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Towards Global Local Governance Development Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

In parts of the world, a relatively strong system of democratic local self-government has been a feature of the political system since the late early 20th century, though full universal suffrage often took many years of struggle to achieve. Elsewhere, however, systems of government were often highly centralized, with little local autonomy even for large conurbations. But over the last 65 years, decentralisation policies have become the norm, even if the systems of democracy and local self-government vary. The trend has indeed been global, and covers countries with widely different Grass Domestic Product (GDPs). Today, in consequence, almost all Latin American and African countries, and many Asian countries, have systems of elected local government, and the new post-1989 democracies of central and eastern Europe all shaped systems of local democracy. The Council of Europe's adoption in 1986 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government gave formal international expression to this trend for the first time, and many of the Charter's principles are also included in the Guidelines on Decentralisation and Strengthening of Local Authorities.

Keywords: Democracy; Decentralisation; Principles; Suffrage; Strength.

Introduction

In parts of the world, a relatively strong system of democratic local self-government has been a feature of the political system since the late early 20th century, though full universal suffrage often took many years of struggle to achieve. Elsewhere, however, systems of government were often highly centralized, with little local autonomy even for large conurbations. But over the last 65 years, decentralisation policies have become the norm, even if the systems of democracy and local self-government vary. The trend has indeed been global, and covers countries with widely divergent GDPs. Today, in consequence, almost all Latin American and African countries, and many Asian countries, have systems of elected local government, and the new post-1989 democracies of central and eastern

Europe all created systems of local

democracy. In reality, central governments often fail to decentralise in a good way, either because of lack of will, or internal conflicts within government, or due to poor policy formation and implementation and almost always, too, because there is a mismatch between competences transferred, and the resources available and devolved to carry them out. The last two conditions – capacity development and local governance/ inclusion– are largely the responsibility of local governments themselves. But these are often immensely difficult things to achieve, either because of the inadequate or incomplete process of decentralisation, or because there is simply a lack of human and technical capacity at local level, to develop the required new systems of government, administration, and governance. It is here that our

partnerships and cooperation for development can play a crucial role in helping to achieve successful decentralisation and local development.

Participation and Partnership

One of the key reasons to decentralise, and to establish local democracy and self- government, is to enable decisions to be made at the level closest to the citizen, and with the involvement of local people. Through their public participation systems, local governments enable citizens to take part in open and transparent processes to identify local priorities (e.g. strategic planning, development, service delivery, budget allocations etc.). Local governments need also to have well-formed Policies and systems of inclusion, to ensure that all sections of the community are able to take part, and that it is not just the voices of the better-off and more articulate that are taken into account. In these ways, local governments enable citizens to exercise what has been called "the right to the city." In addition, a framework of strong public involvement in local governance has the additional value of making public institutions more responsive and accountable, and strengthens the overall system of democratic governance of the country. Local governments also play a key role in bringing all the local players together, including civil society, the business sector, and other institutions of the public sector, to drive the local development process, and to promote greater prosperity, social justice and inclusion.

Good Local Leadership and Governance

Whether we live in urban or rural settlements, we need good local government, playing its various roles positively. But dense and growing urban communities have a more direct and day-to-day need for and reliance on the services, infrastructure, planning and relevant regulation provided by the urban government. It is therefore no chance that the global trend to decentralisation also corresponds to the double demographic change – a rapidly increasing global population, estimated to have reached 7 billion in 2011, and an even more rapid increase in urbanization. It is important to emphasize that the world's rural population will also continue to grow until around 2020, and that even by 2050, it will still be around 2.8 billion. Rural communities and local authorities will continue to face their own set of challenges, not least the high levels of rural poverty and disadvantage, often accompanied by depopulation. Therefore, getting good quality local rural governance, development

and service delivery will continue to be extremely important. The processes of urbanisation have profound consequences also for rural regions, with which they are economically and socially inter-connected. Some 90% of the projected urban growth is due to take place in lower income countries, so it is no exaggeration to say that if we are to achieve a successful and sustainable development globally, the key to this success will lie in the world's cities and towns, especially in "the south", where the problems and opportunities are the greatest. Faced with this huge urban growth, the issue of housing for low income families, including slum upgrading and avoidance, will climb up the global political agenda.

