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**THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN
ENHANCING POPULAR PARTICIPATION**

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I. Introduction

The problems impeding the development of African countries are numerous but well-known. The solutions are similarly well-known but elusive and it is this elusiveness that makes them difficult to undertake. Development must of course be total and must be fairly well-spread. In Africa, this is not so. For whatever measure of development that has been achieved has generally concentrated on few major cities, primarily the capital cities. The imbalance has been acute and has left rural areas where the vast majority of people live largely undeveloped. Such a situation has led to what has become known as "the push of the rural areas and the pull of the urban areas" with the result that urban areas have become eye-sores in view of vast squatter settlements which are made of cardboard, old clothing fabrics and old iron sheets and which have no regard to town planning. The rural areas have consequently lost much of their labour force, skilled and unskilled alike, to the urban areas and have therefore been depleted of valuable human resources.

The only remedy to the situation is of course the development of local areas. This sounds simple and straight-forward, but is easier said than done. The road to local development is long, prickly and replete with obstacles. First, in order for the local areas to develop the centre should give up significant powers and devolve them upon local institutions. But this is not easy in a situation where the central government is control-oriented and politicians are jealously guarding their powers. Secondly, decentralization as an idea is very attractive and irresistible but politicians use it merely as a slogan, not as a serious policy option which should be pursued with commitment and vigour. Thirdly, the general public at the local level has shown a high degree of disinterestedness in decentralization itself and has not demanded or clamoured for it. Fourthly, apathy prevented popular participation in local projects spearheaded by central departments. Fifthly, a high rate of illiteracy kept the spirit of local involvement dormant. Sixthly, paucity of resources has discouraged both field agencies and the emergence of local entrepreneurs who could undertake pioneering

projects. Finally, the lack of administrative and political (in the absence of democracy) experience at the local level has impeded development. All these factors have been used as excuses for more and more centralization. This completes the vicious circle of centralization, alienation, endemic apathy and further centralization leading to a deeply entrenched overcentralization.

One mistaken impression has to be cleared. Decentralization is not the lack of centralization, and it is not therefore a way of doing away with centralization. In fact, centralization and decentralization must coexist and they do coexist (in the French sense) even at the local level. Some functions of government have to be centralized and cannot be decentralized while other functions are better centralized than decentralized. Similarly, some other functions should be decentralized while still some other functions are better decentralized than centralized. Therefore the proportion of centralization to decentralization and vice versa varies from one country to another and one finds a certain function centralized in one country while it is decentralized in another country. Furthermore, a higher measure of decentralization is usually the result of greater capabilities on the part of decentralized structures acquired through decades or even centuries of solid experience. In view of this, the timing of decentralizing a higher function is very important. There is a question of absorptive capacity and the greater the capacity the greater the functions that can be devolved. Decentralization may also differ in degree from one area to another within the same country depending on the level of relative intellectual and technical development of the local areas. Clearly, then, decentralization has temporal and spatial aspects to it. The application of the concept of decentralization is not therefore so simple as it seems.

But, decentralization has become all the more urgent because of a problematic phenomenon called 'overcentralization' or 'excessive centralization'. In Africa, this phenomenon is heavily pronounced. Everywhere in the continent there is an overburdened central government while decentralized structures exist but have no real powers to carry out the few and minor functions ascribed to them on paper. The simple and straightforward prescription to this acute imbalance is of course to strike a reasonable

balance between centralization and decentralization. Yet, so simple a solution has proved to be so difficult a problem. We have seen the reasons in the foregoing.

African governments see and understand the enormous difficulties which are inherent in overcentralization and they also see and understand the immense opportunities which decentralization offers. Yet, they have over the decades since independence chosen, however irrationally, to live with - rather than get rid of - overcentralization. It is so only because overcentralization is tantamount to overconcentration of power and as such it offers politicians the maximum opportunity for the exercise of power. But, power under overcentralization becomes saturated and sterile. Happily, some governments - notably Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda - are trying to get out of this situation by introducing meaningful decentralization within a unitary system (Tanzania and Uganda) or within a federal structure (Ethiopia and the Sudan).

Investing in decentralization is initially expensive in terms of building capacities, channelling of funds by way of grants, subventions and loans, misapplication and misuse of devolved powers, low achievement and bad quality of work. Initially, the investment may be high and the results disappointing, but with a great deal of patience over a few decades (which are nothing in the life of nations), perseverance and consistent effort decentralization will pay off huge dividends without end for centuries thereafter. The initial difficulties are daunting and for governments that are too impatient for development; even a single decade may be too long and failure to achieve immediate benefits may direct government attention elsewhere and away from decentralization.

