

PREFACE

Democracy, development and human rights are three integrated concepts and there exists an intimate, interrelated and interdependent relationship between these three concepts. Genuine human and humane development is impossible to achieve unless development is brought under a human rights regime. Similarly genuine democracy is impossible to achieve unless democracy, as practiced, is also brought under human rights regime. Significant progress in addressing the structural causes of human rights violations and significant progress in realization of all human rights of all, necessitates the attainment of genuine democracy and genuine human and humane development.

In Pakistan false and inappropriate paradigms have retarded the realization of human rights, development and democracy.

Pakistan has had an unusual and turbulent political and democratic experience in the era following the departure of the British from India. In over half a century of its existence, Pakistan has experienced democratic and military regimes, pseudo democracy and quasi dictatorship, and even a civilian Martial Law. For outsiders, the turbulent political history of Pakistan may make an interesting story, but for those who have lived through the experience, it is extremely painful.

The democratic and political turmoil have at one level damaged all legal, legislative, political and democratic institutions in the country but also shattered civil society. First during the colonial era the policies and actions of the colonial masters didn't allow civil society to grow thus creating alienated and dispossessed masses. In the post independence phase long spans of military rules and non-participatory democratic governments had done little to build a strong and vibrant civil society. Laws, practices, policies and attitudes of rulers had always been hegemonic and dominating.

Re-building civil society was the major task ahead of the political and social forces who took on the mission of empowering people, especially marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the society. These forces have largely focused on renovation and strengthening of key state institutions and strengthening key-non-state institutions and civil society organizations. However such efforts have remained secluded and without any significant impact.

The present military regime while announcing its seven point agenda for national reconstruction committed itself for devolving powers to the democratically elected people's representatives at district and sub-district level. The devolution plan announced by the military rulers claimed to establish real, sustainable and pro-people democracy. The elections held during 2002-01 under new devolution plan, besides claims of achievement have also raised some questions regarding the seriousness of purpose and depth of commitment behind a much trumpeted plan.

As the regime announced the plan, a controversy regarding the role of military taking the job of establishing democracy cropped up in the political and social groups. Different opinions existed within these circles regarding supporting, engaging and disengagement with policies or plans announced by the rulers. However through a consultative process and intensive dialogues held within civil society groups and networks, different options were discussed and finalized. However the perceptions existed that despite the principle disagreements on the role of any non-democratic force taking-on the role of interfering in the political and democratic processes of the society, there had emerged an opportunity of providing required education and orientation to citizens on their democratic roles, rights and responsibilities. The basic idea behind the civil society initiative for democratic rights education was to fulfill the requirement for creating an informed citizenry which could then play its role in setting-up strong and vibrant civil society which in turn could guarantee political and democratic order.

Democratic Rights and Citizen Education Program (DRCEP), launched by several civil society groups, attempts to deal with these conditions where ordinary citizens are not taken as subjects but active agents and contributors to the political, economic and social decisions. The program aims to increase public demand for democracy and social and political reforms.

Interventions made during 18 months of Phase-I of this program have contributed in creating an environment of debates, dialogue and discussions. Vigilant roles of citizens' groups and organizations have emerged in the process.

In the process a large number of civil society groups, social and political activists, intelligentsia, academicians, human rights workers, peace groups, media organizations and other public interest groups have played a significant role. Due to their contribution and efforts the basic tasks of reaching out to people, supporting public dialogues and debates for informed analysis and action became possible and result oriented.

The report is divided into three parts, the first part covers the basis political thesis of this program; the second part covers the methods and actions taken to implement the goals and purposes of the program; and the third and final part includes critical observations, lessons and recommendations drawn from the 18-month experience of this program.

The author of this report Mohammad Ali has indeed done a spectacular job of summarizing and narrating the entire experience in an effective and communicative manner.

We owe so much to so many activists, community groups, non-government organizations, lawyers, journalists, peasants, workers, human rights workers, political workers, academicians, lawyers, teachers, students, traders, businessmen for providing their best input in making this process successful and meaningful. Acknowledgement is also due for the members of national steering committee of

DRCEP program who provided guidance and support in designing and then implementing the program.

The core team of DRCEP program in SAP-Pakistan, SUNGI Development Foundation, IDSP Quetta, PILER Karachi and SDPI Islamabad deserve our special thanks for their dedication, commitment and relentless efforts for achieving these results.

We are thankful to all those people especially Nigar Ahmed, Omar Asghar Khan, Khawaar Mumtaz, Kausar S. Khan, Karamat Ali, Dr. Qurat-ul Ain Bukhtiari, Shahrukh Rafi Khan, Mohammad Waseem, Rashida Dohad and Mohammad Tahseen for offering their best advice and support in the process.

We hope this report will generate further debates and discussions on these important issues and will facilitate analysis and opinion-making process. We wait for your valuable comments, suggestions and critique on this report.

DEVOLUTION – A CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

This report juxtaposes the recent devolutionary exercise with the innovative Democratic Rights and Citizens Education Program (DRCEP), which attempted to create a proactive role for civil society in political processes of Experiences as well as feedback obtained from grassroots level through the program platform involving, educating and facilitating non-partisan candidates and citizens will be used to assess the government's devolution plan as it unfolded on ground instead of focusing on its conceptual or policy formulation imperatives. Particular attention is also being given to elaboration of mechanisms by which DRCEP inculcated broad based political awareness and public involvement.

Background

Even a cursory glance at political history clearly shows that democracy is still a stuttering phenomenon in Pakistan. The monopoly of power exercised by the state has been exclusionary but not very efficient. Yielding power is not synonymous with exercising it with diligence or effectiveness. On the contrary, an over-empowered state without checks and balances is more prone to becoming authoritative and corrupt. Such has been the fate of many nations and the Pakistani model of governance only provides additional endorsement in this regard.

Political parties in Pakistan themselves lack democratic values and are sustained instead by traditional power brokers with vested interests. Even during the tenure of politically elected governments, realization and utilization of democratic and electoral rights could not really take place. Our sporadic political regimes continued dealing with the masses on a patronage basis with the primary objective of legitimizing a personal hold on power in disregard to their representational responsibilities. Also due to frequent disruptions in the democratic process and inherent weaknesses of these political governments, not much was done by the state to create progressive and vibrant civil society institutions. Instead of diffusing responsibility to the grassroots, decision and policy making has remained ad hoc and highly centralized. Restrictions imposed on freedom of expression, democratic institutions and political action have in turn stunted the political maturity of our populace.

It is unfortunate that successive governments kept sidelining the founding principle of federalism endorsed by all three constitutions. Rather than providing provincial autonomy under a democratic system, governments in power have repeatedly pursued centrist policies; the 'One Unit' declaration is perhaps the most blatant example. Even Ayub Khan's 'Basic Democracy' principles despite decentralizing power to the district level, proved detrimental to the very concept of universal suffrage ushered in by an indirect elective system.

The army's incursion into politics has been recurrent and increasingly impudent. Its role in engineering politics on the pretext of safeguarding national interests has caused several distortions ranging from unnecessary hindrance to cultivation of unyielding political forces. Increase in ethnic and sectarian unrest as well as mistrust of state structures are the resulting symptoms of this interference.

The vibrancy of civil society is imperative for conscientious nation building. Yet in our case, civil society remains seeped in antiquated folklore and traditions, dysfunctional

social mores and continues to be administered by top-heavy remnants of the colonial era. A recent study conducted for the Civil Society in the New Millennium Project (undertaken by South Asia Partnership for Commonwealth Foundation) reported that a majority of surveyed respondents were unable to distinguish between boundaries of the state and those of civil society. They lacked consciousness about where state interventions are required and where it is up to citizens to play their role. And in face of state restrictions, they also evidently lacked awareness of methods and strategies to cope with the situation¹. Devoid of reliable representation, the greater majority of the masses unfortunately do not recognize their potential role of being primary change agents capable of transforming socio-cultural, economic and political circumstances. Instead, they are no more than unruly mobs since they lack any articulate platform from which to express their demands or to secure their needs. This lack of cohesion and coherence allows for their repeated exploitation by various vested interests and facilitates convenient elite capture during election since voters remain unaware of the very political rationale of their vote casting decisions. In turn, feudal cum sectarian political practices by definition professing vested and myopic goals have often allied with reference to ethnic interests and continued to dominate political decisions.

