Talking about the future

Rishi Sunak

by David Fellows

This commentary suggests that the UK Government's new Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, should use this pre-election year to pursue a much-needed process of public engagement embracing honest analysis, realistic objectives and meaningful initial progress focused resolutely on the key issues.

Politicians can spend too much time stabbing at simple solutions to complex problems. This typifies the Opposition's current behaviour resulting in frequent policy reversals or 'clarifications' but they are not alone. PM Sunak has just announced a substantial increase in medical training throughput but has given little analysis of current difficulties demonstrating how this single initiative will make a critical difference to the NHS.

A risky but more beneficial strategy would be to explain how

he truly sees the UK's key problems and opportunities, explaining their origins and his commitment to beneficial change within a realistic timescale. He would be open to engagement on refinement and priorities but he would emphasise his intention to move forward at speed within the limited time at his disposal before the general election. This would demonstrate intent, practicality and, wherever possible, some evidence of initial impact. The latter prospect is particularly valuable as it is an option that is only available to Government. It is conceded that such an approach would be highly demanding and allow some admission of past policy deficiencies.

The benefits would be three-fold. Firstly, Sunak has had limited opportunity to develop a rapport with the country and this would be an arresting start. Secondly, it would employ his key strengths of analysis, practicality, honesty in debate, ability to communicate in depth and he would be seen to credit ordinary people with the intelligence to understand hard issues. Thirdly, the Opposition would be challenged to meet him on his own terms or be seen as shallow and incapable of the grip required to make serious improvements.

Sunak is sufficiently different from both his two immediate predecessors that this more open, practical and carefully reasoned approach could signal the arrival of a new Government capable of making a critical difference at speed. Ideally, he would be joined by a small team of ministers that would share this style of presentation and help develop the thinking on the issues to be presented in this way. A more collegiate style would also signal a welcome robustness of relationships within Government.

I have already set out [my views on the key issues](#): [economic

[growth](#) (with the [Government more ready to accept a pivotal role in levelling-up](#)); green energy; housing and families; the structure, character and management of the civil service; and [NHS reform](#). I accept that I must add immigration in its various forms. But mission creep must be avoided. This must not become the manifesto. It should be far more focused on the things that matter most.

When explaining why we are where we are and what we now need to do to deliver future success it is essential that the context is properly explained to the electorate. To me this breaks down as follows:

1. The need to foster improved economic productivity and growth through innovation, leadership, education and training, leading to good job opportunities, self-sustaining communities in all regions and affordable public services. This includes addressing the UK's current dependency on immigration to provide the necessary additional labour to compensate for the failure to produce sufficient home-grown talent or achieve adequate productivity improvements throughout the economy.
2. The need to reign-in public spending and restore the public-private sector balance of the economy through greater public service efficiency and a much-reduced dependency on regulation. A key requirement of the latter being the creation of clear distinctions between public and personal responsibilities, a challenging task.
3. The relationship between housing availability, family prosperity, general living conditions, birthrate and public service provision.
4. The need to supplement renewable energy with carbon-based fuels for sufficient time to allow for the

discovery and development of viable zero-carbon solutions that current technology is at present unable to provide on an industrial scale. This includes revisiting issues provisionally resolved by bogus zero-carbon solutions. Clearly current carbon emission deadlines must therefore be extended to avoid the economic and social disasters that will otherwise arise from current timescales.

5. The need to identify the extent of NHS failings has already been referred to. In doing this, the dual public-private system that is already an integral part of UK health service provision must be officially acknowledged and developed in a coherent and cost-effective manner.

6. The need to review the nature of the civil service given the dependency of Government on trust between elected and appointed officials. Specifically, to consider the continued validity of the expectation that senior officials will remain personally loyal to all ministers they serve, will advise them dispassionately and will be prepared to action the policies that are then determined by successive politicians. A change of party is the most obvious but not the only issue here.

These complex situations affect highly relevant issues requiring an elevated level of explanation and engagement. Sunak is equipped to rise to these demands.

The core narrative of the next Government could be introduced and developed in some depth from now onwards. The proposed approach carries the promise of a more profound relationship between Government and Country, rejecting hollow sound bites as a route to electoral success.

The five priorities may have been a starting point but the country needs a more substantial vision that does justice to the challenges that lie ahead.

