

The third publication in the series 'Taking Democracy Seriously'

All Commonwealth countries need vigorous and effective local democracy which is genuinely local and truly democratic and which has the necessary powers and responsibilities, a fair allocation of resources and a significant degree of local autonomy.

In this booklet two leading figures in the Commonwealth Local Government Forum – Mayor Smangaliso Mkhathshwa and Councillor John Otekat – set out the case for local democracy and describe its key features.

As Commonwealth Secretary-General HE Rt Hon Don McKinnon says in his foreword, taken together with the *Principles on Good Practice for Local Democracy*, which appear as one of the appendices, it is a “most useful aid to the promotion of local democracy in each of our countries”.

Make it local, make it democratic

THE CASE FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY



Commonwealth Secretariat

Mayor Smangaliso Mkhathshwa
and
Councillor John Otekat



Commonwealth Secretariat



Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, *Executive Mayor of the City of Tshwane and President of United Cities and Local Governments Africa*

Before being elected to Tshwane Council after its formation in 2000 following the local government modernisation in South Africa, Father Mkhathshwa was Deputy Minister for Education from 1996 after being elected to parliament in 1994.

A parish priest from 1976-1994, he was appointed Secretary-General of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference from 1980-1988, and National Director for the Johannesburg Institute for Contextual Theology from 1988-1994.

Active in the struggle against apartheid, he was arrested and detained without trial several times and from 1986-87 was detained in Pretoria Central Prison where he was severely tortured. He joined the African National Congress after it was unbanned.

He was elected as one of the presidents of United Cities and Local Governments when it was founded in 2004 and is also a Board member of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF).



Cllr John Otekat, *Chairperson of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and President of the Uganda Local Government Association*

John Emilly Otekat became chairperson of Soroti in Uganda in 1998. In 2000 he became regional chair for the eastern Region on the Executive Committee of the Uganda Local Authorities Association and became its President in 2002.

Capt Otekat has wide experience in wildlife management in Uganda national parks. After being Deputy Director for Field Operations from 1992-1997, he became chair of the Governing Council of the Wildlife Clubs of Uganda from 1997-2001. He is currently vice-chair of the Governing Council of the East African Wildlife Society.

He has written a number of papers on wildlife management, governance and politics.

Cllr Otekat was elected chairperson of the CLGF in March 2005 after being vice-chairperson for the previous two years.

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Taking Democracy Seriously is a series of occasional publications by the Commonwealth Secretariat on aspects of democracy.

This is the third in the series. The first two publications in the series are *Creating a Culture of Integrity* by John Uhr and *Political Financing in the Commonwealth* by Michael Pinto-Duschinsky.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, they are offered as a contribution to debate and discussion and should not be taken to represent the views of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

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Foreword

by HE Rt Hon Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary-General



In this booklet two leading figures in the Commonwealth Local Government Forum set out the case for local democracy. I welcome this as a valuable addition to the Commonwealth Secretariat's *Taking Democracy Seriously* series. Taken together with the *Principles on Good Practice for Local Democracy*, which appear as one of the appendices, I am confident that this booklet will be a most useful aid to the promotion of local democracy in each of our countries.

As Commonwealth Heads of Government have themselves stated, local democracy is an essential element in any modern democracy. In the pages that follow the authors have set out a number of the key points. For my part, I want to emphasise three.

First, there needs to be a genuine respect for the local sphere of government on the part of those involved in central and regional government. One way in which that can be demonstrated is through the constitutional and legal recognition of local government, as called for by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their Abuja meeting in 2003. South Africa, India, Ghana and several other countries have given that formal recognition in their constitutions. That is a step which I commend to all other Commonwealth countries.

Even where there is no such legal recognition, local democracy can and must be in a balanced partnership with the other spheres of government. There is no balance when local government is simply the local deliverer of policies and services which are shaped, controlled by and wholly funded from national level. There is balance when there is a sensible division of powers and responsibilities, a fair allocation of resources and a significant degree of local autonomy in the use of those resources. We must all work for that.

Secondly, I want to identify myself with the authors' concern – and that of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum itself – to highlight the role of local democracy in helping to secure the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and the wider effort for development. Democracy is a

valuable end in itself. But we need not and must not stop there. At all levels democracy must play its full part in the eradication of poverty, improving the lives of ordinary people and opening up the new possibilities and opportunities for individuals and for entire communities which development brings. It is not enough to say that local democratic institutions – in common with all others – can deliver. For the sake of the people they represent and serve, they must do so.

