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DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES: IS AFRICA DIFFERENT?

**FROM 'GOVERNMENT' TO 'GOVERNANCE' IN AFRICA:
IMPLICATIONS FOR AND FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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1 INTRODUCTION

It has been said that this is the 'African century', that henceforth it is the 'African decade', and the British Chancellor of the Exchequer speaking on the Africa Commission report stated that 2005 is the year when Africa awakens to strive boldly towards poverty eradication and development. Following colonialism and decline after its demise, a number of initiatives were taken to get the continent out of the mire: There was the Organisation for African Unity that has been talking for over four decades without achieving much tangible of note; the Millennium Africa Plan; the New Africa Initiative; the African Renaissance; the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad); the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) of the United States (US); the Africa Commission; and more recently the African Union; the Pan African Parliament; the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA); and the 'African Agenda'. In this context, one needs firstly to mention the long awaited reform of the United Nations Security Council, currently being thwarted by the US, and secondly various programmes, campaigns and conferences by UN agencies, particularly HABITAT, to promote participatory democracy and good governance, as a means to eradicate poverty. Add to this mix various attempts at conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa spearheaded by the South African President. Are we trying to do too much, too soon? What have we learnt from Africa's history? Whose agenda is being implemented? Are the preconditions or basic fundamentals in place for a concerted, comprehensive, multi-pronged, and sustainable approach to development on the continent?

There appears to be an awakening or realisation that it cannot be business as usual; that people and governments in the developing world matter, even if the underlying motive for development or poverty eradication may be to diminish the threat of terrorism. Given the various initiatives being planned and implemented throughout the developing world and particularly in Africa, the following questions, *inter alia*, arise: Who decides what is to be done and where; how such issues are decided; and whether and how are intended beneficiaries engaged with?

Democracy and decentralisation are currently in vogue, after recent acknowledgement that people at the local level are crucial to development but also to political and economic stability of the state. Is this concept formulated and sold by developed states and donor agencies, something in a long line of ideas or ideals or initiatives that may again fail in developing states, particularly in heavily indebted poor countries?

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Decentralisation may be a necessary precondition or *sine qua non* for democracy particularly for the desired participatory type at the local sphere. However, in Africa it be premised on certain assumptions that could turn out to be erroneous. Consequently, the anticipated benefits of democracy and economic liberation may not materialise. Local authorities have historically been the lowest tier in a hierarchy of governments; as such their level of ‘autonomy’ has generally been so low that they are often seen as inefficient local agencies of the state. Given such institutionalised background, can they be transformed rapidly enough to become strategic development practitioners?

The Constitution and subsequent legislation have been the catalyst for the transformation of government in South Africa, resulting in a paradigm shift facilitated by innovative and precedent setting approaches. Apart from their traditional role as providers of basic services, municipalities here now have to play a leading role in socio-economic development. Hence their statutory obligations are so extensive as to raise the question: Can they deliver in the context of limited resources in a rapidly globalising economy, with ever increasing competition?

This paper will examine the move from ‘government’ by state mechanisms to ‘governance’ by decentralised, democratised, and participatory structures and processes with a wide range of diverse role players within the context of public sector and local government reform in Africa. This will be compared with the situation in South Africa, to draw out lessons of experience. Given the wide-ranging nature or comprehensiveness of the topic and the limitations imposed on the paper, it will be necessary to be selective and focused. There is a dearth of usable information pertaining to poverty eradication and socio-economic development in Africa, more so at the local sphere. Hence the discussion is confined to the issue of democratic governance generally and to the situation at local government level particularly, based largely on the personal experiences of the author in planning and implementing Johannesburg’s partnerships with select African cities. Consequently, there may not be much by way of empirical evidence – the idea is to be practical through undertaking programmes and projects that will bring tangible benefits to the poor and marginalized residing under the jurisdiction of local authorities. For a clearer understanding of the dynamics at the local sphere, it may be necessary to examine the institution of local government, that is, the structures, mechanisms, apparatuses, procedures and processes, so as to determine whether and how African local authorities fit or to the extent they comply.

2 DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2.1 LOCAL AUTHORITIES AS A TIER OF GOVERNMENT

The definitions and characteristics of apartheid era local authorities, something of a hybrid incorporating Roman-Dutch and English law-based institutions, serve as a useful point of departure in describing local governments in Africa. In South Africa, sub-provincial government have been described as –

local democratic units within the democratic system ... which are subordinate members of the government vested with prescribed, controlled governmental powers and sources of income to render specific local services and to control and regulate the geographic, social and economic development of defined local areas.²

² Meyer (1978: 10), quoted by Reddy, PS (ed) *Local Government Democratisation and Decentralisation: A Review of the Southern African Region*, Cape Town: Juta, Chapter 1, 9-29, 10

And further –

The term ‘local government’ is generally used to refer to a decentralized representative institution with general and specific powers, devolved upon and delegated to it by central or regional government, in respect of a restricted geographical area within a nation or state, and in the exercise of which it is locally responsible and may to a certain degree act autonomously.³

Adaptation of South Africa’s previous four provincial ordinances⁴ indicates that the definition of local government would be a municipal council with a name and a seal under which it would be a body corporate with perpetual succession, capable in law of suing and being sued, and generally doing and performing such acts as are necessary for or incidental to the exercise of its powers and the performance of its functions, subject to the provisions of the enabling provincial ordinance and any other applicable superior law. Local authorities operate within a hierarchical system wherein they are subordinate to regional and national governments. As creatures of statute, the nature of the institutions, their powers, functional and geographical areas of operation, and fiscal and financial powers are prescribed. The limited or circumscribed responsibilities of pre 1994 South African local authorities in a centralised, autocratic, unitary state with weak regional government could be somewhat typical of such institutions on the African continent.

2.2 CONSTITUTIONALLY ESTABLISHED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The reform and transformation of South Africa’s hitherto lowest tier of government, facilitated by them being constitutionally established, and thus being unique in the world, could hold lessons for Africa’s sub-regional governments. Hence the two systems could be used as benchmarks for comparison with the position of local authorities in Africa.

Furthermore, the local authority mandate has been expanded: apart from being passive providers of basic municipal services on the basis of race and class, local authorities now have to promote social and economic development in a way biased in favour of the poor and marginalized. This extended role provides numerous developmental opportunities but also serious challenges that local governments in Africa could turn to for guidance in formulating and implementing programmes and projects in their own localities.

