

Bulletin



Local Government on the front line



Comment

By Dr Greg Munro, Secretary-General, CLGF



Welcome to the final CLGF Bulletin for 2020. It has been a year that few of us will forget. I commend all of you in local government who have risen to the challenge of protecting your communities, delivering additional services in the face of fiscal constraints and responded to the economic challenges, as a result of the pandemic. Many of you participated in our regional Covid-19 webinars, and these emphasised the importance of membership in CLGF as good local government practices were presented, challenges explored and information shared.

It was clear that the greatest concern across our local government membership has been the effect on local economies and we followed up with additional webinars on local economic development, and the relationship between this and trade. Local economic development will continue to be a focus going forward as we strive to reimagine our local economies and financial frameworks and create greater resilience in our local communities.

Women have borne the brunt of the pandemic – they have been disproportionately affected in the formal economic sector where hospitality, retail and tourism have been hard hit, and in the informal sector where street and informal trading has all but collapsed. Gender based violence has increased dramatically during lockdown and access to health care has been curtailed. I am pleased that the work of our Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network has been expanded to strengthen our commitment to gender in our work.

One of the many consequences of the pandemic was the postponement of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Rwanda from June 2020 to June 2021. CLGF has utilised this time to work in partnership with other Commonwealth organisations on a call to action on sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth, to be presented at CHOGM. Our world is rapidly urbanising and the sustainability of that urban growth must be a focus for us in our planning, service delivery, local developmental programmes and climate change mitigation.

Many of these areas are included in this bulletin and I hope you will enjoy reading it. All of the CLGF Board and staff join me in wishing you strength, fortitude and happiness in 2021.

CONTENTS



- 3 Sustainable urbanisation: a call to action**
 - 4 LED by example**
 - 6 Local government at the High Level Political Forum 2020**
 - 7 CLGF members: on the frontline of Covid-19**
 - 8 Changes to the CLGF Board**
- News about your Bulletin**
- Stay connected with CLGF**



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Call to action on sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth



By 2050 an extra 2.5 billion people will be living in towns and cities, and almost half of those new urban dwellers are projected to be in the Commonwealth. Rapid urbanisation is the reality for most Commonwealth member states, and CLGF and its members have been increasingly focusing on this growing priority with practical and policy support. For example, by establishing the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN) to share learning; and through re-orientating project work to focus on urban planning and service delivery; and enhancing LED in towns and cities.

Alongside this practical support, CLGF is also working hard to use its voice to encourage the Commonwealth, as a network of organisations, to take a more strategic approach to ensuring sustainable urbanisation across all its member states. This has been at the heart of CLGF's advocacy for some time as a direct response to achieving SDG 11 and the growing urban population; but this has accelerated since 2018, through a stronger partnership with the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP), Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) and the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), together with the Prince's Foundation.

Consultations with our respective members, a cross section of partners working in the urban space, together with High Commissioners and other stakeholders in 2019 and early in 2020, resulted in the preparation of a Call to Action. This was prepared to support our collective advocacy towards the Commonwealth Heads of Government at their summit, which was due to take place in Rwanda in June 2020. Covid-19 saw the summit postponed, but it has also seen cities and towns bear the brunt of the health and economic challenges world-wide, only adding

relevance to CLGF and its partners' efforts to see sustainable urbanisation integrated into the priorities of the Commonwealth.

Starting the week that the postponed CHOGM would have begun, CLGF and its partners, with the support of the Government of Rwanda, embarked on a 12 week webinar series to raise awareness of the importance of sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth. This series was designed to explore some of the opportunities, complexities and challenges of sustainable urbanisation, to share experiences and examples of good practice, and to promote debate on how best to leverage the power of the Commonwealth to support sustainable urbanisation. The events reached over 2,500 participants from 80 countries, including many CLGF members, and contributed to the development of the final Call to Action.