Thirdly and finally, many countries have an efficient system of local administration, and that is important but by itself it is insufficient. Most important of all – as the title of this booklet suggests and the very phrase 'local democracy' makes clear – local democracy must be genuinely local and it must be democratic. It must be as close to the people as possible and it must be as accountable, as transparent and as representative as it can be.

I hope that this booklet – itself a product of our co-operation – will help to take forward the joint endeavour of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum to ensure that there is vigorous and effective local democracy in all Commonwealth countries.

Don McKinnon
Commonwealth Secretary-General

“In new democracies whose unsteady national democratic institutions are based on weak traditions of local autonomy, democratic local governments are even more critical to strengthening democracy. Functional local participatory governing institutions necessarily provide the foundation on which democracy and development can be achieved.”

“The incentive to participate in government processes is stronger locally than nationally because local governments are closest to citizens. Therefore, a way to deepen democracy nationally is to deepen democracy locally.”

President Olusegun Obasanjo, Chairperson-in-Office of the Commonwealth, in his message to the Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2005

The world is made up of countries; countries that have evolved over the centuries and are of different sizes in land area and population. These may themselves be sub-divided into states, provinces or regions, all with their own histories of development. Within these regions there are urban areas, rural areas, cities, small towns or a network of villages that have grown up in response to local circumstances, geography and economic need.

Just as countries have some form of government or leader, the subdivisions and areas within them generally need some sort of governance or leadership. That is where local government comes in. Where there is a recognised system of governance that represents the local community and has some powers to shape local policies and services this is called local government, or local self-government. When there are elections for elected local representatives, these elected representatives are usually called councillors and the institutions they form are called local councils.

Some countries have local or regional institutions that are administrative offices of national government, administering policies and services locally. Though these may work on a regional or local basis, we do not consider them as local or regional government as they are purely administrative. These can be called deconcentration of management functions rather than decentralisation.

Decentralisation and development

One third of the two billion people who live in the 53 countries of the Commonwealth live on less than US\$1 a day, and two thirds on less than US\$2 a day. Around half of the world’s 115 million young children who do not have access to primary education live within the Commonwealth, and

some 70 per cent of those living in poverty are women. Women are discriminated against in some countries, with the extent of discrimination ranging from unequal pay to unequal share in inheritance and marriage regimes, and domestic violence.

National governments cannot tackle these and other problems of society alone. It is increasingly being recognised by those outside local government that provincial/state and local government all have their roles to deliver sustainable communities and a better quality of life for the people who live in our communities. Indeed, for those of us involved in democratic local government, our principal purpose is to improve the quality of life of the people we serve.

In our view, successful decentralisation involves:

- Political decentralisation – the devolution of political decision-making powers
- Democratic decentralisation – locally elected and locally accountable representatives
- A share of the national public purse from the central purse to local areas
- Devolution of tax-raising and spending powers, and
- Administrative decentralisation – the devolution of governmental functions.

Globally there is a growing recognition that local authorities are best placed to help improve living conditions, reduce poverty and promote participatory democracy. More and more countries are moving towards decentralisation. Increasingly, countries are being asked to include a decentralisation strategy in their development and poverty reduction programmes to qualify for donor funding.

We believe that local democracy and decentralisation go hand in hand. Decentralisation and local governments are more effective and lead to more sustainable development if they are democratic.

The 53 countries of the Commonwealth are at different stages of decentralisation and developing local democracy. Some Commonwealth countries already have strong systems of democratic local government while others are just beginning on the road to decentralisation and local democracy. The Commonwealth network provides a strong framework for

We believe that local democracy and decentralisation go hand in hand. Decentralisation and local government are more effective and lead to more sustainable development if they are democratic.



Make it local – a community meeting. Local democracy must be as close to the people as possible

us to share our experiences and innovations and to learn from each other, whatever stage we are at.

Local democracy – giving people a voice

Local democracy means giving people a say in the policies and decisions that affect their lives daily at the local level.

Representative democracy is the most practical form of democracy, where citizens select from candidates or political parties to make decisions for the community. Participatory democracy combines direct and representative democracy, while encouraging the involvement of marginalised, isolated or previously ignored groups including under-represented communities or minorities.

At local level, democracy is usually through a mixture of representative and participatory democracy with democratically elected local government at the heart of the system working with the public and other stakeholders. Democratic local governments create a vital link with ordinary people.

Democratically elected local government is a representative form of democracy whereby councillors are elected at local level to represent their communities either on an area basis or proportionally. Systems for electing councillors vary, and may be party-based or non party-based.

