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# Local Government: Concept, Roles and Importance for Contemporary Society

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## Summary:

This article tries to analyze the concept of local government and also present the definition of different scholars in the field of public administration and political science. Local government is door step government to the local people and is responsible towards the local people. The executive, judicial and legislative are main role of local government. The notion of local government is very important in democratic society which ensures the meaningful people's participation and local resources mobilization for the enhancement of the life of local people.

## Concept of Local Government:

In political term, it is concerned with the governance of a specific local area, constituting political sub division of a nation, state or other major political unit. The local government is administrative body for a small geographic area, such as a city, town, county, or state. A local government will typically only have control over their specific geographical region, and cannot pass or enforce laws that will affect a wider area.

Local governments can elect officials, enact taxes, and do many other things that a national government would do, just on a smaller scale. Local government is the system of electing representatives to be responsible for the administration of public services and facilities in a particular area.

## The concept local government:

- Local government is door step government to the local people.
- Local government is responsible towards the local people.
- Local government is democratic and promotes democratization.
- Local government is multi-dimensional phenomena.
- Local government is basically an organization as a social entity with feeling of oneness.
- Local government is the system of government.

- Local governance and decentralization are interrelated.
- The system of local governance indicates that system of government which promotes the people's participation in each and every activity of government.
- The aim of local governance is to empower local people and it ensures the citizen participation into the governing system of local government.
- It creates an environment for healthy growth of political parties and helps to produce the capable and experienced future leaders at local level
- Under democratic regime, people's participation is help to solve diverse types of local problems.
- Promotes the national integration, creates sense of belongingness and help to solve verities of local issues such as poverty, underdevelopment, condition of exploitation.
- Local self-government denotes right and the ability of local authorities within the limits of law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibilities and the interest of local population.
- Local self-government offers the best opportunity to the people to bring knowledge, interest and enthusiasm to bear on the solution of their own local problem.
- Local government is ancient institution with modern concept.
- Traditionally, the local government institutions have been appointed by the central government, enhanced administrative task only.
- In modern local government institutions has performed multi-faceted functions. They performed political, economic, social- cultural and administrative functions.
- They are directly responsible towards the local people as well as central government.
- They are recognized as the autonomous body. The local government's capacity level is determined by the context where and when it operates and the content what is has to do to accomplish the desire goals.
- Local government around world has been undergoing a process of change over the last ten or twenty years.
- This process is the result of external changes over which individual local government have had little influence: increasing economic interdependence; the process of globalization; changing technologies or the fall of communism.

- Privatization, restructuring of the local government system, changing inter governmental relations are the other causes.

According to the service delivery approach, the local government:

1. Provides an opportunity for political participation.
2. Helps to ensure efficient service delivery.
3. Expresses a tradition of opposition to an overly centralized government.

A local government is a relatively autonomous, multi-purpose institution providing a range of services, with a tax-raising capacity, and is controlled through the election of representatives to oversee the work of full-time officials.

### **Definition of Local government:**

Local government can be described as some government bodies elected by the people that have administrative, legislative and executive functions on the territories under their jurisdiction. It is defined as an authority that decides or determines certain measures within a given territory. Actually, to know the answer of the questions like, what is local government? Which dimension and scope it includes? It is necessary to analysis the view and opinion of some scholars and expert in the field of public administration and political science.

1. Local government is the government of difference, responding to different needs, and realizing different aspirations. "There must be a definite power to do things in a different manner from that followed in other areas within the same of state area. If some local body has it in its power to govern in a different manner from other local bodies, there we have Local Government".

**(Hesluck 1936 as quoted in Stewart 2000).**

2. Local government is part of the government of a country which deals mainly with problems or issues related to a given population within a given territory. This is done basically on the responsibilities of a country that parliament decides to delegate by the laws to local governance. In this definition we find two important elements of local government, that of the existence of directly elected local bodies and local finances, which constitute common denominators of each local government.

