

PART I. DECENTRALISATION, LOCALISM AND INTERGOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Chapter 2

Democratic Decentralisation in the Commonwealth Caribbean: Is There a Case for New Roles and Relationships?

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Local government reform in the Commonwealth Caribbean¹ is a manifestation of experimentation with democratic decentralisation or ‘democratic local governance’ (Blair 2000), which is sweeping political and administrative systems worldwide. Central to the debate is the identification of a ‘democratic deficit’ and a general consensus that greater citizen activism and more responsive state institutions are positively correlated (Gaventa 2004; Narayan et al. 2000; Commonwealth Foundation 1999; Ward et al. 2010).

Democratic decentralisation may fairly be described as a ‘social movement’ in that fundamental transformations are being wrought in institutions, organisations, policy outlook and strategies (Conyers 1986). However, specific goals and objectives differ from one country context to the next, and these diverse expressions reflect the differing ideational stances of its adherents. For instance, proponents of neoliberal ideas see democratic decentralisation as a means of reducing the erstwhile command and control orientation of the state, frequently cited as the primary source of self-serving behaviour that contributes to maladministration (Grindle 2007; Manor 1999).

The development community attaches the goal of poverty reduction to democratic decentralisation, complementing communitarian approaches and empowerment models of development. According to Blair, ‘much of [democratic local governance’s] attraction as a development strategy lies in its promise to include people from all walks of life in community decision making’ (2000: 23). Marginalised groups such as women, cultural minorities, small business owners and small farmers are promoted as important beneficiaries of decentralisation policies. In addition to making local political office more accessible to these constituencies, democratic decentralisation widens the scope for participation. This leads to positive socio-economic outcomes such as provision of infrastructure that meets local needs, improved living conditions and enhanced economic growth (Blair 2000). Hickey and Mohan point out that this participatory approach to development ‘asserts the importance of placing local realities at the heart of development interventions’ with a transformative effect in that agents of development shift roles from acting as ‘directive experts’ to ‘facilitators of local knowledge and capabilities’ (2005: 8; see also Chambers 1983).

For pluralists, democratic renewal remains the essential function of decentralisation, permitting citizens to 'become more effective at rewarding and punishing the behaviour of local officials' (Grindle 2007: 7). Fung and Wright conceptualised these types of decentralisation reforms as 'empowered deliberative democracy' based on 'their potential to be radically democratic in their reliance on the participation and capacities of ordinary people, deliberative because they institute reason-based decision making and empowered since they attempt to tie action to discussion' (2001: 7). Thus democratic decentralisation is associated with skills of deliberation, consensus building and conflict resolution (Grindle 2007).

In terms of public management practice, devolving tasks performed by central government to a lower level is expected to result in higher levels of responsiveness to citizens' needs, as well as improved efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Grindle summarised these sentiments:

When government administration is brought closer to those who receive services ... beneficiaries of these services would become active in demanding good quality. Because those responsible for the quality of services are local, citizens will be more motivated to complain and demand improvements if services fail or decline in quality. Moreover, civil servants will have incentives to orient their behaviour toward good service provision because of the potential for public disruption and complaints from dissatisfied 'customers' (2007: 9–10).

Clearly decentralisation is at the core of contemporary state reforms and, where its democratic component is emphasised, local government reform follows closely as it offers an enabling institutional framework for deeper citizen participation and improved social outcomes.

In the Commonwealth Caribbean, local government reform takes place against a background of a growing disconnect between citizens and government, evidenced in mistrust of elected representatives and a citizenry indifferent to its rights and duties (Schoburgh 2010a). Policy overtures in the region confirm generally that one of the most enduring orthodoxies concerning local government is its perceived value as an 'enhancer' of local democracy. Although the objective realities of democratic practices cast considerable doubt on this orthodoxy, pressures for reform emanating from international agencies are based on the premise that local government is not merely necessary, but is also the most convenient realm for the practice of democratic governance (Schoburgh 2010a). Caribbean policy-makers have thus evinced a strong commitment to 'shoring up the fortunes' of local government. This translates into addressing the outstanding matter of local government's rickety status in intergovernmental relations in the region. The democratic value of local government has found expression in official policies signalling both the philosophical basis of reform and strategic directions for implementation.

The intended directions of democratic decentralisation are clear:

- a shift from unicentrism in which central government dominates all political and policy interactions, to polycentrism in which there is a multiplicity of actors, each assuming a leadership role at different points in the process;

- clarification of the status and role of local government;
- a new role for the centre (central government); and
- a shift from central–local relations to intergovernmental relations in which local government is treated as an equal partner in a web of institutional interactions.

The crucial questions are:

- To what extent have reform policies and strategies demonstrated these values?
- Have local governments used the ‘window of opportunity’ created by reform proposals to press their claim for a change in roles and relationships?
- Is civil society, the new entrant and the actor on which democratic governance rests, seduced by the new policy direction?
- How does central government envision its place in the new context of democratic decentralisation?

These questions will form the basis of a comparative analysis of the attempts by Caribbean governments to institute democratic decentralisation. Using local government reform proposals and policies as our frame of analysis, we examine policy formulation and implementation in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago,² St Lucia, and Antigua and Barbuda. The chapter seeks to provide useful insights into the political economy of reform in the region, and to generate further debate about alternative strategies to achieve sustainable reform outcomes.

2.1 Analytic method

Table 2.1 sets out a ‘democratic decentralisation assessment framework’ (DDAF) to guide our analysis of local government reform proposals, policies and programmes in the country cases. This draws on Brinkerhoff and Crosby’s (2002) implementation task framework; the assessment by Blair and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (1997) of democratic local governance; and Rondinelli, McCullough and Johnson’s (1989) political economy framework.

The DDAF uses a set of indicators that are grouped under four headings:

- *Policy design and interpretation* concerns the technical scope of the policy.
- *Policy orientation* gauges the degree of congruence between action (implementation) and intention (pronouncement).
- *Political motivation* concerns the rationale for the policy.
- *Institutional setting* examines the task environment.

Assessment was carried out by applying a nominal rating scale with values from –5 to +5 depending on the extent to which an indicator is reflected in actual policies and programmes. The framework thus permits us to compare and contrast the disparate reform experiences under common themes. Results are presented in Table 2.2, later in this chapter.