Africa's experience with decentralization has been haphazard and tentative. A chain of short-lived experiments with forms and structures have led to repeated failures and to total disenchantment with decentralization. The Sudan alone - always preoccupied with decentralization because of its vast territory of one million square

miles and varied populations - has had, to this dates, no less than six experiments ^{1/} since the Marshall Report of April, 1949. Ghana, where urban local government was first introduced in Africa in 1854 ^{2/} has had also many experiments. Every effort was abandoned before it bore fruits and every succeeding effort was more or less a total departure from the previous one, not an improvement of it. This syndrome of alternating construction and destruction continues to this day and is bound to halt Africa's journey on the road to development.

The causes of these frequent changes are a reflection of equally frequent political changes at the top of state structures. Frequent goings and comings of the political leaders of these structures make these latter somewhat capricious and so decentralization - like everything else - does not follow a stable course.

II. The Need for Popular Participation

In the theory, the ultimate guarantee against too frequent a change at the top is the mobilization of civil society. In practice, however, this is not always the case. Civil society in Italy - politically advanced and active - failed time and again within the last year or two or even before to guarantee such stability by giving a clear overall majority to a single party. In fact, recent elections in Italy have shown that civil society at the highest of its awareness can be indecisive even when the risk of political instability is so visibly clear. This year's elections in India have also shown the indecisiveness of civil society. The same has happened this year in Turkey too. And politicians have often found it difficult to use their political skills to translate such indecisiveness into workable and stable coalitions. Why then - one may ask - should we bother about popular participation? But, the fact that something is imperfect does not really mean that it is not essential. We always work with imperfect institutions try

^{1/} See Fadlalla Ali Fadlalla, "Decentralization Reform in the Sudan: Past Experience and Future Trends" paper presented to the 17th Roundtable Conference of the African Association for Public Administration and Management, Cairo, 1996.

^{2/} Ursula K. Hicks, Development from Below, Oxford Press, 1961, p. 90.

as we may to mould them towards perfection. Popular participation has enormous advantages for development as follows:

(a) Political: It goes without saying that there can be no democracy without popular participation and so it is the most essential feature of democracy. Political parties palpitate with popular participation and elections become lively and legitimized with popular participation. Out of this emerges, every now and then, what President Lincoln called in his Gettysburgh address in 1863 "a government of the people, by the people, for the people" But democracy improves with the efflux time the quality of that participation and the maturity of the participating public and through the improved instrument of popular participation it simultaneously betters succeeding generations of politicians.

Furthermore, its contribution to political development is almost limitless as popular participation makes political practice very lively and very professional. It thereby enhances standards of practice, of fairness and of probity and establishes itself as the best guarantee of constitutionalism. Its benefits also extend to the area of policymaking. Opposing politicians and political parties are forced to debate policy alternatives and issues in public. They try to articulate their views and make them attractive to the public so that they will secure the maximum of public support particularly in the course of electoral campaigns.

(b) Social: The social benefits of popular participation are equally enormous. It increases the awareness of the public because of conscious efforts of mass mobilization. Political parties, the mass media, individual politicians, government dissemination of information (or positive propaganda) are all agents that trigger mass mobilization. In the process of involving the masses their level of awareness and familiarity with issues increases and they are educated in the process. Their demand for education increases, the number of schools multiply and school attendance improves tremendously. With the increase of awareness caused particularly by campaigns of public health programmes and widespread benefits of education health standards improve a great deal.

Theoretically, awareness coupled with the lack of opportunity to do useful work or gainful employment may cause propensity to crime as is the case with the idle youth roaming about in the streets of major cities. However, it has been noted that occurrence of crime is far less in simple societies and in rural communities. In areas where an increase in the incidence of crime is noted, popular participation draws attention to social injustices which are causal factors of crimes. Hence, a conscious effort is made to curb crime.

It may be argued that popular participation causes competition, friction and violence among the various sectors of society. This may very well be so if participation is allowed to take place outside the bounds of the law. For example, if incendiary propaganda and preaching of hatred is allowed to be spread with impunity the result will most certainly be a breach of the peace on a massive scale: popular participation must not of course be allowed to get out of hand to establish a mob rule. "Participation" is a positive word and popular participation must essentially mean the constructive involvement of the people in their own development - "development" itself being a positive undertaking. In that sense popular participation promotes greater understanding and social cohesion first by creating awareness of common interests which unite rather than divide people and secondly by establishing a spirit of comradeship through joint involvements.

