



REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING

PRESENTATION BY HON. EMERINE KABANSHI, MP MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING ON THE TOPIC DEMOCRATISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT - THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING POLITICAL SUPPORT AND SETTING THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR DECENTRALISATION AND EFFECTIVE LOCAL DEMOCRACY PRESENTED TO THE COMMONWEALTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE IN KAMPALA, UGANDA, 14TH – 17TH MAY, 2013

- Your Excellencies and Honourable Ministers present,**
- The Chairperson and Session Facilitators,**
- Distinguished delegates invited guests ladies and gentlemen**
- All Protocols observed**

Fellow Delegates:

- While the role of local governments in development has been widely discussed and was at the centre of the debate of the conference so far, the **democratic role** of local governance is of equal if not higher importance.
- Decentralisation and strengthening local governance are means to improve service delivery and socio-economic development but also to improve public participation and thus democratisation.
- Local Governments are often called “***schools of democracy***” (Alexis de Tocqueville) This is true as can be seen by the many local government “veterans” – be it elected councillors or senior executive staff - who go on to pursue a career in national level politics, for example the President of the Republic of Zambia His Excellency Mr. Michael Chilufya Sata who was the Senior Governor of our capital City Lusaka or the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was Mayor of Neuilly-sur-Seine. Other former Mayors now hold other offices of high esteem, like Dr. Joan Clos, the Executive Director of UN Habitat who delivers today’s keynote address and is remembered for his achievements as a Mayor of Barcelona.

- Local Governments are not just a training ground for future leaders but more so for citizens to voice their preferences and participate in decision-making: Participation at the local level through consultation by elected local governments gradually transforms into a **habit of participation**; and as this habit develops, citizens come to see the essential interconnectedness of their own interests with those of their fellow citizens and ultimately reach a stage of collective protection and promotion of local interests and the establishment of **democratic political culture**.
- The local level is very close and therefore accessible by citizens. This allows targeted or adequate service provision. It also allows for high-level engagement with the public on **locally relevant issues**.
- The recently revised Decentralisation Policy in Zambia seeks “*to promote a decentralised and democratically elected system of governance which enhances community participation in decision-making*”. The Zambian Government takes this commitment seriously and is ensuring that it is implemented.

But a system of local governments does not develop and function automatically. It requires a high level of stability and support from the national level to safeguard the **existence** and **proper functioning** of local governments in a conducive environment. Central government needs to ensure regular local government elections and in subsequent orientation of new councillors and officers as well as continuous capacity building of administrative staff and elected representatives.

Some of the challenges affecting smooth operations of Local governments in some member states of the Commonwealth include but not limited to the following:

- Insufficient funding which affect participatory Local governance as it is costly processes which require substantial financial resources. This is a challenge faced by most Local Governments especially the rural District which have remitted resource base to collect local revenues. One possible solution member states should address is to introduce an equalization grant and sharing of some nationally or centrally collected taxes between central Governments and Local Governments to address the horizontal imbalances.
- Inadequate human capacity to mobilize and manage resources as well as failure to facilitate local informed decision making process.
- Inadequate advocacy and lobbying at local level by civil society organisations for efficient and effective delivery of services to the communities.

Therefore, the following factors should be addressed as part of the process of democratising Local governments:

- Firstly, the **political will** for decentralisation must exist and be seen. For this, all relevant stakeholders need to be well informed and convinced of the overall benefits of decentralisation and strengthening of Local Government.
- Secondly, it is important to secure **political support** for decentralisation and local governance. The role of **political parties** at national and sub-national levels as well

as **civil society** should not be underestimated to demand and advocate for decentralisation and strengthening of Local Government.

- Thirdly and most importantly, from our experience in Zambia, an appropriate **institutional framework for decentralisation and local governance** is paramount to the success of the process of democratising local government.
- **At national level, the Executive Legislature and the** need to lead the reforms. As decentralisation is a process that cuts across sectors and changes the set-up of the whole government system, it needs to be anchored at the highest level to ensure the necessary authority and guidance.
- In Zambia, Cabinet Office is firmly in-charge of co-ordinating these reforms.
- Subsequently, the most senior officers of the **sector ministries** (the Permanent or Principal Secretaries) have to form a committee to steer the actual implementation of decentralisation. In Zambia, this is the Decentralisation Policy Implementation Committee (DPIC) chaired by Secretary to the Cabinet.
- Most of our Commonwealth countries have a **Ministry of Local Government** or a ministry of a similar name and mandate, which as a permanent body can ensure coordination of day to day implementation of decentralisation while at the same time strengthening the local governments directly through capacity building and oversight.

In Zambia, we have the Ministry of Local Government which has among other departments the Departments of Decentralisation and Local Government Administration .

- When you are implementing Decentralisation reforms, you might have encountered challenges of inter-sectoral co-ordination, my Government has therefore established inter-ministerial technical working groups that are responsible for the implementation of different components of the decentralisation reforms.
- **At sub-national** level similar coordinating structures are needed that bring together sectors and local governments.
- The **local governments** need to be prepared for the reform and sensitize communities within their areas of jurisdiction.
- The **local private sector** and **civil society** and last but not the least in our context the **traditional authorities** need to be included and are on board in the process.
- In summary, decentralisation is a multi-stakeholder process that requires utmost engagement and support from national and sub-national level across all sectors of government as well as from non-governmental actors.
- Therefore, coordination and cooperation are key to ensuring **democratic local governance**.

I thank you for your attention, may the Almighty God bless and guide us in our deliberations to find lasting and sustainable solutions to challenges which may impede the local democratisation and decentralisation reforms in all Commonwealth member states.

I wish you all continued success in implementing your decentralisation and local governance reforms.