Table 2.1 Democratic decentralisation assessment framework

Indicators	Measures
Policy design and interpretation	
Policy meets causal and contextual best-fit criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate definition of problem • Principal causal linkages to problem are understood • Realistic performance indicators and timelines established • Policy marketed for support by key principals (funders; implementers; beneficiaries)
Policy includes fundamental elements for goal attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation articulated
Policy orientation	
Support and commitment to reform by line ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation plan developed and activated • Technical expertise provided and continuous assessment conducted • Programme reformulated
Willingness to transfer functions to local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and commencement of divestiture of functions • Local problem-solving enabled
Willingness to assist in capacity building efforts at local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and commencement of divestiture of functions • Local problem solving enabled
Political motivation	
Strong and committed political leadership (bi-level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steady course of implementation of activities • Ventilation of local perspective
Willingness to share power, authority and financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles of co-governance (competence, subsidiarity) explored • Supportive institutional mechanisms established
Facilitation of civil society groups' participation in local planning and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory mechanisms established and operational • Participatory mechanisms integrated into local policy process
Institutional setting	
Mechanisms that foster accountable local leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of local electoral process • Complementary measures established, e.g. participatory budgeting, citizens' juries, mandatory consultative processes
Community empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of empowered citizenry as zero-sum or positive sum game³
Nature of political competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of influence of party politics on local government
Constitutional amendments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amendments in support of reform goal
Orientation of private and civil sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong and independent civil society organisations • Level of private sector interest in local government

2.2 The varied dimensions of democratic decentralisation

Democratic decentralisation is a multidimensional process that is geared towards specific outcomes or *ends*, but it is also a *means* to these ends. In the first instance it is the most widely perceived end-state of a broad range of actions taken in the name of 'decentralisation', which seek to redistribute power, authority and responsibility between levels of government and administration (Schoburgh 2006; Alfonso 1997; Handler 1996; Rondinelli et al. 1989). Within the broad ambit of decentralisation, such actions have typically embraced:

- *de-concentration*, which involves a redistribution of administrative responsibilities and some authority to regional offices of central government;
- *delegation*, which entails the transfer of management authority for specific functions to semi-autonomous agencies; and
- *devolution*, which implies the creation of autonomous governmental bodies at a lower level.

As a means to an end, democratic decentralisation may be interpreted as either 'part of an administrative mentality or as part of a democratic way of thinking' (Blair 1995, cited in Manor 1999: 53–54). Here the logic of democratic decentralisation is its contribution to long-term goals such as improved welfare, and its potential to enhance capacity in local government. Both the *ends* and *means* interpretations are evident in Blair's discussion:

Through participation [democratic local governance] promises to increase popular input into what local government does, and through accountability it bids to increase popular control over what local government has done or left undone ... it can improve local service delivery ... it can contribute significantly to poverty reduction (2000: 22).

Following Jun and Wright (1996), Schoburgh categorised decentralisation into (a) *administrative decentralisation* – flexibility in administrative organisation to facilitate delegation of authority and responsibility – and (b) *political decentralisation* – power sharing between levels of government. She then argued that, although administrative decentralisation compared with political decentralisation may appear to be 'soft' in terms of the degree of power and authority that is transferred to a lower level, it may nonetheless 'be linked with complex aims such as democracy-building and social control' (2006: 9–10). The prevailing paradigm of governance on which current reforms are based necessarily entails the simultaneous pursuit of political and administrative changes, propelled by globalising economic, social and political forces that challenge conventional approaches to state and governmental organisation. Thus decentralisation processes can be seen to have evolved from an emphasis on de-concentrating hierarchical structures of government and bureaucracies, through power-sharing models that promote democratisation and market liberalisation as an intermediate stage, to the current position of facilitating wider participation of the private sector and civil society organisations. Hence Blair (2000) argues that participation and accountability are the concepts that make democratic decentralisation distinguishable from earlier forms.

This evolution represents a response to the concepts and ideas advocated by the public choice school, and the doctrines of ‘new public management’ that have vigorously promoted citizen participation as a common thread. Political decentralisation is underpinned by a view of governance reform in which governments will aim to create channels and mechanism for public participation in decision-making, abide by the rule of law, increase transparency in public procedures and hold officials accountable (Cheema and Rondinelli 2007: 6). The new administrative mandate rides on the belief that governments should create the context for local citizens to solve their own problems, through deregulating and privatising those activities that could be carried out more efficiently and effectively by the private and civil sectors (Cheema and Rondinelli 2007: 4; Osborne and Gaebler 1992).

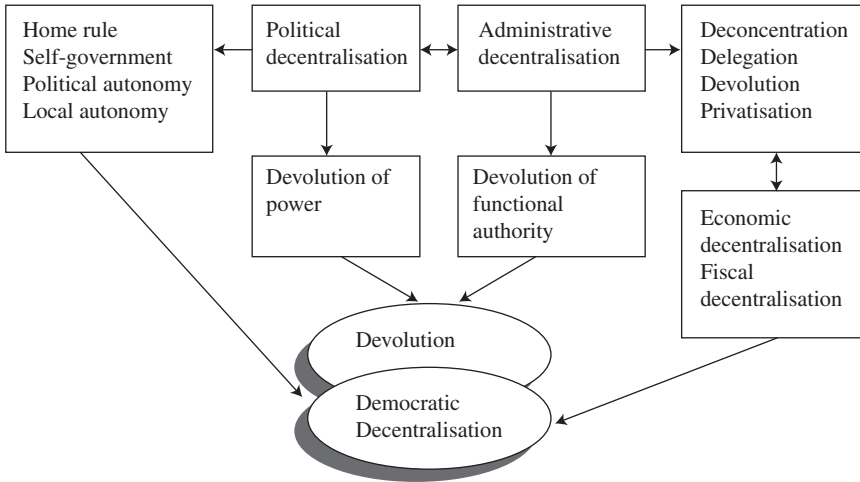
However, although the concept of democratic decentralisation embraces both political and administrative processes, it does not erase the likelihood of conflict emerging between the two. Different actors may pursue different courses depending on the assumptions on which their actions are based. For example, central government officials often prefer administrative decentralisation, while local policy and administrative leaders support political decentralisation. While both subscribe to the critical purpose of democratic decentralisation as a means to promote development and nurture participation and accountable governance, this does not diminish the likelihood of stalemate when they pursue their goals independently (see, for example, Shah and Thompson 2004).

Furthermore, although there is much enthusiasm about democratic decentralisation, the unsatisfactory rate of success with these reforms, especially in developing countries, suggests an important reality – as observed astutely by Manor:

Devolution or democratic decentralisation on its own is likely to fail. Democratic authorities at lower levels in political systems will founder if they lack power and resources – meaning both financial resources and the administrative resources to implement development projects (1999: 7).