In countries which have such systems of democracy, councils are continuing to develop their democratic structures and processes, looking at ways in which councils and elected representatives can be more open, accountable, representative of all parts of the community and reflect the views of the communities they serve.

For instance, local governments are increasingly experimenting with new types of directly elected mayor and cabinet systems, and a variety of forms of direct consultation and involvement of citizens, service users and other stakeholders.

Closer to the people

Democratic local government also provides interaction between the local level and other spheres of government, in touch with and representing the needs of the local community, so is ideally placed as the voice of the people.

While local authorities vary considerably in the size of population they represent, on average a councillor represents around 200-3,000 people, whereas national politicians represent areas of around 50,000 to 100,000 people. Local government and elected representatives are therefore much closer to the people they represent than national governments can generally hope to be and in a much better position to consult and listen to people about their priorities and problems, whether it is water, sanitation, health, education, street crime, housing or jobs.

In our communities we find that people are most interested in specific, local, practical issues about the place where they live or work or spend leisure time. Things that are close to their hearts such as how clean their streets are, easy access to water and other local services, whether there are local schools for their children to attend and what opportunities there are for jobs. In larger councils which may cover a significant population, new ways of communicating with people are being brought in through neighbourhood and ward structures to ensure that everyone can play a part and have a say in their immediate area.

Many Commonwealth countries are small or island states, where the total population of the country may be quite low. Nevertheless, because they have particular problems, such as being at higher risk of natural disasters, due to local conditions, local government still has an important role in the state's governance and development. In the Caribbean for example, led by Jamaica, many of the small island states are beginning to introduce local democracy to help them shape their futures and be prepared for natural emergencies to which such island states are prone. This has already showed results in response to recent hurricanes and tornados, where Jamaican local authorities have worked together and been ready to respond.

Recognising local government internationally

We are continuing to make the case nationally and internationally for democratic local government to be recognised as an essential sphere of democratic government. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Abuja in 2003, Heads of Government reaffirmed their recognition of the value of elected local government as an important foundation for democracy and endorsed giving constitutional and legal recognition to local government.

While local authorities vary considerably in the size of population they represent, on average a councillor represents around 200-3,000 people, whereas national politicians represent areas of around 50,000 to 100,000 people.

2 Local democracy – a vital part of democratic government

“The Group believes that local democracy, particularly the strengthening of elected local government and wide citizens’ participation, including women and youth, is an important way to promote democratic values and deepen the democratic process.”

Report on development and democracy by Commonwealth Expert Group chaired by Dr Manmohan Singh, now Prime Minister of India

“Inclusive democracy at local level is ultimately the key to building sustainable communities and local government is the linchpin for championing the needs of local communities.”

Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, former Minister for Local Government and the Regions, UK

Democracy is the most widely accepted form of government today. Democracy means ‘rule by the people’, giving people a voice in the decisions that affect their lives and access to resources that are theirs.

To make our local systems democratic we must give citizens an active say in local decisions and over politicians who have power locally, including regular elections to elect local representatives.

We believe that local democracy is a vital part of the democratic state. At local level people can be directly involved in decision-making. It is much more difficult to involve many people directly at national level. Local democracy gives citizens influence over the decisions, services and environment that affect them day-to-day, and allows them to influence national decisions through local institutions. Of course, local democracy does not operate in isolation; it is an essential part of democratic government that involves national, regional and local spheres. Vigorous local democracy builds the foundation for a strong and more enduring national democracy.

There is growing acceptance that for democracy to flourish at the national level, and for poverty reduction programmes to work, strong democracy must be developed in the local sphere. We have also seen cases where deepening democracy at local level can help in reconciliation and rebuilding communities following conflict or natural disasters.

Global problems, local solutions

The problems facing humanity today are increasingly global problems – poverty, terrorism, drugs, HIV/AIDS, climate change, degradation of resources, and migration. Though these are common global issues, in our view they cannot be tackled without local as well as national response and action. Action locally reflects where people are based, where such issues are manifest and where the needs of people are felt and must be addressed. In our experience, involving people locally in solutions even to these big issues will make the outcome more sustainable in the longer term.

We can also learn from each other and share our experience. Local authorities working together through local government associations and across national borders can help each other find successful solutions to common global issues that we can each implement locally.

Local action supports people living with HIV/AIDS in Namibia

Namibia is amongst the five countries in the world most affected by HIV/AIDS. AIDS is now the main cause of death there and has given rise to one of the highest proportions of orphans in the world. Namibia joined the UN Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV/AIDS in Africa (AMICAALL) Partnership programme in 2001 and launched a programme in its towns and cities. AMICAALL stresses the importance of locally-led action involving a broad range of stakeholders and being responsive to local needs.

