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The case of Africa ,with special reference to Kenya*

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# **SUSTAINABLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND GLOBALIZATION: THE CASE OF AFRICA ,WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KENYA**

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## **Introduction**

The notion of international linkages with African local communities and authorities is not new to the continent. What may be new is the form linkages inherent in the concept of a new world order which seems to push for the incorporation of all countries onto the global village or global market through the instrumentality of the fast growing information technology and the business aggressiveness of multinational and transnational corporations.

This paper tries to examine the idea of globalization against the need to develop sustainable local self government for Africa. It tries to show that unless local governments and local communities actively participate in the production of their daily necessities and in promoting sustainable local development, globalization which they have no power to prevent could do more damage than good. The paper also gives an illustration of efforts toward local self government where capacity-building activities have greatly contributed to enhancing the capability of a local authority in Kenya to improve local governance and mobilize resources for sustainable local development.

## **Initial global linkages in Africa**

Africa has had various forms of systematic international linkages since time immemorial. However, such linkages have been more intense since the colonization of Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the more advanced industrialized countries of Europe acquired colonies worldwide. In the process of advancing the cause of colonial penetration and control, the colonial governments in Africa got all corners of each territory closely tied to and rigidly controlled by the newly established colonial central government. Under the policy of indirect rule, some colonial powers recognized and allowed the continuation of some centralized traditional authorities like chiefdoms, emirdoms, or kingdoms, to handle local native affairs

as long as they did not infringe colonial interests and as long as they helped to advance the colonial cause.

Where no centralized native system was discernible, the colonial rulers created a system of chiefs as part of colonial administration to bring the dispersed populations and their decentralized traditional systems of authority under the colonial power. Later on, new local native authorities were created under the colonial administrative machinery to organize the provision of some community services locally such as education, markets and trading centers, tree planting, and construction of some secondary roads. But never was a local government operated independently of the colonial central system in such a way as would advance economic and political development of the local community.

In all cases in Africa, the central concern of colonial government was to place traditional or newly imposed local authorities under the colonial government in order to use them as instruments to advance colonial interests economically, militarily, and politically.

### **Post-independence Continuation of International Colonial Structures**

Post independence Africa saw little change from the colonial way of doing things, including the organization and centralization of the local government. The main differences were in the form of gradual removal of open racial discrimination and the intensive use of colonial economic structures to produce more primary commodities for the world market which continued to be under the control of the industrial countries. Therefore, each of the African countries remained firmly stuck to the international system. With respect to local governance, the bid to advance the cause of national integration, led all African post-independence governments to retain the colonial-established systems of local government, keeping all local authorities and other local groups closely tied to the center and using all manner of legal and administrative structures to control them rigidly. The effect was that no legal or administrative incentives were available to promote innovations in the direction of creating an autonomous local government system or any form of viable and sustainable local government.

What remains in Africa is nothing but a very centralized system of local government, where all decision making is subject to supervision, control, and vetting from the central government. This is best illustrated in the case of Kenya where Chapter 265 of the laws of

Kenya subjects all plans and activities of all local authorities to the full control of the central government through the local authorities minister.

In addition, all local initiatives by the local community are subject to control by the central government through what is known as the provincial administration a centralized hierarchy of officials running from the Provincial Commissioner at the provincial headquarters, through the District Commissioner at the district office, the District Officer at the divisional level, to the Chief at the community level.

Thus, in spite of so much talk of decentralization in a country like Kenya, the local residents still have to endure their position as spectators in the decision-making process. After they have cast their votes to elect their representatives in central and local governments, the people have virtually no more say in the way national and local public affairs are run, however intimately these affairs involve the welfare of the population, for example the use of their resources like land, allocation and use of other local public resources, provision of services, and conservation of the environment.

It is for this reason that the international effort to promote self-local government and peoples participation in local decision making may be said to be timely.<sup>1</sup> More so when the aim is to mobilize local, national and other resources for the sustainable development of local communities that are capable of taking part in decision making regarding their own development.

### **Globalization and Local Self Government**

In the debate on sustainable of local self government in the context of globalization, the view is strongly expressed that efforts must be made to prevent a situation where African economies continue to be integrated into the global system basically as producers of inexpensive primary commodities and consumers of finished products and services from the industrial world negating local efforts to develop and make a contribution in any other way.