Furthermore, popular participation is good in harnessing community support for special programmes for particular target groups like the youth and women and for caring for the waifs, the elderly and the handicapped. This enhances and reinforces cultural values of kindness and social solidarity and fights alienation and social deprivation which can lead to crime. It also inculcates in the individual a sense of responsibility and of belonging to a wider community. In short, popular participation helps the various sectors of the community to coalesce and act in unison in the face of common threats like natural disasters and epidemics.

(c) Administrative: Administration without democracy as its guiding spirit can only be limited in scope and heavily control-oriented, not development-oriented.

Without popular participation institutions fall into the danger of decaying because they are deprived of the renewal process which public criticism, involvement and demands for more and better services provide: the challenge of satisfying an awakened and demanding public impels institutions to change with the times and to make themselves relevant to a world which is constantly changing.

Democracy is void without democratic control of administration. Such control is exercised by the public through the legislature which is elected and through ministers who are answerable to the legislature and who are themselves elected. Furthermore administration works within the framework of laws passed by the legislature on behalf of the people and follows regulations and policies formulated, screened and approved by the Cabinet whose members are also elected. Public participation keeps elected political leaders and administrative leaders on their toes. Judicial or quasi-judicial review of administrative decisions and the work of the Ombudsman are all features of democratic administration for which popular participation is essential. Interest groups, pressure groups and the mass media which are means of public expression and therefore participation exert pressure and influence administration. An awakened public no doubt puts senior public servants under the continuous gaze of its eyes with the result that improprieties are exposed as soon as they come to the surface.

Last but not least administration needs to be effective in achieving development. As we have seen popular participation is necessary in educational and health programmes. Development cannot be achieved by administration working in isolation. This latter has to involve the public and ensure that their input to policy, their part in implementation and the taxes they contribute are properly and skilfully utilized in order to produce the concrete results required. Popular participation provides all the necessary inputs to the process of administration; it is needed for the control of administration; and it is needed for the proper utilisation of the outputs of administration.

Having thus established the raison d'être of popular participation from various angles we must now consider at least one of the mechanism of institutionalizing and invigorating popular participation.

III. Local Government as a Catalyst of Popular Participation

Nowadays in Africa and in view of acute crises in many countries "good governance" has become the priority of priorities - the thing without which nothing else can work. This is so because participation in the political process has been limited only to a few and the great majority of the people have been denied their right to play meaningful roles in shaping the policies of their countries. In short, lack of popular participation coupled with rapid deterioration of the economy led to implosions in a number of countries.

Whilst popular participation is essential it has to take place not in a void, but within an institutional framework. For without the necessary institutional framework popular participation becomes disorganized and very much like a mob rule: the people's energies are dissipated without a sense of direction. This robs them of the opportunity of designing their goal, articulating it and achieving it. The net result is either an implosion which develops into an extended civil strife or the other extreme - a slumber which perpetuates apathy. Local government is without doubt one of the primary institutions which can enhance and give meaning to popular participation. Indeed, without the latter it would be meaningless to speak of local government.

The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development states that '.... popular participation is, in essence, the empowerment of the people to effectively involve themselves in creating the structures and in designing policies and programmes that serve the interests of all as well as to effectively contribute to the development process and share equitably its benefits'. ^{3/} The Strategic Agenda for

^{3/} The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development, E/ECA/CM.16/11, 1990, p.19.

Development Management in Africa in the 1990s adopted by a Regional Conference on Development Management in Africa also stresses the "empowerment of the people" and enhanced commitment to devolution in order to give form and substance to popular participation.^{4/} Another ECA publication on "Public Administration and Management Innovations for Increased Popular Participation in the Design and Implementation of National Development Programmes" also calls for institutional arrangements for popular participation.^{5/} Actually, 'Popular Participation' and 'Empowerment of the People' are twin and interdependent concepts and one is meaningless without the other. Participation must essentially involve the exercise of power; empowerment without participation is a contradiction in terms and as such is unthinkable. The power to be exercised emanates from laws which are acted upon by and through institutions. Any power exercised outside the law is not legitimate. Even when it is recognized that sovereignty resides in the people such sovereignty is exercised through laws such as the constitution and electoral laws. Therefore, popular participation must be institutionalized so that order is provided and the form and manner it should take must be understood by the society as a whole.