One town that took up the challenge was Otjiwarongo. Thanks to the leadership of the town council, working with community groups and businesses, funding was secured from the AMICAALL Programme for a Multi-Purpose Help Centre to provide a more supportive environment for the increasing number of orphans. The Centre was set up following wide consultation with local people, service providers, community organisations, and other stakeholders to assess the priorities and needs resulting from the high level of HIV/AIDS and its impact. The Centre now provides a range of services to orphans and young people such as food, clothing and emergency accommodation, after-school facilities and recreation activities. For the wider community it provides HIV/AIDS awareness education, counselling and support for families living with HIV/AIDS.

Local democracy is a vital part of the democratic state. At local level people can be directly involved in decision-making.



Make it democratic – a Sierra Leone voter casts her ballot in a transparent ballot box. Local government must be as democratic as possible and credible elections are essential for local democracy.

Democratic local government – local democracy in practice

We believe that strong and effective democratic local government is the best way of ensuring local democracy.

Local government provides the governance and leadership to enable a local area to plan its development and provide services for local stakeholders – residents, community groups, businesses and others.

Local government is more effective if it is democratic as it involves the public and service users so that resources can be more effectively and more appropriately targeted. The greater capacity that our local governments have to involve stakeholders in decision-making, the stronger and more sustainable those decisions will be.

Some countries have a system of local administration – local agencies and representatives of national government that carry out national government policies and services locally. Such local administrations are just an administrative tool and we do not consider them to be part of local democracy.

The institutions for local government are generally called local authorities or councils or municipalities in many urban areas. Elected local councils are of varying sizes depending on the size of the geographical area and the population represented, number of representatives on the council, size and structure of the council and its way of working, and the number of functions and services for which they are responsible and how they provide them.

Democratic local government structures

Our councils are made up of elected local representatives, called councillors.

The most common election systems for councillors are first past the post (FPTP) or proportional representation (PR). Though many candidates stand for local election following a party system along the lines of the national elections, there are also candidates who stand as independents in some countries.

Councils usually have a political structure, the elected councillors, and an administrative structure of paid officers.

Typical political structures are a leader and cabinet system or a committee

system. Leaders may be elected directly by the people or indirectly by the other elected councillors. Many countries are experimenting with new types of structures to make councils more democratic and representative. Many are moving towards systems with directly elected mayors as the council leader. Such mayors have both an executive and a political role.

Cabinet members or committees have responsibility for policies and decisions in certain designated areas.

Scrutiny and accountability are important for our councils to counter corruption and ensure that systems are fair and honest. We support both internal and external scrutiny through mechanisms such as scrutiny committees, public access to information on all decisions made, participatory budget making, external audit, and the ombudsman.

Strong local democracy requires effective local leadership. Councillors, officers and institutions need the skills and capacity to ensure that local democracy can enable local government to deliver quality services to local communities.

Essential everyday services

Local government is typically responsible for local services such as water and sanitation, local roads, primary education, housing, primary health care, transport, town planning, markets, environmental protection, social welfare, libraries and cultural facilities, sports and recreation, civil protection, local economic development and for local administrative services such as electoral arrangements, registering births and deaths, population statistics and licensing.

These services vary from country to country but generally cover the basic day-to-day services essential for people to have a decent basic standard of living. Many of these services relate to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs – see Appendix 3), thus local involvement in delivering the MDGs is essential.

Local services may be provided directly by a council or in partnership with other organisations such as the private sector and NGOs, or they may be fully contracted out. In recent years we have seen the emphasis move towards making sure that services are efficient, value-for-money and meeting the needs of the community rather than on who provides them. This allows us to draw in the expertise we need for such a wide variety of functions and services in the way that best suits our individual situations.

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Respect and balance – central and regional government need to show respect for the local sphere of government: the partnership between all three must be balanced so that, for example, local democracy has the funding and the powers it needs.

Community leadership is an important and growing role for local government in developing sustainable communities. This involves councils working with their communities and other stakeholders to draw up long-term plans for the future of their areas, bringing in other sectors and service providers to agree the plan and how to deliver it locally.

Globalisation and growing urbanisation has made many of our cities into powerful centres of economic growth and development, the focus for international investment and trade. City councils can often be quite powerful bodies, with some larger cities having economies as big as many small states. In some countries, such as Pakistan, certain macro-municipal functions are managed by district government, which gives them extra authority, resources and capacity.

