

BRIEFING NOTE

End-to-end policy cycle support

**A technical assistance innovation
to improve service delivery**

**MUJIB KHAN SADOZAI
DR SOPHIE RUSSO**

Executive summary

The Sub-National Governance (SNG) programme is a governance intervention supported by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and implemented by Oxford Policy Management in Pakistan since 2019. The technical assistance (TA) aims to strengthen government capability in planning, budgeting, fiscal management, and local governance in Pakistan. The programme operates at federal, provincial, and local levels, to strengthen core government functions in support of more effective and inclusive public service delivery. At provincial level, the programme supports the governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab provinces, and provides technical assistance to selected local governments (LGs) within those provinces.

This paper offers the development community an innovative and replicable approach to support adaptive management in governance interventions. To strengthen service delivery at LG level, SNG has designed and piloted a methodology for

end-to-end policy cycle support in 2021. This has involved supporting LGs across the full policy cycle, covering problem identification, solution design, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and course correction. The initial focus has been on improving solid waste management (SWM), with pilot interventions launched in three local administrations. Given their capacity to promote context-driven policy solutions and reflexive engagement throughout the policy cycle, these pilots appear to be effective tools to deliver technical assistance for improved service delivery.

This brief summarises the overall strategic approach underpinning end-to-end policy cycle support pilots, identifies lessons learned, and makes policy recommendations.

About the authors

Mujib Sadozai is a Principal Consultant in OPM's Governance Practice and works as the Programme Director of SNG II. Dr Sophie Russo is a Consultant working as Programme Coordinator with SNG II.

The problem: How can technical assistance (TA) best improve service delivery?

Technical assistance has come under criticism over the last decade. Its effectiveness has been questioned due to a tendency to provide policy solutions based on international best practice, without reflecting on these reforms' effectiveness in specific local contexts (Andrews et al., 2012, 2015, 2017). Reliance on ready-made solutions delivered by external experts has also been criticised for locking low- and middle-income countries in 'capability traps', instead of building the local capacities required for sustainable change (ibid).

A related issue is that TA often fails through intervening only at one stage or on a limited spectrum in the policy cycle. For instance, TA may be provided for problem analysis and policy design, but support to strengthen policy implementation may be withheld as the activity is perceived as beyond its scope. These challenges are all the more acute because TA often aims to solve 'wicked problems', which are interdependent and do not have straightforward solutions.

SNG provides TA to improve the planning, budgeting, and fiscal management capabilities of governments at the federal, provincial, and local levels in Pakistan, with the objective of strengthening effective and inclusive service delivery. Launched in 2013, it is currently in its second phase of implementation, which runs from 2019 to 2025.

The programme has faced strategic and operational choices related to the issues identified above. SNG support with a focus on building government capabilities in core planning and budgeting functions was not having the desired impact on service delivery. While the TA provided was relevant and effective in strengthening central functions, it was not adequately addressing service delivery challenges, as it failed to strengthen policy implementation or account for wider contextual issues. Another challenge was the absence of elected local government counterparts - due to delayed elections - who could have correctly perceived the role of technical assistance in its wider service delivery context.

This required a change in programme approach. While continuing to support planning and budgeting, TA was also required to strengthen local implementation and address context-specific challenges at the point of delivery. It also had to develop a service delivery model that local government staff could intuitively grasp, and which elected local officials would continue to support once they came on board.



