Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance

Supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat

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ISSUE 2
January 2009

Research & Evaluation
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News & Reviews

Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance

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EDITORIAL

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The diverse contributions to this second issue of the Commonwealth e-Journal of Local Governance cover three continents as well as the Pacific Islands, and explore two broad themes: firstly, challenges for decentralisation and emerging systems of local government; and secondly, the nature and quality of democratic local governance and community cohesion.

Jaap de Visser examines the quite remarkable transformation of local government in South Africa since the end of apartheid – in many ways a model for other emerging systems. He finds that substantial progress has been made towards the goal of 'developmental local government' that can advance the vision of a better life for all South Africans. However, 'institutional fault lines' are holding back further advances. These include capacity constraints, deficiencies in municipal governance and inter-governmental relations, failure to recognise the potential of big cities to play a much stronger role, an overly ambitious and uniform planning framework, and – intriguingly – 'overzealous institutionalisation of community participation'.

Related issues are addressed in the practice note by Annette Christmas and Jaap de Visser. This discusses some of the issues explored in a recent review of provincial and local governments in South Africa, including the need to clarify respective roles and responsibilities, and the scope to transfer more functions to those local governments with the necessary capacity to deliver. Christmas and de Visser again highlight the need to abandon a 'one size fits all' approach and to give the big cities more autonomy, whilst recognising that much of South African local government still faces severe developmental challenges. They put forward a set of criteria to guide decisions on where powers and functions are best situated.

A number of contributions focus on moves towards decentralisation in African and Asia-Pacific countries where local government is for the most part less advanced than in South Africa. John Kiyaga-Nsubuga and Yasin Olum assess the progress of local governance and local democracy in Uganda since the advent of radical

decentralisation policies in the early 1990s. They find a significant gap between intent and reality: the legislative framework is sound and real advances have been made, but local governments are burdened with responsibilities and expectations far in excess of the resources allocated to them and their institutional capacity to deliver. The problem is exacerbated by very low levels of civic awareness and education.

BC Chikulo provides a similar overview of Zambia's efforts to transform and institutionalise democratic local governance, and 'take power to the people', as part of a longstanding decentralisation program. He identifies four distinct phases of activity since independence in 1964, and three key constraints to further progress: a financial crisis facing local governments, lack of 'whole of government' planning and management at the district level, and limited scope for meaningful citizen participation at 'grassroots' levels. There are obvious parallels here with the Ugandan and South African experiences. An important theme is the reluctance of central government and their agencies to cooperate effectively with local governments, or to ensure that they have access to sufficient resources to discharge their responsibilities.

The huge challenges inherent in decentralisation are brought into sharp focus in the two practice notes from India. N. Ramakantan describes the extraordinary 'big bang' efforts of the state of Kerala to build capacity for decentralised governance and participatory planning. In this case very considerable resources were devolved to local governments, and literally hundreds of thousands of people participated in training programs. Importantly, training was extended to civil society in order to foster grassroots democracy, inclusive governance and accountability. Nevertheless, weaknesses in capacity and performance persist and require continuing efforts on a large scale.

Mani Shankar Aiyar and Nupur Tiwari report on action being taken to establish effective institutions of local governance in India's north eastern region. They outline the problem of unequal growth: India's economy is growing rapidly but many people and some regions – such as the north east – are missing out. A strategy is needed to produce 'inclusive growth', and that requires inclusive, decentralised governance. However, progress is patchy: there are needs for further incentives to encourage some states to empower local governments, for new financial arrangements to overcome lack of resources at the local level, and for measures to overcome a 'silo' mentality amongst central agencies.

Phil Richardson explores similar issues in the very different context of two very small Pacific Island countries, Kiribati and Tuvalu. Both consist of scattered islands, many of which retain an attractive semi-traditional lifestyle, although there is continuing migration to growing urban settlements on the 'capital' islands. Decentralisation policies have been pursued to address this urban drift and in part, as Richardson points out, to conform with donor policies. He concludes that some of those policies are inappropriate in Pacific Islands settings. In situations of very

scarce resources, devolution to local governments may simply prove unworkable. Moreover, institutions of traditional governance often still hold sway in the small island communities and adding a layer of 'western' democratic local government can generate disruptive tensions.

The remaining three contributions focus on various aspects of local governance in Australia. Chris Aulich reviews progress towards effective community engagement and participatory governance. He concludes that despite reform processes designed in part to increase engagement, and increased recognition of the need to treat people more as citizens rather than merely customers of service delivery, consultation remains piecemeal and haphazard. Further development of participatory governance may have to take place in organisations outside institutional local government.

Chris Hearfield and Brian Dollery consider another dimension of political governance, namely how local government functions as representative democracy. They examine changes over the years in the local government franchise, the nature of political representation, methods of vote-counting, and the implications of a steady reduction in the number of councils and councillors, which has led to a substantial increase in the ratio of population to elected representatives. This may have created a 'democratic deficit', although other changes may have offset this effect and improved the representative quality of local government. However, an underlying problem is the lack of recognition of local government in Australia's federal constitution: this is seen by some to undermine its democratic legitimacy.

A further critical variable in local governance is the functioning of civil society. Louise Holdsworth and Yvonne Hartman examine the concept of 'community cohesion' in the context of a small rural community. They note that building strong, safe and socially cohesive communities has become an important goal of public policy, and seek to identify a set of indicators of social cohesion based on the experiences of local residents as well as the academic literature. They highlight a sense of neighbourliness as the key factor, supported by good service provision and a well-designed physical environment that promotes accessibility, engagement and a perception of safety. These findings can assist local governments and other agencies to implement policies and initiatives that strengthen the 'social glue' that binds potentially fragile communities.

This issue also includes three reviews of books that also address some of the themes canvassed in other contributions: Robin Hambleton and Jill Simone's collection of papers on urban and metropolitan governance, which among other things highlights the importance of effective *government*; Fumihaiko Saito's compilation of studies of local governance and decentralisation in six countries (including South Africa, Uganda and India); and Liz Richardson's account of community self-help in disadvantaged communities in Britain. We thank Peter McKinlay, Randal Smith and Jenny Wills for these reviews.

I also wish to acknowledge the financial support now being given to the journal by the Commonwealth Secretariat. This has made it possible to appoint an editorial assistant, Anna Vo, to help liaise with contributors and process the increasing number of submissions being received. The Commonwealth Secretariat is a very welcome additional partner.

Developmental Local Government in South Africa: Institutional Fault Lines

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Abstract

This paper provides a brief introduction to the recent history of, as well as the legal and policy framework for, local government in South Africa. It discusses the transformation of local government from a racially configured, illegitimate arm of the apartheid government into a system designed to produce developmentally oriented municipalities. The progress made by South African municipalities towards realising the vision of developmental local government is remarkable and unprecedented. Over the last 13 years, municipalities have embarked on the extension of infrastructure and development, whilst absorbing fundamental changes to their internal governance and management arrangements, financial management systems and intergovernmental responsibilities. The new local government system offers great potential for the realisation of a better life for all citizens, facilitated by a new generation of municipalities. However, the challenges remain huge and some of these can be attributed to institutional fault lines. These include challenges that come with large, inclusive municipalities, new executive systems and the political appointment of senior officials. The paper also identifies the downside of overzealous institutionalisation of community participation. With regard to intergovernmental relations, the paper highlights the need for a clearer definition of local government mandates and a greater recognition of the role of big cities. The current insistence on comprehensive intergovernmental alignment of policies and budgets is questioned, and suggestions are made to substitute this with an approach of selective alignment around key national priorities.

1. Introduction

Thirteen years since the advent of democracy and seven years into the operation of an entirely new local government dispensation, local government in South Africa is in a critical phase. On the one hand, local government has not only survived a fundamental restructuring but has also made great strides towards extending service delivery and development to marginalised communities. In thirteen years, local government has emerged from being an institution that was subservient, racist and illegitimate to an institution with democratically elected leadership, constitutional status and a developmental agenda. On the other hand, as expectations of local government service delivery, quite correctly, have risen, it has become evident that the broader transformation of local government is by no means complete.

The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it provides a brief introduction to the recent history of, as well as the legal and policy framework for, local government in South Africa. Secondly, it examines some fault lines in the design and functioning of the system of local government, focusing on the national institutional and policy framework. Where possible, suggestions are made for a change of direction. It is hoped that this discussion of the local government framework, as well as some of its major challenges, may make a positive contribution to the search for avenues of improvement.

The areas of concern highlighted in this paper are located in the practice of internal municipal governance, the functionality of current intergovernmental arrangements with regards to big cities, and the feasibility of the intergovernmental planning framework. However, before these areas of concern are traversed, a brief history and introduction into the main tenets of the local government framework follows.

2. History of Local Government

Local Government Pre-1994

Before 1994, no single, uniform system of local government existed across the country: each province had its own configuration of local government institutions. Local government as an institution of governance was subservient, racist and illegitimate. The subservience of local government was manifest in that local authorities existed in terms of provincial laws, and in that their powers and functions were dependent on and curtailed by those laws. The development of separate local authorities for separated racial groups, under the leading theme of 'own management for own areas', produced a clever scheme of naked exploitation on the basis of race. Without exception, the well-resourced and viable commercial centres with their strong revenue bases were reserved as white areas. The outlying and poor areas without meaningful formal economies were reserved for black people. In the homeland areas, traditional authorities were tasked with performing local government functions. Transformation of local government into a fully-fledged and non-racial institution of governance was thus impelled by a legacy of

an "urban economic logic that systematically favoured white urban areas at the cost of black urban and peri-urban areas," with "tragic and absurd" results.[1]

Negotiations on local government between the apartheid government and the liberation movements commenced in earnest in the beginning of the 1990s. They produced a foundation for local government transformation. Essential to the outcome was the adoption of the principle of 'one city one tax base', the slogan with which the grossly inequitable distribution of resources was opposed by the liberation movement. Furthermore, a chapter on local government for the Interim Constitution was agreed upon, as well as a transition Act (*the Local Government Transition Act of 1993*) to guide the transformation towards democratic local government.

Local Government Transformation

The Interim Constitution (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*) paved the way for the first democratic elections in 1994 and for the formulation of a final Constitution by the newly elected Parliament. It ushered in constitutional recognition for local government by recognising its autonomy and guaranteeing it revenue generating powers, as well as a right to a share of nationally generated revenue. The Interim Constitution set the scene for the amalgamation of over 1000 racially defined and disparate local government structures into 842 transitional local authorities (Steytler 2006:187).

The final Constitution of 1996 then contained a definitive statement on local government, in the form of a progressive chapter in which local government is firmly established as a mature sphere of government. Furthermore, the Constitution posited local government as a critical development agent by listing the 'constitutional objects' and 'developmental duties' of local government. These centre around democracy, sustainable service delivery, social and economic development, environmental protection, community participation, poverty alleviation and intergovernmental cooperation (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, ss 152 and 152).

The 1998 White Paper on Local Government (Department of Constitutional Development 1998) preceded the implementation of the constitutional provisions. It proved to be a policy that rallied friend and foe around new concepts. It introduced a discourse that would reverberate until long afterwards. It translated the constitutional objects and duties into the concept of 'developmental local government', and defined the new mandate as "local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives." Developmental local government would be characterised by four features.

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[1] *Fedsure Life Assurance Ltd and Others v Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council and Others* 1998 (2) BLCR 1458 (CC), para 122.

- Maximising economic growth and social development: local government is instructed to exercise its powers and functions in a way that has a maximum impact on economic growth and social development of communities.
- Integrating and coordinating: local government integrates and coordinates developmental activities of other state and non-state agents in the municipal area.
- Democratic development and public participation: local government becomes the vehicle through which citizens work to achieve their vision of the kind of place in which they wish to live.
- Leading and learning: municipalities must build social capital, stimulate the finding of local solutions for increased sustainability, and stimulate local political leadership.

The transformation of local government institutions began in earnest with the adoption in 1998 of the Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act, providing for the demarcation of municipal boundaries by an independent Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB). The Constitution contains the imperative of creating a 'wall-to-wall' system of inclusive and viable municipalities (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 151(1)). This represented a break with the past where not all areas, particularly traditional rural areas, were governed by a local authority. The Local Government: Municipal Structures Act of 1998 provided a legal framework for the establishment of local government institutions. It established two modes of local government: single-tiered metropolitan municipalities in large urban areas, and a two-tiered system of district and local municipalities throughout the rest of the country. It further provided a framework for the internal functioning of municipalities. Critical new aspects were the introduction of firstly, an 'executive mayor' system of municipal governance alongside the classic 'collective executive committee' system; secondly, a separate municipal speaker; and thirdly, ward committees as vehicles for community participation. The impact and success of these changes is discussed below.

On 5 December 2000, municipal councils were elected into this new system of local government. A new generation of municipalities thus commenced their journey towards realising the constitutional vision of developmental local government.

In the meantime, transformation work had continued with the adoption in 2000 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act. This Act represents a detailed definition of developmental local government as espoused in the White Paper on Local Government. It engages the developmental vision of municipalities working together with citizens by establishing a framework that instructs municipalities to involve citizens in decision making, particularly through the regulation of a framework for participative development planning.

In 2003, the institutional and developmental chapters of local government transformation were complemented by a financial chapter. The Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act of 2003 establishes a robust framework for local government finance, dealing with financial management and accounting, revenue, expenditure and debt management, responsibilities of accounting officers and mayors, and financial supervision by national and provincial governments. The Act was widely welcomed as a long awaited and necessary framework and financial management tool for municipalities.

3. Local Government's Record of Delivery

Before venturing into a critical analysis of the progress achieved to date with regard to local government transformation, it is important to recall some of the key benefits to be had from engaging local government in development and service delivery (De Visser 2005:19). Firstly, local government is the level of government that is closest to the citizens. At least in theory, municipalities are best able to obtain and understand people's wishes and aspirations for the locality. They should also be best placed to identify and unlock local potential, and mobilise resources present in the locality. These characteristics do not automatically lead to a higher quality and legitimacy of decisions but certainly have the potential to do so. This depends on whether local governments are indeed configured and behave responsively, and to what extent local governments are able to pursue their communities' wishes for the locality through broader government structures and partnerships.

Secondly, there is the promise that local government holds for deepening democracy: having many sites of democratic practice is fertile ground for the growth of new leadership and the consolidation of multi-party democracy. Thirdly, the allocation of responsibility to municipalities creates room for local creativity and avoids the phenomenon where the entire country needs to experience the same experiment before it can be evaluated. Fourthly, municipalities are key players in multi-sectoral coordination as they are the witnesses of the actual delivery by all development actors on the ground.

Against this background, a broad assessment of progress to date indicates an impressive record of expansion of service delivery. Through the leadership of municipalities, basic service delivery has been extended to the marginalised to a degree that is unprecedented in South Africa's history, and at a pace that is noted and commended internationally. Access to water supply increased from 59% of total households in 1994 to 86% by April 2007. Access to sanitation increased from 48% to 73% over the same period. In 1994, 30% of houses in South Africa had access to electricity, but by 2006/07 this figure had increased to 73%. From 1994 to 2006 a total of 2,243 million houses were delivered at an average of 249,290 units per annum (Department of Provincial and Local Government 2007:5).

However, the incomplete and, in certain respects, imperfect nature of local government transformation is evidenced by social protests that emerged most

intensively during 2005 and 2006 and continued in 2007. Protests revolved around poor records of service delivery, real and perceived instances of corruption, and a lack of developmental impact by municipalities (Atkinson 2007:58).

It is also relevant to note that whilst municipal political leadership in South Africa is democratically elected under a national electoral system, voter turnout over the last three local government elections has not been impressive, averaging around 48% (Independent Electoral Commission 2006; Human Sciences Research Council 2006:3). Negative sentiments that contribute to a lower turnout for local than for national and provincial elections relate mainly to a lack of interest and trust in local government (Good Governance Learning Network 2008:34)

It is argued here that certain fault lines in the design of the local government system may have contributed to this negative sentiment and the groundswell of protest against municipalities. These fault lines relate to some of the key elements of the legal and policy framework for local government.

4. Central Tenets of the System

The Constitution terms each sphere of government 'distinctive, interrelated and interdependent' (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 40(1)). These three labels define the values underlying South Africa's system of intergovernmental relations. The status of local government in the South African system of government can be explained by making use of this constitutional terminology.

Local government's 'distinctiveness' as a sphere of government manifests itself in a number of ways. Firstly, municipalities are headed by democratically elected councils (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 157(1)). The electoral framework, laid down in the Constitution, the Municipal Structures Act and the Local Government: Municipal Electoral Act of 2000, provides that municipal councils generally comprise 50% ward councillors, elected on a 'winner takes all' constituency system, and 50% councillors elected via a party list (*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, s. 20).

The second manifestation of the 'distinctiveness' of local government is the fact that the Constitution itself allocates 'original' powers and functions to municipalities. It does this by providing a list of 'local government matters' over which local government has authority (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 156).[2] Additional powers and functions can be transferred by national and provincial governments to local government as a sphere, or to individual municipalities (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 156(2)).

Furthermore, a significant part of local government's financial authority is guaranteed through constitutional provisions that secure local government's power

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[2] Read with Schedules 4A and 5B of the Constitution.

to levy property rates and surcharges on fees (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 229). Finally, the Constitution provides that local government is entitled to an 'equitable share' of nationally generated revenue, providing municipalities with a legal claim to unconditional revenue streams (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 227(1)(a)). It also instructs national and provincial governments to respect local government's distinctiveness (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 151(4)).

The emphasis on the distinctiveness of local government is balanced by the two other constitutional labels, namely the 'interdependence' and 'interrelatedness' of the three spheres.

Local government's interdependence in relation to other spheres of government connotes a relationship of supervision. National and provincial governments are constitutionally entitled and mandated to supervise the performance of municipalities. The constitutional division of functions between national government and provincial governments determines the extent to which either of them may supervise municipalities with respect to a particular functional area. A detailed exposition of this division goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is safe to say that both spheres of government exercise significant supervisory powers with regard to municipalities. National government establishes an institutional framework for local government that is largely uniform across the nine provinces. National and provincial governments must monitor the performance of municipalities so as to ensure that they discharge their developmental and service delivery responsibilities (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 155(6) and (7)). National and provincial governments must support local government (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 154). Finally, provincial governments have the right to intervene in the event of serious problems in a municipality (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 139).

The 'interrelatedness' of local government with other spheres of government connotes cooperation: organs of state in the three spheres of government are instructed to cooperate with one another in a relationship of equality (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 41). This constitutional instruction to cooperate is particularly relevant in the South African context where the constitutional division of functions between the three spheres is not neatly defined. Many overlaps between national, provincial and local functions exist (Steytler and De Visser 2007:5-16; Steytler and Fessha 2007:325). For example, when the Constitution makes national and provincial governments responsible for 'Public Transport' and municipalities for 'Municipal Public Transport',[3] it is clear that the 'fuzzy edges' between municipal and provincial functions require intensive cooperation between the two spheres to avoid and address role confusion.

A key instrument of cooperation is integrated development planning. An important premise of South Africa's planning framework is that the municipality coordinates

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[3] See Schedule 4 of the Constitution.

the planning of development and service delivery by all three spheres of government in its municipal area.[4] Another key manifestation of the inclusion of local government into the broader cooperative venture is that local government is a partner in intergovernmental relations: through organised local government structures (local government associations), it is represented on most relevant intergovernmental structures and institutions (*Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act 2005*).

Municipal Governance

Effectiveness of municipal governance institutions is a precondition in order for any country to reap the benefits of decentralisation. Olowu and Wunsch (2004:9) remark that:

> [w]eak authority and defective institutional and operational rules can make it difficult to reach decisions, and thereby lead to policy failure and weakened local governance.

As mentioned earlier, the transformation of local government governance systems introduced new systems of executive leadership in municipalities. These new systems have drastically changed the profile of a municipality and the desired relationship between its political and administrative components.

Before 2000, the average municipality was governed by a small council with a weak, collective executive structure. The council was chaired by a mayor whose task was largely ceremonial. The municipal administration was led by a strong 'town clerk' who initiated and drove much of the council agenda (Olowu and Wunsch 2004:89). This fitted the context of the municipality as a largely administrative, rather than policy making, authority.

The new generation of municipalities is governed by a large council; it has a strong executive authority, in many cases concentrated in an executive mayor. The council meeting is chaired by a separately elected speaker (*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, ss. 36 and 37) and the administration is headed by a municipal manager (*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, s. 55). The municipal manager is appointed by the council (*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, s. 82) and is expected to work very closely together with the municipal executive[5]. The new legal framework expects municipalities to extend their activities beyond administering national and provincial laws. Municipalities must adopt policies and by-laws, actively engage municipal communities, plan strategically and partner with external institutions. This requires strong political and administrative leadership. A critical difference from the system that prevailed before 2000 relates to the role of the municipal

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[4] See Chapter 5 of the Municipal Systems Act; see also below.

[5] Municipal managers enter into a performance agreement with the mayor. See the *Municipal Performance Regulations for Municipal Manager and Managers Directly Accountable to Municipal Managers*, 2006, GN R805, *Government Gazette* 29089, 1 August 2006.

executive. The municipal executive is expected to initiate policy, oversee the administration and take regular executive and administrative decisions.

At an administrative level, the transformation has been fundamental. The new legal framework has resulted in an improved and rational system for municipal administration. The Municipal Systems Act and the Municipal Finance Management Act have laid down a framework for the municipal administration that is based on modern public management principles. Concepts such as strategic planning, performance measurement, modern accounting principles, transparency, and separation of politics from administration, resonate throughout the legal framework. Community participation in municipal affairs has been firmly placed on the municipal agenda by the adoption of a progressive framework that instructs municipalities to involve communities in decision-making. Best practices on how best to implement these directives are emerging, albeit slowly.

5. Current Challenges

Despite significant progress in the rationalisation and modernisation of municipal governance, there are specific challenges inherent in the new system which are possibly hampering the successful transformation of local government. What follows is a examination of some of the most pertinent institutional difficulties that have arisen in the first decade of democratic local government in South Africa.

Size

A significant challenge is the size of the average South Africa municipality. The country has 283 municipalities that serve a population of close to 48 million and cover a landmass of 1,220,813 square kilometres (Statistics South Africa 2007:1.1 and 2.1). Quick comparisons with Spain (50 provinces and 8,108 municipalities), and Germany (323 districts and 12,477 municipalities), show that South Africa's municipalities are vast in size and population. In fact, municipalities are actually charged with a regional mandate. Not only are municipalities slowly emerging from the painfully difficult amalgamation of varied previous municipal administrations, but the management of often very diverse communities is itself a difficult task. There are many examples of contestation between communities in single municipalities. For example, when one group of communities succeeded, after a protracted and sometimes violent battle, to have their municipality (called Merafong) incorporated into the Gauteng province, another group of communities in the same municipality vehemently questioned that decision.

Furthermore, it is suggested that the size of the South African municipality is a considerable challenge for that municipality when it wants to realise effective community participation. This challenge relates specifically to rural areas. In the quest for economically viable municipal units with redistributive potential, the norm is that a number of towns are demarcated into one municipality together with their rural hinterlands, which are thus very extensive and, again, often diverse in character.

Executive Mayors

As stated above, strong municipal executive leadership is a characteristic of the new generation of municipalities. Many municipalities have 'executive mayors'. This means that municipal executive powers are concentrated in one councillor who is elected by the council as its executive mayor (*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, ss. 55 and 56).[6] The executive mayor, in turn, 'hand picks' a mayoral committee (*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, s. 60).[7] This system stands in contrast to the conventional collective executive system that obtained in all municipalities prior to 2000, and which is still practiced in those municipalities that do not have an executive mayor. The collective executive system entails the election by the council of an executive committee that broadly 'mirrors' the composition of the municipal council (*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, ss. 43 and 44).

It is suggested that the introduction of the indirectly elected executive mayor has been particularly successful in large cities, where it has contributed to visible executive leadership. In general, stakeholders appear to be "relatively satisfied with the system".[8] There are, however, concerns around potential exclusionary effects. The executive mayor system appears to have created a wide gap between executive councillors (i.e. councillors on the mayoral committee) and 'ordinary' councillors who are not part of the mayoral committee. These councillors feel increasingly disadvantaged due to the lack of access to documentation and information flows. A report on the functioning of the mayoral executive system remarked that: "[i]t is clear that the relationships between the mayoral executive committee and non-executive councillors are not based on democratic values, but display a lack of transparency; autocratic decision-making; and accountability. This is expressed by stakeholders as a lack of respect for one another, a culture of secrecy, and perceptions of marginalisation."[9]

Role Definitions

The issue of the division of responsibilities and powers among political office-bearers in a municipality has proved to be a persistent source of tension and contestation. As stated above, the speaker's office was a novelty when it was introduced in 2000. Generally, municipalities have not found it easy to adapt to this new political office-bearer. A persistent source of tension and conflict can be found in the role definition of the speaker vis-à-vis the municipal executive, or more specifically, the mayor. An earlier study found the relationship between speakers and executive mayors to be poor: "Self-defeating patterns of behaviour characterise interaction between the executive mayor and the speaker. Both act in a way that is detrimental to themselves and the municipality and there is little understanding and

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[6] See further Steytler and De Visser 3-29ff.
[7] See *DA v Masondo* 2003 (2) BCLR 128 (CC) for a Constitutional Court judgment on the composition of mayoral committees. See also Wooldridge 2008:478.
[8] See Idasa, paragraph 9.
[9] See Idasa, section 3; See also Atkinson 2007:64.

concern about the consequences of the poor relationship between them and the
negative impact this has on the municipality."[10]

The constitutional reality that the municipal council possesses both legislative and
executive authority (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1993*, s. 151(2))
sets the scene for a possibly uneasy relationship between the speaker and the
municipal executive. South Africa's national and provincial parliaments are
configured in a Westminster style. Their speakers are responsible for managing the
affairs of the legislature: they generally have no authority over the affairs of the
executive save for the occasion when its members participate in the legislature. In
contrast, the speaker in a municipality occupies a different role, simply because the
municipal council is not a body that is exclusively tasked with passing laws and
overseeing the executive. It is also tasked with discussing and disposing of a range
of executive and administrative issues. The mere fact that the municipal speaker
presides over and participates in meetings where administrative and executive
issues are debated and discussed, calls for a more nuanced role definition.

In terms of statutory law, the municipal speaker is at a minimum responsible for
chairing council meetings and enforcing the Code of Conduct for Councillors
(*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, s. 37). However, additional powers may be
delegated to the speaker (*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, s. 37(b)). It is common
practice for the council to delegate to the speaker responsibilities related to
community participation and councillor support. However, both these functional
areas attract a great deal of politics. The engagement of municipal office-bearers
with the municipal community is an intensely political activity where the municipal
executive is involved. At times, speakers do not limit themselves to organising and
guarding the quality of the community engagement. They then become active
participants, often to the chagrin of the municipal executive. Similarly, councillor
support may become an arena for 'petty politics' in the council. Unfortunately, the
power to decide who is entitled to training, conference visits and other types of
councillor support often represents political leverage. The mayor may seek to
preserve control over this.

Mostly, tensions arise from an unclear definition of roles. By law, municipalities
must define the roles and responsibilities in written 'terms of reference' for each
political office-bearer, and provide for internal conflict resolution mechanisms.
Research indicates that most municipalities have not adopted such 'job
descriptions' for their speakers and do not have standing procedures for resolving
these possibly debilitating conflicts (De Visser, Baatjies and Akintan 2008).

Council Appointees

As stated earlier, the role of the most senior municipal official, now called the
municipal manager, has changed significantly. Since 2000, the municipal council
has had the authority to appoint the municipal manager as well as those managers

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[10] See Idasa , section 2.

that report directly to him or her (*Municipal Structures Act 1998*, s. 82; *Municipal Systems Act 2000*, s. 56). This configuration was designed to produce a senior management team in the municipality that understands, and operates in sync with its political principals in the municipal executive. Whilst this objective is supported, there appear to be a number of important side-effects. Firstly, political instability in a municipal council now has an immediate 'knock-on' effect on senior management. A change in local political leadership, shifts in a ruling coalition, or even a reform within a ruling party, often leads to the dismissal of the municipal manager and sometimes even to the dismissal of managers reporting to the municipal manager (Wooldridge 2008:475). This is evidenced by the large number of unfilled vacancies in the top two echelons of municipal administration. In 2006 and 2007, 15% of the posts in senior municipal management stood vacant (National Treasury 2008:184). Municipal administrations are thus suffering from a lack of continuity at senior management level (Municipal Demarcation Board 2007:89).

Secondly, the highly charged political profile of these positions has contributed to a shift in control over appointments from the municipal council to the internal workings of political parties. There is widespread concern that the need for 'political suitability' is starting to eclipse the need for qualified and skilled senior managers in the municipality (Atkinson 2007:67). The fact that 30% or more of senior municipal management has five years or less local government experience reveals a disconcerting trend towards the appointment of inadequately skilled senior managers.[11] It is suggested that this is partly the result of excessive political involvement in what should be appointments on the basis of merit. In order for local government to further improve its performance, a new balance needs to be struck between the need for political alignment of top management with the municipal executive on the one hand, and an insistence on quality on the other. Serious consideration should be given to removing the appointment of the second layer of management from the realm of the municipal council and leaving this to the municipal manager. It is suggested that this will assist in reducing political involvement in the administration, whilst leaving the political alignment between the municipal manager and the municipal executive intact.

Improving Community Participation

The involvement of communities in municipal affairs is not only a key objective of local government but also one of the main reasons for South Africa's choice of developmental local government. Success is this area is thus of paramount importance. Government's recognition of this importance is evidenced by an elaborate and progressive legal framework for participatory governance at municipal level.

Municipalities are tasked to involve communities in the drafting of their integrated development plan, their budget, and in the taking of decisions regarding service

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[11] See Municipal Demarcation Board 2007:88; SALGA 2007:59; National Treasury 2008:185.

delivery and development. Furthermore, the law contains a legal framework for ward committees. These committees generally comprise ten representatives of various sectors or geographical areas in the ward. They are elected by the voters in the ward. The committee is chaired by the ward councillor. Its role is to advance participation of the community in the affairs of the municipality, particularly in relation to development planning. The concept of a ward committee follows similar practices elsewhere, such as the village development committees in Botswana (Serema 2002:1).

However, an apparent contradiction exists between the progressive legal framework for community participation and persistent incidences of protest targeting councillors and municipal administrations.[12] Although government has created ample spaces, platforms and procedures for community engagement with local government, it is clear that communities still elect to take their grievances to the streets. These protests expose not only the current shortcomings in service delivery but also the presence of untapped local energy and involvement with municipal governance. Atkinson suggests that the frustrations of communities are threefold. They relate to poor service delivery, unresponsive decision-making and conspicuous consumption by councillors and officials (Atkinson 2007:58).

There are many underlying reasons for the protests that are not always within the realm of what municipalities are responsible for, and an extended discussion of these tensions falls outside of the scope of this paper. However, a general observation relates to the wisdom of institutionalising community participation. The legal framework impacting on municipal governance is awash with institutions, procedures and platforms that are used to capture diverse interests and channel them into a discourse to which a municipal bureaucracy can relate. The danger that lurks in the creation and nurturing of institutionalised forms of public participation such as ward committees, is that it removes the imperative to continuously look for innovative ways to engage communities. There may be good reason to revisit this approach and seek more insights into how communities really wish to relate to municipal administrations. This observation does not detract from the potential that local government has for deepening community participation or from the noble intentions behind the current legal framework. It rather emphasises the need for adequate strategies at municipal level for translating this potential and the enabling framework into genuine engagement.

6. Intergovernmental Framework: A New Role for Cities?

Central to many of the problems besetting local government is the lack of clarity with regards to the intergovernmental framework. The Constitution combines a strong expression of autonomy for municipalities with a weak definition of the areas that they are responsible for. The precise demarcation of the functional responsibility of a municipality is dependent on a variety of processes and

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[12] For an overview of the scale of protests, see Atkinson 2007:54; SALGA 2007:139; Mathekga and Buccus 2006.

interventions, such as functional definitions in statutes, the outcome of judicial proceedings solving disputes over who does what, or the conclusion of intergovernmental agreements and protocols (Steytler and Fessha 2007:325). The uncertainty over functional areas renders it difficult for municipalities to plan and budget for current and capital expenditure (National Treasury 2008:152). There is a perception that the goal posts are changing continuously (Atkinson 2007:71). The challenges pertaining to the mismatch between the constitutional allocation of powers and the realities of the developmental mandate are traversed in another contribution to this journal (Christmas and De Visser 2009).

