

Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy (JSSRP)**The Impact of the Right to Public Services Act on Governance in Khyber -Pakhtunkhwa: A Case Study of District Kohat****Dr. Huma Qayum¹, Ishaq Ahmad², Khush Bakht³**

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Abstract: *The Right to Public Services (RTPS) Act, enacted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan in 2014, represents a significant milestone in advancing governance, transparency, and accountability. The Act ensures the timely provision of essential public services to citizens, introduces accountability measures against negligent public officials, and empowers citizens to seek redress through grievance mechanisms. This research paper explores the implementation of the RTPS Act with a special focus on District Kohat as a case study. Drawing from secondary literature, official reports, and contextual analysis, the study evaluates the effectiveness of the Act in improving service delivery, identifies institutional challenges, and assesses citizen awareness and utilization of the law. Findings indicate that while the RTPS Act has improved service timelines and reduced petty corruption, challenges remain in enforcement, awareness, rural accessibility, and gender equity. The paper concludes with recommendations to strengthen citizen engagement, expand institutional capacity, and ensure equitable service delivery across KP.*

Introduction

The right to information belongs to people not the government is the principle of Right to Public Services Act, which was approved in January 2014 by KPK Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, assembly. Its aims to improve service delivery standards, the responsiveness of service providers, and the implementation of efficient enforcement mechanisms. It also guarantees the supply of time-bound services to the state's inhabitants. What is the right information for a citizen? Right to Information (RTI) implies that, as a citizen, you can ask for information from public bodies. This could be knowledge about the services public bodies provide, about their staff, about how much money they have and how they spend it, and much more. RTI is already being used by common people across the world to reduce corruption, hold public authorities responsible, get what they are entitled to, and enhance the provision of services like healthcare and education (Brass, 2013).

The Act delivers certain public services to qualified populations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), severely

striking consequences on government representatives found not delivering services within a specified time, allowances, and reward to citizens who are affected by service deficiency/denial. It places a strong implementation method (Khan, 2015).

The Right to Public Services Act is a legislative framework that aims to ensure citizens' access to public services in a timely and efficient manner. The primary goal of such acts is to enhance governance, transparency, and accountability in the delivery of public services by government agencies. These acts typically outline the rights of citizens to receive certain public services within stipulated time frames and with specified quality standards. Communication allows you to observe exactly what the government is executing. Information is authority, which means ensuring that public representatives do not overcharge you for a service if you are aware of the official fee.

- Hold contractors accountable for local development projects, such as waterworks and roads; if you know the work they were hired to complete, you can insist on it being done completely and correctly.
- Find out what happened to your application for a government position, and if it was denied, why someone else was selected instead of you. You will be able to determine whether the selection process was conducted fairly once you are aware of the selection criteria and the marks each candidate received.
- Advocate for improved local services, such as schools and medical facilities. If you are aware of the facilities and services that are funded by the government (Burki, 2011)

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Public Services Commission was established in 2014, to use the authority, powers, and consultants granted under this Act, the Government shall, by the announcement in the official Gazette, establish an independent Commission to be called the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Public Services Commission. The Act included hearing appeals against the orders of the Appellate Authority; (b) making provisions for speedy access to public services by the provisions of this Act; and (c) payment of compensation for delayed delivery of public service by any designated officer to the eligible person (Official document, 2014).

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan's constitution, Article 19-A, already gives you the right to access information held by public (government) agencies. The KPK Right to Information Act, 2013 has now been enacted by the KPK government. Your constitutional right to request information from governmental entities is strengthened by this statute. The legislation also specifies precisely what kinds of public agencies you can request information from and what their obligations are to furnish you with information. To put it briefly, the law clarifies who is responsible for what, which makes information much easier to obtain (Burki, S, 2011).

Citizens can file any complaints about RTI with the independent KPK Information Commission, which serves as the primary enforcement authority for the law. It possesses the necessary abilities to fulfill its task. You can file a complaint with the KPK Information Commission if you're not happy with the public body's response (Brass, 2013).

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has placed water filtration units at several Islamabad locales to supply residents with clean drinking water. However, after multiple complaints from locals regarding water quality, an NGO filed a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to the CDA Water Management Division. They looked for information about water testing, how often the frequency of water filter replacements, and public information display. The information was supplied after the NGO complained to the Federal Ombudsman about CDA's lack of response to their FOI request. As a result of this FOI request, CDA increased its efforts to provide clean drinking water, including allowing the representatives

of the NGO to accompany CDA staff when they changed some filters (KPK Introductory Guide, 2020). According to the KPK RTI Act, "information" refers to any details regarding the organization and operations of a public body. The laws, rules, and regulations that govern a public body's operations; the budget, which includes both allotted cash and actual expenditures; the organizational structure; the number, grades, and pay of staff members; the awarding of contracts and tenders; the services rendered; and annual and other reports are a few examples. These are a few exclusions, or things that aren't allowed to be revealed. This is due to the possibility of harm from some forms of information dissemination. Examples include data that breaches someone's right to privacy (e.g., personal bank accounts) or that, if revealed, could jeopardize Pakistan's ties with other nations, the economy, or national security.