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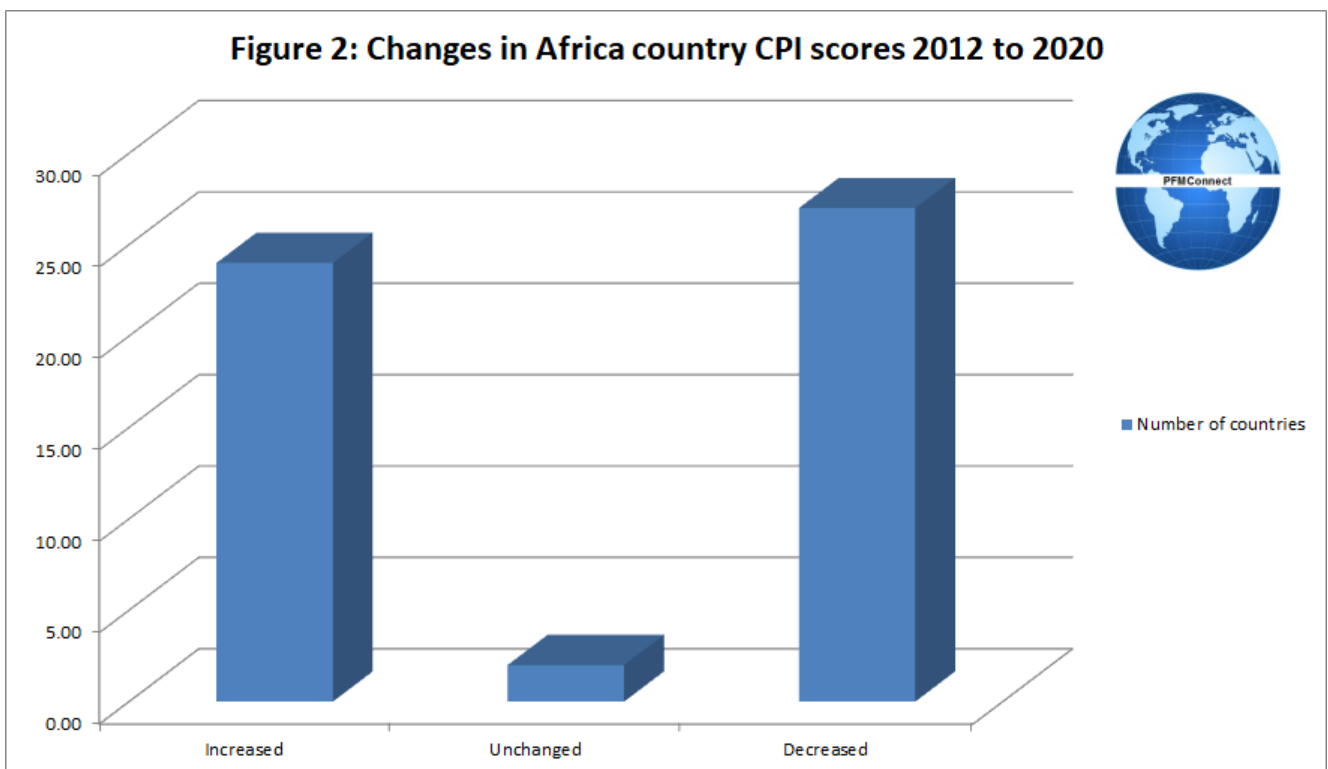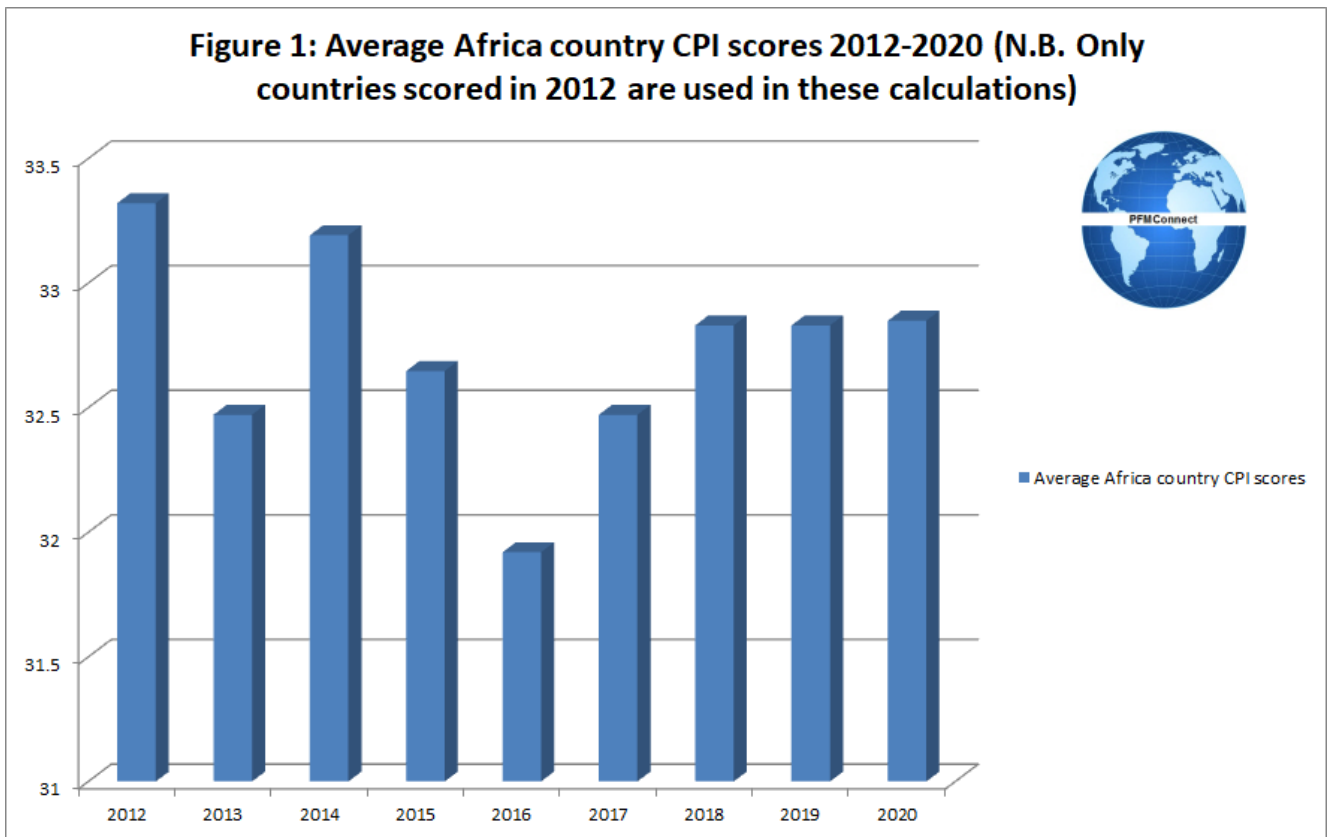
African anti-corruption agencies' digital platform usage