It may be argued that an insistence on a clear demarcation of functional local government responsibilities is naïve, that the complexities of governance cannot be confined to legal definitions, and that flexible governance arrangements are more important. However, three reasons are proffered for greater clarity. Firstly, the constitutional context in South Africa gives rise to an expectation surrounding clarity of responsibilities. If the Constitution itself puts forward a list of functional areas and seeks to protect municipal discretion with regard to these areas, there is an expectation that these constitutional prescripts should be given a reasonably precise meaning. It would not be in keeping with the constitutional promise of autonomy if the Constitution contains a list of functional areas but then the content of these areas is actually immaterial, and that flexible governance arrangements are considered more pressing than giving effect to constitutional provisions.

Secondly, flexible governance arrangements are likely to work better in countries with strong municipal governments and a long history of decentralisation. In such a context, municipalities will enter these governance partnerships as equal partners. But in countries such as South Africa, where decentralisation is a new phenomenon, municipalities (with the exception of strong metropolitan municipalities) are underdogs in negotiations with strong provincial or national government departments. A reasonably clear understanding of the content of the functional areas equips municipalities to enter negotiations surrounding the fuzzy edges as equal partners.

Lastly, the uncertainty surrounding functional responsibilities is undermining the legitimacy of intergovernmental fiscal arrangements. In South Africa, fiscal arrangements and calculations are premised on an understanding of constitutional mandates. If this understanding is contested at a fundamental level, the integrity of the intergovernmental fiscal system is endangered.

Role of Big Cities

An example of incoherence in the intergovernmental framework that should impel law and policy makers to reflect on the adequacy of the institutional and policy environment for local government, relates to the role of big cities. A concern for more coherence in the institutions of local government and the powers it possesses should not be misunderstood as a drive for uniformity. In fact, the imposition of uniformity on an unequal environment produces a lack of coherence. It is argued

that this type of incoherence may be emerging in the system of local government. Despite having a dedicated institutional arrangement for metropolitan areas in the form of single tiered metropolitan municipalities, the local government system pays too little regard to the variations in challenges, capacity and progress between areas (Cities Network 2006:2-28; Van Ryneveld 2007). There are two bases for this concern. The first relates to the fundamental economic importance of large cities.

- The majority of South Africans now live in cities and large towns and this figure is generally on the rise. In 2006, 42 percent of the national population lived in the 21 biggest cities and towns that cover just 2 per cent of the South African land surface.
- The majority of wealth is created in urban areas. The 21 biggest cities and towns together contribute 70 per cent of the national General Value Added (GVA).
- The 21 biggest cities and towns are also home to 25 per cent of persons living below the breadline (Cities Network 2006:2-12).

The second basis for concern relates to the fact that this concentration of both economic activity and poverty in urban areas requires specific, specialised approaches to issues such as:

- Dealing with the informal economic activity and settlements; and
- Planning and implementing in an integrated manner around typical urban governance issues, such as housing, transport and infrastructure.

South Africa's biggest cities are consistently appealing to provincial and national governments, with varying success, to consider the devolution of certain critical functions. The Constitution itself permits and envisages an 'asymmetrical' approach to municipal powers by providing for individual assignments, that is the transfer of authority to individual municipalities (Steytler and De Visser 2007:5-39). To date, this instrument has not been used to empower big cities with authority that goes beyond their 'original' functions. In reality, however, big cities perform a myriad of additional functions, on behalf of or in partnership with organs of state in other spheres of government. These are often based on fluid, informal or contractual arrangements.

Critical areas that have been consistently identified as being in need of a differentiated approach include housing and transport (SALGA 2007:103,108). Authority over housing, and the entitlement to the intergovernmental finances for housing development, is with the provincial governments. However, the eradication of slums and inadequate shelter through the provision of low cost housing is without doubt a key priority of cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and eThekwini (Durban). Similarly, the redesign and upgrade of South Africa's appalling public transport system, historically designed to accommodate the transfer of the black labour force into city centres and white suburbs, is a top

concern of the cities. Yet, cities have little authority over public transport matters (National Treasury 2008:153).

It is suggested that this lack of authority compromises cities' ability to ensure an integrated approach to the provision of housing and the upgrading of public transport facilities in an environmentally sustainable manner. There is no doubt that, through innovative and cooperative arrangements at a regional and provincial level, much can be achieved without resorting to changing the formal division of powers (National Treasury 2008:153). However, it is submitted that the devolution of housing and public transport authority to South Africa's cities would contribute to the acceleration of delivery in these areas. The same does not apply to smaller towns and rural municipalities: in that case, different public transport needs, economies of scale and capacity constraints render it necessary for housing and public transport authority to be exercised at a higher level than the municipality.

7. Integrated Development Planning: Towards Selective Alignment?

The legal and policy framework for development planning in South Africa envisages that municipalities will play an absolutely essential role in realising coherent planning across the three spheres of government. Each municipality is required by law to adopt an integrated development plan (IDP). The IDP must be adopted shortly after the beginning of a municipal council's term. Furthermore, it must be reviewed annually. It is the municipality's strategic plan that is based on an intensive community participation process to gauge and prioritise the municipal community's needs. The IDP is expected to integrate the planning of all municipal departments under the umbrella of a united strategy for the municipal area. Importantly, the IDP must go beyond planning rhetoric and be the basis for the municipality's annual budgets and its spatial planning. Furthermore, the municipality's senior managers must be held accountable regularly, through a system of performance management, for the realisation of the IDP. As if this configuration is not sufficiently ambitious, the IDP is expected to integrate not only the municipality's plans but also the plans of all national and provincial departments and parastatals (such as electricity-generating and telecommunication utilities) in that municipal area (Department of Constitutional Development 1998:19)

There is no doubt that the introduction of integrated development planning has forced municipalities to engage communities and gauge and prioritise their needs. It has also propelled municipalities into a thinking that goes beyond the municipal council's term, and into a concerted effort at integrating service delivery and development across spheres, sectors and actors.

In this framework, the municipality is expected to be the pivot that skilfully mediates the tremendous and varied needs of a municipal community with the requirements of departments and parastatals in two other spheres of government (Patel and Powell 2008:353). All of this is to be done within the parameters of a tight municipal budget. When the municipal capacity is set off against these

expectations, however, the picture looks bleak for many municipal areas. Capacity for integrated development planning at municipal level is low. The dependency on consultants to realise an IDP is staggering. A recent report suggests that 28% of local municipalities lack the most basic capacity to prepare an IDP and will struggle even with additional support. Only one in three (37%) municipalities has independent capacity to prepare an IDP, whilst another 35% have some basic capacity and can prepare an IDP with additional support (Good Governance Learning Network 2008:51). Against the backdrop of these figures, the assignment to municipalities to be the coordinator of all of government's development efforts in the municipal area may be a tall order for some time to come. Thus when they reflect on the municipality's role in intergovernmental planning, Pieterse and Van Donk remark that: "it is unlikely that municipalities will have the political clout (let alone the institutional capabilities) to persuade a national department to delay or redefine its particular programmes." (Pieterse and Van Donk 2008:62)

The intergovernmental aspiration, embedded in the planning framework, which envisages the IDP to be a reflection of the entire government's vision for the municipal area, may be an ambitious attempt at cooperative planning across the three spheres. However, the insistence on this wholesale alignment of municipal budgets and plans with national and provincial budgets and plans may also just be an offshoot of the distrust of municipalities as the custodians of local development. There is no doubt that pervasive trends of corruption, mismanagement, immature politics and a skills deficit in many municipalities do little to dispel this distrust. However, the solution that is now imposed through legislation is, by all accounts, extremely difficult to achieve and harbours significant dangers for the achievement of bottom-up development.

The IDP has become a tightly regulated process that must absorb the input of a multitude of development actors towards the adoption of a document within tight deadlines. This process has thus become a 'pressure cooker', which is incompatible with unwieldy community input which tends to disrupt intergovernmental cohesion and adherence to the intergovernmental deadlines (Good Governance Learning Network 2008:52). There is then a real danger that communities and community organisations will become disgruntled with the IDP, as they perceive the process to be inadequate in responding to their needs. A more realistic approach to intergovernmental planning and alignment may be apposite. It may be worthwhile to consider the identification of a limited number of national key priorities and insist on their alignment, whilst relaxing the effort towards synchronisation on other, less important policy areas. This may provide the necessary room for municipalities to develop their planning capabilities, devise mechanisms for genuine interaction with communities, and display creativity.

8. Conclusion

The progress made by South African municipalities towards realising the vision of developmental local government is remarkable and unprecedented. Over the last 13 years, municipalities have embarked on the extension of infrastructure and

development, whilst absorbing changes to their internal governance and management arrangements, financial management systems and intergovernmental responsibilities. The new local government system thus offers great potential for the realisation of a better life for all citizens, facilitated by a new generation of developmentally oriented municipalities.

However, this paper has identified several areas of contestation and conflict that impede service delivery and development. It has argued that an improvement in municipal governance is essential, and has identified key questions around governance arrangements and community participation. It has also proposed that municipal service delivery would benefit from more institutional coherence and predictability. An example given relates to the need for institutional accommodation of different spatial and economic realities that obtain in big cities. The paper also looked at the ambitious and progressive framework for integrated development planning and asked whether the insistence on comprehensive policy alignment should not be substituted with a policy of selective alignment around national key priority areas.

Thus it cannot be assumed that communities will start reaping more benefits from the developmental system of local government. Municipalities operate in a complex system of intergovernmental relations, which places a high premium on both local discretion and intergovernmental integration. Capacity constraints in critical areas of municipal governance and administration are hampering service delivery. There is also a lack of connectivity between communities and municipalities, which flies in the face of the policy intent of 'developmental local government'. The search for the right balance is far from over.

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Local Governance and Local Democracy in Uganda

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Abstract

Uganda embarked in 1993 on radical decentralization, among other reasons, to enhance local governance and local democracy. The major focus of the decentralization policy was on empowering citizens to participate in decisions that affect their localities. This issue will be examined based on two major themes of the twelve principles of the Commonwealth's 'Aberdeen Agenda' for local democracy – the enabling environment and participation. However, the paper argues that Uganda's devolutionary decentralization can only foster local governance and local democracy if it is properly conceptualised, the facilitating conditions are given careful attention, and the institutional framework is sufficiently elaborate and effective to enable it to achieve its intended objectives. Short of these measures, the gap between intent and reality might be so great as to disable the decentralization policy from achieving real local governance and local democracy.

Key words: *Local governance, local democracy, Aberdeen agenda.*

1. Introduction

Uganda embarked on radical decentralization of powers from central to local governments in the early 1990s as a conscious strategy to enhance local

democracy, improve service provision and reduce poverty. The initial focus was on empowering citizens to participate in decisions that affect their localities. Later, however, attention shifted to strengthening administrative systems to enable them to respond to local service delivery needs and poverty reduction imperatives. This radical shift was in response to the earlier situation in which central government had long dictated developments at local levels in an aloof manner, leaving the populace dissatisfied and unable to participate in or influence their local governance.

Because devolution of power to local levels has been quite rare in Africa, Uganda's experiment has attracted significant attention regarding the extent to which it can promote local governance and democracy, enhance service delivery and help reduce poverty. This paper examines the contribution of Uganda's decentralization to the promotion of local governance and democracy. It argues that decentralization can foster local governance and democracy at the local level if it is properly conceptualised, the facilitating conditions – especially the legal framework and citizen participation – are given careful attention, and the institutional framework is sufficiently elaborate and effective to enable it to achieve its intended objectives. Otherwise, the gap between intent and reality might be so great as to raise questions as to the extent to which decentralization can lead to real local governance and democracy.

The paper discusses these interconnected concepts in the context of the 'Aberdeen Agenda', under which twelve principles to promote local democracy and governance were adopted by the Commonwealth Local Government Conference held in Aberdeen, Scotland in 2005, and subsequently adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government.[1] Uganda's experience will be analysed based on two themes – the enabling environment, and participation and openness to attain local democracy, equity and continuous improvement – in order to illuminate the extent to which decentralization has promoted local governance and local democracy. The paper starts with an overview of 'local governance' and 'local democracy', and then proceeds to analyse how Uganda's decentralization has faired in line with the two themes.

2. Conceptualising Local Governance and Local Democracy

There are several ways of conceptualising local 'governance' and 'democracy'. This paper has used empirically verifiable indicators that can guide various levels of local government in determining how far they are moving along the two themes. Several tools have been developed to make such measurements, such as the UN-Habitat and Transparency International *Urban Governance Index* (UGI) for cities

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[1] The Aberdeen Agenda comprises twelve postulates, namely: 1. Constitutional and legal recognition of local democracy; 2. Ability to elect local representatives; 3. Partnership between spheres of government; 4. Defined legislative framework; 5. Opportunities to participate in local decision-making; 6. Open local government: accountability; 7. Open local government: transparency; 8. Openness to scrutiny; 9. Inclusiveness; 10. Adequate and equitable resource allocation; 11. Equitable service delivery; 12. Building strong local democracy and good governance.

(UN-Habitat 2004; CLGF 2004); the Local *Governance Barometer* (LGB) which measures local government capacity using qualitative and quantitative indicators to produce a *Local Government Index* (LGI) (Dufils *et. al.* 2006), and the *Citizen Report Card* or *Participatory Service Delivery Assessment* (Hafidh 2005)[2] which is used to measure local governance and service delivery impact using feedback provided by beneficiaries to service providers.

Regardless of the tool used, it is now generally agreed that the following constitute the main attributes of good local governance: constitutionalism, rule-of-law, justice, security of person and property, electoral and participatory democracy, respect for human rights and basic freedoms, equity, citizen participation in local decision-making, effective and efficient service delivery, and transparency, accountability and integrity in the management of public and private corporate affairs (Kauzya 2002).

There is no generally agreed conceptualisation of democracy, although it is widely believed that it has intrinsic human development value and promotes individual as well as collective freedoms, responsibility for individual choices, and opportunities for citizens to protect and advance their common interests and wellbeing (Cheema and Maguire 2002). Democracy not only conditions the way in which the poor can participate in decision-making and thereby facilitate the alleviation of their conditions, it also creates space in which individuals and groups can organize along social and economic lines to pursue their interests (Webster 2000).

The concept of democracy is neither value-free nor can it be precisely or adequately defined because of differences in its interpretation by different people and classes (Novacx 1970). However, the most popular conception in current discourse is informed by liberal democracy which postulates that democracy is a system of government in which there is meaningful, extensive, regular and fair competition for all elected positions of government; a highly inclusive level of political participation; and civil and political liberties (freedom of expression, of the press, and to form and join organizations of one's choice) sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation. Democracy can also be conceived in terms of institutions, procedures, formal rights and leadership responsiveness to the electorate. These defining components of democracy are necessary in everyday practice in governmental affairs, in NGOs, and in all other human relations to ensure social order and harmony.

There is a clear connection between local democracy and local governance. Local democracy strengthens local government by creating strong, organized and representative councils to improve efficiency and responsiveness in local development. Sound local governance improves the management of political, economic, and social development at the local, community and grassroots level.

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[2] A discussion paper of the above four instruments is provided in J. Kiyaga-Nsubuga (ed.), *Local Democracy, Good Governance and Delivering The MDGS in Africa*, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007:63-66.

Decentralization by devolution of decision-making to the lowest levels is a fundamental principle of local democracy and thereby good governance because it gives rise to a more responsive organization and greater community involvement. Conceptually, therefore, organized local bodies with clear mandates are generally more efficient and effective in enhancing local democracy and good governance, in delivering services to the local people and in reducing poverty.

3. Assessing Local Democracy and Local Governance in Uganda

Uganda's decentralization reforms contain an inherent paradox. On the one hand, the extent to which formal powers have been devolved from central to local levels, particularly over the management of local affairs, far exceeds what had happened in the country before and in many other African countries. On the other hand, the operation of decentralization indicates significant limitations with respect to how local governments apply those formal powers in practice. Recognizing these apparently contradictory tendencies is crucial to understanding how Uganda's decentralization process has evolved since the early 1990s. The discussion that follows will expose this fact by showing that while decentralization has deepened local democracy and governance in Uganda through the establishment of appropriate institutions, structures, and capacity, the system has not been performing as expected in some crucial areas due to lack of political will by local and national leaders to translate intent into reality.

The Enabling Environment

Uganda's local government system has a legally and constitutionally facilitating environment. It reflects devolution of powers (political, financial, personnel), functions and responsibilities to popularly elected councils and administrative units. These powers include making and implementing development plans based on locally determined priorities; making, approving and executing their own budgets; raising and utilizing resources according to their own priorities; appointing statutory committees, boards, and commissions; making ordinances and by-laws consistent with the 1995 Constitution and other existing laws, ordinances, and by-laws; hiring, managing and firing personnel; managing their own payroll and personnel systems, and implementing a broad range of decentralized services previously handled by the centre.

The system is based on the district as the primary unit, under which there are lower-level local governments (sub-county, municipal, division and town councils), and administrative units (county, parish and village). Kampala city has a separate legal status as an autonomous local government, with divisions, parishes and wards (parishes and wards are administrative units). Local governments are bodies corporate, while administrative units are not. A local government council is the highest political authority within its area of jurisdiction and has planning, administrative, financial management, budgeting, legislative and judicial powers which it exercises in accordance with the constitution, the Local Governments Act (1997) and central government policies and regulations. Local government councils

operate through executive committees and statutory organs (District Service Commissions, District/City Contracts Committees, Local Government Public Accounts Committees).

The authoritative legislative framework on decentralization in Uganda, known as the Local Governments Act, was enacted in 1997 to consolidate and streamline the legal environment within which local governments are meant to operate. Between January 2001 and May 2006 the Act was amended ten times to respond to developments in the implementation of decentralization and to streamline local administration in the country. These numerous amendments are indicative of the steep learning curve the local government system has gone through and the flexibility of the legal framework in adjusting to changing realities. From a design standpoint, therefore, the local government system has the requisite legal-constitutional and institutional frameworks in which to operate effectively. Amending the law to address unforeseen contingencies or emerging issues is healthy, provided it does not jeopardize the operations of local governments. For example, amending the law to disband District Tender Boards (DTBs) and replace them with Local Government Contracts Committees under the control of accounting officers[3] was clearly necessary because DTBs had been turned into instruments of cronyism to which people were appointed by local government councils as reward for political support after candidates have won elections. On the other hand, owing to lack of extensive analysis, considerable controversy followed the abolition of graduated tax[4] in 2006 (not withstanding that it was abolished due to legitimate reasons including its regressive nature and difficulty in collection), because the resultant loss of revenue plunged local governments into a financial crisis from which they have not yet recovered (see below).

4. Openness for Local Democracy

Citizen Participation

Generally, Uganda's local government system is open and participative. However, there are serious challenges facing citizen participation in local development. The fact is that citizens cannot participate in public affairs, even over matters that affect them directly, unless they are empowered. 'Empowerment' refers to the political process of expanding the space for citizens to exercise their freedom of choice and action to have more control over resources and decisions that affect their lives (Deepa 2002). However, local people at the grassroots lack sufficient knowledge and organization, which exposes their agenda to the risk of 'elite capture'. A classical case of elite capture can be seen in School Management Committees (SMCs) in primary schools where the majority of the parents are poor peasants who exercise minimal control over the decision-making process, for example, in financial matters (Prinsen and Titeca 2008). It is also not easy to get the necessary

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[3] District accounting officers, who are usually also the chief administrative officers, are responsible for receiving central government funds, dispersing them to the different departments in the district, and accounting for the use of those funds.

[4] Graduated tax was levied on all able-bodied adults in the country. It was paid annually and fixed by committees constituted at the different levels of local governments.

information, such as services to be delivered and the funds spent on them, to local people at the right time to facilitate appropriate decision-making. Furthermore, not all ideas get included in development plans during bottom-up participatory planning, leading to unfulfilled expectations. Yet a participatory planning approach has been adopted under the provisions of section 36 of the Local Governments (Amendment) Act of 1997 that encourages involvement of all key stakeholders in development planning and implementation so that they are more responsive to the needs of the people (Republic of Uganda 2003).

A major premise upon which Uganda's local government system was built was that local citizens would participate effectively in making decisions over local development in addition to holding their leaders to account. It was also assumed that elected leaders would always work in the best interest of their electorate. The reality has turned out to be different (Francis and James 2003). In most cases citizens have little understanding of their local economies, and also find the planning and budgeting process complicated and their decisions never implemented. Practice has also shown that the local people are easily hoodwinked by unscrupulous political elites who capture the planning and budgeting process to advance their selfish interests. Although all local governments are required to publicize fiscal transfers they receive from the centre, and many of them comply, there is little evidence that local citizens across the country have all the information they need or that they are capable of analysing the financial information even if it was put at their disposal.

It is, therefore, imperative that citizens are regularly provided with adequate information on the nature and resources of local economies, and have their skills in, say, financial management, planning and budgeting enhanced so that they can sensibly participate in deciding over local plans, budgets and investments. Local governments should be assisted to develop effective communication strategies to enable this to happen.

Equity

Providing services equitably has been and still remains a major challenge to local governments in Africa in general (Kiyaga-Nsubuga 2007) and Uganda in particular. First, the cost of service delivery in Uganda has neither been established across the board nor taken into account when determining local government fiscal transfers. Instead, the deciding factor has been the amount of money that is available; which has frequently been meager. This situation is aggravated by late transfers of resources from the centre.[5] Secondly, national standards of service delivery have been established only in a few social service areas, such as primary education and health. Given these limitations, local governments are finding it difficult to cope effectively with their responsibilities. It is essential, therefore, to complete the development of national standards of service delivery and link them

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[5] Numerous instances have been reported when Local Governments have received money from the centre in the very month they are supposed to account for its utilization.

to fiscal transfers, and to eliminate the problem associated with 'unfunded mandates' typical of the current arrangement.

On the positive side, service delivery has been expanded to broaden access and enhance equity. In the education sector, for example, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme has corrected the imbalance that existed in primary school enrolment, which largely favoured boys.[6] Some special variants of the programme have targeted children who are especially disadvantaged, such as the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) which targets children in the pastoral and arid Karamoja region in the north east of the country. Also, reasonably well-equipped Health Centres have been established at sub-county level, with basic drugs and well-trained doctors and health workers. Water-points have also been established within 500 meters in most rural areas (except in very remote areas) to reduce the time women spend collecting water. Local Council Courts (LCCs) have also been established at village, parish and sub-county levels to dispense local justice, because people at the grassroots were finding serious difficulties in obtaining justice through the highly bureaucratic regular court system, which they do not trust anyway. Assessments done so far indicate that LCCs have improved access to social justice by local people as compared to the regular court system whose process tends to be too complex and expensive; they are also trusted by the local people.

Society in Uganda in general is undergoing a critical transition with regard to inclusion of socially disadvantaged groups in national and local development processes. This transition is being engineered to ensure that marginalized groups are not left out with respect to allocation of authority, power and resources. The local government legal framework is very clear on this inclusion. Membership of local government councils is deliberately engineered to ensure representation of previously marginalized groups. For example, women now constitute at least 30% of every local government council; each council must also have two representatives of youth, one of whom must be female, and two representatives of the disabled, one of whom must also be female. In addition, each district has a woman representative in the national parliament. This system reflects government's desire to mobilize the formerly marginalized social groups and promote their participation in local and national decision-making.

Legislation over inclusive decision-making does not necessarily lead to equal participation of all marginalized groups in local politics. Inclusiveness and equal participation are two different things. However, although the impact of this affirmative action is yet to be established, its progressiveness is self-evident. The challenge is to give it real effect so that it can generate positive change and benefits

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[6] In 2004 it was established that as a result of the UPE programme nationwide, levels of school enrolment of boys and girls were almost the same for the age group 6 – 12 at 91%. In the early 1990s net primary enrolment for the same age group was estimated at about 60% with girls lagging almost 5% behind boys. See Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (2007) "Public Service Delivery in Uganda: Abetting or Containing Inequality?" Discussion Paper No. 13, June, p. 10.

in addition to elevating the social standing of the affected groups. Increased numbers on representative bodies is of little consequence if it does not help the marginalized groups overcome the underlying bias against them in the allocation of power, social goods and services, and in values.

Fortunately, local governments have been sensitised and some councillors have been trained in mainstreaming gender issues in local development planning. Civil society organizations have played a key role in training women leaders in advocacy, negotiation and articulation. However, the ultimate test is how to ensure that all this leads to improved access to resources and services by the marginalized groups. One of the major impediments is that the resources available to local governments to provide services are too limited. While pro-poor policies have improved access to basic services such as education, health and water and sanitation nationally, the impacts show spatial variations between and within local governments. For example, in the northern region two decades of insurgency have made it impossible for people to live normal livelihoods. Even in other districts, limited resources and poor execution have prevented the benefits of local investments to be felt fully. Examples abound of shoddy construction of access roads and drainage channels, and of market and slum improvement schemes that have not made any noticeable difference. If anything, questions have been asked as to whether interventions in service delivery are making a real difference for the poor or whether they are, in fact, abetting further inequality.[7]

Electoral Representation

The culture of periodic elections at national and local levels has largely taken root. From the time the National Resistance Movement[8] captured state power on 26 January 1986, local and national elections have been held every four years. This culture has led to turnover in local leadership which is estimated to be as high as eighty percent. Whereas this development is good for nurturing political leadership at these levels, it has also produced unintended consequences in terms of the quality of leadership and representation.

Many of those who get elected by the people turn out to be more interested in satisfying their own personal interests than those of the people who elected them. Also, as much as it would appear that every citizen above the age of eighteen is free to contest local elections, the reality is that because of the 'monetised' nature of politics in the country, many peasants can ill afford to buy their way into political office. This monetised electoral process has now taken root to the extent that even the annulment of results by the courts has not deterred those with money from buying their way into power. This elite capture of the governance process has become endemic. For example, in a study carried out by Reinikka and Svensson (Reinikka and Svesson 2004), the bulk of school grants was captured by local

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[7] Ibid:10.

[8] Until November 2005 the National Resistance Movement was the sole political organization. Today, under the multiparty system, it is one of the political parties.

officials and politicians in primary schools with impunity. The end result has been poor service provision.

Until 2006, political representation at the local level was based on the principle of 'individual merit', whereby individuals contested elected public offices on the basis of what they could offer to the local people and not on the basis of political party competition. Under the current multiparty system, however, individuals are expected to promote the agendas of their political parties rather than their personal agendas. There are two major challenges associated with this new shift in politics. First, most individuals lack sufficient experience in and knowledge of how a multiparty system works. Political parties were re-introduced in the country in November 2005 (Uganda had been ruled on a 'no party' political arrangement from 1986), and the first local, parliamentary and presidential elections based on the multiparty system were held in February and March 2006. Second, most, if not all, the political parties are not functioning in accordance with known democratic principles, values and regulations.

These political challenges have gradually influenced how local government councils operate. On the one hand, party differences have created tension in the management of local public affairs. On the other hand, some candidates have bribed their way into office using material gifts such as soap, sugar, and clothes, hoping to recoup their massive investments once in power. This buying of voters has been possible because of abject poverty across the country (up to 38% of the population is officially recognized as living in poverty). In addition, the majority of the local citizens lack adequate knowledge about their local economies to determine whether or not the candidates can realistically deliver on their promises.

The result of all this is that attendance of local council meetings has been progressively declining. There is increased perception by local people that local governments are in reality mere appendages of the central government and that most politicians get into office principally to help themselves to public resources and privileges. The latter view is reinforced by the widely reported systemic corruption at central and local government levels, resulting in the diversion of meager funds away from service provision. The other unintended consequence of corruption is that decentralization is reinforcing the power of local elites because local citizens lack 'civic competence' in the sense that they are reluctant to exercise their 'voice' and 'political agency' to effect change in their favour (Golooba-Mutebi 2008).

Accountability

In Uganda, an elaborate framework is in place to ensure upward and downward accountability. However, its operation is quite problematic. Indeed, according to Blair (Blair 2000), there are important limitations on how much participation can actually deliver because accountability covers a much wider range of activity and larger scope for democratic local governance strategy than initially appears. Specifically, upward accountability is administrative in nature and is based on

several institutions which include the Auditor-General, parliament (through its several committees, notably those on Public Accounts, Public Service, Social Services and Local Government), line ministries responsible for social services (education, health, water and sanitation, agricultural extension, and roads), the Local Government Finance Commission, local government statutory bodies (District Service Commission, Local Government Public Accounts Committees) and sectoral committees, and Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) who represent the president at the district level. RDCs play a direct watchdog role and are empowered to advise the local government chairperson[9] or the Inspector General of Government (IGG) to initiate an investigation into the management of a local government council's affairs, if they consider the situation to warrant it.[10] This upward accountability has been effective in improving the operations of local government in an administrative sense.

On the other hand, downward accountability has faced significant challenges. For downward accountability to be effective, political leaders should have benchmarks against which they are judged. Furthermore, the citizens should be regularly informed about how resources are being utilized and the impact arising therefrom. The citizens are supposed to be informed about this through their representatives in local government councils who scrutinize local plans, budgets and expenditures through various council committees. However, the citizens are rarely aware of these measures due to limited feedback from councillors. They also have limited means of holding the councillors to account, except perhaps during elections when their only option is either to return their councillors or to vote them out. The high turnover of councillors at local elections is indicative of pent up citizens' frustration, which could have been contained if leaders periodically provided feedback to the citizens on progress made in implementing their electoral manifestos. The limited degree of popular participation at the local levels might be the single most important explanation for the current weakness of the accountability framework.

The experience of more developed countries suggests that a vibrant civil society that is able to keep local governments in check is essential to enhance downward accountability. Because civil society in Uganda is largely weak, strengthening it would go a long way to closing this major accountability gap. Accounting mainly to central government, however effective, is insufficient.

The recent decision by government to re-centralize the appointment of local government accounting officers (chief administrative officers and town clerks) has re-ignited the debate over how the accountability issue should best be handled. Until 2006 local government accounting officers used to be under the control of local political leaders. While this was good for downward accountability, it placed the accounting officers under tremendous local political pressure to contravene established regulations and procedures, especially those relating to financial

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[9] Chairpersons are the directly elected political heads of local governments.

[10] See the Local Government Act, 1997, Section 72 (2) (b) and (c).

management and resources allocation. Accounting officers who resisted this pressure did so at their peril because other districts would not accept them if they were fired. Central government addressed this by re-centralizing their appointment and disciplinary procedures, principally to protect them from hostile local politicians, but this has had the unintended effect of shifting the philosophical basis of decentralization away from devolution. This conflict between philosophy and practice (and its potential consequences) is being debated widely but no consensus has yet emerged over how it should be resolved.

Accountability goes hand in hand with transparency. On transparency, there has been general improvement in the provision of information to the public on local government finance, including publication of central transfers in gazettes; public budget workshops; publication of plans, budgets and accounts; and discussion of related issues through the media. Local governments are required by the Ministry of Local Government and line ministries to publish the fiscal resources that have been transferred to them from the centre as well as those which are locally generated, and how these resources have been spent. Local government plans, budgets, accounts and accountability reports are also public documents which local people can access through their council representatives. The Freedom to Information Act also provides a legal basis for citizens to demand access to unclassified information, and local development issues are frequently covered in the media, particularly by local radio stations. Thus, in theory at least, the local government system is transparent and the citizens are expected to be well informed.

In practice, however, the reality is different. First, the primary avenue through which the citizens are supposed to be informed about decisions and investments made by their local governments is through their council representatives. To do this the council representatives must be able to travel through their constituencies to provide feedback and solicit the views of their electorate. Resources for this facilitation should come from locally generated revenue, but this source of revenue has always been inadequate and has continued to dwindle in recent years following the abolition of graduated tax. Thus, local government councillors are immobilized due to lack of these resources.

Secondly, even if ordinary citizens were supplied with all the available information on local development issues, it is doubtful if many of them would accurately interpret it due to the low literacy levels and lack of effective civic education. Lack of civic education and sensitisation on their local economies has prevented ordinary citizens from coming to grips with local development issues to demand accountability from local governments. Finally, although local citizens have been involved in developing plans for their local areas through a participatory approach, participatory budgeting has not been widely incorporated into local development processes. Thus the citizens have little idea on the efficacy of the decisions that are made on their behalf.

The implication is that in addition to the urgent requirement for development of a national civic programme and sensitisation of citizens on the nature of their local economies, local governments need to develop effective strategies for communicating their decisions and activities to the citizens beyond those that are currently in use. The peoples' representatives should also be adequately skilled and supported to enable them to provide regular and effective feedback to their constituents. Equally importantly, civil society organizations should be strengthened to provide effective checks on local governments to ensure transparency and accountability in their operations.

Scrutiny of the Executive

Elected local government officials, comprising council members and the executive (councillors selected by the chairperson to form a 'cabinet'), have clearly defined responsibilities that provide the basis for their actions. These responsibilities include: initiating and formulating policy (with technical assistance from appointed officials) for approval by the council; overseeing the implementation of council policies by the technical staff; considering and evaluating the performance of the council at the end of each financial year against approved work plans; mobilizing people, materials and technical assistance to facilitate local development; reviewing financial reports and making appropriate recommendations to council; serving as a communication channel between central government, the district and other stakeholders; and monitoring and supervising the implementation of work plans, programmes and projects and other activities undertaken by central government, the district, local governments and NGOs in the local area.