Africa and other Third World have been integrated in the global system since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Then post-independence development served to accelerate that

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<sup>1</sup> In Kenya a system known as District Development Focus to encourage local decision making ended up being controlled by central government civil servants led by the provincial administration.

process. The result is that virtually all corners of the continent are today producers of what they do not consume in form of low-priced primary commodities for export and consumers of what they do not produce in form of very expensive finished manufactured products and services from the industrial countries. The irony of the matter is that nearly all African countries have found it difficult to extricate themselves from such an unfair global system and international order.

The call for sustainable local government in Africa in the context of globalization may therefore be taken to represent two divergent options. In the first place, this may suggest further intensification of integration of the local populations into the global system. This approach is based on the hope that globalization may provide room for new partnership between the industrial countries, African governments and the local populations, and may be explained through a social planning model.

However, the idea that globalization could serve as a means of overcoming poverty and the other myriad problems in the continent may be misdirected and may indeed plunge the continent into deeper economic and political problems. This is because, unless great care is taken to avoid the past assumptions and mistakes, globalization might not address the key question of the lopsided economic and technological structure which is responsible for the economic quagmire, dependency and poverty in which virtually all local populations in Africa find themselves.

In the second place, positive globalization may be crafted. This denotes a body of concerted global efforts to recognize the right of the local and national populations to develop their capacity to produce their necessities and sell the surplus in the global market without the present unnecessary restrictions created under the pretext of a free world market. Such a development would automatically lead African local communities to operate and develop like any other independent society in a context of global equity.

The positive approach to globalization is influenced by a combination of community development and social action models which call for community action to assume responsibility for the development of the local population. These models also inspire efforts to motivate the grassroots community to prevail upon the local and national institutions of power to respect and give unqualified support to the right of all local communities to

sustainable self-development. As Schweke et. al. would probably put it, such efforts have to be directed at empowering the people at the villages, market centers, towns and cities in Africa to access educational opportunities that prepare them for jobs to support themselves and their families in a dynamic economy.<sup>2</sup>

In such communities, people have to be involved in making decisions that affect their lives. And business, households, and government have to make efficient use of land, energy and other resources allowing the local population to achieve a high quality of life with minimal waste and environmental damage. That way, these communities will be healthy, secure, and will have clean air to breath and safe water to drink.

As the situation in Africa since independence has demonstrated, unmitigated concentration of power around the center such that a relationship of patronage exists between the center and the local authorities and their populations not only stunts local initiatives, but also suffocates local potential for economic development and social transformation. In addition, capacity of the central government to provide for all the necessities of the population throughout the country is badly over-stretched and can no longer be relied upon to inspire development for any community.

In contrast to the practice hitherto, it must be acknowledged that people want to decide what their local authorities should do; they want to own and share responsibility for whatever takes place in their midst. Then they will be ready and willing to commit their resources and make the kind of sacrifices it takes to attain their goals by way of solving their problems and satisfying their needs. This is perhaps the strongest justification for local self government in any country.

Out of this realization, two objectives need to be pursued as a matter of urgency. First, African national governments have to be urged and encouraged to acknowledge the right of the local population to local self government as the surest way to satisfy their needs through their efforts. The national governments in Africa have to recognize their limitations in terms of resources and capacity to mobilize the population sufficiently enough to transform the living conditions in the society without further delay. Second, the adoption of the **World**

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<sup>2</sup> William Schweke, Carl Rist, and Brian Dabson, *Bidding for Business: Are Cities and States Selling Themselves Short*, 1994, quoted in Michael H. Shuman, *Going Local: Creating Self-Reliant Communities in a Global Age*, New York: The Free Press 1998, p. 24.

**Charter of Local Self-Government** by such bodies as the OAU and regional organizations such as ECOWAS, COMESA, SADC, and EAC is critical in order to give a regional boost to the pace of establishing truly local governments and authorities, serving local interests, needs and aspirations and involving the local population in local decision-making process. The adoption of the spirit of local self government would automatically lead to the establishment of democratic governance at the local level to the benefit of the local people and the country as a whole.