Good relations between spheres of government

Though our local authorities must have enough autonomy and capacity to do their jobs and deliver results, we must also work within the framework of national priorities and objectives. Thus, we believe that partnerships and good relations between the spheres of government are absolutely essential to good governance.

This means respect and recognition for each of the spheres of government – national, provincial and local – sufficient constitutional provision, defined areas of responsibility and regular dialogue and co-ordination with mechanisms to ensuring this dialogue takes place. Some countries, such as South Africa, have a commitment to dialogue and consultation between the spheres of government in their constitution. More recently, several governments have signed concordats with their national local government associations to agree to hold meetings between spheres of government. The UK and New Zealand both have a formal central-local government group where cabinet members meet with local government leaders.

We also believe that strong local government associations and international organisations such as the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) can help to provide a strong voice for local government and support it in its dialogue with other spheres of government.

A firm financial basis

Finance is one area where councils and national governments have to work together. While councils can often raise some income from user fees,

licences and local taxes, in most cases some funding is needed from the national pool to ensure that money is redistributed to areas that most need support.

At the same time, our councils must be able to set their own budgets in response to local needs. The balance of local funding against central to pay for council spending is often controversial. Yet it is a key issue. Poorer areas may not be able to raise enough locally to fund the services they need as their tax base is very low. Some central government funds are therefore necessary to ensure that local authorities have sufficient capacity and to ensure a fairer distribution of resources among local authorities to meet the needs of their communities.

Local areas also need capital – one-off funding for major infrastructure projects such as roads, transport systems, and infrastructure, including infrastructure to support information technology. More and more local authorities are seeking innovative ways to raise and borrow money for investment in capital projects. Some local authorities, for instance some of the larger municipalities in India, are using municipal bonds to bring in capital, and public-private partnerships are becoming increasingly common to lever in private sector investment. As donor funding is often directed towards such projects, we would encourage donors to give local authorities direct access to such funding for investment projects.

Funding development through decentralisation

Following decentralisation to 110 district assemblies (local councils) in Ghana in 1988, the Government decided that something was needed to strengthen the assemblies and tackle funding problems and in 1994 set up the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF). Recognising that traditional sources of revenue such as local taxes and user fees were inadequate for development, this Common Fund gives at least five per cent of the national budget to the district assemblies to ensure that they have funding for development projects.

Before this fund was set up, councils spent less than 15 per cent of their revenue on development projects, and therefore were not able to have a significant impact on development. The DACF guarantees districts a part of the national revenue for development, thus demonstrating real decentralisation in practice. The DACF is the most important revenue stream for district assemblies for capital expenditure and development spending.

Central government must also create the right climate for local democracy to operate. For local democracy to thrive there must be enough local autonomy to manage local affairs. Local government must have the freedom and power to operate – to drive the agenda and change things, to be able to respond to the needs of our communities.

Features of local democracy

Just as certain principles, processes and institutions are seen as key requirements for democracy at national level, we believe that there are common principles and processes that help to create a strong democratic system at local level through democratic local government.

At the Commonwealth Local Government Conference in Aberdeen in March 2005 on Deepening Local Democracy, a high-powered group of 500 local government leaders, councillors, ministers with responsibility for local government and other stakeholders from across the Commonwealth met to discuss the principles that are desirable for any local system to be considered democratic. Though different countries of the Commonwealth are at different stages of decentralisation and developing local democracy, we were able to agree some basic principles and a framework for local democracy and good, effective local governance.

- Elections that reflect the will of the people to elect local representatives in a safe political environment.
- The opportunity for all citizens to participate in decision-making through consultation, participation and community empowerment.
- Decision-making must be inclusive to reflect the whole community, particularly traditionally disadvantaged or excluded groups such as women, young people, minority groups and people with disabilities.
- Decision-making must be open and transparent, so that the public know how and what decisions are made. The public should be kept informed, with information easily accessible and available.
- There must be adequate processes to ensure fairness and honesty and combat corruption, including openness and transparency in decision-making and adequate checks and balances through robust regulatory bodies and both internal and external scrutiny.

As at national level, human rights, the rule of law and free media are also important to support local democracy.

Effective democratic local government

Central government must also create the right climate for local democracy to operate. For local democracy to thrive there must be enough local

Reserved seats for women boost representation

Since India introduced its system of reserving one third of council seats for women, more than one million women get elected to local government in India. Similarly one third of chairpersons positions are also reserved for women. Not only does this ensure a fairer, more representative system, it has also led to a different focus in policies and priorities to improve the quality of life and prosperity in Indian villages, towns and cities.

