Article

Local Governance Institutions in Democratic Countries: An Study on Building and Strengthening Local Capacities

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Abstract: Local government institutions play a fundamental role in democratic systems by empowering citizens to actively participate in decision-making that impacts their daily lives, enhancing transparency and accountability. These institutions are responsible for managing public services and developing local areas, contributing to sustainable development and improving the quality of services provided to citizens. However, these institutions face numerous challenges, such as a lack of human expertise, a shortage of available resources, and weak coordination between local and central governments. Therefore, this research will address ways to strengthen the institutional capacities of local government institutions, focusing on ways to improve the performance of these institutions, including enhancing the capacity and efficiency of workers, enhancing cooperation with the private sector and civil government, and utilizing modern technology. The research aims to provide practical solutions to these challenges in order to improve the performance of these institutions and enhance their ability to meet the needs of local communities more effectively.

Keywords: Local governance, local governance institutions, democratic states, strengthening and building local capacities

1. Introduction

Local government institutions are essential foundations of democratic systems, playing a pivotal role in driving sustainable development and enhancing citizen participation in decision-making, thus contributing to the achievement of social justice. In democratic countries, these institutions represent the channel through which individuals can directly influence their local policies, reinforcing the values of accountability, citizenship, and transparency. However, the greatest challenge remains building and strengthening the local capacity of these institutions, which requires coordinated intervention between central and local governments at all levels.

The development of these institutions in democratic systems is a key factor contributing to improving citizens' lives by promoting equitable resource distribution and providing essential services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Furthermore, their role is not limited to the day-to-day management of local affairs, but extends to strengthening democracy by empowering citizens to actively participate in decision-making that affects their lives.

Despite these important roles, local governments face numerous challenges in efficiently carrying out their development missions. Prominent among these challenges are the scarcity of material and human resources, weak institutional capacity, and bureaucracy that hinders the effective implementation of local policies. Hence, there is an urgent need to find innovative solutions that enhance local capacities, such as improving

the training of local workers, strengthening cooperation with civil society and the private sector, and making better use of modern technology.

This study aims to shed light on the challenges and opportunities facing local government institutions in democratic countries and explore ways to improve their effectiveness in meeting local community needs. It also seeks to provide insights into how these institutions can be supported to fulfill their effective role in promoting public participation and delivering services with greater efficiency and quality.

2. Materials and Methods

First: The importance of research

The importance of this research lies in examining the role of local government institutions in promoting local development and effective citizen participation within democratic systems. Strengthening the institutional capacities of these institutions is essential to ensuring their ability to efficiently provide basic services and achieve social justice. By strengthening these institutions, citizens can directly influence decisions that affect their daily lives, contributing to increased transparency and accountability in local administration.

The research also seeks to address the challenges facing these institutions, such as the lack of financial and human resources, and to offer practical solutions to enhance the effectiveness of local governance. By highlighting these issues, the research aims to present innovative approaches to improving institutional performance, thereby contributing to meeting the needs of communities. Thus, the research represents an important contribution to the field of improving local governance and enhancing understanding of ways to support these institutions so they can effectively play their role in promoting democracy and achieving social stability.

Second: The research problem

The problem of this research lies in the challenges facing local government institutions in democratic countries, particularly regarding building and strengthening their institutional capacities to meet the needs of local communities. Despite the vital role these institutions play in improving quality of life and promoting citizen political participation, they remain subject to a number of obstacles that limit their ability to fulfill their duties adequately.

Prominent among these challenges are the scarcity of financial and human resources, weak administrative capacities, and a lack of coordination between local and central governments. Furthermore, bureaucracy and complex administrative systems can hinder effective policy implementation. Therefore, the research raises questions about ways to enhance the effectiveness of these institutions and how to improve their efficiency in providing local services and promoting sustainable development.

The main challenge is how to develop a local institutional structure capable of adapting to political and social changes and achieving tangible results in the areas of local governance and sustainable development, thus enhancing local democracy and addressing the challenges facing local government institutions.

