**Public service delivery and public trust**

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The landscape of public debate in Pakistan has been dominated in the last few decades, among other issues, on the quality of public service delivery by government machinery. Various governments, including the present one, have been criticised for the inadequate provision of basic goods and services to the people. Serious questions have been raised regarding the capacity of our governance system to deliver public goods and services to the people of Pakistan in an effective manner. The quality of delivery of public services at three levels—that is federal, provincial and local—has been questioned because of the lukewarm responsiveness of our systems to the challenges and needs of the people. We need to look at this situation in the wider context of the relationship between good governance and the provision of public services, which results in enhancing public trust in the government of the day in particular, and the state at large. The performance of the government in terms of the efficient delivery of services increases the trust of people in their systems. In developing countries like Pakistan, “weak systems and processes of democratic governance, as well as inadequate access to services and economic opportunities, tend to erode trust in government”. Trust on the part of the people towards their government implies confidence in the overall productivity, output and outcomes of the leaders or institutions.

[Somali military kills 28 al-Shabaab terrorists in 48 hours](https://nation.com.pk/29-Jan-2022/somali-military-kills-28-al-shabaab-terrorists-in-48-hours)

Our governance system has gone into reactive mode (as witnessed in Murree) where our institutions become alert and respond only when a disaster, catastrophe or loss has taken place. The political leadership of the country provides an overall policy direction to tackle issues of different sectors of economy. It’s the responsibility of the executive arm of the state to implement those policies to achieve the intended targets and goals to provide facilities, public services and a favourable environment through which citizens of the country could materialise their dreams of a successful life. One of the basic objectives of modern states is to ensure the wellbeing of its citizens while establishing efficient governmental systems and structures. The constitution of the country provides an overall umbrella framework for the form and nature of government, whereas, real governance in the country is conducted through the systems and structures established at different tiers under the law by the government. The success of a public service delivery system largely depends on the way public servants conduct their official business; that is quality and speed of decision making and the implementation and knowledge of organisational objectives and targets, robust monitoring, supervision and internal accountability. The government is a major player in the provision of services to the public therefore, the people have legitimate expectations from it for better management of national resources and the delivery of services, which results in the strengthening of trust in state institutions.

[Western Balkans see highest COVID deaths per 100,000 globally](https://nation.com.pk/29-Jan-2022/western-balkans-see-highest-covid-deaths-per-100-000-globally)

We have seen that in Pakistan, public goods and services such as clean drinking water, good schools, roads, hospitals, public transport, electricity, food security, and a safe environment etc, which improve the well-being of citizens are mostly under-provided. My experience as a public sector auditor for the last four decades has revealed that most of the public sector projects, programmes and other developmental activities suffer on account of cost overruns and time overruns; due to which the delivery of intended services and goods are not only delayed but also provided at higher costs, resultantly putting an extra burden on national exchequer. Some of the factors affecting the provision and distribution of these public goods and services in Pakistan include corruption, fearful and slow decision making, inefficient implementation, a lack of coordination among stakeholders, skill deficits, inefficient monitoring, weak internal accountability arrangements, the absence of performance measurement mechanisms, insufficient performance information, a lack of incentives for good performers, non-adherence to merit-based policies and at times, strategic direction is missing. Cumbersome governmental rules and procedures also contribute towards the slowing down of developmental activities, which ultimately have a negative impact on the timely and efficient delivery of services.

[4.5 magnitude earthquake jolts parts of Swat](https://nation.com.pk/28-Jan-2022/4-5-magnitude-earthquake-jolts-parts-of-swat)

The federal government has no doubt started measuring the performance of ministries and divisions on a quarterly basis, but this system is needed to be made more structured, effective and robust through the maintenance and disclosure of performance information to concerned quarters including the PM office, the Cabinet, the Parliament Standing Committees, the Auditor General and other oversight bodies. All ministries, departments and other government entities need to maintain their performance information in a transparent manner and on a regular basis, not only for their internal consumption and accountability, but also for other stakeholders. The best way to tackle access to the information issue is through sharing it on websites of government entities.

For making our public service delivery system efficient and proactive, there is a need to improve planning and risk assessment processes, simplify the working procedures of the government, amend the law or rules wherever needed, strengthen internal accountability arrangements, increase the implementation capacity of departments, freeing the bureaucracy from unnecessary fearful environment for speedy decision making, enhancing the workforce capacity through skill development and the maintenance of performance information along with the use of technology for efficiency gains. The local bodies institutions should be empowered by decentralising the functions and transfer of adequate funds. The objective of an effective service delivery system can only be ensured when the governance structures of the federal, provincial and local bodies are made more efficient because a majority of basic public services are provided at the local level. The stronger the governance practices, the higher the public trust in government.