**-Clarke (Aijaz, 2007)**

3. Local Government is the sphere of government where local authorities are allowed by law to issue acts or decisions to adjust the way of governance.

**-Hasluck (Hasluck, 2010)**

4. In his book “Elements of Politics”, Sedgwick (Sidgwick, 2014) considers local government as government of some sub organs that have special powers to issue regulations or rules within the area which they manage. So Sedgwick connects this government with its legislative character.

**-(Sidgwick, 2014)**

5. Governance; "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences”.

**(UNDP 1997 as quoted by SHDR 1999)"**

6. Stones in his definition define local government as part of the governance of a country, but that deals with problems or issues of population within certain territory or location. According to him, this kind of government does the so-called “housework” so that living in these areas to be affordable for its residents. It achieves this by keeping the roads clean, children’s education, residential housing construction etc.

**-(Stones, 1968)**

7. The World Bank identifies three distinct aspects of governance: the form of political regime, the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country ‘s economic and social resources for development and the capacity of government to design, formulate, and implement policies and discharge functions. OECD's definition falls along similar lines **(SAHDR, Ibid)."**

8. In a socio-developmental definition, given by L. Godwin on local governance, he defines this kind of government as management of their affairs by the people of the locality where they are. Although short, this definition socially finds place.

**-(Godwin, 2014)**

9. According to Humes and Martin local government should have the following features:
  - Have a certain population,
  - A specific surface area
  - the capacity to sign contracts or to enter into relationships with third parties, ie the legal status and authority

- Have a continuous organization and
- To realize the financial function therefore have the capacity to collect taxes and determine its budget.

**-( Martin and Humes, 1961)**

10. It is a continuing process through which conflicting of diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action may be taken. It includes formed institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest."

**(Commission a Global Governance 1995, as quoted by SHDR 1999).**

### **Roles of the local government:**

It can be observed and analyzed into the following ways:

#### **In the perspectives of the nature of government**

In the perspective of government, the local government has three basic characteristic: Executives, legislative and judicial. Therefore, the role of the local government can be:

**Executive role:** To execute or implement the plan and policies

**Legislative role:** To make the necessary laws, directives and other plans and policies.

Validate the plans, policies and programs of local government.

**Judicial role:** To increase the access to the justices for the local people.

To minimize the petty dispute to local level in effective and efficient way.

**Similarly, role of the local government can be analyzed into the following dimension:**

#### **Political role:**

Politically, the role of the local government can be analyzed into:

- A local government promotes and strengthens local democracy.
- It is recognized as the mechanism for effective functioning of democracy at national level
- It provides opportunities for exercise f democratic norms and vales at local level.
- It is known as the training forum for the future leaders
- It is the instrument for the national integration.

#### **Development Role:**

The local government always oriented to the benefits of their respective community. Economic betterment, social harmony, uplifting the socio-economic status of the local people, infrastructure development, participation into the development activities etc are the primary aims of the local government. Therefore, the local government is ultimately responsible for overall development of their specific community either they are economic or not economic.

**Administrative role:**

The local subject matter or issues can be effectively taken by local government. Resources (financial r non-financial) can be identified and mobilized in effective and efficient way. It manages their affairs more economically as well. The local government carried out their functions according to the needs, expectations and priorities of the local inhabitants.

The major responsibilities of the local government area as follows:

**1. Sense of place:**

Councils facilitate and work with their communities to develop a sense of place through branding, promoting and enhancing local identity, and promoting social cohesion and health and wellbeing.

**Role components:**

- Councils promote and support community leadership.
- Councils provide a central focus and assist communities to define and build a sense of place.
- Councils foster civic pride and ‘sense of place’ through communications, the delivery of community assets and support for community activities.
- Councils use effective engagement strategies to understand the needs of communities and include their needs/views in strategic planning and the delivery of services.
- Councils seek opportunities to promote local identity, and community and natural assets within their local government area and with external organizations.
- Councils facilitate or deliver community development programs that build empowered and resilient communities. Community engagement Councils engage with their communities, sharing information about community, council and government business, and where appropriate, provide opportunities for constituents to

- Councils stimulate and support community involvement through providing access to councillors and appropriate mechanisms for participation and providing opportunities for participative decision making.
- Councils engage broadly to understand the local, regional, statewide, national and international context in which they operate.