Kenya's Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission

Posted by David Fellows and John Leonardo [1]

The release of TI's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) on 28 January 2021 has focused attention in many countries on current corruption levels. In a recent blog we outlined the possible role social media platforms offer for promoting online public engagement in the war against corruption. We also noted that in Africa there are strong positive correlations between social media user numbers and perceived corruption levels. In this blog we review African anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) digital platform, including social networking sites, usage. Additional regional analyses will be prepared over the next six months.

The 2020 CPI outcomes from an African perspective are

disappointing as demonstrated by the trends revealed in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Average Africa country CPI scores 2012-2020 (N.B. Only countries scored in 2012 are used in these calculations)

Figure 2: Changes in Africa country CPI scores 2012 to 2020

Websites and the social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter, are the digital platforms most frequently employed by African ACAs. Updates on ACA activities, developments affecting ACA operations and formal reports are featured on ACA digital platforms.

The [United Nations Convention Against Corruption](#) includes provisions relating to financial management and public reporting (Articles 9 and 10 — see Appendix). The extent of ACA compliance with these provisions has also been examined in this blog.

1. African ACAs digital platform usage

1.1 Website usage

Details of the use of websites by African ACAs as at mid-January 2021 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: African ACAs use of websites

ACAs	Number
ACAs with stand-alone websites	27
ACAs with webpages included in government websites	3
ACAs without any web presence The Uganda case	24
Total	54

NB. Nigeria has two recognised ACAs with websites; Uganda has two recognised ACAs but only one has a website with the other

using only social media sites. One Nigerian ACA with a website and the Ugandan ACA which only has social media sites are not included in Table 1 or Table 2 below.