3. Results

Research structure

This research examines local governance institutions in democratic countries, focusing on building and strengthening local capacities. It also reviews the challenges and opportunities facing these institutions in performing their duties. In order to organize and present this research systematically, it follows the following structure:

1. the introduction
2. Chapter One: The Theoretical Framework of Local Government Institutions
3. Chapter Two: The Structure of Local Government Institutions in Democratic Countries
4. Chapter Three: Building and Strengthening Local Capacities
5. Results and recommendations

6. Conclusion
7. the reviewer

Chapter One: The Theoretical Framework of Local Government Institutions

Local government institutions are an essential part of democratic systems, representing the direct interface between government and citizens at the local level. These institutions include municipalities and local councils, which are responsible for regulating local community affairs and providing basic services such as education, health, transportation, and other essential needs. The importance of these institutions lies in their ability to empower citizens to actively participate in decision-making that impacts their daily lives, enhancing transparency and accountability in public administration. Therefore, the ability of these institutions to perform their duties effectively depends on improving their institutional capacities and providing them with the necessary resources, which contributes to achieving sustainable local development.

1. The concept of local government

Local government is meant to be "the collective name given to institutions that do not have other governments between them and the public, and which differ in terms of structure, size, and purpose despite this common factor." [1]

The recognition of local government in the federal system is a modern phenomenon that has increasingly appeared after World War II, coinciding with the return to democratic rule, as federal constitutions in the modern era did not give room to grant powers to provinces and governorates and did not give freedom to work except on a narrow level, as in the Constitution of the United States of America in the year (1787) and Switzerland in the year (1848).

Local government is known as a system of public administration and one of the development tools that aims to increase the administrative efficiency of the state, by virtue of which powers and competencies are given to localities that help in the ease and speed of decision-making away from the central authority and its control, with this decision being linked to the achievement of the state's development goals and policies, which expresses regional administration or decentralization as a method of administrative organization of the state. Local administration leads to the transfer of some powers to local units, and this does not affect the competencies of the central government, but it will show the mechanisms of participation between the local and central governments, which creates means and mechanisms for coordination and consolidation of the local and central.[2] [3]

Finally, local government is defined as the specific areas that carry out their local activities through bodies elected by their local residents under the supervision and control of the central government [4].

The provincial council is responsible for issuing public policies. It is a council elected by the people of the province and is responsible for serving their interests and meeting their most important needs. [5] Adopting democratic participation as a principle for the residents of regions, provinces, and areas far from the capital center and involving them in administrative and political work in order to improve their cultural and living conditions is an achievement of the principle of equality and social justice in rights and duties based on the principle of effective democratic participation. [6] Local elections are an essential element of local democracy because they give local citizens the ability to evaluate the performance of elected representatives and judge their credibility at the local level. Local democracy contributes to achieving political equality among citizens by providing them with the opportunity to participate in developing local policies and thus enhancing equality among them in exercising their civil rights, including the right to express an opinion on who manages their local affairs, as well as their right to form some defensive groups to defend their rights, and limiting the concentration of power in the hands of central governments in a way that prevents those central authorities from defaming citizens' rights. Local democracy can contribute to achieving social harmony and emphasizing the spirit of participation, thus leading to political stability in society and

enabling voters to choose local leaders they trust [7]. Therefore, the importance of local government institutions lies in their contribution to achieving sustainable development by improving the quality of key services such as education, infrastructure, and health, as well as enhancing popular participation in decision-making that directly impacts their daily lives, which enhances the spirit of citizenship and increases the effectiveness of public services. Local institutions also play a role in promoting accountability and transparency, as they enable citizens to monitor the performance of these institutions and participate in evaluating their services. This will enhance citizens' confidence in the political system and thus encourage them to participate effectively in the democratic process. Therefore, local government institutions are among the most important pillars in building a cohesive democratic society capable of meeting the needs of its members and achieving sustainable development.

2. The difference between local government, local administration and central government:

Local government is a political method and system and a way of internal governance that exists in all federal and unitary states. The local government is subject to the control and supervision of the central government. The local government does not have any original jurisdiction over legislation, but rather is primarily concerned with local administrative affairs [8].

It is a method of administrative organization of the state based on distributing duties and activities between the central and local agencies, for the purpose of the central authority being free to formulate the general policy of the state, in addition to managing the national facilities of the country, and for the local agencies to be able to manage their facilities efficiently, and achieve their legitimate purposes, and what distinguishes this definition is that it shows the role and importance of local administration in managing the local public facilities within its community [9].