The performance of the executive and council against this tall order is scrutinized in several ways. First, the overall performance of the local government which they are in charge of, reflects to a significant extent their effectiveness as local leaders. This performance is evaluated through technical annual assessments that are carried out by the Ministry of Local Government through its Inspectorate Department against agreed performance indicators. Local governments that meet the performance indicators are rewarded with a 20% increase in their allocation the following year, while those that fail to meet the indicators are penalized by a 20% reduction in their allocations. This mechanism has been effective in spurring local development activity and compliance with central government regulations and guidelines, and in increasing the activity level of local government councils so that their areas do not appear on the 'negative' list.

Second, the executive is scrutinized by Resident District Commissioners as explained earlier on. By monitoring the activities of local governments and advising the district Chairperson and central government appropriately, RDCs have kept many councillors on their toes. In some cases, over-enthusiasm has caused considerable tension between them and local government councils. The situation is even made worse by the apparent duplication and overlap in the roles of these public figures – the law empowers both RDCs and chairpersons to monitor the performance of local governments.

Third, like other central and local government officials, councillors are required to conform to the Leadership Code Act (2002). They are required to submit to the Inspector General of Government (IGG – the equivalent of an ombudsman) a written declaration of their income, assets and liabilities, plus the names, income, assets and liabilities of their spouses, children and dependants, within three months of assuming office, and thereafter in March every two years. Failure to comply with this requirement may lead to their removal from office as well as further action. Although these provisions have been applied with respect to a number of high profile leaders, there is a general feeling that the office of the IGG lacks adequate capacity to enforce the Leadership Code in its entirety, and with respect to every person who falls in the leadership category in the country.

Finally, the Uganda Local Governments Association (ULGA) has developed a Charter on Accountability and Ethical Code of Conduct (Uganda Local Governments Association 2006) to enhance accountability, transparency and integrity within local governments. This is a major step forward for a system that had long been accustomed to only being regulated from the centre. Self-regulation is essential for curbing excesses and developing professionalism, and its application by local governments to themselves is an important development which portends well for the future of the system.

Financing of Local Governments

The financing of local governments has a significant bearing on local democracy and governance. If local governments raise substantial amounts of revenue from their local areas they are likely to be subjected to increased demands for downward accountability and for increased citizen participation in deciding how the resources will be used. On the other hand, the more reliant local governments are on central government for their revenue, the more likely they are to place more emphasis on upward accountability and to have less room in which to address local priorities. Given that local governments in Uganda are reliant on central government for nearly 90% of their revenue, it can be safely stated that the accountability flow is severely distorted upwards with serious implications for local level development, especially when combined with the other factors mentioned above. In fact, Steiner argues that poverty reduction through decentralization is in jeopardy in Uganda because of "… low levels of information about local government affairs, limited human capital and financial resources, restricted local autonomy, corruption and patronage, high administrative costs related with decentralization and low downward accountability" (Steiner 2007).

There are three types of fiscal transfers from central to local governments for the implementation of Uganda's decentralization policy: unconditional, conditional and equalization grants. Revenues from these sources are supplemented by locally raised revenues.

Unconditional grants, which are determined on the basis of population (85%) and area size (15%), are intended to permit local governments to have considerable discretion in resource allocation in pursuit of their respective development objectives. However, local governments are required to give priority in allocation to the five Program Priority Areas (PPAs) of government, namely primary education, primary health care, agricultural extension, feeder roads, and safe and clean water. Due to consistent under-funding, however, local governments are forced to assign these grants to the wage bill.

Conditional grants, on the other hand, are meant for pre-determined programs within the PPAs, and their size, access and utilization are supposed to be the outcome of discussion between the central government and the relevant local governments.[11] Conditional grants include a wage component for decentralized staff that previously belonged to the centre.

Equalization grants are a subsidy, or special provision, disbursed from the central government to the least developed local governments to enable them to meet the minimum standards of social service delivery. This grant became operational in the 1999/2000 financial year (Muduuli 1999).

Although the levels of the grants have risen significantly, there have been persistent complaints from local governments about the mismatch between the magnitude of the decentralized services local governments are burdened with, and the very limited fiscal transfers from the centre to fund those services. Another source of friction springs from the fact that the central government retains nearly two-thirds of total national tax collections even though most services are decentralized. This imbalance in resource distribution is one of the major factors behind limited service delivery at the local level.

A further source of imbalance in resource allocation springs from the allocation formula that was used when decentralization was conceived. The original design of fiscal transfers from the centre was based on the number of officers posted in each district rather than on the full personnel establishment in each district. Consequently, districts that did not have full establishments were shortchanged. This was supposed to be corrected when the districts were restructured in 2005. However, persistent under-funding has perpetuated the imbalance. This has been made worse by continuous creation of districts; while there were 36 in 1992, by 2008 there were 82. In fact, the Minister of Local Government was recently quoted as decrying this increase in the number of districts when he stated that if this trend

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[11] Although this requirement is stipulated in Article 193(3) of the 1995 Constitution, its breach by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development has been a constant irritant to Local Governments; see Kiwanuka-Musisi, C.G. President , Uganda Local Authorities Association, in a paper he wrote entitled: 'Emerging Issues in the Implementation of Decentralization', a paper presented at the National Forum on the Implementation of Decentralization, held at the International Conference Centre, Kampala, Uganda, November 15 – 19, 1999:13; see also the Resolutions by the Uganda Local Authorities Association at the same forum (Resolution No. 7).

continued, sooner than later every family in Uganda would be clamoring to have its own district[12].

Central government fiscal transfers are supplemented by a range of local revenue sources. The 1995 Constitution empowers local governments to levy, charge, collect and appropriate fees and taxes for investment in infrastructure and service delivery. These fees and taxes include rents, rates, royalties, stamp duties, personal graduated tax, cess (a tax on local produce such as crops and animals), market dues and fees on registration and licensing. Only funds that have been budgeted for and approved by the council can be spent.

However, local revenue sources presently constitute less than 10% of total local government funding. In the rural areas, local governments used to depend mainly on graduated tax but, as noted earlier, this tax was abolished in 2006 and has been replaced by local service and hotel taxes, which local governments are yet to fully understand and implement. What this means is that local citizens have limited leverage on local governments because their contribution to local revenue is quite minimal. This indirectly undermines local democracy as it weakens downward accountability.

Local governments are also permitted to borrow through bonds, debentures or directly from commercial banks, up to 25% of locally raised revenue. However, stringent conditions are attached to discourage local governments from borrowing as follows: the Minister of Local Government must approve any borrowing exceeding 10% of what a local government may legally borrow; the local government's accounts for the previous year must have been certified by the Auditor-General; the local government must guarantee that it will meet its obligations, including salary payments, while repaying the loans; and the money borrowed must be invested in the national PPAs. No local government has borrowed money on these terms, thus suggesting that the conditions are too stringent.

5. Conclusion

Uganda's local government system offers prospects for enhanced local governance and local democracy. Local governance is about effective management of the totality of state and non-state activities at the local level. The involvement of civil society in the management of local development is crucial in influencing local and national government policies and promoting democracy at the local level.

Improving public service delivery and reducing poverty largely depends on the political and economic context as well as on how decentralization is designed and implemented. The conditions that are indispensable for decentralization to increase social welfare include a functioning local democracy; adequate fiscal autonomy for

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[12] See: 'District Number Worries Otafiire', The New Vision, (Kampala), Monday September 22, 2008, p. 3.

local governments; and adequate technical expertise among local and national government officials. [13]

In Uganda, comprehensive and robust legislation has laid an essential foundation upon which local democracy and local governance have been built. Uganda's decentralization policy and the manner in which it is being implemented has to a large extent transformed the country from what it used to be in the past where the state had nearly collapsed. There is ample evidence of local democracy and local governance in action: citizens elect their representatives in local councils; the local government system is forced to be transparent and accountable; local leaders are being made open to scrutiny; decision-making is becoming participatory and inclusive; and, to the extent possible, efforts are being made to provide services equitably.

However, there are several challenges that prevent local governments from operating to their full potential. The key challenge is the low level of civic education among the population which constrains them from participating fully in the development of their areas. Local governments are over-loaded with responsibilities in contrast to their limited capacities and the inadequate resources assigned to them. This has significant impact on peoples' perception of the extent to which local governments can solve their problems. All the challenges are inter-twined, implying that addressing some requires taking action on others as well. This is to be expected considering that Uganda is undergoing socio-economic transformation that requires continuous reforms on several fronts. Further interlocking interventions, therefore, are needed to deepen local governance and local democracy so that citizens can access better services and lead better lives.

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[13] Ibid.2.

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From Citizen Participation to Participatory Governance in Australian Local Government

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Abstract

This paper identifies types of citizen participation in local government in Australia, in particular focusing on the past two decades when local government systems have been the focus of intense reform. The paper considers the extent to which contemporary views of participatory governance have taken root at local and sub-local levels and concludes that despite reforms intended to engage local citizens more in local government activity, citizen participation has yet to develop significantly into arrangements that reach the level of participatory governance. It also argues that for participatory governance to be further developed, leadership may often have to come from organisations outside institutional local government.

1. Introduction

> The opportunity to take part in the political system is such a fundamental tenet of the democratic system of government that its very existence is rarely questioned. People must be able to have their say – to vote, to engage in political debate and to let those in power know their views on issues which concern them. This is what democracy is about (Richardson 1983:1).

While there is almost universal acceptance of the principle of citizen participation in democratic societies, the means and extent of this participation are frequently

contested. Citizen participation in *government* has traditionally centred on measures to facilitate greater public access to information about government, enhance the rights of citizens to be 'consulted' on matters which directly affect them, and ensure that all voices can be heard equally through fair systems of representative democracy. Such measures typically include standardised rules, protocols, and enabling legislation and regulation (Bridgman and Davis 2000). However, there is a growing appreciation that participation in *governance*, or participatory governance, involves different principles and methods for engagement. These might include developing transformative partnerships; establishing system-wide information exchanges and knowledge transfers; decentralising decision making and inter-institutional dialogue; and embracing relationships based more on reciprocity and trust (Reddel and Woolcock 2003:93).

The shift from government to governance involves the provision of means to engage individuals and organisations outside government through 'structures and arrangements which support effective relationships across the public, private and community sectors as they collaborate in decision-making' (Edwards 2005:12). This has been described by Putnam as 'social connectedness', a critical element in the formation of social capital (Putnam 2000). It involves an active role for government in enabling or capacity building in local communities, rather than the more passive role implied in traditional notions of citizen participation. However, both the traditional notion of citizen participation and this emerging idea of capacity and relationship building have roots in the notion that citizen participation is a 'basic building block for contemporary democratic society and sustainable communities' (Cuthill and Fien 2005:64). Citizen participation in governance also aims to devolve power and resources away from central control and towards front-line managers, local democratic structures, and local consumers and communities in what Stoker terms 'new localism' (Stoker 2004). This has implications for traditional ideas of representative government with communities moving away from vicarious engagement in democracy towards more direct involvement in decision-making processes.

Not only are new means of participation evolving with governance, so too are its goals. For example, an earlier classification developed by Arnstein (1971) has been immensely popular in describing traditional notions of consultation and participation. At the apex of Arnstein's ladder of participation she describes 'citizen control', which contrasts with current approaches to governance that focus on setting and achieving goals through partnerships and collaborations amongst a broad range of stakeholders.

This paper aims to map citizen participation at the local level in Australia, in particular focusing on the past two decades when local government systems have been one of several focuses of intense public sector reform. These reforms included a move away from earlier notions of 'ratepayer democracy', with the introduction of provisions to strengthen universal suffrage in local government and remove or reduce property franchises – reforms designed to enhance *citizen participation in*

government. The paper also considers the extent to which contemporary views of participatory governance have taken root at the local level, as well as the capacity of local government to promote this agenda. It concludes that if participatory governance is to be advanced, it may often be necessary to look for leadership in organisations other than institutional local government. The author shares the view that *citizen participation in governance* is very much a work-in-progress, and further research is required to map and evaluate the diversity of state and local government policies towards participatory governance (Smyth *et al.* 2005:8).

2. Local Government Reform: Legislating Further Citizen Participation

Citizen involvement in Australian local government in the latter part of the twentieth century fell largely within the ambit of 'indirect participation', that is, 'those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of [their representatives] and/or the actions they take' (Richardson 1983:11). These activities include voting, campaigning on behalf of candidates or issues, and engagement in political parties or interest groups. While citizens were seen as capable of exerting important influence, this influence was typically focused on policy delivery rather than design (Sharp 1980). This form of citizen participation is much more congruent with Bridgman and Davis' (1990) articulation above, in that it has focused on enabling protocols, regulation and legislation more than on those forms of participatory governance that actively engage communities in the formulation of policy. 'This was typically in the context of citizens participating in pre-determined policy debates rather than agenda-setting or active two-way deliberation' (Curtain 2003:127).

With such citizen participation, the role of government is a relatively passive one, simply offering a degree of access to those 'participants' who choose to become involved. It is aimed broadly at developing greater transparency and engagement within a context of representative democracy, where primary decisions are made through the representative process. It may also include structural changes that enhance effective local autonomy. These measures reflect traditional political values of equity (for example, through encouraging voting systems that promote universal franchise and principles of one-vote-one-value), responsiveness (for example, in introducing provisions for referenda or protocols for community planning), accountability (for example, through ensuring access to information about decisions, programs and policies), and devolution to local communities.

All three spheres of government in Australia have undergone continuous reform during the past two decades, representing the most significant set of changes since federation in 1901, with the transformation of the public sector both swift and dramatic. In the local government sphere, reforms have been comprehensive at the management, legislative and structural levels, and have focused on two primary agendas: first, the improved management of resources and second, governance issues – especially the redefinition of roles and responsibilities of the various actors in the local sphere (Aulich 2005; Marshall 1998). It is the second agenda that is of particular interest in this paper.

Halligan and Wettenhall identify an earlier phase of local government reform dating from the 1960s when 'the combination of grass-roots participation and the discovery of the urban problem stimulated wide interest in [local government's] potentiality' (Halligan and Wettenhall 1989:80). Consistent with broader pressures for social change, the reform agendas at that time, *inter alia,* included moves to widen the franchise, eliminate multiple voting, and redraw boundaries to ensure greater adherence to principles of 'one-person, one-vote, one-value'. It represented a shift away from the earlier notion of 'rate-payer democracy' in which the dominant considerations had been the 'protection of one's own interests and those of one's own kind' (Chapman and Wood 1984:27). However, the reform impetus appeared to dissipate in the late 1970s.

More recent reforms, undertaken in the context of comprehensive reforms of the Australian public sector at all levels, have aimed at strengthening the accountability of local governments through increased transparency provisions; establishing greater opportunities for community referenda; and mandating reporting provisions to communities. In all states[1] provisions have been enacted for councils to develop strategic or management plans (especially to be more responsive to community wishes); for stricter reporting regimes, both to the community and to the state government; for making key documentation more transparent and available; for continuing the electoral reforms begun in the 1960s; and for extending Freedom of Information coverage to local government. These provisions were designed to strengthen accountability both to the local community and to the state government, improve management capacity and make local government more democratic. In this context, however, being 'more democratic' was understood in terms of enhancing representative democracy and improving both transparency and accountability of local government management activity, rather than considering options for stronger, more direct community engagement. Legislative initiatives in most jurisdictions involved amendments to state local government Acts, or the introduction of new legislation, to strengthen public consultation requirements in relation to councils' proposed activities, forecast expenditure, required total rate (property tax) revenue, and the anticipated level and distributive effects in broad terms of various components of the rating structure.

There is significant variation between local government electoral systems in Australia. These variations relate to the length of council terms, the size of the elected council, who can vote, obligations to vote, and the voting system itself. Significantly, in some states voting is compulsory, aligning this obligation with state and national elections, while elsewhere voting is not compulsory at local government level. While some vestiges of a colonial past, such as multiple voting based on property ownership, have been removed, a majority of states retain a property franchise of some sort in addition to a universal franchise for residents.

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[1] The term 'states' is used in this paper to refer to the six states and the Northern Territory governments at the intermediate level of the Australian federation, all of which have local government systems with similar arrangements.

Voter turnout, one measure of successful participation, is low in those states where voting is not compulsory (see Table 1). While the introduction of postal voting has increased the level of turnout (for example, in South Australia it was primarily responsible for a rise from 15% to 39%), rates of voter participation in those states where voting is not compulsory remain low. Voter turnout at local elections ranges from 12% to 65% with averages in the low 30s. In most rural local governments only a minority (about 30%) of all seats are contested at elections, although this figure in higher in urban elections (about 60%) (Gerritsen and Whyard 1998:42).

Table 1: Voter Participation in Local Government Elections

NSW	Voting in LG elections is compulsory. Turnout for the 1999 and 2004 elections was 84% and 85.7% respectively.
VIC	Voting in LG elections is compulsory with an option for postal voting. Average turnout of 75% (range from 67-87%) for 54 councils where elections were conducted in 2002-2003. For November 2004 postal elections (22 councils) the average turnout was 75% (range 65-84%).
QLD	Voting in LG elections is compulsory. The local government association estimates average voter turnout in 2004 election at 80%, with the average informal vote at 5%.
SA	Voting in LG elections is not compulsory. State average turnout in 2003 election was 33% (range from 23-68%). From 1997, all councils in SA were given the option of conducting their elections by postal voting. The councils who conducted their elections this way saw an increase in turnout of 150% on 1995, with an average of 39%, compared with 15% in councils using polling booths in 1997. Based on the 1997 results, exclusively postal voting was made mandatory from 2000.
WA	Voting in LG elections is not compulsory and polling is conducted exclusively by post. Elections held in May 2005 showed an average turnout of 36% compared to an average of 22% in councils that had used polling booths in 2003.
TAS	Voting in LG elections is not compulsory and polling is conducted exclusively by post. Elections held in 1999, 2000 and 2002 achieved turnouts of 55%, 58% and 57% respectively. .
NT	Voting is compulsory and conducted through polling booths only. Average turnout in the most recent elections was 72% (including informal votes); the range was 66-76%.

Sources: State departments responsible for local government

While variations in electoral arrangements *may* reflect local preferences, what is significant is the limited capacity of local governments themselves to change these arrangements. Only in New South Wales can individual local governments change some aspects of electoral arrangements unilaterally, subject to citizen referenda. In

all others, state government or electoral commission approval is required, and in some cases, changes may require amendments to local government legislation.

The levels of allowance or remuneration paid to councillors also vary across states, and in some instances, between councils in the same state. For example, in Queensland the allowance system has resulted in 'large variations in allowance levels' to the extent that in some councils mayors and elected members can be employed full-time (DoTARS 2005:14). While these variations again reflect local or state preferences, serving as an elected member remains largely a part-time occupation, and this tends to restrict the opportunity to become a councillor to those with other sources of income. Given that payment for members of parliament has been a basic feature of democratic societies for more than a century, precisely to give all citizens the opportunity to represent their communities on a full-time basis, the failure to extend a similar provision to local governments appears somewhat anachronistic.

What is clear is that there remain some structural impediments to full and unencumbered access to the local government system, both for prospective elected representatives and for citizens wishing to vote. The local sphere of government has been described as the 'Cinderella' of Australia's public administration, as it simply has not won for itself that place in our polity which a long history has given it in Britain (Finn 1990:49). One of the markers for this is the level of voter participation, especially where voting is optional, which at present suggests that the enfranchised are not overly enthusiastic about exercising their right to vote in local government elections. Perhaps there is still some remnant of the poor reputation of elected councils revealed in research conducted in the 1980s, which found that many Australians considered their local councillors 'at best incompetent and, at worst, corrupt' (Bowman 1983:180). It may also reflect a view that local government is not treated seriously by governments in other spheres, especially in relation to the allocation of functions and resources; in which case it is hardly surprising that local communities also may not be inclined to treat the sector seriously.

As noted earlier, the recent revitalisation of the reform movement in local government coincided with a period in Australian history of intensive administrative change across the whole public sector. The centrepiece of local government reform was the reformation of state government legislation: between 1989 and 1999, the local government Acts in each state jurisdiction were reviewed and wholly or largely rewritten, with the Northern Territory following in 2008. Common to all changes was the shift away from prescriptive provisions reinforced by the doctrine of *ultra vires*, which restricted councils to performing only those activities specifically nominated under the legislation. In the new Acts, forms of general competence powers were granted to enable councils to undertake almost any activities necessary for them to fulfil the functions and powers delegated to them (subject to other state and federal laws). Typical was the *Victorian Local Government Act*, which gave councils the power to 'do all things necessary or

convenient to be done for or in connection with the performance of its functions and to enable it to achieve its purposes and objectives' (section 3F).

However, whilst these legislative changes widened the scope of local government *activities*, the nature and extent of the delegated *powers* did not change significantly in any state jurisdiction. Despite the modernisation of local government Acts, there is no evidence of significant changes to the state-local power nexus. Reserved powers remain with the state governments, typical of which is the provision in the New South Wales 1993 legislation which gives the Minister for Local Government 'the power to issue any order that a council may issue'; and in Queensland, where the state government is empowered to refuse approval to by-laws, overturn existing gazetted by-laws and overturn council resolutions. Thus even under the reformed local government Acts, local government remains a creature of state and territory governments, all of which retain strong over-rule powers (Aulich 1999; 2005).

Any commitment to local autonomy was particularly tested in those states then collectively known as the 'rust belt' (Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania), in which the financial problems of state governments drove approaches to reform. In these states reforms focused attention more on cost reduction rather than on enhancing local governance (Aulich 2005). In justifying this reform effort, states claimed they had brought about lower local taxes, debt retirement and improved quality of services to residents – few mentioned the impacts on traditional local governance issues and values.

Nevertheless, the reform processes themselves suggested a strong preference for consultative and participative mechanisms: discussion papers, exposure drafts of legislation, inquiries, seminars, community consultations, training programs for newly elected local members and the like were typical of the tools used. In New South Wales, for example, the process of review took four years: it included the release of a discussion paper and an extensive consultation program which involved over 3,000 attendees at seminars, 900 written submissions and 450 telephone calls (NSW Government 1991:3). These reform processes could be described as pluralist and participative, utilising activities designed to lift the level of awareness of participants.

While apparently consultative, the process of local government reform was not without its critics: there were complaints from local government associations in several states that their submissions were not sufficiently considered, particularly in relation to the preservation of state government reserve powers and the overall impact on local autonomy (LGSA 1991, 1992; LGAQ 1992).

Moreover, a recent report by the House of Representatives Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee found that local government has been short-changed, particularly by the actions of state governments in maintaining revenue denial. There are increasing expectations of local government to provide services,

but they lack adequate revenues of their own, and/or insufficient funds are granted to them, to undertake additional functions delegated or prescribed by state governments. The report, completed in 2004, recommended a series of follow up activities to establish a blueprint for future intergovernmental arrangements (HREFPAC 2004), but at the time of writing, there have yet to be put in place any substantive changes to the current nexus.

Martin argues that this resource deficit is precisely the reason why local governments have been unable to become further engaged in community building, and that leadership in this area has 'been usurped by the State government' (Martin 2006:1). He asserts that this use of community development opportunities for state political purposes detracts from the effective public management of 'what is regarded in other parts of the western world as important social processes at the core of effective local governance' (Martin 2006:1).

Thus at the end of nearly two decades of reform, there has been some devolution of functions to the local sphere, but the historic reality of administrative subordination of local government continues to be a central feature of central-local relationships in Australia (Gerritsen and Whyard 1998). While its counterparts in many overseas jurisdictions enjoy the fruits of growing acceptance of new governance principles such as subsidiarity and joined-up government, Australian local government continues to wrestle with a nineteenth century legislative stranglehold imposed on it by state governments.

Nevertheless, the language of partnership between state and local governments and their communities is beginning to emerge, as participatory governance and community building become the new strategic focus of some state governments. By contrast with previous iterations of 'citizen participation', this emerging form of community engagement seeks a more active relationship between government and citizens, by enabling citizens to play a significant and more direct role in shaping the nature and priorities of their communities.

3. Participatory Governance: Active Partnership with Local Communities

This recent interest in more engaged, collaborative and community-focused public policy and service delivery finds its sources in the United Kingdom (UK), the European Union and to some extent the United States. In particular, 'Third Way' politics has popularised a number of reforms centred on ideas of devolution, stakeholders, inclusion, partnerships and community (Reddel and Woolcock 2003:81), ideas which are generally related to community participation. Paradoxically, this is occurring at a time when globalisation and supra-national interests have also become focal points of national activity. These two apparently contradictory trends are complementary to the extent that participation models appear to enable governments to better deal with the consequences of globalisation, especially those regional inequalities that arise from it. Communities are being

challenged to develop their local capacities or social capital to cope more effectively with issues like social exclusion and disadvantage, which have often accompanied economic restructuring in response to global imperatives.

This signals a shift from local government to local governance – the involvement of a wide range of institutions and actors drawn from within but also beyond government, and the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues (Geddes 2005). As Stoker (1998) argues, governance implies that the capacity to get things done does not rest only on the power of government to command or use its authority. There is a growing enthusiasm for new forms of 'distributed local governance that draws on the skills and resources of public, private, and civil society sectors' (Reddel and Woolcock 2003:81).

The acceptance of tenets of the 'New Public Management', particularly in Australia, has also added impetus to the need for greater participation by communities, especially through policy-making processes. Governments are now more likely to search for alternative sources of advice to that traditionally monopolised by its public services, and many of those actually providing public services are outside government. To be effective, policy makers require more information about service delivery and what works, and participatory processes can provide essential feedback for policy making (Edwards 2003; Curtain 2003).
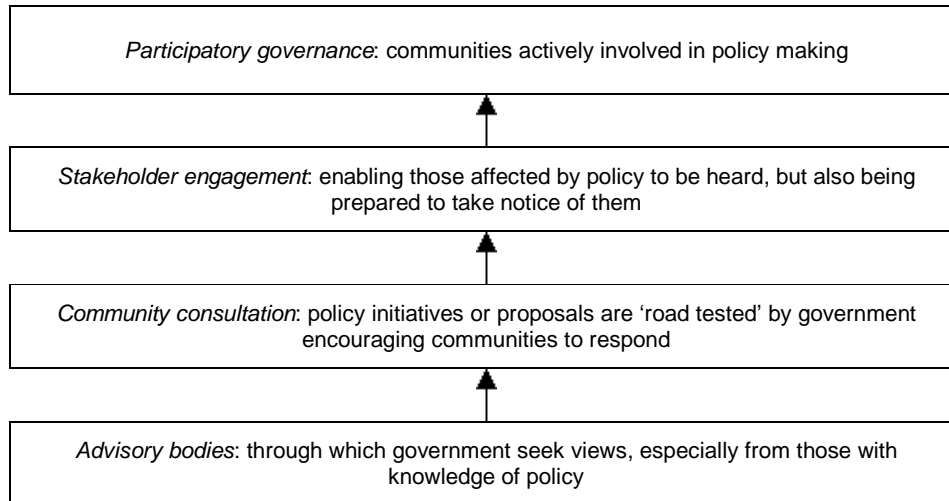
Governments are also responding to demands for participation from a better educated, more articulate and more demanding citizenry, many of whom express a declining level of trust in political institutions and a belief that purely representative democracy often results in a 'democratic deficit' (Pharr and Putnam 2000; Edwards 2005). This belief is expressed in demands for supplementary engagement of citizens beyond the traditional democratic processes of three or four year elections, with calls for more meaningful exchanges with government (Curtain 2003). Further, there is recognition that today many more policy problems are cross-cutting and highly complex, or 'wicked', and seem to defy resolution by government alone (Stoker 2004; Geddes 2005). There is growing understanding that 'governments cannot simply deliver outcomes in complex areas that rely on enhanced individual responsibility and behavioural change to a disengaged and passive public' (APSC 2007:1). 'Wicked' problems may require greater engagement by communities to assist in their resolution.

Stewart (2003) distinguishes different forms of governance and the associated institutional arrangements that governments use to gather information and opinion. These are presented as a continuum (Figure 1) in which interests external to government are progressively more able to influence and shape policy and its implementation: in this continuum, power moves downwards and outwards. Participatory governance is at the apex of citizen engagement both as a form of participatory and deliberative democracy (Caddy and Vergez 2001), and as a form of governance that seeks active partnerships and collaboration between civil society, the private sector and governments (Reddel and Woolcock 2003). Shifts

through the continuum reflect increased acceptance of ideas of community, social
capital, and localism as the foundations of political activity and policy-making.

Figure 1: The Governance Continuum

Participatory governance: communities actively involved in policy making

↑

Stakeholder engagement: enabling those affected by policy to be heard, but also being prepared to take notice of them

↑

Community consultation: policy initiatives or proposals are 'road tested' by government encouraging communities to respond

↑

Advisory bodies: through which government seek views, especially from those with knowledge of policy

Source: based on Stewart (2003)

Participatory governance gives stakeholders the opportunity to engage in policy
making directly, leading to 'cross-boundary forms of negotiated order that involve
government agencies and other stakeholders in both policy formulation and
implementation' (Stewart 2003:151). It involves a shift from technocratic
development of policy with its programmatic or regulatory control, to situations
where some control may be negotiated away from single government agencies. It
marks a sharp divergence from the neo-liberal concept of reducing the role and size
of government, to conceiving government as an active partner in 'associational
governance', collaborating with a wide range of other stakeholders (Smyth *et al.*
2005).

Such participation is not new in Australia: local governments have (perhaps
intermittently) long provided forums and organising capacity to facilitate
arrangements that engage and build local capacity. A generation ago, local
government's singular focus on physical infrastructure, reflected in the label
'roads, rates and rubbish', was supplanted by increasing concerns for the provision
of community and human services, and for stronger community participation in
matters such as land-use planning and community development.

At state and federal government level there is a long history of facilitation of area
improvement programs, regional initiatives and local capacity building projects.
However, these have rarely been sustained and too often their effectiveness has not
been evaluated. Federal governments have asserted an interest in social capital
formation but appear unwilling to invest directly in such programs. While believing
'in the ability of people to generate their own solutions to their own problems' and
that 'social participation helps people to grow and flourish as human beings and be

full members of Australian society' (Reddel and Woolcock 2003:82), federal governments appear to have decided that this is best achieved if handled largely without government or bureaucratic support.

By contrast, almost all state governments have taken a more direct role in facilitating community capacity building. Typically, this is formalised through establishing agencies or administrative units tasked to encourage 'joined-up' and community building initiatives. This activity carries an implicit view that traditional notions of consultation and centrally managed community input into the policy process are no longer sufficient to manage community expectations and the complexity of modern political life (Davis 2001:230).

In Victoria, for example, the government has commenced work on community capacity building, on measures for social capital, service integration and community well-being, and on local learning and employment networks. It has also formally adopted a set of principles to underpin its engagement policy, and has encouraged local governments to develop four-year community plans that include processes of community participation (Martin 2006).

However, Wiseman concludes that while the Victorian government has energetically explored an extensive program of consultative and community-building strategies, it has been more cautious about opening up debate about participatory and deliberative decision making processes. He observes that in Victoria:

> there is mounting concern within local government and non-government
> organisations about the extent of state government commitment to back the
> language of partnership with real changes to decision-making and resource
> allocation processes (Wiseman 2005:69).

At the same time, there is evidence that due to resource constraints, some local councils are actually withdrawing from community engagement at this time when state level governments are enhancing their involvement (Martin 2006).

In Western Australia, the state's Citizenship Strategy aims to actively promote the concepts of democracy, citizenship and sustainability (DPCWA 2004), and the Queensland, Tasmanian and New South Wales governments have all initiated engagement strategies (Reddel and Woolcock 2003). These state programs have tended to emphasise locality and local disadvantage, and 'place management' has emerged as a new term in spatial policy language to signal a holistic approach to the needs of localities (Smyth *et al.* 2005:39).

In Queensland, the intention to utilise multi-sector partnerships was signalled by the Premier who declared that:

> There is … an emerging service delivery model involving governments working in
> partnership with communities to determine needs, devise strategies for meeting
> these needs, implementing activities consistent with these strategies and ultimately

monitoring results. The emphasis is on community empowerment and not on traditional functional program delivery (Queensland Government 2001:10).

