

Review of: "[Commentary] Decentralization — “The Fundamental Challenge in the Pakistan Is the Decentralization of Health Care”"

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The strength of this article is that, despite showing the limitations of decentralization of health in Pakistan, it does not argue against it but suggests ways of making it work by taking small steps towards capacity building. This is a correct position to take. Many influential people, public opinion makers, and those drawn from powerful circles within the Pakistani state apparatus have been critical of decentralization. Some have even called for its rollback because, they argue, the provincial governments and their health departments lack the capacity to perform health delivery functions effectively. Powerful political actors are working to rollback the 18th constitutional amendment altogether. Some of these are the very stakeholders at the federal level that this article seems to suggest should be brought together for a 'stakeholder analysis'. I am not in favour of this approach as it will possibly lead to further political wrangling over the merits of decentralization. To me, the biggest stakeholders are the people at the grass-root level, and decentralization is a good step forward. What is needed to make it work, as the article argues, is to build capacity through small steps and accept a degree of independence for various tiers of health governance, without compromising the oversight function at the federal level and coordination for disease surveillance and epidemic response. This inevitably requires financial and institutional autonomy at the provincial level.