Hence democratic decentralisation must be both a process of *transferring* power, authority and responsibility from a higher to a lower level of government and administration, and one of *sharing* of authority and resources for collective goals. Administrative and political changes need to be supplemented by fiscal decentralisation,⁴ which encompasses revenue sharing between central and local governments and increased fiscal autonomy at subnational levels, as well as economic decentralisation that promotes market liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation and public–private partnership arrangements (Cheema and Rondinelli 2007; Manor 1999). Taken together, these varying types of decentralisation hold out the promise of sustainable outcomes.

Figure 2.1 seeks to capture the many dimensions of democratic decentralisation, confirming that it is indeed a complex process. Irrespective of the overarching scheme a government adopts – whether political or administrative decentralisation – a combination of many factors will influence the ultimate nature and extent of discretionary decision-making at the local level. Figure 2.1 also highlights the reality

Figure 2.1 The process of democratic decentralisation

that political power-sharing is at the core of any scheme of decentralisation, and that reluctance to share power in any meaningful sense will in many instances lead to failed reforms.

2.3 Goals and strategies in the Caribbean

If reforms were to be assessed in terms of whether visions and goals for democratic decentralisation are in synchrony with global trends and respond to domestic priorities, then Caribbean governments would score highly. Consider the following extracts from policies and programmes. We start with Jamaica, which in 1993 commenced a comprehensive programme of local government reform as part of a broader and deeper process of state and governmental modernisation (Ministry of Local Government [Jamaica] 2002). The contemporary period of local government reform is outlined in Ministry Paper 8 of 1993 and Ministry Paper 7 of 2003.

The policy envisions:

... strong and vibrant local government as essential to the attainment of a society in which all citizens enjoy real opportunities to fully and directly participate in and contribute to the management and development of local communities (Ministry of Local Government [Jamaica] 2003: 1).

However, this declaration must be placed against the backdrop of a history of institutional neglect of, and negative policy encroachments on, local government. This prompted the Jamaican government to state an unequivocal position on the value of local government, and to acknowledge that dismantling or downgrading local government is not the best approach to dealing with its past poor performance. The preferred strategy is to identify the issues that contribute to local government's problems and to devise appropriate solutions (Ministry of Local Government [Jamaica] 1993: 3). Nevertheless, as discussed later, the political environment in Jamaica is not

always characterised by consensus among major political parties on the value and role of local government.

Trinidad and Tobago's local government reform policy dates from a 1990 proposal – *The Decentralisation Process: Regional Administration and Regional Development*. It aims to:

... free the people at the community level to serve and assist each other and to better organise themselves to serve their communities and make their country a better place to live (Ministry of Works, Infrastructure and Decentralisation [Trinidad and Tobago] 1990: 2).

Local government is valued as a medium through which to channel co-operative community and economic development using a regional strategy. Initially the emphasis was on administrative decentralisation, but the draft 2009 *White Paper on Local Government Reform* left little doubt about the long-term intent of the policy, namely to 'facilitate the transformation and modernisation of local communities by empowering citizens to participate in the decision-making process' (Ministry of Local Government [Trinidad and Tobago] 2006: iii). And, like Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago locates local government reform in a national programme of socio-economic transformation geared towards achieving developed-country status by 2020.

In St Lucia the uneasy accommodation of local government along with failed attempts at 'decentralisation' led in 1997 to the development of a *Green Paper on Local Government Reform*, which announced a new vision for that level (Ministry of Community Development, Culture, Local Government and Cooperatives [St Lucia] 2000). The goal of 'a highly autonomous, democratic community institution' sits on five pillars:

- accountability to the community;
- responsiveness to local needs and demands;
- provision of a wide range of services to local citizenry;
- partnership with central government in the processes of socio-economic development and poverty eradication;
- contribution to overall socio-economic welfare.

Among the values that inform the government's philosophy of local government is its role in facilitating citizens' understanding of, and appreciation for, the purposes of government generally, and in enabling democratic choices at the local level.

Similarly, the benefits of a decentralised system of government that is 'democratically controlled by local communities' have been seized upon in Antigua and Barbuda, where the government has outlined plans to restructure the local government department and district councils and to enact legislation to effect what is described as 'decentralised administration' (Ministry of Labour, Public Administration and Empowerment [Antigua and Barbuda] undated). This is to take place in a context where there is no formal local government system and the Barbuda Council is the only recognisable local government body on the island.

The preceding text has provided just a few instances of policy shifts being made in respect of the subnational level across the region. Activation of these reform policies demonstrates a dramatic about-face on the part of Caribbean governments, which now designate local government as the most appropriate medium through which communities can exercise both *voice* and *choice* in how they wish to deal with local problems and issues. In addition, irrespective of precisely how democratic decentralisation or a revitalised system of local government is interpreted, four values are observed to be common across the region. These accord a new status to local government as:

- a stratagem for democratic renewal;
- a means through which to maximise social and economic welfare;
- a component of public sector modernisation; and
- a legitimate partner and viable actor in intergovernmental processes.

However, vision and goals are just the start of a potentially conflictual policy process that entails both redistribution of functions and perceived threats to the organisational, policy and political status quo. This reality becomes evident in the strategies that are employed to effect reform programmes and the outcomes that are achieved.

2.4 A focus on structures

As noted above, for Caribbean governments the ultimate measure of democratic decentralisation is empowered communities that nurture the development and institutionalisation of norms of citizen participation in local decision-making and local self-management. The approach to achieving this ideal 'local state' varies between countries and vacillates between two poles: *fragmentation* and *consolidation* of local government structures. The foremost examples of these alternative strategies are, respectively, the municipal experiment in Jamaica (Schoburgh 2010b) and regional councils in Trinidad and Tobago. To varying degrees each country's programme bears on aspects of financial and legislative reforms, institutional and organisational strengthening, and demarcation of administrative boundaries and jurisdictional authority. However, the strategic choice guiding which series of activities are implemented first depends on what is deemed most urgent.

In Jamaica, Ministry Paper 8 of 1993 accorded priority to the restoration of functions and responsibilities to local authorities, which were removed during the 1980s. This included rebuilding the representational and service delivery capacity of parishes (the principal local authorities) through a US\$50 million Parish Infrastructure Development Programme, funded by the Jamaican government and the Inter-American Development Bank (Ministry of Local Government [Jamaica] 1993). Rehabilitation of parish infrastructure was not merely a necessary step in reversing institutional decline and poor performance, but also a precursor to local authorities' assumption of the leadership of the local planning and development process and thus a transformation of their role (Ministry of Local Government [Jamaica] 1993: 6). As a result, local authorities have since resumed oversight of most local services, and laws and regulations have been amended, updated and consolidated where appropriate.