Decentralization is widely accepted as a form of ensuring public participation. But the aspect of it that is more important in this regard is 'devolution' which can mean generally either a regional assembly (which is possible even within a unitary structure as was the case in Kenya at independence) or a local council (i.e. local government). This is sometimes referred to as 'home rule', 'self-government' or 'local sovereignty'. Essentially, local councils are political institutions. Their members are elected periodically by the general public along party lines and they assume the character of miniparliaments since they sub-legislate and levy taxes. Local government enhances popular participation in at least five ways.

4/ Strategic Agenda for Development Management in Africa in the 1990, ECA Publication, Addis Ababa, p.23.

5/ Development Management Series No. 3, ECA Publication Part III.

(a) Elections: Council members are elected in order for the council to be a true representative of the local people. Free and fair elections are the source and the basis of legitimacy. Elections are by their very nature competitive and participatory and competition increases participation. In some countries - the United Kingdom, for example - local elections are seen as a reflection of national political trends and national parties judge from these local elections the percentage of public support they would command if national elections were held at approximately the same time. The interest in local elections transcends local boundaries and sharpens electoral competition at the national level.

As in national elections local elections are preceded by campaigns in which politicians hotly debate policy issues in public: one party promises to reduce local taxes whilst another lays stress on increasing the number of services and improving the quality of those in existence. The debate sharpens, rallies are held, T.V. and radio programmes are aired, slogans are visible everywhere and people are bombarded with a lot of information most of which is contradictory and confusing because of their opposing sources. The widest possible participation is ensured by candidates and supporters going from door to door encouraging people to go out of their shells and participate in the political process. Truly, apathy is fought at the grassroots level and if elections and byelections take place with fiercely fought campaigns apathy is likely to be relegated to the past. However, it has been noted in countries with a wealth of electoral experience that if politicians disappoint their electorates by not delivering what they had promised, the people will be more likely to withdraw to their protective shells and desist from further participation. This partly explains the low turnouts in elections which are held in some countries. Nevertheless, elections are the culmination of political participation and, however imperfect they may be, are the best means of ensuring that the governed will have the power to choose or recall those who govern and that sovereignty truly resides in the people. Local government provides many opportunities for elections.

(b) Management of Resources: Without managing resources politicians will be frustrated, democracy will be a farce because the people will not control the

bureaucracy through their legitimate representatives, and democratic elections will be reduced to exercises in futility. Capable personalities will refuse to stand for elections and only the mediocre will make themselves available, if at all. The people will stay at home and not vote. And why should they vote for politicians who will wield no authority and will not or cannot help them? Local government councils have resources, however meagre they may be in some, which will attract politicians and induce them to stand and compete for elections.

The resources of local councils are human, financial and material. The human resources comprise administrative, professional and technical personnel. Admittedly, the smaller local councils, specially those in the rural areas, have nothing more than two or three administrative staff, including the Executive Officer, and a few others who form the bulk of the other (technical and non-technical) staff. Generally, the management of all the resources mentioned above are the responsibility of the Executive Officer but he is answerable to the Council through its Chairman. His job is to ensure that the decisions of the Council are properly implemented. The Council levies the taxes, allocates resources through its consideration of the budget, approves capital expenditure, monitors implementation, examines the accounts and, since the locality is a limited area, sees daily at close hand the work being done.

The Council is divided into several committees and each member serves at least on one committee. The most important of these committee is of course the Finance Committee. It is so important that it has been compared with the cabinet in the national government.^{6/} This is so because everything that needs to be done entails expenditure and so boils down to a financial matter which should be discussed and approved by the Finance Committee. Because of the relative importance of the different committees politicians play their internal politics in order to arrive at who should serve on what committee but the experience and educational back-ground

^{6/} See Kenneth J. Davey, "Development Administration Revisited: An Inaugural Lecture" DAG Occasional Paper No. 20, Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, May 1983, p. 12.

should be considered when deciding where each member fits. The internal competition for power together with the compromises that are finally arrived at as to what area should get a project makes the council attractive to good politicians.

(c) Provision of Services: The provision of services underscores the relevance and usefulness of the local council to the development of the local area. It provides ocular evidence of its achievements. Hospitals are built, roads constructed, schools provided, water and electricity provided, housing schemes completed, health and fire protection, parks and recreations, are all provided. They in turn provide a sense of achievement. These services provide the substance of political competition; they are the goods which the local politician promises his constituents, and they provide jobs and therefore income to families.

