policies were able to develop strong civil societies that pressurized their governments to implement reforms to achieve SDGs successfully after 2016. However, the story of most of the developing countries is different. They began to formulate their sustainable development strategy after the implementation of SDGs by UN in 2016. My theoretical framework successfully proved that this abrupt policy shift could not be implemented successfully due to the weak institutions and civil society. Ultimately, the change remained confined to the policies only.

This paper further finds out that participation of strong civil society in their own development helps to achieve the SDGs. Existence of institutional setup that helps to empower the civil society is required not only to achieve SDGs but also to ensure meaningful participation of local communities in their own development. Decentralization of power, political stability and existence of democratic norms help to empower the civil society and ensure their meaningful participation. Strong civil society in the developed world successfully pressurized their governments not only to bring changes in their development policies but also in the implementation of new policies. Ultimately, it helped them to perform better on sustainable development index. The civil societies in developing countries need to be empowered and educated enough to play their meaningful role in their own development. World Bank and other international organizations are playing their role in this process but due to the lack of decentralization of power, and political instability in the developing countries; it is easy for the local elites to tilt new reforms in their own favor and to hijack the whole process. Last but not least, meaningful participation of civil societies in their own development and their empowerment will be helpful to achieve SDGs within stipulated time period.

## **Recommendations for Further Study**

We, human beings, are living on the same planet have responsibility to help each other. SDGs are global goals. If high income countries are performing better while low income countries keep performing at low pace, global targets cannot be achieved. To achieve the SDGs, the developed countries should play role in helping the developing countries in strengthening their institutions and civil society. Agenda 2030 has set out the targets. It is now easy for countries to measure their progress. There is need to take concrete steps and make the participation of civil society at all level of policy process an international norm. But radical shift in policies cannot help us to achieve this goal in letter and spirit. Therefore, it is suggested that to achieve SDGs within stipulated time-frame, it is required to empower local communities and develop a strong civil society. Political stability, availability of fund and

decentralization of power will help to achieve this goal gradually and develop a multi-layer governance model that has been described in the UN agenda 2030. On the basis of the finding of this study, it can be suggested that there is a need to do further research to find out the impact of international aids and other economic institutions to comprehend the role of PD in the achievement of SDGs in a broader perspective.

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