Catalyst Local Development

Implicit in all of the above issues is the fact that local governments are vital leaders, catalysts and agents of sustainable and integrated economic and human development– including the social, environmental and cultural dimensions. The quotation from Agenda 21 at the top of this section recalls that local governments have for decades now seen their development role in this broad vision of local and global sustainability a vision reinforced in 2012, at and through Rio+20. As a key part of this 'development' role, local governments need of course to ensure a good climate and the right conditions for good quality, long-term investment – both private and public. Investors, local or international, require security of property rights, and thus effective land registers, cadastral administration and urban development plans. Physical infrastructure (roads, water, waste water treatment, electricity and internet access) must be provided, whilst good means of transport also influence the local economic climate. The local government must also have effective policies and practices on the environment, public health, business licences, local taxes and many other issues, to stimulate investment and economic activity. But the local development role also requires full attention to the *social* as well as physical and economic 'infrastructure', including an effective system of inclusive policy-making and planning, and the provision of essential public services for citizens, in particular for the most deprived. Waste management, water, sanitation, social housing, transport, primary education and healthcare, for example, are mainly or often local government services which greatly affect the quality of life of the poorest sections of the community – and help meet the international development targets at local level. As Kofi Annan, then Secretary General of the UN expressed it to a UCLG mayors' delegation in 2005:

"How can we expect to reach the MDGs, and advance on the wider development agenda, without making progress in areas such as education, hunger, health, water, sanitation and gender equality? Cities and local authorities have a critical role to play in all of these areas. While our Goals are global, they can most effectively be achieved through action at local level."

This catalyst role involves what may be called "territorial coalitions" of all the key local actors – the private sector, universities and educational establishments, local civil society, and many more. It is the democratic local government which is best placed to unlock the potential of this coalition. The LG development role is sometimes made explicit, for example in South Africa's Constitution, which requires municipalities to give priority to the basic needs of the community, to promote the economic and social development of the community, and to participate in national and provincial Development programmes or take Peru's constitution which provides (Article 188) "Decentralization is a continuing process whose purpose is the overall development of the country." In sum, it is the development role – sustainable, inclusive, democratic, and integrative - which is at the heart of every local government's mandate. This developmental role, we should note, transcends the purely local; in issues such climate change, air quality, management of water resources, or risk prevention, local governments play – and must increasingly play - their part in defence of our common 'global public goods'.

The Prospect of Policy and Practice

Local governments have worked together in partnerships and twinning's for over 60 years. After the Second World War, European towns and cities established thousands of twinning's, which aimed mainly at inter-cultural dialogue, promotion of peace and mutual understanding, and the construction of a united Europe. Some east-west links were created across the then 'iron curtain', between cities living under very different political systems, and many more were built once the Berlin Wall fell. From the 1950s, the USA Sister Cities International movement also sprang up, with community-to-community links between US and (at the outset mainly) Asian and European partners. The relationship of European and North American cities and municipalities with Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East is also long-standing, and diverse in origin and content. Historic, linguistic and cultural links are often at the origin of these partnerships,