The provision of services triggers popular participation in two other ways. First, local projects require the participation of the local community in the form of self-help schemes, food for work, or other community support. Secondly, people become involved in fund-raising and in garnering support for taxation. They gladly go out of their way to do all this if they know that the money they pay will be used to provide services which will improve the quality of their lives. The people, having achieved something concrete and beneficial, are stimulated, encouraged and set in motion. Their participation becomes greater, their involvement deeper and their demands incessant. Now, once again, it is goodbye to apathy. Man needs to achieve and every achievement arouses a fresh desire to achieve something new. There is no stop to the anabolism of wants.

(d) Negotiations with the Central Government: Now that the appetite of the local people has been whetted and their taste improved they must extend their arm to the central government and receive funds to supplement what they can provide on their own through their council. The central government is usually ready and willing to provide such assistance particularly where a council is very successful in mobilizing resources and achieves concrete development. The central government provides subventions and grants to encourage local councils but these depend on set criteria

and central policy is so designed - and should be so designed - as to encourage councils which work hard and are successful.

Another area of negotiation is revenue-sharing. A council can and may negotiate with the central government on sharing revenue with the government or, if revenue is already shared, on increasing its own share. It is, of course, a great deal cheaper, if the council is competent, to allow a local council to collect shared taxes and then remit the percentage due to the central government. The council can also negotiate with the central government on its share of the proceeds of a new source of revenue, such as when petrol is found and exploited in the council area. This is generally considered a national resource but a local council whose area provides such resource cannot be denied a fair share of the revenue. That share is of course subject to negotiation particularly if council politicians are determined, skilled and under pressure by an active constituency. Local politicians are at an advantage because of the feeling on both sides that the resource, whether it is petrol or gold or diamonds or whatever, is, after all, theirs and so they negotiate from a point of a psychological advantage from the outset.

Yet another clear area of negotiation is the possibility of devolving more functions and greater powers. Devolution is an evolutionary process. It is done piecemeal in accordance with the growth of the local council. Devolving greater responsibilities on a council requires certain prerequisites which establish the council's readiness for these responsibilities and the powers that go with them. Among these prerequisites are: proper management of council finances, concrete evidence of services provided by the council, a clear indication that local politicians are responsible policymakers and managers, the level of the local people's enlightenment, and, of course, the elasticity of the revenue base of the council. All of these criteria are assessed and a determination of how much more functions and powers are to be devolved further is made. But local politicians try their best to put the case of their council in a manner which is convincing to central authorities. In any case, it is difficult

for central authorities to turn down the request of a fully aware and active local community.

(e) Relations with Deconcentrated Authorities: Field administration being the agent of central government has a clear responsibility for nurturing and developing local government. This responsibility dates back to the colonial days. After all, local government in Africa was conceived and created in its Western form under colonial administrations but was never intended to supplant the strong prefectoral system which was designed to serve only colonial interests. It can be argued therefore that local governments under colonial administration were merely designed to give form and substance to indirect rule but never to develop to a stage whereby local councils would promote popular participation and thereby create political awareness among the populations which would stir national interest in politics which in turn would most likely result in agitations for independence.

After independence the generalist administrator was stripped of his judicial functions (in view of the newly-introduced separation of powers) and was given greater responsibility for nurturing local government as an institution which would really involve the local people in local politics and development, but there still remained a hangover from the colonial period because the new national officers who succeeded colonial administrators had still colonial habits of mind and were hardly able to adjust themselves to their new role of encouraging participation and working directly with the people as catalysts instead of rulers. In consequence, the people themselves considered them un approachable.

Clearly, the new breed of career administrators stepping into the shoes of the old guard did not bring with them new ideas or a change of behaviour and so they drifted with the continuing current of the old functions. The change brought about by independence involved, in the eyes of the people, merely a change of persons, not a change of substance. The situation was crying out for more drastic solutions which would ensure the maximum participation of the public. Only politicians were good at mobilizing the masses, and the functions of the new field administrator required political skills to involve the greatest number of people in local development and the

ability to deal with a growing number of politicians who were, in the nature of things, inclined to oppose the government of the day in all matters for the purpose of unseating it.