Since more than half a century of Pakistan's existence, no sustainable civil society institutions have been able to come to the forefront. Instead of facilitation, the bureaucratic and military establishments have time and again impeded the internal evolution of civil society structures. Most NGOs steered clear from politics or some of the more proactive ones adopted a confrontational stance against draconian measures suppressing human rights under the Hudood Ordinance for example. No significant precedent is available of civil society and government cooperation to achieve a mutually stated goal of good governance.

Program Rationale

When the current regime devised a plan to devolve power to the basic tiers of governance, an immediate reaction though to be motivating this effort was that of reshuffling existing political power bases. The devolution plan formulated by the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) instead of eliminating cult politics seemed to be encouraging it by pursuing a contradictory policy of banning political parties participation in local elections on the one hand and then allowing indirect patronage of candidates, which in effect was reinforcing the precedent of adherence to personal loyalties rather than to horizontal political platforms which at least do have overt manifestos. Retrospective analysis unfortunately provides precedence of similar trends by which military regimes tried to cleave political forces rather than allowing them to synthesize and become more responsive to peoples needs.

Yet despite inevitable and well-founded skepticism invoked by the institutionally ironic architects of this new devolution plan, it's formulation did provide some rather unique opportunities. The sheer scope of devolving power to the grassroots level daunts even the mammoth institutional infrastructure of the state, which can be seen as another reason for pending delays besides the lack of political will and inertia induced and perpetuated by vested interests. Therefore, when the government decided to implement its proposed plan it set off ripples of curiosity and interest. It was for the first time that bureaucratized governance functions were being devolved to elected district representatives including unprecedented women and minority representatives. Furthermore, the LG Plan categorically endorsed a role for civil

¹ Malik Nadeem. *Citizens and Governance*, South Asia Partnership 2000.

society institutions in facilitating and monitoring the devolution process and the subsequent government functions via elected Citizens' Committees and Voluntary Citizen's Boards down to the village and town tiers of district government. This new plan also posed some unique challenges including the need to build institutional capacity of its proposed structures, elected representatives as well as creation of required social capital to make devolution of power a reality.

The true concept of democracy has to be linked with equal representation of men, women, minorities and other marginalized sections of the society. Electoral and democratic rights of people should be recognized, respected and the necessary enabling environment should be provided for the democratic process to flourish so that people's fundamental right to association, expression and assembly are recognized and respected.

Several civil society institutions and representatives including NGOs realized the importance of utilizing this opportunity to actively engage with the present government's devolution initiative. NGOs could potentially offer their community networking capabilities in order to fortify the devolution exercise and also gauge it in view of the basic criteria that any such attempt must imply bringing about an organized change in the very functioning of the state so that the will of people may overtly become manifested in processes of governance. Yet this was by no means an easy undertaking for non-government organizations that are more comfortable with focusing on addressing implications of deficient systems instead of attempting to alter the very power structure from which such deficiencies emanate. There were various risks involved in collaborating with the government including the lack of resources risking resentment of traditional power brokers including politicians, feudal elements and extremist forces.

After considering potential risks and benefits, six like-minded NGOs (see Section B for details) acknowledging the need to build demand for democratic politics and governance in Pakistan through informed citizen action and for reviving public confidence in political and electoral processes decided to come forward and take the opportunity being presented by the Local Government Ordinance for launching the Democratic Rights and Citizens Education Program (DRCEP) in all 102 districts of the country in congruence with the Local Government (LG) elections.

Scope of the Program

Essentially prompted by a pending need of creating a niche for civil society in governance issues, DRCEP's long termed vision is to promote an enabling political education process for citizens particularly marginalized groups to help them realize and exercise their political choices in a more proactive manner. In view of this goal the program has focused on some specific objectives:

- To build the capacity of a core group of social and political activists to undertake democratic education of citizens in general and voters in particular
- To increase political sensitiveness of voters and motivate active participation in local, provincial and national level political processes
- To create and catalyze constructive and positive civic engagements amongst interest groups, political forces and civil society organizations
- To create a new body of knowledge on local government functions, practices and political representation and to sensitize the public at large and voters in general about LG Plan 2000

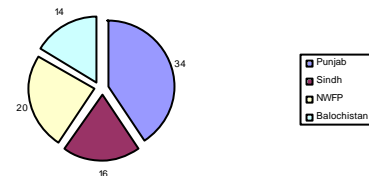
- To create awareness of citizens (including voters and candidates) on basic local government functions, significance and role
- To stimulate informed public debate on democracy and advocate democratic principles and imperatives for pluralism

The process of devising strategic imperatives for the initiative had to take into consideration existing organizational and financial capabilities of civil society organizations, while simultaneously addressing the issue of building their capacities for undertaking similarly broad based responsibilities in the future. Four areas were identified to address these multi-pronged program imperatives:

- Public Education and Mobilization
- Support in Electoral Process
- Candidates Training
- Networking and Advocacy

DRCEP wanted to build upon the momentum instigated by prior civil society initiatives undertaken to strengthen the democratic electoral process; these included SAP-PK's own collaboration alongside some other NGOs (including Savera, Aurat Foundation and Human Rights Commission of Pakistan) with the Election Commission of Pakistan during 1995-2000 to work with community based organizations and other civil society individuals and institutions to hold intermittent dialogues with political leaders and to capacitate women and political activists for initiating advocacy campaigns. In the same vein Peoples Assemblies were also organized only during the past year to stimulate public discourse and mobilization and to encourage coalition building amongst civil society institutions themselves. As already mentioned, DRCEP's objectives were not supposed to be of an immediate utility only since it wanted to build upon previous precedents and demonstrate a sustainable role for civil society institutions in enlightening voters and making representatives more responsive.

Number of Districts Covered by DRECEP



A Implementing Strategic Concerns

DRCEP demonstrated the viability of civil society involvement in enabling democratic processes by taking direct action on issues that it had identified as being vital to improving political awareness and to invigorating the latent role of civil society in the democratic processes.

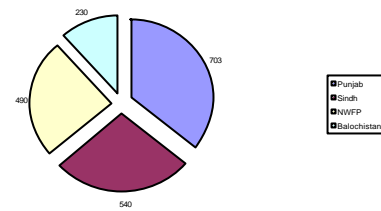
I) Public Education and Mobilization

Only by making citizens aware of their electoral rights can it become possible to expect informed choices leading to election of more responsive candidates. After years of negligence and repression, such awareness could not be achieved overnight but it was vital to utilize the available opportunity to at least initiate the overdue process of building a conceptual background for political empowerment of citizens.

Focal Groups: Formation of focal groups proved vital in view of outreach requirements of the program. In consultation with district stakeholders creditable civil society representatives were invited to form focal groups comprised of at least twenty-five members and in some of the larger districts like Gujranwala these groups

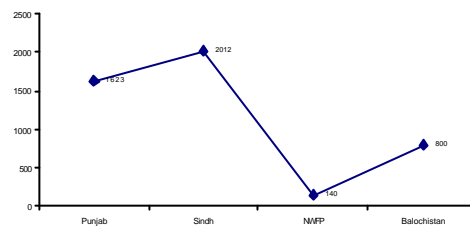
were five times larger in size and included a diverse range of members in their folds particularly journalists, peasants, trade union workers, political activists, lawyers, minority groups, women organizations and religious leaders (*ulemas*). Ninety District Focal Groups (DFGs) were formed with a membership of 4,350 people. The composition of DFG's deserves special attention since they represent a diverse range of opinion makers and community influentials. FGD's are in fact the core essence of inculcating a sustainable platform for civil society in democratic processes in the long run.

Number of District Focal Group Participants



For maintaining a synergetic link to DRCEP goals these focal groups were provided guidelines and training via different types of workshops and consultation meetings that culminated in a national forum. Through interactive sessions focal group members were introduced to fundamental principles of local government, LG 2000 Plan, and other political and social aspects of the campaign including marginalized group concerns. In turn through collaboration with project partners focal groups provided human, technical and moral support for mobilizing local resources, organizing meetings, public forums, seminars, corner meetings and training events for voters and candidates all across the country.