The government of Queensland has issued a package of policies and programs aimed at greater participation in policy development and service delivery, although it should be noted that these represent strategic intentions which have yet to be fully implemented or evaluated (Reddel and Woolcock 2003). Reddel and Woolcock argue that these strategic intentions are overdue in that past practices have failed to appreciate the critical role of local government, community associations and other forms of civil society; and even when recognised, their diversity and complexity were not always easy to accommodate because of the dominance of managerial policies which foster largely passive notions of consultation and agency coordination. More recent reports on the Queensland programs indicate some positive gains, notably the community renewal program focusing on fifteen disadvantaged areas in the state, and the Cape York initiative to address long-standing social problems in indigenous communities in that region. In both cases, the authors claim that these early successes may be due to the use of techniques of associational governance, whereby integrated policy responses involve a movement beyond the traditional social welfare constituency to engage communities more broadly (Smyth *et al.* 2005).

A growing number of cases are emerging where local governments have developed or contributed to associational governance, often through giving prominence to the notion of 'place'. For example, the City of Playford (South Australia) in its development of a high-performance growth hub (Genoff 2005), or the Sydney Harbour Manager project involving a memorandum of understanding between 14 agencies and 19 local councils. The latter is a particularly interesting development as the 'model emphatically does not seek a single vision, an ongoing consensus, or a grand plan. It assumes many voices, competing interests and goals, and shifts in interests and alliances. The model enables clusters of stakeholders and interest groups to develop joint positions and then enter into a dialogue with other main players' (Dawkins 2003: 63).

There is also growing interest in and practice of alternative means of enhancing community engagement. For example, deliberative democratic processes are being employed by governments at all levels in Australia (Carson 2007). These are robust consultation methods that add value to policy-making processes, especially in enabling governments to deal more effectively with complex policy issues such as stem cell research, Aboriginal reconciliation, asylum seeking and climate change. Techniques used also include innovative collaborative planning methods, such as those being used to mediate water and land-use conflicts in British Columbia (see, for example Frame *et al.* 2004); citizen panels, now established by more than three quarters of UK local authorities; citizens' juries; and community dialogues, which are becoming more common in Canada (Curtain 2003). A significant number of Australian local governments are following suit.

4. Some Key Issues

A number of important issues emerge from this discussion. First, as indicated earlier, the data is incomplete and anecdotal about the extent of any shift towards more participative forms of governance. This, of course, is not a problem specific to Australia. In the Canadian context, Stewart (2006:197) argues that 'few efforts have been made to address [evaluation of] good governance at the local level, perhaps mostly because of data collection difficulties.' Further research is required to map the diversity of state and local government policy interventions and to evaluate their effectiveness. For example, there are profound differences of perspective in relation to recent 'community strengthening' initiatives. Some report positively on early trends and anecdotal feedback on the results of some of these initiatives, especially in Victoria, whilst others suggest that:

> many claims about the benefits of strengthening social bonds and increasing civic
> participation are overblown, and that attempts to present local self-help,
> volunteering and social entrepreneurship as panaceas for deeply rooted structural
> inequalities and injustices are naïve and misleading (Wiseman 2006:103).

A second issue relates to the endemic weaknesses of local government in Australia, and the burden imposed by the increasing tasks mandated for it by other spheres. In the UK, Geddes (2000) questions the capacity of local partnerships to create structural change and resolve complex economic and social problems, so given the stronger role of local government in that jurisdiction, it is likely to be even more difficult for Australian local governments. In particular, concerns have been expressed about local government's capacity to assume broader roles in developing leadership in regional participatory governance arrangements. As Beer *et al.* conclude:

> it is not surprising that most economic development agencies [at local level] were
> small with very few staff and limited budgets, that they have been unstable, and
> that in many cases they did not have community and political support and in the
> perceptions of practitioners had little impact on their locality (quoted in Rainnie
> 2005:132).

With 560 Australian local governments, or 78% of the then total number, classified as 'rural' or 'regional' (DoTARS 2005:3), the urban-rural divide represents a critical dimension of uneven resourcing that tends to generate a 'lowest common denominator' effect and restrict the potential of the sector as a whole. This has been recognised by the provision of relatively large national government grants to those councils most in need. However, despite horizontal equalisation these local governments appear poorly placed to assume the type of leadership required to advance participatory governance. It is more likely that leadership in these resource challenged environments has to be assumed by regional bodies such as voluntary regional organisations of councils or regional development networks in concert with state and not-for-profit agencies – provided that these regional bodies are themselves able to marshal sufficient resources and leadership expertise for the purpose.

Third, and on the other hand, there are doubts that state governments would ever be able to effectively manage local initiatives for participatory governance. As Martin comments, there is a 'question [of] how far state governments can go in brokering community engagement strategies across small rural towns and communities' (Martin 2006:2). By contrast, it has often been acknowledged that many local governments in Australia have satisfactorily met their intended functions of service delivery, adequate representation and participation, and advocacy of constituent needs to higher levels of government (Marshall 1998). Self (1997:298) argues that the Australian local sector 'remains genuinely local and grass roots in a way that is no longer true of most overseas systems'. This provides some confidence that local government has a significant place and skill set to be a valued partner in participatory governance, even if there are questions about the capacity of many smaller councils to lead this process.

5. Conclusions

For there to be real benefits from citizen engagement, consultation about public policy needs to move beyond the piecemeal and haphazard process which is evident in Australia today (Curtain 2003). At state and local government levels, in contrast with their federal counterpart, there is considerable evidence of a willingness to engage with citizens rather than merely consult people as users of public services or 'customers'. However, while most states and many local governments have developed policies or protocols to facilitate this higher level of consultation, as well as signalling to their communities that such consultations are valued, there are few examples where effective engagement has been established and accepted as a citizen's right. The concept of engagement appears to be valued, perhaps even seen as necessary, but in few instances has the practice yet been accepted as a fundamental right of communities to enable them to assume a formal place in governance.

State governments are being challenged to surrender their legislative power over local government in order to facilitate 'real' partnerships with local communities and embrace notions of participatory governance. At this stage, it is unclear whether Australian local governments will be able to meet this challenge in ways seen in some other countries, such as the United Kingdom or Canada, where principles of subsidiarity, citizen empowerment and community engagement are more established features of the political landscape. Given current constraints on local government's autonomy and resources, in many cases effective moves towards participatory governance may need leadership and support from outside.

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Representative Democracy in Australian Local Government

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Abstract

In an assessment of representative democracy in Australian local government, this paper considers long-run changes in forms of political representation, methods of vote counting, franchise arrangements, numbers of local government bodies and elected representatives, as well as the thorny question of constitutional recognition. This discussion is set against the background of ongoing tensions between the drive for economic efficiency and the maintenance of political legitimacy, along with more deep-seated divisions emerging from the legal relationship between local and state governments and the resultant problems inherent in local government autonomy versus state intervention.

Key words: *Representative democracy, vote counting methods, franchise criteria, constitutional recognition, councillors.*

1. Introduction

The question of representative democracy in Australian local government has been overshadowed by the debate over the major micro-economic and managerial reforms carried out during the 1990s (Kiss 2003). These reforms were designed primarily to ensure local councils better fulfilled one of the principal roles of local government, namely the efficient delivery of services to local communities

(Dollery *et al*. 2006). However, the second principal role of local government is to provide a forum for the practical expression of democratic values, in particular the representation of community interests both locally and, when appropriate, in wider regional contexts. Thus the reforms were also intended, at least ostensibly, to shift a previously widespread community perception of local councils as simply managers of local services and local infrastructure to one where this second principal role, as democratically representative bodies, gained in significance (Wensing 1997:37; Galligan 1998:205). While the micro-economic and managerial aspects of this structural reform process may have seen improved efficiencies (Dollery *et al*. 2008; Sorensen *et al*. 2007), there nonetheless remains palpable disquiet over what is perceived as the ongoing failure, or even a diminished capacity, on the part of local government to represent and respond to the needs expressed by local communities (May 2003:5). Kiss (2003:104) has argued that the representative legitimacy of local government has been "weakened instead of strengthened" by these reforms. In a slightly less critical vein, Aulich (1999:19) claimed that the dual roles of local government:

> … are often in tension: for instance, in relation to the controversial question of municipal amalgamations, the argument for larger local government units is usually based on the existence of economies of scale in service delivery. The opponents of amalgamations generally claim that there are diseconomies of scale in relation to the democratic values of representativeness, with large municipal units less responsive to community needs and aspirations than smaller ones.

If, as Aulich indicates, attempts to realise economic efficiencies have in themselves hindered representative democracy, and if representative democracy remains the bedrock of political liberty, then the autonomy of local government, and thereby the freedom of the community represented, appears under siege.

In addition to these contemporary Australian concerns, the ongoing question of whether local government should be fully self-governing or subject to the sovereignty of the state has haunted the political theory of local government since its inception. As Wickwar (1970:1-2) puts it:

> These antithetical positions run through the whole evolution of modern local government theory. They may be traced back to Western Europe's middle ages, when a tradition evolved of local liberties being in practice self-achieved, but … this tradition was soon overshadowed by a legal doctrine of local bodies being incorporated by the sovereign. They may also be traced back to the emergence of the early modern state, when a new classical political theory hesitated between thinking of local bodies as quasi-sovereign constituents of the state or as subordinate intermediary bodies between the sovereign and his subjects.

During the late eighteenth century, the French administrator Turgot developed a plan dividing France into four geographic levels of municipality: the village, the region, the province and the entire nation. Those owning property would elect a village council to administer the allocation of tax revenues for local public works improvements, which would in turn elect a representative to the next level of municipal government. With the historical shift occurring during that time from

aristocratic, monarchic to bourgeois, democratic forms of government, Turgot's plan soon became highly influential across Europe as well as in the United States and Britain. Under Napoleon's influence, however, the elected local representative was replaced with a centrally appointed administrator. Yet this approach was again generally reversed during the 1830s and 1840s. While Bentham in Britain emphasized the democratic principle of both central and local governments being responsible to the people, J.S. Mill argued that nonetheless local government should be open to investigation and advice from central government agencies. At the turn of the twentieth century, and contrary to the utilitarian centralism of Mill, a group of British Fabian socialists, including Sidney and Beatrice Webb, set out five principles for local government. As reported by Wickwar (1970:54-5), the fifth of those principles holds that:

> [l]ocal government thus constituted and freed from judicial, statutory, and sub-legislative restraints should enjoy as large a measure of freedom and dignity as possible. Even as it was, initiative and enterprise came as often from local as from central government. The principal historic units ought to be recognized as being true general-purpose authorities, exempt from the *ultra vires* doctrine applied to them by the law courts since the mid-nineteenth century … In particular they should be free to furnish their public with any service that they could afford, by way of self-financing 'municipal socialism' and the provision of all manner of free educational, cultural, and health facilities. The new invention of grants-in-aid could contribute to municipal liberty insofar as they were given on a 'block' instead of a 'specific' basis.

In light of these historically-entwined perspectives on local government autonomy and state intervention, we turn our attention to a discussion of different forms of local representation and their close relation to different methods of vote counting. We then consider trends in the form of representation and vote counting methods in the context of Australian local government, before examining historical shifts in the franchise. A further factor shaping the representative character of Australian local government concerns a declining trend in the number of Australian local government bodies and increasing representative: population ratios. In a final section we consider the current lack of federal constitutional recognition of Australian local government and its implications for representative democracy.

2. Forms of Representation and Vote counting Methods

The case for a direct, participatory model of democracy, similar to that practiced by the ancient Greeks, was strongly advocated by the Swiss philosopher, J.J. Rousseau, during the mid-eighteenth century. However, with much larger expanses of territory and population now at stake than the old Athenian city-state or Rousseau's Geneva, the model of representative democracy, first practiced in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century, has generally been accepted as that most suitable for preserving the democratic principle of political equality. The English-born Thomas Paine (1969:202), in support of the American model of representative democracy, observed that "[b]y ingrafting representation upon democracy, we arrive at a system of government capable of embracing and confederating all the various interests and every extent of territory and population."

Further prominent advocates of representative democracy at this time included the American James Maddison and the Englishman Edmund Burke. Both argued for what has become known as the trusteeship or corporate form of representation; a form which also implicates high levels of education in elected representatives. Maddison claimed that with large voting constituencies there was a greater chance those with talents and education would be elected (Phillips 2003:20). Burke maintained that elected representatives should be entrusted to make informed, independent judgments in the best interests of their constituents (Sawer 2003:39). In other words, freely-elected representatives should have the requisite knowledge and character to make such judgments, and, by virtue of election, are authorised to formulate policy and establish strategic directions on behalf of the social collective.

In defending this corporate, trusteeship form of representation, where the governing body is likened to a company board of directors, Burke and Maddison were also attempting to ensure that those elected would not simply be mouthpieces for particular interest groups or local parochial concerns. Yet those defending this phonographic or 'interest' form of representation, also known as populism, generally stand opposed to what they consider the educational elitism inherent in the idea of corporate trusteeship. They place great value on personal contact with the elected representative and the direct accountability of a member of parliament to those s/he represents rather than to any political party with which the representative may be aligned.

A third form of representation, known as the mirror form, was later advocated by J.S. Mill in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mill argued that the electoral system should make it possible for minority interests and opinions to be represented or mirrored on a proportional basis according to their numbers within an electorate. In common with Maddison and Burke, Mill's intention was to encourage a 'politics of ideas', where those with high intellectual capacities and independent modes of thinking would become elected representatives (Phillips 2003:21). Parliament, in Mill's view, should be a vigorous debating forum with various competing ideas. This is evident in Mill's opposition to proportional representation on the basis of social occupation, whereby parliament would more likely consist of so-called uneducated representatives drawn from the working classes. While Mill in no way denied that working class interests may be represented, his concomitant defence of property ownership as a key franchise criterion considerably reduced the possibility of such representation. Nevertheless, with the introduction of universal adult suffrage in Australia during the 1890s, the political representatives of the working classes became delegates whose views were to mirror party policy, which in turn reflected the interests of workers.

These forms of electoral representation are shaped to some degree by the particular method of vote counting used to determine successful candidates. As Burdess and O'Toole (2004:68) indicate, the two major means employed for this purpose are the majority and proportional methods. The former is a first-past-the-post, simple

majority, or if preferences are to be nominated, an absolute majority mode of selection. Since the majority method, with or without preferences, is generally applied when only a single successful candidate is possible, it often produces an 'interest' form of representation. This has been the case particularly in local government elections where the ratio of population to elected representatives, especially in rural and regional areas, is relatively low.

In the case of multi-member electorates, however, a proportional method of vote counting is more common. This method depends on a certain quota of votes being reached: a quota being calculated according to the ratio of possible votes to available positions, and where the votes of eliminated candidates are transferred, through preferences, to those remaining in the count. This method gives rise to a mirror form of representation, since it has the capacity to reflect or register a variety of different political viewpoints within electoral divisions that are more densely populated or perhaps more geographically extensive. Table 1 provides a tabulated summary of the relations between vote counting methods and the forms of representation to which they generally give rise.

Burdess and O'Toole (2004) illustrate the manner in which local government in the state of Victoria has, through its voting methods, passed from a long history of interest representation to a period of corporate representation during the 1990s, and more recently to a mirror or proportional form of representation. They argue that:

> A corporate view of representation is not dependent on one system [of vote counting] or the other but the type of system can skew representation in two significant ways. On the one hand, proportional systems may lead to unstable coalitions of minor groups who are often unable to agree on substantive issues. On the other hand, majority systems may skew the corporate representation towards limited interests in the community. (Burdess and O'Toole 2004:69)

Burdess and O'Toole also suggest (2004:75), as does Balmer (1982:12), that all three forms of representation may be embodied in the one elected representative and that, depending on a particular issue and its circumstances, a greater weighting may be attributed to the one or another.

Table 1: Vote counting and Representation in Australian Local Government.

	Majority	Majority Preferential	Proportional
Method of Vote Counting	Simple majority or first-past-the-post with no preferences counted	Absolute majority with preferences counted	Quota of necessary votes calculated according to ratio of possible votes to available positions and where votes of eliminated candidates are transferred, through preferences, to those remaining
States and Territory	Queensland, Western Australia	Northern Territory. New South Wales and Victoria when only one or two positions are to be decided. Queensland when only one position is to be decided.	New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania
Application	Both single and multi-member electorates	Both single and multi-member electorates	Multi-member electorates
Form of Representation	Often produces a 'phonographic' or 'interest' form of representation, also known as populism	Less prone to populism since preferential votes are counted	Generally gives rise to a 'mirror' form of representation where the views of different social groups are proportionally reflected

3. Trends in Vote counting Methods and Forms of Representation

No definitive answer to the question of which form of representation is most democratic appears possible. However, in recent years a general trend towards the proportional method of vote counting is evident. The Association for Good Government carried out a study of the 1971 New South Wales local government elections to determine whether those council areas using a majority-preferential (MP) method of vote counting achieved a better or worse representative outcome than where proportional representation (PR) had been employed. As cited in a 1981 ACIR discussion paper (No.5:16), the key finding of the Association was that:

> In every aspect of performance, examined in the survey, PR is superior to MP, generally by a very significant amount … In general, … the results of the survey show that … proportional representation (PR) consistently gives results that are far more satisfactory to the voters and far more just to the candidates than those with the majority-preferential method (MP).

Majority-preferential voting in multi-member electorates can lead to candidates with a small primary vote nonetheless being elected on second and third preferences, although, as Hughes and Costar (2006:69) indicate, this is usually rare. Burdess and O'Toole (2004:74-5) outline the support given to the proportional

method in Victoria by Labor Party ministers for local government in the late 1980s and again in 2002. They further indicate that the National Party has in recent years also lent support to the proportional or mirror form of representation, since some rural voters were said to be disenfranchised due to the overwhelming success of candidates from major regional centres in their electorate. Criticism of the proportional method is generally couched in terms of increased administrative complexities and opening the door to party political groupings in local government. Yet as the ACIR paper (1981:17) argued, candidates need to be aligned with particular or associated groups in their community, since without such support they stand little chance of election.

While each Australian state has made changes to its method of local government vote counting over the past century, four now use the proportional method for determining elected representatives in multi-member electorates. Two of these, Victoria and New South Wales, revert to the majority preferential method when only one or two positions are to be decided. South Australia and Tasmania, which once used the first-past-the-post and majority-preferential methods respectively, now employ the proportional method exclusively. Queensland and Western Australia use the simple majority or first-past-the-post method; however Queensland turns to majority- preferential voting when only one vacancy is to be decided. In the Northern Territory majority preferential voting is the norm (DOTARS 2006:12-13). Of the four states that employ the proportional method of vote counting and so appear to favour the mirror form of representation, only Tasmania has fully abolished the otherwise prevalent division of local government areas (electorates) into wards or ridings. In South Australia, according to figures from 2002, 85% of local government electorates still maintain such divisions. Victoria is recorded as having 81% of local electorates divided this way, and New South Wales 45% (Burdess and O'Toole 2004:68). Because any local government area may have a variety of combinations of single and multi-member wards or ridings, it remains difficult to gauge more precisely the overall extent of proportional representation in the three states that also use the majority-preferential method. However, data from Victoria in 2002 (Burdess and O'Toole 2004:72), indicated that over half the number of local council bodies had single member wards.

The move to 'whole-of-council' elections in certain states would also appear to strengthen the proportional, mirror form of representation. While ACIR (1981:13) indicated over twenty years ago that New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory then held whole-of-council elections every three years, three of the other states were still committed to annual elections at which one-third of representatives would retire or stand for re-election each year after their three-year term. In South Australia, half the representatives relinquished their post annually after a two-year term. The 2004 *Local Government National Report* (DOTARS 2004:8) indicates that New South Wales had moved to a four-year cycle, Queensland remained unchanged on a three-year cycle, while Victoria and South Australia had moved to whole-of-council elections every three years. Western

Australia and Tasmania now held a half council election every two years, while in the Northern Territory elections could vary between one and four years. Two years later, in the 2006 *Local Government National Report* (DOTARS 2006:12-13), four of the six states as well as the Northern Territory are reported as holding whole-of-council elections every four years. Western Australia and Tasmania remained unchanged with half-council elections every two years. The shift to whole-of-council elections every four years in Victoria and South Australia counters to some degree the interest form of representation otherwise prevalent in a ward system, where generally only one representative could be elected at any one time. For what is often at stake in that situation is not so much the exercise of good government by council as a whole, but simply the social standing and personal demeanor of individual candidates.

5. Historical Shifts in the Local Government Franchise

The franchise criteria evident at the time of federation, namely being a British subject of at least 21 years of age and being an owner of property, have been gradually modified during the course of the twentieth century. The age requirement for all tiers of government was reduced to 18 years across all states and territories during the early 1970s. At roughly the same time Victoria and South Australia both extended the local government franchise entitlement to include non-British subjects resident in the state. Western Australia followed suit with the proviso that non-British residents be nonetheless owners of property. The other three states, along with the Northern Territory, maintained being a British subject as a factor in determining any right to vote. Since 1984, however, being a British subject translates (except for those on a British or Commonwealth of Australia electoral roll prior to that year) as being on an Australian state or territory electoral roll; in other words, as being or having become an Australian citizen.

Property ownership as a criterion of franchise has a history stretching back to the pre-emergent condition of local governing bodies as road boards, which levied taxes on landholders for the construction and maintenance of local roads. With their transition to local governing bodies, taxes were extended to cover the provision of further services such as sewerage and waste disposal. Only genuine stakeholders in a local community, it was argued, namely those who paid such taxes or rates according to the value of their property or properties, should be entitled to vote and so have their interests represented in local council forums. This property-based franchise criterion also included those occupiers of land who directly paid rates, and the nominees of companies or corporations present in the electorate.

> In most States the maximum number of votes able to be exercised by an elector in any one capacity was twelve. However any property-owner who was registered as the nominee of a company or as a ratepaying lessee could also cast votes in these capacities. Further, where the local authority was subdivided into wards and property was held in a number of wards, then voting rights were extended to each ward (ACIR 1981:5).

The right to multiple votes based on the total value of property owned was first removed in New South Wales in 1906 (Power *et al*. 1981:31). Nevertheless, if properties were owned in more than one ward or riding within a local government area then the owner was still entitled to one vote in each of those wards. Also, additional votes could be cast if a property owner was also named as a corporate nominee. This modified form of plural voting was adopted in Western Australia in 1960, Victoria in 1968, South Australia in 1976, and Tasmania in 1978 (Power *et al*. 1981:31, 664, 724). Today, plural voting persists in Victoria and to a lesser extent Tasmania. New Local Government Acts passed during the 1990s by the New South Wales, South Australian and Western Australian governments retained a property franchise but applied the principle of one vote per voter across the entirety of any one local government area (Kiss 2003:113).

Queensland, however, abolished property ownership altogether as a franchise criterion and replaced it with that of residency and state electoral enrolment as early as 1920 (DOTARS 2006:13). Similarly in the Northern Territory, residency and territorial electoral enrolment are the sole criteria of franchise. Residency as a criterion of franchise was subsequently introduced in New South Wales in 1941, and while the other four States eventually followed, this did not occur in South Australia until as late as 1976 (Power *et al*. 1981:30-31), and in Victoria until 1982 (Kiss 2003:113). From an economic perspective, a key argument supporting residency as a criterion of franchise is that any rent paid to a property owner in return for lodgings effectively includes a proportion attributable to rates. A further argument is that the general-purpose grants allocated to local government by the Commonwealth are derived from personal income tax paid by all working residents.

While residency, age and citizenship have now become the dominant criteria of franchise in local government elections, property ownership remains a criterion in all States bar Queensland. In Western Australia and New South Wales, any non-resident property owner or occupier must nevertheless also meet the age and citizenship criteria. In Tasmania a voter satisfying these conditions may exercise the right to a proxy vote on behalf of a non-resident owner or occupier.

Overall, there was thus a marked decrease in the voting power of property owners during the second half of the twentieth century, and over the same period there was an increase in the number of eligible voters made possible through the introduction of the citizenship and residency criteria now applied in every state and the Northern Territory

6. Declining Numbers of Local Government Bodies and Councillors[1]

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[1] The term 'alderman' was previously used for elected representatives of some city and municipal councils. We also note that our focus in this paper concerns representative democracy generally and so does not engage in any specific consideration of women or indigenous representatives. Nevertheless it is evident over the last two decades that there has been a marked increase in the numbers of both.

During the late nineteenth century, prior to federation, local government bodies were established through both the voluntary petition of resident stakeholder groups to their respective state governments, and mandatory decree. Soon after federation, in the very early twentieth century, five of the six states, with the exception of South Australia, had introduced exclusive mandatory requirements. At this time, the number of local government bodies had reached a zenith. Since then, due to ongoing boundary alterations and amalgamations promoted by state and territory governments, numbers of councils have generally declined. In New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia this decline has been in the order of 50% or more, while in Tasmania it is close to 40%. Most recently, Queensland and the Northern Territory have undergone major reforms that have reduced the number of local governments by around 50% and 75% respectively. The changes in the Northern Territory, involving the amalgamation of small Indigenous community councils into new 'shires' covering vast areas of largely unpopulated land, could fairly be described as the most radical structural reform in Australian local government history. In Western Australia, by contrast, the number of local governing bodies has remained relatively steady since the time of federation with only a slight drop in numbers.

Table 2: Number of Local Councils in Australia 1910-2008.

	1910	1967	1982	1990	1995	2008
NSW	324	224	175	176	177	152
VIC	206	210	211	210	184	79
QLD	164	131	134	134	125	73
SA	175	142	127	122*	119	68
WA	147	144	138	138	144	142
TAS	51	49	49	46	29	29
NT	0	1	6	22	63	16

* Figure for 1991
Sources: Chapman (1997:4), May (2003:83), state local government department websites

This decline in the number of local government bodies has been accompanied by a corresponding reduction in the number of councillors. In Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria, the number of elected representatives has dropped by 37%, 31% and 73% respectively – that is, from 460 to 288, from 1100 to 760, and from 2196 to 589 (Kiss 2003:109). A further contributing factor in this decline, albeit with lesser impact, has been the sharp fall in the maximum limit of councillors for each council in all states except Queensland since the late 1970s. For 1981, Power *et al.* (1981:30) record limits for cities in New South Wales and South Australia of around 20 elected representatives, 15 in Tasmania, and 11 in Queensland. Without no limits for cities in Victoria and Western Australia, Melbourne City Council is then reported as having 33 councillors, while the councils of Perth and Fremantle comprised 28 and 19 councillors respectively. However, according to the 2006 *Local Government National Report* (DOTARS 2006:12), the maximum limit in New South Wales and Western Australia had been reduced to 15, and in Victoria 12, while the other states had no specified limit. Nevertheless, with the exception of Brisbane City Council, which currently consists of 27 councillors, all the other

capital city councils across the country currently have no more than twelve and in some instances only nine representatives. For smaller municipal and shire councils it would appear that the maximum limit has not varied significantly, except in Victoria where it has dropped from 18 to 12. Furthermore, over the past 35 years, the minimum number of councillors for all categories of councils has fallen from six to five in most states.

Thus the overall number of local government representatives across the country is far lower than in previous decades. More significantly, and in view of national population growth, this indicates that each elected member now represents a much larger number of voters than ever before. That varies considerably from state to state with those more heavily populated having a far greater ratio of population per elected representative. Figures again taken from the 2006 *Local Government National Report* (DOTARS 2006:14) show that in Victoria, which has experienced the greatest fall in the number of local government representatives, this ratio recently stood at 1:8053. In New South Wales, where the population is almost 40 per cent higher, but where there has been a less dramatic drop in the number of councillors, the ratio was 1:4432. For Queensland (before the recent halving of the number of councils), South Australia and Tasmania, these ratios came in at 1:3079, 1:2046, and 1:1710 respectively. In Western Australia, with only a very slight decline in the numbers of councils and representatives, the ratio stood at 1:1475. It is also evident, in view of the still relatively large number of small municipal and shire councils in non-metropolitan areas, and the recent decline in the number of councillors in many larger urban councils, that the more densely populated metropolitan areas have a significantly larger number of people being represented by each elected representative than in rural and regional Australia.

The question which emerges here is: does this declining trend in the numbers of local government bodies and councillors actually decreases the representative and thereby democratic character of local government? An immediate affirmative response, however, would seem far too simplistic. For with the franchise having now been extended to all resident adult citizens, and with the trend towards proportional, mirror representation, where different and various viewpoints have a better chance of being represented in local government, it may well be argued that the representative, democratic character of local government is in fact increasing. This is an issue requiring further investigation.

7. Constitutional Recognition and Local Government Autonomy

With ever-expanding strategic responsibilities over recent decades in the areas of economic, social and environmental planning, the significance of local councils in shaping the future well-being of their respective communities has been dramatically heightened. Not only has the managerial role of councils with regard to the efficient provision of services become more professionalised, but also councils have been actively encouraged to engage more fully with their community, to be more responsive to community needs, and so better fulfil their second major role of providing effective democratic representation. Certainly, since

the extension of the franchise to all residents, local government has come to see itself as increasingly responsible for the whole community and not just property owners. This widening social responsibility is also substantiated on economic grounds; namely local government's expanded revenue base due to the provision of Commonwealth general-purpose grants derived in part from personal income tax (ACIR 1981:6). The significance of local councils as governing democratic bodies has also been recognized, at least to some extent, through the current emphasis on inter-government partnership arrangements with both state and Commonwealth governments. The major political manifestation of this partnership arrangement is the participation of the peak local government body, the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The steps leading to this still informal recognition of local government as a third tier of government have been long and arduous. Perhaps the first sign of recognition came with the Whitlam government's 1974 referendum on whether the Commonwealth should have the right to provide direct grants to local councils. Despite overwhelming rejection, the referendum nonetheless brought increased attention to the role of local government. This is nowhere more evident than in the Fraser government's establishment in 1976 of the Advisory Council for Inter-government Relations (ACIR). An indirect effect of the information and discussion papers thereafter published by ACIR was the formal recognition of local government in four state constitutions: Victoria and Western Australia in 1979, South Australia in 1980, and New South Wales in 1986 (Chapman 1997:6). However, while enhancing the status of local government in the four states, none of those constitutional amendments, achieved simply through an Act of parliament, guarantees local government any basic powers (ACIR 1985:9).

With this in mind, and despite potential challenges in the High Court over the interpretation of any reference to local government that might be inserted in the Commonwealth constitution, ACIR went on to recommend that recognition of local government be entrenched therein on the grounds that this would "explicitly draw attention to the complementary nature of the three spheres of government and implicitly point to their status as partners in the Australian governmental system" (1985:15). Just such a proposition was put to the Australian people in the referendum of 1988, only to be soundly rebuffed. Indeed the 1987 Constitutional Commission had already made the point that such a proposal would institute a third sphere of government leading to counter-productive competition with the states (Chapman 1997:6). In view of previous displays of opportunistic behaviour on the part of all levels of government, Chapman similarly throws doubt on their capacity to engage in any genuine collaborative effort to achieve effective local policy outcomes. For this reason, he argues that "the rational allocation of responsibilities, optimistically espoused by the ACIR publications, is not really viable" (Chapman 1997:12). Nonetheless the failure to recognize the autonomy of local government in the Commonwealth constitution severely undermines its democratic legitimacy.

Whilst the legislative reforms of the 1990s conferred some degree of 'general competence' power on local councils, that is, allowed councils a modicum of autonomy with respect to planning for and managing their local populace, their activities are still strictly controlled within the limits of state government legislation. Under these conditions, those elected to local government are often viewed as nothing more than the political and economic executors of policies emerging from their respective state governments. Moreover, local councils remain subject to the possibility of summary dismissal through ministerial fiat or a legislative act of state parliament, which further reinforces the public perception of local government as nothing more than a subsidiary, administrative arm of state government. This perception is largely borne out by the relatively small numbers voting at local government elections and is a significant factor undermining the democratic legitimacy of local government. While voting is compulsory in New South Wales, Queensland and more recently Victoria, available data (ACIR 1981:9) suggest that this still only results in somewhere between 65 and 85% of all eligible voters turning out to vote. In those other states where voting remains voluntary, the corresponding numbers range from as low as 5 to 40% (ACIR 1981:9). With higher numbers of voters in those states where voting is compulsory, there is less risk of minority interest groups gaining control of a council and some confidence that the results reflect the views of the electorate. Formal recognition of local government autonomy in the Commonwealth constitution could go a long way to changing the current public perception of local government and might thus encourage greater electoral participation.

8. Concluding Remarks

The trend away from a property-based franchise and plural voting to one based on residency and one person-one vote has enhanced the representative legitimacy of local government. In addition, shifts towards a proportional method of vote counting in whole-of-council elections have brought about greater representation of different community views. Further, the division of local government areas into wards or ridings may ensure that different geographical areas are well represented, although this system may tend to favour the phonographic or direct interest form of representation with its inherent parochialism, especially when only one candidate is to be elected and the majority method of vote counting is employed. On the other hand, there has been a marked decline in the number of councils and councillors in many states due to local government reforms initiated by state governments and ongoing boundary adjustments. This has resulted in increased representative : population ratios, particularly in densely populated metropolitan areas, and may have decreased the representative, democratic capacity of local governing bodies, although the proportional, mirror form of representation may obviate this problem to some degree.

