

## Impact of Modern Concepts of Good Governance on Local Government

Prepared by: Salah Adeen Babikir Mohamed (Ph. D)

**1. Concepts of Local Government:** Local government implies that it is local and a government. For some people, local means a small community or area characterized by homogeneity, similar traditions and values. In local government literature and for local government purposes, the term "Locality" means the economic area required to provide certain public services efficiently and economically. There is no one inclusive definition to the term "local government" in local government literature because many forms of local government are implemented in different countries. This can be explained as follows:

a. **John Howell**<sup>1</sup> explains that, "the term local government is an elusive one. It can mean different things to different people. For an Englishman for example, it is likely to mean "The Council", which may perform any number of tasks from cutting grass and collecting rates, to establishing new secondary schools. For a Rural- Sudanese, the local government council may be seen as simply the government, or Al Hokooma.<sup>(1)</sup>

b. **Hampton**<sup>2</sup> explained that, "local" is accepted on all sides in Britain as being large enough to provide several major services such as education and housing in addition to environmental amenities". On the other hand, there is the problem of defining the term "government" because of the changing concept of the word and the continuous changes in the structures, powers and functions of governments. Also it is difficult to define local government because the meaning of the word differs from one country to another.

c. As **Wraith**<sup>3</sup> explained, "Local Government in Britain may be defined as local democracy, exercised through locally elected councils, whose main purpose is to provide or administer social services with a greater degree of independence".

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(1) Al Hokooma: is an Arabic word meaning the government.

1 . John Howell," Local government and politics in Sudan ", Khartoum University Press, 1974,p2

2 . William Hampton," local Government and Urban Politics", Longman Inc., New York, 1987,p,2

3 . Ronald Wraith, "Local Government in West Africa", Georg Allen & Un win Ltd., London, 1964, p,9

d. In the United States Local Government has different meaning. As Cole<sup>4</sup>Stated, "In the United States local government is looked upon as a business concern, much likely any other, but one in which the general public should be encouraged to take an interest".

Referring to the above mentioned concepts one could say that the concept of local government can be understood as an administrative approach for managing the local affairs of local communities. In this approach, sufficient powers should be devolved from higher level of government to locally elected council (representing the public will of local people), and acquires their acceptance and support). The council should be empowered to issue local orders to manage local affairs, impose local taxes and fees to generate sufficient revenue to finance its activities. It should have the power to approve its independent budget. The council should encourage the participation of people in making the decisions regarding the development of their local communities, and it should be committed by developing the community resources and enhancing the welfare of people.

**2. Approaches towards Defining Local Government:** In decentralization literature there are two approaches towards defining local government.<sup>5</sup>

- a. The first approach, which is usually implemented in comparative studies, is to regard all national structures below the central government as local government.
- b. The second approach identifies local government by certain defining characteristics. These characteristics usually focus on certain attributes. Most important among them are the following:
  - Its legal existence.
  - Specified powers to perform a range of functions.
  - Substantial budgetary and staffing autonomy subject to limited central control.
  - Effective citizen participation.

On the other hand, another group of scholars tend to agree that it is very difficult to state one definition for local government and say that it means the same thing in all countries<sup>6</sup>. For example in English local government literature, local government is known as "local democracy". It is multipurpose, has an elected council endowed with power to impose taxes and enjoying considerable

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4 . G.D.H. Cole, " Comparative Local Government", Black well's, oxford, England, 1948.

5 . G.D.H. Cole, ibid,p,12

6 . B, Havenga, "The Role and Purpose of Local Government", University of Pretoria, 2002, P51.

degree of autonomy from the central government. In U.S.A, local government is simply known as "government by people". It is business more than governmental activity; it is the state's concern more than federal concern, with considerable variations from one state to another.

