

# **AUTOMATION OF LAND RECORDS IN PUNJAB**

**AN APPRAISAL**

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**Automation of Land Records in Punjab- An Appraisal**

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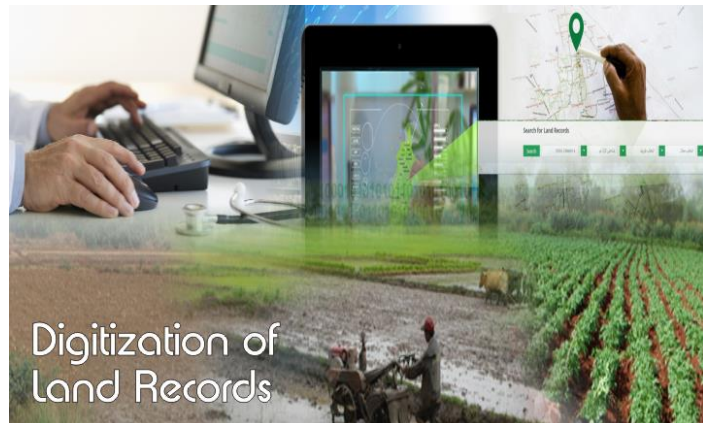
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## List of Abbreviation

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
NPM	New Public Management
N-NPM	Non-New Public Management
LRMIS	Land Record Management Information System
PLRA	Punjab Land Record Authority
WB	World Bank
BOR	Board of Revenue
ARC	Arazi Record Centre
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
PMU	Project Management Unit

## Introduction

Public sector modernisation is a global phenomenon to deal with ever-changing social, economic, and technological challenges faced by governments. Reforms advocated under the banner of New Public Management (NPM) and non-NPM framework focus on good governance in the public-sector management. Kapucu (2007, p.890) contends that the reforms advocated under the banner of the New Public



Source: [realtyquarter.com](http://realtyquarter.com)

Management framework have established objectives including efficiency, effectiveness and set incentives for productive performance and involve greater transparency. To bring efficiency, transparency, and improved service delivery, the government of the Punjab, Pakistan, with the technical and financial assistance of the World Bank, introduced automation of land records as a major reform initiative. Modern Land Record Management Information System (LRMIS) has replaced centuries-old colonial-era obsolete manual land record management system.

This paper examines the major channels of inspiration of this project and whether the LRMIS project achieved desired outcomes as envisaged in project goals and if not, what were the causes of its failure. It also explores whether this reform initiative should further be expanded as an extension of the public sector reform agenda or revised or abandoned.

## Need for LRMIS

The driving forces which pushed forward the LRMIS reform initiative are partly inspired by the good governance agenda of NPM and partly internal pressures like complete incompatibility of complex and outdated land records and their manual inefficient processing with modernising agriculture economy.



Source: [HRdirectapps.com](http://HRdirectapps.com)

Pakistan is an agricultural economy and land plays an important role in the rural economy. Secure land tenure is linked with larger social and economic issues as it helps improve the government's revenue collection and food security. It also directly assists in the realization of human rights, including the elimination of discrimination against women and minorities (PLRA 2017). The issues of tenure insecurity, rampant corruption in the revenue machinery, inefficient and dispersed land record system adversely impacted the rural economy especially

the poor. Punjab is the most populous province of Pakistan and almost 70% of the population lives in rural areas and their livelihood hinges on agriculture. Improving land administration and consequently, the functioning of land markets in Pakistan is, therefore, a priority concern, linked to the broader area of governance and administration at both the central and local levels. However, the overall dispersed and duplicate nature of its land records makes land rights uncertain, negatively impacts economic development, and threatens the vulnerable and the poor whose rights remain virtually unprotected (PLRA 2017). As explained earlier, the digitalization of land records and the achievement of broader social and development goals are interlinked. According to World Bank's Project Appraisal Document on Punjab Land Record Management Information System, the LRMIS project goals are closely aligned with Pakistan's Vision Two thousand twenty-five which focuses on inclusive growth, modernization of public sector, food security, and empowering women (WB 2006). To achieve social and economic goals, the government of Punjab initiated the LRMIS project with the technical and financial assistance of the World Bank at an initial cost of USD 45.65 million. However, the LRMIS Policy transfer process from the donor agency, the World Bank to Punjab, carries with it the combination of ingredients of reforms menu advocated by NPM and non-NPM practitioners including agencification, capacity building, curbing corruption, citizen feedback, and administrative decentralisation.

## LRMIS System



### Agencification

The first ingredient of the LRMIS reform is agencification. Polidano and Hulme (1999) contend that some developing countries are adopting NPM components like agencification of government departments into autonomous bodies. The government of Punjab created Punjab Land Record Authority (PLRA) to manage and expand the LRMIS project. The agencification of the land record department has radically changed the relationship between the political executive and the government officials. For instance, the PLRA has a board of directors. The board of directors is headed by an elected representative rather than a career bureaucrat and the PLRA largely operates independently of the Board of Revenue (BOR). The PLRA is responsible for carrying out the automation of land records and all allied

functions under one head. However, BOR is not completely converted into an authority rather the PLRA is an attached department of the BOR. Although the board of directors of the authority is headed by a politician and there are some members of the board from the private sector. However, the majority of the PLRA board of directors are career bureaucrats. Similarly, BOR is still performing its supervisory functions as PLRA is created as the attached body of BOR.