Legislative action has included drafting a Local Governance Act, which along with two other pieces of legislation, the Unified Services Act and Local Government Financing and Financial Management Act (frequently referred to as the three *strategic laws*), is expected to advance the reform process.

Ministry Paper 7 of 2003 appears more discerning of the complexities involved in assigning local government a developmental role:

The process of reform since then has led to detailed analyses of the development environment in the country and resulted in a better understanding of the complexity of the issues to be resolved in this fundamental process of governance reform (Ministry of Local Government [Jamaica] 2003: 1).

The new priority of Ministry Paper 7 of 2003 is the creation of municipal management mechanisms for discrete urban and rural 'Development Areas'. Schoburgh defines these as 'localities that exhibit great potential for economic take-off, and where social and economic activities cause spillover across functional areas of local administrative units' (2007: 169). She argues that introducing the concept of Development Areas highlights questions about the utility of the parish as a viable unit of local government in the face of changing social and economic circumstances, and may be seen as an attempt to resolve the representational problems that have arisen (*ibid*).

The *Jamaican Municipalities Act of 2003* was promulgated in response to these concerns. It established the Portmore Municipality as an experiment in 'community self-management, construction of norms of co-governance, and ultimately democratic local governance' (Schoburgh 2009: 110). Municipalities are a new form of more participatory local government, established within parishes and assuming some of their functions. Thus municipalisation tends towards fragmentation of current local government units in order to respond more effectively to differing local needs and aspirations. It is also a process through which to facilitate direct local democracy and responsive local political leadership, as evidenced by the adoption in Portmore of a directly elected mayor.

Parish Development Committees (PDCs) parallel the municipal experiment. In addition to their democratic mandate, they are seen as instruments for promoting local development in partnership with other state agencies as well as the private and civil sectors. Ministry Paper 7 of 2003 describes PDCs as 'mechanisms of participatory local governance' created to promote strategic planning, enhance business competitiveness and promote economic development for job creation (Ministry of Local Government [Jamaica] 2003: 7). The problem is that PDCs have not functioned in the manner anticipated. Nor have other structures such as city and town councils or area committees, which were established as standing committees of parishes to broaden participation, brought any observable change to the local policy process. Meanwhile, Business Improvement Districts, tagged as the device for business development and retention, are still at the conceptual stage. Thus, while these various mechanisms might signal important structural shifts, to date they have failed to make either the democratic or the developmental impact envisioned. Moreover, local officials appear unwilling for the most part to accommodate interventions of any form from these new entities, despite the obvious negative impact on achievement of reform goals.

Trinidad and Tobago's 1990 proposal for reform described the local government system in that country as obsolete (Ministry of Works [Trinidad and Tobago] 1990: 4). Establishment of effective local government structures emerged as an urgent activity because it could offer a means to pursue regional development. According to the proposal for reform:

It is not enough to increase the overall level of economic activity or social facilities available in the country; it is also necessary for each area of the country to play its part in national social and economic life (ibid: 3).

Thus at the outset reform was concerned principally with defining local government boundaries. The *Municipal Corporations Act 1990* consolidated all the existing laws governing local government in Trinidad and Tobago, and was seen as 'a catalyst for transforming the local government system into relatively autonomous, financially self-sufficient, efficient and effective corporate entities, providing quality services to burgesses within a participatory framework' (ibid: 5).

In 2006 a *Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform* again placed local government structure at the top of a list of priority issues within the development agenda (Ministry of Local Government [Trinidad and Tobago] 2006). But this time 'structure' had a broader connotation than defining geographic boundaries: it was interpreted as new management systems to be developed in tandem with the new role envisaged for local government. The White Paper espoused a transformational development paradigm in which local government becomes 'a harmonising agency for local development' (ibid: 12). However, apart from the *Municipal Corporations Act 1990* and Amendment Act 8 of 1992, which organised local government into nine regions, two cities and three boroughs, there has been hardly any tangible outcome. The 2006 Draft White Paper notes that local government has operated under new legislation for more than 14 years, but reform goals have not materialised (ibid: 5); hence the decision of central government to review the process within new perspectives on local government reform.

In St Lucia there is evidence of a broader agenda. The 2000 Green Paper conceptualises basic principles on which effective local government is predicated, allied to a belief that 'mere reorganisation of structures, functions and boundaries' is an insufficient base on which to give substance to these principles and thus 'radical constitutional change' is considered necessary (Ministry of Community Development [St Lucia] 2000: 9). While constitutional reform is a consideration in other local government reform programmes in the region, it is not treated with the urgency implied in St Lucia's Green Paper, which perhaps reflects the non-existence of a democratic system of local government in that country for most of the 1990s.

St Lucia's reform programme also gives primacy of place to definition of the roles and functions of local authorities, central government and civil society organisations. For reformers in St Lucia, realisation of the vision of local government as the centre of communities means clarifying both the scope and nature of intergovernmental relationships, as well as bridging the gap between government and the third sector. At the same time the manifesto that 'no control or decision should be exercised or taken by central government if such controls or decisions can be exercised/taken at

the local level, with equal or greater effectiveness' (ibid: 12) offers a perspective on the principle of subsidiarity that is slowly gaining momentum across the region.

Given the absence of a formal system of local government in Antigua and Barbuda (apart from the Barbuda Council), it is difficult to locate current thinking about reform, except to suggest that concerns about over-centralisation of the policy process and the need for democratic control by local communities are gaining momentum. There have been 'talks' about establishing district councils throughout Antigua to facilitate the democratic process, better understanding of the workings of government and co-operation for social transformation at the local level. Structural reform appears to be at the top of the agenda, with early attention being paid to the Department of Local Government within the Ministry of Social Transformation. Ensuring alignment of district councils with constituency boundaries appears to be a significant objective in order to maintain the powers of Members of Parliament (MPs).

Why is reorganisation of local government structures so often the foremost concern in reform, even though it arguably has the least impact on local autonomy? Perhaps the answer lies in three factors:

- it is the easiest activity to undertake, as it poses less potent threats to established power relations;
- being the most visible, it is the shortest route to legitimising the reform process; and
- the existing institutional framework may be more accommodating, although structural change is usually accompanied by new legislation.

Regardless of the reason, structural reforms – whether to organisations or to boundaries – are certainly the most prolific output to date of attempts at democratic decentralisation in the Caribbean.