The Call to Action, which will be launched in January 2021, alongside some good practice examples, recognises the important link between sustainable urbanisation and climate change, as well as the impact of Covid-19 on urban areas. It urges the Commonwealth to focus more on supporting members to

ensure sustainable urbanisation with dialogue, policy guidance etc. But most importantly it highlights the complexity of ensuring sustainable urbanisation and the need for greater collaboration across sectors and between spheres of government and other actors. In many ways the Commonwealth, as a network organisation can bring many of these actors to the table, and CLGF and its partners are encouraging this approach.

Finally we are looking for support for a practical, city-led initiative that can promote learning, build local level partnerships and demonstrate change and innovation across the cities and towns of the Commonwealth. This would directly enhance sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth and strengthen the work of the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network.

This approach has the potential to further reinforce the Commonwealth network, and build meaningful cross-sectoral and multi-level partnerships as set out in the SDGs and the recent High Level Review of the Commonwealth. CLGF will be writing to all its members with more information in the New Year to mobilise members around this exciting initiative.

LED by example



Taking economic development from the local to the global. That was the aim of the webinar series organised by CLGF to disseminate the paper *Local Economic Development as a Driver of Trade in the Commonwealth*. This CLGF report builds on the organisation's substantive work on local economic development (LED) in member countries.

The paper highlights the need for policy coherence and better institutional linkages between local and national government to ensure LED strategy is deployed to open up value chains and enable local stakeholders to participate in strategic sectors and benefit from international trade agreements.

The three webinars, focusing on Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean, used the report to trigger discussion with CLGF members and stakeholders on the experiences of connecting local economic development with national and international trade. Consistent with CLGF's commitment to developmental local government and rooting its work in the priorities of its members, the webinars aimed to highlight issues and inform next steps.

While there were regional specificities, there was a shared context provided by the pandemic and it was through this lens that many focused on the issues at hand. As politicians, planners and other policy makers begin to consider paths to economic recovery there is a common view that this is an opportunity for a reset – and that this does not mean a return to the ways things were in January 2020. Even without Covid-19, globalisation was experiencing a stress test, with questions on how it can better deliver on equity, inclusion and sustainability. LED is an idea whose time has come, and it has universal appeal.

But what role for local government? There was common agreement that municipalities had the potential to

play an important role in planning and formulating LED strategies for example by interrogating value chains, identifying opportunities with local businesses, or encouraging them to think about market access early. Local government is also a legitimate and credible convenor – able to bring private, public and civic together to focus on trade.

There was acknowledgement that, if local government is going to be an effective agent for LED and trade, there





are needs to be met. Fundamentally, municipal authorities' agency needs to be recognised by central administrations and enabling resources must be made available. Local authorities need to improve their trade literacy as part of a more outward facing orientation, and this should be a focus for capacity development. As well as getting central and local to pull in the same direction, it was noted that there are multiple levels of local government that need to be aligned too – with state and city as well as para-statal agencies working on economic development.

National governments have to play their part too. Providing the frameworks for economic planning and embedding LED as part of the overall approach. These frameworks make international references and we heard, for example, about the ways in which the EU supported programmes to localise the SDGs had help focus on inclusive development in the Caribbean. Central administrations can help connect LED and trade by making it a priority in negotiations with external development partners. Governments can also target resources at particular geographies and sectors through domestic direct investment, whether in the form of capital or developmental support.

The voice of business was clear. Entrepreneurs welcomed a focus on MSMEs, given that they characterise the private sector in many Commonwealth economies and that they provide a focus for women and young people. They highlighted the differences between each of the types of business that are often lumped together under

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the heading of MSMEs. The challenges of gaining access to finance are very different for micro enterprises as compared with a medium sized firm.

Covid-19 may have closed down some opportunities, but the webinars heard about the efforts of businesses supported by local government to develop new products and find new markets – whether that's for cassava in Sierra Leone, coffee in Kerala or banana-based pasta in Dominica.

Yes, we did take local economic development global, but in doing so, we heard the importance of tailoring global paradigms to local contexts. And that those contexts vary – not only between regions, but within regions. What works in Gambia might not work in Ghana. We also heard the need to look ahead – not just beyond the pandemic but to the longer term so that the disruptive opportunities afforded by technology and digitisation bring value closer to the places where goods are produced.