Other Commonwealth countries, including Uganda (where in every council at least one third of councillors must be women), Bangladesh, Ghana, Namibia and Pakistan, are now following India's example to introduce mechanisms for increasing the number of women in local political life.

autonomy to manage local affairs. Local government must have the freedom and power to operate – to drive the agenda and change things, to be able to respond to the needs of our communities.

To build strong democratic local government, local councils must have the capacity and the resources to respond to the needs of the local community and deliver their decisions. Local government must have an adequate amount of the national public purse and the ability to raise revenue locally including through taxes or raising capital through borrowing.

Such powers, responsibilities and funding commitments must be clearly defined through appropriate legislation. Most Commonwealth countries that have or are introducing local democracy have used specific Local Government Acts to define the powers and responsibilities.

We believe that people should have the right to local government through constitutional and legal recognition of local government as a necessary sphere of government, as we now have in a number of Commonwealth countries. These include India, the world's largest democracy, and South Africa, where local government was written into the new constitution following the overthrow of apartheid. Some 24 countries of the Commonwealth, almost half, have some sort of constitutional protection for local democracy or government.

Taking part in local public life

In local councils across the Commonwealth we are trying to strengthen local democracy by increasing consultation with stakeholders and public participation in decision-making.

We have developed many forms of local participation, ranging from surveys and market research, to focus groups and public meetings on particular issues, citizens juries, referendums and community planning days.

Some larger councils are devolving decision-making or area planning to smaller areas through neighbourhood and ward structures and consultation so that decisions are made directly by the people they will affect. In the UK the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (the Ministry that oversees local government) is currently consulting councils on ways for developing neighbourhoods to involve people more in their immediate communities. Many UK councils have set up neighbourhoods that work on specific issues or are involved in longer-term neighbourhood plans, bringing together local communities, service providers and other agencies to tackle problems in an intensive and co-ordinated way.

Councils are also looking at new ways to involve groups that are traditionally hard to reach, including minority groups, disadvantaged communities and young people. The effectiveness of services and development can be undermined if people are not involved. India, Pakistan and Uganda all have reserved seats for traditionally under-represented groups in their countries.

New Zealand, the UK and others are beginning to put more emphasis on ongoing participation, beyond elections, and increasingly local governments have a duty to conduct meaningful consultations. In Ghana, New Zealand and South Africa, local government is responsible for participatory development planning.

We must also report back the results of consultation, to show how decisions have been influenced and to keep the community involved. Without this, people will lose their trust in the process.

Communities have a say in their futures in New Zealand

Local government in New Zealand has undergone significant reform in recent years. These reforms change the way that communities and councils work together and think about and plan for the future.

The core purpose of local government in New Zealand is to enable democratic local decision-making and action by communities and to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future.

The Community Outcomes Process (COP) is central to the new system. It gives people a chance to say what they want their community to be like in the future.

The COP helps communities to think about the future in a broad, long-term way, with a ten year view rather than just everyday issues. Every council must complete its first community outcomes consultation by 2006 and repeat the process at least every six years.

The council will use the input to shape its long-term council community plan, setting out the community's expectations for the area and how the council will achieve them. The council will monitor and report on progress at least every three years.

By its very nature, democratic local government plays a key role in the fight against poverty and delivering the MDGs and this is encouraging countries to decentralise. Though the MDGs are global targets, many can only be implemented and delivered locally.

“The 1997 Edinburgh CHOGM, which I chaired, recognised that ‘effective, elected, local government is an important foundation for democracy’. Legitimate and well-functioning local democracy is key to the delivery of the basic services – water, sanitation, education, health, transport, and so on – which are vital to tackling poverty and helping governments deliver the Millennium Development Goals.”

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister, UK, in his message to the Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2005

“Halving the number of people without access to clean water and sanitation requires not only more resources but also needs the active engagement of empowered, responsive and accountable local authorities.”

Dr Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, in her message to the Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2005

The Commonwealth’s commitment to development and democracy was stated in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991 and the Fancourt Declaration of 1999.

The Commonwealth Expert Group on Development and Democracy defines development as strengthening human capacities to lead long, healthy, creative, fulfilling lives. It says that democracy, linked to freedom and participation, is part of development.

