

**PRESENTATION TO THE 2013 COMMONWEALTH LOCAL
GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE, 15 MAY 2013,
KAMPALA, UGANDA**

**THEME: DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE – PUTTING
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AT THE HEART OF DEVELOPMENT**

SESSION: DEMOCRATISING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

TIME: 11:00 – 12:30HRS

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Salutations

INTRODUCTION

I am grateful for the opportunity to present at this august gathering of local government experts and practitioners.

I intend through my presentation, to walk you briefly through the decentralisation process in Botswana; to share with you our endeavours thereof in strengthening local democracy and governance, as to enable us to respond to the needs of local communities, effectively deliver services, promote good governance and effective local development.

I will also share on how we as the Association of Local Authorities in Botswana, seize the available opportunities of decentralisation process to invigorate local development democratization and how we continue to sharpen our interventions to become a more responsive developmental local government.

It is of benefit to also share with you the challenges we are faced with in our effort to grow and sustain a democratic local government. In sharing with you the challenges, I will further demonstrate how we make connections of the decentralisation puzzle through context effective national and international local development interventions.

DECENTRALISATION PROCESS IN BOTSWANA

Tracing back to history, I am tempted to confidently share that the commitment to take services to the people by Government of Botswana dates as far back as pre-independence. It was pronounced through the Government White Paper 21/1964 that:

'... It is essential that constitutional development at the Centre should be balanced by the growth of democratic institutions throughout the country. Freedom and responsibility in thought and action must be stimulated at every level if they are to be fully understood and given effective expression. One of the best checks to any tendency to authoritarianism is a widespread cultivation of these habits of mind and the readiness of people at every level of society to play part in the conduct of local affairs...'

This has been supported by subsequent establishment of District and Urban Councils through Local Government Act (District as well as Townships Acts) in 1965. Successive pronouncements and related national strategies and /or frameworks on local government development with specific focus on decentralisation, were also made post independence. Even though Government of Botswana has never adopted an official over-arching decentralisation policy, it has nonetheless been persuaded by need and arguments for efficiency in delivery of services, democracy and good governance and promotion of inclusive and sustainable development. It sees decentralisation as a valuable policy tool which should be considered as a means to contribute to a desired goal of improving service delivery to local communities and to contribute to development by empowering citizens, societal institutions (public, private and civic) at every level. This would increase peoples

participation in decision making, assist in developing people's capacities, enhance government's responsiveness, transparency and accountability.

The decentralisation structure and process in Botswana has also been influenced by the historical circumstances under which Botswana was established, especially amongst others; the influence of chieftaincy and its cardinal influence in local democracy, the colonial administrative set up and influence, post independence land management policy (where land administration and management was taken away from the chiefs, a developmental state model/ideology, technocratic approach to development planning and the quest for equitable distribution of national resources.

Therefore despite the general consensus and initial commitment to local governance that resulted in the creation of councillors, full decentralisation has not been achieved as the present set up has been skewed more towards deconcentration. While significant achievements have been realised in service delivery; nonetheless this has over the years created bottlenecks that have frustrated local governance and service delivery and has thus lend a new impetus for need for a robust decentralisation drive.

Specifically, some of the Government of Botswana recent decentralisation strategic initiatives include the 1993 Policy Paper and Action Plan on Decentralisation by the then Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Housing; the National Development Plan 8,9 & 10 and the Draft Decentralisation Policy of 2009. The 2009 Draft Decentralisation Policy aims at systemic devolution of authority from central government to local authorities. The main thrust of the policy is also to address holistic service delivery, promote sustainable local democracy and enhance popular citizen participation, ultimately achieving improved quality of life for all by the year 2016. In line with this national agenda on democratising local development and promotion of decentralisation, the Government of Botswana further established Sub-districts to reduce the distance travelled by citizens to access services, to ease overload, congestion and administrative "traffic jam" and/or bottlenecks as well as increase the accessibility of public goods and services and at a lower cost.

These initiatives demonstrate the importance that the Government of Botswana attaches to effective service delivery and further democratization of local development and the need to enhance advocacy for local governance and democracy and build requisite capacity for local authorities. The local authorities established a local government association (BALA) in 1983 with an overarching objective of contributing towards the development of a strong democratic and developmental local government system in Botswana. Since its establishment in partnership with the Ministry of Local Government has played significant advocacy role.