many of which represent the commitment (after independence) to work together for a better postcolonial future. In more recent times, these links may often be created, or maintained, due to the presence in the 'northern' city of an important migrant population from the partner country. Another motivation was that of solidarity, after civil wars, natural disasters, liberation struggles or political persecution, in relation to countries as diverse as Lebanon, Nicaragua or post-apartheid South Africa. At least since the 1980s, and with greater density in more recent years, there has been a strong growth in the numbers of partnerships between 'northern' local governments and 'southern' partners working specifically on cooperation for development. As the international community focused increasingly on the need to assist citizens in low income countries, e.g. via the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and as local citizens in the 'north' showed more support for international development, their local governments increasingly reflected this engagement to make a contribution to tackling the injustices and worst inequalities of our world. Today, many 'northern' local governments' links, for example with partners in China or India, have a principal economic motivation, reflecting a wish by the partner to be connected to a rapidly developing country, with future business potential, and reflect a "positioning" in a more globalised world. At the same time, such partnerships often include development issues, e.g. helping to tackle practical problems like water quality or environmental problems. With the rise of the Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICs) and other emerging economies, anticipate that the role of local governments from middle income countries in partnerships for development will continue to grow in number and importance. The role of local government associations (LGAs) as development partners and organisers has also developed over the decades, notably with the development of the ACB concept – Association Capacity-Building, with peer-to-peer working between LGAs to strengthen their institutional development. LGAs in the 'north' may also play a role in coordinating programmes for and inputs by their member authorities, whilst LGAs in the 'south' are increasingly tasked to transmit information and learning from programmes to their wider membership. In a few cases (e.g. Canada, The Netherlands, Sweden), LGAs have set up daughter companies to perform some of these specialised roles, and to enhance professionalism in development work; in other countries, such as France the local governments have set up a separate dedicated association for international cooperation.

The Diversity of Local Governments Cooperation

Local governments worldwide are involved in a wide range of forms of cooperation and partnership, and for a wide range of motives and purposes. While, some forms of partnership and cooperation are focused on the local governments themselves, e.g. where the primary purpose is peer-to-peer working and learning, others set out to mobilise the widest range of actors (stakeholders civil society and NGO's) to play their role in territorial development, with the local governments acting as mobilises and coordinators. Twinning's where the main purpose is to promote peace, mutual understanding between peoples, and/or cultural dialogue.

Partnerships for mutual learning and capacity-building on LG management, or on different thematic issues, where the local government's own internal capacity is the main focus: Partnerships which focus mainly externally, on local development Strategy and partnerships, usually mobilising partnerships with other sectors and stakeholders Partnerships between LGs where an economic motive (business, trade, investment) is a main driver Partnerships between LGs to work on global issues such as the impact of climate change.

Association Capacity Building (ACB) partnerships between Local Government Associations, usually aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity of LGAs in lower income countries, thus enabling them to better respond to the development needs of their members. Partnerships where an LGA from a higher income country coordinates the deployment of LG expertise from that country, for the benefit of LGs in the partner countries. These forms of cooperation and partnership may be bilateral ones between two LGs or LGAs, or they may involve a grouping or network of partners around a common set of themes. They may be autonomously organised by the partner LGs concerned, or they may form part of a cooperation programme financially supported by a governmental or international funder/donor. As appears from the above examples, by no means all LG international partnerships have development as their main purpose. But from this rich diversity of practice, the present paper concentrates specifically on LG partnerships and cooperation whose principal purpose is to promote development, and thus to make our contribution to the unique, shared international commitment to tackle the worst poverty and deprivation, expressed through the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and to address global challenges that affect the whole world, but the poorest most severely.

Financing for Local governments' Cooperation

The issue of finance is, of course, crucial for all kinds of cooperation. Smaller-scale partnerships can be funded and maintained at a relatively low cost, where the purpose is mainly cultural. But if the aim is to make a significant and sustained contribution to the development process, then cost becomes a key question. Some larger 'northern' cities and local governments have sufficient political will, financial means, citizen support, and legal basis, to contribute from own resources. But this combination is not always present, and therefore the role of external funders is often crucial. Since the 1980s, in several 'northern' countries, national development ministries began to provide financing support for local government programmes and partnerships for development. In this kind of development cooperation, which receives external financing, there is a stronger need to integrate the local government contribution into wider national and international policy frameworks. In addition, financial support has – to a certain extent – become available over the last 20 years from international sources, notably parts of the UN family (e.g. the GOLD programmes of UNDP) and the European Union. The EU has supported a mix of city network exchanges (Asia-URBS, URB-AL CIUDAD), capacity development of LGAs (ARIAL), and other LG actions through the Non-State Actors and Local Authorities (NSALA) programme. Today, in 2012, the work of local government development cooperation can be seen to be at a crucial point. There are many success stories to highlight, but also some weaknesses to confront. Following the 2008 financial and economic crisis, in a number of 'northern' countries, there is pressure on local governments themselves, as well as national governments who have funded this work, to reduce or change the scale or structure of their partnership work. At the same time, the role of south-south partnerships is growing, and nationally-funded programmes for local government cooperation in new middle income countries, e.g. the new decentralised cooperation programme in Brazil, are now being developed.