### Capacity Building

Capacity building of the officials responsible for delivering services and providing the enabling environment is the key ingredient of the non-NPM reform menu. LRMIS reform initiative advocates of public sector reform focused on the capacity building of officials for better service delivery of services. The manual land record system was extremely complex and inefficient and incompatible with the modern economy. The inefficiency was largely caused by capacity issues of the revenue officials, low pays, weak supervisory controls, and extreme political interference in posting transfers of revenue staff. The LRMIS addresses basic capacity issues by automation of land records and development of well-designed and fully equipped Arazi Record Centres (ARCs) run by highly qualified and trained IT professionals to deliver services efficiently. However, capacity building of ARC staff is just limited to training of officials and it is not a holistic concept as advocated by Cohan (1995, p.408) explaining capacity building as redressal of issues holding back development. Hence, for reform to take

roots, all the inhibiting factors in the performance of ARCs should be removed for effective delivery of services.



Source: punjab-zameen.gov.pk

### Curbing Corruption

Curbing corruption is one of the major agenda items on the public-sector reform menu (Klitgaard 1997, p.491) as corruption is perceived as a stumbling block in the way of development. He argues that when government departments are plagued by systematic corruption, the corrupt politicians and officials gain but the public at large suffers (p.492). The LRMIS reform project has been envisaged to eradicate the rampant corruption in the revenue department of the government of Punjab as corruption is only perceived as an obstacle to efficient service



Source: Dawn.com



delivery. Low pays are one of the reasons for corruption in the public sector. Klitgaard (1997, p.492) argues that low pays offered to the officials is an indirect invitation to the officials to make up for the deficiency by accepting bribes. The manual revenue system in Punjab suffered from corruption as revenue officials (Patwaries) were offered extremely meagre salaries. To redress the issue of low pays PLRA officials under the LRMIS project are offered a market-based pay package to attract better-skilled manpower. To insulate the LRMIS from corruption, not only technology is being used by installing CCTV cameras to monitor the functioning of ARC staff, but also third-party monitoring teams are designated to oversee their performance. To discourage corruption and inefficiency the ARC staff is hired on a contract basis and the extension of contracts is pegged with KPIs and positive citizen feedback. According to World Bank's Project Appraisal Document, these external and internal controls have substantially reduced corruption and inefficiency and project efficiency is better than the goals set in the project document.

### **Citizen Feedback**

The basic measure of the success of a reform initiative is the satisfaction of the people and their response to the services delivered. As Putnam (1993 cited in Polidano and Hulme 1999, p.126) points out that 'society is the main determinant of quality of government and economic growth rates'. The LRMIS project has a



Source: Nation.com.pk

citizen feedback component as an inherent part of the project. Citizen satisfaction is one of the important indicators of the performance of the staff on the model of NPM reform. The citizens visiting ARCs are sent text messages for their feedback regarding the quality of services they have received. Citizen feedback is a powerful tool to improve efficiency and transparency in the delivery of public services.

### **Administrative Decentralisation**

The LRMIS reform process may be termed successful as the new land record system has successfully replaced obsolete and inefficient land administration system (Qasim 2016, p.7). World Bank Implementation Completion Report 2017 issued on 05 September 2017 highlights that land record ARCs are effectively operating in all the 144 tehsils of Punjab and ARCs have exceeded the targets envisaged in the project regarding issuance of records of rights of ownership (Fard) and recording of purchase/sale of the property. Similarly, the report points out that the percentage of clients satisfied with land services provided at ARCs exceeded the target of 95%. (WB 2017). According to a report published in The Nation, it is observed, 'it is no doubt that this computerized system has made the delivery of services quite efficient as now the landholders are getting the 'Fard' (ownership deed) in just 30 minutes whereas the process of mutation has also been made very efficient' (Sharif 2016, p.7). The reform process is successful, and it is delivering better as it was well planned and



appropriate to the context. Similarly, the reform package is successful as it was not imposed upon the government by the donor agency, the World Bank, as a part of conditionality for advancing loans for the project. The project succeeded because it was politically owned, and the government took all the stakeholders including government officials from BOR and LRMIS Project Management Unit (PMU), legislators, and donor agency officials on board. In addition, the project remained successful as the project was launched gradually and adjusted according to the ground realities. The LRMIS pilot project was started in Kasur and it was gradually rolled out in three phases into the whole province.

## **Recommendations**

The reform initiative needs to be further strengthened as the land record ARCs are only located at the sub-divisional level and they have limited capacity to provide services to the landholders even in small subdivisions where the customers' average turnover is far less than the bigger subdivisions. The people have to wait for long hours in a queue to wait for their turn to avail themselves of the service. So, the dissatisfaction level of the people with the new system is on the rise. It is imperative to expand this reform initiative to the Qanoongoilevel, so that efficiency and transparency of the system may increase. Similarly, the scope of this project is limited to rural areas and transfer of property regarding urban areas is still carried out manually. Given above, the project scope needs to be expanded to urban areas as well.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, LRMIS has effectively replaced a centuries-old, obsolete manual land record system, and an increase in the value of land reduced transaction costs, and increased revenue generation are expected benefits of the project. However, the broader goals of inclusive growth, modernisation of the public sector, empowering women, and food security as envisaged in Pakistan's Vision 2025 can be achieved from this land reform project if ARCs are established at a much smaller scale for efficient service delivery and LRMIS scope is expanded to urban areas for unleashing the full potential of reform. But the goals of the policy transfer can be realised in a true sense if the reform package receives unconditional political ownership and ARCs are allowed to be run on professional lines without interference from local politicians.

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