INTERVENTIONS BY BALA

Botswana Association of Local Authorities identified the need to strengthen the capacities of local authorities to enable them to become responsive, transparent and accountable entities. Specifically, some of the strategies we undertook to promote developmental local government(s) include the following:

- i) **Local Democracy Assessments:**¹ Through the technical assistance (initially) of International Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and financial support of Friederich Ebert Stiftung, we assessed the perceptions of citizens on local democracy in all the sixteen districts in Botswana. Out of these assessments, it came out clearly that among other challenges:
- a) Implementation of decentralised functions still remains a challenge. The various public sectors operate in ‘silos’ and as a result do not service the public timely, and fail to come with targeted interventions that respond to specific needs of a locality.
 - b) District Offices are staffed by officers who do not have adequate administrative authority to take strategic decisions – over reliance on Headquarters (Central Government) for finalizing decisions.
 - c) The above also made it daunting to grow the relationship between the Local Authorities and communities as communities felt that in most cases, the Local Authorities do not respond to the local needs but are more biased towards a ‘one size fits all development path,’ which is often defined and controlled from the centre (Central Government).
 - d) Whereas communities might be accorded adequate time to engage through a consultative planning process to craft their local development agenda, the same does not occur when it comes to implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects.
 - e) Lack of a platform for dialogue between the local business, community members and the local authorities
 - f) Lack of clarity on the role and conduct of the elected local political leaders.
- ii) **Capacity enhancement for transparent and accountable Local governments:** ² Out of these Local Democracy Assessments and other interventions, we also as the Association undertook a project titled Project P3 (Participation, Partnership and Progress). This project was implemented in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa through the support of European Union and Swedish International Development Agency and through technical assistance of Swedish Association of Local Authorities & Regions.
- iii) For us in Botswana, we had overtime realised that though our members (Local Authorities) are a key player at local level and are the principal legitimate agent of the local development process, they have limited necessary capacity and resources to properly manage and service their localities. Our undertaking of the

¹ BALA Local Democracy Assessment Reports 2000 – 2010

² BALA/P3 Project Final Closeout Report, 2012

P3 Project was in response to this Local Authorities' technical capacity limitation and our contribution to the national decentralisation agenda as well as contributing to the Botswana National Vision aspirations of building **An open, Democratic and Accountable Nation**; specifically to achieve open and transparent governance; and **A prosperous, Productive and Innovative Nation**; to attain a sustainable local economic growth.

Through this project, we focused on the following strategic initiatives:

- a) Local Economic Development: building the capacity of Municipalities and stakeholders so that i) transparency is developed in the relations between the municipal administration and the business community, ii) there is improved understanding of the local conditions for businesses, iii) Improved internal and external understanding of the strategic economic directions for the individual municipality or locality.
 - **Assistance to municipalities in establishing regular public fora – Local Economic Development roundtables.** These were aimed at improving relations between the municipalities and private sector and among the various stakeholders in economic development, thereby further convallescening confidence between local stakeholders. These also provided a platform for information sharing on local economic development initiatives; as such increasing access to information on economic opportunities including market prospects as well business growth avenues, etc by citizens.
 - **Provide direct training to municipalities in various LED tools to enhance their capacities to systemically implement LED responsibilities:** During the project period, in addition to LED Roundtables described above, Botswana focused on i) Leak Plugging, ii) LED strategy development, iii) Business Enabling Environment Surveys, iv) Business Retention and Expansion to mention a few.
 - **Establishing platforms for sharing of experiences and best practices on LED with Ministry of Local Government and other BALA stakeholders;** in order to facilitate discussions and dialogue on possible policy direction on LED.
 - **Provide extensive on-site technical assistance/mentorship to municipalities on planning and executing Local Economic Development.**
- b) Transparent Local Governments: This focused on training municipalities and communities as well as mentoring them on strategies that i) improved budgeting, financial transparency and citizens' understanding of the budget process for meaningful citizens' participation; and ii) Improved services based on customer orientation, regular information and feedback principles.

- **Continuous Service Improvement: focused on capacitating municipalities to draw/review and publish procedures and service standards.** By so doing, it was expected that transparency would be increased and because citizens would have access to standards and procedures and would be able to predict the type and quality of services expected from municipalities, they would actively participate in municipal decision making.
- **Financial Management: with more emphasis on transparent Tariff setting and modelling.** Here there was a realisation by municipalities that tariffs as a cost recovery measure could enhance municipal revenue growth. In addition, BALA team gave technical input to the Task Group on Local Authorities Revenue Collection and Generation in Botswana. This contribution motivated positive dialogue which somewhat enhanced policy shifts that are demonstrated in the current Local Government Act, no 18 of 2012.
- Also, appreciation of the extent of losses made through unsustainable ways of service provision by municipalities was attained. The Tariff Model was used to help in facilitating 'effective negotiation' with community over 'payment' for services, ultimately enhancing the sustenance of service provision by the municipalities and improvement of citizens' livelihoods.
- **Citizens' Budget** – We trained municipalities to draw Citizens Budget, which is a document that summarizes and explains basic budget information. It is a report to the community, presented in an accessible format using simple and clear language they can understand. Being able to understand, individuals can then carry out their responsibility as citizens in a democracy of asking questions that ensure that the local authority explains what it has done in their name.

iv) The New Local Government Act of 2012 and Advocacy Initiatives included in the Act.

Establishment Council Executive Committees: The major thrust of the Local Government Act 2012, No.18 of 2012 was to enhance service delivery, through the legitimisation of decentralised practices which were not otherwise recognised by law, but also to increase the executive powers of councils through recognition of the strategic leadership role played by the Mayors and Chairpersons of Councils. The act establishes council executive committees which will act as “cabinet” of council.