Details of the use of websites by African ACAs in countries with relatively higher and lower 2020 CPI scores are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: African ACAs use of websites by 2020 CPI scores

ACAs	Number	Stand-alone websites	Web page on government site	No website
ACAs with higher 2020 CPI scores	27	19	2	6
ACAs with lower 2020 CPI scores	27	9	-	18
Total	54	28	2	24

Data was available for both 2020 CPI scores and 2020 UN E-government scores in 42 countries. There is a strong positive correlation between country 2020 CPI scores and 2020 UN E-government scores for the 23 countries where ACAs have websites (for which data is available); a strong negative correlation was found for the 19 countries without ACA websites.

1.2 Website visit activity

Actual visit numbers to ACA websites in the 2020 December quarter were annualised to provide annual visit estimates which were in turn divided by country internet user numbers to provide an indication of ACA website penetration levels.

The average derived ACA website penetration level for all ACAs was very low at 0.37%. The only favourable scores were recorded by Mauritius (5.9%) and Madagascar (1.9%).

1.3 Social media activity

Social media follower information was analysed for ACAs with Facebook and Twitter pages using data available in mid-January 2021. Details of current Africa ACA social media pages are presented in Table 3. NB The Facebook and Twitter pages of the two Nigerian and Ugandan ACAs are included in the data presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: African ACA social media pages

ACAs	Facebook pages	Twitter pages
ACAs with stand-alone websites	20	15
ACAs with webpages included in government websites	1	0
ACAs without any website	1	1
Total	22	16

1.3.1 Facebook activity

Less than one half of the ACAs have Facebook pages.

While the average Facebook penetration level for ACAs on a country basis (country ACA Facebook followers divided by total country Facebook subscribers) for the 20 countries was relatively modest at 1.06%, there were some notable exceptions.

Four of the six countries showing penetration levels in excess of the Facebook country ACA average of 1.06% also had follower numbers greater than estimated annual visits to their websites; details are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: African ACAs with significant Facebook penetration levels

ACAs	Estimated annual website visits	Website penetration %	Facebook followers	Facebook follower penetration %
Egypt	404,384	0.82%	630,827	1.49%
Nigeria (2 ACAs)	351,944	0.28%	576,137	2.12%
Seychelles	300	0.42%	850	1.20%
Tunisia	28,920	0.37%	106,104	1.43%

1.3.2 Twitter activity

The number of ACAs with Twitter pages is modest.

The average Twitter penetration level for ACAs on a country basis (country ACA Twitter followers divided by total country Twitter subscribers) for the 14 countries was, however, very high at 23.73%. Twitter country ACA penetration levels exceeded Twitter internet user penetration levels in six countries (Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe).

Two of the countries recording above average country ACA Twitter penetration levels also had Twitter follower numbers that exceeded estimated annual visits to their websites; details are provided in Table 5.

While the majority of visits to the Nigeria and Zimbabwe ACA

websites were made by local residents, the local resident proportion of Twitter followers for these ACAs is not known but it is assumed to be significant.

Table 5: ACAs with significant follower numbers

ACAs	Estimated annual website visits	Facebook followers	Twitter followers	Twitter follower penetration %	Twitter internet user penetration %
Nigeria (2 ACAs)	351,944	576,137	1,172,400	59.82%	1.55%
Zimbabwe	260	0.42%	48,500	28.78%	2.01%

2. Reporting activity

The availability of the following categories of key reports on ACA websites or on web pages of national government websites was examined:

- National Anti-Corruption Strategies

- ACA strategic plans

- ACA annual reports

Details of the availability of the above reports on ACA websites are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Availability of reports on ACA websites

	National anti-corruption strategy	ACA annual report	ACA strategic plan
Available on ACA website	8	14	8
Available on another national non-ACA website	3	0	0
Exists but not available on any website	6	0	0
Being prepared	6	0	0
Not prepared	7	16	22
Total	**30**	**30**	**30**

N.B. One Nigerian ACA with a website and the Ugandan ACA which only has social media sites are not included in Table 6.

Coverage of ACA digital platform activity in the above-mentioned reports, particularly those relating to social media, was also examined.

2.1 Publication of national anti-corruption strategies

Less than one-third of African ACAs with websites have published their respective national anti-corruption strategy on their website.