It is not possible to discuss post 1994 local government in South Africa in any detail. Here it would suffice to briefly mention a few fundamental points. The 1996 Constitution provides for the following:

- status and autonomy to local authorities by their establishment as a ‘sphere’ of government, alongside national and provincial authorities
- powers and functions of local authorities
- fiscal and financial matters affecting local government
- the values that a democratic state will follow as well as the principles governing public administration
- fundamental rights that have to be given effect to by local authorities
- co-operative government, that is, national, provincial and local authorities operating seamlessly, in a co-operative rather than a competitive manner

³ Vosloo, WB & RA Schrire (1978) ‘Subordinate Political Institutions’ in De Crespigny, Anthony and Robert Schrire *The Government and Politics of South Africa*, Cape Town: Juta, Chapter 5, 77-93, 80

⁴ Section 6(1) Ordinance 17 of 1939 (Transvaal); section 3(3) Ordinance 8 of 1962 (Orange Free State); section 3 Ordinance 20 of 1974 (Cape); and section 6(1) Ordinance 25 of 1974 (Natal);

- extension of the mandate of local government, by them becoming a developmental rather than a purely administrative organ, to also promote social and economic development, biased in favour of the poor and marginalized
- legislation to give effect to the Constitution

Having become a creation of the Constitution rather than a creature of statute, a number of statutes have been promulgated to enable local authorities to function more effectively. Many of them are premised on the *White Paper on Local Government*. Some of the more important parliamentary enactments are:

- *Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act*, No 108 of 1991 – which scrapped the ‘influx control’ measures and the *Group Areas Act*
- *Local Government Transition Act*, No 209 of 1993 – which established consolidated local authorities incorporating and serving all races
- *Public Service Act*, No 103 of 1994
- *Development Facilitation Act*, No 67 of 1995 – which provided for integrated development through holistic social, economic and spatial planning
- *Organised Local Government Act*, No 52 of 1997 – that permitted the establishment of a national and nine regional organisations to represent interests of local government
- *Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations Act*, No 97 of 1997
- *Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act*, No 107 of 1998
- *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act*, No 117 of 1998 – which established municipalities throughout the country under three categories, and set out the structures for effective local governance
- *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act*, No 32 of 2000 – which provided for systems, procedures, and processes to guide municipal functioning and promoted participatory democracy by giving local citizens rights (Chapter 4)
- *Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act*, No 56 of 2003

During the colonial and apartheid eras, law was used as an instrument of management, control, and regulation; concomitantly to marginalize the black majority. The Constitution sees law as a tool to promote and facilitate development, working alongside its more conventional regulatory role. While it is all well to have policies and statutes in place, they are of little use if the will or commitment, as well as the capacity to implement or enforce them, is not available. In the African context, there are several other ingredients that have to be part of the mix to ensure democratic governance and sustainable socio-economic development. These are addressed below.

3 DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

For a better understanding of the shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’, it is necessary to appreciate the history of underdevelopment in Africa by examining the colonial system. A brief overview will be provided, followed by a disposition of problems created that have to be addressed.

3.1 POST-COLONIAL GOVERNMENT IN AFRICA

This section will be dealt with under several heads for ease of comprehension.

3.1.1 The problem of centralisation

Almost every African government had, at some juncture, declared its desire to establish an autonomous local government system as a means for promoting popular participation and speeding up equitable development. However, none granted reasonable independence to local authorities: most have turned them into agents of central government or banned them altogether. Some of the reasons for the administrative marginalisation of local government in Africa were:

- the authoritarianism carried over from colonial rule
- the 'privatisation' of leadership positions
- widespread use of primitive accumulation by post-colonial leaders
- disillusionment among the popular classes with post colonial leadership and rule, leading to illegitimacy of the African state
- the multi-ethnic nature of African states and the ever-present threat of secession make a wide latitude of autonomy to local government untenable, as it could be exploited by separatist movements
- limited human and material resources cannot support devolutionary decentralisation
- the need to accelerate the development process and to economise scarce resources through centralised planning⁵

Since local government is but the representation of the state at the local level, it has, likewise, been afflicted. In other words, the problems of governance at the local level are a reflection and a consequence of the crisis of governance at the centre. While such rationalisations may have some theoretical merit, at the level of praxis, however, they may be questioned in the same way that the current situation of inequality and poverty in South Africa continues to be blamed on the colonial and apartheid past. This is because after some four decades of centralized rule, African states now appear more internally factionalised than in the period immediately after independence. Such autocratic rule did not yield the benefits that were expected to accrue from national unity, or the development a unified state was purported to promote. That centralised rule re-emerged after independence is due to the post-colonial African leadership being isolated from the popular classes because they did not keep their promise of decentralisation. Without solid mass support, its hold on power became tenuous, hence the tendency to centralise all power as a way of consolidating its rule. Another incentive for centralisation was the widespread practice of prebendalism, the use of public offices for the personal benefit of office holders and their support groups. African countries still exhibit features that constrain accountability, popular participation, and the performance of local government. The following persists as structural and policy problems:⁶

⁵ Olowu, Dele (1988) 'Strategies for Decentralisation Within Developing Countries: A Nigerian Case Study' in Adamolekun, L, D Olowu & M Laleye (eds) *Local Government in West Africa Since Independence*, Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 109-110

⁶ Enemu, Francis C (2000) 'Problems and Prospects of Local Governance' in Hyden, Goran & Dele Olowu (eds) *African Perspectives on Governance*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Chapter 7, 181-206, 186-193

The 'soft', 'rentier' state as an obstacle

The post-colonial state has remained a vehicle for domination and accumulation: whereas to the power elite it is a means to private accumulation and class consolidation, the mass of Africans have continued to experience the state as a coercive, alien force to be avoided and cheated whenever possible. Few citizens feel any duty to discharge civic obligations to the state. This emphasis on citizen rights, accompanied by a corresponding neglect of civic duties by Africans, derives from the colonial ideology of legitimation which, in trying to justify colonial rule, encouraged the African to view his relationship with the government not in terms of what he does for it but in terms of what he receives from the government. The ideologies also served to disassociate rights and duties in the conception of citizenship.⁷ This situation provides a perspective from which to understand the absence of civic enthusiasm or passion or pride among Africans. Since they feel they owe local government no obligation, they are also unwilling to pay rates and taxes. The widespread feeling of alienation towards the African state explains its 'softness'.

The strength of a state is measured by her capacity and capability to permeate society, regulate its social relationships, and extract required resources from it. Measured against such yardsticks, African countries are weak since they are in varying degrees out of sync with society. Hence local authorities experience the following problems:

- The widespread practice of tax and rate evasion and the existence of organisations in the primordial public, to which the people owe more commitment, constrain local government from raising revenue in their localities.
- The fact that people do not fund the operations of local government make them less inclined to be engaged in civic affairs.
- The perfunctory popular involvement in local affairs has served to weaken accountability.

The problem of structural instability

Repeated 'reforms' in certain countries such as Tanzania were dictated almost exclusively by the interests of centralised political power keen to maintain a stable centralised state. The decentralisation programme begun in 1972 led to the dissolution of existing local authorities and their replacement by highly qualified officials of central government. This decentralisation experiment was later acknowledged by President Julius Nyerere to have been a major mistake.