This unsatisfactory situation led to the politicization of field administration. Tanzania led the way in the early 1960s when party representatives were appointed as area commissioners. Dryden states that "most of the politicians appointed as area commissioners possessed few qualifications as public administrators. Many of them had little formal education and small knowledge of the working of government".^{7/} It appears that the most important qualification required of the generalist administrator was unquestioned loyalty to the ruling political party and the politicians leading it. That became - and still is - a general requirement in much of the continent. Even in military regimes the post of generalist administrator is usually entrusted in the heavy hands of a military officer. Such was indeed the case in Egypt in the 1950s, in Somalia in the 1970s, and in many other countries. ^{8/} Evidently, that was because a military regime could best be represented by military officers.

Generally, a military officer cannot be expected generally to possess political skills. There are notable exceptions of course, but his training does not ordinarily prepare him for a political role. A military administrator puts greater emphasis on the security of the regime and ensures that there is no overt opposition to the government he represents. That is quite different from securing genuine popular support. The civil administrator, on the other hand, is expected to use persuasive more than coercive means. However, his skills of persuasion and political manoeuvring are severely circumscribed if he has had only "limited formal education" as was the case with the Tanzanian area commissioner in the early sixties as described by Dryden. Placing a high premium on "loyalty" alone does not often pay. An uneducated, illprepared administrator who is only blindly loyal to those who appointed him becomes a spoiler

^{7/} Stanley Dryden, Local Administration in Tanzania, East African Publishing House, 1968, p.24.

^{8/} "Decentralization as an Aid to Conflict Resolution in Africa", ECA Publication, ECA/PHSD/PAM/94/13[3(b)], 1995, p.18.

and proves to be a liability to the regime: he fails in his task whether it is development, law and order or both; he mishandles sensitive issues or plays inadvertently, if not deliberately - on the sensibilities on the community whose support he is expected to secure; the regime is then perceived as oppressive and anti-development, and the opposition to it mounts and sometimes takes a violent turn.

In local government, two concepts are very important: the concept of 'democracy' and the concept of 'efficiency'. Democracy is not merely an ideological concept; it is also an essential prerequisite of efficiency. On the other hand efficiency in the delivery of services by local government gives concrete meaning to democracy and thereby prevents it from becoming an empty slogan, devoid of any real substance. We must therefore distinguish between the terms 'local government' and 'local administration' for the former emphasises participation whilst the latter emphasises efficiency. In local government free and fair elections are essential and it is also essential that elected councillors control the affairs of the council in terms of priority determination, allocation of resources, and staffing. In local administration, on the other hand, it is not necessary that councillors be elected, and priorities, resource allocations and staffing needs are determined purely on technical considerations. The concept of local administration presupposes that since elections are a test of popularity rather than of competence they would not produce the right councillors and that therefore it is better to hand-pick those members of the community who are outstanding because of their education, their success in business and/or susceptibility to new ideas of development. Their role, however, is limited to providing local knowledge to another group of councillors who are technocrats, and their participation also serves the purpose of legitimizing decisions which are usually made purely on technical considerations.

Some thinkers are technically inclined and often look askance at popular participation. They argue that it contains "... a minefield of misconceptions "and that

it is the "most befuddled of all concepts in development administration". ^{9/} Professor Davey argues further that local communities are "rarely harmonious", that "they are rarely egalitarian" and that "people are guided by their own perception of interest" and "do not usually respond to government initiatives as they are supposed to, simply out of a sense of gratitude or respect for superior wisdom".^{10/} He goes on further to explain what popular participation can mean in different contexts and the problems it is likely to cause. He warns thus:

"Participation cannot be turned on or off like a tap. It creates its own momentum, its own pattern of demand. If self-help is invited in building schools, government stands the risk of getting more schools than it wants to run. If it is encouraged in providing rural water supplies their location may not coincide with land use strategies and grazing control. It takes an unusually determined regime to enforce rationing and planners' priorities when popular demand is stimulated in this way".^{11/}

He further states that "Public participation in the operation and maintenance of services is far more problematic".^{12/}

All this does not really mean a total rejection of popular participation. What it does mean, however, is that it should not be so unleashed as to cause chaos and throw development plans and projects out of gear. Experience shows that uncontrolled and uncoordinated popular participation can lead to popular frustrations. In Somalia, a new and enthusiastic military government mobilized the masses in the early

^{9/} See, Kenneth J. Davey, "Development Administration Revisited: An Inaugural Lecture", DAG Occasional Paper No. 20, Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, May 1983, p.12.

^{10/} Ibid., p.14.

^{11/} Ibid., p.13.