**3. Local Government Definitions:** Many scholars tend to agree that there is no one inclusive definition for local government. But, it may be useful to state some definitions to explain the common understanding of the concept of local government.

a. Defining local government **Sir Charles Barrat**<sup>7</sup> wrote, "Local Government is the regulation in particular localities of matters of primarily local importance by locally elected bodies raising the money necessary for their activities by the imposition of local taxes and generally sub-ordinate to central government".

b. In **United Nation Literature**,<sup>8</sup> local government has been defined as, "The political subdivision of a nation or (in federal system) of state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control over local affairs, including the power to impose taxes, or exact labor for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected, or otherwise locally selected".

c. **William Hampton**<sup>9</sup> as an advocate to the British Local Government system gave more details about the meaning of local government as follows:

- Local authorities have clearly defined physical structures.
- They are multipurpose and are responsible for providing many services.
- Local Councils are directly elected.
- They have independent power to impose taxes.

d. **Maw hood**<sup>10</sup> described local government as, "The creation of local bodies, separated by law from the national center, in which local representatives are given formal power to decide on a range of public matters. Their area of authority is limited, but within the area, their right to make decisions is entrenched by law and can only be altered by new legislation".

**4. What is Local Government?** Referring to the above mentioned definitions, the major characteristics of local government can be summarized as follows:

- a. It is a political, economic, and administrative approach for managing the affairs of local communities.
- b. Has specific geographical areas and physical structure.

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7 . Sir Charles Barrat, "Your Local Authority", CUP, London, 2nd edition, 1949, P.2.

8 . UNDP, Report on Local Government, Journal of local Administration, Overseas, July, 1976, P,12,

9 . Hampton, opcit, p. 3.

10 . Phillip Maw Hood, opcit, P. 2.

- c. Composed of public officials (as an executive body) and elected popular councilors, necessarily, representing the public will of the local citizens.
- d. The councilors have the legal right to make policy decisions, oversee the performance of executives and manage local affairs.
- e. Local government units are multipurpose, responsible for different functions of local importance.
- f. Has legal existence, and independent budget (as corporate body).
- g. Has the power to impose and collect taxes and allocate substantial resources.
- h. Has reasonable degree of autonomy to exercise power.

**5. New Concepts in Local Government:** Traditionally the major role of local government was the delivery of a range of services. Over time and in most countries, most of these services have been delivered by outside agencies and the role of local government has changed as a result. Recently, the terms governance and good governance are being increasingly used in public administration and development studies. It was introduced by UN Agencies in the last decade of the previous century and is now used all over the world. The prevalence of the concept of good governance caused radical changes in government structures, functions and relations in most countries. The impact of this concept spread to the field of local government studies and gradually the term "local governance" occurred in the literature of local government.

- a. About the evolution of local governance **Stoker**<sup>11</sup> mentioned the following, "We are witnessing the transformation of the structure of government beyond Westminster and White Hall, from a system of local government, into a system of local governance, involving complex sets of organizations drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors". Activities of local government are no longer a monopoly for public sector or civil service alone. Strong emphasis is being given to the participation and contribution of the private sector, NGOs, and civil society organizations in strategic policy decision, the budgeting process, and service delivery.
- b. **Stoker**<sup>12</sup> continues to explain the major components of local governance, "The building blocks of good local governance are many: citizen participation, partnerships among key actors at the local level, capacity of local actors across all sectors, multiple flows of information , institutions of accountability, and a pro-poor orientation".

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11 . Gerry Stoker, in " Rethinking Local Democracy ", Max Malian Press, London, 1996, P. 1.

12 . Gerry Stoker, *ibid*, P.1.

## Concepts of Good Governance

In this regard, and for better understanding of the concept of local government and local governance, it seems it may be more useful to start by explaining the concepts and the major principals of good governance as follows:

### **6. What is Good Governance?**

- a. Many studies indicate that "good governance" is mainly centered upon the participation of all concerned parties in the decision making process and the means by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).
- b. **The World Bank Definition:** The term "Governance" occurred for the first time in the 1992 World Bank Report entitled "Governance and Development". In the World Bank Report<sup>13</sup>, the term "Good Governance" was defined as, "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". In this report, the World Bank identified three aspects of governance:
  1. The form of the political regime.
  2. The process by which authority is exercised in managing resources for development.
  3. The capacity of governments to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions.
- c. **Silaka**<sup>14</sup> defined good governance as, "Good Governance' means competent management of a country's resources and affairs in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to people's needs".
- d. **Wikipedia**<sup>15</sup> described good governance as, "An indeterminate term used in international development literature to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources". The term governance can apply to corporate, international, national, local governance or to the interactions between other sectors of society. It defined governance as "the process of decision-making by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)". It defined good governance as "the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources without abuse of power or corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law".