Nigeria also experienced repeated restructuring and reforms, with the number of local governments increasing from 301 in 1989 to the present 589, in order to bring government closer to the grassroots and to accelerate the pace and spread the benefits of development. This was the opposite of the trend in Europe and the British Commonwealth, where 'downsizing' was in vogue. This strategy did not bring any significant improvement in service delivery, nor enhanced the citizen's impact on the governance process.⁸

⁷ Peter Ekeh (1978: 317-319), quoted by Enemuo, *op cit*, 187

⁸ Enemuo, *op cit*, 190

Political rather than economic considerations was the rationale for reform, which was not sustainable, more so because the majority of Nigeria's local authorities depend on statutory allocations by federal and state governments for sustenance. Both decreasing or increasing the size of local government did not result in better service provision, or enhanced socio-economic development – the 'size' problem persists. Likewise, the contrary trend to decrease the size of local authorities in Europe and South Africa does not have empirical evidence to show its successes. In the case of the latter, a decade after the advent in democracy, 'transformation' and 'reform' still appear to be work in progress, evinced by recent protests against poor service delivery at the local sphere.

The problems of a weak financial base

Chronic under funding and misappropriations of revenues are the major causes of the uninspiring performance of local governments in Africa. Furthermore, the ready availability of transfers discourages internal revenue drive by the councils, making them excessively dependent on federal handouts. These transfers gave rise to a second problem, when municipalities were assigned additional responsibilities often out of proportion with the grants, and repeatedly directed to undertake unbudgeted tasks in support of programmes of federal departments or its agencies (the 'unfunded mandate'). A third challenge was that transfer of funds was consistently late, causing the crisis of budgetary bottlenecks for the councils. Finally, revenue generation from local sources often ran into difficulties.⁹

The problem of military rule

During military rule most institutions of governance and civil society are seriously impacted by sustained praetorian dictatorship. Although local government may have benefited from military rule to some limited extent, it has also negatively transformed the body politic and civil behavioural patterns. Under the military, a municipality is likely to become merely a willing agent of central government, or rather the vassal of the head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces. Consequently, it is certainly not autonomous and does not answer to the people. In such circumstances local government exists only in name.¹⁰

3.1.2 The problem of the developmental state

The failure of the developmental state in Africa may be due to the following reasons:

- post-colonial leaders in Africa did not create institutions of governance and policy implementation;
- lack of management and planning skills;
- absence of an enabling developmental environment conducive to commitment, enthusiasm, productivity, and an appropriate work ethic or culture;
- absence of long range planning and a systemic approach to development;
- inability to define the nature of the state explicitly, to offer preconditions or characteristics of this type of state, or explain the relationships between patterns of governance and development;
- the Organisation of African Unity had been ineffectual;

⁹ Enemu, *op cit*, 192-193

¹⁰ *Ibid*

- poor leadership, with limited unifying powers, and lack of suitable role models; and
- bribery, corruption, graft, and nepotism.

In Africa, particularly, developmental matters cannot be separated from issues of governance and civil society; nor can the selection of policy choices be detached from the capacity of institutions to implement them. Furthermore, factors in the colonial experience and in the strategies of centrally planned economies defined the limits of development on the continent. However, the contemporary political behaviour and administrative practices based on inherited authoritarian patterns of government are more recently being increasingly questioned. The development state in Africa, as in the post-colonial period, is still defined by the colonial legacy, characterised by –

- a patron-client state system that controls entry into the public service but fails to develop the requisite contemporary professional skills;
- a highly centralised, unpredictable political system which lacks institutionalised processes of governance and policy making;
- a political system that consumes rather than increases or conserves economic resources within society;
- an administrative-based local state lacking and precluding decentralised decision making, self governance, and the creation and maintenance of viable local government structures; and
- authoritarian control mechanisms that exist to protect the vested interests of those who control the state, at the expense of society as a whole.¹¹

Furthermore, a number of characteristics and behavioural dispositions originating in the colonial era are deeply embedded in the contemporary African state:

- The diarchy between the local state (centrally defined), and forms of democratic local governance that can provide a framework for social and economic development. Governance at the local level in much of Africa has reflected this diarchy between the top-down prefectural regime and fledgling attempts to create local organs of participation.¹²
- The policy processes in any state system often create ‘orphan policies’ (those that no longer serve the purpose of current elites), and the perpetuation of inherited structures and processes. This situation also applied to South Africa in 1910 when it became accustomed to an intensely etatiste (state-centred) system with an enormous superstructure of labour relations, pass laws, ‘influx control’ legislation and other instruments of misplaced social planning”. Although the legal structures of apartheid South Africa may have been removed, both formal and informal mechanisms of control have been inherited by the new state, while novel forms of governance are being negotiated.

¹¹ Picard, Louis A & Michele Garrity (1995) ‘Development Management in Africa’ in Fitzgerald, Patrick, Anne McLennan & Barry Munslow (eds) *Managing Sustainable Development in South Africa*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 63-81, 63-65

¹² Crawford Young in Chazan (1988: 28), quoted by Picard & Garrity, *op cit*, 67

- Governance at the local sphere is caught in a time warp, with patterns of control defined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, in Africa, the local state should be seen within the context of state transformation and continuity at the national level, at the same time remembering that the municipality is not synonymous with local, democratic government: It incorporates numerous forms of local, intermediate, regional, and national administration and bureaucratic control, including existing state apparatuses with its several parastatal organisations, public corporations, as well as, more recently, special purpose vehicles created for service delivery, that impact upon society.
- The local state delineates the state's impact on society as it incorporates and mirrors all the numerous forms of political and bureaucratic control in a manner that is seen by all in everyday life. Most post-colonial municipalities in Africa, including South Africa, exhibit such inherited patterns of diarchy. This situation could have negative implications for the creation of a developmental state.

