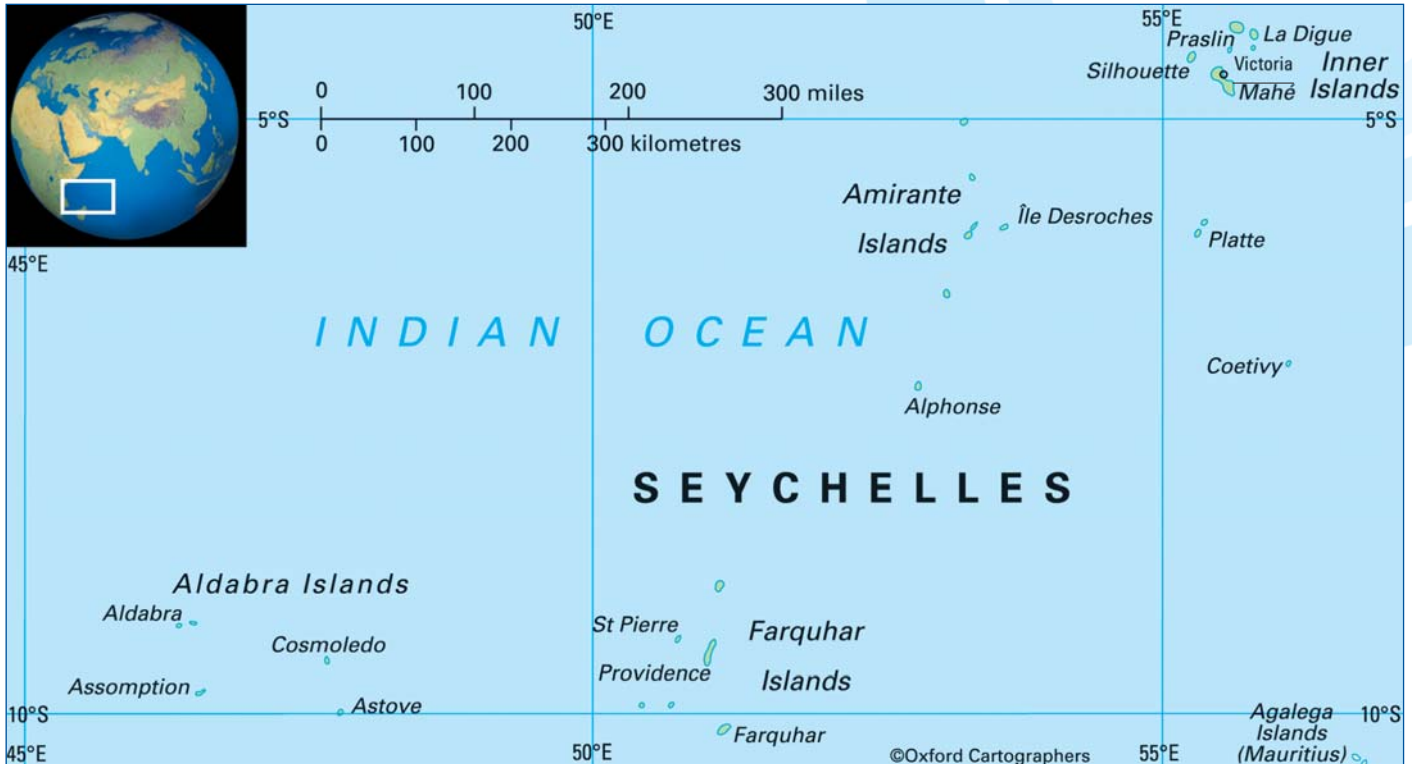




The local government system in Seychelles



1 INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Seychelles is an archipelago of 115 islands situated in the western Indian Ocean to the north of Madagascar, with a land area of 455 sq km spread over a maritime zone of over 1.3 million sq km. Seychelles has a population of 81,541.

Mahé, with a land area of 144 sq km, is the largest and most important of the three main islands, the others being Praslin and La Digue. Most Seychellois (88 per cent) live on Mahé, seven per cent live on the 39.8 sq km Praslin, three per cent the on 14.6 sq km La Digue and the remaining two per cent on the other islands.

Voted in by direct suffrage for a five-year term, the president is the executive head of both the state and the government, as well as the commander-in-chief of defence forces. The president appoints a cabinet of ministers, who must not be legislators, with the approval of the unicameral parliament. The president has the power to dismiss them after the legislature 'has passed a vote of censure' as 'approved by...not less than two-thirds of the number of its members...'¹

The unicameral parliament, called the National Assembly since 1993, is the legislative body and is composed of 25

members elected using the first-past-the-post system, and up to 10 additional seats allocated proportionately. Each participating party is entitled to one seat in the legislature for every 10 per cent of the votes it has scored. Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), elected directly or indirectly, hold office for five years.