Enhanced Revenue Generation: The Act also expanded opportunities for revenue generation to councils through the introduction of the property rates to rural districts has always been exclusive to urban councils.

Inclusion of the Local Government Association: Furthermore, the Act provides recognition for the organised local government as a vehicle for promoting cooperation

and collaboration between and amongst local authorities. This therefore legitimises existence BALA and recognises its contribution towards achieving robust local government and sustainable development.

v) Development of Councillors Handbook and Code of Conduct for Councillors

BALA in partnership with the Ministry of Local Government developed a Councillors' Handbook in 2009, which delineating the following councillor's roles as critical for developmental local government. The councillors as:

- Leaders, policy makers, decision makers, institution builders, communicators, facilitators, enablers, negotiators, power brokers and guardians of the environment among other many more roles.

Furthermore the Councillors Handbook provides guidance of the following key areas:

- **Councils legal framework, functions and powers**
- **functions of political structures of councils**
- **roles and responsibilities of council**
 - Working with the community
 - How to build effective community participation
 - Planning and coordination
 - Performance management system
 - How to sustain community interest
 - Roles and competencies of councillors
 - Financing and financial management of councils
 - Council budgeting
 - Recurrent budget
 - Development budget
 - Revenue of councils
 - General funds
 - Borrowing powers
 - Account and audit
 - The process of participatory budgeting

All of which are vital for the attainment of effective and community-driven local government agenda.

vi) Training of Councillors and Municipal Staff on Good Local Governance

In another effort to capacitate our members to implement their mandate of consolidating local democracy, we further provided trainings and in some quarters coaching of elected officials and municipal staff on these capacity areas:

- Principles of good governance
- Local government finance;
- Functions and responsibilities of local government;
- Project management in local government;
- Local government service delivery and improvement;

- Performance Management in Local Authorities
- Managing Local Economic Development;
- Participatory planning in local government;
- Managing Councils;
- Decentralisation;
- Conflict management in local government

VII) Commitment to the International Agenda

BALA has continued to participate sub-regional, regional and international organisations (including CLGF) that are geared at promotion of local government, and takes seriously the recommendations and related obligations. BALA disseminates these to its members and stakeholders during the conferences and meetings and sets out the implementation of the required actions and lobby the relevant structures for the related action and responses. The initiatives and commitments from these international agenda have played a pivotal role in BALA's advocacy and lobbying for improved recognition of local government, including the recent establishment of Parliamentary Committee on Local Governance and Welfare, enhanced community engagement, and general capacity building of municipalities on effective local democracy. BALA together with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development continually seek ways and act jointly to assist and work with Government of Botswana to implement and honour its obligations in relation to the international local government agenda. The Commonwealth principles on good practice for local democracy and good governance continue to inform the national local government agenda. While local government is not yet given constitutional recognition, we, together with the ministry continue to pursue all available and possible avenues to ensure that it receives requisite legal recognition and that it is adequately protected. To this end we are hopeful that the ministry will receive assistance from partners to help GOB expedite the formulation of an overarching decentralisation policy.

CONCLUSION

In our quest for improved service delivery, promotion of democracy, good governance, and inclusive and sustainable development; a robust local government remains the greatest enabling factor. It has generally been agreed by development experts that where there is a strong local government the propensity to achieve the MDGs is much greater, and that in Africa due to anaemic local government it is likely to take Africa fifty more years to realise the MDGs. As we discuss the post 2015 agenda, we should also be mindful of the need to create a supportive environment for such by embedding local government at the heart of the implementation of the post 2015 agenda. We commend efforts and work of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Leaders for 2015 convened by UGLG of which CLGF is a member. It gives us an opportunity to feed into the consultations of the post 2015 agenda.

It is the people who desire development and it is the people who must own and drive the development process through effective decentralisation that ensures localised participation

where communities will be aware of the challenges that they are facing, and then find solutions for these challenges based on the resources that are available to them. Participatory Local Government/Decentralisation is about empowering communities, to be viable change agents of their own development through equitable local participation. A robust decentralisation /Local government is the best vehicle if we are to reduce dependency on governments and other external development partners since it will help create resilient communities; that have the capacity to drive their own development.

A robust Local Government will give rise to communities that have ability to take intentional action to enhance the individual and collective capacities of their citizens and institutions to respond and adapt to social and economic change

The Kampala November 2007 CHOGM Declaration aptly depicts that “human and political transformation cannot be successful or enduring unless people themselves have a strong sense of ownership of the institutions put in place to govern and support their lives and welfare. Nor will human transformation occur sustainably unless people have a growing sense of achievement and self-worth”. And through enhanced local governance and democracy our people will develop a greater sense of achievement and self-worth as they become architects of their own lives and drivers of the destiny of their communities.

³ National Vision 2016, Government of Botswana, 1997