Delivering the MDGs and alleviating poverty

Governments and national and international organisations are increasingly recognising the need for local democracy and good, effective local governance to work alongside national government to deliver development. By its very nature, democratic local government plays a key role in the fight against poverty and delivering the MDGs, and this is encouraging countries to decentralise. Though the MDGs are global targets, many can only be implemented and delivered locally.

We therefore believe that effective and democratic local government is critical to achieving the MDGs. Access to clean water, achieving universal primary education for instance – these cannot be achieved without the active involvement of local government. In the majority of Commonwealth countries these services are delivered by local or provincial government.

Democratic local government provides a key vehicle for the pursuit of pro-

Local democracy delivers development in South Africa

The South African experience of local government is unique in that it is embedded in a Constitution that is widely regarded as the most progressive. The development of democratic local governance has been driven by the desire to extend democracy as an overriding value of good governance and that local democracy is the most appropriate means to ensure a better life for the people of South Africa.

Over the last ten years the South African model of local democracy has developed into a unique and comprehensive model. Not only is democratic local government a right within the constitution, but the constitution also demands that the spheres of government – national, provincial and local – must interact and consult and inform each other on issues of common concern.

South Africa’s first local government elections took place in 1995. Since the local councils were established the number of households with electricity has gone up from one third to almost three quarters, and the number of households with clean water went up from 62 per cent in 1996 to 85 per cent in 2001. Both of these are responsibilities of the municipal and district councils.

Part of this success is due to the strong involvement of local communities. Municipalities have a ward system, whereby leaders of the wards are directly elected by the residents, a modern version of the street committees that played a crucial role before the first democratic elections. Members of the ward committees inform the decisions of the councils and work with the local government practitioners.

This is now complemented by community development workers who help to facilitate access to public services. These are the foot soldiers of local government – the crucial go-betweens between residents and public services – who also keep mayors informed about specific individual or family problems.

A further outreach programme is through the traditional *izimbizo* – a gathering for local people to have their say with government in the old African tradition of debate.

poor development strategies as it is often responsible for services such as primary health care, water/sanitation, schooling and local economic development that are key to tackling poverty. Local democracy helps to ensure that people living in poverty can be involved in the decisions that affect their lives so that solutions are practical and appropriate. Studies have shown that if people are involved at this level development is more sustainable. A recent UNDP report on Decentralised Governance shows that decentralisation is effective in achieving human development and thus reducing poverty. Donor support for poverty reduction strategies depends to some extent on decentralisation and local level involvement in the delivery of services.

Many of our poorer communities are our most disadvantaged communities and are difficult to reach to give them a voice in making decisions about resource distribution and other issues that affect their lives. We must ensure that we have mechanisms and institutions that empower these communities – and this is more likely to be achieved through local institutions and mechanisms than national ones.

According to the *UNDP Human Development Report 2002*, “in the long run building stronger and more accountable local government is the only way to make decentralisation pro-poor. But it requires time, resources and capacity-building.”

Many of the current reforms in Commonwealth countries such as Lesotho and Sierra Leone are encouraging decentralisation and strengthening elected local government.



Development – women entrepreneurs inspect the mill in their small business. Local democracy has an important part to play in attaining the Millennium Development Goals and the wider drive to promote development.

City communities challenge poverty in Uganda

Poverty reduction is at the forefront of local government’s agenda in Uganda. City Community Challenges (C3) is a mechanism that has been developed by Ugandan local government in partnership with local communities to reduce urban poverty at the household level. The decentralised framework in Uganda means that local authorities at city/district and division can make decisions and implement their plans and use community resources to fulfil them. There are three components of C3 which all districts need to implement – capacity-building of beneficiaries, micro-enterprise and social services. The design is different in each district to meet differing needs. The challenge has been for the communities to identify their own needs and to match resources, attract partnerships to address poverty and to own and plan the projects.

Jinja is one district implementing C3. In Jinja housing was identified by the community as a fundamental need. The target was set to provide 700 low cost homes. Locally available materials were used as well as the unskilled labour of the community itself to cut costs. C3 has been a big success, with clear direct and indirect benefits to the community. According to local reports, the poorest people, and the most disadvantaged, such as women and people with disabilities, have received training and skills in small business management, environmental practices, primary health care and construction. They have new houses and small loan funds for micro-enterprises. Social status and relationships have also improved and there is a real feeling of community cohesion.

Source: ‘Ugandan challenge’ in special issues of Developments, published by the UK Department for International Development in association with the UK Local Government Alliance for International Development

4 CLGF promoting and supporting democratic local government

For the last ten years the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) has helped to strengthen local democracy and promote democratic local government throughout the Commonwealth. Its work has resulted in local democratic values taking root in many countries of the Commonwealth.