The other reason for advocating the establishment of a system of local self government is that unless a community is given a chance to do something independently, its full capacities will never emerge or be directed to its own development. Therefore, the central authorities in Africa must be encouraged to view decentralization aimed at autonomous local government positively, and to drive toward the establishment of working local and grassroots self-governments in the best interests of their populations, thereby making it a lot easier to find solutions to the myriad problems facing the continent today. In particular, African governments have to be persuaded to take the following measures as a matter of urgency:

- a) To provide adequate constitutional and legal mechanisms conducive to the establishment, growth and development of local self government in each country;
- b) To reorganize existing centrally controlled local government systems and inspire the local communities to form local authorities suitable to their needs, and also transfer to them the power which they need to organize and run their affairs in order to improve their economic and social condition as quickly as possible;
- c) To provide adequate opportunities for access to national and international resources by the local grassroots authorities for the development of their populations. This way it becomes clear that local self government does not mean unplugging from the central government. It simply means letting the local people increase their self-reliance, as well as choose and implement what is best for them in their particular conditions and be able to mobilize their resources fully.

Establishment of local self government systems does not have to take place immediately. It can be a phased process provided the goal is to get the local communities and local governments gain self confidence and develop capacity to organize and manage local authorities within democratic, transparent, open and accountable standards that are geared toto

the ends of service provision and social-economic transformation of the lives of local residents. A well worked out strategic plan may get the local authorities to a high level of autonomy in five to ten years.

### **Apprehensions about Local Self Government in Africa**

Critics view the call for local self government with a lot of apprehensions. They fear the kind of competition and challenges that strong local authorities could pose to national governments in terms of the political power they would wield and the amount of resources they would control. Such a fear is associated with the problem of the shaky legitimacy of many national governments in Africa.

The other reservation relates to the organizational capability of the local authorities. Critics argue that local leadership and population lack the necessary know-how, skills, experience and competence to run public affairs independently. They insist that the central government must exercise a large measure of guidance, supervision and control of local government activities - all with a view to maintaining full control of all populations in the country, as well as enforcing uniformity and equality of standards countrywide.

However, the most serious drawback to the creation of local self-governments in Africa lies in the danger of transferring bad national habits, traditions and practices to the local level. It is feared, for example, that decentralization aimed at creating local self-government may lead to the establishment of authoritarian, corrupt and inept local authorities, resulting in misallocation of resources and failure to conduct public affairs in a transparent, open, and accountable fashion as befits modern public management. It must also be recognized that the development of self-government may take time because of the firmly established structure of dependency and patronage, both encouraged and perpetuated by central government.

Whereas such reservations and fears may be justified by the experience of hitherto performance of local governments in Africa, there is no reason why leadership and managerial deficiencies cannot be remedied through adequate constitutional, legal and institutional provisions calculated to help stem the danger of rearing bad governance at the local and grassroots levels. Such provisions would create a framework whereby local citizens, interest groups and the media, among other instruments, could restrain and impose sanctions against misguided local authorities. Due to the long established traditions and habits of poor

leadership and outright mismanagement, the constitutional, legal and institutional framework must be supported by appropriate leadership and staff retraining, as well as putting into place a process of creating public awareness and empowerment through civic education.

This will help to equip the local communities with relevant information, skills and confidence required for them to assume their full responsibility in participating in decision making and enforcing accountability on the local governments and authorities. Local standards will develop to attain the national and global levels that will render establishment of what Shuman calls global links and networks possible, meaningful and beneficial to Africa.<sup>3</sup>

### **Kenya's Experience**

In Kenya a program geared to making local governments autonomous, workable, self-confident and sustainable has been initiated by civil society. The example cited here is intended to illustrate that it is possible to establish free and self-governing authorities in Africa with tremendous positive results by way of sustainable local development. Although this example is based on the individual experience of training-propelled transformation of a rural local authority, it must be acknowledged that this local council exemplifies and typifies several small markets and large urban/market centers in Africa which will grow into the towns and cities of tomorrow. Good and sustainable local governance practice and development in this council will lay a good foundation for the emergence of viable and sustainable large municipal local governments of tomorrow. In this respect the Masaku County Council is a good example to learn from.

### **Masaku County Council**

Under a local government training program, the Agency for Development Education and Communication has set out to promote autonomous, self-reliant and sustainable local governments and authorities in Kenya. From the experience of this program, it is clear that development of sustainable and fairly autonomous local authorities in Kenya and the rest of Africa is possible. This is vividly illustrated by the Masaku County Council of Eastern Province of Kenya.