2.5 Financial reforms

The next priority in local government policy papers are financial reforms, especially for countries that have well-developed systems of local government. However, financial reform has emerged as the most contentious aspect of policy in light of its transformative potential, and because the perspectives of central government and local government officials differ as to how it should be undertaken. Generally, implementation of financial reforms is defined by incrementalism, to the chagrin of local government officials who advocate a more decisive approach to resolving the funding problems that have plagued this level of government for so long. Instead the approach has been to focus on 'maximisation of own-source revenue, enhancement of loan-raising capability and adjustments in the level of central government subvention' (Schoburgh 2007: 167). Improved asset management, loan raising and municipal bonds, as well as an appropriate formula for local government financing, are among the steps under consideration in Caribbean countries to help meet local service needs, but to date the outcomes of reform have been modest.

In Jamaica, for instance, Ministry Paper 7 of 2003 gives prominence to steps taken towards achievement of 'financial autonomy' (Ministry of Local Government [Jamaica] 2003). The establishment of the Parochial Revenue Fund (PRF), through which revenues from property taxes and motor vehicle licences are distributed so as to ensure equitable access to funding at the local level, is presented as a beacon of success. So too are the measures taken to improve revenue flows to the PRF, and to maximise local government's own-source revenues. The paper notes that inflows to the PRF from property taxes increased from 475.9 million Jamaican dollars (J\$) in 1998/99 to J\$645.0 million in 2001/02, while adjustments to user fees and charges saw revenues to local authorities grow from J\$80.0 million in 1997/98 to J\$131.7 million in 2002/02. Additionally, administrative changes to the management of local authorities' commercial portfolios produced further revenue increases, from J\$10.5 million in 1998/99 to more than J\$124.0 million in 2001/02. However, despite these positive results, revenues remain insufficient to meet current service needs, prompting reformers to contemplate conducting a 'revenue survey' to determine the existing revenue base for each local authority, as well as to assess the potential for increased municipal taxation (ibid: 4).

In Trinidad and Tobago, the 1990 reform proposals involved central government retaining responsibility for financing the routine operations of local authorities, providing an annual subvention to each corporation based on an approved revenue and expenditure budget (Ministry of Works [Trinidad and Tobago] 1990: 12). The concern was to formulate revenue-sharing arrangements and to identify the most equitable cost-recovery schemes for certain services such as markets, abattoirs and rental of assets. Subsequently, the 2006 Draft White Paper acknowledged that this method of financing was inadequate to support the proposed new role of local government (Ministry of Local Government [Trinidad and Tobago] 2006)). Yet the strategies outlined for redressing the funding gap appear incongruent with the vision. The plan is to develop a funding formula using demographic and infrastructural criteria; to make block funding available; and to introduce accrual accounting and more effective auditing systems to reduce waste. Also among the proposed measures are institutional arrangements to strengthen property tax collection systems, but not devolution of tax powers. Little has been achieved thus far.

Jamaica may have made greater strides in financial reform, but shares Trinidad and Tobago's muted policy stance on tax-raising powers for local government. The combined experience of the two countries suggests that financial reforms in the Caribbean at this juncture are not to be seen as a precursor to fiscal decentralisation. Reforms are meant to make local authorities more economically viable entities, thus reducing the fiscal burden on central government to fund local services, but not to lead to full local autonomy. Policy settings do not involve cessation of central government influence over budget and financial decision-making in local government, even in the face of consensus that democratic decentralisation or greater local autonomy is unattainable without fiscal reforms. Rather, the code phrase in the policies is that local authorities will be given 'greater control' over funds or sources of revenue allocated to them. Sustainable financing of local government remains an elusive objective.

Nonetheless the incremental approach to financial reforms is understandable. For not only are these reforms mightily transformative if undertaken in their entirety, but they are also complex and could lead to outcomes that derail distributional and macro-economic objectives in small vulnerable states. These considerations inform, for example, Schoburgh's examination of the application of the principle of subsidiarity to local government reform processes in the region (2010c), as well as the broader debate surrounding fiscal relations and decentralisation in developing countries (Prud'homme 1995; Ter-Minassian 1997; Tanzi 1996).

2.6 Institutional strengthening

Another key element of local government reform in the Caribbean is the state of the institutional framework. Institutional strengthening appears lower in the hierarchy of local government problems, but is still a significant dimension owing to its catalytic function in the overarching process of transformation. For example, legislative changes are critical to enable realignment of physical boundaries, as well as improvements in revenue generation. Capacity enhancement strategies, such as human resource development and increased uptake of information and communications technology, relate both to the short-term objective of improved service standards and quality, as well as to the long-term goal of the strategic repositioning of local government as an agent of development.

Unfortunately reformers still grapple with how best to resolve the seemingly perpetual dissatisfaction of communities with the performance of local authorities. Some argue that the solution resides in constitutional status for local government to protect it from the whim and fancy of central governments. Public pressure for constitutional reform has increased, but it is difficult to decipher central governments' stance on the matter, and responses vary. Of the countries under study, Jamaica appears to accept the entrenchment of local government 'in principle' as an important element of reform, but the process continues to languish. Guyana has been the sole archetype of constitutional status for local government since the 1970s, and its experience has not been a particularly good one. Local government is as marginalised in that country as it is in others where constitutional reform is now being contemplated. One may conclude that there exist more powerful forces in the operational environment that stymie the impact of constitutional status.

2.7 Does size matter?

Clearly, local government reform policies in the Caribbean are at different stages of implementation. Our assessment of outcomes thus far suggests a simple division between *starters* and *non-starters*. The former comprise those countries that have effected adjustments, however minimal, in accordance with policy pronouncements. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are the most advanced of this group, but as noted earlier their programmes have been afflicted by 'stops and starts', raising doubts about the stated goal of democratic decentralisation. The *non-starters* are those countries that since assessing the problems and proffering 'best' solutions have not progressed

beyond concept papers or proposals. They are exemplified by St Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda, where reforms have been aborted.

It is difficult not to see *size* as one of the limiting factors for democratic decentralisation in the Caribbean context: the description of its countries as ‘small island states’ suggests a myriad of difficulties in policy development and implementation (Tendler and Freedheim 1994; Fox and Aranda 1996). Smallness of area and population was the justification for dissolving local government in Barbados in 1967. On the other hand the Commonwealth of Dominica, which has an area of just 751 square kilometres and a population of around 70,000,⁵ is perhaps the most successful example of democratic decentralisation. Duncan (2004: 54) describes Dominica as having ‘credible structures upon which to build a truly participatory democratic system with a renewed and reconceptualised local government system as a decisive partner with central government and other non-state actors’.

Perhaps it is more the size and structure of economies that pose the greatest threat to democratic decentralisation. Caribbean countries have recorded low growth rates (real GDP growth of less than 2 per cent per annum), and since the financial crises of 2008–09 growth targets have been missed, leading to tighter fiscal controls and little scope to action reform plans. The contradiction here is that Trinidad and Tobago has a large and well-performing economy, but the evidence suggests that its relative economic strength has not supported any significant push towards substantive decentralisation.