Dualistic governance structures are comparatively unique to South Africa and have their origins over three hundred years ago, when the most important local administrative unit was the magisterial district, established to administer justice and collect taxes. The idea of the institution of the magistrate arises from the position of prefect or territorial governor in Europe, particularly France. Colonialism created a top-down prefectorialism, a type of command relationship with civil society, in most of Africa, a system retained by rulers coming into power following independence, and which has and will be a major challenge to the development of self-governance institutions that are responsive to society.¹³

Local government is at the bottom of the administrative rung in Africa, where only 2,1% of the state's personnel are employed, compared with 4,2% for Latin America, 8% for Asia, and 12% for the OECD countries. The state in Africa was seen as the provider, often, sole provider, of public goods and services, and over most of the continent, viewed as a burden for development.¹⁴ The centralised but 'soft' state has been destructive to social and economic development because political power is concentrated in the hands of a few elite, while citizen capacity is reduced; at the same time economic growth is slowed and social capacity weakened. Under such circumstances, institution building meant to promote socio-economic development has often resulted in dependent, circumscribed, controlled organisations in an authoritarian environment that defines criticism as subversive or neo-colonial. The outcome is authoritarian African states, where political space is uni-dimensional, with a prescribed single path to socio-economic change.¹⁵ A post-apartheid South Africa will not be immune from some or all of these tendencies as local governance poses a threat to the hegemony of insecure national political elites. This is because the crisis of governance in Africa "resulted from the personalisation of personal power, the denial of fundamental human rights, widespread corruption, and unaccountable government". These factors tend to lead to increasing levels of authoritarian control.¹⁶

¹³ Picard & Garrity, *op cit*, 68

¹⁴ Heller & Tait (1982), quoted by Picard & Garrity, *op cit*, 70

¹⁵ Wunsch & Olowu (1990: 5, 305), quoted by Picard & Garrity, *ibid*

¹⁶ Hyden & Bratton (1992: 5), quoted in Picard & Garrity, *ibid*

With respect to the civil service, it may be a truism that politicians in all societies are most comfortable with traditional, precedental and organisational authoritarianism of the type most characteristic of the civil service hierarchy. Patronage/clientelism may serve to mediate and soften state-centred control, but it will also weaken governance structures at regional and local levels.

In post-colonial Africa, hegemony over civil society often occurred through patron-client linkages, which precluded multiple centres of decision-making. Likewise, in post-apartheid South Africa there is already much evidence of gross under-capacitation and inefficiency in the state structures and political expediency in the form of affirmative action could make facing the challenge of effective rationalisation quite demanding. The developmental state should ensure that governance is widely shared among the disparate role players with independent power bases, engaging in participatory decision-making. This is because Africa's problems are less those of poverty of resources, than of the lack of governance mechanisms that can provide for effective organisation for development. The alternative to the centralised non-developmental state is local self-governance, wherein the government's main role would be to provide a framework of rules which empowers and facilitates a developmental environment at the grassroots level, and which encourages local initiative. Hence an environment or network of organisational forms is required, wherein mobilisation and consciousness raising should start with individuals and small groups of neighbours, and not with the hierarchical commands of the authoritarian political movements. Decentralisation as a value system has not been central to the development management debate in Africa, especially since it may be seen as a threat to national elites. Furthermore, donors tend to work with and strengthen central structures. Rather than devolution, African central states have tended to de-concentrate power to local field agents at the grassroots level. Such representatives have historically failed as modernizers and remain alienated from popular social forces. As such, many local authorities have been left to their own devices; however, there have been successes that, in turn, generate a loss of faith in central government at the grassroots level.

3.2 CHALLENGES FACING LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

There is a general assumption that the more participatory the policy-making process is, the greater would be the probability of their legitimacy in the eyes of the potential beneficiaries, and hence more effectively implemented. This is a hypothesis that needs to be empirically tested, especially in Africa. For a better understanding of the relationship between the developmental roles of different levels of government, the schematic¹⁷ below could prove useful, as it serves to give some idea of the place and role of local authorities in a hierarchically ordered system of government.

¹⁷ Hyden, Goran (2000) 'The Governance Challenge in Africa' in Hyden & Olowu, *op cit*, Chapter 1, 9-32, 11

Level	Institutional focus	Concept
Meta	Regime	Governance
Macro	State	Policy-making
Meso	Sector	Administration
Micro	Project	Management

Conceptual distinctions in the study of development (Source: Hyden 2000: 10)

From the table above it is clear that governance is closely related to policy, and that the two empirically interact with each other all the time. The stability of democracy is explained not only by economic development, but also through the effectiveness and legitimacy of the political system. In this system perspective, effectiveness refers to actual performance, that is, the extent to which the system satisfies the basic functions of government as both leaders and followers view it. Legitimacy involves the capacity to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate for society. Effectiveness is primarily instrumental, and can be measured objectively, while legitimacy is evaluative and therefore assessed in subjective terms. In the table the distinction between ‘regime’ and ‘state’ as well as between ‘governance’ and ‘policy’ runs along the same lines. Hence, issues of policy at state level can be evaluated in objective terms, both for efficiency and effectiveness, while the matter of governance would most likely require attitude surveys or such like evaluative instruments aimed at measuring subjective perceptions. Knowledge about the relative degree of legitimacy of a country’s rules and institutions is important in determining the stability of the system at times of crisis in terms of effectiveness. Governments in Africa have proved to be largely ineffective. A major reason why so many political systems on this continent have experienced turbulence, and in some cases total breakdown, is that “this crisis of the state has been accompanied by an equivalent crisis of legitimacy of the regime”.¹⁸

The following five issues, *inter alia*, are key to the consolidation of democratic governance in Africa:

- creation of a developmental environment that incorporates –
 - a culture of caring for and consideration of the poor and marginalized sectors
 - transparency, accountability and responsibility
 - a work ethic that encompasses commitment, productivity, and reliability
 - the spirit of *ubuntu* or *dharma* (assisting the disadvantaged without monetary reward and the internalisation of the will to succeed) that will enable people to work effectively under adverse conditions
 - acceptance of the concept and practise of *swadeshi* or self reliance, and self help
 - eliminating or reducing corruption and bribery, and promoting honesty
- establishing a linkage between economic growth and democratisation;
- enhancing the capacity of civil society institutions;
- reinventing public sector organs; and
- reaffirming the critical ethical norms of the public service.

¹⁸ Hyden, *op cit*, 11

The present case for Africa's democratisation is thus based on the argument that economic growth cannot be achieved without democratic governance. Democratic institutions are likely to contribute to the continent's growth prospects for three reasons:

- They provide an opportunity to build on institutions that are familiar to the people, that is, primordial structures and values; a case for adapting traditional institutions to modern use.
- They help to foster institutions that hold those exercising power accountable.
- They release the peoples' social energies by emphasising the role of the individual in society and by helping them build networks across social institutions, thereby establishing significant social energy for development.¹⁹

None of the above possibilities are automatic: deliberate effort is necessary to turn them into reality in Africa. This requires three types of measures, namely –

- Public sector structures should be built upon the community organisations that exist in almost all African countries.
- There is need to emphasise institutional pluralism by recognising and creating political space for the operation of five critical types of sub-system institutions that should be competent, credible, and have the capacity to interact freely with other institutional actors:
 - political: legislature, executive, judiciary, and quasi-judicial structures;
 - economic: both formal and informal organisations;
 - civil society: including independent professional bodies, trade unions, political parties, and NGOs;
 - international; and
 - public administration: including the civil service, public enterprises, local governments, and specialised agencies;
- Actors in the public sector must be made aware, by the people and through education and training that the primary purpose of this sector is to create and maintain an enabling policy environment for economic growth.²⁰