SNG's solution: End-to-end policy cycle support pilots

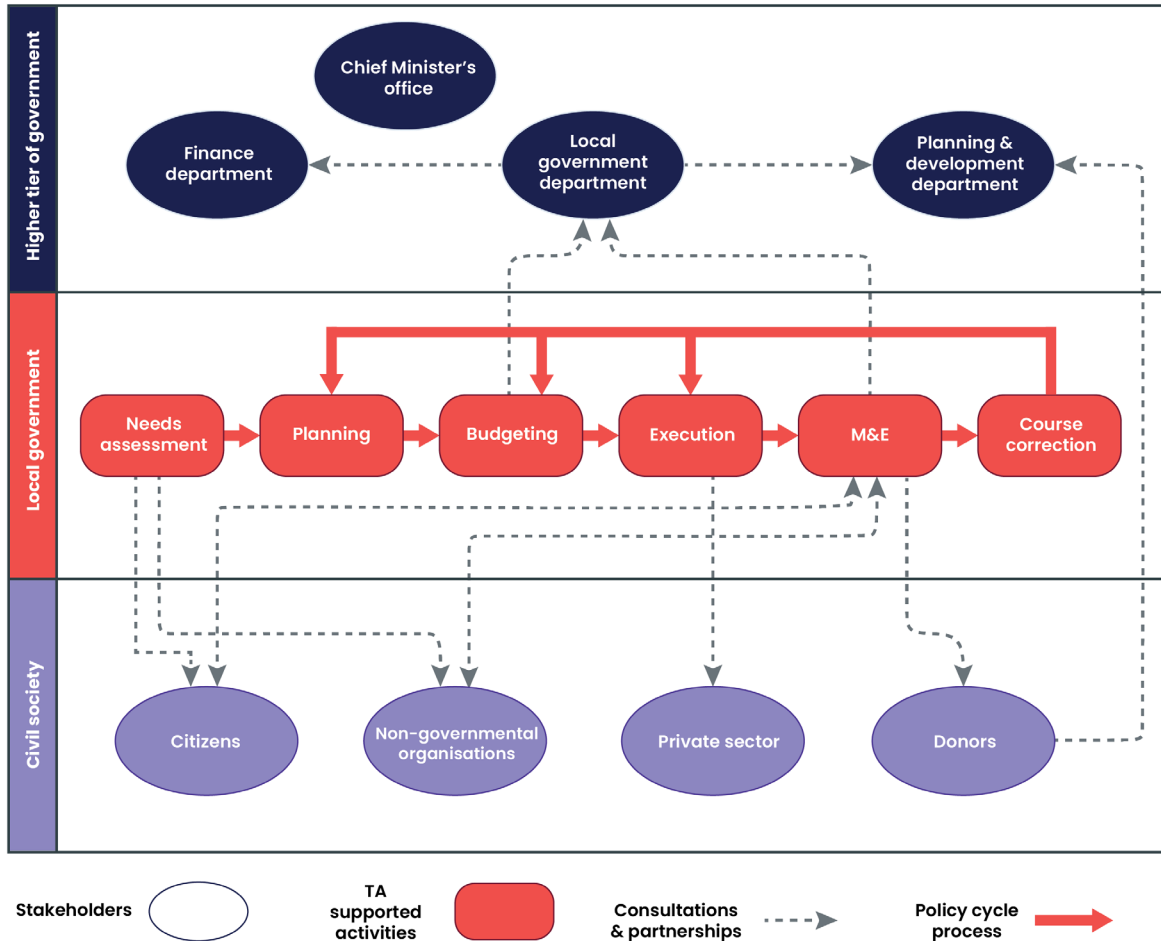
SNG designed the end-to-end policy cycle support model to address these shortcomings and effectively improve the delivery of municipal services. It adopted a complex systems approach that framed local service delivery as a 'wicked problem', requiring analysis of the local political, economic, and social systems in which services are delivered (Ramalingam et al., 2014). End-to-end policy cycle support pilots, covering the full policy cycle – problem analysis, solution design, planning and budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – appeared a promising tool. In these pilots, SNG provided LGs with TA to design, implement, and evaluate innovations to improve service delivery at the local level. The pilots would address the shortcomings of traditional TA by supporting problem-driven and iteratively adapted assistance, focusing on in-depth analysis of local problems, developing context-specific solutions, maintaining reflexive engagement throughout the policy cycle, and building capacities through ongoing collaboration with government stakeholders (see Figure 1).

The pilots would consider the complex system in which services are delivered, and engage with stakeholders at all levels and domains of government and society that make that complex system. This would enable the pilots

to address the technical, organisational, financial, and even political and cultural dimensions of service delivery challenges. For SNG, this approach also offered the opportunity to refine the systemic logic of its intervention, by building linkages between traditional centre of government TA focused on planning and budgeting, and the operational capabilities required for effective policy/service delivery. The end-to-end policy cycle support model is novel in the TA paradigm, as it goes beyond abstract governance interventions to focus on service delivery improvements in an open-ended and adaptive manner, with feedback loops operating at all times.

Following a detailed needs assessment, and in close collaboration with government officials, solid waste management was identified to pilot the effectiveness of the end-to-end policy cycle support approach. In 2020, pilots were launched in two local administrations in KP province (Bahrain and Babuzai), and one local administration in Punjab (Kasur City).

Figure 1: The end-to-end policy cycle support model





The strategic approach

Beginning with the problem rather than the solution

SNG avoided preconceived solutions for improved solid waste management (SWM) in the pilot administrations. The approach adopted was to creatively seek solutions to problems identified by local governments, and to engage and support relevant departments and levels of government as required to improve service delivery. Three key steps were taken in the beginning: first, SNG consulted with the provincial administration to explain the concept and ensure their ownership and authorisation; second, the team engaged with local government to understand context specific SWM challenges, and officers' expectations; third, SNG collected and analysed data to design targeted interventions through needs assessments and waste composition studies.