Attention shifts now to the ways in which CLGF will bring this work to policy makers in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Business Forum, which will take place next June in Rwanda provides an important opportunity – with space already identified on the agenda for this timely discussion.

Our guest article comes from Mr Vijay Krishnarayan, former Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation and CLGF's technical expert on local economic development. He gives his reflections of the three webinars he facilitated.

[Please click here for LED pdf](#)



Local government at the virtual High Level Political Forum



This year's HLPF was held virtually, with some physical presence of those based in New York, but local government's voice was loud and clear:

CLGF, as a founding member of the Global Task Force for Regional and Local Governments (GTF), took part virtually in the Third Local and Regional Governments Forum of the HLPF in July 2020, the Major Group and other Stakeholder discussions (the Local Authorities Major Group is one of 18 major group constituencies).

The theme of the Local and Regional Governments Forum was The Decade of Action - bolstering change from the ground-up. Delivered against the backdrop of Covid-19, the overall objective of this Forum was to produce debate, and a strong commitment from different spheres of government and the international community, to support a transformative process from the bottom-up, based on the SDGs in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis, while contributing to the Decade of Action. Local and regional government representatives have a key role to stop the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in territories while ensuring access to essential public services, including housing, public transport and education, as well as access to food supplies

and support to the most vulnerable, among other tasks. The Covid-19 aftermath is an opportunity to go beyond temporary solutions to build the long-term resilience of regions, cities and communities by choosing recovery policies that build back better; utilising the SDGs as an overarching framework and multilevel governance as its core.

Presenting on the session on delivering universal basic services, Rev Mpho Moruakgomo, Chair of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, stated that the three main challenges facing local government are: firstly, a considerable loss of revenue - estimated to be between 30-65% of LG income; secondly the need to continue delivering basic services it normally provides in spite of frontline staff also being affected by Covid-19; and thirdly the need to provide additional pandemic related services, such as providing extra water and hand washing points in informal settlements, providing additional community education messages, handing out masks etc. In short, local government across the globe has had to provide more with less.

He went on to emphasise that, during the recovery phase, CLGF members were indicating that the following was key:-

1. Decentralisation must be viewed as the new normal.
2. Local governments will need to reframe their local financial frameworks.
3. An increasing emphasis on local economic development will be required.

The post pandemic phase will require strong local political leadership and collective action to achieve these goals and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The multilateral institutions were challenged to create meaningful and practical opportunities to support and work with local and regional governments in these endeavours.

During the HLPF, the Fourth Report from Local and regional governments was released entitled: Towards the localisation of the SDGs. This report, contributed to by CLGF, focuses on the acceleration of transformative actions in the aftermath of the Covid-19 outbreak.

[👉 Please click here for pdf report](#)

CLGF members: on the frontline of Covid-19



The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the greatest economic shocks ever seen by Commonwealth nations in peacetime over the past century. Governments throughout the world have had to manage the fine balance between public health and safety of citizens on one hand, and economic collapse on the other.

For city and local governments, this has had a major impact on income and, within this contracting fiscal space, basic service delivery has had to continue, as well as additional Covid-19-related local government services. It is unlikely that revenue streams will return to normal in the medium-term and, added to this, many industries that drive local economies may never recover to pre-pandemic levels. With the fiscal decentralisation models currently in place in most countries of the Commonwealth, this will impact heavily on local government's long-term capacity to ensure access to key services in local communities.

CLGF held a number of regional webinars with members on their experiences of dealing with the pandemic, framed by selected inputs of members, followed by discussion. The content of each session was rich with examples of good practice and included a discussion about what local government would need to do during the post-Covid-19 recovery phase. Detailed below are the key lessons emerging from the pandemic, which

should also help frame how CLGF and its members will work together to support each other in the post Covid-19 recovery period:

1. Covid-19 responses have been better when they are inclusive of local government and communities. This will be true for the recovery phase too and, therefore, further **decentralisation must be the new normal**.
2. Local economies have been severely affected. It is imperative that local economic development becomes a key focus of future interventions. This needs to support the integration of formal and informal economies, ensuring that a green recovery is also localised and circular economic processes are integrated into the LED strategy.
3. Local government income has decreased dramatically during the pandemic and in many cases a return to pre-pandemic financial frameworks is not sustainable. We must use the recovery period to **re-imagine our local financial frameworks**.