Alongside these ongoing difficulties in determining the best form of representative democracy for Australian local government, a serious flaw in current arrangements is the lack of Commonwealth constitutional recognition of local government as a third and autonomous sphere of government. As May (2003:85) puts it in reference

to an observation made by Stephen Soul (2000): "[w]ithout constitutional backing, Australian local government institutions cannot be truly regarded as legitimate democratic entities."

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Indicators of Community Cohesion in an Australian Country Town

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Abstract

While the notion that communities require resources in the form of financial capital for their development and wellbeing has long been recognised, it has become increasingly apparent that economic resources alone do not lead to community sustainability and wellbeing. The building and supporting of strong, safe, socially cohesive communities that embrace social connections and commitment, has become an important goal of policy and initiatives at all levels of government. The aims of this study were to identify a common understanding of the concept of 'community cohesion', and to develop a set of indicators based on both the experiences of residents in a rural community and the relevant contemporary academic literature. Because community cohesion is an intangible concept subject to multiple meanings, qualitative research methods were used. We identified four main themes which could be translated into the key indicators. The most significant finding is that neighbourliness was identified by participants as the key aspect of community cohesion. Yet, whilst it is central, this does not mean excessive familiarity or the taking of liberties. Indeed, part of neighbourliness involves respecting each other's boundaries and respect for diversity.

Key words: *Indicators, community cohesion, social exclusion/inclusion, social capital.*

1. Introduction

While the notion that communities require resources in the form of financial capital for their development and wellbeing has long been recognised, it has become increasingly apparent that economic resources alone do not lead to community sustainability and wellbeing. This re-evaluation has led to the recognition that combinations of resources are needed to foster community wellbeing, including natural capital, economic capital, institutional capital, human capital and social capital. Of these various capitals, social capital is the least concrete but can be understood to mean the social networks that link people to form a cohesive community (Stone and Hughes 2002a).

In Australia concerns about social capital and community cohesion have emerged as an area of key interest to a large number of government agencies aiming to combine community building and a whole of government approach to policy (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2002). Indeed, the building and supporting of strong, safe, socially cohesive communities which embrace social connections and community life, has become an important goal of policy and initiatives at all levels of government, including local government. But how are strong, safe, socially cohesive communities measured? What are the indicators of such communities? As noted in the 2004 report *Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria* (Strategic Policy and Research Unit 2004), although there is useful information regarding tools for measuring such concepts, few indicators for determining community cohesion have been institutionalised in Australia.

The authors were approached by a small inland local council in Northern New South Wales to develop a set of indicators of community cohesion for a particular locality in the local government area, which could then be used by the council's social planners in order to develop strategies aimed at increasing safety and cohesiveness. The population of this locality is approximately 12,000 persons with a median age of 35, and a median weekly household income of $600 - $699 (ABS 2001). Research has identified this area as being in the top 30 most disadvantaged areas in New South Wales and Victoria (Baum *et al.* 2002; Vinson 2004).

Community cohesion is an intangible concept subject to multiple meanings. Thus its definition can pose problems for quantitative (statistical) approaches, though these are useful for measurement once meanings and definitions have been decided upon. Important inroads have been made in this respect in the UK (Coutts *et al.* 2007; Home Office Community Cohesion Unit 2003). However, qualitative research methods are more appropriate when the aim is to tap into people's perceptions, experiences and understandings. Quantitative methods have made a valuable contribution to the field in the UK by operationalising and developing measures of community cohesion as expressed through a national target – Public Service Agreement 21 (Cabinet Office Third Sector 2007). Qualitative methods can complement this work by eliciting and interpreting meanings which can then be translated into indicators.

Of initial importance to this research project was defining and determining what is commonly meant by the concepts of 'community' and 'community cohesion'. This was done through reviewing relevant contemporary academic literature and consulting with the targeted community. Subsequently, key questions were developed in an attempt to determine social issues that currently impact on local residents. These were then put to the participants in the project, and from this data, indicators of community cohesion identified. There is a paucity of research using this approach, particularly in the Australian setting. This study, then. lends a new dimension to the existing body of work.

The theoretical framework for this qualitative research project is underpinned by the conviction that consulting with the community is the most effective method of arriving at sound conclusions that reflect the understandings and wishes of the public. This in turn is based on an epistemological position derived from feminist methodology, which holds that knowledge gained from the standpoint of the individual's experience is valid and must be taken into account (Haraway 1991). This aligns well with Giddens' (whose views have had considerable influence on social policy in the UK) notion of individuals as 'knowledgeable agents' (Giddens 1984). That is, individuals are imbued with a great deal of knowledge about their social world and are capable of exercising meaningful choices (Bilton *et al.* 1996). Data was collected using a three-pronged strategy, using structured questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Each of these methods has a particular strength, and using more than one method allows a more valid outcome as it produces additional information as well as the opportunity to check and confirm data.

2. Background

The areas of concern to this study relate to four closely linked concepts: community, social capital, community cohesion and social inclusion/exclusion. Issues relating to all four concepts play a key role in addressing social concerns within communities (Bridge *et al.* 2003; Harkness and Newman 2003; Nevile 2003; Vinson 2004; Waters 2001).

The concept of *community* as an aspect of group life has been defined by Hunt and Colander (1996:129) as "a group of people who live in a local area and who therefore have certain interests and problems in common." The ABS (2002:5) notes that the concept of community can "refer to either place-based or non-place-based communities." Place based communities are considered to exist at geographic levels such as in neighbourhoods, workplaces, suburbs, towns, districts and regions, states and countries and even globally. Non-place communities are considered to consist of groups with common interests such as sports clubs and issue-based action groups (ABS 2002). This study used a place-based definition, which was regarded as more appropriate given that the community being studied was defined geographically, with its own set of particularities and characteristics.

Although the notion of 'community' is often associated with connotations that involve caring and cooperation between neighbours, this is not always the case. For

example, the German sociologist Frederick Toennies identified two forms of community: *gemeinschaft* in which a common set of values involving caring and cooperation are shared between community members; and *gesellschaft* in which relationships between community members are uncaring and distant. Nevertheless, the notion of community is more often ascribed to a largely 'traditional' and cohesive way of life in which people know one another and hold common values in relation to their local area (Hunt and Colander 1996).

Community cohesion involves interdependence and shared loyalties between members of a community (Stone and Hughes 2002a). As noted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004), the closely linked terms 'social cohesion' and 'community cohesion' refer to the social ties and community commitments that bind people together. The concept of community cohesion can be defined as the interdependence and solidarity between members of a society (Berger-Schmitt 2000). The broad definition of a cohesive community set out by the United Kingdom Local Government Association (UK LGA) is one that includes: a common vision and a sense of belonging; appreciation of diversity of backgrounds and circumstances; similar life opportunities for all people not dependent on background; and a community where strong relationships can be developed between people from diverse backgrounds within workplaces and schools, as well as within the broader community (UK LGA 2003). Stone and Hughes (2002a) note that social cohesion is concerned with the connections and relationships between individuals, groups and organizations within a community. A lack of community cohesion occurs when there are divisions between social groups, individuals and systems within it, with social exclusion seen as a threat to a cohesive society (Stone and Hughes 2002a).

Closely related to the concept of community cohesion is the notion of *social capital*. According to the ABS, social capital "consists of networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within and among groups". It is a contributor to community strength and wellbeing, and can be accumulated when people interact with one another formally and informally; for example informal interaction with family and friends and formal interaction in groups and organisations in the wider community (ABS 2004). Bridge *et al.* (2003:97) state that "social capital is a concept of current enquiry, research and debate…and has been defined as social connectedness from which arise norms of trust and reciprocity." Putnam (2000:19) claims that the "core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value." Similarly, Bullen and Onyx (1998) note that social capital originates through the social connections and networks that people form that are based on trust, mutual interests, participation and reciprocity within the wider community thus fostering a sense of belonging. Hawtin and Kettle (2000) argue that the concept of social capital is based on the notion that societies and individuals can only achieve their potential when living and working together. An important aspect of this is the extent to which citizens can take an active part in shaping their own lives and engaging in their community.

> Successful inclusionary policies, therefore, are not possible unless residents not only feel safe, secure and comfortable but also feel they belong, have ownership of what is going on, feel proud of where they live, do not feel oppressed and feel able to control their living environment (Hawtin and Kettle, 2000:122).

Although the concept of social capital is not new – it was first used by Coleman (1988) and later by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) – there is renewed concern regarding it as a key contributor to both the social and economic well-being of a community (Bridge *et al.* 2003). In Australia, Eva Cox (1995:3) highlighted the concept of social capital in the 1995 Boyer lectures where she noted:

> Social capital should be the pre-eminent and most valued form of any capital as it provides the basis on which we build a truly civil society. Without our social basis we cannot be fully human. Social capital is as vital as language for human society.

Table 1: Community Cohesion and Social Capital Compared

Community Cohesion	Social Capital
A *state* of integration based on: • interdependence • solidarity	A trust *resource*: • developed through social connectedness • contributes to the building of community cohesion

Where there is a lack of social capital some researchers believe there is also little social and community cohesion, which in turn can lead to social exclusion. For example, the Affordable Housing National Research Consortium (AHNRC) (2001:19) notes that where there is limited community cohesion due to a lack of social capital, "segments of the community will experience social exclusion; in effect they will be prevented from full participation in the life of the community." *Social exclusion* provides a framework for understanding the process of being shut out fully or partially from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems that determine the social integration and inclusion of a person in society (Byrne 1999). The concept of social exclusion focuses on the individual, and the extent to which an individual's experiences are exclusionary in regard to their relationships with other individuals, institutions and systems that make up communities (Stone and Hughes 2002b). Social exclusion may therefore be seen as the denial (or non-realisation) of social engagement within one's community.

Arthurson and Jacobs (2003:i) note that in general terms "social exclusion is understood to denote a set of factors and processes that accentuate material and social deprivation", and can be used in relation to communities as well as individuals. Nornen (cited in Vinson 2004:4) argues that the social exclusion of some communities in Australia has implications for all Australians. Social exclusion is seen to breed social alienation, and unless this is addressed in policy some Australians, along with some neighbourhoods, will continue to experience social disadvantage and exclusion. Marsh (2004) links the two concepts of social exclusion and community cohesion, claiming that exploring and addressing issues of exclusion will lead to an increase in stability within communities.

The need to develop and use community indicators to improve community cohesion and wellbeing has been identified in recent research:

> Collecting indicators that measure whether people get on well together, share a common vision and sense of belonging, appreciate diversity and have strong, positive relationships are critical to understanding community cohesion (UK LGA 2003:4).

Community cohesion indicators are tools for governments and communities to use to translate broad goals into clear, tangible and commonly understood outcomes; and to assess and communicate progress in achieving these goals and outcomes (Wiseman *et al.* 2005). The Discussion Paper: *Measuring Wellbeing, Engaging Communities* (Wiseman *et al.* 2005:3) for example, states that "we need an integrated, long term strategy for local communities to use community indicators to improve wellbeing outcomes." This view is reiterated in the *Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria* report (Strategic Policy and Research Unit 2004:7), where it is noted that "the absence of indicators can mean that important issues drop off the radar."

Local councils in Australia are increasingly interested in indicators of community cohesion. For example, in New South Wales, Camden Council (2006) has developed five broad sustainability indicators which encompass various elements of community wellbeing. Marrickville Council, also in NSW, covers aspects of community cohesion in its 'Belonging' Social Plan (2004). For example, this council's vision for the community is one where people feel safe and valued, feel a sense of pride in the cultural diversity of the area, and have a feeling of trust, cooperation and involvement in contributing to broader community affairs.

This reflects an important indicator of social wellbeing identified by Burke and Hulse (2002), namely the degree to which people see their local area as having a sense of community in terms of feeling safe and secure and feeling a part of it. Other indicators identified by Burke and Hulse include: having close friends/family living locally, having children at local schools, keeping informed of local issues, and using local parks and other services (Burke and Hulse 2002). According to Hirschfield and Bowers (1997) direct indicators of a lack of community cohesion include the inability to supervise and control teenage peer groups, the absence of local friendship and acquaintance networks, and the absence of local participation in formal and voluntary organisations; while indirect indicators include a high population turnover, social heterogeneity and low socio-economic status.

3. Methodology

As noted in the Introduction, this research project adopted a qualitative approach which is interpretive in nature and utilises data in the form of text and phrases (Neuman 2000). As the aim of the project was to identify a common understanding of the concept of 'community cohesion', and to develop a set of indicators based on both the experience of residents in the targeted community and the relevant

contemporary academic literature, the researchers utilised the following methods: documentary searches to review the current literature; administering questionnaires to residents; conducting focus groups with residents; and conducting interviews with key service providers.

A convergent approach was utilised in relation to the research process (Dick 2006). This process began with asking an open-ended question that had been decided previously to generate initial discussion. In all methods of data gathering, this initial question was: *What do you think makes a community good to live in?* This allowed respondents to answer spontaneously without any kind of prior cue. A list of probing questions was also developed so that further information could be obtained and clarified. Focus groups and interviews were then conducted, building on the earlier consultations, after the researchers had identified and reviewed key areas that needed further clarification and discussion. The results of the initial research provided insights about the central concerns of respondents, which further assisted with the direction of subsequent focus groups and interviews.

Sampling and data gathering

Non-probability convenience sampling was utilised to access participants for the research (Neuman 2000). Sampling took place in three ways. For the questionnaire, the researchers on three occasions and at different times of day attended a local shopping centre that could be reasonably expected to be frequented by most residents, and invited shoppers who were residents over the age of 18 to complete the questionnaires. The researchers were assisted by two Indigenous trainee staff members of the relevant local council. The trainees were part of the targeted community and their presence was designed to ensure indigenous people were included in the research. Ethical clearance for the trainees to assist was sought and given. Potential participants for the focus groups were recruited by informing the leaders of established community groups, representing a range of ages and interests, about the project. Participants for the interviews with service providers were identified through contact by the local council's community services team.

Data was collected from December 2006 to February 2007. The study sample covered a broad cross-section of the population and included representatives from seniors and retired people, families raising children and teenagers, community organisations and clubs, and indigenous people. Specific groups are not named in order to ensure confidentiality. Other measures central to ethical research included giving a clear explanation of the research, ensuring negotiated access, and respecting human dignity and privacy (Mauthner 1998).

Questionnaires were used as they can easily be administered to a cross section of the community (Bryman 2004; Dick 2006). The questionnaires were presented face-to-face in a structured manner, thus ensuring that each respondent was asked the same questions in the same order. This is important because it ensures consistency (Bryman 2004). The questionnaires took around 15 minutes to

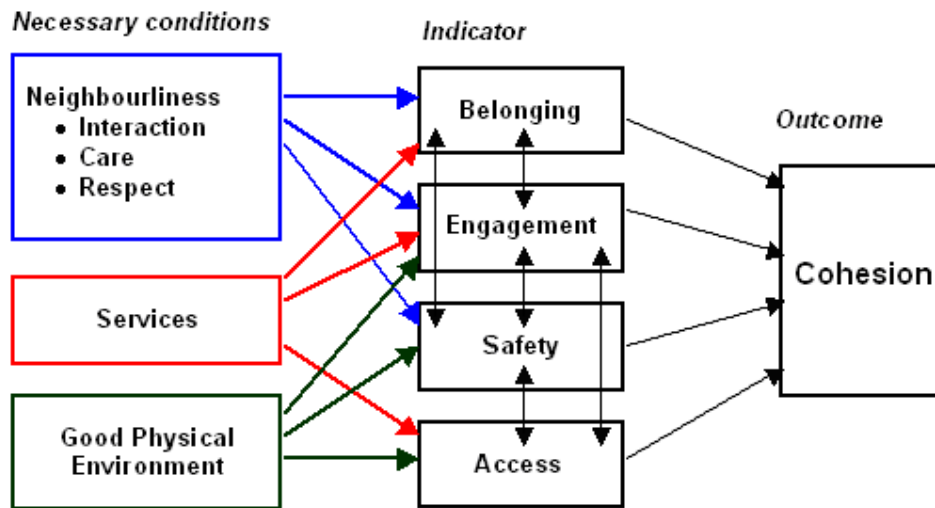complete. In all, 52 questionnaires were completed. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix 1.

Focus groups were similarly selected for their usefulness in research exploring the experiences of a particular group or community, as they provide insights into specific areas and are an effective method of gaining a deep understanding of a situation relatively quickly (Neuman 2000). Numbers participating in the focus groups varied between 5 and 14, with a total of three focus groups held and 29 participants in all. The focus groups included a diverse sample of the target population. The groups were guided by a schedule (see Appendix 2). Answers were recorded on audiotape and notes taken to ensure accuracy (Puchta and Potter 2004). Each focus group ran for around one hour.

Three *in-depth interviews* were conducted with key service providers who have intimate knowledge of the targeted community. The in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face and guided by a schedule. They each took no longer than one hour to complete. The interviews were taped and then transcribed verbatim to provide an accurate account of each interview (Minichiello *et al.* 1996). Consistent with approved methods of handling qualitative data (Ashton-Shaeffer 2001; Rubin and Rubin 1995), transcripts from the interviews and focus groups, along with the responses to the questionnaires, were analysed and coded with key themes identified.

This was a small study, covering just one part of a local government area. The sample size was also relatively small and not strictly representative. Further research needs to be conducted across a range of localities and local government areas to take forward the findings of this study and develop robust indicators of community cohesion. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches should be applied.

4. Findings: Key Themes and Indicators

We identified four main themes woven through all types of data collected. These themes subsequently became the key indicators of community cohesion. They are: *a sense of belonging; engagement; perception of safety;* and *access.* The research further identified the conditions that are necessary in order for community cohesion to exist. These are reflected in the figure below. It can be seen that the necessary conditions feed into more than one indicator, whilst the indicators themselves are related to each other. Further research is needed to develop ways of measuring each indicator, perhaps using some of the questions from our questionnaire as a starting point.

While the study is primarily qualitative in nature, descriptive statistics can be applied to the questionnaire results, as summarised below.

- 40% of respondents had no family members living close by, 21% had only one family member nearby, and 40% had two or more relatives nearby
- Nearly 82% answered that they had friends living in the local area
- Almost 50% of respondents spoke with their neighbours frequently, while only 5% had almost no contact. Yet all felt they could ask their neighbours for help if they needed to
- 94% of respondents were aware of the services that are available in the local area.
- About half belonged to groups or clubs, and about half had attended a community event
- Approximately one third of respondents undertook voluntary work
- 86% stated that they felt like they are a part of the community.

The discussion which follows is organized according to the four themes, which are analysed in further detail and related to the literature. Some of the conditions necessary for community cohesion contribute to more than one indicator, and this overlap needs to be borne in mind. We attempt to flag where this occurs without repeating previous discussion. However, we begin our discussion with defining the concept of community cohesion as identified through participants' responses across all three research methods.

Defining community cohesion

As noted, all participants in each method were asked the same initial question: *What do you think makes a community good to live in?* Answers included:

- A sense of belonging, a sense of community

- Good services – including shops, schools, sports fields and parks
- Community centres/activities centres/meeting places, gatherings of people
- Supportive neighbours, knowing people
- Perception of safety
- Acceptance of, and respect for, people from diverse backgrounds
- Engaging with others in the community (both formally and informally)
- Common goals, mutual respect
- A sense of pride in the community
- Help and community support that is available in times of need.

It can be seen that these answers align closely with the literature discussed earlier. Therefore, common understandings of community cohesion appeared to reflect and confirm earlier research and could be translated into indicators. These are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: List of indicators

A sense of belonging - indicated by:
- Neighbourliness
    - High level of interaction with neighbours, friends and family
    - An ethic of care (offering support and help)
    - Mutual respect: observing boundaries, acceptance of diversity, community consultation
- Ownership
- Sense of pride

Community engagement - indicated by:
- Volunteering
- Use of services
- Attendance at community events

A perception of safety – indicated by:
- Low official crime rate
- Residents' expression of feeling safe

Access to resources – indicated by:
- Adequate service provision
- Built environment that promotes ease of physical mobility
- Provision for socially disadvantaged residents

A sense of belonging

The feeling of having a sense of belonging was a very important factor identified in relation to what makes a community good to live in. Nearly all respondents expressed some level of a sense of belonging to at least some part of the community in which they live. One of the influencing factors of a sense of belonging as noted in this study, and confirmed in other research into people's attachment to community, is the level of integration and involvement in the local area (Cuba and Hummon 1993; Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls 1997; Soloman and Steinitz 1986). For example, Cuba and Hummon (1993) note that local social involvements, particularly those with friends and neighbours, but also those that

involve family, membership of organisations and local shopping facilities and services, are evident as being the most consistent and significant sources of ties to a community. Many of these factors are discussed further in relation to community connection and engagement. The data from our research confirms this, revealing three primary factors as contributing to a sense of belonging. They are (in order of importance): neighbourliness (including the presence of family and friends), ownership, and a sense of pride.

Neighbourliness

Residents overwhelmingly cited neighbours and neighbourliness as the foundation of a strong community. This was perhaps the most striking aspect of the research. We saw that most respondents to the questionnaire had some interaction with their immediate neighbours and most could ask for some kind of help: 'helping in times of trouble' arose a significant number of times in the data. The research showed neighbourliness as comprising three aspects: interaction, a sense of care (offering support and help), and an ethic of mutual respect, which includes an acceptance of diversity.

Interaction can occur in formal settings, as when a person is a member of a club or committee, or it can occur informally, as in contact with family, friends and neighbours. Such contacts can range from simple greetings to more complex interactions and have been cited in the literature as important to community cohesion (Cuba and Hummon 1993; Putnam 1998). Nearly all participants knew their neighbours and most had some kind of interaction with them. Furthermore, the vast majority of respondents had friends living nearby, whilst over half had at least one family member living nearby. The fact that many participants believed they could ask their neighbours for help points to the caring aspect of neighbourliness. Keeping an eye on neighbours' houses whilst they were away, minding children, making loans of equipment and assisting in emergencies are demonstrations of a sense of care, and these are practices that also occur between friends and family members.

However, interaction and care are not sufficient by themselves to maintain good relations between neighbours, family or friends. If there is an absence of mutual respect, relations may suffer. Respect is shown by observing certain boundaries, for example, in standards of civility and public behaviour. Negative incidents of vandalism, petty crime and violence were reported during the course of the research. It appears that in some parts of the community where we conducted our research, it is common for fences to be broken to gain access to another street. This may have something to do with the way public spaces are physically organized (see *Access* indicator), but it also constitutes a transgression of physical boundaries. There is also a symbolic transgression of boundaries in instances of rudeness, and it is self-evident that without mutual respect, a sense of belonging cannot flourish.

Respect is also manifested in an acceptance of diversity. The degree of diversity within the targeted locality was noted by participants in all research methods and

was seen by some residents as having a negative impact on the cohesiveness of the community. Many participants identified the diversity of socio-economic status within the area, noting as one resident did: "You have the wealthy and the disadvantaged living here which can cause problems." Another participant also spoke about disadvantage observing: "the obvious social disadvantage of some members of the community." The UK LGA (2003) concluded that the more socio-economically diverse a community, the more likely it is to experience inter-community and inter-neighbourhood tension. Some reasons for this may be attitudinal, as in a lack of acceptance of difference, or there may be a lack of opportunity for integrating diverse groups. For example, diversity in relation to age groups was identified as an issue for some residents. One older resident mentioned being isolated within their immediate community, which comprises only older people. This means that people of diverse ages have limited opportunity and occasion to interact. Another resident was similarly concerned about prospects for interaction between different age groups, and also brought up the issue of cost, asserting: "We need to initiate contact between the kids and older residents – in the schools too. Have Grandma and Grandpa Days where the elderly come and visit the kids in school…and it doesn't cost money."

Diversity between generations can also impact on perceptions of safety. For example, some older people feel threatened by "groups of young people who can be quite destructive at times." This can limit older people's level of having a sense of belonging because they can be fearful about engaging in activities within their community (Kawachi and Kennedy 1997). Kawachi and Kennedy (1997) argue that social ties and trust within the community are weakened through social exclusion and disadvantage, which can become one factor in committing crime. This concern is addressed further in the discussion related to perception of safety with the community. However, at this point we have attempted to establish that intolerance as shown by a lack of acceptance of diversity is a form of disrespect which mitigates against neighbourliness.

Ownership and pride

A sense of ownership emerged as crucial to sense of belonging to a given community. This was cited by many of the participants as being a key factor in promoting community cohesion: "The community needs to have a sense of ownership."

One service provider pointed out that for that section of the population who live in public housing, there is little choice in where they live and very little chance of ever acquiring their own homes. Ownership gives one a stake in a locality and provides a motivation for establishing good relationships (Bridge *et al.* 2003). The research showed that a sense of ownership is not necessarily contingent upon private property rights, but can also be fostered by having a choice about where one lives, and by being consulted about issues that directly affect residents. Members in each of the focus groups commented on the need for the local council to involve residents more in decision-making. By being consulted, people are given a sense

of ownership of a project and in turn feel pride in what they have accomplished. This pride then flows over into the community.

Indeed, a feeling of pride was named by respondents in all research methods as part of what defines a good community. Pride can only be felt in relation to something one feels a part of, and therefore it is an important ingredient of a sense of belonging. An example of how ownership and pride can enhance community cohesion was found at one of the sporting clubs, where young people were involved in the refurbishing and painting of the toilet facilities, which had been consistently vandalized for a long period. One participant said: "They painted it all up – put a mural on it and it hasn't been touched since. It's given them a sense of ownership."

Community engagement

We found that most participants cited involvement in community life as essential to community cohesion. Engagement can include three distinct factors: volunteering, using services and attending events. We found that volunteering was most commonly seen as promoting social bonds through service and membership of groups such as clubs. Although not all residents who participated in this study were involved formally in clubs and groups, they were engaged in the community in informal ways. This is particularly evident in the responses to the questionnaires, which asked whether residents know their neighbours. The majority not only knew their neighbours, they also had close and frequent contact with at least one of them. This data would therefore signify that even if residents were not members of a formal sporting club or group (about half were), or not involved in official voluntary work (around one third volunteer in an official capacity), they are still connected to, and involved in supporting their community at an informal level. This aligns well with the literature. For instance, Putnam (1998) distinguishes between formal and informal social networks with formal ties including those with voluntary organisations and informal ones being those of family, friends and neighbours. These informal networks can be identified and measured by how often friends and neighbours are visited, as well as through belonging and participating in groups and clubs (Baum *et al.* 2000).

Volunteering

As noted above, many residents do engage in formal activities such as volunteering which can contribute to engagement with one's community. One resident pointed out: "People who contribute to their community through volunteering tend to be the ones who are most engaged." As noted by ABS (2002, p.13): "volunteering may be seen as an expression of reciprocity or potentially as a direct outcome of social capital. The act of volunteering demonstrates a balance between individuals' self interest and public interest." Volunteering can also assist in breaking down barriers between diverse groups within a community, which in turn can contribute to community cohesion in terms of belonging and mutual respect. One resident identified this issue when explaining why they like to volunteer: "You get to meet a

cross section of the community." Indeed, in this study volunteering was seen as a key determinant in indicating a strong community. For example, one participant pointed out: "Maybe that's actually a barometer of how healthy the community is or how it engages – in how people feel about giving up their time to volunteer." Another said: "When people volunteer they often find out that it's a good way to engage – through their kids – and they get to know more about their community."

Some participants had concerns about the concept of volunteerism with one noting: "I don't think that volunteerism should take the place of a paid position"; further commenting that: "volunteers need to be well supported." This signals an element of cynicism in the community. Some participants are aware that the discourse of community cohesion can be used by central governments to legitimise cost cutting in the name of handing back control to the grass roots level.

Use of services and attendance at community events

The uptake of services and attendance at community events feeds into both belonging and engagement by providing residents with opportunities to come together, interact and participate. The shopping centres were the most widely used service, but other services that were significant included health services (community health, early childhood, dental and medical services), sporting facilities, clubs, parks, schools, the library, walking paths and transport. Services which were not available but identified as needed were a youth centre, a swimming pool, better transport, policing, meeting places and services for young children.

Half of the respondents to the questionnaire had attended a community event in the last year. The events cited were a community BBQ, a residents' Christmas party, sports events and events for seniors. Those who did not attend gave reasons such as being too busy, being unaware of the event, or that the event was not relevant to their interests or age group. It would thus seem that a range of well-publicised events that appeal to the various social groups could help to promote engagement.

Perception of Safety

Importantly, the research confirmed that having a level of community connection was a major factor in of perceptions of safety (Haigh 2006).

Residents' sense of feeling safe

For the older residents in this study, especially, a sense of safety was of particular significance. Some older people spoke about not feeling safe in their homes, with several telling of their experiences of intruders and incidents of burglaries and theft. One older resident believed that: "Thieving and vandalism are the biggest problems in our community." Another older resident asserted: "Whatever's not bolted to the ground gets stolen."

However, it was not only older residents who were concerned with safety. This was a key issue identified in all of the focus groups and raised by many of the residents in the questionnaires, as well as in the in-depth interviews. For example, one resident in a focus group said: "I wouldn't go out walking after dark." This comment led to all-round agreement from the other participants: "Yes, safety of a night is an issue." More lighting was one solution identified as being needed to help address issues of safety.

If people do not feel safe in their home, this has consequences on a larger scale. For example, this can impact on the level of a person's engagement with their community because, as explained by one participant: "If you're sitting in your house and you're really fearful it's unlikely that you're going to engage with the community." Another participant explained the connection between their immediate living environment and the wider community this way: "Some people are fearful about where they are living and that impacts upon their perceptions of the community."

Crime rates

It seems clear that a low rate of crime might be a partial measure of a sense of safety. Many residents were concerned that crime was on the increase, with some suggesting ways to address crime. These focused chiefly on a greater police presence in the area. Apart from official policing, suggestions included installing security cameras in key areas such as shopping centres and sporting clubs, or community-based projects such as Neighbourhood Watch. This is consistent with other research into crime reduction within communities. For example, according to Graycar (1999) two key features of crime prevention are: involving community members in projects and committees (engagement), and the creation of opportunities to enable all members to live, work and socialise – to participate – without feeling threatened or being harassed (mutual respect).

Access to Resources

Community connection not only needs to include reducing perceptions of fear of crime through community involvement, but also overcoming the isolation of some individuals. To this end, accessible neighbourhoods and communities have been identified as important for a cohesive community (Haigh 2006). In this project, residents identified access as being of key importance, particularly in relation to the provision of services, but also in terms of having the material means to access these services.

Provision of services

Most residents are aware of services that are currently available in the targeted community. However, as noted by some participants, accessing these services can be problematic if they do not have their own transport, especially at night and on weekends. One participant said: "I think there's enough in the way of services, but

accessibility is another story. There's not enough buses for one thing." This in turn impacts on people's sense of engagement within the community and can add to feelings of isolation. Transport impacts on people's quality of life by allowing people to access employment and education opportunities, services, recreational facilities and other social networks (Haigh 2006). For example, one participant noted: "Transport is a big issue. A lot of people have a feeling of being stuck and confined." This has particular relevance to certain groups such as young people, older people and socially disadvantaged people, many of whom are without private transport.

Built environment

Other issues can also impact on people's ability to access services and activities in the community. For example, good footpaths were identified in relation to access to parks, services and facilities. This was seen as being important especially for parents of young children using prams and strollers, and for older residents. One resident suggested a bicycle path would be "useful for all ages."

The built environment is also relevant to issues of respect for boundaries and safety (Haigh 2006). One example raised in the research was the design of housing estates. In this study, residents identified one particular area where the 'poor design' was seen as leading to "the attitude where some people would just walk through other people's places when they feel like it to get somewhere and it's contributed to people feeling unsafe." A participant explained: "People have to walk through backyards to get to another property and they were taking fence posts out. And that was leading to major vandalism and crime issues for people who lived in an adjoining street." Another participant spoke about "pulling palings from fences" when talking about problems with people walking through property as a short cut. This has led to a feeling of being unsafe: "You have to keep the doors and windows locked because people just walk through."

Issues that relate to the built environment can thus draw together concerns in relation to access, mobility, respect for boundaries and perceptions of safety within a community. The design of the built environment can also add to people feeling closed in and isolated from other members of the community. As one resident explained: "There's only one road in and out…[and] to some extent it's felt that because there's only one way in that it's sort of closed in."