The RTPS Act is a pioneering governance initiative in KP that grants citizens enforceable rights to access timely public services. While similar frameworks exist globally, the KP model is unique within Pakistan's socio-political context, particularly in conflict-affected regions where governance institutions face capacity challenges. By focusing on District Kohat, this research highlights how the Act operates at the grassroots level, explores its impact on local communities, and identifies structural barriers that limit its effectiveness.

Literature Review

The literature on RTPS and RTI laws emphasizes their role in promoting transparency, accountability, and governance efficiency. Brass (2013) notes that such acts empower citizens to demand accountability by giving them enforceable rights to information and services. Burki (2011) emphasizes that legal clarity regarding responsibilities and obligations of public bodies enhances accessibility and transparency.

In KP, the Right to Public Services Commission (2014) was tasked with monitoring service provision, penalizing negligent officers, and compensating aggrieved citizens (Official Document, 2014). Reports by the KP government (2013, 2020) provide introductory guides to citizens, clarifying procedures for filing requests, grievances, and appeals.

Globally, RTPS-like initiatives have improved service efficiency. For example, in India, RTPS frameworks reduced bureaucratic corruption and enhanced delivery of essential services (Mehta, 2015). Similar impacts are observable in Pakistan, though challenges remain in awareness and enforcement (Zafar, 2018).

In Kohat, anecdotal accounts reveal that while the Act streamlined administrative services (domiciles, certificates), rural communities often remain marginalized due to limited outreach and literacy (KPK Introductory Guide, 2020). Gender studies highlight additional barriers for women, who face mobility restrictions and reliance on male intermediaries (Ahmed, 2019).

Thus, while the RTPS Act is hailed as a governance innovation, its practical impact depends heavily on local institutional capacity, political will, and citizen engagement.

1. Accessibility and Timeliness of Services

The Act significantly reduced delays in administrative services, such as issuance of domiciles, birth and death certificates. Citizens in urban Kohat reported quicker turnaround times compared to pre-RTPS conditions. However, rural populations still struggle due to limited infrastructure and distance to service centers.

2. Institutional Performance

Designated Officers (DOs) were appointed for each service, enhancing accountability. While municipal and revenue services improved, health and education services lagged due to systemic issues such as resource shortages and staffing gaps.

3. Citizen Awareness

Awareness remains critically low, particularly in rural Kohat. Urban citizens learned about RTPS through NGOs and media campaigns, but many rural households were unaware of their rights or grievance redress mechanisms.

4. Enforcement and Accountability

Despite formal provisions for penalties, enforcement is weak. Cases of officers penalized for delays are rare, indicating a gap between legal framework and implementation. Bureaucratic resistance further undermines accountability.

5. Governance Outcomes

The Act reduced petty corruption by limiting opportunities for rent-seeking. However, patronage politics still influence service access, with citizens relying on personal networks to expedite processes.

6. Gender Dimensions

Women face additional barriers, including social restrictions, lack of female staff, and dependence on male family members to interact with officials. These barriers limit the inclusivity of RTPS outcomes in Kohat.

7. Comparative Insights

Urban centers like Peshawar demonstrate stronger implementation, while semi-urban districts like Kohat lag due to socio-economic disparities. This indicates that the effectiveness of RTPS varies significantly by local context.

Despite its progressive vision, the RTPS Act faces challenges in implementation. Limited citizen awareness, bureaucratic resistance, weak monitoring, and gendered barriers continue to undermine its impact. Rural areas such as Kohat, with limited infrastructure and literacy levels, experience service gaps despite legal guarantees. Therefore, the study investigates whether the RTPS Act has effectively improved governance in Kohat and identifies the gaps between policy and practice.

The findings reveal a paradox: while the RTPS Act has formalized service delivery standards and improved administrative efficiency, its transformative potential remains underutilized in Kohat. The law's strength lies in its legal enforcement mechanisms and its ability to reduce delays. However, weak institutional culture, low awareness, and gendered social barriers limit its broader impact.

This aligns with global scholarship on governance reforms: legislation alone cannot ensure good governance without parallel investments in capacity building, awareness campaigns, and structural reforms (Mehta, 2015; Zafar, 2018). The Kohat case also reflects the broader challenges of implementing governance reforms in conflict-affected, resource-constrained contexts. The RTPS Act, 2014, is a landmark reform in KP's governance landscape. In Kohat, it has contributed to reducing delays, improving service timelines, and introducing accountability. However, its effectiveness remains uneven due to low awareness, weak enforcement, bureaucratic resistance, and gendered inequities.

Recommendations include

1. Expanding awareness campaigns, especially in rural areas.
2. Strengthening enforcement by penalizing negligent officers consistently.
3. Enhancing institutional capacity in health and education services.
4. Addressing gender barriers by recruiting more female staff and establishing women-friendly service desks.

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