Other Forms of LG Support for Development

Although this policy paper is about Local Governments *cooperation and partnerships* for development, should note at the outset that local governments in higher income countries often provide support for the Millennium Development Goals and other international development objectives in additional ways. For example, LGs may provide financial support to local development

NGOs based in their area, to support an NGO's own international development activities. Furthermore, LGs and their LGAs may fund and promote activities to raise their own citizens' awareness of and support for international development and the MDGs, and development ministries (and the European Union) may fund these 'awareness- raising' activities. In a number of countries, for example Spain, local governments have set themselves a target of spending 0.7% of their income for international development purposes, mirroring the aim for national governments to spend 0.7% of GDP on development assistance.

Towards a Clearer Concept of Local Government Development Cooperation

The local government community has not settled on a single name to describe either its forms of cooperation in general, or its development cooperation activities. Both of the main currently-used terms decentralised cooperation (DC) and municipal international cooperation (MIC) have a long tradition and colleagues from different countries use one or the other to define their work, and will no doubt do so in future, whatever term we use within UCLG. But not all LG cooperation is 'municipal' in a strict sense, and the term 'decentralized cooperation' is used sometimes in a wider sense, to include other local actors. For the purpose of this paper have therefore adopted the generic terms 'local government development cooperation' (for the overall concept), and 'local government partnerships for development' (where the focus is on the partnership). It is one thing to settle upon a name, and another to define the concept. What do we mean by local government development cooperation? At its broadest and simplest, it can mean any form of: Partnership or other form of cooperation between or involving two or more local governments and/or LGAs; this can include cases of cooperation where an LGA coordinates the participation of professional/expert/political contribution from several of its member local governments; and ·Where the main purpose is to address the development needs of one or more partners from lower income countries. However, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co- operation final communiqué (December 2011) provides a relatively clear account of some key elements: "The world stands at a critical juncture in global development. Poverty and inequality remain the central challenge. The Millennium Declaration sets out our universal mandate for development and, with the target date for the Millennium Development Goals less than four years away, the urgency of achieving strong, shared and sustainable growth and decent work in developing countries is paramount. Moreover, the Declaration identifies that *promoting human rights, democracy and good governance* are an integral part of our development efforts Sustainable development results are the end goal of our commitments to effective cooperation. While development co-operation is only part of the solution, it plays a catalytic and indispensable role in supporting *poverty eradication, social protection, economic growth and sustainable development.*

Local Self-Government and Development Cooperation

Role of local governments in development from two very distinct perspectives, which is first sight, may seem to be in opposition. They certainly add a creative tension which runs through this policy paper and advocacy strategy. On the one hand, local governments have and should have strong powers of local self-government. Internationally, the key principles of local self-government are set out in the European Charter on Local Self-Government and in the UN Habitat Guidelines on decentralisation and strengthening of local authorities. The latter provides in general terms (Article 6): "Local authorities should freely exercise their powers within the limits defined by legislation. These powers should be full and exclusive, and should not be undermined, limited or impeded by another authority except as provided by law. The European Charter, in addition, refers specifically to international activities of local governments: "Article 10 – Local authorities' right to associate (1) the entitlement of local authorities to belong to an association for the protection and promotion of their common interests and to belong to an international association of local authorities shall be recognised in each State. (2) Local authorities shall be entitled, under such conditions as may be provided for by the law, to co- operate with their counterparts in other States."