Number of Participants in District Orientation Workshops



Orientation Workshops: These workshops were organized by the main project partners to bring together potential local collaborators including community-based organizations and other relevant stakeholders like academics, labour union representatives, journalists and political activists. Besides introduction to the program functional aspects of this workshop included endorsement of local partners and formation of the pivotal focal groups. District focal group representatives in turn formed tehsil and union council cluster committees for mobilization, training and material dissemination.

District and sub-district level work plans were also devised in these orientation workshops to articulate a mechanism and timeframe for carrying out activities. Reporting procedures were also discussed whereby *tehsil* and union council program representatives provided information to the district level for onward transmission to provincial partners.

District Forums: These forums were scheduled in districts to coincide with scheduled election phases. Line departments, community influential as well as general public were brought to a common platform to break the culture of silence concerning governance issues. Provincial coordinators and partnering organization leadership provided a critical analysis of the LG Plan particularly focusing on mechanism of the LG Plan from the district down to union council level and introduced the DRCEP strategy particularly the role of focal groups in carrying the initiative forward. After thematic discussions on democratic and political issues, theatre performances were held to highlight perceived issues and problems that would be emerging during the electoral process. A Provincial Forum in Lahore and a National Forum in Islamabad were arranged to obtain a broader perspective and to give cohesion to district based activities. These forums did provide an ideal platform

giving greater visibility to DRCEP for advocating representation of marginalized groups in political processes and sharing experiences and soliciting views of other concerned civil society groups (even international institutions in case of the national forum). The emerging concerns were passed onto government representatives (from National Reconstruction Bureau, Election Commission, National Database Regulatory Authority and relevant government ministries) who were in turn provided a unique opportunity to get substantive feedback from those at the local level involved in implementing their policy formulations.

Thematic Content: From district orientation workshops, district forums to corner meetings similar issues were discussed in varying degrees of depth that primarily aimed to increase political awareness and familiarity with local government systems and to reinforce the need of citizens' involvement in governance. Exercising existing rights was emphasized to eventually bring about conditions in which civil society and not the state decides what type of government people need. The most significant issues discussed in this regard were:

- The origin of power and authority
- The exclusionary trends in state structures
- Provincial and federal issues vis-à-vis local government
- Need for political parties and the political process
- Civil society's role in promoting culture of democracy and tolerance
- Role of bureaucracy in local government
- Meaning of people's empowerment
- Citizen's democratic rights and responsibilities in democratic processes
- Minorities, women, peasants and laborers rights
- Political and social influences of feudalism in rural society
- Decreasing tolerance and increasing fundamentalism and its repercussions
- Globalization, developing nations and regional cooperation

Printed material and interactive theatre also reinforced these basic themes. An interactive mode was consciously adopted by all program platforms to simultaneously solicit public feedback in the form of opinions, observations and reservations. The concerns and queries noted in this manner have been compiled and are presented under a subsequent heading entitled 'Peoples Voices.'

Interactive Theatre: Besides inducing traditional dramatic catharsis the theatrical platform is being utilized across the world in recent years for development purposes particularly for awareness raising and capacity building. The importance of development theatre becomes even more important in oral societies like ours. Pakistani NGOs are increasingly aware of this potential of using theatrical techniques to generate debate on social problems and to articulate participatory solutions. Based on the success of another project (where People's Assemblies were organized to debate the proposed Devolution Plan and the medium of interactive theatre was used to enhance public feedback and give further depth to the participatory process) interactive theatre was specifically included in DRCEP's strategic framework and the Interactive Resource Centre (IRC) was established to coordinate this vital component.

The primary function of IRC was to devise a conceptual methodology for conducting interactive theatre performances and to train Focal Group recommended in supervising subsequent performances. During the period of December 2000 to August 2001, IRC organized twelve-theatre training and two follow-up workshops (to devise themes based on field experiences) coinciding with four phases of local bodies

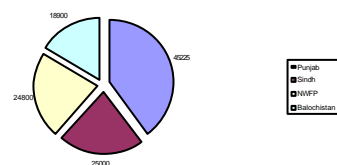
elections. The training workshops involved partner organizations groups of twenty individuals. For four consecutive days, trainees were exposed to confidence building, inhibition breaking, voice, movement and character projection techniques. Conceptual clarity concerning the motive behind Development Theater was then focused upon in the remaining four-day sessions since it was particularly important for participants to realize that they were to utilize this platform as a means to expose communities to electoral and democratic issues. Themes were also finalized in consultation with workshop participants to draw attention to socio-cultural constraints posed by prevailing *baradrism* (caste system) and detrimental influence of *pirs* (saints) and other underlying prejudices and biases that hinder creation of an enabling environment for marginalized candidates and political empowerment of the masses. Actual performances were also a scheduled part of these workshops where plays developed on selected enriching themes were performed as practice. After these workshops seventy-five theatre performances were subsequently held in conjunction with District Forums across Pakistan.

Theatre Performance at Jhang

This play concerns a woman who works in a factory and is encouraged by her peers to contest the local body elections as a labor candidate. She is initially hesitant due to lack of funds and fear of neglecting her job responsibilities. But assured by fellow workers of required support she agrees to contest. After overcoming problems implied by the nomination process she finally wins the elections. Now as a councilor, she attends a union council meeting where she is not well received as a labor councilor by the Nazim who pays more attention to traditional council members like traders, transporters and politically backed councilors. When the Nazim informs the gathered councilors about the availability of three development schemes the lady councilor demands labor union rights for her factory workers. However, she faces immediate rebuke from the factory owner who is also a councilor present at the meeting. Ultimately threatened by expulsion she decides to save her job rather than pursue labour rights at her factory admitting that her job “is more important than the labor union.... to save my children from starvation I will not talk about the labour union.” At this point, the audience was asked if it agreed with the lady councilor's decision. The overwhelming response was negative. Then an aged lady from amongst the participants was invited onto the stage to present an alternative solution. She stated that the lady councilor had to stand up to the factory owner since she had won the elections due to her peers support and was thus obliged to carry their demands to the union council meeting. Instead of cowering to the factory owner's pressure the participant suggested the threat of a strike that would soften the rigid stance of the factory owner. Many other people showed eagerness to offer their own opinions and some of them were invited onto the stage to provide alternate solutions to the staged impasse.

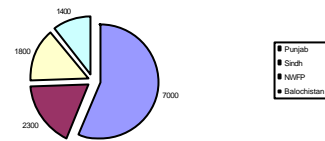
Corner Meetings: Facilitated by union council level coordination committees, these meetings were held in prominent towns and villages to reach out to that amorphous public audience not being included within more targeted activities. Using an interactive approach, the LG Plan was discussed, as was the DRCEP initiative in its attempt to mobilize and empower common citizens by increasing their political awareness and participation.

Number of Participants in Corner Meetings



Mock Elections: Organized by focal groups, these activities were held at key points within districts to help make voting less confusing and more precise. Legitimate voters who remained unfamiliar with the voting process or had never voted before were guided using model ballot papers. The older generation of voters unfamiliar and confused by the new balloting format requiring endorsement of five rather than two candidates, benefited the most from this mock exercise.

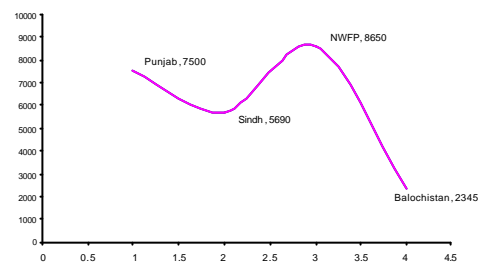
Number of Participants in Mock Elections



Rallies: Public rallies were held in several districts where political activist and general public gathered to peacefully protest against party-less elections and to demand joint electorates and fifty percent seats for women. In Sheikupura, over 500 people participated in one such rally. Besides promoting a healthy trend of public mobilization to influence government policies, such rallies also received due coverage in the local and national press.