While several advantages are claimed for local governments in respect of the benefits of decentralisation in governance, in Africa these remain only potentials. However, the general failure of formal local governments on the continent, with a few exceptions, contrasts with the relative success of community-based informal local authorities. Thus a major challenge and opportunity of enhancing municipal capacity is in synchronising formal and informal structures. The critical ethical norms of the public service needs to be reaffirmed, particularly the following:

¹⁹ Olowu, Dele (2000) 'Bureaucracy and Democratic Reform' in Hyden & Olowu, *op cit*, Chapter 6, 153-179, 164

²⁰ Olowu, *op cit*, 165

- a meritocracy that is capable of attracting and retaining the best officers;
- a professional civil service with its attendant values of objectivity, political neutrality, and anonymity; and
- the representativeness of the various groups in the society in the public service, without undermining merit.²¹

3.3 TENTATIVE SOLUTIONS TO AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

In Western societies, municipalities are organic entities with many even predating central government. African ‘formal’ local governments, by way of contrast, are creatures of the centre, often created for cheap political reasons. A major problem has been that mutually suspicious communities have sometimes been lumped together, thereby eroding civic commitment to the councils. Local authorities should be allowed to function for a reasonable period, say, not less than a decade, before any major structural reforms are undertaken. This is necessary to engender civic loyalty and mass familiarity with their operations. The widespread reluctance to pay local rates and taxes has been often ‘justified’ on the basis that councils have not made judicious use of revenue collected previously, or that funds were misappropriated or embezzled. To encourage accountability and strengthen public confidence, such revenue should be earmarked for specific purposes. Another consideration is that public interest in civic affairs could be promoted through increased co-operation between the formal local authorities and grassroots NGOs, particularly community based organisations. A form of agency arrangement, whereby some of the more basic council functions are assigned to such organisations to implement in their own areas, with the council providing the machinery and part of the funds, could be a solution. If there exists a high sense of morality that guides actions within these community organisations, it may result in more efficient use of these allocations and prompt performance of the assigned tasks.²²

Equitable and sustainable development in Africa is contingent on good governance. This issue is discussed under several heads below.

4 GOVERNANCE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

“Africa is in a rut because a critical variable like governance is missing in the leadership portfolio”. Governance speaks in a direct way to the ruler-ruled relationship; as such, it has three dimensions: the functional, the structural, and the normative. Functionally, governance has to do with how rules are made, legitimised, and enforced. Structurally, it comprises three distinct institutions: the ruler or the state, the ruled or society, and the rules or law. Therefore, in essence, governance embodies the quality of the relationship between the state and social institutions. Finally, the normative dimension of governance highlights the values associated with (good) governance. Democratisation and governance cannot be considered in synonymous terms: they are “gradated values on the continuum of state-society relationships”. Furthermore, Western powers seem to acknowledge that good governance can be achieved without democratisation.²³

²¹ Olowu, *op cit*, 170-172

²² Enemuo, *op cit*, 201

Prior to the imposition of colonial rule, several democratic strands were discernible in most traditional political formations in Africa. The first was the principle of public involvement in decision making, particularly by adults in the planning and implementation of communal affairs and in dispute adjudication, prevalent in certain segmentary societies. In more complex societal formations, even in some highly centralised states, the values of representation, participation, consultation, and involvement (all indices of governance) were deeply embedded in many disparate political settings. Popular indigenous inclusivity was characterised by the notions of discussion or palaver, consensus, and compromise. Airing of different positions in public and debate thereon were essential features of the practice of politics in much of pre-colonial Africa.²⁴

Given the above ideal situation, the question arises: How and why did governance get marginalized in the various African social formations? This was caused by colonialism, a phenomenon that effectively dislocated African societies such that, to date, “the search for a recourse to governance remains elusive”. Colonial rule did not promote the values associated with governance in Africa: it created institutions that were first and foremost instruments of domination. These were established to provide a means to control vast spatial areas with disparate populations. The emphasis was on functional utility, law and order, not participation and reciprocity. Furthermore, the colonial state also exemplified western concepts of sovereignty and territoriality, at the expense of notions such as nationality and legitimacy. Within this highly authoritarian structure, the links or relationships between rulers and the ruled were strictly vertical, while the “definition of government lacked a popular component”. Hence a remote, bureaucratic, and patrimonial form of politics emerged under a state that routinely violated the values of the normative dimension of governance. This pattern was reinforced through selective techniques of economic penetration.²⁵

To assist in the task of administration and to provide basic services to the rulers, colonial regimes encouraged the “formation of new horizontal strata, dependent elites, usually the product of Western education and Christian religion”, who enjoyed privileged access to the new centres and their resources (the ‘divide and rule’ approach). This tiny bureaucratic class was the outward expression of a new norm that placed particular values on the state as the primary source of social mobility. This was clearly manifested, for example, in the Indian civil service and the Indian administrative services. Colonial and post-colonial orders were not structured to promote the values of good governance. Thus the post-colonial state is characterized by the “co-existence of absolute power and administrative involution, or by the dialectic of power and fragility.” It is essentially a neo-colonial one, a politically independent structure within a basically unchanged economic framework and, like its colonial predecessor, is mainly concerned with the maintenance of law and order as well as the accumulation of wealth in the interest of the ruling class. The major preoccupation of the elite, therefore, has been to expand the state’s role in the economy. Consequently, the state is a major prize, the key object of intra-class fractional struggles. Unfortunately, rulers do not seem to realise that power – and especially state power – is a zero sum game.²⁶

²³ Soremekun, Kayode (2000) ‘The International Dimensions of Governance’ in Hyden & Olowu, *op cit*, Chapter 10, 267-279, 268

²⁴ Naomi Chazan (1991), quoted by Soremekun, *op cit*, 271

²⁵ Soremekun, *op cit*, 272-273

²⁶ *Ibid*

In such an environment relative stability requires that intra-elitist conflicts be reduced to factional politics under the control and manipulation of the top leader. Hence opposition parties and free elections are not tolerated, as they present real possibilities of political action by the masses. It is precisely these possibilities that the neo-colonial state strives to suppress. Hence, given their freedom from public accountability and popular political control, African rulers have used the state to serve their own interests, rather than those of society at large.

