**[Climate-proofing mandates](https://www.dawn.com/news/1814361/climate-proofing-mandates)**

[Ali Tauqeer Sheikh](https://www.dawn.com/authors/4987/ali-tauqeer-sheikh) Published February 15, 2024 Updated a day ago

ALL politics is local. The nature of the local polity sets the direction of national policies. In fact, the poor quality of local governance has determined the quality of electoral processes and the misplaced national development discourse.

Candidates are elected or re-elected based on their ability to deliver on local issues. How would the PTI, PML-N, PPP, and MQM, the four political parties that have bagged the most seats at both the national and provincial levels, change the ugly realities on the ground? How would they translate their mandates to deliver local development, described interchangeably as municipal or environmental services?

Efficient and transparent service delivered at the constituency level is a necessary building block for climate resilience. Ideally, the elected representatives will need to climate-proof their mandates to serve their constituents and the feeble national reform agenda.

The big challenge for newly elected assemblies is to transform their respective mandates and craft a clear reform roadmap for equitable, low-carbon, and climate-resilient development. Each of these political parties has stalwarts in its ranks to reach out to his or her counterparts in other parties and broker a non-partisan consensus.

In Pakistan, consolidation of the democratic dispensation and building climate resilience are intertwined. It will be a sustained effort spread over several years, but the functioning of the new national and provincial governments and effectiveness of their opposition groups will hinge on two foundational actions: i) form local government and governance structures, ii) accept, adopt, and accelerate the institutional reform agenda. Let’s take a look at them:

**Formation of local government and governance structures:** The absence of constitutional protection to LGs has weakend the foundations of Pakistan’s economy, institutions, human resource development, and the physical environment. Democracy cannot consolidate or deliver without the national and provincial assemblies getting trained human resources from the lowest rung of society.

LG institutions are the first line of defence against climate-triggered disasters, ranging from floods, droughts, heatwaves, and glacial outbursts to snowstorms, mudslides, urban flooding, and tropical storms. Every district faces at least two of these climate-induced disasters. At any given time of the year, it is likely that the country would be grappling with at least two climate-triggered extreme weather events in two or more different regions of the country.

Efficient and transparent service at the constituency level is necessary for climate resilience.

This climate vulnerability at the community level is made worse by the absence of local institutions at the district, tehsil, and union council levels. Health, education, clean drinking water and sanitation, town planning for waste collection, pavement of streets, the provision of streetlights, footpaths, and storm drains, have all become orphan functions over the years, as has the protection of playgrounds, parks, parking spaces, and communal lands and wetlands.

Herein lies the genesis of Pakistan’s worsening indicators in health, education, climate vulnerability, and economic growth. Instead of increasing budgetary allocations at the national and provincial levels, we need to first stop bleeding at the local level.

These are all provincial functions and the election results have given a strong mandate for action to these political parties in the provinces. Instead of usurping the rights and functions of LGs, they can prioritise LG elections in their respective provinces. The split mandate at the federal level can be leveraged to adopt a new Charter of Democracy that can help the provinces prioritise the devolution of powers, transferring finances to local levels, and strengthening institutions for climate resilience.

On its part, the federal government can help devise new mechanisms. It can become a champion for the formation of local government and governance structures. The issue can be accelerated by bringing it up in a meeting of the Council of Common Interests for national consensus.

There will hardly be any better use of a hung parliament than utilising the weaknesses of a coalition government to agree on a new magna carta. The last time the CCI was used for such a higher purpose was when the PTI from KP, PPP from Sindh, PML-N from Punjab and BAP from Balochistan signed the National Water Policy and Pakistan Water Charter in 2018.

**Accept, adopt and accelerate reform agenda:** The new government will need to build upon several ongoing national initiatives and global commitments. It will, for example, have no option but to immediately strike a follow-up agreement with the IMF. This is important, among other reasons, for the continuity of financial discipline and reforms that have been initiated, including the implementation of Climate-PIMA, the IMF checklist for climate-related institutional reforms at the federal level.

A bigger challenge for the incoming government will, however, be to accept and own the urgency of institutional reforms rather than undertaking them reluctantly, grudgingly, and half-heartedly. The secret recipe for the success of these reforms rests on speed and consistency of action. Pakistan has already dragged its heels on reforms that were first initiated in the early 1990s. The delays have cost the economy, society, and environment dearly.

A coalition government offers opportunities to create a consensus for a long-aspired-to charter of economy, to ensure continuity and accelerate institutional and economic reforms. The fleeting references to this have so far not articulated how it will make society more inclusive and equitable, and contribute towards reducing climate vulnerabilities.

The charter must recognise that Pakistan’s climate-smart planning is overly weak. Policy planning documents need climate-proofing. The Public Sector Development Programme can be paused, as it has more often than not funded maladaptation and vulnerability. Its design and purpose need to be re-envisioned. Poor documentation has failed to increase Pakistan’s ability to access climate-smart investments and finances.

None of Pakistan’s sectoral policies and plans have been climate-proofed and made investment-ready. The national climate policy and adaptation plan, and the Nationally Determined Contributions are neither costed nor prioritised.

In a risk- and reform-averse environment, these are ambitious directions. But the climate-proofing of electoral mandates will merely entail implementing our existing national policies and ongoing international commitments. After all, climate-proofing electoral mandates is essential to reduce existential risks to the country.

*The writer is an Islamabad-based climate change and sustainable development expert.*

*Published in Dawn, February 15th, 2024*