Local administration can be defined as a method of organization, i.e. administrative decentralization, whereby elected local councils are created to manage their affairs under the supervision and oversight of the central government [10].

It is the system that is based on and established on the basis of distributing the authority of the administrative function between the central government and other administrative bodies that are independent and specialized on two bases: the first is regional and geographical, and the second is objective and interest-based, with the presence of administrative oversight over those decentralized units and bodies to ensure coordination and success between national plans and the drawing up of general policies and the process of their completion and implementation [11].

The difference between local government is that it relates to political decentralization and federalism, i.e. a political constitutional character based on the political unity of the state, because local government is the distribution of the three powers between the central authority bodies and the regional governments, while local administration relates to administrative decentralization, as it is limited to the duty of legislation only without implementation and the judiciary, and it exists in simple countries, unlike local government, which exists in federal countries [12].

Centralized rule can be defined as the powers of decision-making being combined in the hands of one person or a number of people, but the degree of that centralization is limited whenever management is limited to one person or entity, which leads to restricting workers' freedom of action and connection with those above them [13].

It means consolidating power in the hands of one presidential body throughout the country, meaning that there is only one authority in the country that undertakes all functions itself and is divided into political decentralization and administrative decentralization [14].

3. The importance of local government in democratic countries:

1. Enhancing popular participation

There are many motives that make a citizen an active participant in his community, including the motive of achieving desires and satisfying personal needs, or the individual's participation may be motivated by social needs such as a sense of belonging, achieving the desire and self-realization in gaining popularity within the community, and the needs of status and appreciation, or this participation may be due to his feeling of having a tangible role in society or because of his interest in the public good and his desire to achieve the public interest of the entire local community. The individual's feeling that this participation is a democratic right and duty, and the motive for participation may arise from a local experience, an incident, or the local community being exposed to an emergency and exceptional circumstance, all of which push the individual to activate his participation in the local community and contribute to its development [15].

The application of democracy by local governments ensures the participation of the largest number of residents of the region in organizing and managing their local affairs themselves, and this is considered a true expression of sound governance and democracy. Development goals cannot be achieved without real and effective participation from segments of society with different social and ethnic affiliations, because political participation is one of the main aspects of democracy. The people's participation in the political process is considered a true expression of democracy, and this participation has an effective role in strengthening local governance [16].

2. Empowering local communities to make decisions

Empowerment is a word derived from power and is the process of granting authority and delegation so that a person has the ability and power to exercise a major role in work and decision-making. Empowerment does not stop at delegating authority and granting power but rather includes a broader concept, i.e. broad freedom in performing work, reducing supervision and its degree by superiors, and achieving independence and self-control in accomplishing tasks. Administrative empowerment is defined as allowing employees a degree of independence, freedom and self-control that enables them to practice and set tasks and goals, solve problems and make decisions through a larger and broader scope of responsibilities and powers [17].

Empowering local communities to make decisions is one of the most important principles in promoting sustainable development and local democracy. This means empowering individuals to influence decisions that affect their daily lives through effective participation, such as community consultation mechanisms and local councils. Empowerment includes strengthening local leadership capacities and empowering groups and individuals to participate in decision-making by developing their skills and enhancing their awareness of issues and making appropriate decisions, creating a more transparent and democratic environment.

3. Improving local service delivery

It is an activity carried out by the administration itself or under its supervision to satisfy most of the public needs. It may be an activity such as health and education, or it may be an authority or organization that manages this activity such as the Ministry of Health, Education and Training. The focus is on these services, starting from simple services to complex services. Attention is paid to services that are tangible to citizens and receive public attention, in addition to focusing on services with high financial returns and facilitating and improving institutional work procedures in general and local work in particular [18].