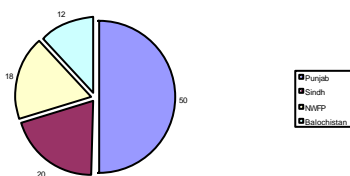
Seminars: Issue specific seminars were held throughout the four phases and their topics drew attention to minorities and marginalized groups' issues as well as discussed the scope of civil society involvement in governance. Political activists were also invited to participate and due media coverage was obtained to increase spread of information emerging from such proceedings. The election process itself was focused upon via this issue specific platform. In Punjab for example, seven seminars were held to specifically discuss the role of polling agents in the electoral process.

Number of DRCEP Seminars/Meetings



Media Involvement: To draw the attention of media on civil society interventions during local government elections, a special effort was made to include local journalists and national daily representatives in focal groups who in turn facilitated media orientation workshops and maintained consistent liaison with their colleagues. The media was invited to seminars and notified about rallies. As a result of this consistent effort, electronic and print media provided through coverage of the entire

Number of Press Campaign Participants



scope of DRCEP activities. Local cable networks even aired video taped proceedings of the district forums particularly in districts of Punjab and Sindh. In Balouchistan as well, frequent workshops were held to instigate press campaigning for example Kech district in Turbat reported having held 6 consultative press briefings during its course of activities. In Zohb district, DRCEP's objectives and concerns were broadcast twice via a public radio station (Zxob).

Motivational Materials: Acknowledging the potential impact of Information, Communication and Education (IEC) techniques on supplementing program goals issue-specific posters, booklets and flyers were developed through research and compilation of information through primary and secondary sources to bolster awareness of voters and candidates particularly marginalized groups. A million posters were put up at public places offering optimal visibility so that an estimated

five million people should see them at least. Topics of the posters were: *Who will be our candidates? Equality for human beings, Motivation for women candidates, Reserve Seats for Peasants and Workers, Age for Voting and You Can Decide Your Future*. A series of 100,000 booklets and 200,000 pamphlets were produced and disseminated respectively. The booklets titles were as follows: *Local Government Plan 2000, Critical Appraisal of the Local Government Plan 2000, Introduction To Democratic Rights and Citizens' Education Program 2000-2001 and Codes of Ethics for Candidates*. The following titles were chosen for the pamphlets: *Concepts For Democracy, Principles And Values of The Democratic Rights And Citizens' Education Program, Responsibilities OF A Voter*.

Note: All the above printed material was disseminated through relevant program platforms like district forums, corner meetings and candidate trainings.

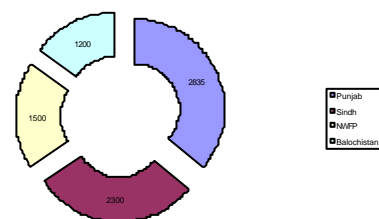
Further Activities: Apart from regular corner meetings and forums, additional activities including study circles and public dialogues and public gatherings were organized as well. Some districts went beyond the scope of scheduled activities to arrange debates between candidates and voters. Candidates welcomed the idea since it gave them a readymade platform to assist their campaign and voters felt intrigued by this novel opportunity to question the intentions of their representative aspirant. Recognizing the value of this initiative, DRCEP officially commended the innovation and from the second phase onwards many other districts and even *tehsils* arranged similar talk shows lasting up to three hours each (40 such debates were organized and around 4,500 people participated in them). In other districts, mass campaigning was taken a step further from the public rallies and door-to-door voter awareness was undertaken in some villages and towns. Political *mushairas* were held in the *seraki* speaking belt of Punjab where a strong poetic tradition was utilized for political awareness.

II) Support in Electoral Process

The primary concern in terms of lending support to the election process was to enable candidates and voters from all walks of life including the marginalized to participate in elections without political, social, regional, gender and religious disparities. Both direct and indirect initiatives were undertaken by DRCEP to provide support to candidates and to make the voter consultation process more meaningful.

Legal Aid Camps: Facilitated by lawyers belonging to district focal groups these camps were established at the district and *tehsil* levels to coincide with scheduled nomination days. Many candidates availed the opportunity of soliciting free legal advise concerning the nomination process and utilized the offered services of contesting unfounded rejections by the returning officers processing their forms. Peasants, workers, women and minority candidates were particularly encouraged to avail these services and provided information on election rules, local government ordinance and code of conduct for the electoral process.

Number of Participants in Free Legal Aid Camps

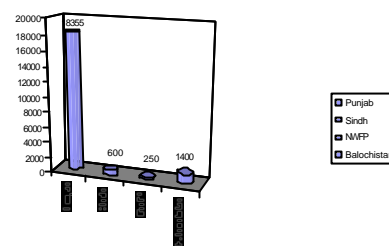


Issues with Candidate Nominations: The overall attitude of returning officers responsible for processing nomination papers of candidates was quite highhanded at

times and gave an impression that they were not complying with a standard norm for gauging suitability of candidatures.

These officers often asked irrelevant questions from aspiring candidates; one woman was asked to give the call for prayer (azan). In Rajanpur district, there was a case of very legitimate grievances brought to the notice of the concerned nominating officer by Ashiq Buzdaar against his opponent. But the ironic decision of the returning officer prevented Mr. Bazdaar's candidature instead of that of his opponent. It was generally observed by legal aid camps that minority candidates' nomination papers were more often being rejected on trivial issues. In Jhang and Faisalabad districts, returning officers were asking for Rs. 1000 against the set security deposit of Rs. 500. Some of them were also allotting very demeaning electoral symbols to women candidates; one woman in Union Council Lahore was allotted the symbol of a banana provoked by which her husband refused to let her contest the election. In Dir district the Deputy Commissioner instead of a government appointed nomination officer (a Session or District Judge) was receiving nomination papers and leaning towards Jamat-e-Islami backed candidates.

Number of Nomination Papers Assistance Beneficiaries



In spite of the boycott of minorities due to separate electorates there were some unusual cases of participation. During the third phase a female minority candidate filed papers for a peasant/worker seat and the returning officer in district Faisalabad accepted her request and subsequently she won the elections. Even in Lahore, there were cases of minority candidates registering themselves in the general seat category until the government decided to let minority candidates contest even Nazim and Naib Nazim seats during the fourth phase.

Recommendations for Candidates: In view of DRCEP personnel observations and categorical complaints brought to our legal aid camps recommendations were formulated and submitted to relevant government departments (Election Commission and National Reconstruction Bureau) for consideration.

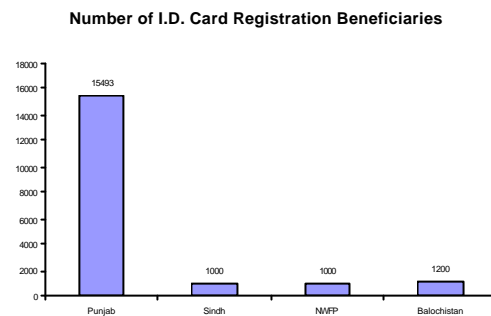
Observing the troubled interaction between aspirants and the official returning officers it was suggested to the government that returning officers be well versed in technical procedures for filing nominations and should stick to them instead of using personal discretion particularly the misuse of discretionary powers with regard to Clause 14 of LG Ordinance which is meant to seek an assurance of faith not test candidates ability to recite lengthy Quranic verses. **The Minister of LG&RD categorically acknowledged this recommendation and this problematic attitude subsided after the initial phase.**

To facilitate marginalized candidatures it was recommended that the security (nomination) fee should have been waived for deserving women and peasant/labor categories. It was also suggested that candidates be allowed to file nomination papers in two or more constituencies as in the case with national elections to increase their chances of being able to contest elections. There was a perceptible misconception that women could not contest general seats. **This concern was acknowledged when the government launched a concerted effort to publicize women's legibility to contest these seats prior to the third phase**

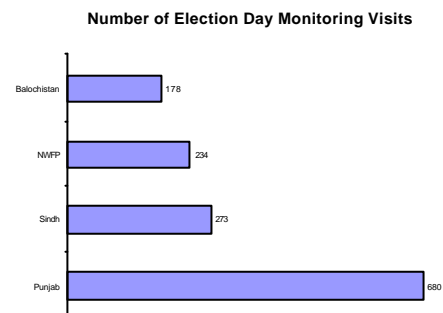
of elections. Submitting nomination papers at the district level posed an unnecessary problem for less resourceful candidates including women so DRCEP suggested that they should be allowed to submit nomination papers at the sub-district levels. **In cognizance of obvious difficulties seen during the first phase of elections, the government decided to appoint additional returning officers and allowed candidate papers to be processed at the sub-district level.**

In view of obvious administrative difficulties it was suggested that civil society institutions including NGOs and CBOs should be allowed to assist candidates. **The government complied with the request by letting DRCEP legal aid camps to be located on the premises of district and sub-district headquarters to assist candidates submitting nomination papers.**

ID Card Registration: At the district and *tehsil* levels voters were provided National Identity Card (NID) forms by DRCEP personnel and assisted in filling them out. Program staff even facilitated the deposit of collective forms at local NID offices. However there was still concern expressed concerning scaling up the NID card registration process since voters across the nation found it difficult to obtain ID cards in time for the scheduled elections.