Thus key questions about the success and failure of reform processes for democratic decentralisation remain unanswered. Nonetheless reform outcomes thus far provide important clues about the nature of the process and whether programmes are composed of the ‘right’ ingredients for goal achievement. This is the subject of the next section.

2.8 Assessing reform outcomes

The normative values of democratic decentralisation have been promoted as a formulaic ‘cure-all’ for governmental problems, but there are a number of studies that have shown that implementation of these policies has not been easy or entirely successful (Nickson 1998; Manor 1999; Blair 2000; Bardhan 2002; Hickey and Mohan 2005; Grindle 2007; Cheema and Rondinelli 2007). Where positive outcomes have been realised, proponents are quick to claim success, but the failures and partial successes have been grist for the mill for sceptics, who quickly point out the limitations of decentralisation policies. Moreover, the fact that results may vary so much between countries points not only to the disparities that exist between ideas and action, but also to the complex framework of political, socio-technical, historical and cultural factors that have to be taken into account and which determine the ‘rhythm, modalities and potential viability’ of decentralising reforms (Alfonso 1997: 171). Decentralisation outcomes are unpredictable, because at the core of the process is redistribution of power, which involves substantial trial and error to achieve the correct balance. This is especially a problem for developing countries.

Notwithstanding this complexity and the nuanced lenses through which democratic decentralisation programmes must be assessed, international experience teaches us

that there are key factors that can facilitate the process (Cheema and Rondinelli 2007; Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002; Blair 1997). These factors establish the content of our analytic framework as described earlier, and form the criteria against which the outcomes of local government reform policies in the Caribbean can be evaluated. The results are set out in Table 2.2.

Our analysis highlights the many similarities among local government reform policies in the Caribbean – notably in the way they seek to address obvious deficiencies in structures, finance and capacity as constraints to local autonomy – as well as their basis in the amorphous realm of politics, where power and political partisanship have an awkward nexus. Politics have been the bane of local government reform programmes in the region, exemplified in the cases of Jamaica and Trinidad and

Table 2.2 Assessment of democratic decentralisation in the Caribbean – select country cases

Criteria	Country and nominal rating scale –5 to +5			
	Jamaica	Trinidad and Tobago	St Lucia	Antigua and Barbuda
Policy design and interpretation				
Policy meets causal and contextual best-fit criteria	+4	+4	+4	–5
Policy includes fundamental elements for goal attainment	–5	–5	–5	–5
Policy orientation				
Support and commitment to reform by line ministries	+5	+3	–5	–5
Willingness to transfer responsibilities to local level	+3	+3	–5	–1
Willingness to assist in capacity-building efforts at local level	+4	+2	+1	–5
Political motivation				
Strong and committed political leadership (bi-level)	+3	+1	–5	–5
Willingness to share power, authority and financial resources	–3	–5	+1	–5
Facilitation of civil society groups' participation in local planning and management	+4	–1	–1	–5
Institutional setting				
Mechanisms that foster accountable local leadership	–1	–1	–1	–1
Perception of community empowerment	+4	+4	+4	+4
The nature of political competition	+5	+5	+5	+5
Constitutional amendments in support of reform vision	–3	–5	–3	–5
Orientation of private and civil sectors	+1	+1	+1	–5

Tobago, where problem definition has focused on administrative issues, when in truth the real source of local government problems is its low status in central–local relations. Rather than being seen as a separate and distinct sphere of political influence, there is a tendency for the operations of local government to be fused with the centre. Thus local government is valued for the political leverage it offers the ruling central administration, more than for its representation of community interests.

Perhaps reformers recognise the political complexities involved in full democratic decentralisation, as evidenced by their use of the term ‘greater autonomy’, a compromise between the current state of local government and the ideal of local autonomy. This tension may explain why, even with established timelines and identifiable outputs, implementation of reform programmes appears to be in constant drift, making the process unusually open-ended and subject to political and administrative manipulation (Schoburgh 2007; Ragoonath 2009). Rondinelli et al. warn that ‘if decentralisation policies are to be implemented successfully they must be designed carefully’ (1989: 59). One criterion of ‘good’ design is to recognise the salience of political factors to successful reform outcomes. In our assessment, all countries score poorly against the criterion ‘*policy includes fundamental elements for goal attainment*’.

Table 2.2 reveals considerable variations in the degree to which central governments’ policy orientation supports reform. For instance, Jamaica scores higher than Trinidad and Tobago in ‘*support and commitment to reform by line ministries*’ and ‘*willingness to assist in capacity-building efforts at local level*’, but the two countries attain the same score when it comes to ‘*willingness to transfer responsibilities to the local level*’. Two actions taken by reformers in Jamaica give them the edge over their Caribbean counterparts. The first was the establishment of the National Advisory Council (NAC) in 1993 (subsequently dormant for lengthy periods but revived in 2004 and again in 2007, both times under new leadership). The NAC serves as a ‘thought leader’ on local government reform and seeks to build critical mass interest in reform activities, as well as to evaluate the progress of implementation. Importantly, it has promoted bipartisan and multisectoral consensus on the new paradigm of local governance. In its 2009 report, the NAC acknowledged the level of institutional support for local government reform, and recommended that the 2007 Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Government Reform be formally adopted as a gesture of consensus, as well as a record of the bipartisan agreement to the entrenchment of local government in the Jamaican Constitution (Department of Local Government [Jamaica] 2009).

Jamaica’s second important step was the downgrade in 2007 of the Ministry of Local Government to that of a department within the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), with a mandate to see to the complete devolution of functions to local government by June 2009.⁶ However, this target was not reached and under the new government elected in 2011 priorities have changed; the department has now reverted to its original status as a ministry. Nonetheless measures were implemented to build capacity in local authorities in preparation for the proposed devolution.

Other countries receive mostly negative scores for policy orientation due to their status as ‘non-starters’ in reform. It should also be noted once again that, while moves towards reform in Jamaica are positive when assessed in terms of policy design or in

relation to the rest of the Caribbean, there remains a disjuncture between reform rhetoric on the one hand and effective implementation on the other. This point has general applicability across the region.

Given this disjuncture, political motivation becomes a critical factor in understanding both the content and pace of reforms. In Table 2.2 the political motivation indicator is assessed using three measures: (a) '*strong and committed political leadership (bi-level)*'; (b) '*willingness to share power, authority and financial resources*'; and (c) '*facilitation of civil society groups' participation in local planning and management*'.