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<sup>3</sup> Shuman, op. cit.

Masaku County Council covers Masaku administrative district bordering the eastern part of Nairobi City, the capital of Kenya. Found in the Eastern Province of Kenya, and with a population of about 400,000 people, the county council lies in range land with livestock and dry-crop farming as the main economic activities. (See map of Kenya) All the rivers in the council area are temporary rivers that tend to dry up during the most part of the year. Hence the council faces the perennial problem of water shortage, which is further complicated by occasional shortfalls in rainfall. Nevertheless, the area does receive occasional good rains and with better local government practice the water problem can be contained, the vegetation cover conserved and fast maturing crops grown to ease the chronic problem of famine and starvation in the community.

In summary, the plan to experiment with the development of sustainable local government in Masaku County Council was inspired by a model which is depicted in **Figure I**. For many years the population and leadership in this county council had come to accept the impossibility of realizing their own sustainable development until a training partnership between the council and ADEC was conceived and carried out.

As soon as the project took off, it became clear that the council was riddled with intractable problems which needed handling effectively before any plan for change toward sustainable local development could be considered feasible. They included the following:

- Constant conflicts and lack of communication between the councilors and council officers;
- Little involvement of local actors and interest groups in decision making;
- Lack of public support due to total disregard of views from the local population who comprised the bulk of the council's revenue payers and service users;
- Low level of revenue collection coupled with resistance to making payments from the members of the public due to council's failure to provide any tangible services;
- Poor road infrastructure, very high unemployment among all age groups, mass poverty, disease, declining school enrollment, and falling living standards;
- Widespread drought and serious lack of water for humans and livestock;
- Fast clearing of tree and vegetation cover;
- Neglect and wastage of resources and equipment;
- Low staff and councilors' morale due to non-payment of salaries and allowances, among others; and

- Excessive and quite obstructive control by the central government through the Ministry of Local Authorities (MOLA), among other factors.

The training program carried out by ADEC was designed in a consultative workshop and a series of meetings with a number of local authorities, including Masaku County Council (MCC). Training itself was targeted at all the councilors and senior staff of each council, followed by training of revenue collection staff and other staff handling closely related functions in the council. Training of the councilors and senior staff focused on role differentiation and complementarity; the role of councilor as development and financial policy maker and community leader; councilor and senior staff as change initiators, planners, and managers accountable to the public; and the role of human resources development in the council and in the community.