So for the international local government community, the right to cooperate with counterparts in other countries is an important one to defend and uphold. It is increasingly recognized in practice, but not always and everywhere, and national legal frameworks for international cooperation are often missing, or inadequate. Therefore, one important goal for UCLG must be to ensure that in every country, there is a positive legal framework for LGs to cooperate internationally. As part of local self-government, many LGs establish, on

their own initiative and responsibility, long-term twinning's and partnerships and many of these evolve into partnerships for development. Indeed, the experience of working together over time can enhance the effectiveness of larger-scale cooperation, since the partners know and trust each other already. However, where the partnership receives external funding for development programmes, the funder will wish to ensure that the programme provides effective development outcomes, and where possible, that its lessons and results can be scaled up. Therefore, the degree of LG autonomy is by definition somewhat reduced. UCLG therefore has two parallel tasks in relation to its policy. First, as ever, is to defend the right of local self-government, i.e. the right of local governments worldwide to enter into bilateral or multilateral partnerships, and to work on projects and issues, that they freely choose. But secondly, and simultaneously, UCLG has to ensure that if LGs and LGAs are to seek and obtain significant and growing external funding for their international development cooperation, the LG sector's contribution must demonstrate positive, cost-effective demonstrable results. Local governments also form part of *national* systems of government, and national anti-poverty and development strategies require coordination between different levels of government if they are to be effective.

The Building Blocks of LG Development Cooperation

Before analysing in more detail the strengths, weaknesses and added value of local governments' development cooperation, it is useful to set out:

(1) The main *goals* of local governments' development cooperation; (2) The principal methodology;

Goals

It is a tautology to say that the overarching goal of local governments' development cooperation is Development! But it is perhaps important to emphasize this, since this is what motivates and drives the participating local governments and associations. But in order to promote and enhance sustainable local development in lower income countries (LICs), local governments' cooperation may encompass a very wide range of forms and activities, to meet one or more specific goals. In broad terms, these goals may be summarised as:

• To strengthen the role and place of local government in development strategies;

• To promote the territorial coordination of

development cooperation actions so they will Pr duke the maximum positive impact on improving the living conditions of citizens;

• To establish references for measuring development cooperation performances among local Governments (benchmarking);

• To strengthen and support good local governance, so that the LG can better carry out its development roles, in particular through:

-Building strong local public institutions for the long term;

-developing efficient and appropriate public services;

Creating and improving sustainable forms of citizen / civil society participation and inclusion in decision-making, and in the wider local development process.

• To support effective decentralisation and devolution, in particular through:

Building capacity of LGs to enable them to carry out new tasks and responsibilities; maximising the added value of LGAs to influence national decentralisation policies and their implementation.

Conclusion

To improve LGs' capacity to tackle and deal with the impact of global challenges, e.g. climate change, on local development. To strengthen the capacity of LGAs to support their members to achieve successful local development, including their roles in:

Advocacy, negotiation and representation with central government in all aspects of the decentralisation process; promoting and disseminating of learning, good practice etc., among their members, including results from international cooperation programmes. Peer-to-peer cooperation, learning and exchange lie at the heart of local government development cooperation, to achieve the goals set out above, in particular in building and consolidating institutional capacity. It is to a large extent through exchanges of local government professionals, administrators, technicians – and not least, politicians – that the learning and sharing takes, place. It is this specific character that distinguishes it from all other forms of international cooperation. This does not mean that only local government people are involved in the cooperation – far from it. Depending on the objectives of the partnership (which will change over time), local civil

societies are likely to be involved in the partnership, as should be the private sector if – for example – the cooperation is around local economic development. But LG development cooperation always has the long-term institutional role and capacity of the local government at its heart. Within this methodology, there are many different modalities. It may be a one-to-one cooperation, or involve several local authorities.

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