Chapter Two: The Structure of Local Government Institutions in Democratic Countries

1. Administrative organization of local government institutions

Constitutional and legal frameworks regulating local government

1. The Constitution: It is a set of rules, whether written or unwritten, that define the powers, objectives, sources and limits of political authority [19]. With regard to the organization of the Iraqi legislature, it can be said that it imposed a wide scope for cooperation between the central government and local governments by granting the latter broad administrative and financial powers, as confirmed by Article Second of the Iraqi Constitution, which states that "governorates that are not organized into a region shall be granted broad financial and administrative powers that enable them to manage their affairs in accordance with the principle of administrative decentralization." The scope of cooperation imposed by the Constitution reached a stage whereby, through the involvement of governorates, i.e. local bodies, in the field of implementation, it determined their equality with regions that rely on political decentralization, i.e. federalism, as it emphasized that everything not stipulated within the exclusive powers of the federal executive authority falls within the jurisdiction of the regions and governorates that are not organized into a region, in addition to their involvement in other powers stipulated by the Constitution (including the formulation of public health and environmental policies, general educational and pedagogical policy, as well as the formulation of general planning and development policy) [20].

2. Executive regulations: These are organizational rules that aim to clarify how local laws are applied in practice. They, in turn, determine the procedures followed by officials in implementing local policy. The local executive authority in Iraq consists of the head of the administrative unit: the governor, the district governor, the district director, or the heads of departments and divisions. The governor is the highest executive official in the governorate. His mission is to implement the orders, decisions, and policies issued by the governorate council, in addition to implementing general decisions, i.e. those issued by the central government, with the assistance of employees of local units. Therefore, the role of local executive units is to formulate public policies in the governorate by developing initial proposals for policies and plans and submitting them to the governorate council. After approval by the council, the responsibility for implementing them falls to the executive bodies in the local units, based on the allocations and available financial resources stipulated in the governorate's annual financial budget. The remaining projects and plans are the responsibility of foreign investment or the private sector, depending on the governorate's policy and approach to implementing public policies [21].

3. Financial and Administrative Independence: Local autonomy is directly related to the financial independence of local units. The higher the local unit's financial self-capacity, the greater its financial independence. The sufficiency of local units' financial resources is usually reflected in the level of independence they enjoy and makes them independent of government support, which would negatively impact that independence if it exceeds its limits [22]. There are many indicators of the impact of the weakness of the local unit's financial resources on its independence. The weakness of the local unit's financial resources is one of the most important factors influencing local councils' response to citizens' needs. In addition, the dependence of local units on central transfers leads to their inability to achieve the degree of financial independence they enjoy under the laws and the constitution. The local unit's dependence on central funding through grants, donations, and subsidies leads to the weakness of local authorities because they are unable to develop appropriate spending plans, while the executive leadership's authority increases, focusing its efforts on obtaining financial assistance from the central government [23].

4. Oversight and accountability: Federal oversight exercises authority over the work of local authorities for the purpose of ensuring the legitimacy of their work and knowing its suitability and compliance with the law, as they are correct decisions

that serve the local public interest and are consistent with the public interest of the people [24].

The control of the practice of business is based on the law and the constitution. Every country has its own constitution, regardless of its political philosophy. It is considered a set of rules that clarify and determine the method of exercising power by those holding power and the political leadership. The rules may be customary or written, regulating the exercise of that power, as the philosophy of the existing political system indicates [25]. The nature of control over the work of local governments comes from the fact that it is based and is based in its establishment on administrative decentralization and requires the availability of several conditions, including that the legal personality is based on an administrative unit that is relatively independent from the state, which is achieved by electing the governing bodies and granting them the authority to make decisions and is under central guardianship and control and financial independence to meet needs. [26]Therefore, the subjection of local governing bodies to the supervision and control of the federal government comes because the independence enjoyed by those bodies is not absolute independence, but rather the federal authority retains the right to control and supervise to guarantee the unity of public policy and to ensure that services are provided to the residents of local units with equality and efficiency [27]. The federal authority exercises legal oversight over the actions of local authorities, based on a single standard: the law. It monitors the extent to which these authorities comply with applicable regulations and laws. Therefore, oversight is a cornerstone of administrative decentralization and a component of local governments.

2. Distribution of powers and responsibilities between the central and local government

1. The extent of delegation of authority to local institutions: Distinguishing national competencies from local competencies in the two forms of the compound and simple state is the basic introduction to the legislation of decentralized organization and is a basic motive that leads to the legislator's recognition of the right of a certain administrative unit to manage its own affairs and that the determination of local competencies is done by the state itself in accordance with legislative texts and the legislator alone has the right to distinguish between what is national competencies and what is local competencies according to several foundations and standards. The issues that concern the state in its capacity as a comprehensive national unit are entrusted to the central authority and other than that are left to the decentralized bodies until they meet the needs that concern the people of the administrative units in particular [28]. Often, the issues that concern the residents of the local unit and are related to their private affairs and what is related to their daily lives are considered local competencies or that these competencies are the best applied at the local level [29]. Article [31] of the permanent Iraqi Constitution of 2005 in force stipulated thirdly of the powers of the governor:It is the implementation of the general policy set by the federal government within the governorate's borders [30].