Victoria, in Mahé, is the capital and has a population of 23,000.

There are 25 districts which serve both as constituencies for both legislative and presidential elections and as the geographical units for local administration, or local government areas.

2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE SEYCHELLES

In 1756, the French settled the then uninhabited Seychelles. From 1814 it was under British rule and administered from Mauritius until 1903. Seychelles became an independent republic in 1976.

James Mancham, leader of the Seychelles Democratic Party (SDP) was elected as the first president in 1974. Albert France René, a member of the socialist Seychelles People's United Party (SPUP), became prime minister of

the coalition government.

Following an armed coup in 1977, René was installed as the new president. The SPUP was restyled Seychelles People Progressive Front (SPPF) in 1978 and was the only legal political party from 1977 to 1992. A one-party regime was entrenched in the 1979 Constitution of the Second Republic and René, the only candidate, was elected president again.

In late 1991, legislation was enacted to restore a multi-party system. The 1993 Constitution of the Third Republic which, as subsequently amended, is still in force, allowed multi-party elections to take place. In the elections of 1993 and 1998, René was re-elected president and the SPPF was returned with an overwhelming majority.

In 2001 the presidential elections were held separately, for the first time, from the legislative contest. René won again, gaining 54.19 per cent of the 50,238 valid votes cast. In April 2004, René resigned and James Alix Michel, the then vice-president, was appointed president for the remainder of the presidential term until July 2006. At the July 2006 elections Michel was re-elected with with 54 per cent of the vote.

In the 2002 general election, voter turnout was 83.5 per cent. The SPPF, which won 54.3 per cent of the vote, won 18 seats plus five additional seats according to the proportional scheme. With 42.6 per cent of the votes, the SNP won seven seats directly and four more seats according to proportional representation. Winning only 3.1% of votes, the SDP did not gain any seats, nor did the Social Democratic Alliance (SDA) which won a negligible number of votes.

2.1 Position of local government in the state

Since the turn of the century, government policy has been to create better governance, as outlined in 'Partnership Beyond 2000 – A statement of the SPPF Vision, Policy and Strategy', which says that public service 'must be made of men and women who possess a high degree of professionalism, integrity and an ability to assist the country's leadership to set standards in the management of human and material resources in order to achieve effective good government'.²

Seychelles central government is increasingly delegating responsibilities to the 25 appointed district administrations to bring public services closer to the people, encourage citizen participation, promote national unity and foster community spirit.

The elected local authorities were abolished in 1993 and replaced by nominated ones. This came about with the result that the opposition in the Constitutional Commission objected to the motion of local elected leaders as per the Local Government Act 1991. Since 1993, the Minister of Local Government has set the political orientation of these appointed district authorities. The minister performs his or her functions 'under the direction of the President'.³

Local administration is essentially non-political. State-appointed, it also operates under the control of a government ministry set up in 1991 when it was responsible for local government, youth and sports. Since 2002 the ministry has been entrusted with local government, culture, youth and sports until 2006 when it became the Ministry of Community Development and Youth.

The principal secretary, the ministerial chief executive officer, ensures the planning, and the implementation, of all central government projects at the grass roots and executes central government's other decisions relating to the districts.

Besides identifying projects and problems, the district administration helps deliver public services and facilities at the grass roots and carries out various community activities. The Community Development Department of the Ministry provides general leisure, recreational,

health and social services through the local administration. The local authorities help citizens not only to take advantage of state services and facilities, but also to take part in public affairs in the districts. They implement programmes concerning senior citizens, neighbourhood recreation, the disabled, voluntarism, local initiative awards, community leaders' training, cultural development, the running of community centres and inter-agency activities.

Administrators are appointed by the government to lead local authorities and serve for a two-year renewable contract. They are responsible to the principal secretary of the Ministry of Local Government, Culture and Sports. All 25 district administrators, of whom many were members, if not chairpersons, of the former district councils in 1991-1993, have been close to the ruling SPPF.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Constitutional provisions

The constitution empowers the government to set up local administration as it deems fit. It is stipulated under Section 167(1), that 'a law may for the purpose of facilitating the administrative functions of the State in respect of its social and economic undertakings contained in Chapter III, provide for the division of Seychelles into such number of units which shall bear such name as the law may specify'.

3.2 Main legislative texts

Ordinance No. 23 of 1948 first provided, during the colonial period, for local government. Reference was made to district councils in Volume III, Cap.131, of the Laws of Seychelles 1952 with subsequent amendments through Ordinance No. 11 of 1960. In 1968, certain sections of the District Councils Ordinance were amended or repealed.