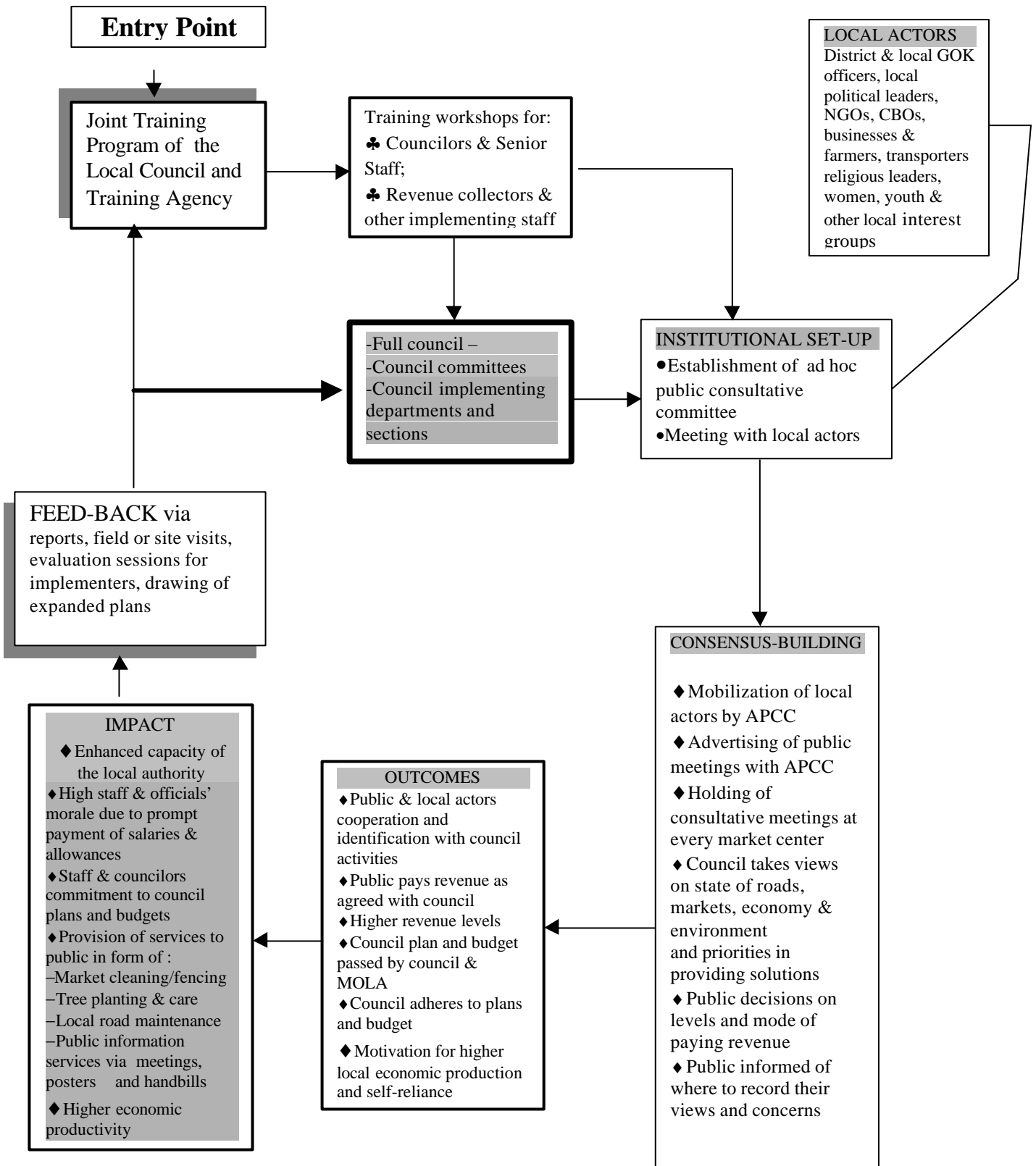
Planning, budgeting, resource mobilization and coordination, and facilitative financial controls were also tackled by experienced experts in the areas of resource mobilization and financial administration.

After a series of training sessions for the councilors and senior staff, and after an intensive skills upgrading course for all revenue collection personnel, tremendous changes have been witnessed in the capacity of the council to develop and manage a sustainable local government in Masaku County Council. These include:

**Communication and Leadership Activities:**

- Change of attitude and practice in the work of councilors and staff alike;
- Improvement of communication and cooperation between councilors and staff;
- Councilors' and senior staff's adoption of new commitment to planning, budgeting and sticking to the budget as a major policy document;
- Creation of accessibility channels and partnership involving the council and local actors, business, CBOs, interest groups and the public who are the council's customers; getting them to discuss how best to measure sustainability and how to move the community onto a sustainable pathway of organization and communication; and
- Council's bold move to involve members of the public in directly participating in decision making regarding revenue levels, mode of collection and local priorities by way of services to be addressed by the council.

Figure I: Training-Based Sustainable Local Government Development: Change Model Flow chart



APCC=Ad hoc Public Communications Committee

### **Growth of Revenue**

- An increase of revenue collection from 29,881,000/= to 34,314,000/= between June and December 1998 and 1999, a growth rate of 15 percent. In the month of June 1999, revenue rose to 7,147,000/= compared to 4,647,000/= in June 1998, a change of 54 percent.<sup>4</sup>

### **Resource mobilization and infrastructure maintenance**

- The council has started to move in the direction of full capacity utilization, resource mobilization, self-reliance and elimination of wastage and idle capacity; among other matters.
- The council has embarked on improving physical accessibility through rehabilitation of graders and through repairs and maintenance of roads. Roads in six out of 15 locations have already been graded.
- One of the council's six bore-holes, Mutu Mwaki, has been rehabilitated with council own resources and local residents are now getting sufficient supply of clean water.
- The council has rehabilitated two vehicles and it has purchased a new 4 wheel drive vehicle to facilitate the new efforts of the council.
- Educational bursaries and educational materials all amounting to 750,000/= have been distributed through the local councilors to respective beneficiaries.