While the role of the media in national anti-corruption strategies is addressed in the eleven national anti-corruption strategies reviewed when preparing this blog, references to the role of social media are limited. Egypt's National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2019-2024), Namibia's National Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan (2016-2019) and Sierra Leone's National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2019-2023) make

mention of social media activity,

The Namibia and Sierra Leone strategies outlined particular roles for social media activities.

Morocco's ACA published a study in 2019 that assisted its preparation of a supporting communication strategy for its National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2015-2025). This study listed social media as one of the key success factors; viz. "The body must open up on social media and have "an online platform or space", which it must maintain and control in order to get closer to its target segments and to be responsive".

2.2 Publication of ACA annual reports

Only 14 of the 30 African ACAs identified in Table 6 have recently published their annual reports (or de facto annual reports) on their websites. Specific reference to the use of social media was made in 8 ACA annual reports.

The Ghana ACA noted in its 2018 annual report the use of social media by the Ghana chapter of Transparency International. The Kenya ACA provided statistics about website hits and social media followers in its 2018 annual report. In its 2017 annual report the Mauritius ACA gave a detailed discussion about its social media activity including its approach for using Facebook.

The executive summary for the Morocco ACA's 2019 annual report noted that the ACA had to address its social media strategy in

the course of developing its overall communication strategy.

Brief references to the use of social media were made in the Namibia (2019), Rwanda (2019), Sierra Leone (2019) and South Africa (2020) ACA annual reports.

2.3 Publication of ACA strategic plans

The modest number of ACA strategic plans that have been prepared recently is very surprising.

Five of the ACA strategic plans include specific references to the use of social media (Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Togo).

Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda ACAs set out specific strategies and performance indicators for social media in their strategic plans. The Sierra Leone ACA set out specific strategies and progress markers while the Togo ACA set out details of the proposed launch of its website.

2.4 Overview of ACA online reporting activity

Assuming it is appropriate for all ACAs (including both Nigerian and Ugandan ACAs) to publish country anti-corruption strategies and their annual reports and strategic plans on their websites, the number of these documents that may be potentially published stands at 96 documents. Only 30 documents were published on ACA websites. This outcome falls short of the standards envisaged in the United Nations

Convention against Corruption.

3. Social media performance and document publication correlations

ACA Facebook and Twitter subscriber penetration levels are weakly related to the number of ACA National Anti-Corruption Strategy, strategic plan and annual report publications placed on ACA websites.

While ACAs with relatively high Facebook and Twitter subscriber penetration levels have not generally been relatively energetic publishers of the above-mentioned reports, their social media posting activity has been sufficiently active to attract significant numbers of followers; this is most evident in the case of Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

ACA Facebook and Twitter subscriber penetration levels have, with a few exceptions, often substantially exceeded ACA website penetration levels.

4. Conclusion

The survey demonstrates a very limited level of publication on ACA websites of ACA reports in the three key categories identified in section 2.

It could add credibility to ACA professionalism and integrity to publish these reports even if some of the more sensitive detail concerning methodology and programming was omitted.

While ACA websites offer potential public engagement opportunities, social media activity has the potential for even higher engagement levels. It should be borne in mind that social media use in Africa, while a relatively recent phenomenon, is rapidly becoming extremely popular. The analysis demonstrates that while overall ACA use of social media is relatively limited, some ACAs have made considerable progress, particularly with the use of Twitter.

Those ACAs with websites but who currently do not have Facebook or Twitter pages should certainly consider these social networking sites as a means to gaining public confidence in anti-corruption activities and their cooperation in combatting anti-corruption investigations.

Appendix: United Nations Convention Against Corruption

Financial management and public reporting provisions

Article 9

Public procurement and management of public finances

2. Each State Party shall, in accordance with the fundamental principles of its legal system, take appropriate measures to promote transparency and accountability in the management of public finances. Such measures shall encompass, inter alia:

(a) Procedures for the adoption of the national budget;

(b) Timely reporting on revenue and expenditure;

(c) A system of accounting and auditing standards and related oversight;

(d) Effective and efficient systems of risk management and internal control; and

(e) Where appropriate, corrective action in the case of failure to comply with the requirements established in this paragraph.