2. The balance between centralization and decentralization in democratic countries: Centralization is the concentration of powers related to decision-making in the hands of one person or several people. The degree of centralization may be limited whenever power is limited in the hands of one party, which leads to restricting the freedom of action of workers by linking them to someone higher [31].

It is the concentration of power in the hands of a single presidential body throughout the country, i.e. there is one authority in the country that undertakes all functions itself [32]. Decentralization is the exchange, distribution and transfer of power towards regions, localities and municipalities. It is an administrative method for governing the region, whereby the central authorities transfer some legislative, executive and judicial powers and authorities to the regions, and the system is the one that arranges the relationship between the regions and the state [33]. Therefore, the balance between centralization and decentralization in democratic countries reflects the attempt to distribute powers between

the central government on the one hand and the regional and local governments on the other. Centralization provides coordination that may be unified for policies and joint decision-making at the state level, while decentralization gives citizens a greater opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and allows for the allocation of resources to suit the needs of each region. Democracies seek to achieve this balance to ensure that the needs of citizens in local areas are met while preserving the unity of the state. This requires accountability and transparency at all levels of government.

Chapter Three: Building and Strengthening Local Capacities

1. Local Capacity Building Strategies: Capacity building and strengthening strategies aim to develop the knowledge, skills, and institutional structures in local communities, enabling local governments to manage their affairs sustainably. These strategies enable individuals and groups to address economic and social challenges and develop effective local solutions.

   a. Local education and training depends on providing educational and training programs that aim to enhance the skills of individuals in the local community in various fields such as entrepreneurship, technology, and community awareness [34].

   b. Involving the local community in decision-making: Encouraging participation by community members in decision-making enhances local capabilities through interest and increased awareness of local issues and enhances the sense of responsibility among individuals [35].

   c. Strengthening local infrastructure: Investing in infrastructure such as electricity, roads and water contributes to improving the living environment, which enhances economic growth and production capacity at the local level [36].

   In addition to other strategies that work to enhance local capabilities, including stimulating teamwork, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, and fostering cooperation and partnerships with external parties.

2. The Role of Central Governments in Strengthening Local Capacities: Central governments are key players in guiding and defining public policies in countries. Although the central authority dominates decision-making at the national level, its role in strengthening and supporting local capacities, including competent authorities and local governments, in managing local affairs is vital. The relationship between local and central governments combines guidance and cooperation, with the central government working to strengthen local governments by providing regulations, public policies, and technical and financial resources, contributing to sustainable development and improving citizens' living standards.

   a. Guidance and legislation

      The central government contributes significantly to strengthening local capacities by enacting legislation and laws that regulate the relationship between the various levels of government. The central government establishes regulatory and legal frameworks that define the duties and powers of local governments, ensuring sound guidance in implementing local programs in line with national goals. The central government also provides guidance that assists in implementing local policies in line with national goals, thus helping to reduce risks such as misuse of resources and corruption.

   b. Partnership and cooperation

      Cooperation may be in the legislative field, as the legislative authority, according to the current Iraqi Constitution of 2005, consists of the Federal Council and the House of Representatives, and the Federal Council has not yet been enacted or formed. The relationship between the House of Representatives and the provincial councils that are not organized into a region is represented by the unification of legislation and its non-conflict with legal and constitutional texts in order to preserve administrative, political and legal unity, which is one of the most

important goals that the federal authority and the provincial councils work and strive to achieve [37]. Local governments are partners with the central government in providing services to the public, and these governments perform, according to the powers granted to them, appropriate services in cooperation with the central government for their local communities. There is a vertical relationship between the central and local governments, represented by the lowest level of local governments to the highest level, which is the central governments, and a horizontal relationship represented by the exchange of expertise, cooperation and experiences between local governments and the central government.