In the context of rapid globalisation and increasing competition between cities that goes with that phenomenon, tools of conventional urban management wisdom appear too simplistic and rational to withstand the complexities of unpredictable patterns, particularly in Africa. Many African neighbourhoods are endowed with certain forms of social capital that appear to be key elements of urban local development strategies. For example, if entrepreneurial development requires localities to substantiate face-to-face contact as a means of generating diverse, collectively held beliefs and mobile networks of affiliation reinforced by substantiated histories of coalition and trust, then many African urban contexts are likely to embody most of these characteristics.²⁷

In Africa, regulatory powers have been increasingly transferred from the regional to the local level, replacing a state-driven discourse with a municipal one. International financial institutions opine that such actions provide greater opportunities for the regulation, as well as technical and financial support, of urban development. But when the decentralisation of political power is also linked to the trend towards the privatisation of service delivery, a political vacuum is created which amplifies the actual and/or potential incompatibilities between profit making and the social good. Furthermore, where local government leaders collude in diverting public funds into private pockets, municipalities provide neither accountability nor trust. Under such circumstances there is the oft mistaken notion that civil society automatically provides an alternative to local government. As the state withdraws from or greatly reduces its role as provider, urban residents in many African cities have done little to step in. Fortunately, associations of various kinds have formed to take over certain essential services. Globalisation may accelerate the marginalisation of communities throughout Africa, but it also “implicitly accords spaces of autonomy for an often richly textured reconfiguration of social life”. However, globalisation also increases the distance of these communities from the resources necessary to sustain their entrepreneurial endeavours in local self-government. Therefore there is need for greater articulations between local initiatives and diverse social groupings in order to mesh together increasingly complex patterns of survival, development and governance into a larger, more coherent urban form “premised on its own organic identities rather than contrived attempts to imitate urban modernities from other contexts”.²⁸

4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF GOVERNANCE

There appears to be three new trends that characterise the ‘third wave’ in local governance:

- increased involvement of the private and non-profit sectors in governance structures and service delivery;

²⁷ Swilling, Mark, Abdou Maliq Simone & Firoz Khan (2002) “‘My soul I can see’: The limits of governing African cities in the context of globalisation and complexity’ in Parnell, Susan, Edgar Pieterse, Mark Swilling & Dominique Wooldridge (eds) *Democratising Local Government: The South African Experiment*, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, Chapter 20, 305-327, 307-308

²⁸ Swilling *et al* (2002), *op cit*, 308, 310

- a new type of elected leadership that is willing, and has the skills, to negotiate complex multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilise resources and build communities; and
- an increasing use of facilitated discussion to jointly formulate shared vision, resolve conflicts, make decisions, and develop consensus between different interests inside and outside governing structures.

The changing nature of capacities for local governance is linked to shifts in the way cities are governed, and incorporates moves from government to governance; unisectoral to cross sectoral; co-ordination to collaboration; structure to process; and formal structures to networks. Taken together, this is reference to governance capacities and trends that depend on a relational culture.

By contrast, while cities in the developed world are increasingly turning to post-modern relational ways of governing in response to greater complexity and uncertainty in a rapidly globalising and urbanising world, local governments in highly relational environments like Africa tend to deny – in the name of a contrived rationalist modernity – what may be their greatest strength: the implicit conditions within urban communities for a relational approach to governance. It is unfortunate that urban elites tend to exploit the relational webs in African cities and their constituent relations “to build resource bases for a contrived (and parasitical) urban modernity, rather than mobilising these diverse energies for a generalised, authenticated and indigenous set of urban visions that could drive the emergence of a set of urban forms that take seriously the voices, values and needs of the urban majority”. The adverse result is that relationships become ambiguous, provisional, and truncated, thereby having to be constantly reinvented as they are strained by the requirements of “introverted survival within ever-changing, disconnected, interstitial hidden abodes”. If the building of non-exploitative relational webs, rather than purely contract-based markets or hierarchical modernities, became the normal practice and focus of local governance, it is possible that relationships could become more supportive, interdependent, reciprocal and trusting. The challenge, therefore, is to liberate African local governance from the “rationalist delusions of positivist modernity”.²⁹

Having looked at African governance in general, the focus is now narrowed by briefly examining requirements for good governance in Africa.

4.3 CONSIDERATIONS UNDERLYING THE NEED FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

In present day Africa, the following may shape policy choices:

- consensus that some sort of democratic mode of governance is the most appropriate way to structure intra-state and state-society relations;
- the economic crisis that the continent faces which will, by virtue of the power of the international economy, need to be addressed according to market principles structured by international economic regulations set by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and other international economic agreements;
- the highest average urbanization rate in the world, at just below 5% per annum;
- the severe negative pressures placed on natural resources and on the capacity of the environment to absorb waste;
- the increase in demands for sustainable livelihoods, services and goods that will emanate from enfranchised populations created by liberalization and democratisation;

²⁹ Wallis (1994: 292-293), quoted by Swilling *et al* (2002), *op cit*, 321-322

- the challenges of endemic diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS;
- chronic and acute poverty, deprivation, and the need for food security;
- land reform and security of tenure; and
- domestic and foreign direct investment in the productive sectors, and beneficiation.

The above combined processes have made policy makers concede, at least in principle, that they cannot be managed by a centralized political system that disempowers both sub-national governments and non-state actors. Following trends in Europe, decentralisation is assumed to be a necessary condition for successful democratisation. Today, urbanisation is deemed to be best managed where it is manifest, at town and city level. The establishment of environmentally sustainable planning and development systems are believed to be viable only if local communities play a central role. “It is now an article of faith (although often contradicted in practice) that without strong local government, effective delivery will be impossible”. The discussion of governance, particularly as it applies to Africa, is at a very early stage of development and a common discourse for defining the problems and solutions has yet to emerge. Hence, the notion of local urban governance needs to be defined at the outset.³⁰

4.4 TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

The World Bank’s 1989 report on Sub-Saharan Africa introduced the term ‘governance’ into mainstream debate. The view was that in the post-Cold War era, governance was the root cause of problems in Africa. The solution, consequently, lay in programmes aimed at ‘good governance’ generally, and in particular the strengthening of public management, increased accountability of politicians and officials, effective and independent judiciary, autonomy of the press, independence of civil society formations, and transparency in financial reporting. The World Bank defined governance as:

the mechanisms whereby an institution incorporates the participation of relevant interest groups in defining the scope and content of its work – including the capacity to mediate among these interests when they enter into conflict and the means whereby it demonstrates accountability to those who support it through its mission mandate and the application of its resources in pursuit of these goals.³¹

The key words emerging from the above definition are participation and accountability. Governance is considered to be a system of governing which is concerned with the nature of the relationship between rulers and the ruled, state and society, government and the governed. This definition implies credibility, accountability and transparency on the part of officials; and legitimacy, responsiveness, sensitivity required of the regime. Governance also embraces the manner in which power is exercised, effective and accountable institutions, democratic principles, the electoral process, representative and responsible structures of government, and the need to ensure open and legitimate relationships between civil society and the state. The viewpoint is that governance is an approach or perspective, which focuses on:

- state and societal institutions and the relationships between them; and
- the ways in which rules are made in a society to render them acceptable as legitimate and to enhance values that are sought by individuals and groups within the society.