Election Day Monitoring: DRCEP undertook this exercise in an effort to help keep the process of elections fair and transparent and to simultaneously ascertain ground realities actually emerging from the electoral process. A team of 2100 vigilant citizens and political activists was formed in 87 district to monitor elections and voting on polling days. The Election Commission encouraged DRCEP monitoring teams during the first two phases but then became reluctant. However many useful observations and suggestions emerged from this assumed function that are being listed below.



Problems with Staff: There were many complaints about polling booth staff across the nation. Absenteeism, lack of professional adequacy, biased and rude behavior were frequently noticed. The DRCEP monitoring team in Sindh estimated that half of polling stations visited by them during the first phase of elections had insufficiently trained and hurriedly posted staff particularly at women polling booths. At many rural polling stations there were complaints of men being posted on duty at women polling stations. The security staff at various polling stations comprised of army and police was also noticed being unnecessarily hostile.

Polling Booths: Many polling booths were located away from main public transportation routes making it quite inconvenient. The lack of adequate space demarcated to various polling booths compromised ballot secrecy. Essential facilities like adequate lighting inside and provision of shade outside the polling booths were lacking. There was not enough stationary or even result forms at many polling booths.

Ballot Papers: The design of the ballot papers was very complex. There were between thirty to sixty candidate symbols for general seats making it very difficult for voters to identify and endorse chosen candidates. The symbols were not even printed clearly. The time constrain compounded the confusion and lead to incomplete and incorrect voting. One woman exiting the polling booth admitted to our monitoring team that she had only been able to spot three symbols of candidates she wanted to vote for and the rest of her endorsement had been exercised randomly. At the High School Ahmad Nagar polling station in District Khanewal during the third phase of elections, symbols for two general councilors candidates were missing from the ballot papers thus leading to a long delay. Similar cases of missing candidate symbols were reported in Wards 6 and 27 in District Mianwali. And these are only reported cases for the Punjab. Even during the fourth phase such problem were not complete removed. In Gulshan-e-Iqbal Town of Karachi District, the DRCEP monitoring team reported a candidate symbol missing from ballot papers. And due to our interception the authorities managed to issue him a new symbol and voting resumed after an hour's delay.

Voter Lists: NADRA provided voter lists were riddled with mistakes till the last phase of elections. These lists were incomplete and inaccurate. Incorrect information pertaining to NIC numbers, age, names of voters or their relations denied many people the right to exercise their vote. Many men found their names printed in women voter lists and in fact a woman discovered the reverse occurrence she went to the men's voting station to cast her vote. Furthermore, there were discrepancies between lists available with polling agents of candidates and those inside the ballot booths in such contradictory cases presiding officers did not allow voters to exercise their right. Numerous voter names were altogether missing from the lists when they insisted that they had cast votes during the last elections. Some voters had to visit a few booths before they found their names on the list. In Karachi lists provided at Polling Station 197 had missed out names of a whole lane of registered voters, causing chaos and agitation at the booth. The compilation of these lists remains an unexplained phenomenon to the common man and its elaboration could have demystified the process and made it a bit more concise. Whenever, faced with these minor glitches the DRCEP team tried convincing presiding officers to let voters exercise their rights but this facilitation was negligible in face of the number of legitimate voters who were not allowed to exercise voting rights through no mistake of their own.

Identification Requirement: Many presiding officers were themselves confused or unaware of the government's policy concerning identification and in many cases refused to entertain any of the other permissible forms of identification including birth registration certificates, marriage licenses and/or passports. In Shalimar Town of Lahore District, many railway employees were not allowed to cast votes even though they had railway department issues ID cards.

Women Seats: In the first phase many women seats were uncontested (particularly those of female labor councilors) or contested between few candidates while the remaining candidates hardly received any votes. Area influential had resorted to the nomination of female servants to obtain these seats. In most tribal areas of NWFP, women were not been allowed to vote due to wide spread consensus of religious groups. This ultra-conservative element spilled over to other provinces in varying degrees. In the Punjab for example the Union Council of Mehr Shah Wali with its predominantly Shia community adhering to *purda* did not allow women to cast votes till one o'clock but then the males withdrew allowed their women to vote. In Buneer

district most women were elected uncontested whereas in Charsadda district, female candidates secured the Nazim and Naib Nazim slots.

Rigging: In Shalimar Town Ward 32 an aspiring Nazim's influence on the polling staff was apparent since only his supports were allowed to exercise their right to vote. His opponent's wife was not allowed the privilege. Similarly in Ward 80 (Nawabwalan) goons aspirant were coercing voters and an army man was himself stamping the ballot papers. In Ward 117 the Jamat-e-Islami had dominated the polling booth staff and only allowing its own party members to cast votes. At another polling booth in Nawabwalan, there was a comb placed on top of the ballot box a symbol of the Jamat-e-Islami backed candidate. Upon observation of such incidences, the DRCEP Coordinator himself brought these incidents to the notice of the Election Commission Complain Cell only to be rebuked by the words "who are you to complain?"

At a Government Model College polling station in Khanewal District, the DRCEP monitoring team saw another interesting phenomenon. The booth was empty and its staff was resting. Upon inquiry it was found that the area landlord had forbidden anyone from voting in the elections since none of the candidates had obtained his approval. It was found out that the landlord (Syed Sallahudin Gillani) had unsuccessfully contested for a Provincial Assembly seat several times and his brother was a High Court Judge at the Multan High Court. Apparently the district administration had contacted him but been unable to reverse his decision. Coincidentally a female labor councilor candidate passed away and elections in this union council had to be rescheduled but no one dared cast a single vote even in the by-elections.

Fake Voting: Many of the voters who came to the booths in the later afternoons and early evenings due to severity of heat found out that by this time someone else had already cast a vote in their names.

Voting Recommendations: Based on feedback of our district election monitoring teams suggestions were formulated and forwarded to the government after each election phase to help overcome hurdles in the future.

All polling booths need to be situated in open spaces with enough room inside to maintain privacy of voters casting ballots. Efforts are also needed to ensure provision of necessary facilities like a shade outside and adequate light and stationary inside the booths. **A slight improvement was noticed in the second phase and during the last two phases a notable difference was visible in this regard.**

Either the number of polling booths and/or their staff strength needs to be increased or else support from civil administration on polling day needs to be strengthened. Due to obvious pressure on the presiding officers some of them even forget to stamp and sign the back of ballot papers. The presiding officers need to be experienced and well informed about required procedures Notifications in this regard should be sent out well in time so that the procedures are implemented effectively. Election observations reported presiding officers were themselves unaware about procedures, the most blatant one being vote casting without a National Identity Card. It was also noticed that novice presiding officers had a particularly difficult time in dealing with Election Day issues and crises and were of no significant help in guiding confused voters. It was also suggested that polling agents be further orientated to guide candidates and voters, some were reported to be unaware of the basic fact that written voter complaints could be submitted via them to the presiding officers. Not did they know about tender votes.