Article 10

Public reporting

Taking into account the need to combat corruption, each State Party shall, in accordance with the fundamental principles of its domestic law, take such measures as may be necessary to enhance transparency in its public administration, including with regard to its organization, functioning and decision-making processes, where appropriate. Such measures may

include, inter alia:

(a) Adopting procedures or regulations allowing members of the general public to obtain, where appropriate, information on the organization, functioning and decision-making processes of its public administration and, with due regard for the protection of privacy and personal data, on decisions and legal acts that concern members of the public;

(b) Simplifying administrative procedures, where appropriate, in order to facilitate public access to the competent decision-making authorities; and

(c) Publishing information, which may include periodic reports on the risks of corruption in its public administration.

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Policy Frameworks and Municipal Effectiveness

By David Fellows [1]

Introduction

Local governments, referred to here as 'municipalities', tend to be smaller scale, face less complex challenges, and have less diversity amongst stakeholders when compared to national governments. This relative simplicity should be regarded as their defining strength. It eases the path to identifying their core mission and prioritising service developments within resource constraints and national mandates.

A common problem with capitalising on this strength is that municipal strategic policy agendas are often asserted without sufficient regard to their consistent articulation, internal coherence or supporting administrative sub-structure. It is the author's contention that without these attributes municipal leadership will always lack clarity of direction; delivery competence; and full hearted community support. In addition, the media will have grounds for scepticism and its criticisms will probably intensify over time.

This piece outlines the elements of an effective municipal policy framework and the need for its periodic review and realignment.

The Policy Framework

The fundamental elements and principles of the policy framework are outlined below:

1. Policy objectives should be set at a long-term level with more detailed expression at shorter timescales. This policy cascade must be consistent. The policy cascade must be achievable in a practical sense and there must be sound and clearly expressed reasons to expect the necessary resources (finance, skills and materials) to be available in the timescale envisaged by the policy objective.
2. Operational changes must be supported by realistic development plans and external expert support should be sought to help develop internal capacity where necessary.
3. There should be a medium term budget reflecting the

stated policy system over a minimum 3 year policy timescale. All budgets should contain both revenue and capital provision that should be consistent between the two, realistically achievable. Where policies are changed the budget must change accordingly.

4. No spending commitment must be made until budget provision has been allocated as a priority above all competing demands that would otherwise make funding untenable.

5. Service delivery arrangements and underpinning administrative processes must be set out clearly and there must be adequate training plans to achieve the intended outcomes.

6. The budgetary control must be exercised to ensure that expenditure and revenues are consistent with the budget and where this is not achievable then modifications to policy, practice and budget must be made appropriately. The overall responsibility for containing spending within budget must be imposed on departmental heads without the option of delegation to a lower level.

7. Benefits realisation strategies for new developments must be used to guide successful outcomes and risk management strategies used to anticipate and mitigate possible challenges.

8. Civil servants must have performance contracts for achieving service outputs and outcomes within budget.

9. There must be public engagement in the development process and transparency about its outcomes.

10. The logical chain of policy, delivery practice, supporting administrative processes, development plans and budgetary provision must be understood by politicians and administrators at all levels.

This type of policy framework could be said to be applicable to anywhere within to anywhere within the public service but in municipalities it is more tangible in terms of proximity

between the administration and the community as a whole, more easily comprehended as a working system that encompasses the entire municipality and more capable of being used by the political leadership as an envisioning and executive tool. This sentiment was echoed by Mr Armand Beouinde, Mayor of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso at the [UN-Habitat Conference in Marrakesh](#) last November.

Review

Periodic reviews of the policy framework offer an opportunity to improve coherence and effectiveness. They can also lead to a better understanding of municipal capacity and critical areas of weakness that must be addressed if ambitions are to be fully realised. It may be useful for such reviews to be undertaken independently and shared with the community for comment prior to finalisation.

Conclusion

Municipalities are well placed to make crucial contributions to community well-being and development. Better governance based on coherent policy frameworks and sound development plans can help them deliver on their potential. In the author's view development partners can be too keen to rush developing countries into adopting practices that are unsustainable before the necessary organisational capacity has been achieved.

End note

We should be pleased to discuss the ideas in this piece with those who believe that they may have relevance to their situation.

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[1] *David Fellows began his career in UK local government where he became President of the Society of Municipal Treasurers and a pioneer of digital government, he followed this with stints in the UK Cabinet Office and the National Treasury of South Africa. He is a director of PFMConnect.*