



Commonwealth Local Government Conference  
Kampala, Uganda  
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DEMOCRATISING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

**Address by Amitav Banerji,  
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Secretariat**

I am delighted to be here. My sincere thanks to the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) for inviting me to speak.

It is wonderful to be back in Uganda. This brings back many happy memories of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in this very venue in 2007, when momentous decisions were taken.

Munyonyo will always be remembered for the *Munyonyo Statement on Respect and Understanding*, two words which have more meaning today than ever before. And the beautiful waters that wash the shores of this complex lend their name to the Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan.

I have had the privilege of being associated with democracy in the Commonwealth ever since I joined the Secretariat more than 22 years ago.



That included the privilege of being involved with drafting the 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration.

I was in Auckland in 1995 when the Millbrook Action Plan was adopted and, through it, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) was established, creating a pioneering Commonwealth institution.

Democracy has come a long way in the Commonwealth. Twelve countries have moved from one party or military rule to multi-party democracy since 1991.

Eight of the top ten countries according to the Mo Ibrahim ranking of good governance on this continent are from the Commonwealth.

We have had several examples of democratic transitions being consolidated through credible elections, most notably next door in Kenya only a few weeks ago.

The Commonwealth is the only global organisation that makes it mandatory for a country applying for membership to be a functioning democracy. And the Commonwealth led the way in making it unacceptable for a constitutionally elected government to be overthrown.

The former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, famously remarked 'all politics is local'. He was, of course, referring to the fact that every Member of Parliament must worry about his/her constituents and cultivate them properly.



However, he could just as easily have been meaning to say that all democracy is local and all government is local. Because local councils and local government are where elected representatives and accountable civil servants interface the most with people at the grass-roots level.

The Commonwealth recognised the importance of local government a long time ago, when the Commonwealth Local Government Forum was established in 1995.

An important milestone was reached at the Malta CHOGM in 2005, when Commonwealth leaders welcomed the Commonwealth principles on good practice for local democracy and good governance, the so-called Aberdeen Agenda adopted by the CLGF Conference in Scotland earlier that year.

In 2009 at Port of Spain, Heads of Government adopted the Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles, which inter alia recognised that “parliaments and representative local government and other forms of local governance are essential elements in the exercise of democratic governance”.

Most recently, the Charter of the Commonwealth, which came into effect on 1 January this year, formerly enshrined the earlier affirmation made in Trinidad and Tobago of representative local government as a core value of the Commonwealth.



The Commonwealth, therefore, has proclaimed at the highest political level, that local democracy and good governance at the local level are integral parts of its DNA.

We in the Secretariat therefore work closely with the CLGF in many ways, be it the development of policy, or the assessment of the quality of democracy in a country under scrutiny of CMAG. We often look to CLGF to help propose observers for our election observer missions. We also work with GIDD, our partner Division in the Secretariat, whose Director is also present here today, in the provision of technical assistance to buttress local government.

The theme of this session is ‘Democratising Local Development’. It brings to the fore an issue that has long been debated and will probably continue to be debated in time to come.

As far as the Commonwealth is concerned, the proposition is actually quite simple: democracy and development are two sides of the same coin and are mutually reinforcing.

In the Aso Rock Declaration in 2003, at the Abuja CHOGM, our leaders said: “while development and democracy are goals each in their own right, they must be mutually reinforcing, with a clear ‘democratic dividend’ in terms of delivering tangible benefits to people. We are convinced that broad-based prosperity creates the stability conducive to the promotion of democracy and that strong democratic institutions better promote development”.



At that Abuja CHOGM, Commonwealth Heads of Government made a commitment “to make democracy work better for pro-poor development by implementing sustainable development programmes and enhancing democratic institutions and processes in all human endeavours”.

For the vast majority of countries in the Commonwealth development remains a key objective. In the Commonwealth Charter, Sustainable Development is identified as a core Commonwealth value.

For most of our countries, there is little meaning to being members of the Commonwealth if the organisation does not help countries create a better life for its citizens.

For that reason, the Commonwealth has also been a strong champion of the Millennium Development Goals. For the very same reason, we must now take a close interest in the post-2015 development agenda.

While national governments will always remain important, the onus is even greater on local governments to deliver the fruits of development.

In exactly six months from today, Commonwealth leaders will assemble in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for their biennial summit.

While they have yet to agree on a special theme, it is very likely that this theme will focus on inclusive and equitable development, as President Rajapaksa hinted yesterday.



Development with equity and inclusivity is at the heart of our theme here today. The organisers of this conference have clearly been prescient about what our national leaders will discuss in Colombo in November!

I am sure that you will want the outcomes of your deliberations here in Munyonyo to be fed into the deliberations of our Heads of Government in Colombo, in order to ensure that local democracy, in the context of developmental local government, remains firmly on the radar screens of our members.

I wish you well in your deliberations. Thank you.