Jamaica has taken some steps towards (a), notably in terms of the directive issued to local authorities in 2007 to offer their perspective on the reform direction. Ministry Paper 7 of 2003 was quite blunt:

Within twelve months all local authorities will be required to develop a reform plan in accordance with the new policy guidelines. If this plan is not forthcoming ... at the expiration of the agreed time period, the Ministry of Local Government, Community Development and Sport reserves the right to intervene to establish such a plan (Ministry of Local Government [Jamaica] 2003: 16).

All countries scored negatively on (b) with the exception of St Lucia, which outlined a programme of co-governance based on the principle of subsidiarity in its 2000 *Green Paper on Local Government Reform* (Ministry of Community Development [St Lucia] 2000), but with little subsequent evidence of the policy being activated.

In relation to (c), implementation of parish and community development committees gives Jamaica a strong positive score. Once again, however, this action has had little demonstrable impact in achieving reform objectives: it is unclear whether the perspectives of local leaders and the deliberations of development committees are being integrated into either the reform programme or decision-making in local authorities.

A key factor in weakening political motivation for reform is that the institutional setting is devoid of both functioning systems that hold local leaders accountable, as well as institutional arrangements to protect local government from the self-interested behaviour of policy officials (see indicators in Table 2.2). Deficiencies in the local electoral process are a case in point. In Jamaica, for example, local elections are rarely held when they fall due, illustrating the low regard in which community preferences are held. Party politics are the most influential factor in the management of local electoral processes, and by extension the degree to which reform goals are achieved. While successful in other ways, the NAC seems powerless to arrest the practice of local elections being used for political expediency.

The impact of party politics is also evident in Trinidad and Tobago's experience with local government reform. The National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) came to power in 1986, subsequently winning the 1987 local government elections and later framing the revolutionary *Municipal Corporations Act of 1990*. However, in 1991 the People's National Movement (PNM), which dominated Trinidad and Tobago's politics from 1956 to 1986, was returned to government. It then won the 1992 local government elections on a manifesto of greater local autonomy for

municipal corporations. The PNM subsequently kept its election promise to reduce the number of regions from 13 to 9 by means of *Amendment Act 8 of 1992*, but, while it emphasised accountability and value for money, it made no substantive changes to local government reform policy, nor did it advance the implementation process. This remains the situation after further changes of government in 1995 and 2010.

The conclusion may be drawn that, where local government serves the purpose of the ruling party, there is little compulsion to change the system. The obverse is also true: whenever local government is perceived as a political liability, then reforms take on a degree of urgency. Essentially, however, the political climate in the Caribbean appears antithetical to democratic decentralisation. This is compounded by weak systems of accountability, lack of strong civil society organisations and networks that might advocate for change, and the limited resources available for reform efforts in economically vulnerable small island states. The result has been an incremental ‘stop-start’ approach to reform, which is centrally managed and consolidates the power of national government. As argued elsewhere, ‘because local government is valued as an instrument of political ascendancy rather than a tool of democracy, local government reform is a tool of central control’ (Schoburgh 2007: 162).

All this means that ‘success’ in local government reform has to be seen not so much in terms of 100 per cent achievement of the indicators, but rather in whether such reforms remain part of the overarching agenda of government and continue to make progress. The importance of monitoring progress has been highlighted by Jamaica’s NAC, which has recommended the formulation of a new ministry paper to indicate ‘the course of action being pursued and outcomes that are to be achieved’ (Department of Local Government [Jamaica] 2009: 79), noting the time that has elapsed since Ministry Papers 8 of 1993 and 7 of 2003. It has further proposed that the new paper integrate local government reform with other programmes aimed at social transformation (2009: 72).

2.9 New roles, new relationships

The country cases reveal that most central governments in the Commonwealth Caribbean have taken some worthwhile steps towards the goal of democratic decentralisation. This is so especially for those countries designated as *starters*. However, the rate of progress has been uneven with little real advancement of local government systems. Part of what is now required to deepen the process is a new outlook for the triad of actors – central government, local government and the non-governmental sector (profit and not-for-profit) – based on a common understanding of their role in goal attainment. There is no denying that reform policies in the Caribbean have already to some extent narrated new roles and relationships to support modern local government systems, encapsulated in concepts such as *local governance*, *public–private partnerships* and *networks*. But confusion persists in the role of the centre and the relationship between the national and subnational levels.

Democratic decentralisation via the route of local government reform has been a central government project. It is conceptualised and executed as such with little

contribution from the beneficiaries of the reforms or other actors internal to the state. Unarguably the international development community has a stronger presence in these negotiations than local government or other sectors, and as a result the ministries under whose portfolio local government falls have been at the forefront of implementation. This is understandable, especially at the initial stages, but their continued predominance might explain the reason for the difficulty in crossing each reform threshold. Since there is no evidence to suggest that local government itself objects to the content or the direction of proposed reforms, then it makes sense that central ministries of local government should shift their role from *steering* to *enabling* the process of transformation. This would reduce the level of paternalism that presently characterises central–local relations, creating instead a context for local government to leverage support from independent actors such as the private sector. It could also build local problem-solving capacity by virtue of increased potential for self-correction and learning.

A criticism that could be levelled at local authorities is their seeming distance from the reform debate, evidenced by their failure to articulate an authoritative position on the future of local government and to seek and incorporate the views of their citizens. Put simply, local governments in the region must assume a greater share of the responsibility for reform outcomes. Their tendency to focus primarily on limited funding and resources regurgitates policy thinking from a previous era, and fails to present any creative ideas about local government's role as a harbinger of local democracy and agent of development.

Nor does the solution to local government's problems rest purely in constitutional status, though admittedly this would be an important 'value add'. Policy is about argumentation and what gets implemented depends on skills of persuasion and the mobilisation of influence. In order for local government to command central government's respect in the region, the lack of which is at the heart of the issues, local policy officials must play a role in shaping the reform discourse. They can do this by providing an independent interpretation of the problems; by conducting their own *prospective* analysis; and by providing considered feedback on policy strategies and outcomes. Local authorities are the sites of change and are thus endowed with first-hand knowledge of impacts. It is imperative that they become learning organisations, both to bring about better reform outcomes and to ensure their own viability in the long run.

Clearly, new legislation has not fundamentally altered central–local relations characterised by a dominant central government. In fact, both Jamaica's Municipalities Act of 2003 and Trinidad and Tobago's Municipal Corporations Act 1990 and its subsequent amendment have given the respective ministers for local government final veto power in local decisions. A similar arrangement applies in the case of services that local government provides and which fall under the purview of a central government ministry or department. Antigua and Barbuda, even at the stage of contemplating the best institutional fit between the Department of Local Government and decentralised governance and administration, thought it necessary to maintain the status quo by proposing that district councils be in the 'line of

sight' of MPs. It could be construed that central governments are cautious in reform because of the implications that a transformed local government may have for their own operations (Ragoonath 2009).

