



**HIGH LEVEL COMMONWEALTH SYMPOSIUM ON
PROMOTING INTER-GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND SHARING OF
GOOD PRACTICE POLICIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT (SOUTH ASIA)**

Colombo, Sri Lanka, 24-25 April 2012

CONCLUSIONS

Ministers, senior officials, mayors and elected councillors and other senior local government stakeholders from Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Malaysia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka met in Colombo, 24-25 April 2012 under the auspices of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) and the Commonwealth Secretariat and with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The symposium was hosted by the Government of Sri Lanka through the Ministry of Local Government and the Federation of Sri Lankan Local Authorities.

It was noted that the symposium was the first of a series of important Commonwealth meetings in Sri Lanka leading up to the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), and Sri Lanka's subsequent assumption of the chair of the Commonwealth in 2013-15.

Participants welcomed the endorsement provided by Heads of Government at their meeting in Australia, 2011 for the role of CLGF and their recognition 'of the role and place of local government, in partnership with the private sector, for promoting strategies for localism, sustainable development, and economic growth' and their support for the implementation of the *Cardiff Consensus on Local Economic Development*. They agreed that taking forward the *Cardiff Consensus* should be an important policy objective.

In their deliberations, participants recognised that local government in Asia faces considerable challenges, notably rapid urbanisation, rural under-development and the ensuing pressures on the provision of local community services, including for poor and marginalised sections of society, such as water and sanitation.

Promoting intergovernmental relations, local democracy and good practice policies

Participants recalled the incorporation of the *Aberdeen Agenda on Principles for Good Practice on Local Democracy and Good Governance* into the core Commonwealth political values at the meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government in Trinidad, 2009 and their discussions reviewed the extent to which these principles were being implemented in their respective countries, particularly with regard to issues around intergovernmental relations between central/federal, provincial/state and local government. They emphasised the importance of:

1. The establishment of participatory, democratic and decentralised governance.
2. Fulfilling legal and constitutional obligations regarding the functioning of local government, including the timely holding of local elections supported where appropriate by election observer missions.
3. Good inter-governmental relations between central, state/provincial and local government including establishing formal mechanisms to engage local government in policy planning and development and in regular dialogue.
4. Support for the establishment and strengthening of national and state/provincial associations of local government.
5. Promoting inclusive and pro-poor local development strategies to benefit all citizens in urban as well as rural areas.
6. Encouraging local government that is accountable and transparent.

7. Facilitating inter-communal dialogue between different ethnic, religious and other groups, especially in post-conflict environments.
8. Increasing fiscal decentralisation/transfers and ensuring the allocation of predictable and timely resources to local government to allow it to fulfil its tasks, including through the ability to raise local revenues where feasible.
9. Improving the competence and skills of local government mayors/councillors, staff and institutions to respond to the needs of local citizens through appropriate training courses and other capacity-building programmes such as peer learning.
10. Ensuring sufficient staff and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for elected mayors/local councillors and administrative staff, including central and state/provincial government staff in accordance with decentralisation and public sector reform objectives.

Regional cooperation on local government

Participants recognised the value of greater regional cooperation and sharing of good practice policies among Commonwealth countries in Asia and agreed to work with CLGF, the Commonwealth Secretariat and other partners to develop a CLGF regional programme in Asia to promote good practice policies in local government and to strengthen local government capacity, overseen by the responsible CLGF Board members from the Asia region. The regional programme would seek to:

1. Share and disseminate good practice policies on decentralisation and the implementation of the *Aberdeen Principles* with a view to promoting core principles, notably constitutional/legal recognition, regular local elections, sound intergovernmental relations and strengthening local government associations.
2. Undertaking assessments of how the *Aberdeen Principles* are being implemented in member countries.
3. Take forward the 2011 CHOGM decisions on the implementation of the *Cardiff Consensus*, including how local government can work in partnership with the private sector in this area.
4. Facilitate technical partnership exchange programmes, study visits and other regular interaction between local authorities, concerned ministries and other stakeholders in the region, drawing on practical experiences from all Commonwealth countries.
5. Research how relevant local government issues could be integrated into the work of the responsible regional organisations including SAARC and other regional organisations.

It was agreed to request the Government of Sri Lanka, as the forthcoming Chair of the Commonwealth to assist in the establishment of a CLGF regional programme office in Asia and other Governments, where possible, to contribute human and other resources for such a programme.

Participants also agreed to encourage greater uptake of CLGF membership at local, state/provincial and central government level as well as in respect of associated policy/academic institutions and to cooperate with concerned civil society bodies.

Participants requested the conclusions of the symposium to be brought to the attention of the CLGF Board meeting, Belize, 17-18 May by its Asian Board members. They further looked forward to an active input and participation from the Asia region at the next CLGF Conference on *Developmental Local Government*, in Kampala, May 2013 which would be presenting policy recommendations to the 2013 CHOGM in Sri Lanka.

It was resolved to meet again at high level in 2013 to review progress.

Participants expressed their warm appreciation to the Government of Sri Lanka through the Ministry of Local Government for the generous support and hospitality provided.