

# Review of the Commonwealth Local Government Good Practice Scheme

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## GPS - Highlights

*The final (third) phase of the Commonwealth Local Government three year capacity building programme, the Good Practice Scheme, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) came to an end in late 2011. The programme partnered councils and local government associations from six targeted Commonwealth countries - Jamaica, India, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Pakistan and Ghana - with their counterparts in South Africa, India and the UK with the objective to exchange good practice and generate innovative solutions to challenges faced by local governments.*

*A total of 34 projects were active during the Scheme's lifetime and contributed successfully to having a positive impact on the ground for local communities. The dissemination of the project activities through national workshops in partnership with national local government associations meant that the successes and lessons were shared with local governments throughout the countries concerned.*

*A new focus of the third phase of the GPS was to promote south-south partnerships: six of these partnerships were set up, three of them being tripartite, two having a northern hemisphere partner, with the remainder, both dual and tripartite, being south-south.*

*Despite partners' diverse cultural, socio-economic circumstances and administrative practices, this methodology of technical support and exchange of ideas allows partners to share and compare their challenges and reflect on own approaches. The south-south partners, with varying cultural beliefs, learnt that cultural practices should not be ignored in advancing new initiatives: traditional norms and practices are a way of life for the majority of communities especially those in the agricultural, small scale farming sector.*

CLGF Project Officer Rachael Duchnowski looks back on the Scheme's successes and challenges.

## Good Practice Scheme – Goals

The overarching objective of the Commonwealth Local Government Good Practice Scheme (GPS) was to contribute towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at the local level; there were four expected outputs:

1. Increased capacity of local authorities to plan and deliver services, through successful implementation of CLGF-funded projects focussed on the following nationally agreed themes, relevant to the achievement of the MDGs;
2. Measurable and/or assessable improvements in individual and/or departmental/local authority management efficiency and effectiveness delivered through the GPS projects;
3. National local government associations possess effective knowledge management systems and dissemination networks working nationally - and internationally through CLGF;
4. Utilisation of expertise of local government practitioners in partner countries to improve local government performance more widely.

Each target country had a specific theme, chosen by their local government association or equivalent in discussion with CLGF; in Jamaica it was strategic planning for service delivery, in India, governance and service delivery. Both Ghana and South Africa focussed on local economic development (LED), while Sierra Leone chose waste management and Pakistan strengthening governance.

Forging and sustaining effective partnerships has been at the heart of the programme. More than 80% of all projects forged formal partnerships with local organisations, through contractual arrangements, shared services, funding agreements and memoranda of understanding, and the projects have also resulted in strategic partnerships between councils, and with key stakeholders that previously had very little contact with local government, such as private sector companies, regional development agencies, and NGOs.

### **Strategies to support local government in LED**

Both Ghana and South Africa focused on LED (Local Economic Development). Each project tackled the theme differently but in accordance with their national policy at the time. In Ghana, the National Poverty Reduction Strategy gives district assemblies a mandate to tackle local poverty and improve standards of living, whilst in South Africa LED is a statutory function and of local government, working with the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the government department responsible for local government, amongst others.

Both countries are placing increasing emphasis on the importance of improving the capacity of local government to deliver this work more effectively, however, their ability is limited as a result of lack of capacity and understanding of what can be completed on often inadequate budgets. It was evident that in Ghana prior to the Good Practice Scheme, the participating assemblies had little or no engagement with LED as a discipline and their role as potential enablers of economic growth within their communities was unrecognised and unfulfilled. In South Africa Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) were weak due to the historic legacy of apartheid, and local government's role in LED, especially in rural areas, was also limited. In some cases the project partners reported that there was either no or very limited baseline data on LED, which reflected the lack of formal engagement in the LED sector.

As a result of gaining understanding of the conditions that were presented, the projects in both countries sought to develop strategies as well as tangible results to assist local governments in addressing the challenges before them. Ghana saw significant achievements in urban and rural areas, ranging from development of a community centre, creation of a federation of small businesses for the exchange of good business practices and networking, development of a business newspaper which is self-financing and able to fund further LED initiatives, and using sport as a way to integrate economic and social development, training unemployed young people in football coaching as a result of this training several have been able to secure paid coaching jobs.

The Mfantseman Municipal Assembly and Kent County Council project created a community centre, offering training in a number of different and practical trades, business support services, and mentoring. Mfantseman used its position as the local authority to coordinate a number of public sector organisations that staff and support the centre. The training generally focused on three areas; capacity-building for public sector workers such as: management skills for teachers, trade skills for entrepreneurs such as painting and hairdressing, and business training such as financial management also for entrepreneurs, and to date in excess of 300 residents have received training from the community centre. Their work with businesses has been complemented by a business starter pack kit, distributed at the centre, that gives a comprehensive overview of the processes and planning entrepreneurs need to go through in order to start and manage a businesses in Mfantseman and assists the assembly in monitoring business take up rates, maintaining communication with the business community and measuring the efficacy of their interventions.