^{12/} Ibid., p.14.

seventies for self-help in building new school, and hospitals. The result was that far more buildings than could be provided for as schools and hospitals were constructed in this manner and there were neither adequate staff nor adequate equipments to complete the goal of those self-help activities. In the end the great majority of buildings collapsed because they had not been used and maintained, and they were poorly and hurriedly constructed in the first place. The resulting frustration gave a bad name to self-help and to popular participation. Such negative experience can discourage further experiments with popular participation. On the other hand, clear and lasting success with properly done experiments can spur further projects which will draw on the strength of popular participation. And once a knack of using popular participation to advantage is developed we can be assured of a proper and lasting marriage between public involvement on the one hand and technical and managerial requirements on the other. The benefits of such marriage will then be too obvious to be ignored by anyone doubting the utility of popular participation.

One has to go then beyond the rhetoric and see the necessity of popular participation for efficiency and effectiveness. Nearly all experiments with local government, particularly in Africa, are actually tantamount to involving the public in their own development and in their localities so that they will learn how to fend for themselves and to be self-sufficient and to be free and to be less burdensome on the rest of the nation. Local government, as we have seen at the outset of this paper, can inject into popular participation a capacity to be efficient. Professor Mawhood has described the Tanzanian experience as "The Search for Participation".^{13/} But it has been more or less the same with the search for the best possible form of participation in Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria and many other countries. Local government everywhere has been used as the accepted medium of popular participation.

If public participation has to be improved and made relevant to the achievement of development then local government councils must be improved and transformed

^{13/} See Phillip Mawhood (ed.) Local Government in the Third World John Wiley & Sons, 1983.

If public participation has to be improved and made relevant to the achievement of development then local government councils must be improved and transformed into effective instruments of development. The councillor should be a key to both. He makes policy and he sees to it that it is effectively implemented and because councils are generally small except in major areas he is closely involved and identified with implementation in view of his daily interaction with the council's technical and managerial staff. If he is educated as to his role and is allowed to play it properly and allowed to control resources as he should, public participation will be stimulated and men and women of high quality in terms of education and service-orientation will come forward and contest in local elections to become councillors. In the fullness of time, councils will have excellent councillors, better policies, excellent staffing, greater ability to create resources, enhanced competence to provide better services and a capacity to generate a healthy political competition which willy-nilly will increase public awareness and result in more meaningful participation.

If the councillor is the key to all this, how should his quality be improved? First, in a community where the rate of illiteracy is close to 100% a programme of general education in which civics plays a large part will seem to be the starting point. In that type of situation it might be a decade before a reasonably enlightened and sufficiently educated councillor is found. But, it is worthwhile to invest in the future, and ten years in the life of a nation is but a fleeting moment. Where such a prospective councillor is already available but is discouraged by the fact that the council is dominated by the official side and a perception that he would not be able to change that situation, a different strategy should be worked out to dispel these fears and convince him or her to serve. A monetary incentive should be seriously considered. The idea of giving free service to one's community may be philosophically sound, but a good prospective councillor who is called upon to serve will surely examine the opportunity cost: he or she will have to see what this would mean in terms of forgoing economic pursuits especially when he or she has a family to support.

This is an argument for paying councillors for the work they do for their community. The form of payment is seldom, if at all, a monthly salary. Usually, a

sitting allowance and transport allowance are paid. This has the advantage of encouraging councillors to attend sessions, and the disadvantage of repeated adjournments. However, even this material incentive does not really guarantee much: unemployed persons may run for the council elections just for the allowance and those who are economically better off may not be attracted at all by these allowances which by their standards may appear to be meagre. The matter is indeed complex and not as simple as it looks. Since persons who have other economic pursuits are likely to deliberate in a more business-like manner, decisions may be expeditiously arrived at and the number of sessions considerably reduced as a result. Money may thereby be saved and the allowances may even be sufficient for the small time spent on council business and away from other pursuits. Furthermore, some councillors may be so economically well-off that they may feel safe to forgo the allowance and accept the honour inherent in serving the community. But, the one problem that stands out when councillors are businessmen or affiliated with private business is in the area of granting contracts.

Apart from financial incentives prospective councillors are attracted by the amount of real resources they are likely to manage. The resources generally are: council finances; contracts; allocating services; and council employment. The greater the resources, the greater the personalities that will be attracted. If a council's catchment area is small and poor its revenue will most likely be minuscule, and central subventions may be so unimaginative that it will likely cover the salaries of some of the staff and scarcely anything else. Such a council cannot be expected to attract good councillors. It will be necessary then for the central government to engage in the revision of local government boundaries so that councils will cover economically viable areas where popular participation will yield some positive results in improving the financial situation of a council.

