

Delivery as One – Report of the Secretary-General’s High Level Panel on UN System Wide Coherence

Local Government International Bureau (LGIB) response December 2005

UN coherence on local governance

The LGIB welcomes the Panel Report in its aim to enhance the focus and effectiveness of the UN. We are disappointed however in the lack of reference to the local sphere of the UN’s work. In particular the report outlines how the UN should engage with civil society and the private sector (page 37) but it makes no reference to its existing and future engagement with local government.

On numerous occasions UN bodies, including UNDP, UNEP, UN Habitat, have indicated the vital role that local government plays in contributing to achieving the MDGs, as well as local sustainable development¹.

“We need to recognise that achieving the Millennium Development Goals will be done thanks to local authorities. I would say that 70% of the agenda is typically the mandates of local authorities”. Christophe Nutall, UNDP

The UNDP Hub for Innovative Partnerships produced a database reviewing where and how different UN bodies work with local government and decentralization programmes. The database indicates there is a wide variety of activities involving local government and local actors across all the UN Agencies and programmes, as well as in the World Bank. However, the UNDP research also highlights that there is clear a lack of communication, coordination and coherence on local activities across the UN agencies. Greater coherence in the sphere of local governance is vital to establish opportunities for cross fertilization and joint learning, to examine how national and international policy is or is not working on the ground, as well as to share and scale up good practice that occurs at the local level.

¹ UNDP (2005) ***Toolkit for localizing the MDGs***. Capacity 2015
www.capacity.undp.org/index.cfm?module=Library&page=Document&DocumentID=5669
and

UK Local Government Alliance for International Development (2004) ***Decentralisation and poverty reduction: A contribution by the UK Local Government Alliance for International Development to the UN MDG Action Plan***, November 2004. www.lgib.gov.uk/lga-alliance/documents/LG_decentralisation_sub.pdf

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The LGIB therefore recommends that the UN needs to *specifically* address how it will seek to ensure greater coordination and coherence in relation to the ‘local sphere’ of the UN’s work, both globally as well as through the proposed One Country Programmes.

Key recommendations

1. Coherence at the national level

1.1 'All of government' model should include local government

The 'all of government' approach recommended on Page 35 needs to incorporate national local government associations and related bodies, with the aim of improving national policy-making and improving the effectiveness of aid delivery at a local level. All UN programmes that are active nationally and locally need to act in a coordinated fashion to avoid duplication and improve the allocation of decentralization activities according to appropriate competencies and need. They need to consult and work in partnership with national and regional associations of local government where they exist, alongside central government engagement².

1.2 Resident Coordinators Office - engaging local government

The Panel recommendation on Page 37 – regarding the national 'Resident Coordinators Office' - should include a clearer definition of the different stakeholders that the offices should work with. In particular it should advocate, promote and broker of partnerships with local government, including national and regional local government associations, individual local authorities, as well as other sub-national stakeholders.

1.3 Gender equality – women in local government

The political representation of women is a very important aspect of gender equality. The UN One Country Programmes should incorporate the election of women as local councillors as one of their areas of concern – recognising of the importance of women impacting on local policy making, and towards promoting service delivery that is better targeted to the needs of women.

2. Coherence at the international level

2.1 Consistent approach to decentralization – the UN Habitat Guidelines

² Based on recommendations from: OECD (2004) *Lessons learned on Donor Support to decentralization and local governance* www.oecd.org/dataoecd/46/60/30395116.pdf

In UN programme delivery there needs to be a more consistent approach to working with and supporting local government. UN Habitat is currently drafting “Guidelines on decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities” to be agreed at UN Habitat’s Council in 2007³. This guidance, once it has been agreed at the UN Habitat Governing Council and endorsed by the UN General Assembly, should be promoted and applied throughout all the UN agencies.

2.2 UN Special Observer Status for local government

The Cardoso Panel, which examined how the UN liaises with civil society groups, recognized that local government is clearly distinct from civil society and the private sector. Democratically elected local government representatives have significant political and programmatic expertise to bring to table to inform the UN’s work. Currently the main avenue of dialogue is with UN Habitat, however, as indicated in the introduction of this paper local government is involved in and impacted by a wide range of other UN programmes. LGIB therefore recommends that local government should be given special status for dialogue with UN agencies, in the same way that Parliamentarians have been granted special status.

3. Sustainable Development elements

3.1 A Strengthened UN Environment Programme – building local capacity

There is a significant lack of environmental management capacity in many local authorities in the developing world. The Resident Coordinators Offices need to ensure sufficient in-house environmental expertise to advise and provide support for working with national and regional local government associations so that they can directly to help strengthen their individual local authority members and work towards scaling-up local environmental good practice⁴.

3.2 Financing for environment and sustainable development: Options for the Global Environment Facility (GEF)

³ UN Habitat (*Draft*) **Guidelines on decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities**

www.cities-localgovernments.org/uclg/upload/template/templatedocs/ENG_Annex1_Guidelines_on_Decentralization_revised_version.pdf

⁴ UN CDF (2005) **Delivering the Goods - Building Local Government Capacity to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals**. A Practitioner's Guide from UNCDF Experience in Least Developed Countries, October 2005

The GEF needs to be made more accessible to local government and other local actors in order to target strengthening of local capacity and expertise in the environmental sphere. This could include specific funds targeting build-up national local government associations' in-house environmental capacity, e.g. to support national / regional training activities, peer-to-peer learning and mentoring programmes which are aimed at local government and other local stakeholders.

3.3 Options for an independent and authoritative assessment of the current UN system of international environmental governance (IEG)

IEG assessment needs to examine the local sphere of environmental governance and identify capacity gaps which need to be addressed in order to strengthen local implementation of environmental regulation and policy.

3.4 Sustainable development: Options for ECOSOC and the Commission on Sustainable Development

In moving towards a stronger implementation focus the CSD needs to address the challenge of how to scale up localized examples of good practice.

3.5 Establishment of a UN Sustainable Development Board

The proposed Sustainable Development board should include - in a formal or advisory capacity - representatives from each of the major groups, including local government, to ensure effective assessment and broad accountability by the UN One Country programmes.

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