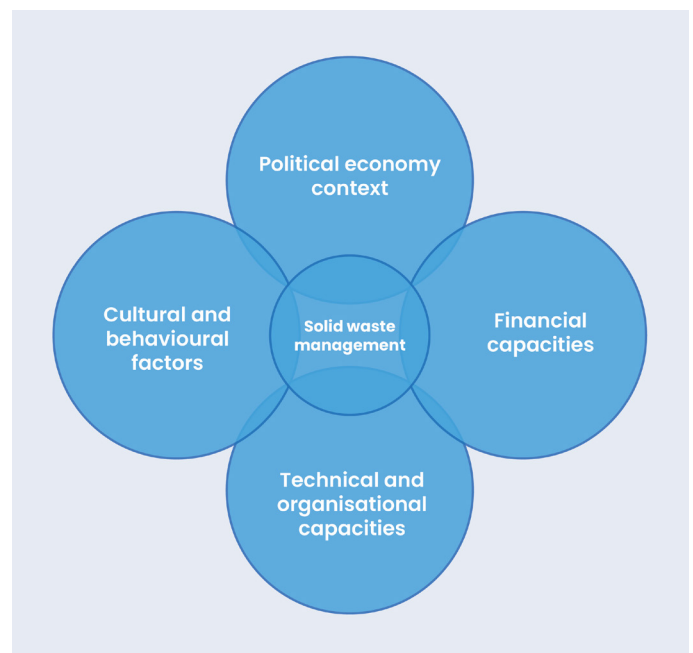
The analysis focussed on the problems facing solid waste management, accounting for local power dynamics and the formal and informal practices that determine how waste is (mis)managed. This was used to design evidence-based and context-specific solutions for improved SWM. Early consultations and targeted solutions ensured that the proposed interventions had wide support amongst local stakeholders.

Working hand-in-hand with government throughout the policy cycle

The end-to-end approach is informed by a view of service delivery as a complex system, involving multiple actors and institutions, and requiring effective capabilities across the policy cycle, all of which SNG needs to engage with and support to effect change (see Figure 2). Working across the policy cycle provides a comprehensive perspective of the activities required to achieve results, and enables the team to provide support where it is most needed. Activities and the nature and level of support differed for each LG, and the process was not always linear. The complex systems approach ensured the end-to-end conception of support also promoted vertical coordination with higher tiers of government, for example to access additional resources or secure regulatory support, and, where needed, involved the private sector for innovation and efficiency.

This horizon-spanning instilled an entrepreneurial spirit in solid waste managers, who then sought out solutions wherever available.

Figure 2: Solid waste management as a complex system



SNG worked hand-in-hand with counterparts in municipal and provincial governments. Local government officials were given the opportunity to select the sector for intervention. They chose SWM because it was where they struggled the most. It was also one of the few services where the mandate rests fully with local government. Engagement with provincial leadership ensured high-level ownership, and the potential for additional resources to fill financing gaps and support scale-up, including to other local governments, in the event of successful piloting. Working alongside the different tiers of government throughout the policy cycle was critical to ensure relevance and ownership, and to increase the likelihood of success.



Remaining flexible and responsive

SNG's problem-driven approach extended beyond the launch of the pilots. The pilots were designed as experiments requiring ongoing innovation and flexibility. Teams engaged across the policy cycle and over the long term, constantly seeking new solutions to problems as they arose, and until they were solved. By engaging in regular reviews, the team was able to iteratively adapt its approach to ensure relevance and effectiveness in each local context.

This involved analysing and responding to the evolving political economy context of SWM, as local administrations went through fiscal crises and changes in government. SNG adapted its activities swiftly whenever required. For example, when the pilot in Kasur City slowed down due to the municipality's lack of funds, SNG pivoted and started a successful pilot collaboration with Akhuwat Foundation¹ in the neighbouring town of Mustafabad. Similarly, when KP's interim caretaker government² did not release funds allocated for the construction of a waste recycling centre in 2023, SNG supported Bahrain and Babuzai in managing waste stockpiling and launching a home-grown green waste recycling initiative.

A key feature of the pilots was the problem-solving approach adopted by the team, supported by operational flexibility provided by the programme. The team was not deterred by challenges and actively sought alternative pathways to achieve pilot objectives.