The rural partnership in Ghana was a project between Upper Denkyira West District Assembly and Hampshire County Council, the project has successfully integrated LED into the priorities and practices of the assembly, creating relationships with stakeholders at the

local and regional level, and developing services for local businesses in the process thereby strengthening the capacity of the assembly to develop and deliver LED initiatives. The institutional impact included the embedding of economic development within assembly's medium term development strategy, training for senior assembly staff, the design and implementation of an inward investment strategy and the formation of a business led Sub-Committee for Productive and Gainful Employment (SPGE) supported by the assembly with an action plan and mandate, a good practice model that is now being dissemination through the local government association, due to interest from other local authorities. They also launched the Abora Palm Oil Processing Plant that generates income for the assembly, accessing capital through EU funding, and employing the local community. The outcomes of these activities resulted in a close working relationship with the Regional Development Agency in any and all LED projects, where before there was no contact, closer working relationships with the private sector around creating employment opportunities and identifying skills gaps, where there was none and leveraging this relationship for private sector support towards community development projects.

### **A community consultation-based approach**

In developing the projects and the methodology project participant's first main priority was to ask 'what is their starting point?' In South Africa this was done through various means such as community consultation, engaging with local businesses (informal and formal), universities and other similar bodies, farmers and other relevant stakeholders. Community consultation was a central part of all of the South Africa projects, with a particular focus on strengthening the municipalities' relationship and understanding of their respective local business communities and consulting with communities on the kind of LED support they would like to see the municipalities providing. A range of different methodologies from community meetings, events, surveys and direct marketing were used.

Successful outcomes in South Africa Included: the development of a credit union; improving the sustainability of SMMEs through increased capacity to bid for and win local tenders, and increased capacity for the municipalities to support SMMEs to enable them to meet this objective; agricultural diversification and how the municipalities can support this; and, supporting municipalities to promote inward investment.

In India project participants engaged their target communities through various methods outlined below:

- In Rajkot, before their GPS project, no one in the Rajkot Municipal Corporation (RMC) engaged in any community development work; as part of their tripartite project with Leicester City Council and the Ludhiana Municipal Corporation, 100 households were surveyed through a door to door questionnaire. Workshops were held, community planning exercises, and wider campaigns were all used to maximise community consultation.
- All the partnerships have actively sought to engage with disadvantaged and or underrepresented groups in their respective wards. In Aurangabad and Kohima, the focus was on women, school children and self-help groups in the community. In Bhubaneswar, further campaigns ensured that different sections of the society, from celebrities, business establishments to residents associations and street vendors associations were represented and influenced the cleanliness drive undertaken by the Corporation. In Rajkot local school teachers were recruited to act as advocates as well as facilitators for RMC's community education work and sensitisation.
- In Aurangabad, the project between Aurangabad Municipal Corporation and Birmingham City Council took a further step by recognizing local women by registering their Self Help Groups with the Corporation.

Capacity building is an important part of the GPS, thus project outcomes included institutional development, staff and councillor training, on the job work experience, and mentoring and shadow working. Senior councillors were involved in all the projects to help ensure the long term sustainability of the outcomes.

### **Practitioner to practitioner learning**

In Sierra Leone the Scheme funded three local authority pilot projects with local councils on waste management and one National Association of Local Government (NALG) project with the Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone. The waste projects broadly had the following aims:

- To develop financially sustainable, safe, solid waste management strategies for participating districts.
- To sensitise residents in the council's wards to more environmentally sustainable methods of disposing of waste.

The practitioner to practitioner learning was used to:

- Design, plan and implement Waste management strategies that are responsive to the needs of the local community and environmentally sustainable.
- Build strong relationships with local stakeholders, partners councils, marginalised groups, civil society and other spheres of government
- Develop management and governance structures to ensure their approach to waste is financially sustainable, value for money, and appropriate to the needs of their service users.

Waste management services were devolved from central government management to local authorities, along with other key basic services in the Local Government Act of Sierra Leone (2004). Despite on-going commitment from central government to decentralisation and supporting decentralised services, local authorities are often under resourced and under capacitated to effectively manage waste services.

Projects implemented in Sierra Leone showed mixed results in terms of measurable improvements in service delivery. A key constraint was the lack of capital funding within the Good Practice Scheme. Where capital funding was available, e.g. through complementary activity by other donors, such as with the Warwickshire and Bo project who achieved matched funding via UNDP, improved service delivery was demonstrated.

The projects did however successfully have a wider impact and significance for local government through their impact on national policy. This was achieved thanks to the high level engagement from senior Ministry to local staff and politicians, the Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone, other relevant government ministry officials such as health and sanitation and other public sector bodies and donors. This has been accomplished through the projects individually via their partnerships, but also through the dissemination process which engaged all local councils in Sierra Leone.