## 2. **Strategic leadership:**

Councils provide strategic leadership through understanding current and future operating environments, identifying opportunities and risks and making decisions which align with long-term strategic plans and corporate plans.

### **Role components:**

- Councils monitor and address the current and future needs, challenges and opportunities of the community in the context of the local, regional, state, national and international environment.
- Councils create long-term strategic and corporate plans which are achievable and measurable, and monitor and report progress against plans.
- Councils use strategic and asset plans as the basis of responsible revenue raising decisions, ensuring rates reflect annual costs of service delivery and long-term infrastructure needs.
- Councils manage finances, service delivery and assets to meet the needs of communities and ensure. Long-term financial sustainability for future generations.
- Councils strategically plan for infrastructure investment using cash reserves and/or debt responsibly.
- Councils articulate evidence-based priorities and develop partnerships with community and. government to achieve those priorities.
- Councils provide leadership and are prepared to effectively manage emergency and disaster events and their long term impacts.

## 3. **Land-use planning:**

Councils are strategic land-use planners who work with communities to create an environment that guides the use of land to balance economic, environmental and community/social values, and to support the health and wellbeing of their communities.

### **Role components:**



- Councils understand the environmental, social and economic potential of land within their municipal area and across the regional catchment, and incorporate that knowledge into their decision making.
- Councils work with communities to generate local and regional strategic plans that maximize the sustainable public and private return from land use.
- Councils work with stakeholders and communities to ensure plans are understood and can be efficiently translated in the use and development of applications.
- Councils assess development and use applications against the appropriate planning instruments.
- Councils monitor and enforce compliance with land-use and development conditions. Where appropriate, councils cooperate with each other and adopt a regional perspective in landuse planning.
- Councils consider climate change and other environmental impacts in their planning and decision• making.

#### **4. Economic development**

Councils facilitate the economic development of communities by working with the business community to attract and retain investment and support sustainable economic growth.

##### **Role components:**

- Councils have a constructive working relationship with businesses locally and within the region and are accessible to and proactively assist potential new businesses.
- Councils support local economic strengths and promote economic diversity while taking into account the characteristics of the community.
- Councils account for the external environment in planning and adapt plans to support local economic viability within the context and vision and sense of place desired by the wider community.
- Councils monitor and understand the economic drivers for local or regional communities as well as the vulnerabilities and opportunities within communities.
- Councils establish strategic alliances and relationships with existing or potential businesses or markets and effectively and effectively utilize regional groupings of councils for leverage.

- Councils enable the business sector, and support regional and/or state government initiatives which will broaden their economic base and lead to future growth and prosperity.
- Councils engage with key partners in business and government who influence economic prosperity through planning and investment.

#### **5. Service delivery and asset management:**

Councils are responsible financial managers who deliver cost effective, equitable and efficient services and assets which reflect local needs and expectations and are guided by council's long-term corporate planning objectives.

##### **Role components:**

- Councils provide assets and services to an agreed level determined in consultation the community while meeting relevant standards and statutory requirements.
- Councils implement contemporary, long-term financial and asset management systems to ensure assets are maintained in a condition that meets the identified needs of the community. Councils have access to resources to ensure the efficient maintenance and replacement of assets and the efficient delivery of services.
- Councils' strategic community plans are integrated with both short- and long-term financial, social and asset management plans.
- Councils conduct regular service reviews to ensure services meet community needs and are financially sustainable and adjust service levels where appropriate.
- Councils provide meaningful reports on financial performance including service delivery and asset management performance to the community.

#### **6. Legislation and by-laws:**

Councils enforce relevant state and national legislation and create by-laws and policies as required to support the efficient and effective functioning of council to support the community.