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13. World Bank, Good Governance, 2013, Available at: <http://www.ifad.org/.pdf.Good governance, World Bank>.

14 . Silaka, Good governance, 2014, Available at: [http://www.silaka.org/current/pecsa/sas3/c\\_intro\\_eng.pdf](http://www.silaka.org/current/pecsa/sas3/c_intro_eng.pdf).

15 . Wikipedia, Good governance, 2014, Available at: [w.w.w, en, Wikipedia, org /wiki/Good governance](http://www.en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Good governance).

**e. Human Rights Definition:** The Human Rights Definition <sup>16</sup> is one of the most inclusive definitions of the concept of good governance. It defined good governance as follows:

“ Good governance encompasses full respect of human rights, rule of law, effective participation, multi-actor partnerships, political pluralism, transparent and accountable processes and institutions, an efficient and effective public sector, legitimacy, access to knowledge, information and education, political empowerment of people, equity, sustainability, and attitudes and values that foster responsibility, solidarity and tolerance”.

**7. Principal Elements of Good Governance<sup>17</sup>:** As explained in recent studies, the principle elements of good governance include the following:

**a. Participation:** Participation could be either direct or through representation. It requires the following prerequisites:

1. All parts of local community who are affected by or interested in a decision should have the opportunity to participate in making that decision.
2. Freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand.
3. The concerns of minorities are taken into account and the voices of the vulnerable of society are heard in decision-making.

**b. Rule of law:** Good governance also requires:

1. Fair legal frameworks enforced impartially.
2. Full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities.
3. Independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force.

**c. Transparency:** Transparency means that decisions taken and enforcement:

1. Follows rules and regulations.
2. Directly accessible and open to those who will be affected by such decisions and people should be able to see how and why a decision was made.
3. Enough information is freely available and provided in easily understandable forms and media.

**d. Responsiveness:** Good governance requires that institutions:

1. Try to serve all stakeholders.

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16 . Human Rights, Good governance, 2014, Available at: [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)- Human Rights Report 2010, Google.

17 . Wikipedia, Good governance, 2013, Available at: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good\\_governance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_governance).

2. Have the capacity and flexibility to respond rapidly to societal changes and general public interests.

**e. Consensus Orientation:**

1. Balances the different interests of a society.
2. Broad and long-term understanding to what is needed for sustainable human development.

**f. Equity:** All citizens should feel that they have a stake in their society and have opportunities to improve and maintain their wellbeing, and to not feel excluded.

**g. Effectiveness and Efficiency:**

1. Provision of quality public services that satisfy the society's needs, by sustainable use of natural resources, and protecting the environment.
2. In local government, it means that local government entities implement decisions and follow processes that make the best use of the available human and natural resources as well as time, to ensure the best possible results for their communities.

**h. Accountability:** Accountability is a key and fundamental requirement of good governance. It means that decision-makers in government, the private sector, and civil society organizations are accountable to the public, and the stakeholders and all those who will be affected by their decisions or actions. In a government entity accountability means it is able and willing to show the extent to which its actions and decisions are consistent with clearly defined and agreed upon objectives. In a local government unit it means the obligation to report, explain and to be answerable for the consequences of decisions it has made on behalf of the community it represents.

**j. Strategic Vision:** It means the future vision of good governance and human development, and what is needed for such development. It means the ability to predict future problems with regard to expected changes (e.g. demographic, economic, environmental, etc.).

**i. Fighting Corruption:** Fighting corruption means efforts exerted to minimize corruption.

## Evolution of the Concept of Local Governance

As a result of the wide spread of the concepts of good governance, and the great successes it realized in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of management in both the public and private sectors in the United States and most of the European Countries, accordingly the concept of (Local Governance) occurred in decentralization and local government literature.