The resulting impact of the projects has been that the national local government association has determined waste management as its first lobbying priority, the Ministry of Local Government has welcomed the recommendations from the projects and the dissemination workshop, and local councils have all benefitted from the learning from the projects and are actively sharing the documentation produced by the projects. The discussions held at the national dissemination workshop produced key recommendations agreed by all the councils that set a clear direction for the needs of councils in Sierra Leone in waste management and how they want to move forward collectively in building their capacity, sharing their services, and communicating messages to the general public.

In addition to the partnerships between UK councils and Sierra Leone councils, local partnerships with other public sector bodies have also formed. Bo and Makeni worked closely with relevant central government ministries, and the partnership between Bo and Makeni itself is notable as previously the relationship had been strained and there was very little cooperation between the two. But the most significant partnership for Bo has been with Mercy Hospital Research Laboratory with whom a formal agreement was signed to share GIS data mapping information. The mapping was undertaken by the research lab and Bo has been able to utilise this to provide for the first time ever clear maps of their wards, and the waste needs of these communities, which has had a direct impact on how the council plans for waste management.

### **Building capacity and sustainability**

It was critical to the GPS that the projects focused on building sustainable solutions. This was done through building capacity, developing systems and governance arrangements to improve local service delivery, particularly focusing on services to poor and disadvantaged communities. In many cases this involved undertaking significant reviews, stakeholder consultation, and policy development. Due to funding restrictions the majority of GPS projects ran for two to two and a half years, therefore it was essential that projects developed effective and clear monitoring and evaluation strategies, to continually assess the impact that the project has had in the years to come.

The use of different approaches to tackle challenges and ensure maximum impact is key, especially if training of practitioners is involved. For example, the project between Vhembe District Municipality and Gondal Municipality used the master trainer approach to build capacity. By forging closer links with the university and local colleges, the municipality has helped to spread the learning across the district. The Municipality has signed a Memorandum of Understanding to help sustain a focus on training and agricultural outreach and the training partners have clearly defined their respective roles to avoid duplication and to promote coordination.

Due to the buy-in of senior elected representatives municipalities have either embedded their LED work into their Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) or have used the project to implement priorities already articulated in their IDPs. In at least four cases (Mbombela, eThekweni, Steve Tshwete and Vhembe) the project has resulted in new policies or processes to enable more effective governance and management arrangements e.g. the consortium agreement in Vhembe, and the involvement of the Economic Development Forum in political decision making around LED in Mbombela.

### **Some lessons learned**

Being flexible and adaptable to the environment that you are delivering your project is essential to successful delivery. The methodology for the project, between Hastings Borough Council and Western Area District Council, was originally focussed on communicating messages about responsible waste disposal but following the first visit to Sierra Leone it was evident that a more practical approach was also needed. Ideas developed by the partnership and community groups involved recycling, composting and anaerobic digestion on a local basis and received widespread support from WARDC and community leaders. An Interim Sustainable Waste Management Strategy has since been developed, along with a Phase One Implementation Plan which focuses on the practical development of demonstration units for composting, anaerobic digestion and recycling. The communication and marketing proposals have also been refocused to include education and communication through schools in Hastings, Sierra Leone and work with twinned schools in Hastings UK.

In some instances partnerships were not always as easy to develop as it was first assumed. In developing these partnerships it proved to be beneficial for projects to focus on developing relationships also with the other public sector bodies as well as with their partners.

A fundamental component of the GPS was to be responsive to the needs to local government. In Pakistan for example, due to the suspension of locally elected leaders, the planned local government projects were unable to go ahead and instead the only project to continue was the partnership between the four provincial local government associations. With assistance from the Local Government Association of England and Wales, the four associations implemented a targeted national campaign strategy, lobbying key decision makers, mounting legal challenges in court and mobilising committees through national rallies and various media outlets. The impact of this has been a clear and recognised role for the NALGs in the public debate on local democracy, with documented international support and engagement with diaspora networks.

The close of the GPS saw at least 500 local government stakeholders, both central and local as well as other key players in the field come together for country based dissemination workshops. These workshops were an important part of the overall Scheme. They were designed in such a way that it allowed projects to not only share the outcome of their project, but also to ensure that the lessons learnt had a benefit beyond the councils that were directly involved, thereby creating a greater overall impact in the countries concerned than just the councils who were directly involved in the projects. The workshops resulted in strategic

policy recommendations to improve national policy making on LED, waste management and strategic planning, as well as allowing participants to have a chance to network.

CLGF is hoping to develop its capacity building work with members through strengthened regional programmes that will take into account the lessons learned from the GPS and is currently seeking funding to do this. Following consultations with members and discussions at the recent CLGF Board meeting in Belize, new programmes will have a greater regional focus and more attention to knowledge sharing to capture and disseminate good practice.

More information about the Good Practice Scheme and individual projects can be found on CLGF's website at <http://www.clgf.org.uk/about-the-gps/>.