Possibly the most pressing role change to be wrought is in the dimension of human resources, often blamed for the incapacities that attend local government. While current attempts to build human capacity are commendable, something more fundamental is required. The cue lies in the developmental role of local government, which suggests a shift in orientation of the local policy and administrative executive. Reforms have to be seen as a process of institution building that demands committed and competent leadership. Commitment comes from being vested in the process, and competence not only from education and training but also an appropriate match between skill sets and scope of work.

This highlights the importance of developing a modern human resource strategy in local government in the Caribbean, one which improves on the current practice of recruiting staff via municipal services commissions that are under-resourced and ill-equipped to match local authority needs with managerial skills and competencies. In addition, the benchmarks of professionalism in local government have to keep pace with emerging ideas, such as those of the 'new public management', and with organisational and institutional adjustments presently taking place at the national level. This point is of particular relevance to the position of chief administrative executive, whose professional legitimacy in the past has derived mainly from the ability to deliver local services efficiently and effectively, including advising councils, ensuring continuity in business processes and organisational stability, as well as balancing 'political' and 'public' interests (Nalbandian 1999). While these attributes remain important, the paradigm of *community* to which all local government reform policies in the region subscribe, together with the developmental role of local government, suggest that professional legitimacy must now also be grounded in new tasks, relationships and attitudes at the core of which are individual rights and equity as the basis of empowerment.

Another key challenge for democratic decentralisation resides in the extent to which the profit and not-for-profit sectors in the region are convinced that their involvement would make a significant difference to the state of local affairs. The signs are that neither sector is sufficiently enthralled by the reform programmes; this may be because of what are perceived as negligible results. Civil society groups have advocated for constitutional status for local government, as well as gender equity in local electoral processes, but both issues remain unresolved. Private sector involvement in reform debates has been non-existent, despite some attempts to create a conduit for business input (such as the parish development committees in Jamaica). While civil society organisations may be spurred at intervals to act based on their social conscience and their ability to gain the attention of the international development community, business is less likely to do so without incentives. Just as individuals prefer to associate with successful persons, the same applies to organisations: local authorities have to demonstrate that they can manage their portfolios effectively and efficiently in order to engage the private sector.

Democratic decentralisation relies on critical resources such as high-quality and committed leadership, information, knowledge and skills to improve policy and implementation. Among other things, this suggests that efforts to draw on the resources of civil society and the private sector need to transition from discretionary to mandatory, accompanied by measures to remove the threat of political manipulation (Department of Local Government [Jamaica] 2009). However, even if institutional frameworks are established to involve these sectors in local decision-making, much depends on whether this is seen by the political leadership as a zero-sum game in which their own influence and room to act is reduced. Regrettably, there is a preponderance of evidence to suggest that this is the case.

Finally, a lesson to be taken from the Latin American experience with democratic decentralisation is that perhaps the time has come for the Caribbean to initiate its own 'quiet revolution' by acting independently of the 'advice' of aid agencies and moving ahead energetically with reform plans. Campbell (2003: 8–9) ascribes the success of Latin America to political decisions that ran counter to conventional wisdom:

governments moved quickly, not with slow deliberations as they were advised. They enshrined decentralisation in national constitutions, not in easily modifiable national laws. They transferred revenues to local authorities long before the true costs of delivering services were known and they were soft on spending rules throughout political liberalisation ... Local governments in the region ... invented through trial and error new ways of doing political business.

The Caribbean reality is that much of what is interpreted as 'lack of political will' is actually lack of finances to support reforms, and thus independent thinking comes with its own costs. However, to ensure necessary reforms, Caribbean policy-makers must be prepared to accept responsibility and find the resources required. Given a willingness to experiment and learn from the results, the obstacles to democratic decentralisation might not be so daunting.

2.10 Conclusion

For all intents and purposes the process of democratic decentralisation in the Commonwealth Caribbean has become synonymous with changes to subnational governance, and especially the orientation and activities of local government. Current tendencies towards local government reform originate in the conviction that this level of government is a viable medium through which to craft solutions to societal problems. As a consequence, the democratic and functional values of local government have found expression in policy documents that variously signal both the philosophical bases of reform and strategic directions for implementation.

However, democratic decentralisation involves much more than effective local service delivery or improved citizen participation in decision-making. It is fundamentally about curtailing the power of the centre (government, ministries and departments) to permit the evolution of community empowerment and local self-management. This is the crux of the matter and what is apparently missing from otherwise well-intentioned

policies. The tentative way in which implementation activities have been handled suggests that reformers are hesitant to confront the issue of just how much power to devolve.

When local government reform is attached to the goal of democratic decentralisation, it becomes clear that local power is both conditioned and limited by its institutional setting and that decentralisation is a political process rather than an administrative one. Gaventa's précis is instructive:

new forms of participatory governance create uncertainty about roles and new ways of doing things. For participatory governance to work, old rules of engagement need to be replaced by new ones that outline clearly the processes for inclusion and decision making, and the new roles, rights, and responsibilities of the various parties. Otherwise, old procedures are likely to kick in, even if the process looks more inclusive and participatory (2004: 23).

Democratic decentralisation is a process of negotiation and is thus inextricably linked to the broader political economy: social inequities and power asymmetries are fundamental considerations. The quest for a new order of local governance in the Caribbean requires consistent commitment on all sides, a willingness to experiment with new ways of addressing the challenges and obstacles involved, a stronger effort on the part of local government itself and, ultimately, agreement on significant changes to current roles and relationships.

Notes

- 1 Accounts of the region's local government systems may be found in Commonwealth Local Government Forum (2004, 2009, 2011), Ragoonath (2004), Duncan (2004), Singh (1972) and King (1990).
- 2 Local government reform policies and programmes pertain directly to Trinidad, as Tobago already enjoys a level of devolution facilitated by the *Tobago House of Assembly Act 37 of 1980*.
- 3 A zero-sum game is where citizens gain power while political representatives lose power. In a positive sum game both citizens and political representatives benefit.
- 4 Much of the analysis of fiscal decentralisation is done under the rubric of fiscal federalism. This is covered by a large body of literature, the starting point of which is Tiebout's (1956) model but which has been expanded into a robust debate by, for example, Oates (1972) and Bird and Vaillancourt (1998).
- 5 Dominica Population Census 2001.
- 6 This action was taken by the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), which came to office in 2007 but lost to the People's National Party (PNP) in the 2010 national elections.

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