On 27 September 1991, the People's Assembly, as the legislature was then called, adopted the Local Government Act 1991 which specified the registration and regulation of the activities of political parties.

On 22 December 1993, the legislature, which had by then become the National Assembly, voted for the dissolution of the district councils, clearing the way for their replacement by a new system.

The current constitution, adopted in 1993, allows for local administration. However, there is no relevant legislation to enact this. The Public Service Orders regulate the functioning of state administrative officers posted in the district administration. The Financial Management Regulations govern non-administrative transactions.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Main divisions

A local administration runs each district under the supervision of the principal secretary of the Ministry of Local Government, Culture and Sports.

The level of development reached, as regards amenities and infrastructure, differs in the 25 districts.

4.2 Distribution of local governments and populations

The average population of a district is 3,250. The district of La Digue which forms part of the Inner Islands, with a population of 2,100, is the smallest in the archipelago. With 4,270 inhabitants, Anse Etoile is the most populated district on Mahé, and Port Glaud, with a population of 2,170, is the least populated single district. Two-thirds, 65 per cent, of Seychellois live in urban areas.

The two districts of English River and Saint Louis are in the heart of the capital, Victoria. Six other sub-urban districts are also within the capital: Bel Air; Mont Buxton; Mont Fleuri; Les Mamelles; Plaisance and Roche Caïman.

5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

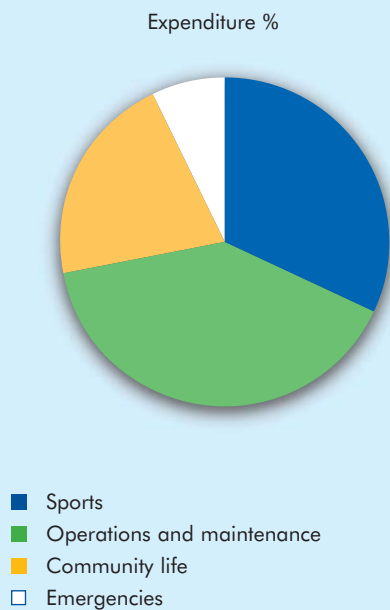
5.1 District council structures

The Local Government Act 1991 provided for an elected council in each of the then 23 districts. The chairperson, a full-timer, and five part-time councillors were returned for four years. The chairperson was both a legislator and the executive head of the district council.

As the local authority is appointed rather than elected, there is no ward system.

Since 1999, the Minister of Local Government has appointed the 12 members of each district community council for a two-year term. The councils, which meet every two months, are advisory and function under the aegis of the Ministry of Local Government. The appointed district administrator convenes and chairs its meetings and supervises its operations. The local MNA sits, in principle, on the council. The other council members represent government and voluntary organisations or agencies providing services to the local community. Local residents known for their interest, experience, or contribution can also be appointed as members. This consultative body allows networking by all the stakeholders, offers opportunities to the residents to promote community spirit and encourages self-help. It also develops partnership with the private-sector and non-government bodies.

Figure 1. The financial structure of local government in Mont Fleuri



Women are well represented as leaders of local administrations; 13 of the 25 district administrators are women. The mayor of the capital city, Victoria, is a woman.

5.2 Local government staffing

The district administrator, who heads the paid service, recruits staff subject to approval by the Ministry of Community Development and Youth.

The staff generally consists of three officers and general workers. The officers include an assistant administrative officer, a secretary and a works supervisor.

The workers comprise two night security guards a day security guard, a community hall attendant, a cleaner and a handyman. In addition to this, 10 to 15 labourers are employed under the unemployment relief scheme, forming part of the beautification team posted in each district.

Disciplinary power rests with the district administrator acting under delegated powers, in compliance with the Public Service Orders.

5.3 Independent scrutiny

The internal auditor of the Ministry of Local Government, Culture and Sports and the auditor from the Ministry of Finance examine the accounts of the district administration. The Auditor General, holder of a constitutional post, also checks the accounts.

The Ombudsman may intervene to investigate complaints relating to such transactions.

6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

The district administration has no statutory or discretionary powers. Central government or

parastatals provide almost all the services and facilities, and the various forms of infrastructure, at the grass roots.

7 FINANCE

7.1 Revenue

The Ministry of Community Development and Youth pays a sum in advance every quarter to each local administration.

Taxes and other user fees are paid to the central government. They include the trade tax, the goods service tax, and licence fees. There is no property or land tax. Property rates were abolished in Seychelles in 1977.

There are also small amounts raised in other fees and income. For example, in 2003, the district administration of Mont Fleuri (catering for 3,600 inhabitants) received Seychelles Rupees (SR) 107,814 from the rental of the daycare centre and chairs. This was in addition to the amount for salaries paid directly by the Ministry. In the other larger districts, such direct income also comes from the rental of social centres and market proceeds.