Green space was another aspect of the built environment that was considered important for a cohesive community, with design being identified as central. As one participant said: "…it has to be 'good' green space." One specific local park was identified as being well used. A resident commented: "I think one of the things that is used well in the community is the Park." Another said: "The Park is a meeting place. My teenagers walk up there to play basketball and they're always safe." Once again the recognition of the importance of meeting places to a community in fostering a sense of belonging is evident. It is clear that much informal engagement is taking place within the community's green spaces.

Social disadvantage and access

People in receipt of lower than average median weekly household incomes said that participation in some activities was problematic. For example, one resident noted: "With sport it can cost between $65 and $150 to join up and then there's all the equipment and some people can't afford it." Issues of social inequality concerned residents. This was particularly evident when discussing costs of accessing activities and services. Another resident when commenting on the cost of participating in sport and other activities said: "We need free things to do – free things are important." More broadly, the following comment tied socio-economic diversity to 'free things': "Free things to do goes back to the broad difference of the socio-economic difference of people living here. The ones that use the free facilities are the ones that can't afford to have their own pool, for instance. Or the ones that can't go down town because they don't have transport.".

One resident, when speaking about social disadvantage, identified the lack of choice that some residents face: "Some people have made the choice to live here but there are those who don't have a choice. A lot of people who are socially disadvantaged haven't got the choices - they didn't choose to live here. So we need to provide financial assistance so they can participate in sport and these sorts of things."

Clearly, accessibility of services in terms of cost and choice is particularly important for socio-economically disadvantaged people. Being able to take part in activities can impact on the level of community involvement (or engagement) in general, which in turn has been identified as key to sense of belonging (Byrne 1999).

5. Conclusions

The indicators of community cohesion that we identified highlight a number of factors, namely, neighbourliness, the provision of services, and a good physical environment, and these are deeply interdependent. For example, access is important in its own right, but it also contributes to a perception of safety (particularly in terms of the built environment and urban design) and assists in promoting engagement. This is an area that needs further research to elicit the specific links between access factors and cohesion. A sense of belonging has a reciprocal relationship with engagement: engagement helps to foster a sense of belonging, whilst belonging motivates engagement behaviours. These findings were broadly consistent with the established literature on community cohesion, which lends a dimension of validity to the research. Local government authorities and service providers are doubtless already aware of many of these issues. However, there is a need to formalise and conceptually map the relationships between the various elements which together comprise social cohesion. This, it is hoped, will assist such bodies in the design and implementation of policies and initiatives which can strengthen the 'social glue' that binds potentially fragile communities together.

We have seen that there are both formal and informal elements that make for social cohesion. Though local councils and services providers can address the more formal components, they cannot control informal social processes. This is particularly relevant to the indicator of neighbourliness. There is, for example, a degree of randomness in who becomes one's neighbours – mostly they cannot be chosen. The way that such relationships are formed and the manner in which they develop is informal and organic in nature, and therefore largely beyond the influence of other parties.

The most significant finding was that participants overwhelmingly named neighbourliness as the most important aspect of a strong community. Yet, whilst it is central, neighbourliness does not mean excessive familiarity or the taking of liberties. A key part of neighbourliness involves respecting each other's boundaries and this includes a respect for diversity. The promotion of an environment conducive to achieving this sort of balance must be the primary object of strategies aimed at promoting community cohesion.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

Community Cohesion Questionnaire

1) What do you think makes a community good to live in?

2) What sorts of things make you feel safe in your community?

3) How many of your family members not living with you live in (this suburb)?

4) Do many of your friends live in (this suburb)?

5) Do you know your neighbours

   5a) If yes, how often would you talk to your neighbours?

6) Can you ask your neighbours for help?

   6a) If yes, what kind of help?

   6b) If not, why not?

7) Do you know what services are available in (this suburb)?
   eg: <u>education</u>; <u>transport</u>; <u>facilities</u> such as parks, playing fields, meeting places; <u>health services</u> such as baby health centres; <u>shops</u>; <u>support services</u> such as community visiting schemes etc.

8) Which services do you use?

   8a) What services do you think are most needed in (this suburb)?

9) Do you belong to any community groups or clubs?

   9a) If yes, which ones?

10) Have you attended a community event in (this suburb) in the last year?

   10a) If yes, which ones?

   10 b) If not, why not?

11) Do you do any voluntary work in (this suburb)?

   11a) If yes, what kind?

12) Do you feel like you are a part of the community?

   12a) Why?

   12b) Why not?

13) How long have you lived in (this suburb)?

14) How many people live in your household?

15) Any other comments?

Appendix 2

Interview Guide (Focus groups and in-depth interviews)

- What do you think the word 'community' means?

- What do you think makes a community good to live in?

- How important is a sense of safety to community cohesion?

- How important is the built environment?

- What do you think makes a community feel like home?

- How important do you think services and programmes are in fostering a sense of community cohesion? Why?

- What services do you think are most needed in (this suburb)?

- How important do you think membership of community groups or clubs is to community cohesion?

- How important do you think voluntary work to a sense of community cohesion?

- Any other comments?

Local Governance Reforms in Zambia:
A Review

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1. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the efforts of successive Zambian governments to transform and institutionalise democratic local governance, and to come to grips with the socio-economic development challenges facing the country. It assesses the progress and challenges that governments are facing in their efforts to transform local government into democratic, developmental local governance.

Local governance reform has been transforming the structure of governance in Zambia. Since the country attained political independence from Britain in 1964, a commitment to decentralisation and popular participation has been an important component of local governance reform strategies. The problem that confronted the government at independence was one of transforming the inherited provincial and district government structures into a dynamic local governance framework that could facilitate sustainable public participation in the socio-economic development strategies envisaged by the new regime. The officially stated policy has been one of "taking power to the people" (Zambia, 1972:33), and a critical objective of the local governance reforms has been to strengthen local authorities by the decentralisation of power. Consequently, over the years governments have sought to design and implement decentralised democratic local governance to facilitate wider participation by the citizenry and facilitate effective service delivery.

2. Local Governance Reforms

This section provides an overview of the reforms implemented in four phases between 1964 and 2008.

Phase I: 1964-1970

The initial phase entailed the new government's attempts to establish political control and transform the inherited provincial and district government structures into cohesive, dynamic organisations of local development management, which could facilitate sustainable socio-economic development (Chikulo, 1981, 1985a).

On gaining independence in October 1964, Zambia inherited a dual system of administration. This comprised central government field administration and elected local government. Zambia was divided into eight provinces consisting of 44 districts. At the sub-district level there were Native Authorities in the rural areas. 1965 saw the abolition of Native Authorities, which were viewed as symbols of colonial repression and manipulation, and the introduction of new local governments under the *Local Government Act* (No.30) of 1965. Under this Act, 67 local authorities were established: 24 were urban authorities, and 43 were rural councils. The Act gave local authorities wide-ranging powers to discharge over sixty functions in their areas of jurisdiction.

In November 1968, the government announced reforms which entailed 'decentralization in centralism'. As the then President Kaunda (1968:19) elaborated:

> "I define this decentralization in centralism as a measure whereby through the
> Party and Government machinery, we will decentralize most of your Party and
> Government activities. While retaining effective control of the party and
> Government machinery at the centre in the interests of unity."

At the district level, these reforms involved the appointment of a District Governor (DG) to head each of the 53 districts. The DG became the politico-administrative head of the district. He was the personal representative – *alter ego* – of the President, and performed this role through the various committees he chaired in the district. Thus during this phase the government sought to institute political control over field administration, hence the emphasis on cohesion and the need to build a centralized polity (Chikulo, 1981).

Phase II: 1971-1979

The second phase involved efforts by the government to create a network of 'grassroots participatory' structures between the local authorities and the sub-district level in order to facilitate public participation (Zambia, 1971). The abolition of Native Authorities had created an institutional gap between the local authorities and the sub-district level. In order to plug this gap village productivity committees,

ward councils and ward development committees were established under the *Village Registration and Development Act (No. 30)* of 1971. This made the village the primary focus at district level. Under the provisions of the Act, a village productivity committee (VPC) was established in each village, sitting under the chairmanship of the village headman. The VPC was responsible for considering the administrative and development needs of the community and sending representatives to the ward development committees (WDCs). A WDC was established in every local government ward – a ward being an area within a local authority from which a councillor is elected under the provisions of the 1965 *Local Government Act*. The functions of WDCs were to consider development needs, get ideas from VPCs, and pass these on to the local authority. This network of committees was supposed to provide the basis for decentralized local governance.

Phase III: 1980-1990

On 13th December 1972 Zambia was formally proclaimed a 'One-Party Participatory Democracy', thereby granting the ruling party constitutional paramountcy over the entire state administrative apparatus. As then President Kaunda (1973) aptly put it:

> "The Party is supreme in our One-Party Participatory Democracy. It is the source of national policy. The Party will not only be interested in working out broad policies and objectives, it will be directly involved in the planning, organization, control and management of the entire administrative machinery of our nation".

This phase witnessed increased politicisation and the imposition of the supremacy of the party over local governance (Chikulo, 1985b, 1989). Consequently, the central and local government administration was merged with the ruling party (UNIP) structures, to create an integrated district administration, under the 1980 *Local Administration Act (No.15).* The major objective of the 1980 Act was to "…ensure the effective integration of the primary organs of the party and other local administration units in the district."

The most significant structural change entailed in the 1980 Act was the abolition of the distinction between party, central and local governments. This involved the establishment of an administrative structure composed of party, central and local government officials. The stated goal of the reforms was to integrate local administrative departments of the central government, local councils, and the party structure in order to improve coordination and eliminate duplication among them. Consequently, a single integrated politico-administrative structure was created in each of the fifty-five districts, to which was assigned the totality of party, central and local government activity. A single administrative agency called the district council was established in each district under the chairmanship of a centrally-appointed political appointee – the District Governor. The council was a statutory, deliberative, and consultative body, concerned with the determination of broad policy objectives and critical assessment of development programmes.

The new councils went beyond what Leemans (1970:53) called 'a single hierarchy model' of government at district level, since they replaced the former tripartite local government framework, including the incorporation of the party organization into the new structure. As a consequence, the new structure of local government not only brought the decision-making process closer to the public at district level, but also ensured closer party control over the mechanism of field administration. Thus political control was considered crucial for the effective functioning of the new system of local administration.

At the sub-district level, the 1980 reforms were designed to reinvigorate the administrative structures by eliminating the duplication of work between party committees and local government committees. Consequently, the party organizations from constituency to section level were merged with ward development committees and village productivity committees into a single set of structures vertically integrated with the district council. These performed both the functions assigned to the party committees by the UNIP Constitution, and the functions assigned by the 1971 *Village Registration and Development Act*. The single hierarchy of committees consisted of ward, branch and section committees. Local government elections were abolished and replaced with party elections. Party officials elected as ward chairmen, represented the ward on the council. The 1980 Act increased the representation of local party members and excluded the majority of local residents who were not members. As a consequence, democratic local governance was undermined at the local level, as the party representatives were not elected by universal adult suffrage, yet they were expected to represent and take decisions on behalf of local communities.

The system of local governance established by the 1980 reforms was, therefore, basically an attempt to create an institutional synthesis between local government, central government, and the party. It thus approximated what Coleman and Rosberg (1964) called a 'party-state', in which, in order to achieve higher levels of mobilization for socio-economic development, the distinction between civil servant and politician was blurred and the relationship between them transformed.

Phase IV: 1991- 2008

A clamour for multi-party democracy led to the scrapping of the *de jure* one-party state in December 1990, and the introduction of political pluralism (Chikulo, 1996). Consequently, the transition to a multi-party system demanded a restructuring of local government. Firstly, local government had to be 'de-linked' from the ruling party; and secondly, measures were introduced to strengthen democratic control over administration, and increase its accountability to democratically elected bodies. The promulgation in August 1991 of the *Constitution of Zambia Act (No.1)* and the *Local Government Act (No.22)*, 'de-linked' the ruling party from all civil service and state apparatus, repealed the 1980 *Local Administration Act (No.15)*, and re-introduced the distinction between the ruling party, the central government, and local government.

In addition, the 1991 *Local Government Elections Act (No.26)* re-introduced universal adult suffrage at the local government level. This democratised local government by affording every citizen who is a registered voter an opportunity to stand for election, or vote for the candidate of his choice, irrespective of political affiliation. The Act provides for the demarcation of the council's area of jurisdiction into wards from which councillors are elected for a five-year term.

3. Current Structure of Local Governance

The current system of local government in Zambia flows from the fourth phase of reforms. The Constitution of Zambia provides for the establishment of a democratically elected local government system based on universal suffrage, whilst the 1991 *Local Government Act* provides for a single-tier system of local government comprising three types of councils: city, municipal and district.

There are 72 local authorities countrywide:

- 4 are designated as City Councils
- 12 are Municipal Councils
- 56 are District Councils (comprised of smaller rural-based local authorities).

The composition of councils is as follows:

- All elected councillors in the district
- All members of parliament in the district
- Two representatives appointed by all chiefs in the district – as a means of involving traditional rulers in local governance.

The 1991 *Local Government Act* provides for the establishment of a Local Government Electoral Commission to administer local government elections. Councillors are elected every five years. Initially, this was only three years, but the *Local Government (Amendment) Act (No.8)* of 2004 provided for a change of tenure to five years, in order to align it with presidential and parliamentary elections.

Councillors elect mayors and deputy mayors every year in the city and municipal councils, and chairmen and deputy chairmen in district councils, from amongst themselves. Members of parliament and chiefs' representatives are not eligible for these positions. The mayor/chairperson is the political head of the council and performs ceremonial functions, but lacks executive powers. The town clerk or district secretary is the executive head of the council.

The *Local Government Act* of 1991 (as amended several times) empowers all categories of local authorities to undertake wide-ranging functions. The councils are recognised as the primary bodies responsible for development at district level. They are the statutory deliberative and consultative bodies concerned with the

determination of broad policy objectives and critical assessment of development programmes, as well as the efficient and effective management of their areas. Consequently, the Act gives sixty-three scheduled functions to the councils, which include among others the provision of services such as water supply, sewerage, health, feeder and district roads, education and housing. Thus the 1991 Act has strengthened the role of councils as focal points for wider participation and delivery of social services to the local communities.

With regard to finance, the Act gave councils powers to raise and utilize revenue from their own local sources at their discretion. In addition, councils receive transfers of funds from central government, which are supposed to be their major source of revenue. The transfers are firstly, the means by which the central government shares taxes with councils; and secondly, provide a conduit through which various grants from sector ministries are disbursed to enable councils to undertake delegated functions on their behalf. These grants take various forms consisting of general, special and capital grants. Special grants are meant for financing projects which are prior-earmarked by central government. Capital grants are meant to be used for financing capital projects, while general grants are additional financial resources extended to district councils.

4. Key Challenges to Effective Local Governance

Legal, policy and institutional frameworks have been put in place to establish and democratise local governments, with the objective of deepening democracy and improving service delivery. However, there are three key challenges affecting the effectiveness of local governance (Chikulo, 2000; Zambia, 2002a and b).

Financial Crisis

Raising sufficient revenue is one of the most intractable problems facing most local authorities, and the majority of councils are unable to meet their statutory functions and obligations. Although the 1991 Local Government Act has given councils vast powers to raise and generate their own revenues, few are able to take advantage of this provision due the fact that their resource base is too small to sustain their operations. As a result, local authorities have accumulated crushing burdens of debt or arrears and are now faced with financial crises (Crook and Manor, 2001). Few can stand on their own feet.

In addition, government actions and policies have exacerbated the financial problems of councils, which face severe resource constraints due to the following:

- Declining and erratic disbursements of grants from central government
- Erosion of asset base through various actions and policies of the central government such as the 1992 directive to councils to disinvest in commercial ventures and sell rental housing stock at uneconomical prices
- Unfunded mandates – local authorities given increasing responsibilities without corresponding capacity in resource mobilization

- Redirection of funds intended for local authorities to the control of local politicians, for example constituency development funds and youth projects funds controlled by MPs, or to semi-autonomous local institutions such as the Health and Education Management Boards created to perform specific functions on behalf of sector ministries.

This lack of resources has left significant gaps in service delivery capacity and placed limitations on the extent of to which stakeholders can participate in development management. Without financial sustainability, local authorities are unable to effectively provide services to their communities, and their developmental capacity and autonomy are thereby undermined.

Lack of Integrated District Development Management and Planning

There is a lack of holistic, integrated planning and management at district level. Effective integrated planning and management is undermined by the absence of an effective coordinating mechanism under the direct control of the council. District Development Coordination Committees (DDCCs) were established in 1993 as forums for planning and implementation of development activities, as well as community participation. They are technical committees mandated to coordinate development activities in the district and prepare development plans for submission to the district council. The DDCC is composed of heads of central government departments and other development agencies represented in the district, as well as the executives of the district councils. Thus, the majority of the members are bureaucrats representing central government departments, and are answerable to their parent ministry, not the local authority. The council has no legal administrative authority over central government line ministries. The deconcentrated sector ministries which provide services within the council's area of jurisdiction, report direct to their parent ministries in the capital city of Lusaka. Thus they remain primarily responsible to their ministerial chain of command. The DDCC is thus rendered ineffective because it has no legal authority to back up its operations, and the council has no control over its operations.

The Extent of Meaningful Citizen Participation in Local Governance

The major weakness in the current local governance system is the lack of legally constituted local government institutions at the local, ward or area level. There is no forum for community participation in decision-making on local development activities and affairs. Under the 1991 *Local Government Act*, each council's area of jurisdiction is demarcated into wards. However, these wards at the sub-district level are only recognized for purposes of local government elections. As noted earlier, under the previous system of local government, a network of village productivity committees, ward councils and ward development committees had been established to facilitate development and induce participation. These 'grassroots participatory structures' made the local council the primary focus of development at district level. However, under the 1991 Act ward development committees and village productivity committees are not formally linked to local authorities and are thus no

longer functional in most instances. The result has been the creation of an 'institutional vacuum', with no effective forum for community participation in decision-making on local development activities and issues at sub-district level. Thus although local authorities are accountable to the ratepayers, opinion polls indicate that most people feel councillors do not reflect their views in the council and are not accountable to residents (Moomba, 2002:29; Lolojih, 2003:16). Studies have also shown that the public have little trust in local government and there is a low level of participation in local government elections (Erdmann and Simutanyi, 2003).

5. Conclusion

Although local governance reforms have brought about significant changes in policy frameworks and institutional structures, in order to facilitate and anchor effective delivery of socio-economic development services, local authorities are faced with difficult constraints and challenges. The strength of decentralised local governance remains limited. For it to be effective, not only should local governance be downwardly accountable, but other central government agencies and bodies at district level should also be accountable to local government. The argument that democratic decentralised local governance can deliver services more efficiently and more responsively depends on the adequate provision of resources. Yet lack of financial resources continues to constrain the effectiveness of local authorities. The failure to fully empower local authorities undermines their effectiveness and legitimacy.

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Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice: Reviewing the Functions and Powers of Local Government in South Africa

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1. Introduction

The chairperson of the parliamentary Portfolio Committee on local government recently described local government in South Africa as "a chicken whose legs have been tied for too long". In other words, even when the fetters that bind the chicken's legs are loosed, it remains at a loss for what to do with its newfound freedom (Tsenoli 2007). This descriptive analogy ostensibly refers to the failure of local government to harness its newfound power in post-apartheid South Africa and to claim its rightful position as the driver of development at the local level, and instigator of bottom-up growth and progress, which is meant to shape and transform society in the new South Africa.

Of all the spheres of government, local government arguably has the most immediate developmental mandate to realise the ideal physical environment for the communities it serves (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996*, ss.152,

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[1] This practice note is based largely on a research paper authored by De Visser and Christmas for the Community Law Centre: *Developmental Local Government: Determining Appropriate Functions and Powers.* The full paper is available at <http://www.communitylawcentre.org.za>.

153).[2] The 1998 White Paper on Local Government,[3] echoing the developmental mandate entrenched in the Constitution, instructs municipalities to:

- Exercise their powers in a manner that maximises economic growth and social development
- Coordinate development activities of state and non-state agents in the municipal area
- Deepen democratic development through community participation
- Build social capital for increased sustainability.

This exacting developmental mandate is in keeping with the established principle of subsidiarity, which advocates that "public responsibilities should be exercised by those elected authorities who are closest to the people" (Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2007). In other words, the impact of the collective efforts of national, provincial and local government in fulfilling their constitutional obligations to citizens must be tangibly seen and felt at the local level. The Constitution, together with the White Paper on Local Government, therefore entrenches the role of local government as the driver and guardian of such development.

The upcoming 2009 elections provide South Africans with the opportunity to reflect on how far we have come in the first 13 years of democracy, and on the extent to which constitutional ideals have been translated into reality. As part and parcel of this broader process, the then Minister for Provincial and Local Government, Sydney Mufamadi, launched a national review of provincial and local government on 31 July 2007.[4] This process invites everyone, from civil servants to the private sector, tertiary education institutions and most importantly, ordinary South African citizens, to review the successes and failures of government in post-apartheid South Africa. For local government in particular, the review process provides an opportunity to reflect on the experience of the new local government dispensation just eight years after it was first established. Importantly, this evaluation probes the extent to which the functions and powers delineated for local government have enabled it to meet its developmental mandate. It is the purpose of this practice note to evaluate the current allocation of functions and powers in the Constitution, and furthermore to propose a set of criteria to guide decisions on where powers and functions are best situated.

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[2] The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (hereafter the Constitution) obliges a municipality to "structure and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community and to promote the social and economic development of the community".

[3] The White Paper on Local Government, 1998 is a policy document which consolidates and elucidates the developmental mandate of local government entrenched in the Constitution. Local government legislation enacted in the wake of the White Paper is based on the policy directives contained therein.

[4] Following the resignation of former President Thabo Mbeki, there was a reshuffling of the Cabinet. Mr. Sicelo Shiceka MP, replaced Mr. Sydney Mufamadi as the Minister for Provincial and Local Government.

2. Balancing the Scales: Achievements vs. Challenges

The transformation of South African local government from racialised, fragmented administrative centres under the apartheid government, to a constitutionally recognised, autonomous sphere of government, is described by many as phenomenal. In the face of seemingly insurmountable service delivery and infrastructure backlogs, the progress made by local government in extending basic services such as water, electricity and sanitation to the millions of citizens who were previously excluded from accessing these services, is significant.[5] However, the varying levels of success achieved by municipalities in fulfilling these duties reflects the diversity which characterises local government.

Local government in South Africa is comprised of 283 municipalities, which range in population, size and resources from severely under-resourced rural municipalities to first class metropolitan giants ('metros'). The six metros currently house one third of South Africa's 48.7 million population. They are also considered to be the economic powerhouses of South Africa, collectively contributing 59% of South Africa's GDP (South African Cities Network 2005). Despite these hubs of intense development and economic growth, South Africa on the whole remains one of the most unequal societies in the world in respect of wealth disparity. With the rapid rate of urbanisation most visible in the metros and cities, unprecedented levels of development often co-exist alongside conditions of abject poverty. While levels of service delivery have been attained at the local level, the developmental mandate of local government as set out in the White Paper extends much further than basic service delivery. This mandate, however, can only be achieved if municipalities are equipped with the appropriate functions and powers to fulfil these roles.

3. Stumbling Blocks to Development

There are a number of inherent challenges that present stumbling blocks to local government achieving its full developmental potential.

Autonomy

The decentralised governance model adopted in the Constitution designates specific powers and functions to each sphere of government, which are enjoined to work together "to secure the well-being of the people of the Republic" (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996*, s.41(1)(b)).

As appropriate as such a vehicle for co-operative governance may seem within a democratic context, having three spheres of government operating each with a degree of autonomy makes for complex relationships, which also impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of government. As a relatively new sphere, local

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[5] For elaboration on the roll-out of services by local government, see budget speech by the then Minister for Provincial and Local Government, Sydney Mufamadi, on 2 June 2008. Accessed on 10 October 2008 at <http://www.polity.org.za>.

government is faced with the challenge of establishing its autonomy. National and provincial government have therefore had to re-conceptualise their political attitudes towards local government in line with the new constitutionally entrenched ideal of developmental local government. In practice, however, different approaches are evident across sector departments. These approaches range from being respectful of local government autonomy to clearly patronising.[6]

Service Delivery and Infrastructural Backlogs

As stated above, municipalities inherited huge service delivery and infrastructural backlogs from the apartheid system of governance. They also faced a lack of capacity and skills to deliver at the local level. In the restructuring of local municipalities in 2000, much of the institutional memory of local government was lost. A major concern often voiced is that appointment of municipal staff is at times made on the basis of political patronage and not necessarily skills and expertise. While government has attempted to address capacity deficits through Project Consolidate (a program that deploys skilled workers to particularly weak municipalities to assist in capacity building – see <http://www.projectconsolidate.gov.za>), there are concerns that this initiative is not enough. Deficits in scarce, specialised skills such as engineering, are fast becoming critical.

Pervasive Poverty

The World Bank report for 2006 ranks South Africa as one of the most unequal societies in the world (World Bank 2008). The saturated labour market and growing unemployment rate, coupled with the effects of the worldwide recession, have made it increasingly hard for the poor in South Africa to attain basic minimum living standards (Triegaardt 2008). Local government, while developmental in nature, cannot be held solely responsible for making in-roads into the pervasive poverty which permeates South Africa.

Poorly Defined Functions and Powers

One of the most pressing challenges facing developmental local government, and which comprises the subject matter of this paper, is poorly defined functions and powers. Poorly defined powers and functions have been a source of great concern and confusion for municipalities since the creation of the new local government dispensation. This lack of clarity has often resulted in duplication of duties, confusion, inefficiencies and arguably even deterioration in the delivery of services to communities. In worst case scenarios it has led to intense animosity between provincial governments and municipalities, who reach an impasse in respect of

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[6] De Visser (2008:6) describes two very different attitudes expressed by the respective national departments of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Minerals and Energy (DME) pertaining to municipal powers to prescribe the installation of solar water heaters in new buildings erected within the municipal jurisdiction. The DTI makes such powers subject to national approval, while the DME correctly assumes that municipalities have the inherent power to make their own by-laws on the matter.

which sphere should perform a particular function. This has even led to situations where neither sphere wishes to take responsibility for a contested function.

The impact of poorly defined powers and functions can have far-reaching consequences. There is, therefore, growing concern about the manner in which the Constitution currently distributes functions and powers.[7] In addition, the mechanisms employed by national and provincial governments to allocate additional functions to local government do not comply with the legislative framework enacted to regulate such transfers. At times, these transfers of functions and powers only serve to perpetuate the gap between the functional and fiscal resources of municipalities, and the vision of developmental local government which South Africa is seeking to attain.

4. Sources of Local Government Functions and Powers

'Original' Powers of Local Government

Schedules 4B and 5B of the Constitution list the functional areas that are the responsibility of local government. The Constitution provides municipalities with the necessary legislative and executive powers to administer and fulfil these functions (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996*:ss.156(a), 156(2)). These are the most significant of local government's powers, and are referred to as 'original' powers because they are sourced directly from the Constitution. As such, these powers are safeguarded and may not be removed or amended by ordinary statutes or provincial Acts. Any change would therefore have to be effected by amending the Constitution itself.

The 'original' powers, however, do not correspond to the prescription of developmental local government. A cursory evaluation of the listed functions and powers reveals a mixed bag of competencies which do not necessarily relate to each other or to a strategic, over-arching developmental mandate.[8] Municipalities, for example, lack the policy-making and financial authority to achieve developmental objectives in critical 'high impact areas' such as housing and local economic development. This creates an untenable situation where municipalities must rely on external actors to initiate and drive development initiatives that pertain to these functions.

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[7] Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, when addressing the National Council of Province's Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) Summit in 2007 made an appeal for an 'objective look' at whether the current configuration of powers and functions, including the constitutional aspects, is appropriate. See: Trevor Manuel, MP, 'Co-operative governance and intergovernmental fiscal relations' Address at the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) Summit (Cape Town: 3 May 2007).

[8] For example Schedules 4B and 5B include functions which range from building regulations and municipal public transport to licensing of dogs, cleansing, and traffic and parking, to mention just a few.

Have the Schedules Kept Pace with Reality?

Another key question relates to whether the Schedules of the Constitution have remained relevant in the aftermath of the comprehensive demarcation of new municipalities for post-apartheid South Africa that took effect in 2000. It seems evident that the powers listed in the 1996 Constitution have not 'caught up' with that demarcation process. The approach taken in the Schedules to management of the built environment at the local level is a case in point. [9]

Municipalities in South Africa perform a myriad of functions that centre around the management of space. Land use planning, delivery of potable water, electricity and sanitation are key examples of this, Furthermore, municipalities are instrumental in the extension of water, sanitation, electricity and road infrastructure. Even a municipality's prime income source, property rates, has a significant spatial component to it.

The demarcation of municipal boundaries in 2000 was primarily concerned with reconfiguring municipal space as a result of the exigencies inherited from the apartheid system of local government. Rationalising the numerous municipalities that served the different racial groups constituted the crux of this exercise. The demarcation process therefore saw the creation of contiguous municipal space in the form of large municipal areas. A logical consequence of this demarcation should have been the allocation of concomitant powers to drive development within this space.

The allocation of functions as it appears in the Schedules however, does not reflect this change. Management of the built environment is disaggregated. In the Schedules, the functions of planning, housing and transport are treated as distinct from each other. Housing is not a local government function but is a concurrent national and provincial function that is implemented with municipal assistance. This disaggregation applies not only to the way the function is defined, but the manner in which it is allocated across spheres. The Schedules for example, separate *provincial* transport and planning from *municipal* transport and planning. Confusion thus exists with regard to a municipality's power with regard to land use management and public transport.

Management of the built environment should logically be comprised of an integrated set of functions which have an immediate impact on municipal space, including:

- Planning
- Urban areas

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[9] The points discussed under this heading emanate from a Roundtable meeting hosted by the Community Law Centre on 5-7 March 2008 in Stellenbosch, Cape Town. The Roundtable was based on the initial outcomes of the review process of provincial and local government which is currently underway. These discussion points are extracted from the report on the Roundtable which was authored by Annette Christmas and is accessible at: <http://www.communitylawcentre.org.za>.

- Management of space and movement across space
- Transport
- Housing
- Infrastructure that supports transport and housing.

In order to foster development in an integrated and coherent fashion, cities should be empowered to drive these key processes without depending on external agencies and institutions. While it is true that national and provincial governments can allocate additional powers to local government by means of assignment, delegation or agency, these sources of power do not enjoy the same level of protection as the 'original' powers of local government. Because developmental local government is a concept which is based in the Constitution itself, Schedules 4B and 5B should not contradict this intention and limit a municipality's ability to fulfil this mandate.

Additional Powers and Functions

The Constitution together with the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) outlines the appropriate procedures for transferring functions to municipalities. These procedures seek to ensure that the assignment of powers outside the constitutional competencies of municipalities is well placed, that legislative and executive capacity is transferred, and that municipalities are safeguarded against unfunded mandates. However, while virtually all national and provincial sectors acknowledge the importance of municipalities and engage them in service delivery, they almost never do so by using the appropriate means of transferring functions. In practice, delegation and agency are the most commonly used means of transferring powers to local government, which reduces the role of local government to that of service deliverers or implementing agents of national and/or provincial governments. Other mechanisms for transferring functions include sector-specific instruments similar to delegation. The housing accreditation process is an apt example of how the transfer of a function and the terms of implementation thereof is strictly regulated by another sphere of government. Housing is currently a Schedule A function, which means that it is a concurrent function shared by national and provincial government. As such, municipalities have to apply to provincial government to become entities accredited to administer national housing programmes or to become housing developers. If accredited, there is no permanency in respect of the transfer of powers and municipalities are bound by the terms of the agreement concluded with the provincial government, once again reducing them to implementers rather than the drivers of development.

The requirements for accreditation are outlined in the National Housing Code (National Housing Code 1997, Part 2, Chapter 2). Accreditation is not a suitable mechanism for the devolution of the housing function to local government. Notwithstanding the fact that in practice very few, if any, municipalities have been accredited (South African Local Government Association 2007), the exclusionary nature of the process means that certain municipalities are enabled to perform the housing function in a manner that facilitates their developmental mandate, while others are completely excluded from the opportunity until they are able to meet the

requirements of accreditation. There is, therefore, a disproportionate benefit for citizens who are the beneficiaries of housing initiatives within the jurisdiction of municipalities which have been accredited.

The difficulties encountered in the accreditation process represent the first hurdle that municipalities have to overcome even before leaving the starting blocks. One challenge relates to a lack of understanding of the application process (Department of Housing KwaZulu-Natal 2005), and the arguably high threshold requirements for accreditation. For example the 'proven track record' requirement stipulates that: "the Council's proven track record of initiatives and involvement in housing provision and/or community development in its area of jurisdiction will be a recommendation" (Ibid 2005). In respect of capacity, it is a pre-requisite that the municipality should have "financial, administrative, professional and technological capacity to fulfil its housing responsibilities and to administer the National Housing Programmes." It is difficult to conceive of many municipalities who currently have that level of infrastructure, as the appropriate kind of capacity is unlikely to emerge without the existence of authority.