**8. What is Local Governance?** Few attempts have been made on defining local governance. Among these attempts are the following:

- a. **Anwar Shah**<sup>18</sup>defined local governance as, “Good local governance is not just about providing a range of local services but also about preserving the life and liberty of residents, creating space for democratic participation and civic dialogue, supporting market-led and environmentally sustainable local development, and facilitating outcomes that enrich the quality of life of people”.
- b. **UNDP** defined local governance as,<sup>19</sup> “A set of institutions, mechanisms, and processes through which citizens and their groups can articulate their interests and needs, mediate their differences, and exercise their rights and obligations at the local level”.

**9. Why is Good Governance Important in Local Government?** According to **Wikipedia**, there are many factors that assure the importance of good governance in local government. Most important among them are the following:<sup>20</sup>

- a. It promotes community confidence in its council when local citizens are convinced that their local council is taking decisions in a transparent and accountable way, regarding the community's overall interest, and adhere to the law and stands up to scrutiny.
- b. It improves local government performance because the executives and councilors will be more confident in their work, and councilors will be convinced that their views will be respected and that the council chamber is a safe place for debate and decision making.
- c. Furthermore, it encourages officials to provide honest advice which is acknowledged and respected by the councilors.

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18 . Anwar Shah, the New Vision of Local Governance, 2013, Available at: World Bank. org //.

19 . UNDP, governance/decentralization,2013, Available at: [www.undp.org/governance/decentralization.htm](http://www.undp.org/governance/decentralization.htm)

20. Wikipedia, Why-is-good-governance-important, 2013, Available at: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/).

d. It leads to better decisions because they are based on good information and data, considers stakeholder views, and is subject to open and honest debate.

## **Most Recent Principals in Good Governance**

In 2018 the European Union added more principals to good governance and defined it as follows: <sup>21</sup>

**1. Fair conduct of elections, representation and participation:** which means;

- a. Public elections are conducted freely and fairly, according to international standards and national legislation, and without any fraud.
- b. Citizens are at the center of public activity and they are involved in clearly defined ways in public life at local level.
- c. All men and women can have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate bodies that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on the freedoms of expression, assembly and association.
- d. Decisions are taken according to the will of the many, while the rights and legitimate interests of the few are respected.

**2. Ethical Conduct, meaning that:**

- a. The public good is placed before individual interests.
- b. There are effective measures to prevent and combat all forms of corruption.
- c. Conflicts of interest are declared in a timely manner and persons involved must abstain from taking part in relevant decisions.

**3. Competence and Capacity:**

- a. The professional skills of those who deliver governance are continuously maintained and strengthened in order to improve their output and impact.
- b. Public officials are motivated to continuously improve their performance.
- c. Practical methods and procedures are created and used in order to transform skills into capacity and to produce better results.

**4. Innovation and Openness to Change:**

- a. New and efficient solutions to problems are sought and advantage is taken of modern methods of service provision.
- b. There is readiness to pilot and experiment new programmes and to learn from the experience of others.

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<sup>21</sup> . Summarized from: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/good-governance/ principles#>

- c. A climate favorable to change is created in the interest of achieving better results.

**5. Sustainability and Long-term Orientation**, meaning that:

- a. The needs of future generations are taken into account in current policies.
- b. The sustainability of the community is constantly taken into account.
- c. There is a broad and long-term perspective on the future of the local community along with a sense of what is needed for such development.

**6. Sound Financial Management**, meaning that:

- a. Charges do not exceed the cost of services provided, particularly in the case of important public services.
- b. Prudence is observed in financial management, in the estimation of resources, revenues and reserves, and in the use of exceptional revenue.
- c. Multi-annual budget plans are prepared, with consultation of the public.
- d. Risks are properly estimated and managed.

**7. Human Rights, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion**, meaning that:

- a. Human rights are respected, protected and implemented, and discrimination on any grounds is combated.
- b. Continuous efforts are made to ensure that all have a stake in the local community, identify with it and do not feel excluded.
- c. Social cohesion and the integration of disadvantaged areas are promoted.
- d. Access to essential services is preserved.

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23 . UNDP, governance/decentralization,2013, Available at: [www.undp.org/governance/decentralization.htm](http://www.undp.org/governance/decentralization.htm)

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