

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN

GUYANA



1 INTRODUCTION

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana is located on the Caribbean coast of South America with an area of 214,970 sq km and a population of 769,095.¹

Guyana is a unitary state situated on the northern coast of South America. The head of state is an executive president elected as part of the party list system, used to elect the parliamentarians. The cabinet is appointed by the president and may include no more than five individuals not sitting in the National Assembly, as the parliament is called. The

capital is Georgetown.

The National Assembly has 65 members comprising 40 members elected by proportional representation and 25 elected by regional assemblies for a five-year period.

Guyana is subdivided for administrative purposes into 10 regions. Local government comprises regional, municipal and neighbourhood spheres. In all there are 156 local government bodies including the Amerindian village councils.

Local government expenditure contributed 0.3% to GDP in 2001.

2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF GUYANA

2.1 Position of local government in the state

There have been attempts to introduce constitutional reform, including local government reform. This process suffered setbacks due to a political impasse. The process has recommenced with the opposition party's return to the National Assembly and the Joint Taskforce on Local Government Reform has completed its report.

The last National Election on 28 August, 2006 saw the People's Progressive Party/Civic gaining 36 seats accounting for 55% of the vote. The People's National Congress/ Reform – 1 Guyana gained 22 seats, the Alliance for Change 5 seats and the Guyana Action Party/Rise Organise and Rebuild and the United Force each gained 1 seat.

The Minister of Regional Development and Local Government is responsible for supervising and administering laws pertaining to local government, under the Local Government Law (Chapter 28:02). In fulfilling these duties there have been instances in which elected councillors have been suspended from office.

The 10 regions of Guyana have councils elected to govern them every five years. The function of the regions is to provide all services necessary for the wellbeing of the citizens within their jurisdiction.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Constitutional provisions

Local government is enshrined in the constitution. Chapter VII, section 71(1) states that local government is a vital aspect of democracy and shall be organised so as to involve as many people as possible in the task of managing and developing the communities in which they live.

3.2 Main legislative texts

The main laws pertaining to local government in Guyana are found in the Laws of Guyana, Chapter 28:

- Municipal and district councils (28:01)
- Local government (28:02)
- Local authorities – elections (28:03)
- Valuation for rating purposes (28:04)
- Local Democratic Organs Act 12 of 1980

- Procurement Act No. 8 of 2003
- Central Board of Health Act (Chapter 145).

Sections of these laws have been amended over the past few years; however the current reform process is seeking a comprehensive review with the aim of introducing new legislation. The Minister of Regional Development and Local Government and the junior minister responsible for local government are responsible for the administration of these laws.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Main divisions

There are three tiers of local government operating in Guyana:

- Regional democratic councils (RDCs)
- Town or municipal councils
- Neighbourhood democratic councils (NDCs).

The constitution, however, provides for other tiers below the level of NDCs.

The RDCs operate as decentralised offices of central government delivering services on its behalf. The towns and municipalities are responsible for the services allocated to them under the Municipal and District Councils Act. The NDCs carry out the responsibilities allocated to them in the Local Government Act.

The RDCs have an oversight role with regards to the NDCs, as they do with the municipalities of Corriverton, Rosehall, Linden and Anna Regina. The municipalities of Georgetown and New Amsterdam have greater autonomy accorded to them and as such are not under the overview of the RDC structure.

There are 10 RDCs, six municipalities and 65 NDCs. There are also 75 Amerindian village councils.

4.2 Distribution of local governments & population

The RDCs range in population from the smallest, Potaro/Siparuni, with 5,574 to the largest, Demerera/Mahaica, with 295,000. The average RDC population is 70,000. The smallest municipality is Anna Regina with a population of 13,000, and the largest is Georgetown with 250,000. The average size of municipalities is 26,000, excluding Georgetown which alone is larger than the other five municipalities put together. The NDCs range in size from 2,000 to 15,000.

The urban population makes up some 35% of the total.

5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The system for local elections was proportional representation for councillors, on the basis of

universal suffrage of citizens who have attained the age of 18. Councillors are elected by the entire electorate of the authority; therefore there is no ward system. RDC councillors are elected for a term of office of five years. These elections coincide with national elections. The introduction of constituency-based elections is envisaged.

Councillors in the municipalities and NDCs are elected for terms of three years. The mayors, chairpersons and their deputies are elected indirectly by the councillors on an annual basis.