³⁰ Swilling (1997), *op cit*, 1

³¹ The World Bank (1993) *Governance, the World Bank Experience*, Operations Policy Department: Washington, DC

This approach by the World Bank has been criticised by many African analysts who hold that the Bretton Woods institutions have tended to articulate these issues in a “language derived from established Western liberal democracies without sufficient recognition of contextual specificities and the complexities of diverse African discourses”.³²

The following key elements appear to be crucial to good governance:

- managerial and organisational efficiency;
- accountability;
- legitimacy and responsiveness to the public;
- transparency in decision making; and
- plurality in policy options and choices.

The accountability aspect is perceived to embrace the manner in which power is exercised in the management of the country’s social and economic resources for development. Thus, vision, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, credibility, predictability and reliability (on the part of the leadership), combined with confidence and stability (on the part of the society), are the hallmarks of good governance. This concept also emphasises effective and accountable institutions, democratic principles, reliable electoral process, representative and responsible structures of government, and the need to ensure an open and legitimate relationship between civil society and the state. “Without good governance there can never be a good government and a good society; there can also never be sustainable and appreciable development”. Effective communication among and between the various urban role players is also key to good governance.³³

Governance implies a shift in thinking regarding the nature of the state and its relationship with society.

The shift from a noun (government) to a verb (governance), from structure to process, from things to relations, from independence to inter-dependence, from linearity to (feedback) loops, from rational structuration to patterns of chaos, is influenced by the combined universal disillusionment with the nature of the state and the impact of the post-modern imagination that has abandoned the myth of human self-unification and the vision of a utopian end-state.³⁴

The word ‘governance’ is defined in a number of different ways in the literature and in African political discourse, as indicated by the following five views:³⁵

- In general terms, it refers to the founding values and the constitutional metapolicies that constitute the nature of governing institutions, guide their actions and shape the complex relations between them and society.³⁶
- Many international development agencies holding a prescriptive position and equating ‘good governance’ with the classic liberal democratic model.

³² Landell-Mills & Serageldin (1991); Schmidz (1995), quoted by Swilling (1997), *op cit*, 4

³³ Onibokun, AG (1997) ‘Governance and Urban Poverty in Anglophone West Africa’ in Swilling (ed) *op cit*, Chapter 4, 85-114, 96-97, adopting the views of Halfani *et al* (1994) *op cit*, and Olowu & Akinola (1995)

³⁴ Swilling (1997), *op cit*, 3

³⁵ Swilling (1997) *op cit*, 4

³⁶ Hyden (1992), quoted by Swilling (1997), *ibid*

- It is not concerned with the nature of the state and government, but is targeted at state-society relations. Once the focus shifts to this relationship, then democratic governance is about empowerment of civil society formations so that they can participate in decision-making and policy formulation.³⁷
- It is an ideological device that post-Cold War Western governments have chosen to use to “mask the imposition of capitalist market policies (via structural adjustment) on highly unequal societies, with the consent of increasingly disempowered state systems that no longer represent the real interests of the poor majority – a formula that will lead to increased political conflict and a return to authoritarianism rather than democratic governance”.³⁸
- The fifth approach goes beyond the normative and critical approaches referred to above by attempting to theorise what Hyden³⁹ calls the ‘governance realm’. This writer’s primary concern is the dynamic of the ‘civic public realm’ in Africa – the sphere of public and political life that is not reducible to the state/public sector because it cannot be maintained that the state is the only player when it comes to the formulation and setting of public policy. His assumption is that the nature, health and texture of the civic public realm are dependent on the substantive content of governance relations.

Governance is the conscious management of regime structures with a view to enhancing the legitimacy of the public realm, meaning that it is about the way the power structures of the day (the ‘regime’) and the framework within which civil society operates are managed so that together these two interdependent elements can make up a robust and healthy civic public realm. It has four essential properties:

- the degree of trust existing between classes, clans and political elites about the nature, purpose and rules of socio-political interaction and practices;
- the extent to which there are effective relations of reciprocity in the public realm. Reciprocity is present where associations and parties are allowed to form, defend and promote stakeholder interests within the public realm via political competition, pressure, negotiations and conflict resolution. Reciprocity will be unlikely if trust does not exist, but trust without reciprocity will soon dissolve into cynicism;
- the degree of accountability, that is, whether the governors can be held accountable by the governed via institutionalised procedures and processes. Within civil society trust and reciprocity cannot be sustained over time without the eventual implementation of structures of accountability, nor can formal accountability mechanisms attain real meaning without trust and reciprocity across society; and
- the nature of authority, that is, how political leaders make policies and implement them such that they resolve problems of ordinary citizens and promotes the legitimacy of the public realm (capacity to govern).⁴⁰

The four elements in Hyden’s above approach, taken together, allows one to ask concrete questions about relations of trust and reciprocity, as well as accountability and authority when attempting to understand governance.

³⁷ Chazan *et al* (1988); Halfani *et al* (1996); quoted by Swilling (1997), *ibid*

³⁸ Leftwich (1993), quoted by Swilling, *ibid*

³⁹ *Op cit*

⁴⁰ According to Hyden, *op cit*

This is more useful than prescriptive liberal democratic models, or simply the critique of these models as masks for the logic of international capital accumulation. It also allows one to “go beyond a descriptive equation of governance with state-society relations”. However, there are two problems with Hyden’s framework:

- It is still state-centric. Such conceptions of governance often ignore the efficacy and power of non-state modes of governance, which can, at times, have a greater influence over the distribution of urban resources than the state itself. An alternative to state-centrism is the argument that as societal and economic relations have become increasingly complex, diverse and dynamic (or post-modern) in a context of mounting fiscal constraints, a tension has opened up between governing capacities that were previously located exclusively within the state, and governing needs that the old state forms can no longer respond to. There is then a shift from state-centric assumptions about the locus of the capacity to govern, to the creation of new governing partnerships entered into by state agencies, private sector businesses, and NGOs/CBOs in response to the new governing needs that have emerged in post-industrial societies. This search for governance in the vacuum created by unmet governing needs in a context where the state is incapable of developing the necessary capacity to respond to the complexity, diversity and dynamism of rapidly changing conditions provides a very useful framework for understanding what is happening in Africa’s towns and cities.
- The second is that while his conception of governance is useful for analysing the relationships between organizations, he fails to ask what governance means for the internal management of African organizations.

An analysis of governance should start by identifying where the locus of governance is across a whole spectrum running from the central state and then beyond, to non-state formations in civil society. Next, an examination of the degree of trust and reciprocity within civil society, as well as the extent of accountability and the governing capacities of organisations, in both the state system and civil society, to meet the governing needs of society in general, is required. Whereas trust and reciprocity are concerned with the values underpinning organisational relationships, accountability and governing capacity are about the way these organisational relationships are constituted and organised throughout society. Cutting across all of this is the question of the internal organisational management of institutions, associations, and organisations in all sectors. Following systems theory, governance cannot be seen as merely the sum of these different elements, but rather it is about the quality of the inter-relationships between the parts. This, in turn, is what determines the nature, health and strength of urban municipal governance.⁴¹

Local urban governance refers to the realm of relations between and within organisational forms operating at the local sphere, with municipalities playing some role in governing and managing urban development processes in conjunction with an array of formations in civil society that are involved one way or another in promoting and/or defending civic interests within the public realm. This, however, only helps one to understand the realm of relations that local urban governance is about, rather than providing a useable normative definition.