There is no reason why government servants and polling staff on election duty must forego their right to vote. It was recommended that the prior facility of using postal ballots be reinstated for such personnel in the future.

Incorrect voter lists caused a major electoral hindrance. Inaccuracies were rampant during the initial phase and although a slight improvement was noticed during subsequent phases, inconsistencies and negligence remained evident right till the end of the exercise. It was strongly suggested that future attempts must address the issue of voter lists as a primary barrier to a fair and well-contested electoral process. Formation of mobile teams enlisting respected community members like teachers could help verify voter registration.

Besides provision of accurate voter lists there was also a very confused policy pursued by the government. NIC requirements were relaxed during the first two and final phases and suddenly tightened in the third phase due to electoral fraud suspicions, only to be relaxed three days before the election. Ambiguities in election rules and procedures caused unnecessary confusion and also undermined confidence of voters in the election process itself.

Ballot papers format was very muddled during the initial phase and the government was urged to simplify it. **During the second phase, the government revised the ballot papers format by printing district candidate symbols only rather than those of the entire province.** On the broader observation of voter problems with what was altogether a complicated voting procedure, **the government did do some damage control by assertively propagating balloting procedures to speed up the procedure and prevent incomplete balloting.**

III) Networking and Advocacy

Given the scale of the desired impact a lot of effort went into advocacy and coalition building. A basic objective of organizing district forums was to introduce the project to a broad range of stakeholders and in effect DRCEP was able to gather such audiences that included government representatives as well as numerous civil society representatives. Twelve consultative forums were organized specifically for policy makers and government officials and an attendance of 5000 people was recorded. Focal groups similarly provided another linkage for otherwise disparate individuals to come together and work towards a common goal through identified activities.

Besides project partners some well established NGOs also lend us their support. The National and Punjab Rural Support Programmes provided organizational support in Narowal, Multan and Sialkot districts by helping DRCEP arrange district forums, seminars and to disseminate printed materials. Although the CWRC had a more explicit mandate of facilitating women there was a synergy of ideas and information exchange at the advisory level.

Advocacy for the program was undertaken via similarly resourceful means while retaining a focus on the program's thematic priorities. Printed materials were disseminated to supplement activities like seminars, corner meetings, facilitation camps and forums to create a deeper understanding of vital issues in terms of democratic principles, local self-government, pluralistic democratic order and gender sensitive governance and the implications of the electoral process. Besides motivational materials interactive theatre also enriched the district forum discussions. Forum proceedings were even videotaped and broadcast by private satellite

channels. The media also played a vital role in further widening public awareness of DRCEP activities.

IV) Candidates Training

Training of candidates particularly from marginalized groups was a vital component of this project aiming to perpetuate devolution in genuine terms rather than seeing old ways being endorsed by new words. Focal group representatives organized these trainings and local resource people were asked to facilitate them and these trainings were then held from union council to the ward level. Candidates were given a briefing on the significance of strong local government including a comparative history of local governance systems already introduced in Pakistan including the reasons for their shortcomings, candidates were informed about LG Plan focusing on the roles and responsibilities of councilors, their linkage to village and town councils and advantages of the planned citizen boards. Potential difficulties and means to address them also came under discussion.

(V) Research and Dialogue

Issue specific research was undertaken by SDPI, one of the DRCEP partner organizations to focus on structural issues fundamental to democratic governance. One such research study has been completed which investigated the importance of landed power and other determinants of local body election outcomes. The research for this study was initiated in two districts of Punjab and Sindh after the first phase and in Baluchistan and NWFP after the fourth phase of elections. The hypothesis of the study was that in Pakistan's rural setting, even at the local level people vote for those who are able to facilitate the delivery of services or provide patronage including mediation with the state. Prominent landed families within *beraderis* and bigger *beraderis* within the multi-ward system were identified as the most influential actors in this regard. The subjective perceptions gathered through research concurred with the initial hypothesis as well as qualitative assessments since being a landlord or having support of a landlord and *beraderi* were identified as the most important determinants of electoral success by candidates and voters. Reiterating the need for land reform the study stressed upon the need for short and medium measures to complement the vital process of power diffusion. On the macro level, institutional checks like strengthening the election commission and ensuring proper transition mechanisms from one political government to the other were highlighter. Whereas at the micro-level, building countervailing power to the elite domination was stressed which acknowledged some of the measures taken in the devolution plan including reservation of seats and delinking service delivery from wealth by attempting its availability less impartial and exclusive through devolution of power.

Additional efforts were also to be made to document the processes, experiences and lessons, strengths and weaknesses of program experience. Besides, project reports including activity and proceeding reports, this present document is itself an attempt to collate experiences in a qualitative sense which besides outlining the scope of activities undertaken has tried to place them in a specific context that should prove useful for similar efforts in the future.

B Planning and Review

The size and scope of DRCEP activities kept increasing with each new phase of the devolution exercise. Provincial implementation of the project was exclusively undertaken by separate NGOs. Sungi Foundation in NWFP, Pakistan Institute of

Labor Education and Research in Sindh, IDSP in Quetta and South Asia Partnership of Pakistan (SAP-PK) in Punjab. SAP-PK also served as the national focal point and liaison organizations for the program. Additionally Sustainable Development Policy Institute helped with research and data collection whereas Interactive Resource Centre was responsible for interactive theatre in all the provinces. These six partner organizations with the help of numerous local groups and individuals implemented the program across all the districts of Pakistan.

As elections were held in four distinct phases, project activities corresponded with the government plan and an effort was made to use experiences from earlier phases for planning campaigns for the next phases. This planning mode not only enabled project personnel to better plan and manage their activities and resources but in turn helped prepare and preempt campaigner and voter problems and also made the government planners more sensitive to ground realities.

Central Partners and Advisory Council Meetings: The project planning and review was undertaken through consistent self-assessments. At the beginning and end of each phase the partner organizations met to plan and review project activities. During the course of such meetings, preparatory tasks were identified and an action plan for the project was formulated outlining province-wise responsibilities. Project partners came up with clear-cut criteria for focal group composition particularly with regard to their non-partisanship. The Advisory Council members also held meetings to conceptualize project values and principles and later to help in the prescriptive decision-making in light of emergent problems and opportunities.

General Observations

These observations are a qualitative compilation of indirect feedback and perceptions recorded by project personnel and partners.

Problems: The LG Plan itself was unclear piecemeal and contradictory. Behind the grandiose dramatic flourishes the government itself was confused and perpetual amendments to the LG Plan resulted in much confusion. Firstly, the details of the plan were not properly advertised to the public and their dissemination within the government was also not very effective. Government revocation of a lenient identification policy during the third phase caused a lot of confusion. The contradictory attitude of returning officers towards legitimate voters is one example of the subsequent ambiguity which created an obvious hurdle in the electoral process. Some key devolutionary elements of the LG Plan were also undermined with later alterations including the revamped interjection of army monitoring teams. The lack of information concerning provincial powers under the new setup cast a lot of doubt on the whole devolution process. Explanation of LG Plan particularly with regard to indirect elections remains, which the government needs to undertake as soon as possible. The scope for civil society participation initially conceived within the LG Plan has not been realized due to ambiguity surrounding the formulation of Citizens Committees and Citizens Boards which must be formulated and integrated with district level functioning as soon as possible.

During the actual process of elections, due to the poor management of electoral rolls, many eligible voters could not avail their voting rights. Election Day monitoring teams made this observation across the nation and it is estimated that a third of legitimate and motivated voters were not able to exercise this right. The clustering of labor/farmer categories also lead to confusion since people were not sure whether they could vote for more than two peasants or laborers against four allotments.

Candidates were similarly unsure thus leading to fewer nominations and sparsely contested nominations in this category particularly in the initial phase of elections when even lesser attention had been given to the potential confusion.

The election schedule was affected more by political expediencies rather than consideration for people. The weather was extremely unpleasant during the last two phases and their schedule clashed with harvesting season, which is obviously a priority in rural areas. The government's decision to reduce wheat prices had caused evident despondency in Multan. People's confidence in the government was severely affected after its decision to curb purchases, followed by similar decisions regarding cotton and rice. Thus people were not willing to pay heed to or participate in the new devolution plan. The water crisis in Sindh had also soured people's faith in government capabilities and intentions. Such factors effected mobilization and subsequent voter participation trends during the electoral process.