The consequence of this mechanism for transferring a function is aptly demonstrated in the Western Cape. The Western Cape provincial government has consistently denied the City of Cape Town's application to be accredited to perform the housing function, prompting the metro to declare an intergovernmental dispute with the province. The mayor of the City of Cape Town, Helen Zille, cited "red tape delays with the municipality's own projects, especially when it comes to housing" as a key impediment to delivery (Zille 2007). Even the smallest metro, Nelson Mandela Bay, has categorically stated that it is "more than capable and is in fact already fulfilling this function." Despite this, housing remains a provincial function and local government, as the sphere of government which is most accessible to the people, often has to bear the brunt of community dissatisfaction in the face of delivery failures.

Another significant consequence of fragmented sector-based efforts to involve local government is that municipalities often end up bearing the hidden overhead costs associated with the function. This is because the protection against unfunded mandates offered by the Municipal Systems Act is not applicable to the instruments used.

5. Enhancing the Governance Role of Local Government

What, then, is the appropriate way to equip local government with the necessary authority to play a developmental role? First, there is a strong case for re-defining the existing competences listed in the Schedules. Apart from concerns about the content of the Schedules not providing appropriate authority to achieve developmental goals, there are also concerns about the manner in which competencies are defined in the Schedules. While broadly defined competencies are appropriate for national and provincial government, they are inappropriate for local government. They create overlap and confusion about the role of local

government, which is often interpreted very narrowly. Local government competencies therefore need to be defined as precisely as possible.

Second, additional functions, where an authoritative policy role is envisaged for local government, must be transferred within the parameters of the legal framework established for assignment. In South Africa, in addition to the Constitution and Municipal Systems Act, 'Guidelines on Allocation of Additional Powers and Functions to Municipalities' were recently promulgated by the Department of Provincial and Local Government (2007). These guidelines attempt to infuse the assignment process with the necessary safeguards that would protect the interests of all parties to the assignment. Importantly, they assert that functions can be assigned either to individual municipalities or to local government as a sphere. A differentiated approach to assignment is therefore possible and appropriate, given the variety in capacity and economic and spatial realities present in municipalities.

6. Indicators for Local Government Powers and Functions

Having described the developmental mandate, the mismatch between mandate and powers, as well as the instruments available for intervention, the question is then: What powers and functions are best performed at local government level? A number of indicators emerge from national and international literature on decentralisation. These indicators are useful to determine at what level a particular function should be performed. They must be complemented by consideration of generic aspects such as the history and context of local government. In the South African case, this refers specifically to the special developmental role of local government, the need to redress the legacy of apartheid, and the political culture within which local government operates. In addition, any application of these indicators must take place against the backdrop of the principle of subsidiarity, which as stated above, advocates that governance should be located as close to citizens as possible.

Six indicators are proposed that could assist this assessment, using the housing function as an example.

- **The degree to which economies of scale can be obtained at a higher level:** if it is more efficient and cost-effective to perform a function at a supra-municipal level, this is an argument against allocating the function to local government.

- **The degree of spill-over effects of a function:** spill-over effects occur when residents from outside the municipal area make extensive use of, or benefit from the service. Examples of this include 'network' services, such as highways and telecommunications.

- **The necessary capacity:** the existence of capacity is key to the ability of local governments to perform their functions. However, it should not always be the decisive factor: it is important to avoid a 'Catch 22' dilemma

whereby authority is withheld because of a lack of capacity, but capacity cannot emerge without the granting of authority. If authority and resources (both financial and human) are transferred jointly, capacity should develop as communities are entitled to, and expect, the delivery of services. As described above, an apt example of how the capacity argument is applied to slow down the transfer of authority to local government can be seen in the housing sector.

- **The degree of intersectoral coordination:** all government service delivery comes together in the municipal area, making local government the ideal coordinating agency. Multi-sectoral and multi-sphere integration should be achieved mainly through the Integrated Development Plan (IDP).[10] Multi-sectoral coordination is vital in respect to housing which, by its very nature, is an integrating activity as it includes planning, land administration, housing recipient identification, delivery of a package of services, development facilitation and the provision of the house itself.

- **The degree of grass roots community participation required:** a strong indicator is the extent to which community participation is an essential part of the function. It can be argued that all government functions require public input, which could render the indicator meaningless. However, the type of engagement required may differ: public participation for the development of national social welfare policies is different from engaging the public on renaming municipal streets or establishing a housing development project. As the intensity of the required engagement increases, municipalities become best placed to perform the function. Housing is a function that requires high-intensity, grassroots community participation. It is perhaps one of the most 'vulnerable' functions in this respect: if community participation is inadequate, successful implementation is easily hampered by disgruntled residents.

- **The degree of policy control over the built environment:** it is often argued that municipal responsibility centres on controlling the built environment, that is, the spatial and physical aspects of public service delivery and government regulation. This is supported by the White Paper vision of municipalities as facilitators of local economic growth. Municipalities facilitate economic growth primarily through the provision of the infrastructure, necessary for economic activity. Key elements of infrastructure for economic growth include –

    a. people infrastructure (proximity to personnel)
    b. skills infrastructure (availability of skills)
    c. financial infrastructure (currency, banking)

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[10] An IDP is essentially a participatory process of planning through which the municipality assesses needs, prioritizes them and then formulates objectives and strategies to address them. The IDP should consolidate all municipal planning into a comprehensive strategy that is linked to the municipal budget.

      d.   telecommunications infrastructure

      e.   roads (and ports) infrastructure

      f.   energy infrastructure

      g.   regulatory environment (tax, labour law)

      h.   location (land, building, sanitation).

Local government is the prime actor in establishing people infrastructure and controlling location (a and h). It plays an important, but not primary role in roads, energy and the regulatory environment (through property taxes). Its role in financial, skills and telecommunications infrastructure is limited. This sliding scale coincides with the relationship with the built environment: the more the function has to do with the built environment, the more intense local government's involvement should be. This indicator demonstrates that it is essential for municipalities to have authority over the housing function in order for them to discharge their responsibilities for the built environment.

7. Need for a New Approach

Application of the above six indicators suggests that in the South African context, consideration should be given to transferring further functions to local government. Many of the arguments used against changing the content of Schedules 4B and 5B of the Constitution (the 'original' powers of local government) relate to fears of fragmentation and deterioration of services as a result. However, these arguments often overlook the reality that in South Africa, the fact that a power or competence is an 'original' local government function does not minimise oversight powers of national and/or provincial government. A municipality's authority over its 'original' functions is anything but unfettered. National and provincial government oversees municipal performance of 'original' functions through the legislative framework within which municipalities must operate.[11]

Any review of local government powers and functions therefore requires a nuanced approach which focuses on specific functions and assesses whether there is a need for greater local government involvement. In the South African context this approach should be guided by the following two questions. First, does the absence of the function from Schedules 4B or 5B make the Schedules an inadequate reflection of developmental local government? If so, there is an argument to revisit the Schedules on this matter. Second, should (certain) municipalities be afforded policy-making authority over a function that is not currently allocated to local government? If so, the assignment of the function to local government may be considered.

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[11] s155(7) of the Constitution confers the power on national government to 'regulate' the exercise by municipalities of their executive authority. The term 'regulating' in the context of section 155(7) of the Constitution was interpreted by the Constitutional Court to mean 'a broad managing or controlling rather than direct authorisation function'. This relates to the framework within which local government must exercise these powers. In other words, the regulatory power enables national government (and also provincial government) to set essential national standards, minimum requirements, monitoring procedures etc.

There are two key aspects here. First, the transfer of functions to local government must be consistent with the procedures in the Constitution and the Municipal Systems Act. Second, the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to municipal functions needs to give way to a nuanced and differentiated approach that takes into account spatial and economic realities, as well as capacity constraints currently facing municipalities.

The challenge of creating integrated sustainable cities, with the marginalised in our society sharing in the benefits of developmental local government, is immense. The metros, by and large the success stories of local government in South Africa, need to be the drivers of developmental processes within their jurisdiction with minimal provincial and national government interference. An asymmetrical approach must be taken to local government to allow for the development of capacity where lacking. Capacity must, however, be developed in a manner that would sustain local government delivery. In the budget speech delivered by the then Minister for Provincial and Local Government, Sydney Mufamadi, he emphasised that "priority attention must be paid to ensuring that improved local government performance becomes a self-sustaining dynamic" (Mufamadi 2008).

In view of the upcoming 2009 elections, the outcomes of the review of provincial and local government will not only impact the shape and form that local government will take in the future, but importantly, the political attitude manifested towards local government. The review process poses key questions which ask whether the current configuration of provincial and local government has improved the delivery of basic social services and deepened democracy in the new South Africa. It is hoped that the answers to these questions would fundamentally change the face of local government in a manner that will result in better service delivery and, ultimately, better lives for all South African citizens.

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PRACTICE

Governing the Outer Islands:
Decentralisation in Kiribati and Tuvalu

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1. Introduction

For over a decade the governments of Kiribati and Tuvalu have adopted decentralisation policies to strengthen the role of local-level authorities in development. This can be seen as a response to both domestic policy drivers and global trends. However, while Kiribati and Tuvalu share a common past and many of the same development issues, the decentralisation process has taken distinct paths in the two countries. This paper takes stock of the Kiribati and Tuvalu experience, drawing on research, country-specific project evaluations and practitioner perspectives. It focuses on local governance at the outer island level and examines three dimensions of the decentralisation process: policy drivers; central-local relations; and integration of traditional and modern institutions of governance.[1]

2. Drivers of decentralisation policy

Similar factors have driven decentralisation policy in Kiribati and Tuvalu. This is unsurprising, given that the countries share common histories and developmental challenges. Until independence in 1971, the two island groups were part of one British protectorate, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. By 1979, they had split to become two nations. Since then, Kiribati and Tuvalu have faced similar constraints

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[1] Hassall and Tipu have recently published a valuable stock take of local government across the region, including Kiribati and Tuvalu, focussing mainly on institutional characteristics (Hassall and Tipu 2008).

to development, such as limited natural resources, low economic growth, widely dispersed geography and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Migration from the outer islands to urban centres has also increased sharply since the 1990s, driven by the lure of the cash economy (Asian Development Bank 2003; 2007). These factors have made effective outer island governance extremely difficult. However, while the confluence of these concerns continues to threaten the future of outer island communities, there remains an enduring attachment to the island lifestyle, which has proved a powerful policy driver. This author noted the fondness with which residents of urban areas describe life on the islands, especially the plenteousness of traditional foods and persistence of cultural norms of sharing and reciprocity. It is thus apparent that the desire to maintain a way of life under threat, as much as any economic consideration, has shaped decentralisation. As the current Tuvalu national development plan laments: "the outer islands have always been regarded as the heart of the nation, however in the last decade the heart has become weaker" (Government of Tuvalu 2004).

The prioritization of local governance and local development has also had a political dimension, given that the majority of members of national parliaments in both Kiribati and Tuvalu come from outer island constituencies. This is despite the fact that half the population is now concentrated on the respective capital islands, Tarawa and Funafuti. It is in this context that the three aims of outer island development, the reversal of urbanization, and development of the capacity of local authorities, have been a prominent part of national development plans (Government of Kiribati 2003; Government of Tuvalu 2004), and perhaps partly explains why limited attention has been given to urban governance until recently.

In addition, the particular 'logic' of decentralization that has influenced international trends since the late 1980s has impacted on policy in both Kiribati and Tuvalu (Turner 2003). Most international financial institutions and donors (including those working in the Pacific) have orientated their development assistance on the basis that decentralisation strengthens local democracy, governance and ultimately, development. As small countries reliant on development assistance, this 'supply side' consideration has created an additional incentive for Kiribati and Tuvalu to pursue decentralisation policies.

3. Central-local relations

The evolution of stable and cooperative central-local relations is recognised as a building block of successful decentralisation (Turner 2003). The role of central governments is critical in setting the legislative parameters for decentralisation, assisting local governments with financial and technical support, and linking local planning and budgeting with national development priorities. While newly created local governments may initially be reliant on central government grants, the ideal reform outcome is generally seen as one where democratically elected local authorities can generate enough revenue to finance the delivery of services that are responsive to local needs. As this section will elaborate, however, the reform trajectories of Kiribati and Tuvalu have tended to diverge from this ideal type.

In Tuvalu, the Falekaupule Act (FA) provides for the election of six councillors to each island Kaupule (council), which also has an administrative arm. The Kaupule is in turn accountable in various respects to the island Falekaupule – a body of traditional leaders who hold ultimate decision-making powers over local affairs. The FA also requires Falekaupules to facilitate community participation in local governance processes such as planning and budgeting. The Falekaupule Trust Fund (FTF) was established in 1999 based on contributions from the islands, central government and donors. It is administered independently of central government and is designed to provide greater self-reliance for island communities.

The FTF has provided Tuvalu's local governments with an enviable mechanism for establishing fiscal autonomy from central government. Investment in local governance in Tuvalu averages more than AU$400 per capita (Hassall and Tipu 2008). As Hassall and Tipu point out:

> per capita expenditure by local government in Tuvalu is higher than in Kiribati, the closest neighbouring state with a somewhat comparable economic environment…it could be surmised that Tuvalu's trust fund is contributing significantly to the wellbeing of communities at the local level. (Hassall and Tipu 2008: 18-19)

However, the full potential of the FTF has yet to be realised, in part due to unfavourable incentives. Falekaupules and Kaupules have an incentive to direct their requests for funding for specific development projects to national ministries and members of Parliament, rather than the FTF, which is based on their own contributions.

In Kiribati, the legislative basis for decentralisation is the Local Government Act (LGA), which was introduced in 1984 and last amended in 2006. The LGA provides for the devolution of political power to elected island councils, and transfers extensive service delivery responsibilities to the local level, including primary education, public health and provision of utilities. In theory, island councils are fiscally empowered to perform these functions through a combination of recurrent grants from central government and revenues generated locally.

In practice, however, island councils have a small revenue base and little control over service delivery, with the bulk of funding and key staff positions coming from central government ministries (Ortega 2008a). The reluctance of the central government to devolve fiscal and administrative powers appears to be based on both fiscal constraints and concerns about the capacity and competency of island councils to manage local affairs. This catch-22 situation, and the disconnect between legislation and practice, has prevented island councils from maturing into effective institutions for local governance and development. One observer in Kiribati captured the situation by describing the island councils as 'children' who were not yet ready to become independent from their 'parent'. This combination of factors has contributed to a situation where investment in local governance in

Kiribati is well under AU$100 per capita, a low figure even by regional standards (Hassall and Tipu 2008).

The central government, with the support of development partners such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has sought to address these issues by amending the LGA to increase the terms of island councillors to 4 years, and by intensifying capacity building efforts on the outer islands. It remains to be seen what impact these efforts will have on long term central-local relations and how the significant challenge of financing local governance will be addressed.

This brief overview highlights the challenges of matching finance with function, especially in the context of a limited revenue base and economies of scale. The Falekaupule Trust Fund, while yet to be fully utilised, has provided Tuvalu with an innovative solution that is sustainable and encourages local autonomy in governance and development. Kiribati, with ten times the population of Tuvalu, has yet to identify a mechanism for lifting investment in local governance without heavy reliance on central government grants.
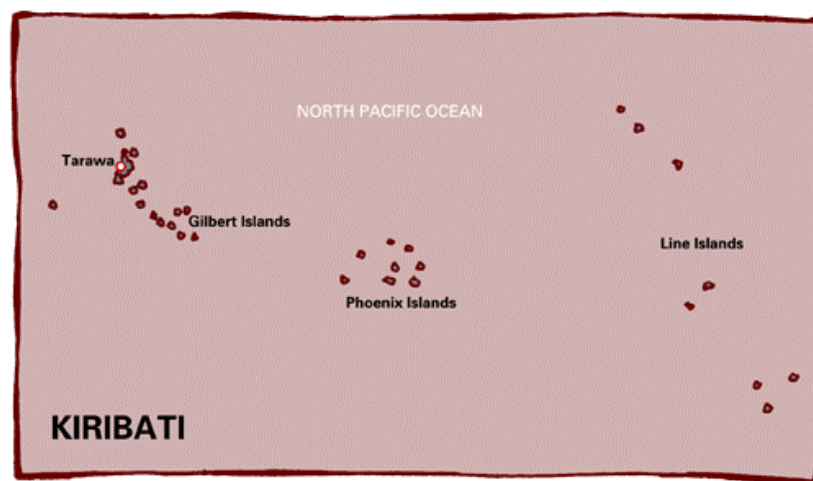

Image courtesy of NZAID

4. Integration of traditional governance institutions

The presence of a formal state in local affairs is a relatively new phenomenon in the Pacific (Hassall and Tipu 2008). In many parts of the region, local communities view traditional leaders and mechanisms as the most legitimate and effective institutions for representing their interests and meeting their needs. In most Pacific Island countries, modern local governance institutions were established during or directly after the colonial era, with little regard for how they would integrate with pre-existing institutions. Kiribati and Tuvalu, with their distinctive Micronesian and Polynesian cultures, have both experienced challenges in this area.[2]

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[2] Tuvalu is Polynesian, retaining features of the chiefly system such as respect for rank, while Kiribati is Melanesian, with greater emphasis on egalitarianism in structuring social affairs.

In Kiribati's outer islands, the Unimwane, or council of elders, continues to exercise considerable influence despite not being recognised under the Local Government Act. The Unimwane is a key pillar of an egalitarian culture that helps ensure that absolute poverty is virtually unknown in Kiribati (Asian Development Bank 2007). However, Ortega (2008a) describes "long-standing tensions between the traditional leadership and the island councils who are viewed as a central government agency, a tax collector, and a conduit for island development funds" (Ortega 2008a:v). Tensions between the Unimwane and elected island councils also leave little room for participation by marginalised groups such as women and youth. The realities of governance processes at the island level are therefore far more complex and contested than is envisaged under the Local Government Act.

Tuvalu is a rarity in the Pacific, with its traditional and modern governance institutions formally harmonised through the Falekaupule Act. Its success in enabling stronger island autonomy has attracted interest from other countries and experts in the field. However, the contradictions inherent in vesting many local decision-making power in the hands of traditional, unelected leaders are apparent. This is demonstrated by recent events on Nanumaga Island where the Falekaupule, in a variation on traditional sanctions, sacked two Kaupule employees over an issue of religious affiliation (Ortega 2008b). The case highlights the tension between traditional and modern norms and practices, and the caution needed when blending them in formal institutions.

In the case of Tuvalu and Kiribati, traditional leaders and institutions are strongest at the local level and are likely to have an enduring relevance for local governance. The experience of both countries illustrates the need to harmonise the two systems, but the enormous complexities involved mean that the mechanisms for doing so are not easily replicable. Local leaders' dialogues, supported by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, which bring together traditional and elected leaders, are a useful forum for progressing this agenda.

Image courtesy of NZAID

5. Conclusion

This brief overview of decentralisation in Kiribati and Tuvalu suggests that there are significant items on the international decentralisation 'menu' that have been inappropriate for both countries. Foremost among these is that full administrative devolution has been unrealistic, as it has been for many other countries in the Pacific region (see Duncan 2004). Responsibilities have not been matched with sufficient finances and this has resulted in poor service delivery and diminished confidence by local communities in the ability of local governments to deliver. As Schoeffel points out: "cutting the pie into smaller pieces doesn't make the pie any bigger" (Schoeffel 2003:4). In the case of Tuvalu, this has been partly resolved by the Falekaupule Trust Fund, but in Kiribati financing remains arguably the biggest constraint to improved local governance.

A second area of divergence is the relationship between traditional and modern governance systems. The lesson from the Kiribati and Tuvalu experience would seem to be that while ignoring traditional institutions and leaders is a recipe for weakening local governance, giving them widespread powers may also be problematic. It is also apparent that the country-specific complexities of this issue make generic international models (which generally focus on modern institutions) less relevant. Having said this, given the similar challenges they face, there is significant potential for Pacific Island countries to learn from each other with regard to the harmonisation of traditional and modern systems.

Kiribati and Tuvalu share common histories and similar natural endowments and development challenges, yet their approaches to outer island governance have been

markedly different. The institutional, political and cultural factors discussed in this paper appear to have been pivotal in setting the two countries on different paths of decentralisation. Of the two approaches, Tuvalu's has been more successful in financial terms, but it is unclear whether the Tuvalu approach would have been (in the past or present) technically or politically feasible in Kiribati. What is clear is that despite threats such as urbanisation and climate change, economic and political necessity will continue to drive demands for stronger local governance on the outer islands.

Relevant resources

UNDP Decentralisation and Local Governance practice area
<http://www.undp.org/governance/sl-dlgud.htm> and Practice Note
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Democratic Decentralization and Empowerment of Local Government Associations in Kerala

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1. Introduction

During the past decade the Indian state of Kerala has been successfully carrying out democratic decentralization, and has substantially transformed the functions of local governments in line with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, which institutionalised the local government system in India. In particular, formulation and implementation of micro plans with community participation has produced remarkable changes in the dynamics of local development and in the public management of local governments. This initiative for participatory planning at the local level taken by the government of Kerala enormously empowered local communities and the different actors in the local political system.

In promoting democratic decentralization, Kerala adopted a 'Big Bang' approach. The government launched a 'People's Planning Campaign' and undertook massive capacity building efforts to empower local governments. It also devolved massive financial resources to local governments to exercise the powers and responsibilities vested in them by the Constitutional Act and the State laws. Associations of local governments were placed at the centre of this strategy and became part of an institutional framework for regular consultation on policy issues related to decentralization and local governance.

From 1996 to 2001 these capacity building activities were carried out by the 'Campaign Cell' of the State Planning Board. Since then responsibility has been transferred to the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), and today KILA is recognized as the nodal institution for capacity building of local governments and their associations in Kerala. The sustainability of democratic decentralization is seen to rest in large part on building the capacity, continuous support and ownership of the associations of local governments.

2. 'Big Bang' Approach

Typically, it would be argued that capacity building is the precondition for any successful decentralization. Traditional wisdom calls for firstly, capacity building of local governments, and then giving power to them by degrees as their capacity improves. In Kerala, this theoretical sequence of decentralization was reversed. Instead of waiting while the capacity of elected representatives and officials of local governments and their associations was enhanced, the government took the revolutionary decision to devolve 35 to 40 percent of the Ninth Five Year Plan outlay to local governments at the same time as building capacity. This transfer of responsibilities and funds to local governments generated considerable pressure on the state government from various quarters to build competence, and to ensure that new responsibilities are carried out effectively and funds properly utilized. Thus to operationalise decentralization it was decided that capacity building had to coincide with formulation of local plans and a strategy of 'learning while doing' was applied to the local planning process.

A distinctive feature of the decentralization experiment in Kerala was the central role allotted to developing capacity in participatory planning and empowerment of associations of local governments in policy advocacy. The task of formulating and implementing local plans was quite new to local governments and their associations, and they had never experimented with such a responsibility. Thus capacity building focused on local plans based on local choices and preferences, and supporting people-centered development processes at the local level.

Apart from the comprehensive nature of the local plans and the maximum autonomy given to local governments in their plan formulation, the micro-level planning methodology adopted in Kerala is distinguished from similar experiments in other states by an insistence of mass participation and transparency. Capacity building was designed to promote empowerment and social mobilization of the people for social and economic transformation. It was realized that capacity building initiatives on a massive scale were essential for any people-centered development process. Capacity building for democratic decentralization is seen as a long term investment in people and their organizations. It was also realized that building social capital and an enlightened citizenry would be useful for fostering strong and effective institutions of local governments and promoting deliberative democracy.

Therefore attempts have been made to ensure the participation of mass organizations and associations of local governments along with elected representatives and officials in capacity building programs. These programs covered tens of thousands of elected representatives, officials, experts and representatives of numerous mass organizations. It became a massive awareness building activity for the ordinary people as well as competence building for elected representatives and the leaders of associations of local governments.

Another aspect of capacity building in Kerala is its focus on marginalized social groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women, to reduce the gap with the rest of the society. Concerted efforts have been made to empower and mainstream these groups through capacity building. Emphasis has been given to empowering them to take actions and decisions in governance.

3. Leadership by the Campaign Cell and Associations of Local Governments

The Campaign Cell of the State Planning Board and associations of local governments were involved in all aspects of the training cycle, right from designing the training policy to assessment of the training for local government functionaries. The Campaign Cell sought the support of experts in different subject areas and training methodologies and made use of all available resources in the state for this purpose. It also opened up new and exciting arenas in local governance and development and innovated diverse new methodologies for training delivery on a massive scale. Training programmes were designed in tune with different phases of local plan formulation and to suit the training needs of local governments to carry out particular planning tasks. The Campaign Cell undertook regular consultation with leaders of local government associations regarding the practical and operational training needs of different local government functionaries, and ensured that methods of delivery were suited to the different needs of officials, elected representatives and representatives of voluntary organizations. District Training Advisory Councils were formed with the active involvement of leaders of associations of local governments to steer programme implementation.

4. Capacity Building to Empower Local Governments and their Associations

The democratic decentralization process in Kerala realized the complexities involved in political decentralization and restructuring of powers in favour of local governments. One of the most important assumptions of democratic decentralization was that empowerment of local governments would lead to fostering political decentralization and broadening the mass base of local governments, accelerating the process of democratisation. However, there was an evident lack of capacity on the part of elected representatives to materialize the objectives of the Constitution Acts, 1992 (73rd and 74th Amendments), and to realize the meaning of self-governance. Experience suggested that the Panchayati

Raj[1] and municipalities had so far worked as bureaucratically controlled, state funded delivery arms of government with only a semblance of local democracy. The elected representatives had no real control in the decision making process and in its implementation. The greatest challenge before democratic decentralization was, therefore, to build the required level of capacity among the elected representatives to carry forward the process of political decentralization and to exercise the powers mandated by the Constitution and state laws.

Capacity building is the key to transforming local governments in this direction. Attempts were made to generate a clear understanding of the importance of training and the value of people's participation. Local governments and their associations realized that coping with the rapid political and social transformation generated by decentralization also requires a great deal of administrative competence. Hence, local governments and their associations responded positively to the capacity building programmes, and have shown high degree of motivation and enthusiasm in the learning process.

5. Training Strategy

Capacity building for democratic decentralization was to move away from traditional forms of training and development. The approach taken was a practical one to equip the different functionaries and resource persons quickly and effectively to formulate local plans through a democratic and participatory process. Increased involvement of learners was ensured through a 'learning by doing' approach. Learners were given every opportunity to give their feedback and transfer the learning into their real work situations.

The strategy was as follows:

- Leadership by the Campaign Cell and associations of local governments in all aspects of the training cycle
- A modular training structure with well defined objectives and a clear plan of action
- A more focused and needs-based approach to training design and implementation
- Regular and ongoing monitoring and assessment of learning and transfer of learning
- Periodic updating of the capacity of trainers and regular interaction with policy support groups like associations of local governments
- Efforts for reinforcement and follow up of learning.

A cascading training-of-trainers strategy was applied. Resource persons were identified at all levels. The 800 Key Resource Persons who attended state level training programmes trained 10,000 District Resource Persons who in turn trained more than 100,000 Local Resource Persons during different phases of the Peoples'

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[1] Rural local governments at village and district levels.

Planning Campaign. The success of democratic decentralization was largely due to the selection of appropriate persons with proven credentials as trainers and resource persons, and the support extended by associations of local governments.

Democratic decentralization and the capacity building efforts also focused on creating a responsive system of administration at the local level and making departmental officials accountable to the elected representatives.

There is no parallel for the training programmes organized as apart of the capacity building process of decentralization in Kerala in terms of its scale: the number of participants, extent of coverage and diversity of topics that were covered within a stipulated time frame. The number of participants who attended at different levels of training programmes during the six phases of People's Planning Campaign are given below.

Phase	State Level	District Level	Block Level	Panchayat/ Municipal Level
I	375(5)	11,716(3)		100,000 (1)
II	660(3)	11,808(2)		100,000 (1)
III	300(4)	1,146(3)	150,000(2)	
IV	3,014(3)		10,000(2)	
V	1,186(3)			
	304(2)			
VI	150(2)	6,000(2)		
	300(3)		6,000(1)	
VII	2,890(2)		6,000(1)	
	3,360(2)		25,000(2)	

Numbers in parentheses represent days of training. Figures do not include one day conferences like state level conferences of Presidents and Chairpersons, consultation meetings etc.
Source: Economic Review: 2000, State Planning Board, Government of Kerala

Target groups for training programmes included the following categories:

- Elected representatives of local governments
- Ministerial staff
- Officers of transferred institutions
- Voluntary experts of different organizations
- Members of expert committees
- Experts from different scientific and academic institutions.

The composition and coverage of target group(s) varied in different phases of the training based on the objectives and the agenda of the Peoples' Planning Campaign, as did the design, content and coverage of the training programmes themselves. Core subject areas of training programmes consisted of:

Democratic Decentralization and Participatory Planning

- Changing paradigm of development planning
- Concept and importance of decentralised planning
- Basic principles and methodology of local planning
- Peoples' participation and democratic decentralization
- Role of Grama Sabha[2] in local governance
- Gender in development
- Development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
- Panchayati Raj and its Constitutional mandate
- Preparation of the Development Report
- Formulation of development plans and projects
- Appraisal and vetting of plans
- Implementation and monitoring of plans.

Local Governance and Financial Management

- Panchayati Raj Act and Municipal Act
- Powers and responsibilities of local governments in the changing context
- Roles and responsibilities of the President, Secretary and committees
- Conduct of meetings
- Preparation of budget and integration of budget and plan
- Utilization of funds and accounts keeping
- Store purchase rules
- Pubic works management.

6. Institutionalising the Capacity Building Process

The establishment of a systematic ongoing approach to capacity development and training is the key to making the decentralization process sustainable and transforming local governments into more accountable, democratic, transparent and responsive institutions. Therefore since completing the initial task of formulating and implementing local plans and achieving the requisite competency in participatory planning, attempts have been made by the State Planning Board to institutionalise the capacity building process. A project known as Capacity Development of Decentralization in Kerala (CapDecK) was launched with the support of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). In this phase the SPB collaborated with a number of local learning and academic institutions to conduct further training:

- Kerala Institute of Local Administration
- State Institute of Rural Development
- Institute of Management in Government
- Kerala Agriculture University
- Medical Colleges
- State Council of Education Research and Training
- Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development
- Integrated Rural Technology Centre

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[2] Village meetings open to all adults over 18 years of age.

- Centre for the Development of Imaging Technology.

Nearly 30,000 participants attended training courses offered by these institutions during 1999-2000.

Subsequently the Committee on Decentralization of Powers recommended that the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) be designated as the lead institution for capacity building of local governments. In order to fulfil this task, KILA has been involved in designing and implementing a large number of training programmes with the objective of strengthening local governments and empowering community level organizations. The focus is on assisting local governments to strengthen their internal systems in tune with the spirit of decentralization. Core subject areas of capacity building by KILA are therefore:

- Good local governance
- Empowerment of standing committees
- Natural resource management
- Project management
- Gender mainstreaming and women empowerment
- Development of marginalized social groups
- Public works management
- Financial management and accounting systems.

Details of training programmes organised by KILA during the institutionalisation phase of decentralization are given in the table below.

Year	Programmes	Participants
1999-2000	103	7,623
2000-01	75	8,607
2001-02	83	10,256
2002-03	58	4,200
2003-04	245	64,160
2004-05	249	29,009
Total	813	123,855

7. Fresh Approach and New Strategy for Capacity Building

The capacity building efforts carried out as part of democratic decentralization have produced a transformation in the functioning of local governments in Kerala. Local governments are now capable of formulating and implementing local plans and are competent enough to carry forward the political decentralization process in the right direction. Key results of capacity building include:

- The development of the desired level of capacity on the part of elected representatives to exercise political powers vested with them and to take part in the decision making process

- Improved performance of local governments in exercising the powers mandated with them by the Constitutional Amendment Acts
- Increased level of competence of the staff and officials of local governments and of institutions transferred to local governments to provide better delivery of services to the people
- Increased capacity on the part of civil society organizations and enrichment of social capital to facilitate effective public management
- Enlightenment of citizens to take part in the public management of local governments and to participate effectively in the decision making process at the local level
- Improved level of performance in accountability, transparency, democratisation and responsiveness of local governments, and in responding positively to local needs and demands.

However, a fresh look into capacity building efforts for local government is now needed in light of the experience of the last decade. Many local governments are still unable to make full use of the powers vested in them. An ongoing capacity building process should be designed and implemented on the basis of following principles:

- Training to be organised in sufficient quantity and quality within the stipulated time frame
- Better coordination, integration and networking of training organizations within the state
- Effective collaboration and policy dialogue between associations of local governments and training organizations
- Greater ownership of local governments and their associations in the capacity building process
- Training-supportive studies and research for policy advocacy and transforming local governments.