Embedding experts as long-term facilitators of change to build local capacity

To avoid TA's tendency to create capability traps, SNG team members have been working as facilitators, supporting local actors to implement reforms, rather than as 'doers' carrying out implementation activities themselves (Nastase et al., 2021b). Team members were locally recruited and dedicated to the pilots from their launch, enabling them to build relationships of trust with stakeholders in government and civil society. They were present in the districts to facilitate inter-agency communication and coordination, and provided regular updates to provincial government to ensure their continued sponsorship.

By working as a facilitator of change alongside key stakeholders, SNG built the capabilities of local officials and promoted a culture of innovation and problem-solving. Activity implementation was undertaken by municipal officials and solid waste management corporations at local level. SNG staff participated in meetings as observers and provided technical assistance only as requested by their counterparts, some of whom have now become reform champions. A key insight gained by local officials has been around the need to conceive of the solid waste issue in its entirety and find an integrated solution, rather than to try to fix it piecemeal.



¹ Akhuwat is a not-for-profit organisation that has been working for poverty alleviation in Pakistan since 2001. It provides interest-free loans, education, health, clothing, and social services to the poorest.

² Interim caretaker governments are a constitutional requirement in Pakistan. They aim to ensure free and fair elections.

Early results

- Local governments accepted needs assessment as the starting point for effective engagement on improved SWM.
- Rapid introduction and expansion of door-to-door waste collection (from initial 100 households to 1,200 households) and of waste segregation in Bahrain. The elected head of the municipality committed to cover the whole town (4,000 households).
- Successful expansion of door-to-door collection to an additional 5,000 households and introduction of waste segregation in Babuzai.
- Launch of cost recovery efforts in Bahrain to ensure the sustainability of new SWM services. The levy will cover 50% of the cost of a sanitary worker, with the first month's partial recovery already having clawed back 30%.
- Recycling units in Bahrain and Babuzai helped recycle close to one tonne of waste each in their first twenty days of operation.
- Substantial increase in consumer satisfaction with SWM services documented in KP (from 25% to 97% in Babuzai, and from 44% to 88% in Bahrain).
- Replication of the Kasur pilot in Mustafabad, in collaboration with Akhuwat Foundation.
- Collaboration with the private sector to kickstart the new methodology and demonstrate improved SWM practices in Mustafabad.
- Integrated Resource Recovery Centres (IRRC) adopted for recycling in Bahrain, Babuzai, and Mustafabad.
- Revised solid waste management guidelines developed for the pilot municipalities notified by the KP provincial government for adoption by all municipalities.
- Both the KP and Punjab governments providing their own funds to enhance SWM in pilot areas, including funding for IRRCs, improved landfill sites, and investment in SWM equipment.
- Keen interest by development partners (e.g. GiZ) in incorporating the end-to-end methodology in their support for improved SWM services.

Lessons learned

Choose pilot localities wisely

Each municipality has its own characteristics and challenges. It is important to consider these factors in selecting pilot locations. Starting with localities that enjoy relatively good capacity can promote success. Resources should be available, and the leadership reform-minded and eager to make a difference. The pilot in Kasur City stalled due to a lack of funds. It was salvaged by associating an external partner with funding to support SWM services in a new area. This enabled the pilot to proceed, demonstrating early positive results that provided a basis for seeking additional resources from government.

It is also important to test the intervention's effectiveness in different contexts. Working in varied settings and comparing results helps in assessing what works in each context. For example, in KP, SNG launched two pilots, one in which solid waste was collected by a municipality, and another where it was collected by a public sector incorporated company. This demonstrated that the pilot's end-to-end policy cycle support model was effective in both contexts, with teams adapting their approach to the specifics of each locality.

Build strong working relationships with government counterparts at all levels

A key challenge for collaborative problem-solving is government capacity, especially local government capacity. Officials in resource-constrained settings are often poorly trained and tend to rely on external TA, which can often lead to capacity substitution rather than capacity building (Nastase et al., 2021b). Maintaining collaborative relationships with government counterparts throughout the policy cycle, and involving them in problem identification and solution design, is critical to ensuring that they build their capacities. SNG supported this process by establishing forums for policy discussion and coordination at both local and provincial levels.

Engaging with the leadership at municipal and provincial levels is critical for authorisation, and to provide impetus to the work of pilot field teams. This was challenging for SNG due to frequent transfers of senior government officers, including heads of departments, at municipal and provincial levels. To ensure continuity, SNG established strong working relationships with wider reform coalitions (rather than individual champions) at authorisation and operational levels to ensure continued engagement and momentum. In KP, SNG created local implementation committees involving municipal officials and sanitary workers. These were critical to the pilot's success.