Since elections were to be held on a party-less basis, candidates could not draw support of political organizations nor be accountable to their explicit manifestoes and instead experienced a more insidious presence in terms of indirect patronage and influence being exercised for party favorites. Many voters and candidates expressed their discontent through DRCEP platforms that the same old political groups and power elites were gaining power by backing candidates through informal alliances. Landlords' children who have not yet inherited properties were contesting elections on (landless) peasant seats. The public demand for joint electorates not being accepted had led to the disillusionment (boycott) of minorities. These recurrent discrepancies continue to hinder the facilitation of both political awareness and participation at the grassroots level and the recent devolution exercise once again failed to conclusively remove deep-rooted barriers to democratization.

Positive Trends: Despite problems almost inevitable in view of infrastructural inefficiencies and the mammoth scope of the electoral exercise, there was gradual improvement in procedures evident from the fact that during the initial phase of elections it usually took 10-15 minutes for an average vote to be cast but this procedure was lessened to 5-7 minutes in later phases. Confusion over peasant and workers seats and eligibility of female contestants was lessened during latter phases. An increase in voter registration was also observed reportedly due to the fact that district level governance is much more conducive in terms of geographical proximity to the reach of a common man. Although impossible to quantify our motivational efforts further reinforced this healthy trend. Women and other marginalized groups participated in elections in greater numbers in the capacity of not only candidates but also voters. In Gujranwala for example, 1408 women contested elections for general seats and there were over 500 candidates for the peasant/worker seats. Our monitoring teams also noticed many fresh faces when contestant results were being announced for general seats and those reserved for peasants and farmers.

Peoples Voices

To give insight to public reaction to our initiative and the kind of response solicited via different project platforms, a representative selection of such feedback in the form of queries, concerns and comments is listed below:

- How is true democracy possible without Islam?
- How can a peasant candidate bck horns with the traditional power of feudal landlord?

- Will the government pay elected candidates?
- What was the need for drawing out elections on a phase basis?
- Will these local body elections receive any constitutional cover?
- When can government employees vote?
- Will the LG Plan allow the Lodharan district government decide on its own accord to sell its surplus wheat to Balouchistan to increase revenues or else can the Nazim of Lodhran reject DCO nominates and appoint a DCO from his own area? If none of this is possible then what is the devolution of power?
- How can the hundred and fifty year old grip of bureaucracy be broken off all of a sudden?
- Is this devolution plan feasible and sustainable?
- Will anyone listen to women councilors and implement their decisions in the union councils?
- The country is the same as before so are its people and those who govern them. How can this new plan work?
- Despite the prevailing poverty, new taxes are being introduced at the zila level, will this not burden the people further?
- Can revenue allocations for larger zilas be reallocated to smaller zilas within the district?
- What will be the exact duties of women labour councilors in the union council?
- How will the LG Plan deal with prevalent trends of provincialism?
- How will the corruption of local bodies be prevented?
- How can one term this process democratic when the minorities are barred from contesting Nazim seats and elections are being held on the basis of separate electorates?
- The voter age has been reduced to 18 instead of 21, whereas in Pakistan people are not politically mature and responsible till a much later age.
- Women representation has been enhanced without any educational requirements that will be conducive to efficient decision-making.
- Political processes are embodied in political parties and so politicians should not be discredited nor should they be discarded since they are in fact vital to our governance.
- The LG Plan is meant not to strengthen but to disrupt our representative power. Previously, each ward had a councilor but now councilors are being elected for the whole district. We may not even get a representative in the district. Local peoples' power to unite for a common concern is now going to be even more difficult.
- Even this time, the same old faces as before are winning elections again and will be back in power with the DCO under their control. There may be more peasants, laborers and women elected under the plan but the masses are allowing the landlords to return to power and until this trend continues there will be no real empowerment for the common man.

Positive programmatic contributions

DRCEP successfully cultivated nationwide contacts to forge an alliance of nearly 2,500 civil society institutions, NGOs and political groups for initiating a massive motivation campaign to participate in political processes and also to monitor and evaluate available opportunities. District focal groups brought about by a coalition of national level organizations provided a sustainable mechanism for engaging civil society and its workability was evidently demonstrated by activation of identified program activities meant to bolster ailing democratic processes for empowerment

and awareness. These focal groups developed and strengthened a new cadre of individual and organizational political activists. New nation-wide institutional structure (formation) that agrees on a minimum agenda of rights based democracy and has begun to develop organization capacity to implement democratic programming. Besides district level orientation workshops and district forums the creation of Interactive Resource Centre provides an example of another innovate platform through which awareness raising and problem solving debates on peoples political empowerment were initiated and it became a new tools for providing political education. The DRCEP initiative provided visibility to NGOs in the political process initiated dialogue with religious parties and created linkages with local and national government institutions by becoming a conduit for common peoples experiences and demands and for initiating public political debate. A variety of platforms were made available at the district level with subsequent linkages down to the lowest tiers of governance for the proactive involvement of grassroots civil society organizations and individuals.

Simultaneously, the very initiation of such a program implies a landmark achievement for civil society maturity and a break away from biases of the past. Now a new responsibility has been reposed in civil society vis-à-vis political processes. DRCEP helped encourage the development of an educated political mass by initiating the process of political education via numerous program platforms. The program has also proved the possibility of not only mobilizing but also facilitating the electoral process with subsequent influence on policy change. Project experiences have provided retrospective insight concerning complexities, ambiguities and gaps within the Local Government Plan that will be focused upon as plans are being made to carry this initiative forward. The importance of marginalized groups representation was highlighted through advocacy and facilitation overtures that enhanced their image and enabled peasants and workers to fight elections against feudal landlords and industrialists. In the same vein female candidates were also encouraged to enter the electoral process. Improvement in voters' lists and ballot papers format more positive behavior of returning officers were also the more tangible results of direct DRCEP interventions. Overall, the program has initiated a much needed culture of dialogue and formulated a framework for coordination and collaboration amongst social organizations, civil society and political and media groups. Public discourse organized for this purpose laid particular emphasis on participation of farmers, workers, women and minorities helped in highlighting their concerns and situating their role in the overall democratic process. Some of the project impact is less easy to quantify but certainly has justifiable claim to the end result as in the case of the government announcement to restore joint electorates for the coming provincial and national assembly elections.

Program Constraints

The time spacing between the four phases of the project was not consistent and this caused great strains with regard to program preparations. Certain sections of society accused program personnel of perpetuating the government's agenda without even bothering to familiarize themselves with our objectives and activities. This skepticism was compounded by the lingering mistrust of NGOs which have often been overtly persecuted by the establishment for fraud labeled by ultraconservative elements as propagators of foreign interests and now were being considered agents of the establishment itself. The cynicism was nothing new but what did pose a more serious challenge to this initiative was the lack of political experience of many partner CBOs. In many cases it required a paradigm shift of renouncing their earlier apolitical stance. The limited funding also hindered further institutional support to integrate

and guide district level activities due to which more attention was given to the functional or procedural political awareness (candidates nominations, balloting etc.) rather than political awareness. There also remained need for greater focus on local dynamic of political processes. Perhaps in Punjab there was balance simply due to the fact that the project coordination team was situated within the province and readily available to assist local initiatives. In retrospect, inter-provincial sharing of experiences based on more consistent organizational understanding could have alleviated this constraint and will be focused upon in the future to avoid ad hocism by the introduction of management information system and an inbuilt mechanism for risk assessment, authentication and impact analysis.

