

Constitution Reform Forum **TT**

From maximum leader to maximum participation

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MEDIA RELEASE

TAKING LOCAL GOVERNMENT BEYOND A NATIONAL CLEAN-UP CAMPAIGN

While acknowledging that the planned national clean-up campaign by the municipal corporations can have some benefits, the CRF is concerned that it may have the effect of diverting attention away from the need to develop a more comprehensive long-term approach to the management and protection of the environment. Even more importantly, it can reinforce the status quo and suppress commitment to the wider local government reform agenda. No one can deny the reality of the environmental degradation in our country and the resulting health and safety risks that it poses for citizens. But a one-off campaign could hardly be expected to address this problem adequately.

What is required is a properly designed and executed system to undertake all aspects of this multi-faceted operation on a year-round basis. The implementation of an anti-litter and recycling programme should be given top priority in such a system. Regularly-scheduled cleaning of water courses and underground drains, and a year-round mosquito-control programme should also feature highly. The citizenry should expect no less from its municipal corporations.

In order to achieve efficiency in this and all other aspects of their work, there needs to be a serious evaluation of existing organisational structures. Mayors and Chairmen should not simply wait on legislation to start focusing on the need for organisational improvements. It is already common knowledge that the statutory committees are largely ineffective, that councillors are hard-pressed to effectively respond to the needs of their burgesses, that the whole system of litter wardens and municipal policing has little or no impact on the communities. The leadership within the corporations should assume some responsibility for beginning the change process, however limited.

Going beyond the issue of proper organisation and management, citizens need to be assured that their local government body cannot be altered at the whim and fancy of the sitting government. The status of the local government authorities must be enshrined in the constitution to ensure that it cannot be changed by a simple majority in Parliament. One recalls how the People's Partnership administration was able to introduce proportional representation to appoint aldermen through an amendment to the Municipal Corporations Act. It was easy to get this politically self-serving measure passed in Parliament since all that was required was a simple majority vote.

The extent of the reform agenda being proposed by the current administration makes it even more crucial that local government should be enshrined in the constitution. With responsibilities such as the delivery of social services, maintenance of schools and other government buildings, providing support

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for local economic development, the creation of community forums to provide a two-way exchange of information, there must be some constitutional guarantee that no central government can easily make changes to the institution and thereby undermine its capacity to function efficiently.

Even though the actual legislation for the proposed reform is yet to be brought to Parliament, the newly installed corporations must demonstrate that they are aware of the scope of work to be done and are willing to embrace the challenges that lay ahead. Putting so much of their resources into a one-off national clean-up campaign is short-sighted at best.

Signed: Olabisi Kuboni

Chair, CRF

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