c. Censorship

The relationship between the local and central government may be supervisory, as the independence enjoyed by the local authorities and councils is relative and not absolute, and is determined by the supervision possessed by the central government, which is granted by the laws and constitutions in force over the local governments, their work and their jurisdictions. Despite the central governments relinquishing their powers of a local nature to the local units, they retained the right to supervise and monitor them to ensure that they operate in a manner that is consistent with the general policy of the state. There is a group of objectives upon which the supervision of the central government over the local units is based, including confirming the administrative and political unity of the state, confirming that these local units carry out their functions and duties and operate in accordance with the systems and laws issued by the central government [37].

d. Training and Capacity Building: Local capacity building and training are among the most important pillars that contribute to promoting sustainable development at the local community level. They play a significant role in qualifying local groups and individuals to contribute to achieving sustainable development and assume responsibility. The process of local capacity building is ongoing and aims to enhance the knowledge and skills necessary to implement local initiatives and projects effectively. This process is not limited to providing technical knowledge but also includes strengthening organizational and leadership skills, which contributes to empowering individuals and communities to face challenges and achieve development independently. Studies indicate the importance of continuous training for local communities. The World Bank report explains that investing in local capacity building can contribute to significantly improving institutional performance and achieving sustainable development. This reflects the importance of training not only as a tool for transferring skills but also as a fundamental element for enhancing the ability and independence to adapt to rapid changes in the global and local environment [38].

e. Enhancing coordination between governorates and regions: Coordination between regions and governorates is crucial for enhancing social and political stability in countries and achieving balanced development. In many countries, regions and governorates are considered administrative units with relative independence, making coordination between them essential to ensure the effective achievement of economic and development goals. Enhancing this coordination requires activating joint working mechanisms that include continuous communication and cooperation in several areas such as education, security, economic development, and public services. To achieve coordination, coordinating bodies and committees must be formed that include representatives from governorates, the central government, and the regions [39], [40]. These bodies must work to develop joint policies and ensure their consistent implementation across different regions. Through these bodies, experiences can be exchanged and challenges can be addressed between different regions, contributing to the development of innovative solutions [41].

Results and Recommendation

1. One of the most important outcomes is the disparity in local capacities, and this significant disparity in the capabilities of local institutions among democratic countries. In some countries, these institutions play a pivotal role in decision-making and service provision, while in other countries their role is weak and they rely heavily on the central government.

2. The role of the central government, as its support is one of the most important factors in strengthening these local capacities. Therefore, local governments need technical and financial support to improve their efficiency and performance.

3. Community Participation: It is essential to strengthen local capacities through citizen participation in decision-making, which will enhance the credibility of these local institutions.

4. Education and training are among the most important factors in strengthening local capabilities. Therefore, training programs for employees in local institutions must be developed to increase their efficiency and improve their performance.

5. Financial challenges: Local institutions face challenges in securing the financial resources needed to deliver their services effectively, which negatively impacts their ability to meet citizens' needs.

Recommendation

a. Promoting decentralization: Decision-making at the local level should be encouraged to ensure better response to community needs, thus strengthening the relationship between citizens and local authorities.

b. Supporting rehabilitation and training programmes by developing these training programmes for employees in local administrations to enhance their capabilities and skills in the areas of organisation and management.

c. Increasing financial resources: Efforts should be made to improve financing mechanisms for local governments by developing new ways to provide financial resources to finance local projects and creating flexible tax policies.

d. Encouraging community participation by developing mechanisms that enable citizens to actively participate in local decision-making by listening to their suggestions and opinions.

e. Promoting accountability and transparency to ensure the efficient use of resources and to avoid corruption requires transparent practices for local officials.

By implementing these recommendations, the role of local government institutions in democratic countries can be strengthened, contributing to improved sustainable development and administrative performance at the local level.

4. Conclusion

Local government institutions in democratic countries are a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainable development and enhancing popular participation in decision-making. They represent a bridge between the central government and citizens, contributing to more effective and efficient service delivery. Studying local capacity building and strengthening requires a focus on developing administrative structures, providing financial and technical resources, and providing ongoing training. By strengthening these institutions, accountability and transparency can be enhanced, leading to improved government performance and increased trust between the government and citizens.

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