⁴¹ Swilling (1997), *op cit*, 6-7

It appears to follow that democratic local urban governance will develop if accountable and democratically managed municipalities evolve and enter into partnerships, alliances and collaborations with well-managed formations in civil society which are committed to the principles of trust and reciprocity in the promotion and defence of citizen interests. Furthermore, such united, democratic ‘alliance’ must have the resources and capacity to formulate and implement policies that deal effectively and efficiently with urban development problems. This conception of urban governance self-consciously places municipalities at the centre of its vision, but surrounded by the requisite partners to fill the resource/capacity conditions. This suggests both a horizontal and a vertical matrix of relationships that define the nature and dynamics of local governance”.⁴² In East Africa during the 1990s the usage of the concept of governance assumed three distinct orientations:⁴³

- Continuation of the ‘managerial’ notion of governance, wherein emphasis was on the manner in which public functions were executed, including the technicalities of policy formulation, execution, and outcome, as well as to societal responses to state action. The prime issues of concern were finance and personnel, as well as the process, which deals with the whole array of issues involved in the mobilisation of resources for the benefit of urban residents, and consequently the nation.
- The second concept of ‘governance’ places emphasis on the main institutional organ formally assigned the task of administering urban development, with the authority vested in municipal councils. Urban governance is therefore equated with socio-political and economic operations of municipal authorities, whilst making passing reference to other agencies. Whereas the previous approach assumes that the locus of power is within the domain of central government, here the power locus is simply shifted to the municipal system.
- The third concept is much closer to the explicit and implicit rules and structures that sustain and protect the civic public realm. In addition it acknowledges the existence of multiple agencies of power and authority that individually pursue specific interests but maintain an interdependent relationship whose content defines the quality of the regime’ and growth of the civic public realm.

With reference to studies in East Africa, the concept of governance refers to the composite regime formation comprised of rules of behaviour, sanction mechanisms, and operational agencies that sustain the public realm at a given level of society. Each regime defines a distinct sphere of power and authority that guide the mode of living in the particular sector. The main difference among regimes is that each one operates within the terms of its own internal logic. At the same time, “the multiple regimes maintain degrees of relationships that range from mutual animosity and benign co-existence, to shared reciprocity”. Urban governance, therefore, refers to the overall configuration of regime structures within an urban context.⁴⁴

⁴² Swilling (1997), *op cit*, 11

⁴³ Halfani, M (1997) ‘Governance of Urban Development in East Africa: An Examination of the Institutional Landscape and the Poverty Challenge’ in Swilling (ed) *op cit*, Chapter 5, 115-159, 119-120, hereafter referred to as ‘Halfani 1997(b)’

⁴⁴ Halfani, 1997(b), *op cit*, 120

The above discussion serves to highlight the complex and confusing local government operating environment generally, and particularly in Africa. It does not augur well for the design and implementation of institutions and processes that will guarantee successful local government operations. There is need to know more, for empirical studies, rather than philosophical outpourings of academics and theoreticians. They, however, do serve a purpose, for example, in highlighting what additional requirements are, such as the need for institutional reform and the kinds of skills and knowledge essential for the design of institutions and process that will be effective.

4.5 KNOWLEDGE INADEQUACIES ON GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

In Africa it may be necessary to create a hegemonic order that will serve as a central logic for the determination of urban development. To do this one needs firstly to “foster the process of political democratisation and decentralisation of power and authority, as well as to create the structures for social integration and civic engagement”. The initiation of such a transformation is a knowledge intensive process that necessitates the building of awareness and commitment about the problems and solutions, reconstituting institutional relations, developing methods and tools of intervention, and disseminating experiences for adaptation and replication. All these underline the importance of knowledge generation, particularly thorough research.⁴⁵ The research implications are:

- the issue of urban governance has largely remained a theoretical discussion – there is need for empirical studies that will show the magnitude of the problem in different urban centres and areas of Africa’s five regions;
- further investigate the exact nature and strength of the relationship between poor urban governance and the manifestations of urban poverty;
- address the problem of how to mobilise the people generally (and the grassroots in particular) for effective participation in governance and urban development; and
- research is also needed on an appropriate and adaptive technology for urban development.

A major challenge of good governance is to promote research activities in order to improve our knowledge of the process. The new research agenda should include:

- the various dimensions of local participatory governance;
- the relationships between local administration and the organisations of civil society;
- new local citizenship and social solidarity in the urban context;
- new forms of partnerships for the provision of urban services; and
- the specific problems of governance in large metropolitan areas.

The knowledge base with regard to urban development, urban government, and local urban governance in Africa is inadequate. Urban research and policy networks should strive to deepen their sub-continental linkages with a view to raising the necessary resources to build up databases of best practices and innovation, structured conversations to increase mutual learning, collaborative policy formulation that can be used to lobby for policy change, and direct interventions in institutional change processes in order to build capacity and redefine vision and role. It is interesting to note that the City of Johannesburg established its International Relations Unit in 2001 and the Johannesburg Innovation and Knowledge Exchange in 2002 to undertake such work.

⁴⁵ Halfani, 1997(a), *op cit*, 31, 33

If sequential learning begins to happen on a sub-continental basis, then maybe a shared vision of an indigenous African approach to local urban governance will begin to emerge. This is in fact happening with, for example, the City of Johannesburg implementing Nepad by establishing twinning relationships with certain select African cities.

5 CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed the move away from ‘government’ to the new concept of ‘governance’. It has shown how complex the operating environment of local governments has become, and the various challenges to be faced in post independence Africa. The involvement of several new role players in what were traditionally authoritarian structures and processes in apartheid South Africa makes for an even more difficult policy and delivery environment at the local sphere. The situation has not been helped much by central government laying down statutory requirements in the context of limited material and intellectual resources at all levels of government, but more so among municipalities.

Partnerships, alliances, and collaborations with the private sector, parastatals, CBOs, NGOs, and perhaps other as yet undetermined actors vying for roles in development give rise to new challenges of leadership and management, as well as of co-ordination, consolidation, communication, and compliance. Perhaps such an environment creates space for involvement of an honest broker, such as the South African Local Government Association and the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa, if they were endowed with the requisite expertise and capacity. However, the problem does not end there: such an institution must be able to show it can add value, or else it may be viewed as another layer in the hierarchy.