While analyzing campaign experiences, particular provincial situations had developed with regard to challenges and gaps facing the program. In NWFP for example, there was strong reaction from some religious forces that reacted strongly against involvement of NGOs and women in the electoral process. However the local partners utilized personal contacts with community representatives of such opposing forces to pacify their concerns and dampen their opposition to the program's democratization agenda. In Balouchistan a similar situation was faced in Loralli district where female mobilization faced unsurpassable opposition of religious groups. In Zhob district on the other hand support of both political and religious groups resulted in effective mobilization of citizens including women in Sindh the political boycott had prompted tensions in urban areas like Hyderabad, Mirpur Khan but there was not a significant hindrance to program activities. Punjab presented a different picture where mobilization was effective and result oriented. The National Reconstruction Bureau had introduced a city government plan for Karachi according to which there was to be a single city district with 18 towns and 178 union councils under the setup which is a point of contention in itself, but additionally despite this special treatment meted out to the metropolis by planners there was a evident lack of government participation in DRCEP arranged district orientations workshops.

DRCEP's Future Direction

In retrospect this project activity has clearly demonstrated the feasibility of civil society involvement in the vital arena of governance and its cognizance is vital for further broadening the course of similar civil action. Creation of an enabling democratic environment via DRCEP is not an immediately achievable objective but rather a long-termed goal. While the initial phase of the project focused on facilitating and monitoring the government's devolution drive as a means to exercise existing political rights of representation and participation there remains much to be done. DRCEP project partners realize the continued need for providing impetus to civil society linkages recently forged by them. For this purpose they reconvened to focus on evaluation and assessment of the initial phase and simultaneously devise a well-integrated framework for continuation of efforts for a period of another three years. It was thus decided that public education and advocacy on democracy and democratic rights as well as the role of the electorate need further fortification. And now that power has been devolved down at the grassroots level, it is imperative to begin focusing on training of elected representatives as well as the relationship between elected constituents and their constituencies. Similarly important is the need for simultaneous strengthening of future planning and current implementation of devolution for which the role of the FGDs has been realized to coordinate and increase collaboration with the media, participating CBOs and NGOs to enhance effectiveness of efforts being undertaken particularly with regard to marginalized groups.

The situation at hand is an ideal time for building models and strategies that can link DRCEP's democratic agenda with other outreach programs and local and regional imperatives for strengthening linkages between public representatives and society. There are however some evident threats that could impede accompany existing and future goals. These include heightened danger of extremist religious forces interference from traditional feudal, tribal and vested political power structures. There is also a more internal risk that implies that the future course of interventions could become too focused on local government systems and consequently overlooks larger civil society concerns. To address these perceived threats to credibility of the overall initiative, a comprehensive strategy has been formulated to capitalize on existing strengths by linking and politicizing partners' constituencies around issues pertaining to democratization of state and society using available linkages and understanding developed with civil society organizations and political parties to focus on integrated and feasible model building focusing on fortification of a new cadre of activists and organizations influencing policy change through research and strengthening local struggles and movements and consolidating links between public representatives and the society for the forthcoming elections.

The future course of action requires investments including programmatic research, publishing and sharing with civil society in general and DRCEP partners in particular. Launching longitudinal studies for model building has also been highlighted in this regard. Greater interaction with public representatives and civil society is required to help institutionalize the program. In retrospect the utility of developing cohesive mechanisms for documenting and sharing the processes for enhanced learning experiences also been realized besides supporting formulation of citizens' monitoring, research and evaluation mechanism at local levels to ensure public interest. Furthermore, the process of designing and developing innovative strategies for engaging large proportion of civil society is still ongoing.

Future collaborations for the initiative will be engaging more civil society organizations like political parties, trade unions, professional bodies in a conscious effort to develop intra and inter linkage between elected representatives and society at large to redress issues of public concern. The media will again be involved in instigating larger political and democratic debates. Communication with the state for influencing policy and creating influence through public policy making bodies for socio-political reforms is also to be built into the future project methodology.

Thus a comprehensive approach has already been agreed upon by DRCEP partners in a strategic workshop that highlighted existing concerns and besides articulating the above-mentioned, future collaboration and investment imperatives also identified some damage control means to address current threats. These damage controlling implications include conducting detailed risk assessment and management analysis of traditional power structures and extremist forces, enhancing and sustaining organizational strength of DRCEP partner organizations including strategic dissemination of program values, principles and positions and appropriating program focus through institutionalizing research, planning, assessment and reflection systems.

It is hoped that focus on fortification of evidently positive program outcomes that build on lessons learnt in retrospect and keep in view emerging ground realities for reformulating further support will help strengthen and sustain democratic awareness and practice within the specific political culture of Pakistan.

ELECTION PROCESS



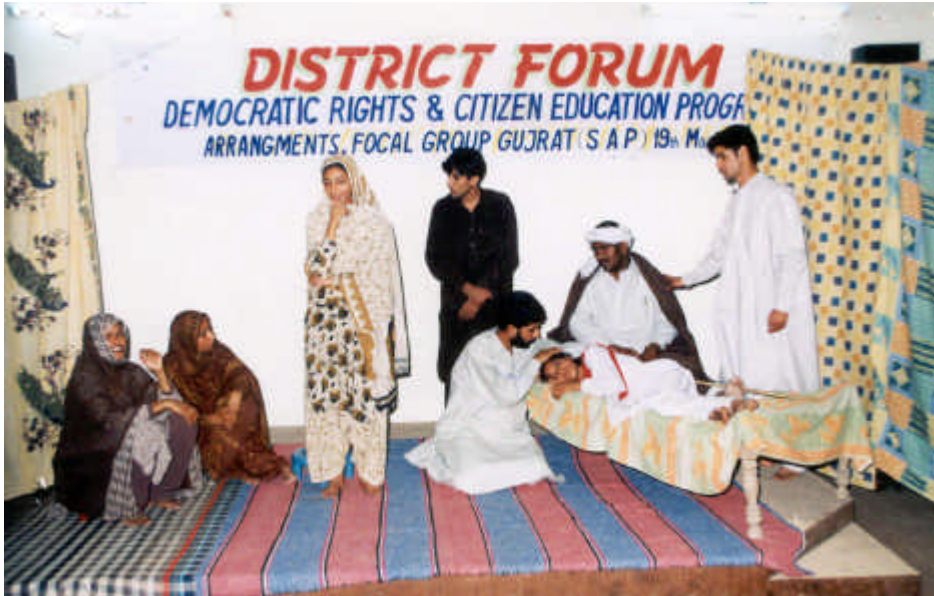
ELECTION DAY MONITORING



PUBLIC FORUMS



THEATRE PERFORMANCES



LEGAL AID CAMPS



SEMINARS



NATIONAL DATA COMPILED

ACTIVITIES	Number of Activities				Number of Participants									
	Punjab	Sindh	NWFP	Balochistan	Punjab		Sindh		NWFP		Balochistan		Total No of Participants	
	34 Districts	16 Districts	20 Districts	14 Districts	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Formation of focal groups	39	13	12	14	502	201	340	200			37	15	879	416
District orientation workshops	39	29	12	25	977	646	1140	872			582	218	2699	1436
Seminars on DRCEP	17	25		43	4244	3256	3495	2195			1458	887	9197	6338
legal aid camps	40	12		14	2072	753	1236	1064			158	67	3466	1884
Corner meetings	408	36	201	182	11237	6307	16635	8365	13931	3379	13751	5149	55554	23200
Assistance in I-D cards registration.	27	27		14	10,271	5,222	673	327			1436	864	12380	6413
Public forums	36	13	23	13	9670	5410	1986	949	7254	1759	2253	747	21163	8865
Theater performances	40	13	9	11	9670	5410	1574	1226	2489	1743	1932	768	15665	9147
Mock elections	70	7		6	3000	4000	1223	577			250		4473	4577
Training workshops for peasants and workers	45				1300	950	187	98					1487	1146
Women seminars	42		8		Nil	1750								1750
Door to door visits for mobilization	75				1500	1800							1500	1800
Seminars on the role of polling agents	7				820	180							820	180
Workshops on L-G plan	52				950	630							950	630
Press campaign	34	13			50		22		36					
Election observations	102 Places visited	20 Places visited			68 teams		12 teams							
Material dissemination	850000 posters, 100000 booklets, 200000 pamphlets were printed and disseminated among the districts of Pakistan and near about 5500000 were approached through printed material													

2500 organizations took part in the program directly.