CLGF was established in 1995 in response to a need for a collective voice for government at local level and to press for decentralisation and democratic local governance. Since then it has:

- represented local democracy at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs)
- worked closely with UN-Habitat on the urban governance campaign
- represented local government on key UN committees
- provided direct technical assistance and practical support to more than 50 local authorities through partnerships between authorities in different countries on specific projects
- jointly organised, with the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth expert teams to observe local elections
- gained Commonwealth associated organisation status.

CLGF is promoting and supporting democracy at local level, encouraging democratic local processes, systems and structures by:

- capacity-building programmes and projects, such as the Good Practice Scheme, which provide technical expertise and joint working between local authorities in the Commonwealth
- building and disseminating a bank of information on good practice
- encouraging and supporting networks and events to share information and ideas, develop policies and disseminate good practice.

Since the first Commonwealth Local Government Conference held in 2000, Commonwealth Local Government Conferences have become established as major biennial events for Commonwealth policy-makers and practitioners involved in local government. The most recent, in Aberdeen in March 2005, focused on Deepening Local Democracy, with some 500 senior policy-makers coming together to agree a set of principles for local democracy and good governance (see Appendix 1).

CLGF promoting and supporting democratic local government

CLGF works closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat and other Commonwealth and international organisations. The Secretariat has supported CLGF and its members in regional projects and events on decentralisation and local democracy.

CLGF works with and through its members. It has members from national ministries with a local government portfolio, provincial/state governments and local governments including local government associations. Through meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops it consults its members on policy and its work programme and provides a forum for the spheres of government to interact.



Principles for local democracy – senior local government policy-makers at the Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2005 agreed a set of principles for good practice in local democracy and good governance.

Aberdeen Agenda: Commonwealth principles on good practice for local democracy and good governance, CLGF, 2005

Citizens and governance, Commonwealth Foundation, 1999

Commonwealth Local Government Handbook 2005, published by Publications UK for CLGF, 2005

Making democracy work for pro-poor development, Report by a Commonwealth Expert Group, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003

Decentralised Governance - A global matrix of experiences, Management Development Division, UNDP, New York, 2000

Acronyms

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CLGF	Commonwealth Local Government Forum
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Appendix 1. CLGF's Aberdeen Agenda: Commonwealth principles on good practice for local democracy and good governance

- Constitutional and legal recognition for local democracy
- The ability to elect local representatives in conditions of political freedom
- Partnerships between spheres of government
- Defined legislative framework to ensure local government has the appropriate powers in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity
- Opportunity to participate in local decision-making
- Open local government – accountability to the community
- Open local government – transparency of decision-making
- Openness to scrutiny
- Inclusiveness to reflect the social, economic, environmental, and cultural needs of the whole community
- Adequate and equitable resource allocation
- Equitable service delivery
- Building strong local democracy and good governance

Appendix 2. Countries in the Commonwealth

Antigua and Barbuda	Kenya	Samoa
Australia	Kiribati	Seychelles
The Bahamas	Lesotho	Sierra Leone
Bangladesh	Malawi	Singapore
Barbados	Malaysia	Solomon Islands
Belize	Maldives	South Africa
Botswana	Malta	Sri Lanka
Brunei Darussalam	Mauritius	Swaziland
Cameroon	Mozambique	Tonga
Canada	Namibia	Trinidad and Tobago
Cyprus	Nauru	Tuvalu
Dominica	New Zealand	Uganda
Fiji Islands	Nigeria	United Kingdom
The Gambia	Pakistan	United Republic of Tanzania
Ghana	Papua New Guinea	Vanuatu
Grenada	St Kitts and Nevis	Zambia
Guyana	St Lucia	
India	St Vincent and the Grenadines	
Jamaica		

Appendix 3. The Millennium Development Goals

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

The Commonwealth Secretariat works closely with and encourages support for the Commonwealth Local Government Forum.

CLGF was set up in 1995 to provide a collective voice for local government in the Commonwealth to promote decentralisation and local democracy.

Ten years on, CLGF continues with its advocacy role. It is an associated member of the Commonwealth and has formal status with a number of United Nations agencies and with the EU-ACP Cotonou Agreement.

CLGF promotes good practice, information exchange and capacity-building through its programmes, projects, publications and events, including the Commonwealth Local Government Good Practice Scheme, the annual Commonwealth Local Government Handbook and a major biennial conference for local government policy and decision-makers.

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