The main *raison d'être* of a council is of course to render local services which improve the quality of life for the community. The underlying assumption is that the council's catchment area is economically viable, particularly if the council's management is good at resource augmentation. If a council is then able to mobilize

local financial resources and manages to obtain generous subventions from the central government it will be in a position to provide tapped and clean water, roads, schools, electricity and clinics. Neighbourhoods will compete for these services. As the councillor becomes the determinant of priorities in the allocation of these services he becomes powerful and therefore the focus of attention. Able citizens will then come forward and compete in local elections since being a councillor is now a much-vaunted position. Competition for political office sharpens awareness and stimulates popular participation.

In larger councils where greater financial resources are managed awarding contracts becomes part of the normal business. This is an area which attracts greater talents. Council members award contracts for a number of reasons: political patronage, favouritism, corruption and technical consideration are among the leading factors; seldom are contracts given solely on the basis of "the lowest bidder". The richer the council the more lucrative are its contracts and the more complex its business the more likely it will contract out parts of it. Again, this stimulates participation since the council is so much involved in the stimulation of the economy.

A council may also manage other resources such as housing and council employment. These surely add to the attraction. Often, it is not easy to get a council flat or house (both of which are of the low cost type) or employment. The councillor manages these resources particularly if he is so senior as to wield great influence within the council. Again, a certain degree of corruption, political patronage, favouritism or even nepotism is practised in the allocation of these resources. This is inevitable (which does not mean acceptable) since human organizations are never perfectly objective in the allocation and management of resources. Such resources as we have mentioned here are to be found mainly in urban councils. But, the fact that they are there waiting for someone to manage them attracts a large number of persons boasting to have education, experience and a high sense of civic responsibility. All this is brought up in electoral campaigns which impel the public to come out in great numbers and participate.

Conclusion

Development is a process which requires no less than the total energy of a nation and the more its individuals contribute the greater the chances of achieving it. Confucius once said: "To reform a nation is to reform the individual". With every individual playing a part, popular participation can be assured. Total development can not simply be the monopoly of a few who take the brunt of that heavy task on their shoulders while others who are in the majority, particularly in the rural areas, are sitting idle and learn to be dependent.

The advantages of popular participation are many: it opens the eyes of the great majority of people to new ways of fending for themselves; it enables them to learn by doing; it distributes the burden of development in a fairly equitable manner; it relieves the administrative congestion which impedes the smooth functioning of the central bureaucracy; it diffuses tensions by giving everyone a role to play; it thereby inculcates a sense of responsibility and a sense of belonging; it improves the mobilization of financial resources; and it helps to achieve development. All of this is good on paper and gives the wrong impression that one finds in popular participation a paragon of virtues - a panacea to all the problems of a developing society.

However, encouraging popular participation without a clear sense of purpose and without coordination can dissipate resources without really achieving anything of substance. We have seen how enthusiastic popular participation in self-help in Somalia has caused confusion and a waste of resources. Popular participation should not develop into a situation whereby too many cooks will spoil the broth. It is not because public involvement is intrinsically wrong that one has to be careful; it is because popular participation is itself a huge resource which should be used in a proper manner. For if the energies of the people are dissipated on causes which have not been properly studied and are unworthy the resulting frustration can send the masses back to their protective shells of apathy - a situation which will be more difficult to fight in any second round.

development. But, local government allows the nation to work in a series of segments which are called 'local communities' and which can achieve development in their councils areas. Local councils are therefore key to meaningful participation which can lead to concrete achievements for which the local people are at once the creators and the beneficiaries and which they can look at with pride and satisfaction.

If local councils should be effective as recognized instruments for securing popular participation it follows then that they should be properly structured, properly managed and financed, and adequately empowered to carry out functions of a development nature. All this will attract councillors of high calibre and will render local elections something which will stir local feelings and make people respond to the issues, support the candidates of their choice, hold existing councillors responsible for any shortcomings, vote them out, vote new ones in and oversee their performance. Political agitation which local elections provide is the anti-dote of apathy. But people have to know that the local council is their own and not just another department of the central government. Only their participation can guarantee the council's autonomy, but only the amount of resources the Council is allowed and the amount of discretion it is supposed to exercise can guarantee the people's enthusiastic participation.