Build strong linkages with communities and the private sector to leverage resources

Effective service delivery requires substantial resources which local governments may not be able to provide, especially in times of austerity. Accessing the resources of the private and NGO sectors can be useful in ensuring that reforms move forward. While such partnerships may not be envisaged at the start of the project, it is important to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders early on, and to remain flexible during implementation.

- In Babuzai, the pilot was implemented through an existing partnership between local government and a public sector waste management company. This helped bring in private sector expertise whilst maintaining alignment with government priorities.
- Working with the Akhuwat Foundation enabled a shift of the pilot to Mustafabad when Kasur City ran out of resources. Akhuwat embraced the pilot approach and financed some SWM services in Mustafabad, which led to provincial government donating a sizeable piece of land for the landfill site and providing additional resources to modernise the SWM machinery.

Given that SWM can generate revenue, it is potentially attractive to private sector engagement. This can be useful in establishing early results to convince government of the viability of such an intervention, and promote its replication. It also contributes to the sustained provision of services through effective collection of fees, reducing the burden of service provision for municipalities.

Active participation by the community contributes to successful pilot implementation and the acceptance of new service delivery approaches. The respective communities remained involved throughout the pilots, providing continual feedback that contributed to course correction and their eventual success. Increased civic engagement on SWM issues has led to the adoption of domestic waste segregation prior to its collection by sanitary workers, increasing the overall efficiency of SWM operations. Community ownership has also been demonstrated by a willingness to pay for SWM services, and it has resulted in demands from neighbouring municipalities to adopt this end-to-end policy cycle support approach.

Use cost recovery, even if partially, to build ownership and accountability

Cost recovery for effective service provision can build ownership and accountability of government counterparts. Most municipalities in Pakistan deliver SWM services free of cost, despite severe funding constraints. This contributes to poor services and low morale amongst sanitary workers. In Bahrain, SNG found that introducing service fees brought a sense of ownership and accountability amongst sanitary workers, which motivated them to work more effectively. This feeds a virtuous cycle: as service delivery improves thanks to enhanced ownership and accountability, residents are increasingly willing to pay, which leads to improved service delivery. This virtuous cycle builds trust in local government, which in turn can have positive spillover effects on service delivery in other sectors (through an increased willingness to pay for other services, for instance), and enhance trust between the state and citizens. It should be noted, though, that cost recovery can only be successful once citizens notice an improvement in the sanitation environment.

Communicate widely about results to promote continued progress and scaling

Pilots are often criticised for lack of scale-up, even when they are successful. SNG's experience demonstrates that communicating widely and effectively about the approach and its successes is critical for progress and scale-up. As part of its communications strategy, SNG shared lessons learned with government stakeholders and development partners to build wider awareness and support. The programme held a national conference on SWM in 2022, and has organised field visits for municipal authorities, including from other provinces and development partners, to the pilot districts.

Replication of the end-to-end support pilot is now envisaged in Lahore and Sialkot in Punjab, and has started in Haripur and Mansehra in KP. GiZ has committed to replicating the pilot in eight municipalities in KP. These developments will ensure sustainable impact even after SNG's involvement comes to an end.

Policy recommendations

- Explore the potential for further end-to-end pilots in other service delivery sectors. This approach can be effective in addressing policy implementation challenges, especially at the local level. Piloting is low risk, and can be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of an approach which can then be adopted more widely.
- Cost recovery and long-term sustainability need to be built in from the outset. This requires government commitment in the form of initial authorisation, and in commitment to meet future funding requirements.
- Provide funding for lesson-sharing from pilots. This may require support from development partners for research and events, and building coalitions of stakeholders with shared interests. Learning will support future upscaling activities that may be less resource-intensive. A more ambitious research agenda could be to compare the impact of limited focus TA with that which tries to reform the whole service delivery system, in the manner of end-to-end policy cycle engagement.
- TA programmes need to be willing to take risks and adopt flexible approaches, including exploring policy implementation challenges. FCDO is already a pioneer in such adaptive programming approaches, as demonstrated in the [LearnAdapt programme](#) (2017-2020).

Conclusion

Solving the formidable governance challenges that low-and middle-income countries face will require improvements in the practices of technical assistance

programmes. Development professionals and their government counterparts must continue to embrace a culture of learning and adaptation in order to develop more effective approaches to achieving their objectives. As the development community searches for programme tools that support problem-driven and adaptively managed assistance, SNG's experience suggests that end-to-end policy cycle support may be one such tool.

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