All this is geared to the attainment of self-reliance in local resources and capital. There is full awareness that the council cannot unplug from the national or global economy altogether. It is also geared to encouraging the local population to produce for themselves necessities like food, water, energy, housing and clothing, among many consumer and producer goods and services.

### **Environmental Conservation**

- The council now routinely carries out cleaning of market and urban centers under its jurisdiction under the supervision of senior staff from council headquarters;
- The council is currently about to finish fencing its nine major open markets in a bid to facilitate market maintenance programs and protect trees from being destroyed by

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<sup>4</sup> Report on ADEC Training Seminars and Courses, by Peter M Mbatha, on behalf of the County Clerk, August 8, 2000.

animals. A number of trees have been planted in the markets and more will be planted as soon as the long rains come next year; and

- Popular participation in environmental conservation.

With the ongoing efforts in Masaku County Council, one can look forward to the emergence of socially and economically sustainable development of many of the market and urban centers currently under the stewardship of this rural council. The Masaku Municipal Council and four other town councils are hard put to emulate the recent changes and performance record of the county council

### **Problems encountered in search of change**

In doing these things, the council has faced numerous problems. These include:

- Lack of constitutional and legal support for their efforts to do and achieve things the way the local population and local leaders deem fit ;
- Over-centralization of authority and obstructive legislation militating against autonomous local decision-making and implementation; all planning, budgeting, raising of revenue, and expenditure being rigidly controlled by the central government through the minister; oftentimes the decisions of the minister being influenced more by political interests than the interests and needs of the local community.
- Lack of political will to make local authorities fairly independent of central government which itself tends to rely on revenue it collects on behalf of the local authorities but which it rarely avails to the local authorities; and
- Phobia for competition from local centers of power and fear of the crisis of eroded legitimacy that may ensue from the potential success of local authorities in the face of central government failure to deliver goods and services; among other factors.

### **Future Prospects on a National Scale**

Various central government led attempts have been made to implement some modicum of decentralization since independence. However, they are so few and so much controlled by the central government that they cannot be taken as a move toward local self government in Kenya. Essentially such efforts have effectively served to make the power of the central government stronger than before. The efforts in question include the following:

- ❖ Institutionalization of provincial administration extending to the remotest corners of the country;
- ❖ Establishment of provincial and/or district (seemingly local) technical or specialized boards including education, health, water, agricultural, trade and roads boards, all of which are chaired or controlled by the provincial administration on behalf of the central government;
- ❖ Establishment of District Focus Strategy for Development intended to involve the local population in choosing their development priorities mainly for funding by the central government. The effort was eventually controlled by the local representatives of the central government, and local initiatives remained marginalized.
- ❖ More recently the central government has allocated a portion of fuel levy to the local authorities with a view to enabling them assume a greater role in the maintenance of the local road network.
- ❖ The local authorities will also be allocated five percent of national income tax revenue for their budgetary support.
- ❖ Also the creation of a National Road Board and District Road Board is intended to enable local leaders and private stakeholders to participate in decision making pertaining to road maintenance locally.

All these efforts have come about as a result of criticism that the central government has taken over virtually all the responsibilities which rightly belong to local government jurisdiction and capabilities.

However, the most fundamental changes seem to be on the way. There are now clear pointers that the ongoing constitutional reform may lead to emergence of a much more decentralized local government system in Kenya in the next few years. In addition, many more local groups and communities have, out of desperation, embarked on some local initiatives to start solving their problems and to make the local authorities to wake up in order to meet local development demands, provide services and be accountable in resource allocation and management. Such initiatives are mainly urban based and include organizations like neighborhood associations and community and residence groups, all trying to take charge of their interests within the residential areas while at the same time pressurizing the local councils to do their work.

Out of these efforts a clear organizational base is emerging on which a campaign for local self government for sustainable development may be waged and upon which future trends and developments may depend. Through civil society led training programs on local governance more awareness is being created and the local authorities and the community itself will demand a better deal and freer hand in mobilizing and utilizing their resources for their own economic, social and environmental protection and development.

Nevertheless, the capacity of these groups and any would be autonomous local authorities and governments in Kenya to form useful linkages on equal partnership with global agencies may take a while to materialize unless what we have called positive globalization is supported with concrete resource commitments to help empower the local authorities in the developing countries such as Kenya. This is a consideration that the World Charter on Local Self Government must take into account for it to have a meaningful impact on Africa.

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