The 75 Amerindian councils sit for terms of two years. These are elected by the indigenous peoples (see section 12.1).

Decision-making in the councils follows reports made by the sub-committees and decisions taken by the full council.

Currently only 5% of all councillors are women; none are regional chairs, though there are two regional vice-chairs. One of the deputy mayors is a woman, but there are no female mayors. Two of the NDC chairs are women and there are two women vice-chairs.

5.1 Regional democratic and municipal councils

The RDCs and municipal councils are required to establish three committees: finance, works and social development. Apart from this requirement, these councils have full discretion to establish the committees they see fit.

The regional chairs normally work full-time for the RDC and are remunerated accordingly. The mayors and deputy mayors of Georgetown and New Amsterdam work full-time on council duties and are remunerated accordingly. Those of the other four municipalities are part-time.

Regional chairs and mayors both appoint advisory committees and executive powers lie with the councils.

5.2 Neighbourhood democratic councils

The NDCs must establish two committees: finance and works. Beyond these two the NDCs have full discretion to establish committees as they see fit.

The chairperson of the NDC is elected annually, works part-time and is remunerated at a rate determined by the Minister of Regional Development and Local Government. The chairperson appoints an advisory committee, but the council retains executive powers.

5.3 Local government staffing

Staff are recruited for the RDCs by the central public service body, which retains the power to hire and dismiss staff. The RDCs are responsible for the approval of the appointment of staff by all the NDCs.

Although the law allows for the deployment of central government staff to local government, it is uncommon for this to take place.

The RDCs are required to have a clerk designated as chief executive officer, normally referred to as the regional executive officer. This officer is also designated as the accounting officer and is responsible to the Ministry of Finance. The municipalities on the other hand must appoint the following:

- Town clerk
- Clerk of markets
- Engineer
- Medical health officer
- Environmental health officer
- Municipal treasurer.

The legislation covering the NDCs stipulates that they are required to appoint an overseer who collects rates in the absence of any other officer.

The head of the paid service is in the RDCs the regional executive officer (REO), in the municipalities the town clerk, and in the NDCs the overseer.

The typical staffing structure in the RDCs and municipalities is a REO or town clerk, supported by heads of division under whom are heads of section, below whom are the general staff. In the NDCs the staffing structure is flatter with the overseer managing a structure comprising heads of division supported by general staff.

5.4 Independent scrutiny

There are three independent scrutiny bodies relating to local government; these are the Auditor General's office, empowered by the Financial Management and Accountability Act, the Central Housing and Planning Authority and the Central Board of Health. Both the latter two are empowered by legislation establishing them.

6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

The RDCs are responsible, with central government and the NDCs, for health, education and infrastructure.

In addition to the shared responsibilities stated above, the municipalities and NDCs are responsible for refuse collection and disposal, cemeteries and crematoria, and slaughterhouses.

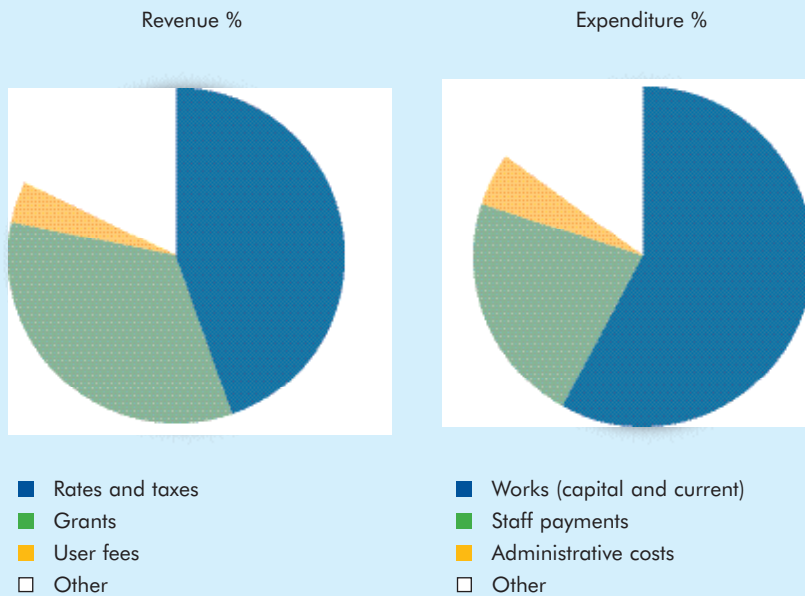
7 FINANCE

7.1 Revenue

The total aggregate revenue for the NDCs in the financial year 2005 was G\$620m (US\$2.32m).² Of the total, G\$420m (US\$1.57m) was raised locally and the remainder was central government grants. The main sources of income for the NDCs are:

1. Rates and taxes	45%
2. Grants	34%

Figure 1. The financial structure of local government in Guyana



Amerindian village councils serving the indigenous people. The spending power of local government is extremely limited in relation to the number and extent of its responsibilities.

References

- 1 CIA World Factbook 2007
- 2 G\$267.6 = US\$1, Financial Times, 29 September 2000
- 3 CIA World Factbook 2007.

- 3. User fees 4%
- 4. Other 18%.

The municipalities and NDCs are responsible for raising and collecting taxes.

7.2 Revenue-sharing

There is no revenue-sharing policy, but central government does provide subventions to local government bodies on an annual basis. These grants are for specified developmental work or activities.

7.3 Expenditure

The total aggregate expenditure of the NDCs in 2000/2001 was G\$571m (US\$2.13m). The main lines of expenditure were:

- 1. Works – capital and current 58%
- 2. Staff payments 22%
- 3. Administrative costs 5%
- 4. Other 15%.

Local governments are not permitted to set deficit budgets.

8 ORGANISATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Guyana Association of Local Authorities (GALA) is a voluntary body financed by membership dues and comprising the NDCs and the municipalities. Its membership is voluntary.

9 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

With the exception of Georgetown and New Amsterdam, the municipalities and the NDCs are overseen by the RDCs. The relations between these spheres of government are conducted through *ad hoc* meetings.

GALA is actively involved in the promotion of open intergovernmental relations between central and local government.

10 E-GOVERNMENT

E-government strategies at both the national and local level are currently in the planning stages. Currently no services or resources are available under the e-government plans, either to the public or to local councillors.

In 2005 there were 160,000 internet users in Guyana, or 21% of the population.³

11 ENVISAGED REFORMS

Electoral and administrative reforms are envisaged. A local government reform programme has been initiated through the Joint Taskforce on Local Government Reform. A political impasse brought this to a standstill but during 2004 it was restarted. It is anticipated that the reforms will have implications for the electoral system used in local government.

12 MISCELLANEOUS

12.1 Indigenous people

The Amerindian Act provides for separate Amerindian village councils for the indigenous people of Guyana. The responsibilities of the village councils are similar to other local government councils. However, they have no structures for self-financing.

13 SUMMARY

Local government in Guyana comprises the RDCs, established and operating as offices of central government, municipalities governing the large cities and towns, the NDCs operating at the neighbourhood level and the

Service	Delivering authority			Remarks
	Central	Regional	Local government	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION				
Police	●			
Fire protection	●			
Civil protection	●			
Criminal justice	●			
Civil justice	●			
Civil status register	●			
Statistical office	●			
Electoral register	●			
EDUCATION				
Pre-school	●			Private
Primary	●	●		Private
Secondary	●	●		Private
Vocational and technical	●	●		
Higher education	●			
Adult education	●			Private
SOCIAL WELFARE				
Kindergarten and nursery	●			Private
Family welfare services	●			
Welfare homes	●			
Social security	●			
PUBLIC HEALTH				
Primary care	●	●		
Hospitals	●	●	●	
Health protection	●			
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING				
Housing	●	●		
Town planning	●			
Regional planning	●			
TRANSPORT				
Roads	●	●	●	
Transport	●			
Urban roads	●			
Urban rail	●			
Ports	●			
Airports	●			Private
Other	●			
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION				
Water and sanitation	●			
Refuse collection and disposal	●		●	
Cemeteries and crematoria	●		●	
Slaughterhouses	●		●	
Environmental protection	●			
Consumer protection	●			
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS				
Theatre and concerts	●			
Museums and libraries	●			
Parks and open spaces	●	●	●	
Sports and leisure	●			
Religious facilities	●			
UTILITIES				
Gas services	●			Private
District heating	●			
Water supply	●			
Electricity	●			
ECONOMIC				
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	●			
Economic promotion	●			
Trade and industry	●			
Tourism	●			