7.2 Revenue-sharing

Central government pays officers' salaries, the wages of employees in the establishments run by the local administration, and the wages of the labourers working under the unemployment relief scheme.

7.3 Expenditure

Budgets for local administrations are set by the central government.

In 2003, the district administration of Mont Fleuri spent a total of SR158,900 (US\$28,000). This comprised:

1. Operations and maintenance	40%
2. Sports	32%
3. Community life	21%
4. Emergencies	7%

The Community Development Department of the Ministry spent a total of SR43,585,000 (US\$7.8m) in 2002.⁴

8 ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

There is no national organisation for the local authorities.

However, in 1994 the Association of the Districts of Victoria was set up. Registered under the Registration of Associations Act 1959 as subsequently amended, its chairperson was granted the status of mayor in 1997. Since 2003, the Local Government Minister appoints the mayor with the cabinet's approval for five years. (Previously, on behalf of its districts and

forming part of the Association, the MNAs of Victoria elected the chairperson.) Receiving financial aid from the government and other sources, the Association assists local authorities in their socio-economic, sports and cultural activities. The Mayor of Victoria represents the capital of Seychelles both nationally and internationally.

Only legislators and representatives of the districts of Victoria are admitted to the Association. The executive committee consists of the mayor, a secretary and a treasurer. The latter two office-bearers are elected for one year at its annual general assembly. Chairing the Association, the mayor is also its executive head and spokesperson. A 12-member consultative body, whose members represent the various segments of the capital's society, is appointed by the mayor for five years to help her execute the projects in Victoria.

The Association is a member of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the Association of Francophone Mayors.

9 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

District administration offices operate with the close collaboration of the ruling party's officials and committees.

Founded in 1994, the U-First (Tourism) Committee is a formal structure chaired by a representative of the Seychelles Hotels and Tourism Association. This comprises one district administrator serving on behalf of the Department of Community Development, and other members representing the remaining ministries, the rest of the public administration and private business. This is an important committee as tourism is the country's economic mainstay, providing about 30 per cent of employment and more than 70 per cent of hard-currency earnings.⁵

10 E-GOVERNMENT

About five years ago, the introduction of e-government was officially announced. A local private company was awarded the contract to develop and set up a system linking all the government ministries and agencies. However, there has not yet been much progress towards achieving this.

Being within a government ministry, district administration centres form an integral part of the central electronic project.

In 2005, there were 20,000 internet users in Seychelles, representing 24.5 per cent of the archipelago's population.⁶

11 ENVISAGED REFORMS

Though local government is appointed in the Seychelles, nevertheless it is looking to develop strong partnerships and sustainable

programmes. A discussion paper, '10 Years of Local Government in Seychelles – a Decade of Community Participation in Development', was published in April 2004. In it, the then Local Government Minister appealed for 'the ideal environment for the fostering of harmony, fraternity and neighbourliness'. It outlines the need 'to sustain the development process through a strong partnership between the local communities, NGOs and other agencies to collaborate in implementing sustainable community development programmes'.⁷

The document concludes that: 'During the last decade, the case for local government as the decisive role player in securing peaceful, fair and sustainable development with the participation of a multi-sectoral team has been proven. There is no doubt that a high degree of social cohesion has been realised and new opportunities for service delivery have been explored. Our new challenge now lies in taking advantage of these opportunities in partnership with our stakeholders to deliver these services at an even higher level.'⁸

12 MISCELLANEOUS

Each district has a district social committee, separate from the district community council, to help identify local issues and needs. Chaired by the district administrator, it comprises representatives of the sports club, senior citizens, young people and the neighbourhood recreational support committees. The other representatives are from the emergency services, cultural development, environment and beautification, community centre and disabled support groups. Educational and social activities are held in the community halls of the district authorities.

13 SUMMARY

Seychelles covers a relatively small land area and small population. Local government in the Seychelles is currently appointed rather than elected, and operates through 25 district administrations to provide grass-roots services and facilities. It is almost entirely financed by the central government.

Though local government in Seychelles is appointed, nevertheless it brings in many groups, with some form of democratic consultation and participation.

References

- 1 Sections 73–74, Constitution of Seychelles (Third Republic), 1993
- 2 Seychelles NATION, 3 December 1991
- 3 Section 70 (4), Constitution of Seychelles (Third Republic), 1993
- 4 Report of the Management and

Information Systems Division, Ministry of Information and Technology, Republic of Seychelles, 2003

5 CIA World Factbook 2006

6 Ibid.

7 '10 Years of Local Government in Seychelles – a Decade of Community Participation in Development', 2004, p.6.