

the enhancement of human well-being.

The general trend in the world today is towards "human administration", greater participation and democracy at the grassroots. In this context democracy has become the most important legitimising force for democratic governance.

Historical Perspective.

The Commonwealth of Nations is one of the most important institutions striving to ensure that democracy and the rule of law thrive among its 53 member states spanning all the continents of the world. One third of its membership is located in Africa.

Commonwealth States cooperate in an effort to promote the basic principles such as democracy, fundamental human rights, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government as demonstrated by the Harare Declaration of the Heads of State and Government Meeting (CHOGM), 1991.

We also note with pleasure that the Commonwealth African Heads of State and Government, at their CHOGM, held in Gaborone, Botswana, in February 1997 formerly recognised that effective local government was an important foundation for democracy; a position adopted by the larger CHOGM in Edinburgh, October 1997.

It is further noted that the Commonwealth continues to espouse democratic values in various forms including in the United Nations. However, it has yet to be proved that these declarations and statements of intent are implemented by our national governments. It has to be further confirmed in practice that Commonwealth Governments accept Local Government as a sphere of government as has been adopted by the Republic of South Africa. For how long shall local government be taken as a non-governing level?

This paper will cite some examples of the emerging good practice in Africa as well as the reverse situation in some cases.

Why Local Government?

Whereas local government has existed in Africa and elsewhere in the world even before national governments as we know them today; its acceptance and or recognition by national governments has taken different forms. It has often been seen more as a threat than an opportunity in most quarters, hence some national governments prefer to promote deconcentration rather than devolution of power and authority to local government institutions notwithstanding the proximity of local governments to the people whose interests we all purport to represent. Local government should be viewed as and it is indeed that type of authority, which is self-governing, autonomous, pluralistic and participatory in nature. Local government has primary jurisdiction in meeting the common needs of