4. A planned and detailed disaster response capability is essential, but an additional focus on **local disaster resilience** is also required.
5. An unexpected challenge during the pandemic has been **migration**. This has been on two fronts: reverse migration, as workers return to their home towns and villages from major cities; and the loss of forex remittances from diaspora workers.
6. The recovery at a local level will require an increased emphasis on **technology and innovation**.
7. Our cities and human settlements have both formal and informal components. Both have been affected and the pandemic has highlighted the inter-dependence of these two components. Support for further **integration of formal and informal components** is necessary.
8. Finally, pandemic responses, multi-dimensional recovery efforts, and all of the above issues, will require **strong local political leadership**.

Whatever the outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic, the future is going to be very challenging. Yet this could also represent an opportunity. An opportunity not to return to old ways of approaching our economies, finances and services. CLGF needs to be at the forefront of this, helping members address the challenges and to seize upon new opportunities as we construct a new normal for local government, where cities and local government are at the heart of our economies and development responses.

The recent webinars held by CLGF have helped, and will continue to help inform this, and assist in shaping the work of CLGF going forward and in ensuring that the CLGF network is geared to respond and ensure members can support each other during the post Covid-19 recovery period on these issues.

Changes to the CLGF Board

To help you get to know the CLGF Board Members better, we will be announcing any changes to the representatives in the Bulletin.

This December, it is our great pleasure to welcome the following councillors to the governing body of CLGF. We would also like to express a warm and heartfelt thank you to the outgoing members for their dedicated service: Mayor Dave Cull, Mayor David O'Loughlin and Cllr Nick Small.



Cllr Stuart Crosby, Councillor for Bay of Plenty Regional Council, is the new President of **Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ)**, after being Vice-President from July 2017 to July 2020, and replaces Mayor David Cull as CLGF Board member. He has been an elected representative since 1986, serving as Chair on various committees, a period as Deputy-Mayor and Mayor of Tauranga City Council.



Cllr Linda Scott, Councillor for the City of Sydney, was elected as the President of the **Australian Local Government Association (ALGA)** in November 2020, having been Vice President since November 2018 and a board member since 2017. She replaces Mayor David O'Loughlin as alternate Board member.



Mayor Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol, is a member of the City Regions board of the LGA and replaces Cllr Nick Small as representative of the **Local Government Association of England and Wales (LGA)** on the CLGF Board. He was elected Mayor in May 2016 and became the first mayor of black-African heritage of a major European city. He is also a member of the CLGF Executive Committee.

The Board elections will be held at the next CLGF General Meeting. The full list of CLGF Board members can be found on the CLGF website.



News about your Bulletin

To reflect our new style of communications, from 2021 we will be producing the CLGF Bulletin quarterly.

We are also featuring a number of regular items:

- Guest article - to provide a different perspective about our work and the key issues
- Changes to the CLGF Board - to ensure you know who is serving on our Board
- Network updates – information from our two networks: the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN); and the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network (ComWLG); and
- Local government elections – to notify when and where these are taking place across the Commonwealth

We hope you will find this new style, quarterly Bulletin interesting!

Bulletins are available for download at www.clgf.org.uk/resource-centre/clgf-publications/clgf-bulletin/

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CLGF has launched its own YouTube Channel to serve as a new tool for members, partners and the local government community as a whole. With regular updates, it will help you to stay connected to CLGF's programmes, advocacy and networks. Subscribers will receive notifications of new uploads, as well as information about forthcoming live events that you can attend, wherever you are.

Get up to speed with topics, such as local economic development or sustainable urbanisation, and hear from experts about how they are impacting local government in different regions of the Commonwealth. See what's in store and **subscribe to the CLGF YouTube Channel** to stay updated on seminars, live events and much more! All in one click.