Training will have to be learner-centred and new methods of training delivery will be required. The strategy should involve development of the capacity of training professionals, increased involvement of learners in their own learning process, development of a modular structure of training, and a more focused approach to training evaluation.

Training will also need to keep pace with changing needs. Elections are held every five years. Changes in elected representatives also result from the rotation system of seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and women. This will create a demand for continuous capacity building of elected representatives. Periodic reinforcement of capacity building is also needed for the effective performance of local government functionaries. Capacity building cannot be a one-time affair, it will be continuous and regular efforts should be made to build competence according to needs.

At the same time steps have to be taken to measure performance after training events to see what level of improvement has taken place. Measuring performance in this way is also important to ensure effectiveness in using training resources and to make capacity building efforts sustainable. Generally, very few attempts have been made to collect data on performance in the workplace after the training. It is of utmost importance to conduct training-related studies to assess the validity, currency, authenticity and sufficiency of training.

Alongside training there is a need for a common platform for stakeholders in decentralization to come together and discuss the day-to-day affairs of local governance and policy issues related to decentralization. The associations of local governments should provide the lead to establish these platforms at both state and district levels. Activities would include:

- Experience-sharing and networking of local government functionaries
- Policy advocacy for strengthening decentralization and good governance
- Documentation of innovative practices in local governance and their dissemination
- Promoting capacity building of different functionaries of local governments
- Promoting research and studies on local level development issues
- Strengthening associations of local governments and their capacity to deepen decentralization and grass-roots democracy.

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PRACTICE

Inclusive Growth through Inclusive Governance in India's North East

Mani Shankar Aiyar and Nupur Tiwari

Ministry of Panchayati Raj and DoNER,[1] Government of India

1. Introduction

'Inclusive Growth' is both the title and the overarching goal of the Eleventh Five Year Plan of India.[2] Economic reforms have led, especially over the last five years or so, not only to accelerated growth but to *sustained* accelerated growth. Yet, notwithstanding the considerable space given to Panchayati Raj[3] in the Eleventh Plan, there still seems to be some reluctance to accept inclusive governance as the quintessential and unique path to inclusive growth.

There is no doubt that the acceleration of growth on a sustained basis combined with major tax reforms has resulted in a miraculous augmentation of government revenues, particularly over the last four years. This has resulted in buoyant spending on the social sector. In his recent address to the National Convention, the Prime Minister estimated the increased spending on poverty alleviation and rural development at four times that of the last year of the previous government. In

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[1] Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region.

[2] Editors note*:* India's five years plans are framed, executed and monitored by the Planning Commission. See <http://planningcommission.nic.in>.

[3] Editors note*:* Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are units of local self-government. There are three levels of panchayat - village, intermediate, and district. See 'Decentralization and Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)' in Chapter X: Governance, Eleventh Five- Year Plan 2007-12.

absolute numbers, this represents an increase (in nominal terms) from around Rs.34,000 crore[4] in fiscal 2003-04 to about Rs.120,000 crore in the current financial year. Moreover, this increase comes on top of growth in such spending between 1993-94 and 2003-04, in nominal terms, from about Rs.7600 crore to about Rs.34,000 crore.

Why, then, is there such a mismatch between growth in the booming sectors of our economy and the income of the entrepreneurial classes, in contrast to the uncertain, sporadic and un-sustained condition of the vast majority of Indians? Why is India prospering when most Indians are not?

"To ensure inclusive and equitable growth, we need
to integrate our rural areas into the modern
economic processes that are rapidly transforming
our country"

In August 2007, the Arjun Sengupta Committee (http://nceus.gov.in) reported the deeply disturbing yet widely accepted figure of 836 million Indians – over 75% of our people – as being 'poor and vulnerable', surviving on an average expenditure of under Rs.20 per day. This is the equivalent of what a family of four earns per capita as the daily wage in Tamil Nadu under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme.[5]

Although over the last four years India has witnessed a sustained GDP growth rate of 8.8 per cent per annum, which is set to rise even higher, poverty levels remain unacceptably high. More than 300 million people in India still live in deep poverty at less than a dollar a day, while another 350 million live on less than two dollars a day. In this sense, the rich-poor divide has increased and poverty reduction figures for India are

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[4] An Indian crore equals 10 million.

[5] Incidentally, the NREGP wage rate in Tamil Nadu is just about the highest in the country. For more information, visit: <http://nrega.nic.in>.

now lower than those of Bangladesh. There are also disparities among regions, states, sectors and communities. Among the states, the North Eastern Region as a whole and the Central regions, which have large tribal populations, are lagging behind. Among sectors, agriculture has fallen behind industry and the service sector.

The key component of our 'strategy of inclusive growth' must be inclusive governance as the means of empowering the disadvantaged, with the aim of enabling them to overcome their poverty. It is the effective empowerment of the disadvantaged through the effective devolution of functions, finances and functionaries to the representative institutions of local self-government on the principle of subsidiarity (which states that anything which can be done at a lower level should be done at that level and no higher level), that will pave the way to the effective implementation of other measures of inclusive growth. These include:

- Stepping up investment in rural areas, in rural infrastructure and agriculture
- Increased credit availability, particularly to farmers and others, and offering them remunerative prices for their crops
- Increased rural employment, including the provision of a unique social safety net in the shape of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme
- Increased public spending on education and health care, including strengthening the midday meal programme and offering scholarships to the needy
- Investment in urban renewal, improving the quality of life for the urban poor
- Empowering the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, minorities, women and children, socially, economically and educationally
- Ensuring that, through public investment, the growth process spreads to backward regions and districts of our country.[6]

Local self-government, as elaborated in our Constitution, provides the essential means of reconciling 'accelerated growth' with 'inclusive growth', and we cannot secure inclusive growth without inclusive governance. The virtually three-fold increase in annual allocations to rural development and welfare, and the launching of new schemes like NREGA, BRGF and RTI,[7] are not inadequately impacting on the concept of inclusive growth because governance at the grassroots is still far from inclusive. In addition, too large a proportion of the central government's annual expenditure of Rs.81,000 crore on rural development and welfare reaches the people – if at all – through government-run or officially managed silos, whilst too small a proportion of it is actually planned and implemented with the participation, involvement and supervision of village communities and their elected

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[6] Based on the foreword by the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, in Report to the People 2004 - 2008, UPA Government. See: http://pib.nic.in/archieve/upareport/report2008.pdf [7.39MB]

[7] Respectively, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (http://nrega.nic.in); the Backward Regions Grant Fund (http://brgf.gov.in), and the Right to Information Act (http://rti.gov.in).

representatives. Frustration can emerge if Gram Sabhas[8] are largely non-functional, and if most elected representatives (other than Panchayat presidents) are left uninvolved, particularly when they see more and more money being poured into rural areas with much of it beyond their control or responsibility. This can undermine the overarching components of governance such as policy formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

"Rural prosperity and poverty
eradication is possible through
Panchayati Raj"

This lack of involvement is incongruous considering that the Constitutional amendments have so firmly rooted Panchayati Raj in our system of governance. Today, 3.2 million elected representatives, including 1.2 million women and well over 22% from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (their estimated share in the rural population), serve in these grassroots local bodies of our vibrantly democratic society. There are two reasons for this anomaly: firstly, a lack of effective devolution of functions, finances and functions by state legislatures/governments to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs); and secondly, inadequate provisions for planning and implementation through PRIs in the guidelines issued by central ministries for centrally sponsored and central sector schemes. Both directly impinge on inclusive growth. To reinforce economic reform and secure inclusive growth it is important that Panchayati Raj be brought centre-stage as the principal governance reform. Also, parallel measures for empowering the grassroots are required in those areas that the Constitution exempts from the Panchayati Raj system, such as the Sixth Schedule areas and much of the North Eastern Region.

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[8] A bi-annual village meeting of all persons aged 18 years or more, which considers development schemes and reviews the work of the Panchayat.

Activating and strengthening institutions of local self-government requires adherence to certain broad and generally well-accepted principles of institutional design. Some of the features of a good design for local self-government include:

- Conducting regular elections for local bodies
- Clarity in the functional assignments to different levels of local bodies in rural and urban areas
- Matching the devolution of functions with the concomitant devolution of funds and functionaries so that the devolved functions might be effectively performed
- Ensuring that elected representatives of local bodies effectively wield powers
- Building capacity in local bodies to undertake planning
- Ensuring a healthy, constructive and mutually fruitful relationship between officials appointed by the state government and elected local bodies
- Providing for collective decision-making through Gram and Ward Sabhas and holding the local body to account for its performance.

In addition, it is important to create appropriate systems and institutions for planning and delivery of public services, including information systems, as well as for monitoring and evaluation and ensuring accountability.

Inclusive Governance in the North Eastern Region

Systems of decentralised governance in the North Eastern Region show a wide diversity due to ethnic, linguistic and religious variance unparalleled in any other region of the country. While the Panchayati Raj system (Part IX of the Constitution) fully covers two of the eight states of the region – Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, three other states (Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland) are entirely exempted and have their own local systems. The remaining three (Assam, Tripura and Manipur) have both Panchayati Raj and non-Panchayati Raj areas existing side by side. Furthermore, although Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Assam, Tripura and Manipur are covered under the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution, the extent of powers devolved upon Panchayats in these states is uneven. Such diversity is healthy and to be encouraged even though it makes local governance exceedingly complex, since it reflects the immense ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity seen in the region.

Some positive outcomes are as follows:

- Sikkim has been adjudged the third best state in the country in the implementation of Panchayati Raj
- Assam has been judged the best for activity mapping[9]

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[9] Activity mapping is a process required under the Constitution as part of devolving powers to PRIs. It is undertaken by central government departments in order to allocate functional responsibilities among the three tiers of Panchayati Raj.

- Tripura and Manipur are among the better states for their pattern of devolution
- Arunachal Pradesh has been commended for recent steps taken to move towards effective devolution.

In all five states there is considerable scope for advancing the cause of devolution. Happily, all five are party to the 150 conclusions of the seven Round Table Conferences held in 2004 covering all eighteen identified dimensions of Panchayati Raj. Those conclusions were reinforced by Memoranda of Understanding or joint Statements of Conclusions signed by the Chief Ministers and the Union Minister of Panchayati Raj, including agreed state-specific action points. Accelerated implementation by state and central governments of these agreed action points will contribute greatly to securing inclusive growth through inclusive governance in the North-East Region. A common feature of these diverse systems of self-governance is that all need strengthening. This is as true of the North East as it is of most parts of the country.

2. Progress in the Five States

Sikkim has completed activity mapping, including detailed assignment of funds to Panchayats and of the officials who will be attached to each Panchayat for the performance of devolved activities.

Minister Aiyar with villagers
of Tuithumhnar, Mizoram

The Arunachal Pradesh Activity Mapping Order 2007 was issued in October 2007 and the executive order for devolution of 29 subjects of activity mapping subsequently issued in February, 2008, covering 20 government departments. There is overlap of some of the functions devolved to different tiers of Panchayats and more clarity is required to specify devolved functions in terms of policy, planning, implementation, and coordination and control. Furthermore, the relevant

government functionaries (officials) have yet to be transferred to Panchayats, although the Directorate of Panchayati Raj has initiated the process in consultation with the departments concerned.

Assam has 21 districts covered under Part IX of the Constitution whilst other areas fall under the Sixth Schedule. The Government of Assam issued a notification in June 2007 through which functions, functionaries and funds in respect of 23 subjects were devolved to the three tiers of the Panchayats. The responsibilities of each tier are clearly demarcated and these have been distributed according to the capacity of each level of Panchayat. The activity mapping also indicates in detail the staff transferred to the Panchayats and the accounts from which funds will be drawn for the activities assigned to the Panchayats.   However, elections to the Panchayats in Assam were held in December 2007 and it is still to be seen whether the notification regarding activity mapping has been effectively implemented.

The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act of 1994 details the intended devolution of functions to the PRIs, covering all 29 items listed in Schedule 11 of the Constitution. However, activity mapping approved by the state cabinet in September 2005 lists only 16 of these items, and no funds and functionaries have been devolved.   Whilst the state government has undertaken to transfer all functionaries along with functions and finances to the Panchayats, and to frame rules for Panchayat-based cadres of technical and other support services recruited at the Panchayat level, there is no visible progress in this regard.

In Tripura, activity mapping was completed in 2005. This also covered the 29 items listed in the 11th Schedule and applies to 21 departments. The government of Tripura has taken a decision to implement the activity mapping in phases. To date, irrigation schemes, primary schools and institutions relating to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) have been transferred to the Panchayats through executive orders. Functionaries for five items from the 11th Schedule have been devolved to Panchayats, who review their work and have the power to recommend payment of salary, transfers, grants of leave and disciplinary action. However, overall controlling authority remains with the line departments and the state has continued to recruit further staff after devolving functionaries to Panchayats.

All five States will need to clearly identify those budgetary items that ought to go to the Panchayats and to separately earmark them through a Panchayat sector window in the budgets of the relevant line departments. This will ensure the flow of funds required for undertaking devolved activities. Functionaries will need to be devolved to the appropriate level of the Panchayati Raj system to reflect any given activity assigned in the activity map, and in conformity with the pattern of devolution of functions and finances. These are all works in progress and activity in this regard over the last few years has been encouraging. The stage is, therefore, well and truly set for 'inclusive growth through inclusive governance' provided this is given priority and followed through assiduously and conscientiously.

Institutionalising participative planning from the grassroots level in the preparation of a district plan is another key step in the strengthening of Panchayats. As mandated in the Constitution, 80% of the members of District Planning Committees (DPCs) are required to be *elected* by and from amongst the elected members of the district level Panchayat (Zilla Parishad) and the municipalities within the district. Although most of the five states falling under Part IX of the Constitution now have DPCs with constitutions, in Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura some issues relating to the composition of the DPCs still remain to be clarified, owing to special circumstances.

The district plan must emerge from plans prepared by each village Panchayat, intermediate Panchayat, district Panchayat and municipality for their respective geographical areas and functional competencies. To this end, state governments need to clearly inform Panchayats at each level (and the municipalities) about the resources likely to be available and the activities entrusted to them. DPCs have the responsibility of 'consolidating' these local plans into a draft district development plan and forwarding it to the state government.

The North Eastern Region states concerned have commenced the process of district planning through the Panchayats in districts covered by the Backward Regions Grant Fund. However, steps will need to be taken to ensure that these guidelines are fully followed and district planning is established as a practice in all districts in the region.

> We must put an end to planning from above. We must put an end to priorities being conceived and decided at ethereal heights, far removed from the realities on the ground. We must initiate a process of people's planning. (Shri Rajiv Gandhi)

3. Governance Reforms in Exempt Areas

All of Meghalaya and Mizoram, and large tracts of Tripura, come under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. Nagaland and the hill areas of Manipur are governed by similar arrangements through state legislation. Such special arrangements are aimed at the protection of tribal areas and interests, by mandating district or regional local self-government institutions entrusted with the dual tasks of protecting tribal culture and customs, and undertaking development activities. However, unlike their Panchayati Raj counterparts, the Autonomous Developmental Councils that are supposed to establish responsive administrations and undertake development planning functions (with maximum participation of the people), are yet to fulfil their role effectively.

In order to maximize people's participation in governance and to chart a clear roadmap to involve these institutions in grassroots planning, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj appointed an Expert Group on Grassroots Planning for the Sixth Schedule Areas (and those areas not covered by Parts IX and IXA of the Constitution). The Expert Group has suggested a series of sequential steps for

building the district plan. First, a district vision that sets out the goals and outcomes for the next 10-15 years will need to be fashioned through participative processes starting from the grassroots level upwards. Each planning unit should then articulate the vision and set out goals and outcomes in terms of human development indicators, infrastructure development and development in the productive sectors of the economy, based on available physical and human resources.

4. Conclusion

While the Constitution leaves it to the states to determine the nature, direction and pace of devolution, there is a crying need to motivate the states to further empower their PRIs, and also to provide incentives for PRIs to be transparent and accountable in their transactions. As the Eleventh Five Year Plan states:

> …there is a need to build in incentives that will encourage the States to devolve functions, funds and functionaries to the PRIs. In order to capture the extent to which this process and empowerment of PRIs has actually progressed in a State, a suitable devolution index will be developed and will be called the PRI-Empowerment Index. (para 1.148)

Central government could greatly accelerate and rationalise this process by adapting the guidelines of Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes (the principal sources of funding for PRIs), to ensure the importance of PRIs in the planning and implementation of these schemes in conformity with the letter and spirit of the Constitution.

There is also an imperative to make available untied block grants to the PRIs so that they have an adequate reservoir of financial resources to plan and implement neighbourhood economic development and social justice programs, as envisaged in Parts IX and IXA. The 13th Finance Commission (http://fincomindia.nic.in) has a golden opportunity to build on the tentative beginnings of previous Commissions by increasing untied grants, particularly for maintenance of community assets and improved service delivery.

We continue to rely heavily on a creaking bureaucratic delivery system, fashioned into administrative silos, which over six decades has proved to be quite unequal to the task of delivering development. The Eleventh Five Year Plan says:

> The DRDAs (District Rural Development Agencies, the bureaucratic arm of the Ministry of Rural Development) in their current form and content do not appear to have the requisite wherewithal to handle a complex issue such as poverty. The current administrative set up at the national level is unequal to a large task such as poverty elimination across geographical and social complexity… (para 4.70)

Our need is not bureaucratic development but participative development, that is, grassroots development through grassroots democracy. The path to such development was charted through the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution which resulted in the present Part IX ('The Panchayats') and Part IXA ('The

Municipalities'). In these two parts of the Constitution we have the key to inclusive growth through inclusive governance. For inclusive growth, we need to hitch the horse of accelerated growth to the wagon of participative development.

NEWS AND REVIEWS

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**Governing Cities in a Global Era: Urban
Innovation, Competition and Democratic Reform**
Robin Hambleton and Jill Simone Gross (Palgrave MacMillan,
New York, 2007.)

Robin Hambleton and Jill Simone Gross have assembled a collection of papers
which powerfully supports their argument that "those concerned with the future of
cities, whether as academics or practitioners, should devote more time to
instrumental learning from abroad." Contributions range widely from the influence
of globalisation and urbanisation, to the importance of understanding the unique
impact of our own context; from innovation in the leading 'world cities' of the
developed world, to the seemingly intractable problems of cities in the developing
world; from celebrating the importance of a shift from government to governance,
to contributions highlighting the potential of governance to undermine local
democracy; and from the role of leadership to the dangers of persistent
managerialism.

A central theme throughout the book is the relationship between government, the
formal institutions of the state, and governance – government *plus* the looser
processes of influencing and negotiating with a range of public and private sector
agencies to achieve desired outcomes. The editors in their opening chapter set out a
focus on *governing* cities based on the argument that governance in the absence of
strong government can lead to urban breakdown. Two contributions provide
valuable empirical evidence on the shortcomings of an over-emphasis on
governance.

Judd and Smith discuss the role of special-purpose authorities in urban
development in the United States. These are stand-alone entities (often formed as
special districts with their own independent revenue sources), typically established
to develop and run major projects (stadia, convention centres, major cultural
initiatives), usually to distance them from the uncertainties of public processes
(consultation, referenda etc). The model is very much governance in terms of local

government working with a range of public and private sector parties to establish and fund these entities. Judd and Smith argue that the public has been the loser by being distanced from local democratic accountability, citing research that: "historically, advocates for these major projects have invariably over-estimated use and revenues and under-estimated costs. The reasons are not hard to find. Working in a closed world of supporters of their projects, participants and the consultants who advise them share an interest in moving forward."

Davies considers partnership building in the UK within the framework of local governance. Drawing on his own and others' research he argues that "community participation is being subverted to managerial and technocratic ends." Evaluation of New Deal for Communities funding concluded: "the original assumption that partnerships should be given a strong degree of local flexibility and freedom has been steadily eroded." Essentially, the key condition for genuine partnership working, that partners respect each other's views and seek to achieve consensus, was not present. Government and managerial objectives overrode community interests.

From this reviewer's perspective the major interest of this work lies in its contributions to understanding different arrangements for metropolitan governance, including how they have evolved, and the effect of local context (historical, social, political, economic, geographic). Röber and Schröter, comparing institutional reform in Berlin, London and Paris, draw valuable attention to the importance of historical context, whilst at the same time highlighting a common theme of the search for a means of managing strategic decision-making at the level of the metropolitan region. It is not just London which has seen the importance of separating responsibility for regional strategic issues from service delivery.

Tsukamoto and Vogel review a range of literature on the role of the state in the rise of world cities, much of which argues that globalisation leads to decentralisation because of the need for localities to be internationally competitive: "nation states should promote devolution if they seek to enhance the competitiveness of their cities." Their own research, focused on twenty world cities, leads to the conclusion that "globalisation is almost as likely to lead to greater political centralisation as (to) decentralisation", with a major factor being intervention by central governments to promote development.

For this reviewer, the discussion of the role of the state would have benefited from considering the research on the hostility which many central governments have shown to the emergence of a strong metropolitan level (OECD 2004, Davoudi 2006). This has been an important factor in developments (or the lack of them) in metropolitan governance in, for example, Canada and Australia, where metropolitan regions such as Toronto and Sydney labour under dysfunctional governance arrangements.

Kübler and Randolph's account of metropolitan governance in Australia through the Sydney experience is a timely reminder of the very high costs of failure to deal adequately with the challenge of metropolitan governance, as well as an illustration of the potential for local governments in a fragmented system to develop coping mechanisms. In this respect, Kübler and Randolph describe the emergence of strong collaboration amongst eleven councils in Western Sydney, driven by the failure of the state government to deal with a major infrastructure deficit. There is an interesting if somewhat loose parallel with Zhang's account of evolving urban governance in Shanghai, where building owner associations (commercial) and property owner associations (residential) have come to play an important role in urban governance, effectively filling a gap, driven by the incentive to protect their significant investments. At least where the inherent capability is present, it does seem that local governance will out.

Other contributors provide valuable insights into the role of leadership within local government, including John Nalbandian who considers the response of professionals to the conflicting forces of administrative modernisation and civic engagement, balancing new public management driven demands with the imperatives of local democracy. Nalbandian makes the very valuable point that the growing professionalism of local government management in recent years has further widened the capability gap between management and elected members, a phenomenon which is an increasingly significant issue in a number of jurisdictions.

In their concluding chapter, Hambleton and Gross end by revisiting two scenarios developed in their opening chapter for the future of cities – a balkanised world of fortified enclaves and widening social divisions, or a revitalisation of local democracy with cities re-establishing themselves as centres of culture and civilised living. Part way through this chapter they set out what this reviewer regards as the essential prerequisite for the optimistic scenario:

> … it seems clear that higher-level governments have a responsibility to ensure that effective governance arrangements and resources are in place. In too many countries national governments are failing to rise to this challenge…. local leadership and an enlivened local democracy are crucial for urban success, but these local energies need to be orchestrated and supported by higher levels of government (state and federal in federal systems, national in unitary systems). This means ensuring that the powers, funding, and the configuration of local democratic institutions are suited to modern challenges rather than to a bygone era.

Hambleton and Gross have provided a very valuable resource for anyone concerned with the future of metropolitan and city governance. That said there are two things that they might like to consider. The first is the possibility of producing a layman's version capable of being easily assimilated by the typical elected member. The second is whether the global credit crunch, and the potential retreat from reliance on markets which have set so much of the context for urban development in recent years, might not justify a second edition revisiting some of the judgements about the forces driving the development of our cities.
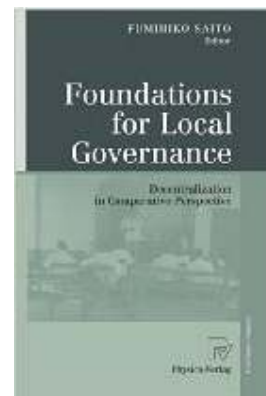
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NEWS AND REVIEWS

Randal Smith

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Foundations for Local Governance: Decentralization in Comparative Perspective
Fumihaiko Saito (Physica-Verlag, Heidelberg, 2008)

This is a rich collection of case studies and will be valuable to anyone seeking a wide range of examples of local governance and decentralisation in developing countries. It covers Indonesia, India (Kerala and Karnataka), Sri Lanka, Uganda, South Africa and Ghana. With the exception of Sri Lanka, all the countries have two chapters devoted to them by different authors, thus providing a broader perspective on both the context of decentralisation and research findings.

It is also interesting to have the perspectives of different national outlooks and disciplines – anthropologists, scholars of public administration, geographers, economists and political scientists.

However the studies are of variable quality. It is a major editing challenge to bring together such varied perspectives to produce a coherent publication, and that has not been fully achieved in this instance. Many of the chapters would have benefited from rigorous sub-editing to reach an evenness of international English. This may have resulted in the loss of distinctive voices, but it would have improved the readability of the book as a whole.

In the introduction, Saito seeks to bring a binding theme to the whole book. However, there are many generalisations and over-extended assertions lacking evidence or substantiation. At one point he asserts: "In the context of developing countries, the decentralized state is considered ideal to help reduce pervasive poverty. The world today is following the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which was [*sic*] adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000." Who considers the decentralized state ideal? Few countries devolve sufficient finance for local governance to be truly successful, and few allow even a measure of autonomy over the finances.

Whether intentional or not, Saito appears to adopt an extremely managerialist line in the introduction, for example asserting the view that the requirement placed on UK local government to work in partnership with local public private and voluntary sector bodies is a process fraught with tension. But the real point here is that local government is expected to provide strategic leadership for the area, manage the tensions, and make the delivery of key outcomes more likely and more efficient in doing so. This is not a 'process' in the management sense: it is a series of political challenges and responses.

In most cases the two chapters on each country are split between a substantial description of the local government system in one, followed by an analytical chapter. The descriptive chapters are excellent and very useful: basic descriptions of local government systems are hard to find and their contribution should not be overlooked.

The chapters on Indonesia are fascinating, but frustratingly ahistorical. At one point Tikson writes that: "Outside Java, the administration reforms that took place in the 1930s were actually made to accommodate the existence of traditional laws." Without going into the issue of the origins and validity of the so-called traditional laws, why should this be of any surprise? This was an administrative reform driven by the metropolitan power to make colonial rule more efficient – indirect rule through traditional leaders was simply cheaper. At around this time a similar approach to indirect rule was being applied across British Africa, and there was much interaction on the administration of indigenous peoples between the Dutch and British in this period.

The chapters on India are excellent – both sharply focused on the core issues and yet providing the reader with a strong sense of the external and internal pressures for change. Writing on Kerala, Harilal notes the tensions between state and local government, arguing that the relationships need restructuring.
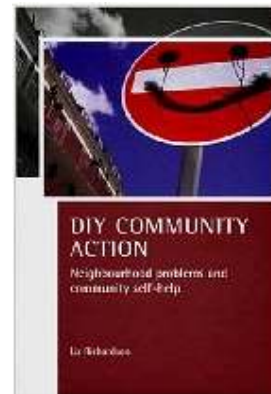
The analytical chapters on Uganda, South Africa and Ghana all bring out the tensions that exist in those systems, and should be put to good use by those interested in local government and development. It is often the case that local government cannot drive development, but that it can help remove some of the barriers to development, and so it is important to have lucid analyses of the systemic tensions – tensions to which practitioners are often blind.

Jenny Wills

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**DIY Community Action: Neighbourhood problems
and community self-help**
Liz Richardson (The Policy Press, University of Bristol, 2008)

This book explores collaborative community engagement for local well-being
initiatives, and is substantially based on the experiences and perspectives of activist
groups in low-income neighbourhoods across the United Kingdom. It gives a voice
to people in precarious communities and "helps to explain the strong desire that
people feel to organize themselves at a level below that of official structures, no
matter how low or lowly."

The value of volunteering, how groups organize, what gives groups the right to
organize, obstacles and barriers to self-help, and supports that can maximize the
potential for self-help groups, are all canvassed. The book provides significant
insights into, for example, personal motivations behind participation; the ongoing
significance of community to residents; ways in which governments, formal
organizations and employed staff can undermine groups, rather than support
engagement; and the attributes of effective community self-help groups.

The book concludes with the lessons from the overall research and a range of
recommendations for promoting a broad community building framework that gives
equal weighting to the following four factors:

- Facilitation of self-help groups
- Good quality services and management of neighbourhoods
- Civic engagement, democratic renewal and local accountability
- Stable and strong communities.

DIY community action is defined as "informal groups of people, acting on a
voluntary basis, working together to solve problems by taking actions themselves,
and with others." The qualitative and stimulating information in this

comprehensive book is sourced from wide-ranging interviews with 300 community
volunteers from 82 deprived areas, and material from many others who participated
in a national program of intensive training and small grants to stimulate and
facilitate self-help actions. This five-year project, carried out between 1996 and
2001, was funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

Whilst focused on lower-income areas the scope of the book is wide and its content
will be of interest to all those residents, activists, organisations and governments
interested in community building, community well-being, neighbourhood renewal,
and local social and political advocacy.

The book's nine chapters of nearly 300 pages clearly set out information, analysis,
figures, information boxes, explanatory tables and summaries which should assist
the reader to come to a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of broad
concepts such as community, local empowerment and social exclusion. At the same
time the book provides easy access and insights into specific topics which may be
of relevance to particular readers, for example, team work and leadership, and the
value of volunteering.

The project activists involved in this research impress as resilient, resourceful and
down-to-earth people. They see the importance of strong community spirit and
attachments to place, whilst at the same time admitting that there can be negative
impacts for broader social inclusion in tight-knit, insular communities. Their
comments indicate that they are cognizant of the many local difficulties and
tensions surrounding them as they tackle, albeit on a small scale, the problems that
directly impinge on the quality of life of their communities, such as poor services,
bad design, management and maintenance of estates, and anti-social behaviour.

It is acknowledged that the self-help group members studied represent only a small
proportion of the population; but rather than simply seeing the activists as the
"usual suspects," or what others may term "squeaky wheels", and accordingly
dismissing their efforts and inputs, the book argues that they constitute a legitimate
part of the participatory process. On this basis the book constructively puts forward
a number of accountability and transparency suggestions that could enhance
legitimacy of the groups in their direct and informal relationships, in the
neighbourhoods, and also in interfacing with the wider community and external
bodies: for example having other residents help raise funds or give financial
backing, reaching out to the wider community, more openness to outside scrutiny,
and the promotion of diversity.

It is refreshing to have research and discussion grounded in a clear concept of
community, rather than arguing about differing interpretations that tend to negate
the existence or validity of communities. Community in this instance is spatial and
geographical and a set of social relationships, i.e. both 'place' and 'people.' The
definition used "does not presume that neighbourhoods should be a primary focus
for residents' careers, leisure time or social lives", but acknowledges that the

quality of neighbourhoods, services, and the behaviour of others impacts upon the quality of peoples' everyday lives, "whether we care about those people, or not." The ability to engage, with the purpose of influencing quality of life community outcomes, is therefore seen as an important aspect of social inclusion and of fundamental consideration in any approaches to community building.

Engagement is also seen as important in terms of the relationship between direct participatory democracy and representative democracy. The book argues that if different forms of accountability and legitimacy were understood and respected between stakeholders then all would be empowered.

> Residents can engage and contribute to local democracy, and can start co-producing. They are more likely to be encouraged to make self-help inputs to their own quality of life. Local politicians could be better stimulated to play an effective community leadership role and contribute to local democracy. Local workers and other professionals could be encouraged to problem solve at the front line. This could add professional expertise and feed in evidence to guide options for local actions to raise the quality of the decision-making process.

This view provides a timely challenge, reminding us all that empowerment calls for transformational changes in the way in which people relate and that tinkering with power bases will not necessarily result in sustained changes in community well-being.

The book offers seven lessons about community building which reinforce the comprehensive approach taken in this self-help study. They are:

- Neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion are about more than just tackling poverty
- Neighbourhoods and communities matter to people
- Self-help in all forms is at the base of community building
- Community self-help is a choice by the minority that produces benefits for the majority
- Community self-help in poor communities provides triple benefits, viz. improving mainstream services, contributing to neighbourhood renewal, underpinning democracy through civic engagement in decision-making and civic responsibility
- The legitimacy of community groups was questioned by many other bodies and often misunderstood
- Community organizing is strong, yet fragile.

These lessons are then reinforced with final recommendations for promoting a community building strategy. Add the four community building framework factors and a complete package is provided for enhancing overall community well-being through self-help. In addition, the inclusion of specific suggestions for targeted actions by different stakeholders makes this publication an invaluable resource for all those committed to achieving changes for the better at neighbourhood and community levels.