

Foreword

Principles for Local Government Legislation: Lessons from the Commonwealth Pacific is the fourth title in the Commonwealth Secretariat Local Government Reform Series. This series offers guidance on various aspects of local government reform to public sector policy-makers, senior managers at central and subnational levels, as well as students and researchers in public administration with an interest in local government issues. Each volume distils contemporary thinking and international good practices from around the Commonwealth.

Research is an important component of the Secretariat's governance work. Policy investigations contribute to informed decisions taken by policy-makers. Our policy research in local governance outlines choices for member governments rather than presenting categorical solutions. We also endeavour to provide cutting-edge evidence for the design, implementation and review of public policies that contribute to broader development goals.

The current debate over the type and scope of decentralisation, to a large extent, revolves around country-specific structural and managerial issues. In recent times, decentralisation has seldom been smooth sailing. Local government reforms pose new challenges in governance and public administration. Decentralised local governments often need to perform new and more complex tasks that are sometimes politically sensitive.

This publication addresses developmental issues in the Commonwealth Pacific through analysis of local government laws that form the basis of formal institutions. The Commonwealth Pacific represents all three ethno-geographic groupings – Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. However, there are vast differences between and within countries in terms of socio-economic and political cultures and traditional governance. Across the Pacific, local councils take a variety of different forms, ranging from traditional village structures to fully-fledged municipalities. Whatever form local government takes, however, an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework is essential to ensure that councils can effectively address the needs of their communities. We believe politically informed understanding of the legal basis of grass-roots institutions should lead to a positive developmental change.

Our aim is to strengthen local government reform strategies and processes, so that Commonwealth governments can make more informed policy choices about decentralisation. The Secretariat will continue to support Commonwealth member governments by advancing knowledge of these and other public sector reforms. Though this research in no way is 'prescriptive', we sincerely hope that it will assist the policy community in the Commonwealth Pacific, and beyond, to improve formal

institutions of local governance, and thereby contribute towards consensus-building and a sustainable national vision for development.

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