##### **Role components:**

- Councils enforce relevant state and national legislation efficiently and effectively within the local area.
- Councils provide feedback to government regarding the efficacy and cost impacts of implementing legislation.
- Councils create by-laws that meet the needs of the community and environment in the local area.

- Councils develop, implement and regularly review meaningful policies as required to support the objectives of the council and the community.

## **7. Representation and cooperation:**

Councils engage with each other and other spheres of government to represent and advocate the needs of their communities, and where appropriate, cooperate and work in partnership to generate the greatest benefit for communities.

### **Role components:**

- Councils engage with other governments to gather information, provide information, and explore and pursue opportunities.
- Councils coordinate activities with other governments through participating effectively in reforms, taking advantage of opportunities offered by other governments and working in partnership with other governments.
- Councils contribute at the local level to the achievement of national, state and regional policy goals.
- Councils develop a clear evidence base of regional strategic priorities which are advocated to government with a unity of purpose.
- Councils maximize opportunities for resource sharing and joint procurement to reduce costs and improve efficiencies and effectiveness of services.

## **Importance of Local government in contemporary society:**

The local government is very important notion for the contemporary society for the sustainable development of entire nation because of the following peculiarities of the local government.

- Has the local authority. Management or governance of a certain locality is made by a body composed of persons directly elected by the people of that area. This representative body is responsible for the administration of local affairs in that area.
- Provides public services for residents of the area within its jurisdiction, which is the main goal of this government.
- Local finances. In order to provide services and perform functions effectively, it is imperative that the local unit has its own finances. Because the services it provides to citizens should be financially covered. These finances can be obtained from local taxes but also from state subsidies.

- Local autonomy. This means that the local government has the right to establish and operate in the activities and functions that are recognized by law. It also includes the legal right of local residents to choose their representatives that will govern the territory under the set laws. It should be noted that autonomy does not mean sovereignty over these bodies, as belonging and legally depending on state structures.
- Local Participation. The success or failure of the development plans of the territory it relates to how much active participation of the local people is there. Through this government it is sought greater participation of people who are given the opportunity to participate in the decision making process. It's a condition that, if a goal to be achieved, then the participation of the public should be necessarily.
- Local Leadership. Usually people who deal with local governments, especially in rural areas, are characterized by a lack of experience, professionalism. Therefore, they should be provided with leadership-management skills in order to develop various projects initiated.
- Local accountability. This means that local representatives of the people are elected by them to meet the ultimate goal that is to provide services in the most effective manner possible. If this is not achieved, then the vote of the people makes them to not be re-elected at the next election.
- Local development. This is very important feature, because the primary goal is the development of local government within the area which exercises jurisdiction.

The importance of this government is primarily in support of democracy. As if democracy is to function properly, then it is necessary the participation of as many citizens in the decision making process. Progress achieved on the basis of these methods is more solid and democratic than that achieved over the communist totalitarian methods.

Secondly, the local government can create future leaders. This means that local government is a training period and effective enough to gain experience and knowledge on the art of government policy-making and governance transition to nationwide. This has happened in our country, where yesterday's mayors have used their position as a springboard to move to the party leadership or central governments. This underlines once again that the best school of democracy and the best guarantee for success is the practice in local government.

Thirdly, its importance lies in the fact that manages much better and more efficiently the local affairs as it is closer to the needs of citizens.

Finally, its importance lies in the fact that it serves as a communication tool and an intermediary between the central government and the people or community. Thus requirements of citizens are transmitted to the central government by local government bodies and on the other hand the central government policies are made known to the public through local government organs. This two-way relationship makes possible a close relationship between people and high levels of government.

More specifically the importance of local government is as follows:

- To Promote the Democracy
- For the development
- For effective service Delivery
- To empowerment
- To promote the people's participation
- To make the policy decisions
- To make the institutionalization of inclusiveness
- For the dispute resolution
- Effective utilization of resources
- To create the feelings for door step government
- To perform the role of Central government
- For sustainable Development
- Makes the bridge between central government and people

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